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Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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Tuesday, February 18, 2020

Chair: Mr. Bryan May



Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

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• (0850)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Jolène Savoie-Day): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

[Translation]

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. She cannot receive other types of motions and cannot entertain points of order or participate in debate.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party. I'm ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): I move the nomination of Bryan May as chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Sean Casey that Mr. Bryan May be elected as chair of the committee. Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

[Translation]

(Motion agreed to)

I declare the motion carried and Brian May duly elected chair of the committee.

[English]

I invite Mr. May to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

First, thanks to all of you for your confidence. I will do my utmost to remain fair and to make sure that we stay on track and be as efficient as we can possibly be in this committee.

Does the committee wish to proceed at this time with the election of vice-chairs?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I invite the clerk to proceed with the election of the vice-chairs.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Thank you.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

[English]

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): I would like to nominate Phil McColeman.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): I second that.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Schmale that Mr. McColeman be elected as first vice-chair of the committee. Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

I declare the motion carried and Mr. McColeman duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition. I'm now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): I would like to nominate Luc Desilets.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Samson that Mr. Desilets be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Desilets duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

The Chair: If the committee agrees, we will now proceed with the adoption of routine motions. Members have received in an email the committee's routine motions from the previous Parliament. As a reminder, a motion must be moved by a committee member and does not need to be seconded.

Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a list of routine motions here that we can circulate.

To begin with the first one, I move:

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

I would like to invite the analysts to take their seats at the table.

MP Casey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five (5) members; the Chair, one Member from each Party; and that the subcommittee work in the spirit of collaboration.

● (0855)

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four (4) members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after fifteen (15) minutes, regardless of members present.

The Chair: MP Blaney, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you so much.

Where it says “one member of the government” and “one member of the opposition”, I’m just wondering if we could make it “two members of the opposition and two members of the government”, which equals four. This is something that we have done in PROC as well.

The Chair: We have an amendment, and we need to deal with the amendment first.

Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Darrell Samson: We're okay with that.

The Chair: All in favour?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Motion as amended agreed to)

MP Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That witnesses be given ten (10) minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six (6) minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows: Round 1:

Conservative Party

Liberal Party

Bloc Québécois

New Democratic Party

For the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for questioning be as follows:

Conservative Party, five (5) minutes,

Liberal Party, five (5) minutes,

Conservative Party, five (5) minutes,

Liberal Party, five (5) minutes,

Bloc Québécois, two and a half (2.5) minutes,

New Democratic Party, two and a half (2.5) minutes.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

MP Casey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the Committee only when the documents are available in both official languages and that witnesses be advised accordingly.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

MP Casey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two (2) representatives per organization; provided that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

MP Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff member at an in camera meeting and that one additional person from each House officer's office be allowed to be present.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

MP Casey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That one copy of the transcript of each *in camera* meeting be kept in the Committee Clerk's office for consultation by members of the Committee or by their staff.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: MP Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That a forty-eight (48) hours notice, interpreted as two (2) nights, shall be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that (1) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee not later than 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday; that (2) the motion be distributed to members in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said notice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour; and that (3) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day and that when the committee is travelling on official business, no substantive motions may be moved.

● (0900)

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

MP Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: I move:

That, in relation to Orders of Reference from the House respecting bills,

a) the clerk of the committee shall, upon the committee receiving such an Order of Reference, write to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee to invite those members to file with the clerk of the committee, in both official languages, any amendments to the bill, which is the subject of the said Order, which they would suggest that the committee consider;

b) suggested amendments filed, pursuant to paragraph (a), at least 48 hours prior to the start of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill to which the amendments relate shall be deemed to be proposed during the said consideration, provided that the committee may, by motion, vary this deadline in respect of a given bill; and

c) during the clause-by-clause consideration of a bill, the Chair shall allow a member who filed suggested amendments, pursuant to paragraph (a), an opportunity to make brief representations in support of them.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

I believe that is the last one.

Thank you very much, Mr. Casey, for your yeoman's work on that. We appreciate it.

Mr. Sean Casey: It's a pleasure, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Seeing no other routine motions, I will ask the committee if it wishes to discuss any further business at this time.

MP Samson.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of motions on some very important topics that the committee could study. As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, I am delighted to have the opportunity to work with all the members of the committee. It is paramount that our first objective be to support the men and women of the Canadian Forces as well as veterans. We have a huge job ahead of us. The committee did some great work during the 42nd Parliament. We hope to raise the level of co-operation to better address the needs

and demands of veterans and to make sure they know about the benefits available to them, benefits they most certainly deserve.

I have two motions. I know members of the Conservatives, Bloc Québécois and NDP also have motions to put forward. As I mentioned, the objective is to build on the work accomplished during the 42nd Parliament.

With that, I will read my first motion. It deals with an issue that other parties no doubt supported as part of their election platforms. It's certainly an important issue worth studying.

I move the following:

That the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs conduct a study on a long term Canadian Strategy for Commemorations which recognizes and honours the service, sacrifice, and achievements of all Canadian Veterans; which takes into consideration future events, monuments, memorials, graves and cemeteries both at home and abroad; that the Committee invite officials from Veterans Affairs Canada, interested stakeholders and Canadian Veterans, educators, and other partners; that this study include visits to memorials and monuments both within Canada and abroad; and that the Committee table a report with recommendations to the government on the best way forward in the 21st century to inspire and educate Canadians and citizens around the world to recognize the service and sacrifice of all who have served our country.

It's extremely important to recognize that there are no more World War I veterans left and that the number of World War II veterans is dwindling. We must continue to educate Canadians all over the country. That's it for my first motion.

● (0905)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion regarding this first motion?

Mr. Ruff.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): I have nothing against this motion, other than that I don't think it should be the first study of this committee. It's a great idea; however, I think there are a lot more pressing issues with our veterans that we need to take care of. For those who aren't aware, I just retired a year ago, so I'm well versed in a lot of the veterans issues, and I have a large number of veterans in my riding.

As I said, it's a great idea. I just don't think it should be our priority.

The Chair: MP Blaney, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I thank the member for this motion. I agree that right now.... Of course we recently saw articles saying that 44,000 veterans are in a backlog. I think this increase, which I believe is about 10% from six months earlier, is a little more pressing and urgent.

I am also a little concerned about the commitment to travel. I really respect our veterans, and I think we've seen in the last while some feelings around commemorations that felt disrespectful to some of our veterans. I believe there's an important piece to be speaking about here, but I just want to recognize the resources that would be needed for us to do that extensive travel, when there's a lot of important work that veterans need right here in this country right now.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'd like to introduce a second motion, if that's okay.

The Chair: We'll need to vote on this motion or vote to defer—take some course of action before we can move on.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I think the objective is to share the motions we have, and then as a subcommittee determine which ones are first, second and third. I don't think we need to go through them, but the points are well taken. I think they're very important, but I think a good thing to accomplish in our first meeting would be to rack up the motions, the themes that are extremely important to this committee, and then we'll move to a second phase, which is determining which ones should go first, second and third.

With that, I'd ask the chair to call the vote on this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: We just received this motion, and I think we need 48 hours. We can put on all these motions. I don't think it necessarily requires a vote at this time.

The Chair: Just for clarification, the 48-hour notice is if we're not in committee business. We've moved into that.

To Mr. Samson's point, are you looking to vote on this now, or are you looking to withdraw the motion?

Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I think when you put something on notice, it doesn't require a vote right away, in order to be spoken on. It just requires being put on notice. I think we should all be putting our motions on notice today, as Mr. Samson said, and then at a later time, at subcommittee, we can vote on whether or not we want to move forward with the individual motions.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'm okay with that. That's the objective I had as well.

With that, I'd like to move to my second motion, and we'll continue to flow right across and get the job done so we have themes on the table.

The Chair: Are we good with that? Okay.

Mr. Darrell Samson: With that, Mr. Chair, the second motion I bring to the table is this:

That the committee conduct a study consisting of at least six meetings on federal supports and services to Canadian veterans' caregivers and families; and that the committee table a report with recommendations on how the federal government could improve those services and supports to better meet the unique needs of veterans' caregivers and families.

• (0910)

The Chair: Thank you.

For the record, are you putting this motion on notice? You're not moving the motion.

Mr. Darrell Samson: That's correct.

The Chair: Okay. Is there any discussion?

Seeing none, are there any further motions?

Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your election.

I'd like to put a notice of motion:

That the committee conduct a study on women, LGBTQ2+ and racialized veterans, including the challenges and barriers faced by minority Canadian veterans, specific supports and services offered to minority veterans, specific needs of minority veterans, and how Veterans Affairs Canada can improve and target services to minority veterans to better suit their needs.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Marie-France.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): I'd like to suggest a topic of study.

What do you call it?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Here it is.

[*English*]

That the committee conduct a review of the Education Training Benefit and that the committee table a report with findings and recommendations on how the government could continue to improve the life of veterans.

[*Translation*]

That is for the committee's consideration.

[*English*]

Mr. Andy Fillmore: It's a notice of motion.

The Chair: We don't have a copy. Would you be able to repeat that one more time, please?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Very well. I'll read it more slowly.

[*English*]

That the committee conduct a review of the Education Training Benefit and that the committee table a report with findings and recommendations on how the government could continue to improve the life of veterans.

I apologize for not bringing a copy for all of you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion?

Are there any further motions for discussion?

MP Ruff.

Mr. Alex Ruff: I would like to put a notice of motion:

That the committee, as its priority, immediately conduct a study into the backlog of pending veteran disability benefit applications at Veterans Affairs Canada.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Are there any further motions or notices of motions at this time?

MP Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Relating to the service dogs:

That the committee study:

- a) The efficacy and use of psychiatric service dogs by Canadian Armed Forces veterans to alleviate the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD);
- b) Why despite presiding over the collapse of a process to establish a national standard for the training of PTSD Psychiatric Service Dogs and subsequently promising a streamlined process for Veterans Affairs Canada to introduce its own standard the government has yet to establish any standard; and
- c) What should constitute minimum national standards for the training of PTSD Psychiatric Service Dogs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion?

We have MP Blaney, and then we'll go over to MP Ruff.

Mr. Alex Ruff: I was going to have some discussion on that.

The Chair: Yes. She's ahead of you.

Mr. Alex Ruff: I'm sorry to cut you off.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That's okay.

I thank the member for this motion. I think it's an important discussion to be having around service dogs. I don't have anything formalized, but one of the things that I think should be added to that is the resources for our veterans to get those service dogs. We know there are a lot of veterans on the waiting list. There's a limited amount of resources; these are significant expenses for veterans.

The other aspect, just for the purposes of discussion, is around the limits on housing for many of our veterans who have service dogs. I've worked with multiple constituents who have service dogs and who are at risk of homelessness, in some cases because they cannot access housing that will allow them to have a pet. This is far more than a pet. This is often what makes a veteran's life more accessible; they can actually walk out the door.

I will take this to review, but I think we have to look at the resources for our veterans to get these services dogs. The other part is how we can find ways to make housing more accessible for them.

Thank you.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Ruff.

Mr. Alex Ruff: I was just going to add a little bit of context to the motion. This is something I've heard is a huge issue right across the country. Let's take travel as an example. A lot of our veterans sometimes can't fly with their dog because of a lack of a national standard. We need to get that standard in place so that our veterans

can travel with these animals, because they're essential. I witnessed it just this past week. A week ago Sunday, there was a mental wellness day for paramedics and veterans. It impacts my riding, and the service dog thing came up countless times in discussions with those people who utilize this great service. We need to get a national standard out there.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Lloyd, please.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I believe I'm the last one to speak on this, or is there anyone else?

The Chair: No one else has put their hand up, at this point.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Okay.

I'm certainly open to amending this. I just feel that... We put it on notice, and maybe when we have further discussion, it will give you some more time....

Oh, you're different from the person who was here before.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Wait a minute.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): There was a sex change.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Yes. Excellent.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Well, I don't know what he said anyway. Sorry.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Luc Desilets: Hi.

The Chair: Welcome, Luc.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Oh, look, they changed your name, too. Good.

At any rate, it will give you some time to review it. If you have any amendments, we can discuss that at the next meeting, to amend it to have the housing and resources for veterans and things of that nature.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any further discussion on the motion?

Are there any other motions to put forward?

Seeing none, I would ask whether the committee is in agreement to adjourn today's meeting.

Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Speaker, we don't have to do this today, but I think we should reflect on and come forward with names for subcommittee members. I believe it's one per party.

The Chair: That was amended. It's two of the opposition and two of the government.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Two of the opposition and two of the government...?

A voice: No.

The Chair: No? Sorry.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: That's reduced quorum.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's one, one, one and the chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Because some of the members are not here, I think it might be best for us to reflect as a party and submit or come forward with a name. Then the work can begin on looking at the proposed themes that we would study. We would have the subcommittee go through that and bring a recommendation to the group. We would move it from there, I understand.

Again, because of the work that needs to be done, I don't know whether we can have a meeting on Thursday or next Tuesday. I know they're trying to set up all the committees. I would leave that with you.

The Chair: The routine motion doesn't specify how the subcommittee is determined. It could be done here at the next meeting, or we could just submit names to the clerk to put forward.

We have Mr. Casey, and then MP Blaney.

Mr. Sean Casey: I would like to offer the suggestion—I can put it in the form of a motion, if you wish—that the subcommittee on agenda and procedure meet in place of the full committee at the committee's regularly scheduled time on Thursday, and that in advance of Thursday, each of the parties have someone there as their representative in accordance with the motion we passed.

The Chair: Is that a motion?

Mr. Sean Casey: I offer it as a suggestion. I can put it in the form of a motion, if you wish.

The Chair: Because it's a motion, we need to deal with that....

Is this in reference to the suggestion?

• (0920)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I was just going to recommend that all parties send in the name of their person to the clerk. Obviously, it's pretty clear for me who that will be—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Rachel Blaney: —but I think it's important that we do that.

If we do a motion, I don't have an argument with that. I just think it's important to set a date as soon as possible.

The Chair: Are we all in agreement with MP Casey's suggestion that we send the names to the clerk and that we use Thursday's meeting as our first subcommittee meeting? Are we fine with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. I think we can avoid having a vote on a motion. We're all in agreement, then, that we will proceed with that. We will maybe send an email out so that MP McColeman is aware of that as well.

Is there any other discussion before we adjourn?

Excellent. Thank you very much, everybody. It's been a long time since I've done this. It feels good.

The meeting is adjourned.

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