



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 001

Wednesday, October 14, 2020



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• (1105)

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Jolène Savoie-Day): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum. I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, entertain points of order, or participate in debate.

[*Translation*]

We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

I am prepared to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): I nominate Mr. Bryan May as chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Samson that Mr. May be elected as chair of the committee.

[*English*]

Are there any other further motions? No.

(Motion greed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. May duly elected chair of the committee. I invite Mr. May to take the chair.

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. Thank you. That was a tense moment there with that silence, but I'm glad we cut through that.

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

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): On a point of clarification, Mr. Chair, can you indicate how you would like the committee members to notify you, whether it's by the "raise hand" feature, or simply by this?

The Chair: I'll go through that, Mr. Brassard. If we can just get through the election of the vice-chairs, then I have a bit of a script that we'll go through and I'll answer most of those questions.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you.

The Chair: You're welcome.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

There is currently no French interpretation. I don't know if this is normal, since we are starting the meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Oh, no.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: The interpretation should be working. Give us a moment to check it out.

[*English*]

The Chair: If I speak in English a bit here, would you give a thumbs-up once it gets fixed. Is there still no translation?

Do you hear any translation now?

Mr. Desilets, do you have the language selected on the bottom there?

[*Translation*]

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): I hear the interpretation when I click on the "interpretation" icon at the bottom of the screen, next to the word "participants". I clicked on "French" and I hear it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is anyone else having a problem with the translation?

Mr. Desilets, you're on mute, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: I'm sorry. I don't know why, but it works now. I haven't made any changes.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much. We will have technical difficulties with this, and I appreciate everyone's patience.

Again, does the committee wish to proceed at this time with the election of the vice-chairs? Seeing a lot of nodding heads, I invite the clerk to proceed with the election of the vice-chairs.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

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 position of first vice-chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: If I can interrupt the clerk for just a moment, now I don't hear the French translation. I was hearing it without difficulty, but now that is not the case.

The Clerk: Okay, I'll verify with the interpreters.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): The interpretation is working well.

[*English*]

The Chair: There's still no interpretation. I can hear it in English.

Do you want to test it out there again, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: Absolutely.

[*Translation*]

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

I am now ready to receive motions for the position of first vice-chair.

You have the floor, Mrs. Wagantall.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Clerk, I would be pleased to nominate John Brassard.

The Clerk: Thank you.

It has been moved by Mrs. Wagantall that Mr. Brassard be elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Are there any further motions?

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

Go ahead, Mr. Samson.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you very much.

I nominate Mr. Luc Desilets of the Bloc Québécois as second vice-chair.

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.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: You're welcome.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we proceed, I did have some continued difficulties with the translation. The French was coming through, but when people switched to English, I was hearing the French and not their microphone, so we do have some continued technical issues here.

Did anybody else experience difficulties, or is it just me? I see that some of us did.

Okay, just to clarify, when there was a switch from French to English, I heard the interpreter in both situations. I did hear the translation into English when French was being spoken, but when the speaker switched to English, I was hearing the French being spoken in my ear, not the person speaking.

We'll just give them a few minutes here to see if they can figure out what the issue is before we proceed.

Was anybody having difficulty with anything other than the French translation? Was the English translation working for those who were listening to the French?

I'm just getting word that we should be good now to move forward. That's great. Thank you.

This is going to be an ongoing thing, folks. I just wanted to say at the outset a huge thank you to the technical folks there in Ottawa. This is not going to be an easy process, and we will try to be as patient as possible as we learn the process together.

First and foremost, thank you for your confidence. It's an honour to chair this committee again. Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

Before we get into the routine motions, I promised MP Brassard that I would do a run-through of how we would proceed. To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few important things to know moving forward.

Number one, interpretation in the video conference will work very much as it does in a regular committee meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either "floor", "English" or "French".

Two, as you are speaking, if you plan to alternate from one language to the other, you will need to also switch the interpretation channel so it aligns with the language that you're speaking. You may want to allow a short pause when switching.

Three, before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you're ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone.

Four, I remind you that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair.

Five, should members need to request the floor, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order.

Six, if you wish to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member, you should use the “raise hand” function. This will signal to the chair your interest in speaking. In order to do so, you should click on the “participants” button at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you will see next to your name that you can click on “raise hand”.

Seven, when speaking, please speak slowly and clearly.

Eight, when you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

• (1115)

Nine, the use of the headset is strongly encouraged. In fact, if we can all agree that it would be not just an encouragement but a requirement, that would be good. Interpreters will have a very difficult time if you don't have your headset in use.

Should any technical challenges arise—for example, in relation to interpretation or a problem with your audio—please advise the chair immediately, and the technical team will work to resolve them. Please note that we may need to suspend during these times, as we need to ensure all members are able to participate fully.

Before we get started, can everyone click on their screen on the top right-hand corner to ensure that they are in gallery view? With this view you should be able to see all the participants in a grid view. It will ensure that all video participants can see one another.

If the committee wishes, we can now proceed to the consideration of routine motions.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm just asking for clarification. I just see on the screen here that a staff member from Mr. Brassard's office is here, and that is fine, but my staff don't have access. Just for clarity, I'm wondering if this is a normal practice or if something else has happened.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: No, he isn't supposed to be there.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm not sure who is talking there. It says “clerk”.

I'm not sure who admitted him, so you're absolutely correct, MP Blaney, that that person should not be on there. There is a phone line that staff can sign into. If your staff do not have that phone line, please let the clerk know, and we'll get that to you right away. This is important because, if they try to listen on the website, there is a delay. We want you guys to have access to your staff in real time, so the phone line is critical to use.

Thank you for catching that, MP Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I just thought I was unaware of something that had changed, so thank you for that clarification.

The Chair: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Are there any other questions before I move on to routine motions?

I see the “raised hand” function. Very good, MP Lalonde, for using that. You have the floor.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I wish you congratulations from the people here in Orléans on this appointment as chair.

I would like to bring, Mr. Chair, the routine motions, and I would like to start with the analyst services:

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?

I guess a question for the clerk is whether a hand up is sufficient, and I'm just getting word here. Yes, as long as we have agreement from everybody, we can move forward in that way.

At this point, seeing no disagreement, I would like to invite Jean-Rodrigue Paré, the committee's analyst, to activate his camera in order to participate in the meeting.

Seeing that he's just joined us, hello, sir.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): Good morning.

I'm only going to make a few comments in French, so as not to confuse the interpreter unnecessarily. I know some of you, and it's a pleasure to meet you again. If you need anything in terms of content, organization of files or material you may need, it will of course be my pleasure to help and support you until the end of the session.

[*English*]

The Chair: Excellent.

MP Lalonde, we'll go back to you.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

We will continue with the motion on “Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure”:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five members, namely the Chair and one member from each recognized party; and that the subcommittee work in a spirit of collaboration.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Excellent.

Go ahead, MP Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: This is the motion about meeting without a quorum:

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 members are present, including two members of the opposition and two members of the government, but when travelling outside the Parliamentary Precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Excellent.

MP Lalonde, you may proceed.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: The motion on “Time for Opening Remarks and Questioning of Witnesses” is as follows:

That witnesses be given ten minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six 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 minutes; Liberal Party, five minutes; Conservative Party, five minutes; Liberal Party, five minutes; Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes; New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion?

Go ahead, MP Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

Again, I want to add my congratulations. I've always enjoyed you as a chair, so I'm happy to see that happen again.

I have a couple of amendments that I would like to propose.

In PROC and in many other committees, they have looked at the 10-minute timeline for an opening statement and changed it to “between five and seven and a half minutes”. That's to make sure that when people do their presentations, we get through them quickly so that we can get to the question portion, which is so important.

The other amendment I would like to propose in this section is changing the second round to “Conservative Party, five minutes; Liberal Party, five minutes; Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes; New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes; Conservative Party, five minutes; and Liberal Party, five minutes.” Again, this has been done in PROC and the majority of the other committees that have met to this point.

The Chair: Do we have any discussion on this amendment? We obviously have to deal with the amendment first.

Go ahead, Monsieur Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Rachel, I am wondering if you could clarify. You're proposing to reduce the 10-minute timeline to five minutes to seven and a half minutes.

• (1125)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Yes. I would recommend five minutes.

Thank you for that question. I think that's important.

In other committees, I know they've largely gone to between five minutes and seven and a half minutes. Some have done five. That's what PROC did. Yesterday, for example, INAN did six. I know that some other committees have done seven and a half. I would propose five minutes.

Mr. John Brassard: Then you're proposing that this timeline would extend the level of questioning into a third round. Is that right?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It potentially could.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay.

The Chair: It would depend on how many witnesses we have.

Mr. John Brassard: Right.

Just so that I'm clear again, and so that everybody else is clear—because this is the first time I'm hearing about this—in the case of the Conservatives, it would be a six-minute first round and a five-minute second round, and you're proposing a potential five-minute third round if the timeline is good. Is that correct?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Correct.

Mr. John Brassard: Okay, thanks.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Go ahead, MP Amos.

[*Translation*]

Mr. William Amos: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your election.

I just want to mention that I support the suggestions made by Ms. Blaney.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Go ahead, MP Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, I'm just questioning if the suggestion of MP Blaney is for five minutes or seven and a half. What is part of her amendment to the motion, please? It's just for clarification.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: My recommendation is for five minutes. I just wanted to make it clear to the committee that other committees have had discussions and had moved it to between five minutes and seven and a half. I just wanted to make sure to share that information. My recommendation is for five.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, I would support the five-minute amendment also.

The Chair: Just before we move on, does the clerk have any questions in terms of clarification on the amendment?

The Clerk: The amendment is that witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statements, and then when we go down the text of the motion... I can read it all, and then Ms. Blaney can make sure that I have it done correctly. The amended motion would read:

That witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows: Round 1: Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party.

Then it would be:

For the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for questioning be as follows: Conservative Party, five minutes; Liberal Party, five minutes; Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes; New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes; Conservative Party, five minutes; Liberal Party, five minutes.

Is that correct?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That is correct.

The Chair: Excellent.

Is there any further discussion?

Go ahead, MP Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, I'm not a steady committee member, but one thing I would be mindful of is that five minutes can be awfully short, so if there is a veteran who has issues with speaking, I would just ask that you use a little bit of discretion—that all members use a little bit of discretion—to allow them to have their say.

Coming to this committee is probably one of the most intimidating things that a veteran can do, but I would hope that all members would just show a little bit of compassion in those unique situations. That's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Chair: I would concur with that, MP Albas. Thank you for bringing that up.

MP Wagantall is next.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Thank you, Chair.

What Dan has said is very true. We want to be able to know that they are comfortable coming and that they aren't pressured. Five minutes is so limiting. I would prefer to see seven minutes as the standard compromise.

The Chair: We will have to move and dispense with MP Blaney's amendment before we would discuss an additional amendment if we want to change that time.

• (1130)

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Chair, if Rachel is good with this, what I would propose is that it could be up to seven minutes rather than just the straight five, but that the witnesses could have up to seven minutes for their opening statement.

That might resolve the situation of whether it's five or seven. At least we can give them up to seven. That might be a resolution.

The Chair: Again, that's an additional amendment that we would have to come back to. I just want to make sure we're staying in the realm of procedure here in terms of dealing with the motion.

The exception—and I'll confer with the clerk—would be if MP Blaney would amend her motion. I think that would be okay.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Chair, yesterday when I moved something similar in INAN, of course we talked about elders and needing the time, so that's why we felt it was important to leave it to the discretion of the chair. There was a friendly amendment for six minutes rather than five minutes.

I'm more than happy to see Ms. Wagantall's amendment as a friendly amendment to my amendment. I don't know if that's procedurally correct. I leave it to the chair.

The Chair: I can simply say, folks, that if the latitude is still there for the chair to hold those conversations before the meeting, obviously it would depend upon how many witnesses we have at the meeting. If there's one witness, we have much more leeway. For the second part of your amendment to work, we'd have to shorten the witnesses' time a little bit.

I see that MP Casey has his hand up as well.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would not support having opening statements at any more than five minutes, and here's why.

Let me say this. My support for the motion will be conditional on the opening statements being limited to five minutes.

I agree that the chair should have discretion in the circumstances Mr. Albas described, but in the first round you have four six-minute slots. That makes 24 minutes. In the second and subsequent rounds, you have four five-minute slots and two slots of two and a half minutes. That's 25 minutes.

You thus have 49 minutes of questions. Take that 49 minutes of questioning, with two witnesses presenting for five minutes each, and there's your 59 minutes for one panel.

The problem I have is that if you increase the time for the presentations, the slot that gets cut is the Liberal slot at the end. To be comfortable with moving us to the back of the line and moving the NDP and the Bloc up the line from where they were in the last Parliament, I would want to have the assurance that there's some hope of getting to us. That assurance is gone if the opening statements are longer than five minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm happy to leave my motion at five minutes.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

We have to deal with MP Blaney's initial amendment.

To clarify from the clerk, we will be voting on MP Blaney's amendment. Is that correct?

The Clerk: Yes, that's correct.

The Chair: Do we need to do a recorded division on this motion?

The Clerk: If the whole committee agrees, then we don't need to go to a recorded division. If not everyone agrees, then we can go to a recorded division.

The Chair: Okay.

Let me ask—and committee members can either nod or shake their heads—does everyone agree with MP Blaney's amendment?

Mr. John Brassard: We agree.

The Chair: Excellent.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We'll go back to MP Lalonde, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will now present the motion concerning document distribution:

That only 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.

• (1135)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: MP Lalonde, you may continue.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: This is the motion concerning working meals:

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

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Please continue, MP Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I will move on to the motion regarding travel, accommodation and living expenses of witnesses:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two representatives per organization; and 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)

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: This is the motion regarding access to in camera meetings:

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.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: You may continue, MP Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Here is the motion regarding transcripts of in camera meetings:

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?

Go ahead, MP Brassard.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Chair, I know that it's been the experience of other committees for the chair to ask for unanimous consent, given the fact that we are virtual. I'm going to make a suggestion that we verbalize our consent as opposed to maybe going to a recorded vote. If there's a need to go to a recorded vote, then we do that, but I think we should be verbalizing our consent just so that everyone is clear where everyone stands.

That's just a suggestion.

The Chair: Just so I'm clear, are you referring to this process we're going through right now?

Mr. John Brassard: Yes, that's exactly what I'm referring to.

The Chair: It just gets really tough with everybody talking at the same time. The microphones don't really work well that way. I'm trying to do that visually. We can try it. I'm just not sure if our interpreters....

Mr. John Brassard: You can direct and call us on it, right? You could say, "Do the Conservatives agree? Yes. Do the Liberals agree? Yes."

The Chair: Sure, okay.

Mr. John Brassard: That's my suggestion.

The Chair: Can I make a suggestion, just for the sake of speed? I can change it to asking if anybody disagrees. If anyone disagrees, then they can verbalize it at that point. I'm just thinking of trying to get through these motions as efficiently as possible.

Is that a good compromise?

Mr. John Brassard: I agree.

The Chair: Okay, that's excellent.

I'm sorry; I lost my place. I'm not sure where I was at, to be honest.

Mr. John Brassard: You were on meals.

The Chair: I was on notice of motion, I think. I was not on meals.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: No.

[*English*]

The Chair: That was a nice try.

Is there any discussion on notice of motion? No, we haven't read it yet.

Go ahead, MP Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I'm starting to be a little confused myself, Mr. Chair.

This is the motion regarding notices of motion:

That a 48 hours notice, interpreted as two 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 no 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 outside the Parliamentary Precinct, no substantive motions may be moved.

• (1140)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion? Does anyone disagree with the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: MP Lalonde, please continue.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: The last routine motion concerns orders of reference from the House respecting bills:

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.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion? Does anyone disagree with that motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Seeing no other routine motions, does the committee wish to discuss future business at this time?

I don't know if this is an old hand up, but I see that Sean Casey has his hand up. Please go ahead, MP Casey.

Mr. Sean Casey: It's about 58 years old.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Sean Casey: I have a motion to present, Mr. Chair. This is what I would call a continuation motion, I guess.

The motion is as follows: I move that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs agrees that all substantive motions adopted by the committee to undertake studies or hear from witnesses in the first

session of the 43rd Parliament are hereby readopted by the committee without modification or amendment.

That's the motion I wish to present. Perhaps I can offer just a little bit of colour, because I know that we have some new members on the committee.

Essentially, the committee had adopted four specific motions as a work plan and had assigned priorities to each of them. As the first order of business they covered, first and foremost, the backlog, and they dedicated no fewer than four meetings to that study. The second was to undertake a study of federal supports and services to veterans, caregivers and families, with no fewer than three meetings dedicated to that study. The third order of business was to undertake a study of the efficacy and use of psychiatric service dogs, with no more than three meetings devoted to that study. The fourth was a study on commemoration, with no fewer than three meetings.

That's just by way of background, Mr. Chair. The motion is essentially to readopt all of those four substantive motions as our work plan.

The Chair: Thank you.

I see that a few other people have put their hand up.

Just for clarification, Monsieur Desilets, you had your hand up very briefly and brought it down. I just want to make sure you're good.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Everything's fine, Mr. Chair. We're just looking forward to moving the next motions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

MP Blaney, is your intervention about MP Casey's motion or is this an additional motion that you'd like to bring forward?

• (1145)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I will speak to Mr. Casey's motion first.

I agree that of course the studies this committee put forward earlier in the session are important ones. I do think we need to revisit these. I have some additions that I would like to look at, so I'm not comfortable supporting the motion unless I have more clarity about the process.

My understanding is that the subcommittee would be able to meet, review what had been done, look at any new motions that are applied, and then create a work plan based on that. Things have changed. I think it's important to continue a study on the disability backlog, but it has been a significant number of months. There is a PBO report that all of you know, and I'm very interested in following up on that and in making sure we get more clarity on that issue.

I guess what I'm saying is that I want to know the process before I commit to agreeing to anything. I don't think moving forward with the old work plan makes sense until there is a more substantive debate about where we need to go.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're welcome.

If I can add to that, I would agree that things have definitely changed. Not to speak for Mr. Casey, I believe the focus is to get us moving and back up and running—to hit the ground running, so to speak. I agree that a subcommittee is a very good idea to flesh out the specifics of each of these studies to make sure they're substantive enough and have the right focus, but I think that would be determined in subcommittee, not in relation to MP Casey's motion. I think it's not completely necessary to have the subcommittee before we can move this motion so that we can give direction to the clerk to get moving and get back up and running.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I would like to hear the motion again. I might want to make an amendment so that the first meeting, prior to the whole committee meeting, is a subcommittee meeting to put forward work plans. Then we'd be bringing a plan about how we're moving forward to the first meeting of all members. It's to have that discussion in our second committee meeting after this one.

The Chair: We have to discuss Mr. Casey's motion and vote on it first. Then we can discuss what the next meeting looks like. I don't think we have to defeat Mr. Casey's motion in order to have a subcommittee meeting.

Mr. Casey, do you want to elaborate?

Mr. Sean Casey: The only thing that I wanted to do was reread the motion, as Ms. Blaney suggested. It is as follows: That the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs agrees that all substantive motions adopted by the committee to undertake studies or hear from witnesses in the first session of the 43rd Parliament are hereby readopted by the committee without modification or amendment.

I would take that to mean—exactly as you indicated, Mr. Chair—that at our next meeting, we would start in with the backlog study because that was what was adopted in the last Parliament.

The Chair: A subcommittee meeting could also be held in addition to our next scheduled meeting, if I'm not mistaken.

Mr. Sean Casey: Agreed.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: The motion says “without modification or amendment.” I can't support that, because I would want to modify the study on backlog. I'm just being clear. I will not support the motion because of that language.

The Chair: I understand that. Any motion we move here just gives direction to the clerk to get started. We would follow that up with the subcommittee meeting. If those adjustments are needed, we can do that then and there. I think we agree, MP Blaney, that this is a good course to move on.

Is there any other discussion?

Go ahead, MP Brassard.

• (1150)

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure the “raise hand” function is working properly. I've raised it about three or four times.

The Chair: I'm sorry. It didn't come up. For whatever reason, you're not on my screen.

There we go. I can see you just fine there, sir.

Mr. John Brassard: You'd think I would have learned my lesson with PROC.

Frankly, I share Rachel's concern regarding the “without amendment” aspect of this motion. I believe there are some significant issues that we still need to deal with.

We have, as Rachel said, the parliamentary budget office report on the backlog. There's a lot of new information in there. I'm not in disagreement with moving on that report and the backlog situation, but the process is that we go to the subcommittee. That, in effect, sets course and direction for this committee.

My concern is that with respect to the family caregiver question, the efficacy of service dogs and...what was the other one? There were four specific things, and there's a new session. There's more information. We've had the supplementary estimates, for example, that have been tabled in the House of Commons. We haven't dealt with that issue. That doesn't reflect what's in Mr. Casey's motion. There's an order of the House on April 20 for committees to look into this and report back by November 27.

I'm not going to support this motion as is. The Conservatives will not support this motion as is. I think we need to go through the process, have the subcommittee provide direction and then have the clerk work on whatever comes out of that subcommittee at that time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I see MP Wagantall has the “raise hand” function there.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Chair, I don't believe that this can be done as it's being presented today, as those motions were all dissolved. He'd have to bring back the evidence and witness testimony and table a whole new motion, even if it's the same. My understanding is that this blanket motion can't actually take place.

The Chair: We can definitely ask the clerk for some direction on that. I believe we are able to do that.

Maybe the clerk can clarify if it is out of order, but I don't believe it is out of order.

The Clerk: One moment, please. I'm just consulting.

The Chair: MP Casey, you have your hand up again.

Mr. Sean Casey: On that point, Mr. Chair, with respect to the four motions that were adopted, there was only one on which we heard any testimony. That was with respect to the backlog. If there is an issue over the fact we've received testimony, it would only be applicable to the one.

I'm not sure why we wouldn't be able to consider the testimony from that previous meeting as read into the record. I'd certainly defer to the clerk on that.

The Chair: I will also point out, folks, that we don't actually have a schedule for this committee right now. I know there are still negotiations happening in terms of when that's going to be. We can most certainly use this normal time slot for a subcommittee meeting if we don't have that schedule ready to roll.

The Procedural Clerk (Christine Lafrance): Mr. Chair, my name is Christine Lafrance. I'm another clerk of the House of Commons.

The Chair: Hello.

The Procedural Clerk: Can I shed some light on this motion?

• (1155)

The Chair: Yes, please.

The Procedural Clerk: It's a whole new session, so what happened before, procedurally speaking, is not in front of the committee right now. If the committee wants to follow up on these studies, I would suggest that every motion be readopted one by one and that the committee undertake a study on what it wants to do.

Also, we have some wording to import into the session with respect to whatever happened during the last session. For example, it would be, "Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on [subject] and that the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the first session of the 43rd Parliament on the subject be taken into consideration by the committee in the current session."

That would be the appropriate way to continue a study that was started in the previous session. It would be one by one. The motion states "all substantive motions". I don't know how many motions the committee adopted during the last session, but it means that all of them would be imported.

The Chair: That's a very good point. Thank you very much for that clarification.

Mr. Casey, would it make sense to withdraw this motion and move this to a discussion at the next available opportunity to convene and have a subcommittee meeting?

Mr. Sean Casey: Based on that advice, I think that is the logical next step, Mr. Chair. You can consider my motion withdrawn.

The Chair: Thank you all for catching that.

Mr. Brassard has his hand up. I see Mr. Desilets as well.

I will go to MP Brassard first.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Chair.

I'm glad the clerk clarified that, because the logical next step in this new session of Parliament is to go to the subcommittee and deal with not just potential motions but the agenda and dates of the meetings.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP Desilets.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Is this the time to introduce some motions?

If that is the case, perhaps some of them could rally my colleagues and allow old motions to disappear.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. We are in committee business, so it is proper to move motions. If it pertains to our study schedule, I would ask that maybe we move that to the subcommittee so that we're not dividing, but that is up to you, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Chair, if I may, I would like to move four motions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Sure. I don't have them to share with the rest of the committee. To clarify, we're just putting them on notice. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: They should have been translated and distributed to my colleagues, if I am not mistaken.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, the clerk did receive them just before the committee meeting but did not have an opportunity to review them as of yet. You can read them into the record right now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Perfect.

I will read it slowly to make sure that the interpretation is correct.

The first motion reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee resume at the earliest opportunity its study on the backlog of disability benefit claims at the Department of Veterans Affairs, which it began in the 1st Session of the 43rd Parliament; that the committee give special consideration to the possibility of pre-approving all disability benefit claims at the Department of Veterans Affairs; and that the evidence and documents received by the committee at that time on the subject be taken into consideration by the committee in this session.

I will now continue with the other motions.

Am I reading at an appropriate speed?

[*English*]

The Chair: Read a little more slowly, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: It will be my pleasure.

The second motion reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the quality of life of veterans in major centres and the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on them; that the committee devote a minimum of four (4) meetings to this study; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

The third motion reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on administrative delays in processing files at Veterans Affairs Canada, including the differences in processing times between the files of English-speaking and French-speaking veterans; that the committee devote a minimum of two meetings to this study; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

The fourth and final motion is the following:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study and make recommendations on the challenges and barriers faced by minority veterans (women, LGBTQ2+ and racialized veterans); that the committee give particular attention to the specific needs of veterans in these minority groups, as well as specific supports and services that could be provided by Veterans Affairs Canada; that the committee devote a minimum of three meetings to this study; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

Those are the four motions I wanted to submit, Mr. Chair.

• (1200)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Desilets.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Is it on this particular motion, sir?

Mr. John Brassard: It's on the motions that were just presented.

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. John Brassard: I need clarification from you. Are we proceeding with notices of motion here, or are these motions being tabled for debate right now? I don't understand how this process is playing out. I have motions for which I can give notice as well, and I'm prepared to do that, but are we going to be debating these four motions, the subsequent motions that I suspect will be coming from Ms. Blaney, and then the motions that I'll be putting forward? Are we debating them today, or are we just putting these motions on notice?

The Chair: I don't want to speak for Mr. Desilets, but I suspect that these are just to be put on notice. I think we agreed just a few moments ago that we needed to push MP Casey's motion to a subcommittee, and I think we should do that with all of these. If you want to read it into the record for the purpose of getting it on notice, we can definitely do that, but I think the commitment we just made was that we're going to move to subcommittee to deal with all of these in a substantive way, one by one, so that we can draw up that new road map for this committee.

Unfortunately, I don't have these motions to distribute. The clerk has them, but they haven't been translated, so I can't distribute the motions to even have us look through them with a fine-tooth comb. I'm definitely open to folks jumping in to move a notice of motion as Mr. Desilets just did, but I would recommend strongly that we move all of this to the subcommittee to discuss.

Does that answer your question, Mr. Brassard?

Mr. John Brassard: It does. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

In terms of order, I have a couple of raised hands here. I have Rachel, Monsieur Brassard and then Sean Casey.

We'll go to you first, Rachel. Is this a motion or is this to discuss—

• (1205)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: This is not a motion.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I have a motion to propose, but I'm more than happy, if I understand the clarity that I think I've reached, if we

do that through the process and give the notice of motion to the clerk. Then we'd have a discussion during the appropriate time at the subcommittee meeting.

The Chair: Correct.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: If that's how that is going to work, then I think I will go through that process.

Thank you so much for those motions. I found some of them very thoughtful and I look forward to discussing them.

I recognize just how unprecedented these times are, in that we don't know a lot about when committees are going to be meeting. I know that the House staff is working very hard and I thank them so much for their incredible work to make sure we move as quickly as possible and get the committees up and running. I know that it will happen.

I am wondering, Chair, if you could just clarify for me that, as I think I'm hearing, our first meeting, once the whips make their agreement and send that out and it's public, will in fact be a meeting of the subcommittee, so that it can bring forward to the full committee recommendations about how to move forward. At that point, we can review all motions that have been put forward and perhaps amend and put together some that are similar and then present something to the larger committee.

I'm just looking for clarification.

The Chair: Yes, I would say that's the intent on how to move forward. The very next meeting would be a subcommittee meeting so that we can do this properly. I know through the clerk that we have received motions from other members, and we can circulate those in as quick a time as possible.

Mr. Brassard is next. Then I have MP Casey and MP Desilets.

Mr. John Brassard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to run through these quickly. I think the clerk can confirm that she did receive our notices of motion as well as the translation of those motions. If she could just confirm that for the record, I would appreciate it.

The Clerk: Yes, Mr. Brassard, I have received your notices of motion. I have them in both languages, and if members wish, I could circulate them through the P9 addresses right now.

Mr. John Brassard: Right.

Since I have the floor, I am going to read these notices of motion into the record in advance of their going into subcommittee.

Motion number one is "That pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the committee undertake the study of the Supplementary Estimates (B) 2019-2020, and that the committee invite the Minister of Veterans Affairs and departmental officials to appear."

I will note as well that the estimates, as I said earlier, were tabled September 30, and that pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) and the order made on Monday, April 20, each committee may consider and report or shall be deemed to have reported the same back to the House no later than Friday, November 27, 2020.

Therefore, I think it's important that we pursue the supplementary estimates in advance of that timeline of November 27, 2020.

The second motion for which I'm giving notice is "That as its first order of business and pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee conduct a study of the backlog of pending veteran disability benefit applications at Veterans Affairs Canada, and that no fewer than four meetings be devoted to this study."

I want to commend Ms. Blaney for her question to the PBO on the backlog and the subsequent report that was issued last week, outlining that we are now upwards of 50,000 cases of veterans and their families not receiving adjudication or decisions on their claims. I think that is an extremely important study. We need to have witnesses and have the PBO come in, and I want to thank Ms. Blaney again for that.

The third notice of motion is "That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the Royal Canadian Legion and other veteran organizations and their financial health during and after the COVID-19 crisis."

The situation involving veterans' organizations such as the RCL has come to the attention of all Canadians. I know that Bill C-4 addresses some of the issue, but this is not a "just now" issue. It is going to be a long-standing problem across this country for these service organizations, including Dominion Command and the Royal Canadian Legion, to help veterans and their families as we move forward, because many of them are facing financial hardship. It's important that we look at these organizations and the impact of many of these service organizations not being able to function in their proper fashion. We need to study the impact on veterans and their families and on those organizations.

The final motion—and I'm glad to see Mr. Casey sees this as important—that is on notice is "That as the fourth order of business and pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of (a) the efficacy and use of psychiatric service dogs by Canadian Armed Forces veterans to alleviate the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder; b) that the resources required by Veterans Affairs Canada to implement access to psychiatric service dogs; c) the challenges faced by veterans with psychiatric service dogs; and d) what should constitute minimum national standards for the training of PTSD psychiatric service dogs, and that no fewer than three meetings be devoted to this study."

As Ms. Casey indicated, this study was being done in a previous session of Parliament. We feel it is extremely important, and now is the time to continue that study.

Those are the notices of motions, Mr. Chair, that are in front of the committee. I'll be glad to speak to them as we move to subcommittee and figure out what the agenda is going to be, going forward.

Thank you for your time.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

MP Casey, you're next.

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

I'm going to take my lead from Mr. Brassard. He has put on notice two of the four motions that were part of my original motion, the motion that I withdrew. I want to put the other two on notice to be referred to the subcommittee as well.

The first one is "That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of federal supports and services to Canadian veterans, caregivers and families; that the committee report its findings to the House with recommendations on how the government could improve these services and supports to better meet the unique needs of veterans, caregivers and families; and that no fewer than three meetings be devoted to the study."

The second one is "That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of a long-term Canadian strategy for commemorations, which recognizes and honours the service, sacrifice and achievements of all Canadian veterans; 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 the committee report its findings to the House 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; and that no fewer than three meetings be devoted to the study."

The Chair: Mr. Casey, could you send those to the clerk so that she's able to distribute them?

● (1215)

Mr. Sean Casey: I'm happy to do that.

The Chair: Mr. Desilets, you are next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Chair, my intervention is a little late. I just want to approve of the way you operate in relation to the subcommittees and tell you that these were obviously just notices of motion on my part, just as my colleagues are doing now.

[*English*]

The Chair: Welcome Mr. Carrie. You're just getting in under the wire here to the meeting. It's good to see you, sir.

I see no other hands at this point. Is there any additional committee business before I call for agreement to adjourn?

Seeing none, is the committee in agreement to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Excellent.

It was a great start. We had a few technical glitches at the beginning. A huge thank you to everybody there in Ottawa who make this possible. We always seem to work well together.

Thank you very much, and take care. Have a great rest of your week.

The meeting is adjourned.

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