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Standing Committee on Health

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 001

Monday, December 13, 2021

Chair: Mr. Sean Casey



Standing Committee on Health

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• (1535)

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Naaman Sugrue): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

I must inform the 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, cannot entertain points of order nor participate in debate.

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 now ready to receive motions for the chair.

Go ahead, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Yes, I'd like to nominate MP Sean Casey, please.

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

Are there any further motions?

It has been moved by Mr. Jowhari that Mr. Casey be elected as chair of the committee. Pursuant to the House order of Thursday, November 25, I will now proceed to a recorded division unless there is obvious consent.

I declare the motion carried and Mr. Casey duly elected chair of the committee.

Mr. Casey, I invite you to take the chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair (The Chair (Charlottetown, Lib.)): Thank you very much, Mr. Clerk.

Thank you to Mr. Jowhari for moving my nomination and for the other committee members not insisting on a standing vote. I'll do my best to be impartial, efficient and polite to one and all. Thank you so much.

Mr. Clerk, I believe that normally the next step is for the election of vice-chairs.

The Clerk: Yes, Mr. Chair. You've anticipated correctly.

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.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'd like to nominate Luc Berthold for the vice-chair position.

The Chair: Thank you.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Ellis that Mr. Berthold be elected the first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Seeing none, it being moved by Mr. Ellis that Mr. Berthold be elected the first vice-chair of the committee, I will now proceed to a recorded division unless there is obvious consent.

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

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: 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.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): I'd like to nominate my friend Luc Thériault.

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

Pursuant to the House Order of Thursday, November 25, 2021, I'll now proceed to a recorded division, unless there's clear consensus.

(Motion agreed to)

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

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, we are in your hands.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk, for your excellent work. I also want to thank you for sending me some notes to start the meeting. I'll read them now.

[*English*]

Welcome to meeting number one of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Regarding the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members whether they are participating virtually or in person.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind all participants to this meeting that taking screenshots or photos of your screen is not permitted.

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation, and in light of the recommendations from public health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19 to remain healthy and safe, the following is recommended for those attending the meeting in person. First, anyone with symptoms should participate by Zoom and not attend the meeting in person. Second, everyone must maintain two-metre physical distancing, whether seated or standing. Everyone must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is recommended in the strongest possible terms that members wear their masks at all times, including when seated. Non-medical masks, which provide better clarity over cloth masks, are available in the room. Everyone present must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer at the room entrance. Committee rooms are cleaned before and after each meeting. To maintain this, everyone is encouraged to clean surfaces such as the desk, chair and microphone with the provided disinfectant wipes when vacating or taking a seat.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank the members in advance for their cooperation, although I admit it will be challenging for me to enforce these measures from my basement in Charlottetown.

Moving on to other business, I would now like to suggest as the next order of business that the committee now proceed to considering our routine motions. In preparing for this, the committee clerk has circulated a list of routine motions that the committee adopted in the last parliamentary session. The committee clerk can also answer any questions you may have about the routine motions.

If it is the will of the committee, I'm prepared to entertain the first routine motion.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Chair, I want to bring up a technical issue.

The sound is so loud in the room that I have trouble hearing the interpretation in my earpiece.

Is it possible to find a balance that doesn't involve you losing your lovely voice?

The Chair: That's a reasonable request.

I'll keep my voice down a bit, if that helps.

[*English*]

Mr. Thériault, is it a little better when I'm speaking more softly?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: That's much better, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. I need to speak less enthusiastically then.

[*English*]

I'm now ready to entertain the first routine motion.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Mr. Chair, if it would please the committee, I would read the routine motions.

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Concerning the analyst services, 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.

[*English*]

The Chair: You've heard the motion. Is there any discussion?

Seeing none, are we ready for the vote?

All those in favour of the motion as presented, please indicate by a show of hands. I suppose, Mr. Clerk, is probably the best way to go, unless a recorded division is required.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, unless it is unanimous or on division, it would be a recorded vote.

The Chair: All right.

The Clerk: Around the table, I'm seeing that it seems to be unanimous.

The Chair: I'm not there, so I guess I'm going to rely on you to be my eyes to determine whether there is consensus in the room.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're now ready for the second one.

Mr. van Koeverden.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Concerning the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, I move:

[*English*]

It reads:

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

The Chair: Is it agreed?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're ready for the next one, Mr. van Koeverden.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Concerning the meeting without a quorum, I move:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence published when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including two members of the opposition parties and two members of the government party, but when travelling outside the Parliamentary Precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.

• (1545)

[*English*]

The Chair: Is it agreed?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The fourth motion deals with time for opening remarks and questioning of witnesses:

That witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statement; that whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statement 72 hours in advance; 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 for the first round: Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois and 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; Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes; New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes; Conservative Party, five minutes; Liberal Party, five minutes.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

The Clerk: We have Mr. Davies, and then Monsieur Thériault.

The Chair: Mr. Davies, please go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Thank you.

I have a small proposal to make on this. I noticed that the routine motions that have been circulated are not precisely the same as the routine motions that were adopted by the health committee in the first and last session of the last Parliament. There's a subtle difference here that I wanted to point out to my colleagues and I'd like to make a suggestion.

In the routine motions adopted by the health committee in the last Parliament, it said that witnesses be given up to 10 minutes—it said 10 minutes, but five minutes is okay—for their opening statement at the discretion of the chair. Then it went [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] during the questioning of witnesses that six minutes be allocated for the first questioner, etc., and it went forward. You can see that the qualifier of “the discretion of the chair” was over the witnesses' amount of time.

If you look at the proposal before the committee today, that's been moved. The discretion of the chair now is modifying the six minutes for each party. I don't know if that was done on purpose, but I certainly don't think the chair should have the discretion to

give six minutes or less in a first order of questioning, or, in fact, over the time.

I would propose that we either move the words “at the discretion of the chair” back to where it should be—which is over the witnesses' amount of time—or just strike it completely, so that we know that witnesses are given up to five minutes. The questioners get up to six minutes in the first round and then they get their five and two and a half, etc.

I would point out that where the discretion has been exercised is generally in the second round. If witnesses go over or if we have had a point of order or something, sometimes in the second round we don't have the full time, so the chair would sometimes ask if it was okay if each party got three minutes or something and we would give that approval or not by unanimous consent. That always worked very well. I believe that's the proper way to handle that issue. It's not to give the chair the discretion as to whether or not we get six minutes or five minutes, etc.

I hope I'm not terribly unclear. That would be my suggestion.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Mr. Davies.

To determine exactly how to handle this, you've actually put forward a couple of suggestions. One is to completely delete the reference to the discretion of the chair. The second is to move it.

We probably need to settle on one of those or entertain further discussion as to which way we should go. Unless we are going to proceed with this as a friendly amendment or by consensus, we're going to be left to vote on the amendment, which hopefully won't be necessary.

Are there any further interventions on this particular point? Mr. Davies, would you like to indicate whether you're suggesting that the words be deleted or relocated?

• (1550)

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that clarification.

I think I will proceed with proposing that the words be deleted, so that we have certainty about how much time the witnesses have and how much time we have for questioning. Then we can operate by unanimous consent if we feel that we need to make changes. Of course, we can always revisit the routine motions and put it back in if we need to.

For clarification, I'll propose we delete those words.

The Chair: Okay, I guess the way to proceed with this is first to go back to the mover.

Mr. van Koeverden, do you consider the amendment to be friendly? If so, we can just proceed and take it as is. If not, then we'll need to vote on the amendment.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Davies for your intervention.

You're correct. The routine motions are not identical to how they were last time. I think we both experienced in various committees in the previous Parliament the time constraints involved with doing things semi-virtually or in a hybrid format occasionally, with the delays with witnesses or with other members of this committee; hence, somebody was tasked with identifying how to move forward, use the time allotted and not go terribly over.

I think we can all agree that we have a friendly chair and somebody has to be given the discretion as to how to divide time when we have limited time, so I would ask that we, in good faith, keep the routine motions as such.

As you said, if we find that a grave miscarriage of justice by the chair has occurred, we can come back and revisit them at another time. I think appealing to the chair's good judgment in cases where he does have to make a call would be prudent.

The Chair: The discussion now then is on the amendment. Are there any further interventions with respect to the amendment suggested by Mr. Davies to delete the words "at the discretion of the Chair"?

Monsieur Thériault.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Thériault, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Unless the interpretation is incorrect, I gather from Mr. Davies that he was referring to the witnesses having seven minutes to speak. In addition, to ensure that the parties have the time to ask their questions, he wants us to remove "at the discretion of the Chair" so that we have six minutes.

I understood that the witnesses' presentation time would be increased from five to seven minutes. I think that, when we conduct a study, we must give the witnesses the necessary time to share what they have to say. I think that, when people are asked to come, it's important to give them a minimum amount of time to speak.

I think that it would be more appropriate to spend seven minutes rather than five minutes hearing from the witnesses, and to keep the six minutes of speaking time in the first round.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

You just moved a subamendment. We must first decide whether to adopt the amendment moved by Mr. Davies. We can then discuss your proposal to extend the presentation time for witnesses.

We're now discussing the amendment moved by Mr. Davies to remove the words "at the discretion of the Chair."

• (1555)

[*English*]

Are there any further interventions on Mr. Davies' amendment?

We are then ready for the question.

Do we have consensus—obviously, we don't because it wasn't friendly. I believe this requires a standing vote as to whether the words "at the discretion of the Chair" be removed from the routine motions.

Mr. Clerk, could you conduct a standing vote.

The Clerk: Yes, Mr. Chair.

I think Mr. Powlowski wanted to make a comment first.

The Chair: Dr. Powlowski, go ahead.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I just want to say my understanding was that the whips from all parties agreed on the present wording and so that's why we're going with it.

The Chair: Yes, that's my understanding as well.

Are there any further interventions with respect to the amendment?

If not, Mr. Clerk, can you conduct a vote, please.

Mr. Don Davies: My colleague referred to a different point.

The whips may have agreed, but our committees are masters of their own procedure, and it is extremely common for committees to shape the routine motions in ways that deviate from that, as we have done on many occasions.

If you want to conform to what the whips want, that's certainly an argument, but I don't want anybody at this table to think that just because the whips agreed, it means we can't modify our motions if we see it fit to do so.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Is there any further discussion?

Are we ready for the question?

You're on, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: I would seek guidance on whether the committee would like a recorded division or to have it on division.

Mr. Don Davies: I think it should be a recorded division.

The Clerk: A recorded division has been requested by Mr. Davies.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Thériault would like to move a second amendment.

Mr. Thériault, do you want to move it now? I gather that you want to extend the witnesses' presentations to seven minutes. Is that right?

Mr. Luc Thériault: That's right, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Colleagues, we have a second suggested amendment to allow seven minutes for opening remarks by witnesses. Is there any discussion on this amendment?

The Clerk: Mr. Davies would like to intervene.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: I'd like to thank my colleague for the amendment. I have considerable sympathy for this. Our routine motions in the last Parliament allowed for up to 10 minutes per witness. It's kind of complicated. Then we adopted a special motion of the House that was moved by Ms. Rempel Garner that sent some special rules governing how we handled COVID, which was basically in force for most of the last Parliament. In that motion we had four witnesses per hour, so it made 10 minutes unworkable, because that would have been 40 minutes of the 60. We were routinely cutting that down.

I think the normal course of events or normal situation is usually to have two witnesses per hour. I think that's better, because when you have two witnesses—of course each witnessing organization can have two representatives, which could be four people sitting here—it allows you to pay proper tribute to those witnesses and give every member a chance to question them.

The other thing I'm going to mention is that sometimes this committee can have some pretty high-powered people who are highly skilled. We have epidemiologists, immunologists and experts. I've had sympathy with asking them, as Mr. Thériault said, to come here, sometimes in person, and give us the benefit of their wisdom for five minutes. It takes me five minutes to clear my throat sometimes.

Usually I think having more time makes sense; however, in this case, I'm not going to support this for the following reason. If you look at the way the time has been allocated, it's pretty elegantly done. If we have five minutes per witness, and there are two witnesses, 10 minutes is gone. Then the first round of questioning is four rounds of six minutes each, so that's 24 minutes. That takes us to 34 minutes. Then in the second round, the Conservatives have five minutes and the Liberals five, and then there's two and a half minutes and another two and a half, for another five minutes; then it's the Conservative for five minutes, the Liberals five, for a further 25 minutes to finish the second round. If you add that up, it's 59 minutes.

It rarely goes as smoothly as that, but in theory, if we start on time and we hold everybody to their time, then with the two five-minute periods, we have a chance for everybody to get through the first and second rounds. I think we should aspire to that.

I would say to Mr. Thériault that, per the previous routine motion that we just debated, if we find that five minutes is not sufficient, then I think we can always revisit our routine motions in March or April, if we want, to see how they are working.

The final thing I'll say is, as much as I want to hear from the witnesses for their five minutes, I do think that a good witness can get to the nub of the matter in five minutes. The real benefit of this committee is in our questioning. I think to maximize members' ability on this committee to ask questions that their constituents want asked; the more so the better.

Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Are there any further interventions on the amendment?

The Clerk: I believe Mr. Powlowski and then Monsieur Thériault would like to speak.

The Chair: Go ahead, Dr. Powlowski.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I'm somewhat agnostic on most of these motions, but on this particular one, I feel inclined to support it because we have some excellent witnesses.

What we're dealing with in this committee is often fairly technical subject matter, and sometimes it takes people time to explain the issues and make their arguments. Although I greatly appreciate that we want to have the opportunity to ask questions that our constituents might be interested in, at times those may not be, at least according to the witness, the most important topics that he or she may want to talk about.

Giving people an opportunity to fully explain their perception of a problem and how they should deal with it is important and we ought to give them the time, so I feel inclined to support the motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Powlowski.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Thériault: I wanted to add that we often invite an organization. It seems that we could give that organization seven minutes rather than having all the people with the organization speak.

Sometimes, we think that we're saving time. However, when a witness doesn't cover the whole topic in their presentation, we have to ask them questions to clarify what they could have said in their presentation. This prevents us from asking them further questions.

In the Standing Committee on Health, we've been through the first, second, third and fourth waves. The people who have tracked this whole process have taken courses. Everyone may have a PhD in public health and, in a way, epidemiology at times. Of course, there are computer tools such as Zoom, but sometimes it's hard to get witnesses to leave work to come talk to us for five minutes.

When we have four people at the table, they don't all need to speak when they're from the same organization. I think that it would be good to consider seven minutes per organization or per specialist. That's why I would make some adjustments to my colleague Mr. Davies' comments on this matter.

I invite the committee members to vote, since the discretion of the chair is guaranteed in any case. We can make adjustments afterwards.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I have Ms. Kramp-Neuman and then Mr. Van Koeverden.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Kramp-Neuman.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): I understand looking for longer than five minutes. That being said, recognizing that this committee is very technical, but also very compassionate, if there is a situation where people want or need more than five minutes, it is the will of the chair to ask for the consent of the committee. There is some flexibility that could be granted.

As a baseline, five to seven minutes is a window, but five is fine in this case.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you.

I tend to agree with the previous statement. I'd also just say that if we truly want more time for our witnesses, and we can all agree to that, we also all mutually agree to try to keep our questions short, because we've all been in meetings before where the question takes up more than half of the allotted time.

If we truly do want to hear from our witnesses, that's an accommodation that we can all agree to in good faith. I agree that five minutes is enough and that our chair is compassionate and will not necessarily cut people off, but it's almost never the case that we get through that 59-minute period in a 60-minute stretch.

The Chair: Yes. That's been my experience as well.

Are there any further interventions on the amendment?

The Clerk: I have Mr. Ellis and then Mr. Davies, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Ellis, go ahead.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of the other things to keep in mind, of course, is that subject matter experts often like to wax on about their particular expertise. Given that, I think that what we really want to get at here is the questions that we want answered, and not necessarily to hear what

their expertise is in their minds. I would caution about just willy-nilly adding time to their speaking time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Davies, go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: I just want to add to the point as well that we always invite people to submit written briefs, so there's never any limitation on the length of their written briefs as long as we're clear with them to submit everything they want in writing. Really, the five minutes is a chance for them to sort of hit the highlights and get to the point so we can ask them questions, but they can submit very lengthy written briefs if they want.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

The Clerk: There are no more speakers on my list, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Can we deal with this motion on division, or would someone like to request a recorded vote?

Mr. Clerk, in the room, can you discern whether we're good to go, or whether a recorded vote is required?

• (1610)

The Clerk: It seems that we will require a recorded vote as I'm not getting the sense that we have unanimous consent or desire for on division.

The Chair: We need someone to ask for it, please.

The Clerk: It's requested by Ms. Kramp-Neuman.

The Chair: Please proceed, Mr. Clerk.

(Amendment negatived: nays 9; yeas 2)

The Chair: We are now on to the main motion as originally presented. Is there any discussion on the main motion?

Seeing none, do we have consensus in the room to adopt the motion?

The clerk advises me there is consensus.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're on to the next one.

Mr. van Koeverden, please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Concerning document distribution, I move:

That only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the committee and only when such documents are in both official languages, and that witnesses be advised accordingly.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any discussion on the motion?

Seeing none, is there consensus in the room to adopt the motion as presented?

I'm advised there is consensus.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: The sixth motion is my favourite, and deals with working meals:

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

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Seeing none, is there consensus in the room to adopt the motion as presented?

Is everyone okay with my discretion on this one?

Mr. Don Davies: And when we're hungry, we'll want exclusively P.E.I. potatoes.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Would you like to hear it again, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: All right.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Concerning the travel, accommodation and living expenses of witnesses, I move:

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: You've heard the motion. Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

• (1615)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Access to in camera meetings:

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

The Chair: Is there any discussion on the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Concerning the transcripts of in camera meetings, 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; and that the analysts assigned to the committee also have access to the in camera transcripts.

[*English*]

The Chair: On the motion is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Notice of Motion:

That a 48-hour notice, interpreted as two nights, be required for any substantive motion to be moved in committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that: (a) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday; (b) the motion be distributed to Members and the offices of the whips of each recognized party 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; (c) 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 holding meetings outside the Parliamentary Precinct, no substantive motion may be moved.

The Chair: You've heard the terms of the motion. Is there any discussion on the motion?

The Clerk: Mr. Davies would like to intervene.

The Chair: Mr. Davies, go ahead, please.

Mr. Don Davies: I have just more of a question and an observation.

What's different in this language from last time, and in fact I think for every notice of motion or routine motion that I've seen, is the obligation of the clerk to distribute the motion to the offices of the whips. I just don't know why that is the case. I'm not necessarily opposed to it, but the routine motions last time did not have that language.

Other than the whips wanting to stick their noses into everybody's business all the time, I kind of understand why they want it. They just want to know, and I'm not sure there's any harm in the clerk distributing it, but I just thought I would, for transparency's sake, share that with my colleagues as it does appear to be new. If anybody had any thoughts about it, I would entertain them.

The Chair: Does anybody have any thoughts or anything else they wish to contribute with respect to this motion?

The Clerk: I don't see any other members who wish to make further interventions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Davies, you have us stumped. Do we have consensus in the room to adopt the motion as presented?

I believe I'm advised that we have consensus.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll ask you to be patient because this motion is long.

Concerning the orders of reference from the House respecting bills, 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.

[English]

The Chair: You have heard the terms of the motion. Is there any discussion?

Seeing none, do we have consensus to adopt the motion?

I'm advised that there's consensus in the room.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you.

Technical tests for witnesses:

That the clerk inform each witness who is to appear before the committee that the House administration support team must conduct technical tests to check the connectivity and the equipment used to ensure the best possible sound quality; and that the Chair advise the committee, at the start of each meeting, of any witness who did not perform the required technical tests.

The Chair: You've heard the terms of the motion. Is there any discussion?

Seeing none, is it the will of the committee to adopt the motion as presented?

There's consensus in the room.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Is there any further business to come before the meeting?

[Translation]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I think that there's another motion.

[English]

The Clerk: I have Mr. van Koeverden and then Mr. Davies on my speaking list, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Sorry, I was just indicating that there was one more routine motion.

The Chair: Do you wish to move it?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Sure, if you wish.

[Translation]

Concerning the linguistic review, I move:

That all documents submitted for committee business that do not come from a federal department, members' offices, or that have not been translated by the Translation Bureau be sent for prior linguistic review by the Translation Bureau before being distributed to members.

[English]

The Chair: You heard the terms of the motion. Is there any discussion?

Mr. Davies, did you wish to intervene on this?

Mr. Don Davies: No, Mr. Chair. I had some other business I wanted to bring to the committee.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there any discussion on the motion?

Seeing none, do we have consensus to adopt the motion as presented?

I'm advised there's consensus in the room.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Is there any further business to come before the meeting?

The Clerk: I have Mr. Davies and then Mr. Hanley, Mr. Chair.

• (1625)

The Chair: Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I had three other routine motions I wanted to propose for the committee's consideration. I'll move them one at a time.

The first one is something that has really been in all routine motions that I've seen, and I do have copies in English and French. I'll just read it out and then pass it out:

That all requests to appear before the committee be distributed to the committee members.

Perhaps I could speak to that briefly. We all know that occasionally—in fact frequently—there are witnesses who write to the chair and request to appear before the committee. All that this motion would do is to have the clerk notify the members that those requests have been made. It would be kind of a courtesy to the members so that we would know who is wanting to appear before the committee. It can sometimes influence whom we call as witnesses.

Let's say we're going to embark on a study and a number of groups contact the clerk to say they'd like to appear. If that's circulated to all of us, we can incorporate that into our own request for witnesses. I would hope that this is non-controversial. It has been part of the health committee's routine motions before, and, to my understanding, of many other committees as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies. The motion is in order.

Is there any further discussion?

Seeing none, is it the will of the committee to adopt the motion as presented?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I have a question, just for clarity's sake.

Is there any reason to believe that it could slow the process down? Does the clerk then distribute that info to us, or does somebody else distribute it?

The Chair: Mr. Davies, do you want to respond to that?

Mr. Don Davies: I defer to the clerk, but the way it's worked in the past is because the requests go to the clerk, an email is sent by the clerk saying a request has been made by such and such a witness.

I don't believe there's been any slowing down of any process, and that's all we get—just notification.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: So it's just an email. There's no vote or anything like that. We'll just be notified.

Mr. Don Davies: Yes.

The Clerk: It would be helpful for me, just for clarity, to know whether you simply wish to have distributed the information that a request was received and by whom, or if you wish for the full request to be translated and distributed as it was received.

Mr. Don Davies: I would just suggest whatever is easiest and quickest. The point of this routine motion is just that we would all be kept abreast on who wants to appear before the committee, so whatever would be easiest is best.

I would perhaps suggest that maybe you consult with the clerk from the last health committee and ask how they did it. Usually it was just an email that said, "the BC Nurses' Union has requested to appear for this study". It was usually something very simple.

The Clerk: I think, regarding translation, it would be fastest and most efficient to simply distribute information on who made the request, what study it pertains to and when it was received.

It seems that everyone's in agreement with that understanding, so, Mr. Chair, I think we can move forward that way.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the motion?

Do we have consensus in the room to adopt the motion as presented?

I'm advised that there is consensus in the room.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The motion is adopted.

Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The next one is similarly uncontroversial and it is, as well, a routine motion that has been adopted by many committees. It would read:

That whenever a Minister appears before the committee, every effort be made to ensure that the meeting is televised.

It's pretty standard fare. It doesn't require it be televised. As you can tell by the language, it just indicates that every effort be made. It's usually something that all sides want to be done anyway. When a minister appears before a committee, it's usually very important.

When you have it in the routine motions, as has been the case before, it just indicates to the clerk, in terms of booking rooms, to book a room that has the capacity to be televised. That's the purpose of this.

I'm surprised that it wasn't in the routine motions by the whips. I'm going to guess that it was just missed, as opposed to a deliberate issue, because it's really been standard in all routine motions that I've seen in committees for many years.

• (1630)

The Chair: Are there any further motions?

Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Is there any discussion on the motion?

There's no discussion. Do we have consensus to adopt the motion as presented?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This last one is my final proposal. I will pass it around, but I will read this one into the record as well.

Members will have seen that we passed a couple of routine motions that have to do with going in camera, but there is no motion that specifies when it is appropriate to go in camera. I've re-tabled a routine motion that was passed by this committee in the last Parliament. This was taken from another committee that was chaired by a former colleague of mine. I think some eight committees had language similar to this in their routine motions last Parliament. I'll read it as such:

That the committee may meet in camera only for the following purposes: (a) to consider a draft report; (b) to attend briefings concerning national security; (c) to consider lists of witnesses; (d) for any other reason, with the unanimous consent of the committee;

It goes on to say the following:

that all votes taken in camera, with the exception of votes regarding the consideration of draft reports, be recorded in the Minutes of Proceedings, including how each member voted when recorded votes are requested; that any motion to sit in camera is debatable and amendable.

If I may speak just briefly to it, Mr. Chair. I think one of the most hopeful statements I heard our current Prime Minister say when he first took office was that he wanted to lead a government that was open by default. I think he's right about that. I think, as a parliamentarian, that the people's business should be by definition and by default open.

We have all seen—at least those of us who have been in other Parliaments—that sometimes parties and governments want to go in camera a little too earnestly. They dive in camera to basically shield debate from the public, and there's no real reason for it not to be in public but simply that they prefer it to be in secret. I think it's really important that we be seen as parliamentarians who are conducting the people's business in public.

Having said that, there are obviously situations where it's appropriate to go in camera. The situations that have been designated here are the ones that I think everybody agrees on. If there's a situation that's been missed, I'd be happy to entertain an amendment.

Generally, when we're considering a draft report, that is done in camera because we want to be free to haggle over wording and paragraphs, and we want people to be able to speak their minds. As well, reports deal with witness evidence. Sometimes if we're critiquing witness evidence, out of respect for the witness, we want to do that in camera. We don't want to be looking like we're being disrespectful to their evidence.

Second, obviously national security is very broad. That would be something I think we'd all agree should be done in camera.

Considering lists of witnesses is another thing that we do where we don't want to be politically grandstanding on witnesses, but to have a fulsome discussion about who would be good witnesses to have before the committee.

The last part I think is the most important one to me, which is that the list is not exhaustive. It's for any other reason that the committee may determine to be legitimate, but it would require unanimous consent. When we all agree that it's appropriate not to conduct our business in public, then we can leave that open for the committee to determine.

In terms of votes, I think, except for votes when considering draft reports, every other vote in Parliament is conducted publicly. I think our constituents deserve to know where we stand on issues. It's only in committee where there's this perverse ability to dive into secrecy and vote in a way that nobody will know how you voted. I don't think that's right.

There are certain cases where it's appropriate, and that's why there's provision made for it in certain cases.

● (1635)

I'll conclude by saying that the reason I'd like this in our routine motions, as opposed to leaving it out, is that the presumption should be that we conduct our business in public and we narrowly define when we don't. It's not the other way around. If we don't adopt this, that means we'll go in camera whenever we want to by majority vote. I think that's putting the cart before the horse.

This has been done before by our committee. It worked very well, by the way, and I don't think we ever had a problem with it. I would say that this is a good chance for us all, as committee members, to make a statement to the public that we will be conducting our business in public, except in very narrowly circumscribed circumstances where going in camera is appropriate.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

During your remarks I received an email from the clerk to indicate some procedural concerns. I'm going to suspend to take advice from the clerk. I'll reconvene the meeting in three minutes to rule on the admissibility of the motion.

We stand suspended.

● (1635)

(Pause)

● (1640)

The Chair: All right, colleagues, thank you for that indulgence.

I've had an opportunity to be advised by the clerk on the admissibility of this motion, and I rule the motion out of order by virtue of its not being in compliance with the Standing Orders. In particular, the Standing Orders consider a motion to go in public or in camera to be a non-debatable motion—that is, under Standing Orders 67(1) and 67(2). This is outlined in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, chapter 20, at page 1089, where it says:

Any member may move a motion to go from sitting in public to sitting in camera (and vice versa). The motion is decided immediately without debate or amendment.... In practice, committees often change from one to the other at the suggestion of the Chair, with the implied consent of the members.

With that, is there any further business to come before the meeting?

● (1645)

The Clerk: Mr. Davies has an intervention.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that ruling.

I would then move another routine motion, identical to the one I just did, but with the words “That any motion to sit in camera is debatable and amendable” deleted. It's the exact same motion, but I'll take out the part that caused you to rule it out of order.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Clerk, do we need to huddle, or can I consider the motion to be in order?

The Clerk: I don't have any further advice, and I think your conclusion is correct.

The Chair: Very well, then, I declare the motion to be in order and now open for discussion.

Are there any interventions on the motion?

The Clerk: I do not see any.

The Chair: Very well, I take it that we are ready for the question.

Do we have consensus in the room with respect to this motion? If not, would someone please ask for a standing division?

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Chair, may I have a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: You most certainly may.

Mr. Clerk, could you look after that?

(Motion negatived: nays 9; yeas 2)

The Chair: I declare the motion defeated.

Is there any further business to come before the meeting?

The Clerk: Mr. van Koeverden has an intervention.

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: First, I'd like to thank everybody in the meeting for helping us get through the humdrum stuff in the first meeting. It's always routine, but I thank everybody for playing along.

I thank the chair and congratulate him on his election.

I would like to say that, in the spirit of where we are currently in Canada and around the world, in the state of a global health emergency, what an extraordinary obligation we all have to work together to improve the situation in Canada and get the answers that Canadians deserve, ultimately, in a spirit of collaboration. That ideal of coming together on this committee shouldn't be lost.

In that regard, I also want to acknowledge that this has been a long month of sitting. It's rare that we sit four weeks in a row. We have an opportunity to go home now and see our families, our constituents and stakeholders. We should not lose sight of the work ahead in this committee.

What the next step could be, if we all agree, is for the first meeting back when we reconstitute to be a briefing from officials—not necessarily any specific official, but in the context of the pandemic. Wherever we are when we do reconvene, the first meeting should be one with officials, so that we can start off with a question-and-answer period and a statement from those officials.

That's just for the sake of conversation.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Koeverden.

Are there any further interventions?

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Chair, it's Steve Ellis.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, Dr. Ellis.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: I wonder if we have a list of whom the member's thinking of inviting. We'd like to suggest that the Minister of Health be here.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: It's totally at the will of the committee. The minister is at our disposal. I don't think it should be limited to the minister.

In the past, this committee has had Dr. Tam join us as well. It should not be limited to any.... We've had PHAC, members of the Public Health Agency and Health Canada.

The list of officials is long. I just got briefed by the ministry last week. There are five different agencies that are all of relevance to this committee, so we should not exclude any one.

The Chair: I'm happy to take the responsibility of coordinating with the vice-chairs and Mr. Davies to determine exactly whom people want and make sure that we hit the ground running the first of the new year, if everyone's comfortable with that.

The Clerk: Mr. Davies would like to intervene.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that's a wise way to proceed.

Just for clarity, though, we should have an idea at this meeting. For sure, we should invite the minister and Dr. Tam. Beyond that, I think we can work it out, but we should be on that page.

The other thing I was going to mention is this. What was in my mind—and maybe we can do this on the Wednesday, at our second meeting—is that the meeting would be a subcommittee meeting, because each party is represented at the subcommittee. At that second meeting, we'd come with some ideas of how we're going to be proceeding in terms of studies. I had in my mind that it should be the first meeting. I'm okay with reversing that, as well, and having the first meeting back being a subcommittee meeting and then having the minister and Dr. Tam come on the Wednesday.

I'm happy if Mr. Van Koeverden wants to leave Monday for the minister. That's fine with me. I just think one of those meetings that week should be a subcommittee, so that we can start organizing our work for the new year.

The Chair: Yes. I think that's a good suggestion.

What we decide will be impacted by the availability of the minister and Dr. Tam, and whoever else we decide on. If we agree that the first two meetings will be a briefing and a planning session, we can take it from there.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I think I could also add, as the representative on the subcommittee, that I would be flexible as well, and if there's a lack of availability on Monday, for example, due to travel or some unforeseen circumstance, then we can always have that meeting first. I do think that if you want to bring business to the subcommittee meeting in terms of studies and ideas, then they should be informed by first having a meeting with the officials and, potentially, the minister as well.

But I'd also be fine with reversing them if that's the preference.

Mr. Don Davies: If I could just respond quickly, I kind of like the idea of having the flexibility, because my experience with ministers is that they're very busy and if you go with one day for a minister, the chances are they can't make it.

If we allow the chair to have the flexibility of saying two different dates, with great respect, I don't know that.... I bet you every person in this room has at least three ideas for studies right now. I don't think anything that we hear on the Monday is going to significantly change that.

I think the flexibility is better than not.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I have Mr. Powlowski and then Mr. Ellis.

The Chair: Mr. Powlowski.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I'd suggest that at the meeting we also ask for the head of NACI, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, and the deputy minister. In their first address, I imagine they will—whether we ask them to or not—give us an assessment of our present situation with relation to COVID.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Ellis.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think the other consideration, of course, is that there's not a lot of flexibility to add meetings, and I would suggest that we need the committee meeting first. I think the other thing is that we also need to address the Auditor General's report that's recently come out. I would suggest holding a regular committee meeting before the sub-committee meeting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any further interventions? Is there anything else to come before the meeting?

If not, just let me say thank you. I think we're off to a good start. We have a lot before us but we clearly have an engaged group that seems to have their eye on the ball, so I'm proud to be in the chair and to be part of this and I will do my darnedest to make sure that our time is used efficiently right from the hop.

Thank you so much, everyone. I hope you enjoy your time with your family and the ones you love over the next few weeks and that we come back all set to do good things for Canadians.

Is it the will of the meeting that we adjourn?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you. Merry Christmas and happy holidays, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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