



CANADA

Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament

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Thursday, October 8, 2009

—
Co-Chair

The Honourable Sharon Carstairs

Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament

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• (1300)

[English]

The Joint Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): Honourable senators, members of Parliament,

[Translation]

We can now proceed with the election of the joint chair from the House of Commons.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the joint chair on behalf of the House of Commons must be a member of the government party.

[Translation]

I am now prepared to receive motions to elect the joint chair.

[English]

Mr. Boughen.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): I put forward the name of Peter Goldring.

The Joint Clerk (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): It has been moved by Mr. Boughen that Peter Goldring be elected as joint chair of the committee. Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Clerk (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): I declare the motion carried and Peter Goldring duly elected joint chair of the committee.

We may now proceed to the election of the joint vice-chair. I'm ready to receive motions to that effect.

Senator Mobina S.B. Jaffer: I put forward Mauril Bélanger's name.

[Translation]

The Joint Clerk (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): It was moved by Senator Jaffer that Mr. Bélanger be elected joint vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

The committee has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Clerk (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): I declare the motion carried and Monsieur Bélanger duly elected joint vice-chair of the committee.

Senator Carstairs.

The Joint Chair (The Honourable Sharon Carstairs): Thank you, colleagues.

I want to give you just a quick review, but before I do that I want to tell you that the one o'clock meeting time that has been established by the House of Commons chairs is absolutely unacceptable. The Senate has its statements at 1:30, followed by its question period, which would mean most of us could stay here for only 15 minutes. So take that message back to your respective whips, please, that we'd like to return to our 12 o'clock time.

Yes, Senator Stratton.

• (1305)

Senator Terrance Stratton: Yes, I'd like to reinforce the fact that there are a fair number of us in here who are required to be in the chamber at 1:30, and you need a little bit of prep time. So I would very much support Senator Carstairs' request for the meeting to be held at noon so that we can get something done.

I would suggest right now that we are really not going to do anything this afternoon because our minds are going to be elsewhere. I would request adjournment of the session today so that we can establish a working session the next time around.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Sharon Carstairs): Before you make that formal announcement of a move to adjourn, I'd just like to alert the members as to what has happened up till today—if you would defer that for just a moment, Senator Stratton.

Before we came back into session the joint chairs wrote to the speakers to say they had now received our report and asked what is the next step. We asked if we could have a meeting with them. We had a meeting with them the first week we were back. The Speaker of the Senate was perfectly comfortable because the Senate of Canada had approved the committee report unanimously. However, it has not been moved and has not been accepted in the House.

Speaker Milliken took the position that he would like to have that motion approved in the House before he took further action. We then called a meeting of the steering committee. They took the position that they wanted to meet with the speakers. We immediately wrote to the speakers that day and asked them to set up a meeting with us. That meeting has now been scheduled for Tuesday, October 20, at 10:45 a.m. in Speaker Kinsella's office.

I cannot attend that. I will be in Geneva, where I chair the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. But I have no difficulty with the meeting continuing in my absence. I hope it will, because we need to bring this to a head as soon as possible.

So that is what we have heard from the speakers.

Meanwhile, on September 30, 2009, at exactly 11:08, I received by e-mail, with no cover letter, the report from Mr. Page on his action plan. I immediately contacted my clerk and asked for it to be distributed to all members of the committee, which I understand was undertaken. I have to say I was less than impressed with the means by which I received this, but that has nothing to do with the issue, other than I'd like to see a little courtesy practised around this place.

In any case, we have the report—his reply to the action plan. I think the next step, other than what might take place with the speakers on October 20, is to have a meeting with Mr. Page. I leave that in the hands of those of you who will be at that meeting. Suffice it to say I am at your command. Should you think at the meeting on October 20 that you should have a meeting on October 22, by all means proceed.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thanks, Chair.

Can you give us a sense of where we are right now on the PBO and their work? I'm trying to determine how much of a crisis we have, as opposed to a problem. A crisis in my mind would mean there was a seizing up of work in the PBO for whatever reason. A problem would mean the work was being done but stuff had to be resolved, whether it was the flow of money or accountability procedures. Can you give us a sense of whether we're problem-managing or have a crisis?

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): I think we are problem-managing at this time. I spoke with the chief librarian, and he assured me he could make sure there were funds available for at least the next month or so. I think we're okay on that front.

However, we do have a crisis if one looks at the normal process for supplementary estimates. Supplementary estimates are normally submitted to Treasury Board by September 30. We are now at October 8 and no supplementary estimate has been forwarded from the speakers' offices. I would suggest to you that Speaker Kinsella is of the view that he could not do that without this committee being satisfied that our expectations in our report were met by the parliamentary budget officer.

• (1310)

Mr. David Christopherson: I see.

As for the timeframe, I realize that the September 30 deadline is there. Of course, with unanimous consent committees in Parliament can do whatever they wish—assuming that's available to us. Is there anything else time-wise...? Maybe Mr. Bélanger knows, as a former minister. Is there a drop-dead scenario if we cross a certain date, and no matter what we unanimously agree to do we can't fix it? Or are we in a position where as long as we maintain unanimity we can still move this through, as parliamentarians, as we deem appropriate?

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): I've also been a minister. Treasury Board has a certain amount of flexibility, and I think that's the best way I can put it. There comes a point, however, where you do have a drop-dead date because they have to be printed and submitted to Parliament before we rise at Christmas time. So there is definitely a drop-dead date. It isn't right now, provided Treasury Board is prepared to be flexible.

But we need to have that meeting with the speakers. We need to find out from them where they want us to go henceforth, because we did this report for the speakers. It was done at their request. They're the ones empowered by the legislation to direct the activities of the Library of Parliament, more particularly the parliamentary budget officer. So that's why I think the meeting on the 20th is critical, and the meeting following that might be equally critical.

Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Chair, I missed this, and I apologize. Is the meeting on October 20 for the steering committee?

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): It is for any members of the steering committee who wish to attend.

Now I need to go to the Senate, because I am the first off in senator statements this afternoon.

I will now entertain a motion from Senator Stratton.

Senator Terrance Stratton: I move that the chairman adjourn the session.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Senator Sharon Carstairs): Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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