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Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness

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Tuesday, June 28, 2005

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Chair

Mr. John Maloney

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•(0915)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order. We are on the record as meeting number 49 of the justice committee.

Mr. Breitkreuz, you were going to proceed with your motion.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. My motion is self-explanatory, and for the record I'd like to just read it:

Whereas the Law and Government Division of the Parliamentary Information and Research Service of the Library of Parliament has issued a report dated June 15, 2005, revealing the fact that thousands of law-abiding owners of registered short-barrelled handguns are unable to renew their registration certificates because it was "...not made possible due to the timing of Bill C-10A's enactment and coming into force," and

Whereas neither the Government nor the Canada Firearms Centre has proposed a regulation or amendment to the Firearms Act to correct this problem;

Therefore, I move to have this serious problem investigated and addressed by the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

I would like to thank Mr. Raaflaub for being here today and for answering my query to the library and for putting together that paper in response.

I had a briefing yesterday with James Deacon, the director general of policy at the Canada Firearms Centre, and Morgan Elliott, who is the senior policy adviser to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. They advised that they have not yet proposed an amendment to the legislation that would fix this problem, although they did suggest that this problem could not be fixed by regulation alone. So we do need some sort of a legislative amendment, and I'm proposing that we investigate this. I don't think it would take long. We could probably do it in one or two sittings of the committee, make a recommendation, and I'm sure it could clear Parliament very quickly.

Now, the intent of the government is very clear on this point. The government and Parliament have made clear its intention by first proposing and passing its amendment to the Firearms Act in Bill C-10A that extended grandfathering rights to all law-abiding owners of registered short-barrelled handguns. The government has also made its intent clear by issuing at least six amnesties—that's according to the library researchers. When I was talking to the Firearms Centre yesterday they mentioned there have been seven amnesties since 1998, according to them, to the owners of these

short-barrelled handguns. While trying to find a permanent legislative solution to the problem, they have issued these amnesties.

The government's intent was also made clear because the Canada Firearms Centre renewed the registrations for about 3,000 owners of the section 12(6.1) handguns because they already owned short-barrelled handguns of a similar class. Additionally, by granting grandfathering rights to about 90,000 owners of registered and now prohibited firearms, the government has made it clear that it does not consider these prohibited firearms—and they're mostly handguns—to be the least bit dangerous when in the hands of law-abiding persons licensed to acquire, possess, and use them.

Also according to the Canada Firearms Centre, there are now about 1,500 owners of section 12(6.1) handguns who are caught in this catch-22 situation. They are unable to renew the registrations for their short-barrelled handguns and thereby achieve grandfathering status under the law.

I got these figures from the Firearms Centre people yesterday.

The purpose of my motion is to help these 1,500 law-abiding owners of section 12(6.1) handguns to get out of this legislative limbo by seeking a simple legislative amendment consistent with the Firearms Act, as passed by Parliament and the government's clearly demonstrated intent. So I ask for the members of this committee to support my motion to have this problem investigated and addressed.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any comments?

Mr. Macklin.

Hon. Paul Harold Macklin (Northumberland—Quinte West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In addressing this particular issue—obviously, it is a matter that has caused some concern—I think it's important to put this motion into some form of context.

There are currently seven million firearms registered and recorded in the Canadian firearms registration system that is managed by the Canada Firearms Centre. Police, customs officers, and chief firearms officers across the country use this firearms information in the system, of course, every day to make important public safety decisions and to help investigate and prevent crime. My understanding is that they're using it now at the rate of at least 14,000 requests a week.

The vast majority of registered firearms, about 6.4 million, are ordinary rifles and shotguns, and they're classed as non-restricted firearms. Roughly another 400,000 firearms are classed as restricted firearms, and these are typically the handguns. The last 200,000 firearms are prohibited firearms. There are many kinds of prohibited firearms, including the fully automatic weapons and the semi-automatic military assault-style rifles. The Firearms Act, in section 12, lists the various categories of prohibited firearms.

The individuals who own these firearms were grandfathered to do so when the Firearms Act came into force. About 90,000 individuals currently have grandfathered status to own one or more categories of prohibited firearms, that is, 90,000 people out of a total of about two million licensed firearms owners.

The short-barrelled handguns and .25 and .32 calibre handguns are prohibited due to their typically small size and potential ease of concealment. These are the firearms to which the motion directs itself, commonly called "12(6)" firearms.

In order to be given grandfathered status and be able to own prohibited firearms of any category, a person had to own at least one firearm of that kind before the Firearms Act received royal assent in February 1995. The Firearms Act came into force in December 1998—so a three-year difference. Between February 1995 and December 1998, some people who did not have grandfathered status purchased section 12(6) handguns. Those handguns were not prohibited at the time, but it was known that they would be when the act came into force.

Bill C-10A had been drafted to address this and to give the people who purchased the handguns during that time period grandfathered status, but the passage of the bill was subject to long delay, as it only passed in May 2003. In the meantime, the original registration certificates for these handguns, which had been issued by the RCMP under the Criminal Code, expired in December 2002.

This meant that these people did not continuously hold a valid registration certificate once the new provisions under Bill C-10A came into force. The effect was that these people did not acquire the privilege to own these prohibited handguns. Now, this is clearly unfortunate. There was an expectation created that the owners of the handguns would be able to keep them. Again, I underscore that this was due solely to the delay in the passing of the legislation.

The Canada Firearms Centre is confirming figures, Mr. Chairman, and at this time believes that approximately 1,000 individuals find themselves in this situation. The centre plans to send a letter to each affected individual this summer to remind every person of all of his or her options. In that regard, there is currently an amnesty order in place for these individuals under the Criminal Code allowing these people to legally dispose of their firearms. In practice, that means to sell a firearm to someone who does have the privilege to own it, to export the firearm, or to deactivate it or have it destroyed.

The option of selling the firearm allows the owner to recover some or all of the value of the firearm. The amnesty order expires, though, this December 31, 2005. Without the amnesty order, these individuals would be in illegal possession of firearms.

Mr. Chairman, this situation obviously is not ideal. The alternative is to amend the legislation before the end of this year, 2005. The

paper from the Library of Parliament raises the possibility of amending regulations to address this issue. However, we understand that this is not a possibility and that legislative change would be required and, at the moment, the government is not proposing to amend the act.

● (0920)

We will ensure that all affected individuals and businesses are clearly informed of the options, and we will provide whatever information and assistance we can in this regard through the Canada Firearms Centre.

I would once again remind you, Mr. Chair, that this situation arose as a result of the delays in passing Bill C-10A, and we all recall why those delays occurred. However, Bill C-10A contained numerous important improvements to the Firearms Act. Most of these changes have now been implemented and related regulations have been made to ensure that we continue to have the most effective firearms controls possible and that we provide Canadians with high-quality service.

At the same time, and it would be of interest to Mr. Breitreuz, the costs for the Canada Firearms Centre continue to decline. The main estimate for the Firearms Centre requests \$82.3 million for 2005-06. That is about \$18 million less than the approved spending for the previous year and down 59% from its peak in 2000-01.

Mr. Chairman, there is help that is being offered. Options are being offered to individuals who find themselves in this position. Accordingly, at this point, I think it would be unnecessary, because of the clarity.

I don't think we disagree much in terms of the numbers. Mr. Breitreuz is estimating about 1,500. We're estimating roughly 1,000. We're going to try to approach this, as I say, on an individual basis and try to help resolve this issue.

Accordingly, I don't think it would be necessary for this committee to investigate this problem, because I think the problem is well before us and it's very clear. The only issue is on how we seek the solution. At least at this point, the government is proposing a solution that should hopefully lead to these individuals being able to extricate themselves from this situation. Accordingly, we would not be supporting the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Comartin.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): I have a question to Mr. Macklin, if I can, Mr. Chair.

It seems to me that the government is breaching an agreement with these owners. I don't understand why none of the three alternatives comply with the original undertaking that the government had given to these owners.

I would add to that. Has an attempt been made to draft a quick amendment? This is pretty straightforward on what needs to be corrected. In effect, you need a retroactive amendment to the legislation of probably one paragraph, two or three at the most. I don't understand why that option wasn't there.

• (0925)

Hon. Paul Harold Macklin: At this point, I'm not aware that any draft amendment has been prepared, but it is obviously something that could be considered.

The Chair: Mr. Breitreuz.

Mr. Garry Breitreuz: I would like to comment in regard to that, as well.

First of all, the government made its intention clear. They want to register as many firearms or all the firearms in the country that they can. I think the approach you've outlined really flies in the face of that. The whole purpose of Bill C-10A was to try to draw everybody in.

I think it could be a very simple amendment to address this. With the committee's permission, I'd ask Mr. Raaflaub to comment on how complex an amendment like this would have to be.

On the second comment, in regard to costs, if something isn't done here, this will dramatically increase the costs of this legislation, because there are now going to be a lot of court cases. Some of my sources tell me that the government is not going to win these court cases. I think it's in the government's best interests to address this problem.

Would Mr. Raaflaub be willing to comment on some of the things that have been said here today? How complex would an amendment like this have to be? Could it not be done quickly?

The Chair: I can ask for clarification from our researchers.

Mr. Philip Rosen (Committee Researcher): Before my colleague answers the question, I want to make it clear that this paper was prepared at his request, as Mr. Breitreuz indicated, and it's not something we did on our own initiative.

The second point I'd like to make is that neither my colleague nor I are drafters, but I think my colleague may have something to say that could be of some assistance.

Mr. Wade Raaflaub (Committee Researcher): There are really two aspects to this problem. The first is that the relevant registration certificates expired in December 2002, and nothing can be done about that. The section currently drafted in the Firearms Act requires people to have a continuous registration of those particular handguns, so the amendment would have to resolve the problem of continuous registration.

I think it would be relatively easy to create a retroactive amendment, where you'd remove that requirement, at least for these particular individuals. It would have to be cleverly drafted so that you're only applying it to these intended individuals, but the continuous requirement would be what would have to be removed from the legislation.

The Chair: Mr. Ménard, you have a comment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): I know the firearms in question are currently prohibited by a law that was already in place in 1995. People currently in possession of these firearms and whose case is problematic did not own these firearms before 1995, if I understand correctly. They decided to purchase the

prohibited weapons in 1998, knowing that they were prohibited. Virtually any interest these weapons might present is unhealthy, not to say illegal, in nature. They are of no interest to collectors. They are not precision weapons. They have only one advantage: they can be hidden easily. People who have them in their possession can therefore get around some of the firearms possession procedures. These are also weapons that are not very expensive, and consequently can easily fall into the hands of street gangs.

The Conservatives are always talking about firearms registration. I would point out that generally speaking we agree with the criticism about the cost of registration; however, with respect to the question of principle... They are always saying that real criminals will still get firearms. Yes, but it will cost them more and it will be more complicated.

However, the people pushing up the murder rates are not so much the real criminals as the little guys, those who are starting out, who have little money and who belong to street gangs. The presence and availability of firearms in general is something that incites people to commit impulsive crimes. The best evidence of this is that the murder rate in the United States is three times higher than it is in Canada. The rate for spouses killed by firearms is eight times higher in the U.S., I believe. We therefore see very clearly that when the number of firearms in circulation drops, and when we allow these weapons to be used only by responsible, properly trained people, we do have an influence on the most dangerous types of crime.

Firearms of this type are the ones that street gangs could easily obtain. We are not talking about vehicles that people register and that are restricted to individuals who have passed the examinations and obtained a permit. Vehicles are used to get around, but they are dangerous enough that we register them and monitor them. Firearms of this type have but one use: to kill or inflict serious wounds.

We are talking about people who knew that these weapons would be prohibited in three years and decided to obtain them anyway. What is their interest in doing so? Are they collectors? If they are interested in collecting, there is a solution open to them: they can deactivate the firearm in question, and make it unusable. There are ways of doing this.

I confess that I do not have much sympathy for these people, although I do not like the process. In addition, I think that the fact the government is taking so long to implement an act has consequences for people who could at some point, after a number of amnesties and a bill that allowed them to continue to own them, hope that they might be able to keep these firearms "in all good faith". I say "in all good faith", but the only good faith that they have shown was to think about defying the act in 1998, when the possession of this type of firearm became illegal. They knew that these weapons would be prohibited and they were informed of that when they purchased them. After that, there were some amnesties that enabled them to keep these weapons for a certain period of time.

• (0930)

I feel no sympathy for these people. Why would someone want to possess a weapon that can kill and has no other use except to kill or to inflict serious injury unless he or she wants to use it or sell it illegally?

That said, if there were an easy legislative solution, I might be prepared to consider it. That is what bothers me. However, there again, the solution must be adapted to the circumstances.

Mr. Macklin says that everyone remembers a particular thing. I am sorry, but I do not remember that. I was not here, but I think I was following the debate on firearms. I understand that someone who was a member of the committee or who was involved in the debate would remember this. I do remember, however, that all sorts of objections were raised systematically and every procedural mechanism was used. I suspect that people were getting a great deal of money from the American firearms lobbies. People made it very difficult to pass the bill, but it is not my impression that this was done to improve it. They did it rather to try to ensure that the act would never be implemented.

My conviction remains the same. If there is one thing that was clear when we were looking at crime for years, if there is one effective way to prevent the most dangerous type of crime, if, contrary to the minimum that some people would like to have in all our legislation, there is one measure that actually reduces crime, that measure is definitely firearms control.

If some day the government comes up with a simple solution... There is a problem. It is not an injustice, but we are granting amnesty to people who put themselves into an illegal situation. A bill is being proposed so that they know that they could normalize their situation. I understand that these people could keep these firearms in their possession.

If there were a simple way of dealing with the problem, we would accept it, but we are going to be voting against the motion put forward by our Conservative colleague. In my opinion, it would simply encourage those who possess these firearms. If they are collectors, they do not want to use this weapon. If they want to demonstrate to us that they do not want to use it, they need only deactivate the weapon, and then they will be able to display this collector's weapon. I do not think there are any shooting competitions using weapons of this type. They are not accurate. They are weapons that can kill and that have a very short range. They are weapons that allow people to get around some of the security procedures.

These weapons are dangerous, and I do not think we should encourage their distribution.

• (0935)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Comartin, Mr. Warawa, and then Mr. Breitreuz.

[Translation]

Mr. Joe Comartin: I agree with almost everything Mr. Ménard has said, Mr. Chairman. However, that is not the problem, and the solution that has been proposed is not the appropriate one.

[English]

This is really a matter of the trust between us, as members of this House, the owners of those guns, and quite frankly the members of the House when Bill C-10A went through. It seemed to me, at that point, that the government as a whole—all parties—had said we were going to deal with this particular issue.

I agree with Mr. Ménard. The guns generally, unless they're being used for practice shooting—and I think this would be fairly rare—are dangerous weapons. But that issue was addressed and dealt with in Bill C-10A, presumably, with at least the majority of the House of Commons agreeing that that was how we were going to deal with the problem.

We can't avoid our responsibility to see that legislation carried through. There's obviously been an error made just because of the reality of the lateness of the bill coming into effect. I don't think we have the right, as members of Parliament, to stand back and say it's too bad. Our responsibility is to cure this problem.

The amendment to Bill C-10A, it seems to me, from looking at what needs to be done here, is a relatively straightforward one. It's going to be a retroactive amendment. We're going to say to anybody who has a weapon of this nature and had it registered at this period of time that it's legal. That's in effect what we are going to be saying.

It's probably a one-paragraph amendment, and if we could get all-party support on that, we could send it through the House—as we have a number of bills in the last couple of months—very quickly. We could be doing this in the fall, at the early start of the session at that point. It's not a major problem.

I'd say to Mr. Breitreuz that I'm not sure the solution is to bring the matter before this committee any more, because if we do, I think it's just going to delay it, and given what's going to happen by December, I'm a bit concerned. I'd prefer to see if we can't get the government onside and get all the opposition parties onside to agree to a quick amendment and then run it through without it even coming to this committee.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Being a relatively new member of this Parliament, having been here now a very quick and short year, I've come to this table expecting a degree of open-mindedness and I am disappointed with comments made around this table that prejudged the people who have these weapons. I will be supporting the suggestion that's just been made by Mr. Comartin that there could be a quick amendment, as he said, of one paragraph, and a speedy resolution of this problem.

Before I go down that road, I want to just respond quickly to Mr. Ménard's comments. There was an opinion expressed here, which Mr. Comartin said he endorsed, that these weapons are easily used by gangs. Well, what percentage of these 1,000 or 1,500—whatever the number is—law-abiding Canadians, who are looking for some assistance here, are providing these weapons to be used by gangs? I would speculate that it is none. So why the comment? The comment was that they'll be used for spousal abuse to kill or seriously injure. What percentage of these 1,000 to 1,500 people have permitted their weapons, or personally used their weapons, to kill or seriously injure? I would speculate that it is none. They bought them knowing.... They were informed. Well, what evidence do we have?

To prejudge the situation shows, I believe, a strong bias, an unhealthy bias at this committee. I think we need to be open-minded and listen to all the facts, not come with a frame of mind of not wanting to be confused with the facts.

I would encourage us to be open-minded—I think Mr. Breitzkreuz's request is a fair one—and spend one or two meetings to come up with an open-minded consensus that looks for real solutions to this problem. I think the government does have a responsibility to correct this problem. Some would call it mismanagement. Whatever we want to call it, we have a problem here, and there's an obligation by this government to create a solution to the problem we've created. To spend two meetings to find a solution to this I think is appropriate, and I would encourage the government—this government has a responsibility—to find a solution to this problem. These are law-abiding people. They're not gang members. They're not killing their spouses. We have an obligation to provide a solution to this problem.

Thank you.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Warawa.

Mr. Breitzkreuz.

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz: Thank you.

I appreciate the comments that have been made around the table, and I'm glad people are open to this motion. I didn't think it required a whole lot of debate, but I have to react to some of the comments made.

I appreciate Mr. Comartin's approach. I agree, it can be done quickly. I think that if the government drew up an amendment, within two hours we could have experts here analyzing it and saying whether it is good or not good, and it could be a done deal. I don't think it has to take a lot of our time. We're spending more time deciding whether we should do it than how long it would actually take to do it.

I have to react to what Mr. Ménard said. There is one serious flaw with his line of reasoning, and that is these are law-abiding citizens who are trying to comply with the law. The assumption he made that somehow these people have intentions to do something wrong with these firearms is completely inaccurate. They wouldn't have come to me if they hadn't been frustrated with the fact that they can't comply with the law.

It is a matter of trust. The government screwed up. We didn't get it right here in Parliament, and we should have gotten it right. Because we made the mistake, it is incumbent upon us to correct the mistake.

These people had enough faith when they purchased these firearms that government would do it right and that the government would be encouraging registration and making it possible for them to do so. When that didn't happen, I think they were extremely frustrated. We should honour their faith in us that we are going to correct this.

Mr. Ménard talked about street gangs. These people are not part of street gangs. They are not part of organized crime. These are friends and neighbours who are trying to do what's right. I would suggest to Mr. Ménard that he read the research, which counters most of what he said. I don't want to get into that at this point, but most of those statements were not factually accurate.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (0945)

The Chair: Mr. Moore.

Mr. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Notwithstanding anybody's opinion on the merits of whether the gun registry works, one of the things I think is essential, and I think the government has acknowledged too, is that it does require cooperation. It requires stakeholders to buy into it if it's going to even attempt to be successful.

Reading this, it reminds me of a similar but different scenario that I noticed is happening in New Brunswick. It was brought to my attention by two constituents. I raised it in this committee with the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and also with Mr. Baker when he was here. With regard to legally owned long guns that were in the prohibited category, where these individuals were grandfathered, the guns were grandfathered, they were legally purchased, the person was legally licensed.... And you have to understand that I know some of these people personally, and they are law-abiding to a T; they bend over backwards to obey the letter of the law, and they dot all the *i*'s and cross all the *t*'s to make sure they're in compliance. My understanding is that they were informed by the chief firearms officer for New Brunswick that they could no longer transport their legally owned and legally acquired firearms. That was completely without warning. It was on amendments in Bill C-10A, but it's bureaucrats' interpretations of those amendments. What has happened is bringing the whole thing into disrepute.

That's one group. They were complying with the law, and because of something that wasn't even contemplated when Bill C-10A was debated—I've talked to people who were on the committee at the time, and they said that possibility never came up—that wasn't the intent of the committee when we passed Bill C-10A, all of a sudden as of April 1 these individuals would not be able to legally use their legally acquired firearms. So you have that group of people. I understand that Canada-wide, according to Mr. Baker's testimony, they used to be able to go to a range or competitions. They can no longer do that.

Now we have individuals who Mr. Breitzkreuz has identified. Unless we address this as parliamentarians, knowing that in both those instances apparently it was some sort of either bureaucratic shortfall or a timing issue...it is incumbent upon us, for Canadians to have faith in us as parliamentarians, that these things don't happen by stealth, with no warning whatsoever, or by accident so that all of a sudden their rights are being impacted.

I do support Mr. Breitzkreuz's motion.

The Chair: Any further discussion?

Very quickly, Mr. Ménard.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: I thought we were discussing this to try to find a solution. In the end, I am prepared to go along with the view expressed by Mr. Comartin. I would simply say that I do not understand the objective of those people who purchased these weapons in 1995. Perhaps you could explain that to me. You say that they are law-abiding citizens. Mom Boucher was abiding by the law when he registered his motorcycle. The fact that he respects some laws does not mean... Someone who owns a gun may not want to use it. Personally, I find it unnatural to collect weapons that are used to kill, but such collectors do exist. I am quite prepared to agree to passing some provisions for them but I fail to see why a collector would want to have a weapon that works. He could very well deactivate the weapon. An honest citizen does not need a weapon of this type to defend himself at home, because one must almost be right beside the other person in order to use this weapon. I think I am quite open-minded. Could you explain to me why someone would have any interest in obtaining such a weapon except that this is a weapon that can be hidden easily?

There is probably no point in discussing that. We should perhaps spend our time discussing more serious matters. I am prepared to go along with the solution put forward by Mr. Comartin. If the government is prepared to recognize that over the summer, it could come forward...

I am very careful about amendments that are drafted in one day, Mr. Breitzkreuz. That is how mistakes can be made in legislation. When we draft important texts, it is a good idea to set aside some time to think about them before proceeding. Perhaps Mr. Comartin's solution may be satisfactory to you. However, the government will have to demonstrate some openness.

• (0950)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ménard.

You can have a thirty-second response, Mr. Breitzkreuz.

Mr. Garry Breitzkreuz: I forgot to respond earlier on the issue of why the weapons aren't just deactivated. If you know anything about firearms, to effectively deactivate a weapon would completely devalue it, and it wouldn't be a collecting item any more. You have to alter the firearm so much that it's not worth anything any more.

So that's the flaw in that argument.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. All those in favour of the motion, please raise your hands.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Have you found a solution?

[English]

The Chair: Pardon me?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: With unanimous consent, could we not ask whether there is a solution? What is the government's reaction to Mr. Comartin's suggestion?

[English]

Hon. Paul Harold Macklin: Well, I think everyone has put themselves on the record here. I will go back and, based on the information that's been brought forward here, have appropriate discussions. The question before us is not necessarily that; it's whether we should have an investigation and a review of the entire matter. I submit that the motion that is before us is not a motion I can support. That's not to say that I can't take back the information that's been brought forward here today.

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, I've called the question. We have had half the vote. We had ample opportunity for discussion. I think I have to proceed with the balance of the vote.

Those against the motion, please raise your hands.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: Mr. Marceau.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, BQ): Could we make Joe's suggestion a motion on which we could vote? In that way, we could move forward the issue that Garry wanted us to review. We could do that on the basis of consensus, since this is what we all want, if I understand correctly.

[English]

The Chair: On consent, I think we could, but I think maybe the message is to Mr. Macklin that there seems to be some strong support for doing some legislative changes to effect the result that Mr. Comartin has suggested.

Hon. Paul Harold Macklin: Let's put it this way. The feelings of the parties generally have been clear today. I will take that back and see what effect it may have on the decisions that have been made today. I think this is likely an appropriate way to go.

The Chair: I think there is a possibility that the motion could be brought, but certainly not today, because I don't feel you have consent to do that. Someone might want to consider that for the fall.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): The point has been well made.

The Chair: We might find an appropriate resolution when we have some more time to think this through.

Thank you very much on that motion.

We're not finished yet. We have a housekeeping matter. Mr. Myron Thompson expressed concerns about the rotation of questioning. We have before us several options that could be considered in this respect.

Does anyone have any comments? Are we not content with the current situation? Would we like to codify it a little more through one of these options here?

Go ahead, Ms. Sgro.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Chair, can I make a suggestion that we deal with this issue at the first meeting when we come back in the fall?

The Chair: Well, it was on the agenda for today. We could defer it on consent here today.

Hon. Judy Sgro: We can deal with it as a first item of business when we come back to clarify what the rules will be.

• (0955)

The Chair: The whole idea was to get it done now so we wouldn't have to worry about it.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Well, from our end, you can see that the numbers are diminishing. I think it's inappropriate to deal with it in isolation, with the other members not being here.

The Chair: I'm trying to be impartial, but that's not the fault of the committee.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I'm only putting it on the table.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Marceau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau: Mr. Chairman, I had an informal discussion with Mr. Thompson earlier, and it is not my impression that he has a concrete suggestion to make. We are all very good at talking a long time without saying much, but in order to avoid that, it would be a good idea for Mr. Thompson to put forward a suggestion that we could discuss when we return.

[*English*]

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Chairman, I didn't have any real proposal or way to do it. I only suggested to you, one day on the street, on that particular day, there were some of us who were unable to ask any questions, while Mr. Comartin had three questions. It happened more than once. I'm not picking on him; he happens to be the only one here from the NDP. I pointed out that I felt the fairest way was for everybody to have at least one chance, before anyone else gets two. That seems like a fair way to do it.

As to how you set it up on a rotation, my mathematical brain wasn't working in that sense. I only said that I felt it was fair for everybody to at least have one opportunity, before anyone else has

two chances. There were many meetings when some of us left and had no chance.

The Chair: We have a couple of suggestions on the floor. Two suggestions are to defer it.

Mr. Myron Thompson: As I'm the one who brought it up, I'm willing to defer it to the fall, because I'm sure we won't be sitting any more. But I think it's something we should get straight right off the bat and make it as fair as possible. To me, that seems to be the fairest way.

The Chair: Mr. Warawa, do you have any comments?

Mr. Mark Warawa: I would agree on a deferral. I think we should look at all the options. These are only some of the options.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This is the second time it has been on the agenda. I think we have to deal with it.

Ms. Sgro's suggestion that we deal with it first thing on our agenda in the fall is probably a very good suggestion. We will do that, before we start any more questioning of witnesses. It will be the first item on the agenda. That's in agreement with the committee.

Please consider it. I think we should leave it the way it is or make a recommendation to deal with it at the first meeting.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Should I put a suggestion on the floor?

The Chair: No, I don't think we need that. The understanding is that this will be the very first item we will deal with at the meeting in the fall.

Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Are there any other items?

Thank you. We're adjourned.

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