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Tuesday, May 9, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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• (1530)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee: Members of the committee, I see a quorum.

Your first item of business is to elect the chair.

[Translation]

I am ready to receive motions for the position of chair.

Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): I move that Mr. Gary Schellenberger be elected Chair of the committee.

[English]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Bélanger that Mr. Schellenberger be elected the chair of this committee.

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Schellenberger duly elected chair.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: We'll now proceed to the election of the first vice-chair of this committee. I'm ready to receive motions for the position of vice-chair.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I move that the associate critic for the Official Opposition, Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia, be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

The Clerk: Are there any other motions?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): I will decline.

The Clerk: Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Clerk, I would like to nominate Ruby Dhalla for the position of vice-chair.

The Clerk: We have a motion proposed by Mr. Simms that Madam Dhalla be elected vice-chair of this committee.

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Madam Dhalla duly elected first vice-chair of this committee.

We will now proceed to the election of the second vice-chair of this committee. I'm ready to receive motions for the election of the second vice-chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): I move that Mr. Maka Kotto be elected second vice-chair.

The Clerk: Mr. Angus moves that Mr. Maka Kotto be elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

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

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. Kotto duly elected vice-chair of this committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: I will now invite the chair, Mr. Schellenberger, to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): Thank you very much for the great support. That's another election that I have been in in the last three years. Today is the ninth, and on Friday it will be my third anniversary in the House. I was elected in a byelection in 2003, and subsequently elected twice since, so I have had quite a few elections in the last while. I thank everyone for the great support that you have given me to chair this great committee.

I feel that we have had a very good working relationship in this committee over the three years. I have learned a lot of things. The Honourable Mauril Bélanger taught me some very valuable steps in committee work in my very first.... I think I had been here for about two or three months, and I think neither one of us at that particular time liked the way the committee was going. Over the last number of years the consensus and the working relationship around this table have been phenomenal, and I think various other committees have been told how well we work in this standing committee.

I just want to leave a couple of things with the members of the committee. We will shortly adjourn for today, but I want people to come back to the next meeting on Thursday at 3:30.

Over the next couple of days I would like people to think of what we want to deliberate on, at least from now until the summer break. One thing that has been near and dear to my heart, and I'm going to throw it out, has been small museums and archives. It's something that I know I brought up at one particular meeting that was going on, and it didn't even concern small museums and archives, but I did mention them. Afterwards there was a gentleman who came up to me. He was the president of the small museums and archives, and he said, "You are the first person who has mentioned us in five years." So I think that would be something.

I know Mauril lives in this region, but I don't know how many of us around this table realize the facilities that are kind of under our umbrella: the Museum of Civilization, the War Museum, the National Art Gallery, and various things. I'm just thinking that in the short time we have from now until summer, we might think of whether there could be a day or two when we might tour and meet some of the people who operate these. Again, we can relate that to small museums and archives. That's just a little pet thing of mine, but I am only the chair, and we're ready to look at various other things.

Yes, Jim?

• (1535)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you.

Congratulations on your ascension to the throne. It's terrific.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to echo what you've just said. Having had the privilege of becoming the parliamentary secretary, I've taken the time now to visit seven of the local institutions relating to archives, libraries, art galleries, and museums. At all seven they have specific challenges. The challenge for the government—no matter which government it is—is that we're talking about literally billions of dollars that are required. When you put that—which is a reality either for capital costs, or they have some serious issues in terms of running costs....

I was at the Museum of Nature this morning and had a tour of the construction site there. The government came up with an additional \$48.3 million, which is a substantial amount of money. We have these countless millions of dollars where the case can be made in each one of these institutions, and they want us to come and to see. But we then take a look at the fact that there are 2,500 museums and such organizations in the constituencies outside of the national capital region—that's 2,500. We're not talking about billions; we're not talking about \$48 million; we're talking about their getting \$9 million—for 2,500 museums.

I think getting an idea of what the needs are firsthand.... Probably of all of the places I've been to, the one that was most impressive for its technology was the archives in Gatineau. It's a gigantic building—you're not going to believe it—a humongous vault inside a building with air circulating. It's really space-age stuff.

These are all things we could learn about in this period of time that would equip us better when we're taking a look at museums per se, but also in light of the fact that we're talking about millions and billions of dollars versus \$9 million for the 2,500 museums.

So I agree with you completely. However, the one the minister asked me to gently suggest to the committee—this committee is

master of its own destiny, and we deeply respect that—is that there has been a certificate of nomination for a Mr. Robert Sirman as director of the Canada Council for the Arts. The Canada Council has been operating now for a long period of time with only a couple of directors, and this is a very urgent nomination that will expire on June 16.

It is up to the committee to go through the process to ratify this nomination, and it's gently suggested that it might be the first order of business, so that we can help the Canada Council by getting this appointment either accepted or rejected in order to get on with business.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you.

We can deal with that at the very next meeting.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I too want to congratulate you.

There are a number of items the committee will have to address.

The museum policy you brought up is something the previous government was working on and had pretty well concluded, so if there's a will from the current government to fund it, that could move forward quite rapidly.

There are other issues that have been precipitated by the government's actions that this committee might want to pay some attention to. I'll get to those, but I had hoped that we could deal with one, or ask our clerk to look at obtaining information to deal with one issue, perhaps as early as Thursday, Mr. Chairman. Of course, we're in the hands of the committee here.

On June 11 to 14, the Banff World Television Festival will occur in Alberta. It will be, as it always is, the gathering place for a lot of the people who make television and film happen in this country—the institutions, producers, and you name it. I was hoping that the committee might entertain going to the Banff festival, and I'm putting forward a request to that effect, that all members go. It would be a tremendous way for us to interact with representatives of all facets of that industry.

This is perhaps the item that will be most preoccupying some of us: the government's intention to review the CBC mandate. For instance, how it goes about doing it, when it goes about doing it, is something that interests me and interests our party, for sure, and I would imagine it interests members of the other parties of this committee. I would think that this is something we would want to address on a priority basis, as well. Certainly there's the appointment, or the review of the appointment, of the CEO of the Canada Council for the Arts. There's also a board of the NAC that has lapsed, and I gather that the gentleman who is occupying the seat was not asked to continue. He could have, but he was not asked, so there's a vacancy there, as well. There may also be a series of vacancies on a series of boards of commissions that we may want to have a list of, for instance.

Finally, there's the entire matter that's being speculated upon by the government of a review of the television industry. How the government will go about doing that and who it would ask to do that is of concern, and I would like that to be addressed. Other members of the committee, as well, would want that addressed rather early in the mandate and not have it wait for fall.

These are some of the issues. There is the whole situation of Telefilm Canada. Its MOU is up. There's a report that the minister has been sitting on now for a number of weeks. Where is it? When can we expect that?

There are a few issues, and I'm glad that you asked for a list by Thursday. I would hope that we could deal with the Banff matter on Thursday.

• (1545)

The Chair: I'm sure the clerk will put that on the agenda so we deal with that. There is definitely a procedure we have to go through to get clearance, or to get the okay, to go to that.

Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations on your election to the chair. It will be a pleasure for me to have the opportunity once again to exchange views with you. We've worked well together in the past, particularly on the drafting of the report on the film industry.

Is this the right time to broach topics of interest to us, or should we proceed first to adopt routine motions? If I understand correctly, the plan was to discuss various subjects next Thursday, including our museum policy. If that's the case, then I have a list of topics that I'd like us to discuss.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, I would suggest that what we do today is take everything under advisement and bring it back, and that will be our first order of business at our Thursday meeting. We can talk about each thing that is most relevant to people. We'll have to look into a request for Banff, because we do have to get clearance. We have to get the money to go. We can work on it that way.

I suggest that we bring a list of things we want to talk about. We can vote on those things on Thursday.

I'll take one more comment from Charlie, and then we'll adjourn after that.

Yes, Charlie.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, it's great to be back on the committee with you. I think this committee has done some really strong work in a very collaborative sense, including our recent film study and the Lincoln report.

I'm intrigued by the issue of museums; it's an issue very dear to my heart. My concern, however, is the timeline, and I think we do need to sit down with a calendar and block off how much time we have for issues and where we need to put our priorities.

I would suggest at the outset that there are going to be two issues we're going to have to deal with. Come this fall, we know that the

copyright legislation will probably be coming down, unless the parliamentary secretary can tell me otherwise. So we will have to block off a fair amount of time to deal with that legislation, because a lot of eyes will be on us. That's going to put a certain amount of pressure on the timeline in the fall.

The other issue is television, as has been mentioned. A number of issues are coming together pretty much at once. We do have the review of CBC. I think it is the mandate of this committee to look at CBC, especially in terms of regional programming and domestic drama content and where we're going with that. This ties into the CRTC review of the television licences, which I think raises a question that we need to ask as a committee: what is the status and success or failure rate of our domestic content standards? That's also tied in very much to what's happening over in Geneva with the GATS, where we are the subject of an audio-visual request that has serious implications for the future of domestic television content quotas and our ability to maintain our own preferred tax rates. Those negotiations are ongoing. We are a requestor nation at the GATS in terms of telecom, which ties into broadcast. So what I'm suggesting is that these issues are all coming together right now and that we as a committee need to be able to look at them.

I would suggest that television and broadcast be our initial focus, and we're going to have to figure out the time and how to scope that. As we get through that and come up with a report and a clear direction, the other issues will fall into line and maybe we can start looking at a calendar between now and probably the late fall or Christmas in order to be able to balance out these priorities.

The Chair: Thank you.

Right now with the speeches that have been made and the accolades that have been given, that's great. I urge everyone to get a list, and we'll have a very stringent meeting on Thursday to try to set our priorities.

Yes, Charlie, I can agree with you inasmuch as we have to look past July at what we have. We want to be able to figure out how many days we have and whether we can do justice to our list in that time and make sure that one item follows the other.

Yes, Jim.

• (1550)

Mr. Jim Abbott: I was just going to suggest that we will want to consider at the beginning of the meeting on Thursday whether we want to have it in camera or not. As a critic, I was always opposed to in camera meetings as a matter of principle, until I got into a few of them, when I realized that we could be much more candid and frank about the establishment of priorities. I will be leaning that way, but it will obviously be the call of the committee. It's something we will have to consider, so I'm just putting it on the table.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: When are we going to debate the motions mentioned by Mr. Kotto, namely those motions having to do with the order of questioning or notices of motion, for instance? There's also the matter of documents that must be produced in both languages before they can be tabled, and so on and so forth. Are we going to discuss this today or at the start of Thursday's meeting?

[*English*]

The Chair: I would say we'll deal with them at the beginning of the meeting on Thursday.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, regardless of their nature, can we receive notice of these motions?

[*English*]

The Clerk: I could circulate the motions to members' offices this afternoon when we're back.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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