



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

CHPC • NUMBER 003 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): I welcome everyone here today to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

First, I have to make the announcement that the witness we had asked to come today, Mr. Sirman, is unable to attend. He has said that he will attend the meeting on May 30, which is the Tuesday after the break.

At the last meeting we suggested that we would deal with Mr. Kotto's motions that were put forward to the committee. Everyone got a copy of those motions, and I would now like to deal with them.

Yes, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Before I begin, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to advise committee members that I'm withdrawing the follow up motions tabled last week with the clerk. This morning, my office received a call from Mr. Lahaie who advised me that it was best to wait for the motion to be worded more conventionally before proceeding. That's fine with me, and I hope my colleagues will agree to wait until they receive the amended motion at a later meeting. I'm referring here to motion number 4.

[English]

The Chair: First of all, it is noted that motion 4 by Mr. Kotto is withdrawn. It states: "That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage refer the Lincoln Report to the House for a response."

Mr. Bélanger.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, may I just say how very disappointed I am to note that the prospective appointee to the position of Director of the Canada Council is not here today. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister had impressed upon us the urgency of dealing with this matter today, given that the position was vacant.

Moreover, at the last meeting, we discussed at considerable length the fact that we would be holding a very limited number of meetings before the summer adjournment—six in all, if I'm not mistaken. The fact that this person isn't here today is a deep disappointment to me. It shows a lack of respect. I'm an understanding person, but we've not been informed of the reasons for this absence. We were simply told that this person was unavailable. I find it rather odd that a person

trying for this position could not find the time to meet with us today, as scheduled.

I just wanted to state my position for the record. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): As I recall, we did that motion on Thursday. He was informed on Friday, asked to come on Tuesday, and was unable to make that arrangement. I don't know if we can read a whole lot into that, other than the fact that it was exceptionally short notice and he could not make the arrangement.

I don't really understand this attitude, to be quite frank.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, it's my understanding that this person has nonetheless visited the Canada Council offices and met with staff members. If he can find the time to meet with Canada Council employees, then perhaps he can also find the time to meet with committee members who must endorse his appointment. If members of the party opposite don't like it, too bad for them.

[English]

The Chair: That might be one of the first questions we can ask the witness when he comes to the next meeting. I'm quite sure his reasons are valid. I couldn't go and twist his arm to have him here. I was only notified today that he wouldn't be able to attend. If I had known yesterday, I probably would have sent a note to every one of you.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Further to that, Mr. Chair, my concern has been that we don't have much time in this spring session. I would like to feel comfortable that at each meeting we have we are getting the most work done possible. I'm feeling a little at a loss now because if we had had a sense that he wasn't coming we would have probably planned other things to do. We certainly don't want to be sitting here scrambling to fill gaps, because we all agree that there are lots of issues.

I don't know what we can do about this in future, but I think particularly in the spring session, since we have so few meetings, we are going to have to have an order of business that we can follow and that we feel we can come prepared to discuss, because otherwise we're losing really valuable time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

With that said, we'll go ahead on Mr. Kotto's motions.

Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The first motion reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage ask the Minister of Heritage, before committing herself in the review of the CBC-SRC mandate, to comply with the motion that she herself had adopted during the 38th parliament, the last paragraph of which reads: "That the government, when establishing this independent task force, do so under the advisement of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, and that the membership reflect that of this committee;" and that the Chair report this motion to the House of Commons.

My objective in moving this motion was to call to mind the importance of the motion introduced by Ms. Oda during the 38th Parliament, given that we had agreed the mandate of the CBC-SRC was open to debate. The lock-out had just ended and the point had been made that people living in the regions did not have ready access to news and information. We also took this opportunity to discuss programming content, which more closely resembled that of private television networks than that of a public broadcaster. In short, the subject-matter proved very interesting to us.

In light of media reports, we got the impression that it had decided to analyze the facts and question people about the CBC's mandate, leaving our committee to play a minor role in this whole affair. Therefore, I'm pleased to hear Mr. Abbott say that this is not at all the case. Consequently, I urge all members of the committee to support this motion.

• (1540)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: I would like to report that I've had a discussion with the minister, and she is of the same mind now as the minister as she was when she was the critic. There is no change in her position. She did make a suggestion that I would like to propose as an amendment. I think it will, if anything, enhance or upgrade Mr. Kotto's recommendation.

Looking at the phrase "and that the membership reflect that of this committee" as being somewhat of a micromanagement of the establishment of the committee, I can report to you, as I did the other day, that she has approximately, as I understand it, five options at her disposal that she's considering. Considering that, she wants to make it as transparent and thorough a review as possible, but at the same time, she wants to try to make sure there isn't any unnecessary delay. I know she would like to be doing it pretty well on a full-time basis. The phrase "the membership reflect that of this committee", which is somewhat micromanaging, really isn't of any great value.

She suggested dropping that and adding in.... I'm sorry, I just have one copy, but let me read this, please: "...and that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report prior to the consideration of the Minister", which I think is what people on this committee want.

Having been through the creation of this great red brick—and I know Mr. Scarpaleggia will concur... I think it was at least a year and a half, and we went around and around, and we then ended up going through quite a drafting and so on and so forth. The

involvement I think this committee wants, and which I'm sure all members of the Conservative Party want, is to be afforded a real opportunity to review and comment on the draft that would be in public prior to her actual consideration of the report.

It's offered in the spirit of upgrading this and in the spirit that this is a continuation of where she was coming from as the critic, making sure there is an open, transparent, and thorough review of the mandate of the CBC. She will be making detailed announcements before the House rises in June as to which of the options she has chosen. I would suggest that this is probably an upgrade of this motion.

• (1545)

The Chair: Is that in both official languages?

Mr. Jim Abbott: I have both official languages.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: With all due respect, I don't exactly see that as a friendly amendment. When I read this, I see that the committee wants to have input on the terms of reference for this study and input on who is being invited to partake and take this study on. We should have the ability to make sure that all witnesses are heard, and then have the ability to vet the final document. To just see the final document and be able to comment on it I don't think is the same as what this motion is asking for, which is more involvement throughout the process.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to go in the same direction, if you will. I can infer from the comments that Mr. Abbott has made that the minister has pretty well decided not to use the committee of the House to have the mandate of the CBC reviewed; otherwise, she wouldn't be concerned about the makeup of that committee. I respect the prerogative of a government to initiate reviews as it sees fit, but that's not the issue here.

If the minister is serious about involving the committee, I would have to go along with Mr. Angus and seek an amendment to what you're proposing, Mr. Abbott, that offers the committee an opportunity to review and comment on the terms of reference of whatever vehicle the minister chooses from the five options she's considering. If the government was serious about involving this committee, then the terms of reference of whatever mechanism is chosen to review the mandate of the CBC might be much more acceptable from where we're sitting.

To review the draft report in public is an interesting proposal, because even this committee doesn't review its draft reports in public. I was wondering if you could be a little more explicit as to what you have in mind there. If there is an offer to review a draft report and comment on it, I would presume that it should be in camera. The confidentiality of these reports, since they are only draft, should be respected, as we've respected the draft reports of this committee when they've been reviewed in camera.

The Chair: Do we have a response, Ms. Dhalla?

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): I want to build upon what I think Mauril said, and Charlie as well. I think it's important for the members of this committee to be involved in the actual process.

You mentioned that there are five options the minister is looking at. If you have knowledge of what those five options are, I think it would perhaps be of great interest to all of the members. But if we look at a draft report upon its end stage, I don't know what changes could be made at that particular point. I myself would like the committee to be involved and engaged in ensuring that the terms of reference are defined and also to make contributions as to the dynamics and the makeup and perhaps the mandate of what that review process is going to entail.

Mr. Jim Abbott: These are all valid questions. I'm looking forward to my motion coming back so that I can read it, and we'll have a quick debate on that aspect of it.

The point I would like to make, and the reason I brought this big red brick, is that if we truly want to have a mandate review and have it in a timely manner, and if we as parliamentarians are prepared to live in Ottawa and work on the mandate review eight to ten hours a day from now until it's complete, then please volunteer. I myself happen to be a member of Parliament for a constituency with 100,000 people and I have other things that I'm involved in.

In order to do this particular review, we met well over and above the normal scheduling for the committee—well over and above, and we did it in a couple of weeks off as well—and it still took a year and a half.

This is not a rhetorical question. Have we really thought this thing through? Mr. Angus, would you like to take time out from being a member of Parliament to become a member of a committee that is reviewing the CBC mandate on a full-time basis? If so, then fine; I rather think not. Certainly I wouldn't be prepared to be.

Secondly, with respect to the concern about setting the terms of reference and the process at the beginning, who is going to be on the committee setting the terms of reference?

I'm anxiously waiting for the motion to come back, because I would like to be able to read from the motion.

The intent of the motion is not to say, here is the final draft. That is not the intent as expressed to me by the minister at all. I hope you would be able to take my words totally at face value and understand that in the position of being the minister she's taking exactly the same position as he took as the critic and is saying there is a place for this committee, absolutely. There has to be a place for this committee in this process. If, at the time it's reported to this committee, the committee says the terms of reference suck, or this was bad, or that person shouldn't have been there—whatever the case may be—then fine, that's a process. What we're trying to do is to expedite it in the most transparent, accountable way possible. That's the entire process.

One of the things Mr. Schellenberger and I have had a discussion on—and between Mr. Bélanger, Mr. Scarpaleggia as an assistant to Clifford Lincoln, and myself have—is a collective and corporate memory that this committee has always worked in cooperation. Although we may have different goals and objectives and may see

the world differently, nonetheless we have had a tremendous amount of respect in moving forward.

As I say, the motion that has been proposed by the minister is proposed with that in mind and with the attitude of getting on with the job, instead of waiting into the next Parliament after the next election before we have the mandate review in our hands. To have the mandate review as expeditiously as possible is the objective here.

• (1550)

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'm glad to know he's concerned about where we're going in our job as members of Parliament. I'm not taking time out from my job; I'm doing my job as a member of Parliament. My job is to ensure that if a mandate review of CBC is taking place it's done in the interests of all Canadians. If that means taking extra time, well, yes.

I guess what I'm trying to get my head around is that we're being offered a proposal where the minister picks three people—we don't know who they are or how they're going to be chosen—

Mr. Jim Abbott: It's three, five, seven, or nine. I don't know the numbers.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Well, however... Then at the end of the day we get to see the report before it goes to the public. That is the same as pretty much any parliamentarian gets at the end of the day.

I would suggest that Mr. Kotto's motion speaks to the need for when the terms of reference are being drawn up. I don't think we're talking about eight to ten hours a day for weeks to draw up terms of reference. We want to be there when the terms of reference are drawn up so that we can talk about them. Do they fit the needs? Do they respond to the issues our citizens need to have addressed?

When the team is chosen, certainly I want to be at the table to talk to them. How do we know what their criteria for choice are? Do we even know why the minister chose them? We need to have a say at that point.

This isn't micromanaging; this is so that, at each step of the way before they go off to do their work, we can go back and say to our citizens, yes, this is an open and transparent process. If it takes a little bit of time to do that, I think the public is certainly going to want us to be sure we take that time.

The Chair: Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Simms.

[English]

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): I just have a quick point before we go to Mr. Kotto.

We talk about the collective knowledge we have here based on the past, in you, sir, and in Mr. Bélanger, Mr. Kotto, Mr. Angus, and me over the past while. I think that could be a positive input to the terms of reference when the task force is set up.

I understand your concern about getting into the machinations each and every day of what this committee or this task force will do. It is certainly not my intent—I can only speak for myself at this point.

The terms of reference by which the task force gets started could certainly be something that is helped by the collective knowledge we have—and that is a compliment to us all—and we can provide it to the task force before it gets started. It could take a little bit of extra time, but as Charlie pointed out, not to the point where it's going to affect my position as a member of Parliament.

• (1555)

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Would it help matters, Mr. Abbott, if we set a limit on how much time we would spend looking at the terms of reference, so that we don't get bogged down and so that the process can move forward expeditiously?

I agree; if we have five or six meetings on the terms of reference, this thing will never get off the ground, and that doesn't serve anyone's interest. But if we gave ourselves a time limit, maybe that would allay any concerns members opposite might have.

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Given the fact that I wasn't here in the 38th Parliament, I have a question for Mr. Kotto. He made reference to establishing the independent task force. Was it the intention—Mr. Abbott may be able to clarify this as well—that this task force be composed of members of this committee?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Presumably that's one of the five options. We don't know that.

Mr. Ed Fast: If we're talking about a motion here... We don't even know what kind of independent task force we're referring to. It's a little difficult for me to make a decision on the motion. If we're talking about what's essentially either a subcommittee or a committee of the whole of this particular committee, that's one issue; if in fact we're talking about an independent task force consisting of community members, that puts a different flavour on it

Perhaps Mr. Kotto could clarify that for me before I make one other comment.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: First of all, let me remind you that we're talking about Ms. Oda's motion, not mine.

My purpose in calling to mind this motion was simply to remind you that, despite what the media reported before Parliament reconvened, there had been some discussion about setting up a task force to examine and re-evaluate the mandate of the CBC-SRC with the help of the committee. Hence the reference to the seek the committee's advice. The rules governing this study would still need to be defined. I think we're at liberty to define all relevant rules.

The motion was recalled today because in light of certain media reports, we were concerned and thrown off balance, and left with the impression the minister was planning to set up a task force and completely exclude the committee from this democratic exercise. The CBC is a public, not private, broadcasting network. As such, the committee cannot be kept in the dark about its operations. We are the people's elected representatives and we are entitled to review the corporation's activities, given that the CBC-SRC reports to the Department of Canadian Heritage. We are entitled to express our opinion and this motion is a reflection of that reality.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I have three things, Mr. Chairman. The first is that we're dancing here because we haven't received the response from Mr. Abbott in terms of the willingness to have the committee review the terms of reference. So I would be prepared to move a subamendment, if I may.

First of all, in the motion in English, I believe there's a mistake, Mr. Chairman. I think we meant, if I may: "That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage ask the Minister of Heritage"—I'm missing a "Minister" there—"before compromising herself in the review of the SRC-CBC budget...". Should it be "mandate"? We have to make sure that the translation is accurate, because *en français c'est le mandat*.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoulo, CPC): You're right.

[English]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So we'll make sure we're talking about the same thing, and I thought we were talking about the mandate.

So to the motion that is before us, we're adding an amendment proposed, presume, by Mr. Abbott, to which I would propose a further subamendment as follows: delete everything after "advisement of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage" and replace it with the following: "and that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity to review and comment on the terms of reference of the CBC-SRC mandate review prior to the commencement of the review".

The reason I'm not referring to the draft report—and that's my second point—is that if we've commented and had some input on the terms of reference, then I wouldn't want to be boxed in on the final report by having had a look at the draft report without being able to influence the changes in it. That's asking too much, I suspect, because if it's not our report, I wouldn't want to have that. I'd like to keep the liberty of throwing rocks at the final product, if I want to.

The third thing is that I'm going to take you up, Mr. Abbott, on your offer. If your minister wishes to appoint me to the review panel, or whatever is going to be structured for CBC/Radio-Canada, I'm prepared to accept that, because I believe the CBC is an important enough institution in the firmament of culture in Canada that it is worth our time, as parliamentarians. And if it requires eight hours a day for a period of time, so be it. I'm prepared to step up to the plate, as you were kindly looking for volunteers. So please register my name at the top of your list of volunteers.

The Chair: Ms. Dhalla.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Simply to build upon what's been said by some of the other colleagues here, I think in terms of actually having a defined composition, the rules, who's going to make up the committee and also the procedure that will be entailed, are of paramount importance. The CBC holds a very near and dear place to many Canadians across this country. I think as parliamentarians, and especially as parliamentarians on this committee, we have a responsibility to our constituents and to other Canadians to ensure that the review that is carried out does have accountability and transparency, and also is a fair review. I think to comment on an end product when you haven't been involved from the beginning wouldn't do the report justice and wouldn't do the whole review process in itself any type of justice.

I don't think you were able to comment on what the five options are that the minister is exploring, so perhaps we as a committee could also look at bringing the minister to our committee and having her elaborate on what her intentions are in regard to those five options, and the direction in which she hopes to see the review proceed.

I think it's important for this committee to be involved right at the initial stages, especially in terms of composition, in terms of mandate, and also in terms of defining the rules as we move forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Abbott, go ahead, please.

Mr. Jim Abbott: I think Mr. Bélanger has something really workable there, and I'm looking forward to hearing the precise wording again.

Just before I do, perhaps I could inform Mr. Kotto that the various reports that were circulating in the media contained very creative fabrications—highly creative fabrications. What the minister was or wasn't going to do never left her lips; what I was or wasn't going to do, or be involved in or not be involved in never left my lips. During that particular week, as a matter of fact, I was tied up at an international conference with 20 different countries at Whistler, B. C., and I told my staff that I was not interested in commenting on anything to do with the CBC review. People who read through the various news reports were quite shocked to hear that I was going to do this, and I was going to do that, and I was going to trash the CBC, which I would never do. All of these things that were in the press were some of the most highly creative fabrications of so-called news that I have ever seen in my entire life.

We're starting where we're starting.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Starting in *The Post*?

Mr. Jim Abbott: They were absolutely amazing.

What I'm saying is, going back to what I mentioned before, we as a committee, and certainly I as a parliamentary secretary hoping to be a positive contributor to this committee, have always had differences of opinion and shared different perspectives and even suggested we go in different directions, but we are trying to do so constructively on behalf of all Canadians and with goodwill.

With that in mind, I wonder if I could hear the wording of Mr. Bélanger's motion. I think what we would do is simply, as you've

suggested, Mauril, delete this draft report business and go with your motion. Could you give us the wording again, please?

• (1605)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: What you have in bold would read as follows: “that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity to review and comment on the terms of reference of the CBC-SRC mandate review prior to the commencement of the review”.

Mr. Jim Abbott: I like that. That covers everything that has been raised on the other side, I think, does it not?

The Chair: I'm going to come to you second.

Mr. Kotto, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: With the consent of the mover of the amendment to the motion, I'd like to go with the amended motion. Could you possibly read the motion? I don't have the text here in front of me.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'll translate it.

Mr. Maka Kotto: If we confine ourselves to the notion of reviewing and commenting, then that excludes any kind of positive suggestions.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In any event, Mr. Kotto, you have to understand that the government is free to establish the terms of reference it wants. The committee, for its part, is also free to make comments and to propose amendments. If I were seated opposite, I would be hard pressed to agree to allow the committee to amend the terms of reference of an entity that the government is about to set up. However, I would gladly agree to let the committee make comments and propose amendments, as would appear to be the case.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Then the text would need to reflect that.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I have no objections to proposing an amendment. The French version would read as follows:

[English]

“and that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity to review and comment and to offer modifications to the terms of reference”. So it would be “offer modifications to the terms of reference”.

[Translation]

The English version, on the other hand, would state the following:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity to review and offer modifications to the terms of reference of the CBC-SRC mandate prior to the commencement of the review.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Precisely. We agree on something.

[English]

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

Mr. Ed Fast: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't want to get bogged down in terminology. I fully accept Mr. Bélanger's amendment. I think it's helpful; it's going to move us forward.

I had referenced the terms “independent task force”. I think there was some agreement that we don't know exactly what form that's going to take; it may not be an independent task force. I noticed Ms. Dhalla referred to “review process”. Is there any objection to replacing “independent task force” with the words “review process”? A review process is broader; independent task force is very specific. We may hire consultants, right? That wouldn't be a task force.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Whoever's going to be doing the review.

Mr. Ed Fast: Exactly. Mr. Chair, that was—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: There are no flowers in this carpet to trip over. We have to be careful here.

Mr. Ed Fast: The second thing, Mr. Chair, is that in the second line we see reference to “compromising herself” in the review of the budget, translated directly from the French. Is that what it means?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No, it's the mandate, “committing”.

Mr. Ed Fast: “Committing”, all right. Do we have that revision in the motion?

The Chair: Yes, it's already in there.

Yes, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: My concern about changing Mr. Kotto's motion too much is that it was a heritage committee focus in the 38th Parliament. We asked CBC to report back to us on their plan for regional broadcast. We never really did come up with a satisfactory answer. We asked CBC to bring forward issues on domestic drama content. This committee has established a clear stake in CBC reviews, because we've been carrying them out. We were reviewing Mr. Rabinovitch's mandate; we brought him forward. So we are part of a CBC review, however it's structured.

My concern with changing this too much is that there might be wild speculation in the media. But I have no reason not to believe that wild speculation at this point because I haven't heard how this, whether it's a review or an independent task force, is going to be mandated. We have to be able to meet the people who are going to do the work, whether it's a committee or a group, and there's no reference to that. If there are three people being chosen—or five, ten, or fifteen—why are they being chosen when it has been an area of special interest to this committee and an area of this committee's expertise?

I'm wary about moving too far from Mr. Kotto's motion. At the very least, I'd say that regarding input into the terms of reference, we have input into the membership of this review team, or at least have the chance to cross-examine or meet them.

•(1610)

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: To be crystal clear, I am manufacturing a “for instance” here. This is not a statement about anything. I manufacture the “for instance” that the minister, for reasons best known to herself, chooses a highly qualified individual to do this review. During the course of the review, the individual intends to hire experts on particular aspects of the review. Are you suggesting that after interviewing this one individual, before he or she could hire these experts, they would have to be referred back? This is what I'm referring to as micromanagement.

For all the reasons that Mr. Angus just stated in terms of the expertise, the background, certainly the desire to move forward and do what is in the best interest of Canadians, this committee has a responsibility, and the minister wants that responsibility to be carried out by this committee. I suggest that Mr. Bélanger's motion accomplishes that without getting into the micromanagement.

The Chair: Mr. Kotto.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Angus' remarks are relevant. Without minimizing Mr. Bélanger's sub-amendment, I wish to remind members once again that the invitation implicitly extended to us as committee members when Ms. Oda's motion was tabled and unanimously adopted during the 38th Parliament was made very openly.

At the time, we felt that we were working together, as we have always done. The Chair was also a member of that committee. Without wanting to be paranoid—and it's not because one is paranoid that things don't happen—I believe that everyone is fundamentally affected by the government's decision to set up an independent body or task force to review the CBC's mandate.

Therefore, no one, be it the government or the opposition, should be excluded from this democratic exercise. I repeat, the CBC is not a private entity, but rather a public broadcaster. Therefore, if there's even a possibility that somewhere down the road, its mandate will change, we have a duty, as elected officials, to take constructive action from the very outset of the review process.

This is what prompted me to move this motion. I have absolutely no desire to be excluded at any time from the various stages of this review of the CBC's mandate.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. We've had quite a bit of discussion on this issue. Maybe it's a good thing we didn't have a witness here today, because we wouldn't have had enough time to debate this very important issue.

Before us we have a subamendment, so we do the subamendment first?

And what about the other amendment here? Oh, that was agreed to.

•(1615)

Mr. Jim Abbott: For clarity, Mr. Chair, I wonder if it would be simpler if I simply withdrew my amendment and we used Mr. Bélanger's amendment as the amendment.

The Chair: Okay, you've officially withdrawn your amendment?

Mr. Jim Abbott: Yes.

The Chair: Then we will vote on the amendment by Mr. Bélanger.

The motion would read:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage ask the Minister of Heritage, before committing herself in the review of the SRC-CBC mandate, to comply with the motion that she herself had adopted during the 38th Parliament, the last paragraph of which reads: "That the government, when establishing this independent task force, do so under the advisement of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage"; and that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity to review and comment and offer modifications to the terms of reference of the CBC-SRC mandate review prior to the commencement of the review.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Would it possible for us to get a hard copy of that?

That's really quite convoluted, unfortunately.

The Chair: On the original motion, as you get down to the second last line, after "Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage," you delete everything after that and it be added: "and that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity to review and comment and offer modifications to the terms of reference of the CBC-SRC mandate review prior to the commencement of the review."

Mr. Jim Abbott: Yes, that was my understanding.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Wasn't that being added to part of Mr. Abbott's...?

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Jim Abbott: No, I withdrew it.

Mr. Charlie Angus: So that's it? We're just going to see the terms of reference, but no comment afterwards?

Mr. Jim Abbott: I think the point that Mr. Bélanger made was that he wants—and I understand, politically—to be able to throw stones. If he's involved in the review of the draft, it's more difficult. I understand that; it's part of the parliamentary process.

The Chair: We've heard the motion as amended. The vote is on the amended motion—

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Chair, are we going to include that the membership reflect that of this committee?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Scott Simms: We're not going to include that.

The Chair: No.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: And I thought we had replaced "task force" with "review process".

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Is it possible for someone to type up that motion before we all vote on it? It would be much easier for all of us to make a decision if we could see it.

The Chair: Our resources are kind of short at this committee. We don't have a typewriter here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chairman, the motion concluded with the words: "[...] and that the Chair report this motion to the House of Commons." I insist that...

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Absolutely. That was noted in our first report.

• (1620)

[*English*]

The Chair: Are we prepared to vote on the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

Mr. Jim Abbott: Could you read the first part of the amended motion, please?

The Chair: I think I can, as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage ask the Minister of Heritage, before committing herself in the review of the SRC-CBC mandate, to comply with the motion that she herself had adopted during the 38th Parliament, the last paragraph of which reads: "That the government, when establishing this independent task force, do so under the advisement of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage"; and that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity to review and comment and offer modifications to the terms of reference of the CBC-SRC mandate review prior to the commencement of the review; and that the chair report this motion to the House of Commons.

Yes, Mr. Malo.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): There's a slight problem. The reference is to the motion that the Minister of Heritage "herself had adopted during the 38th Parliament." That's no longer the case, given that what appears in parenthesis is Mr. Bélanger's proposed wording.

[*English*]

The Chair: Should that be removed, then? Because it is redundant.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, should there be any reference to that previous motion from the 38th Parliament? Should it not just flow as a motion from this committee?

The Chair: Let's try this one: that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage ask the Minister of Heritage, before committing herself in the review of the SRC-CBC mandate, to comply with the motion.... No, we want to take that out of there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: I have something to say, Mr. Chairman. I'm somewhat uncomfortable with deleting the reference to Ms. Oda's motion. We're talking about her legacy. Should she not go along with our recommendation, she would be renouncing her very own words. It's important to me that her name be mentioned.

[*English*]

The Chair: You would like it in.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Perhaps the text should be divided, or a clarification of some kind made.

[*English*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You started that, Mr. Abbott, but let me see if I can complete it:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage ask the Minister of Heritage, before committing herself in the review of the SRC-CBC mandate, to comply with the motion that she herself had adopted during the 38th Parliament, part of which reads: "That the government, when establishing this independent task force, do so under the advisement of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage". Further more, that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity...

I'm sorry, it's difficult to work in two languages.

The Chair: I'm going to read this. I'm not sure, because I've got arrows and everything going all over the place here, so here we go:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage ask the Minister of Heritage, before committing herself in the review of the SRC-CBC mandate, to comply with the motion that she herself had adopted during the 38th Parliament, part of which reads: "That the government, when establishing this independent task force, do so under the advisement of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage". Further more, that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage be offered the opportunity to review and comment and offer modifications to the terms of reference of the CBC-SRC mandate review prior to the commencement of the review; and that the chair report this motion to the House of Commons.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

• (1625)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I have a question, Mr. Chairman. Will this be tabled in the House as report number one by tomorrow afternoon?

Mr. Jim Abbott: What's the significance of that?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: We love committee reports, Jim.

The Chair: Yes, it could be tomorrow afternoon.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Will it be in the proceedings after question period?

The Chair: Could we have that done, Mr. Clerk?

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'll be cheering you on when you stand up.

The Chair: Thanks. No spears, just cheers.

Thank you for getting through that motion.

The second motion by Mr. Kotto is that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage review the mandates of the crown corporations under its purview to ensure their capacity to carry them out properly.

Mr. Bélanger.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I have a question for Mr. Kotto.

Generally speaking, I support the motion, but to avoid any confusion, was it his intention to ask our research officer to undertake this task and periodically report back to us, so that subsequently, the committee could set priorities for reviewing the mandates of these Crown corporations?

Mr. Maka Kotto: That was the initial intent, inspired as you will agree, by the fact that we are witnessing the dawn of a new culture of governance which will make us review all requests for public funds. In some respects, it's a way for the committee to anticipate future changes and to get a head start on issues that could prove controversial if we don't get off on the right foot.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So then, initially we'd ask our research officers to undertake this task. Is that correct?

Mr. Maka Kotto: No. Eventually, we might ask them to do this work, provided they were up to the challenge. Otherwise, we could proceed. It remains to be seen. Everything is open to consideration. We could also proceed to hear from witnesses. We heard from certain persons during the 38th Parliament, following various budget discussions, as well as when the committee was examining the new film policy. It's a matter of dealing with certain formalities.

Officials have data and statistics that can shed light on the government's real intentions, in light of what likely to happen in the

case of the CBC-SRC. It's a first step. There will certainly be more of them. To govern is to plan for the future. Of course, we're not the government party, but you do see what I'm saying.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast: We've already agreed to review the mandate of CBC in the first motion, or we've essentially acknowledged that this is going to be undertaken by the minister. We're going to have input into that process. There's quite a number of crown corporations under our umbrella. Do we know how many there are, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Jim Abbott: I just happen to have it handy: Canada Council for the Arts, Canada Science and Technology Museum, Canadian Museum of Civilization, Canadian Museum of Nature, Canadian Race Relations Foundation, National Arts Centre, National Gallery of Canada, and Telefilm.

I don't know if these would be crown corporations, but there is also the Canadian Cultural Property Export Review Board, the Public Service Commission, the Public Service Labour Relations Board, and the Public Service Staffing Tribunal.

So which ones of those do we want to do?

• (1630)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The National Film Board as well, and the archives?

Mr. Jim Abbott: No.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: And the library?

Mr. Ed Fast: That's my question, Mr. Chair. The CBC review alone is a massive undertaking, and we're now adding to that workload of this committee all of these additional corporations. Mr. Angus did say earlier that we're going to be running out of time. I just don't see how this is manageable, but let's see where it goes.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I would feel more comfortable if we asked our researchers to give us an overview of the corporations, and as well, Canada Council's involvement with National Film Board—the other important players. If we can have that by the end of the spring session, it's going to make it easier for us to know where we need to go in the fall session.

I don't think we have very much time right now. I do think that when we do lay out our calendar over the coming year, our ability to say the nature museum...whether we're going to be able to decide to take a day to review its mandate, or two days or three days. I'd prefer that by the summer break we had an overview that we could all look at. When we come back in the fall, we'll be laying our calendar then.

The Chair: Mr. Abbott again.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Just by the way, the agencies under this are CRTC, Library and Archives Canada, the National Film Board of Canada, and Status of Women Canada.

I'll give you an example. I mentioned at an earlier meeting that as parliamentary secretary I'd had the privilege—and I count it a very great privilege—to be able to go to a few of these museums. For example, if you were to go to the Canadian Museum of Nature, you would find it under construction. They are about halfway through a \$48 million project, and there is a lot of input that they would like to give this committee for us to understand what it's about.

Also, interestingly, the Museum of Nature is involved in things like endangered species and the COSEWIC listings and things of that nature, because the Museum of Nature establishes a benchmark of either live archives or archive objects, natural objects, etc. Within itself, it would be worthy of, at the very least, three hours to go and see the construction site—they're doing an amazing job—but it would probably take a couple of sessions for us to understand the mandate of that one alone, which goes to what Mr. Fast was saying.

I've also had the privilege of going to the Canadian Museum of Civilization. It's the same thing, times two. I've had the privilege of going to the National Gallery and seeing some of the challenges they're faced with, particularly some of the expansion they would like to do. There is particularly the Canada Science and Technology Museum, which has two large facilities in the Ottawa area, but has a number of others outside this area.

What I'm saying is that although this is the shortest motion in front of us—perhaps a grand total of 20 words—*en anglais*, in any event—it's about a five-year project for this committee. I think in order to be real, we would need to narrow it down just a bit.

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin is next.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Well, being new to this committee, I actually think that motion 2 would stand as being most beneficial to those of us who are new to the committee, because it would give us a broad understanding. But I understand the arguments that have come from all sides of the table with regard to the time constraints.

I would support what Mr. Angus suggested with regard to reviews coming forward. Then we might be able to prioritize as to which areas we would like to go to first when we come back in the fall. Certainly I think this committee has a responsibility to look at all the different portions of its responsibility and not just single out certain areas we want to focus on. It would allow a very broad perspective. So I certainly want to see, even if this motion isn't passed, that we spend a significant portion of our attention on these types of initiatives, to see a broad overview of the entire department.

•(1635)

The Chair: Just before I come back to you, Mr. Kotto, I want to get my two cents' worth in.

I think it's a great motion. I didn't know—and I see the list here now—of all the crown corporations under our umbrella. At the same time, when we're talking about some museums, I want to get back to what I mentioned on the very first day I was here. I hope we have some time, as we go through the agenda, to do another part of our mandate, and that's the small museums and archives across this country.

I'm just putting that in. I know it got a little off the topic of your motion.

Again, please expand on your motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In my humble opinion, there are always ways of introducing a motion of this nature. When a budget is in the drafting stages, pre-budget consultations are held. Representatives from a cross-section of society make presentations. I don't think the entire exercise takes longer than two weeks. Some government agencies dedicated to arts and culture are in a deplorable state. Without going into more details, it seems that the further we advance, the more irresponsible our actions become.

One example that comes to mind in the Canada Council. For years now, this agency has been asking for additional funding of at least \$150 million. This year, it was granted a paltry \$50 million over two years. That's not an adequate level of funding.

Ultimately, the people in dire straights are the artists and creators who will be tempted to give up, spelling an end to the creativity that nourishes our collective psyche and moulds our identity. Least we forget, we have an important mandate to fulfil, namely to defend, not destroy, our culture.

Today, our neighbour to the south exports close to \$7 billion in cultural products produced by artists and creators. The United States have their own production culture and we have ours. What sets us apart is that the State is always ready to jump in to assist, train and nurture our creative talent. If we abdicate responsibility, what kind of message would we be sending to those who defend our language, identity and cultural sovereignty? That's our fundamental goal. There's always a way to bring in this type of motion. We're not asking for a study, or to start over again at the very beginning. Studies have already been done.

Mention was made earlier of museums. The Canadian Museums Association has already examined the situation of museums at considerable length. The last government did some studies that are now gathering dust on some government shelves. It wouldn't take long to compile and analyze some of this data. It's not like we're starting out with a blank slate. Some work has already been done. We simply need to find a way to... The timetable is not a sticking point for me. This work can in fact be done when we reconvene after the break.

[English]

The Chair: We've heard arguments from both sides and around the table. I call the motion.

The motion reads:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage review the mandates of the Crown Corporations under its purview to ensure their capacity to carry them out properly.

(Motion agreed to)

•(1640)

The Chair: Motion 3 reads:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage summon the senior executives of Telefilm Canada, the members of its Board of Directors in November 2004, and Stéphane Odesse. The item on the agenda will be a review of the selection process and criteria for a film event in Montreal in 2005.

Yes, Mr. Malo.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: At the last meeting, certain committee members wondered which managers and board members the committee was interested in meeting with. Therefore, I'd like to propose an amendment to Mr. Kotto's motion, to add the name of those individuals whom members would like to call before the committee. The motion would read as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage summon the senior executive of Telefilm Canada at the time: Richard Stursberg, Michel Pradier and Jean-Claude Mahé, the members of its Board of Directors in November 2004, namely Charles Bélanger, Jacques Bensimon, Felix Fraser and , Trina McQueen, and Stéphane Odesse.

The rest of the motion would remain as is.

[English]

The Chair: Could we have a list? Are they all going to come?

Yes, Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: I'm not so far removed from opposition that I can't recall the desire to get at whatever the truth may be. Certainly, with our having just taken over, we have no vested interest in this whatsoever. With that qualification, I would like to see this motion go forward at an appropriate time.

If you take a look at the Quebec minister's report made public on May 5, and the Canadian heritage minister's report made public on May 6, and you read those, you will then have the total amount of testimony that will be permissible before this committee at this time.

Now, we can invite the witnesses to come and to read those reports. That's fine. But the fact is, with two sets of litigation that are currently in process, that are pending, while there is a possibility there might be a few extra small bits and pieces that the executives from Telefilm might be able to say, because of the fact that the matter is before the courts—not just in one instance, but in two—I can guarantee that the answers will be under very strict control of the lawyer who would be sitting beside them. They would make sure there wasn't any way that they were compromising the process.

What I'm trying to say is that I concur, I agree that this would be a very good motion, and at its time it should go forward. But to do so right now, I would suspect, could very well be a waste of time because of the constraints that would be on the witnesses at this time.

The Chair: Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I understand Mr. Abbott's reasoning, but with all due respect, I disagree completely with him. First of all, this is simply not a waste of our time. This issue was raised during the 38th Parliament, when the Chair was a member of the committee, and surely he will recall how adamant I was about calling Telefilm Canada officials before the committee to discuss this matter. There was no question at the time of going over the entire file because two cases were indeed before the courts, pitting Telefilm Canada against an organizer of a Montreal festival.

We're not dealing with the same file today. We're talking about discussing the subject openly, about hearing from people who were

behind the decision to go with an invitation to tender and about assuming one's responsibilities—one mustn't use the word “accountability”—for what transpired between the two agencies. The two agencies were competing against each other and in light of information that was made public, it's clear that the rights of one of the two agencies were violated, in the case, the rights of the FNC. In essence, the festival was stillborn. The event was staged, but organizers racked up an enormous deficit. As we speak, it's unclear as to whether there will even be a film festival in Montreal this summer. Toronto has its festival. According to some people, who are crowing over the news, it seems Montreal is being squeezed out of the film festival market.

Therefore, I think we need to put some questions to those responsible for this admittedly unfortunate turn of events. While Quebec is doing its job in so far as SODEC is concerned, we have a responsibility to do the same with respect to Telefilm Canada. SODEC is not dependent on the federal government, but Telefilm Canada is. The members of this committee have a duty to be transparent and to take their responsibilities as seriously as Quebec officials have done with respect to SODEC when it comes to invitations to tender and the selection process.

• (1645)

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

I've been concerned about this because it's an issue I have not been fully briefed on. I am, as a rule, wary of using the committee to bring forward festival leaders to review the criteria of why they made the decisions they made, whether they were successful or disastrous. I am worried about a precedent of micromanaging.

I am concerned about the issue of... I'm not sure, my understanding is that litigation is still going on; Mr. Kotto says it's not. I'd like to have that clarified. At this point I don't feel comfortable enough saying yes, we're going to bring forward all the witnesses whose names were just read out to go through this if we're not going to be able to get to the bottom of this, if litigation is ongoing.

I would be more than willing to...and I don't normally suggest in camera, but, for something like this, to sit and have a rundown of what went down, so we have a better understanding of why we should be intervening as a committee.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Could the clerk tell us if the *sub judice* rule has any effect at all on the motion before the committee?

[English]

No, I'm asking if the clerk could tell us whether or not the rule of *sub judice*, by which we are bound, has an impact upon this particular motion or not. I need to know that before I continue.

Can you repeat that so everyone can hear it?

Mr. Georges Etoka: If there is a process taking place in front of a court right now, usually the committee restrains itself from inviting the people involved to come and make comments before the committee.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Okay. Is this the case?

Mr. Georges Etoka: I don't see—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No, no.

[Translation]

I think I know the answer to the question, but I would like confirmation of the fact that right now, there is either one or two pertinent cases pending before the courts.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Not cases having to do with the selection process, but cases involving the Losique-Telefilm Canada matter. However, Losique is not being called to testify before the committee.

•(1650)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: No, but Telefilm Canada officials would be.

Mr. Maka Kotto: That's true, but not in connection with the Losique case. The latter has filed charges against Telefilm Canada with respect to the Secor report. This has nothing to do with the grid that led to the selection of the Regroupement pour un festival de cinéma à Montréal rather than the FNC. We're talking about two separate files. There is no connection between the two, because these incidents occurred at different times.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: There are two cases before the courts. Correct?

Mr. Maka Kotto: Losique has two cases pending against Telefilm Canada.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: I have a point of clarification. Are we talking about putting together these witnesses to come before us to talk solely about the selection criteria of these particular festivals—and no festival in particular, just the selection criteria?

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: The selection criteria in place led to Spectra being chosen over the Festival du nouveau cinéma, or FNC. According to information made public months after the fact, it was discovered that the FNC had actually won the competition. The rules of the game were changed in mid-course to give the advantage to Spectra. However, the FFM is not involved in...

[English]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: If I may conclude—

The Chair: A little order here, just for one second. We have about three people talking here right now. I apologize, I interrupted.

Mr. Bélanger, you can finish.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I should indicate there is absolutely no relation whatsoever between Charles Bélanger and Mauril Bélanger, in case there's any doubt.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: This is the document we've received. You can read between the lines, so to speak.

[Translation]

Mr. Kotto, I am somewhat concerned that the Telefilm Canada report we received appears to show—at least that's what we've been told—that some of the information was deleted from the report because of the cases before the courts. If that's not the case, I'd like an opinion...I don't have a problem inviting persons to testify before the committee. I don't care if it's 2004 or 2006. We'll continue to do our job. However, I especially do not want us to fall into the *sub judice* trap.

Before I venture an opinion on the subject, personally, I would prefer to get a formal opinion as to whether or not, by adopting your motion, we would be violating the *sub judice* rule with respect to cases before the courts. If we are not, then I have no problem backing the motion. However, if there is a problem, I would agree with Mr. Abbott that we should wait.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Kotto, and then I'm going to have a little statement to make here too.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: On the one hand, based on the information we have, there is no case pending. However, I understand full well your position. We can amend the motion, with the understanding that we will receive an opinion. That is possible. We can also ask the witnesses to refrain from discussing certain matters. However, it would surprise me very much. I've been following this matter since the very beginning in Montreal. I don't know how many of you are familiar with the events that have transpired. For those of you who are, you know that the FNC has not filed charges against Telefilm over the selection process. Nor has Spectra.

Had charges been filed, there would not have been a report on SODEC's role in this affair. Quebec's Minister of Culture and Communication announced these measures further to the recommendations that flowed from the inquiry. An inquiry was in fact conducted precisely because the matter could be publicly discussed.

This matter is in the hands of Telefilm Canada, because the agency comes under federal jurisdiction. An inquiry was conducted in Quebec. I don't see why the federal government couldn't also conduct an inquiry into a Crown corporation, specifically Telefilm Canada.

Again, Telefilm Canada representatives were unable to testify before the committee during the 38th parliament because two cases were pending before the courts. To my knowledge, there is no reason why we can't have them here and ask them to explain the selection process and what led them to choose Spectra rather than the FNC.

[English]

The Chair: Could I make a suggestion here, since we're not quite clear on whether there's litigation going on in these particular cases, that we ask the clerk to clarify, to see if there is any litigation? Could we request an opinion that this motion could be dealt with by this committee?

That would be my suggestion, that we defer the motion until we have clarification on this issue. Could I get consensus around the table? Would that be fine? We'd ask the clerk to get clarification, and once we have that clarification, we'd bring the motion back.

• (1655)

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chairman, I see that you're trying to find a basis for agreement. That's good, but as I see it, time is a problem. I don't mean the time it takes to dispense with the motion, but the time remaining in order for Montreal to stage a festival. That's my first point.

Secondly, I have a problem with the fact that any bids forthcoming from Telefilm Canada would not be discussed again by this committee. No one but us can publicly debate this question. Let me say again that the Government of Quebec did its job where SODEC was concerned. We must do the same, in order to operate in a completely open and transparent manner.

Now then, if we agree to get an opinion that we either allow us to go forward, or prevent that from happening, then we need to move quickly, as summer is fast approaching.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, the law clerk will be contacted tomorrow to provide an opinion. That would be my suggestion, that we do this. If not, we can vote on it now and we can let things go.

Is it the consensus around the table that we ask the law clerk to look into the motion?

Thank you.

Yes, Mr. Malo.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: I know we decided not to have a meeting this Thursday, since the Australian Prime Minister is scheduled to make a speech in the House. However, if the clerk could get this information to us quickly, perhaps we could meet for 30 minutes or one hour on Thursday, after the Australian Prime Minister's address.

[English]

The Chair: The whips have agreed there are no meetings on Thursday.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chairman, as a compromise solution, could we have an opinion sent to our office as quickly as possible, possibly by Thursday?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Fine then.

[English]

The Chair: Yes. And it'll be my suggestion that at the next meeting convened.... The witness was supposed to be here today; we were only going to have an hour and a half. We could make sure that at that particular meeting we set up to deal with your motion.

Motion 4 is withdrawn.

Meeting adjourned?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Oh no. You'll notice I didn't hammer the gavel.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I think there's a motion before us with attachments about a budget for travel. May I comment on the budget for travel first?

My understanding is that if we go, this would be for three days, which is the 11th, 12th, and 13th, so you need half of the hotel accommodations and you need half of the per diem. So already you've reduced this substantially. I would argue that if indeed there is a benefit for us to be there, there is also benefit for the participants of the festival, and that we should not be paying any conference registration fee. If the festival is not prepared to accept those conditions, then too bad. Finally, I suspect that if you look around for some cheaper airfares than \$2,400, you'd be able to find them.

So I submit to you that this budget of \$98,000 can be reduced by half fairly easily.

• (1700)

Mr. Jim Abbott: I have a couple of things.

First, I haven't had a chance to review the budget that closely, but I understand there are translators going, etc.

Mr. Mauril Bélanger: No, he said local....

Mr. Jim Abbott: Okay. But is that not surrounding the fact that there is going to be a formal committee meeting there? One of the concerns I want to report about that is that I have conferred with the Conservative Party whip, and our feet are glued to the floor of the House of Commons.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Will that be the case for all committee travel, Mr. Abbott?

Mr. Jim Abbott: I only asked him about ours.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: If this committee can't travel, then surely to God none of the others can travel.

Mr. Jim Abbott: I don't know what his position is on the issue of committee travel. I can tell you what his position is on Conservative Party members.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, if indeed the motion we've adopted should proceed, with a budget that is reflecting the actual costs.... I think this is not reflecting actual costs, because it's not six days, it's three days. I went through this. If you need translation for one day, surely to God you can get it for less than \$27,000.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: It's just \$2,000.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Is it \$2,000? That's fine. Okay, the total is \$27,000.

But if you skip the registration fee, then you're looking at a budget cost of half that, or even less. That's quite normal, quite in the parameters that our committee is used to, and we should submit it. If the House leaders—because the prerogative of committee travel rests with House leaders—refuse to have this committee travel, then they will find out among themselves and we'll act accordingly. But that's a decision that rests with House leaders.

Mr. Jim Abbott: I agree completely. I just wanted to report. The process has been put in place by this committee by a majority vote and the process will come to its logical conclusion. I just wanted to report that from the perspective of the Conservative Party whip, we aren't going anywhere.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: If the Liaison Committee, which you'll go to, Mr. Chairman, agrees to free up the money and the House leaders agree, the whip will have to live with that, whether it's the Liberal whip or the Conservative whip. I'm sorry, but that's the way it's been and will presumably continue to be.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I was surprised to see that we were going for five or six days. My sense is that we were going to go to Banff...I would prefer maybe two full days, where we were sitting in hotels inviting people to come to see us, and a bit of time to also see some of the work they're doing, and then we would leave.

It also seems to me the standard order of business is that we would make the recommendation, and then the whips would come back and tell us if they're going to support it or not. So I don't think we should be self-censoring.

My concern is that I'd like to get an answer soon enough, because if the Conservative Party are going to stay in Ottawa, I'm certainly going to be going to my whip and asking for time to go to Banff regardless, just to meet people, because I do think it's very important, as a critic, to be there. I would prefer that all critics were there, but we shall have to see.

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, just for the record, whether my whip or my House leader authorizes the expenditure of these funds, I will not be attending, so you can already knock the budget down by whatever the proportional share is.

I did listen to Mr. Angus earlier in our meeting talk again about not having much time to get the business of this committee done, given the fact that June is just around the corner. Now we're talking about using up perhaps two of our committee meetings for that trip. On top of that, some of us serve on two committees, so that's four committee meetings I would be missing. It's just not justifiable at this point in time. I made that point last time, and I haven't changed my opinion.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, we had that debate. I would be curious to know if the minister is going or not. If it's important enough for the minister, perhaps it is for others as well.

May I bring up another matter?

The Chair: I think we'd better settle this one first.

• (1705)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I thought we'd settled that already at the last meeting.

The Chair: What we will do is ask our clerk to give us a revised budget and get it to each one of us as quickly as possible. Again, we're off next week.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I thought you had the authority to proceed. This is very nice, but I—

The Chair: Yes, okay. We'll get a new budget and I will go to the Liaison Committee. We will proceed that way. But we will get it to

everyone, and if there are any other problems with that, get back to me. Okay?

Thank you.

Yes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: On another topic, are we under...?

The Chair: You're under another topic.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'm going to pick up on something Mr. Angus said and Mr. Fast has commented on, which is the lack of time and the overwhelming amount of work we do. We had agreed that this particular meeting would deal with two items: a series of motions plus the review of appointment or nominee. Could we possibly, Mr. Chairman, entertain that at the next meeting on May 30...? You told us that the nominee will be present. Could we also entertain receiving someone else for the second half of that meeting? Could we entertain that? I will have a suggestion at that point.

The Chair: One thing that is on the agenda already is Mr. Kotto's motion. How long is it going to take us with the...?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I would have thought we might want to hear from CBC/Radio-Canada, and to see any views.... We could have, first of all, them responding to some of the past requests of the committee in terms of regional programming and what not, and their views and concerns, hopes and aspirations vis-à-vis this mandate review in preparation of our exercise at reviewing and commenting on and offering modifications to the terms of reference of the mandate review.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I would fully support that. I don't know if we can do it within the space of an hour or whether we need to have another meeting. I'm not opposed to doing an extraordinary meeting on a Wednesday afternoon or something so we can do this, because we will be needing to get some direction from them, especially for the new members, if we're going to have terms of reference being discussed on CBC. We could hold a separate meeting on that. We could start with an hour and agree to—

The Chair: I would suggest today we had allowed half an hour to do four motions, one motion was withdrawn and it took us almost an hour and a half to do the other three motions.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: This is the principle of the work expanding to occupy the time available.

The Chair: Yes, I think.

I would suggest that at the next meeting we will have our witness, Mr. Sirman, here. We will ask him questions. I know the Canada Council was mentioned here today, and some various reports. Maybe we could expand a little wee bit more on the mandate of the Canada Council, and we might all be able to understand that. I would suggest that we do this and deal with Mr. Kotto's motion, and that will make a very good meeting, I think.

Yes, Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Bélanger had asked for a list of the vacant positions within the Canadian heritage portfolio and organizations. I have it here. There's a continuation of one line on the back for the French.

Taking a look at this, I was very interested: for example, for the Canada Council for the Arts, one director, one member; for the Canada Science and Technology Museum, the president is missing; for the CBC, one member is missing; and so on and so forth. So there are obviously some vacancies here.

The Conservative government is starting into a process for these kinds of appointments that we are attempting to expedite as quickly as possible. It was deeply regrettable that today a decision was made by the board responsible for the person who was going to be responsible for actually establishing how that process was to be undertaken. It was deeply regrettable that it didn't happen.

I believe there are two or three other appointments that have already been made in the process, and now we're going to have to circle back and find someone else to do it. The point is that where the practices of previous governments—of various political stripes, to be non-partisan—had, I'm sure, their own internal processes, it wasn't always clear how the vacant positions were going to be filled.

Because we're really totally focused on the entire issue of accountability, and we think the Canadian people are, we are now in the process, as expeditiously as possible, of establishing a process whereby people who are qualified—for the sake of their own qualifications, and not necessarily for the sake of the political party card that they have in their pocket.... We are totally focused on that, and we are going to make it happen as quickly as possible.

As I say, I just find it regrettable that things didn't work out. The person the Prime Minister had nominated for the position is probably the most qualified—not one of the most, but the most qualified—person to get the process started.

So there is going to be a bit of a delay.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

I have come to the bottom of my orders of the day.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, I have a question.

Is there a time when we can hope to invite the CBC/Radio-Canada to appear before us in view of preparing ourselves for the review of the terms of reference of the mandate review?

Mr. Jim Abbott: Remember that the minister is going to be appearing on June 1. I wonder if the meeting following June 1 would be the best time. It would be a full meeting, and it would give the CBC an opportunity to do proper preparation.

I'm just wondering about jamming the CBC into an hour or less at the meeting before the minister comes.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I'd rather have an hour than nothing. If we're going to have a fruitful and fulsome discussion with the minister, there are issues that we wish to be prepared for. One of them is the CBC. And if we can't have them at this committee, then some of us individually I suppose, will ask to meet with the management of the CBC.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I was just going to suggest that at our next meeting we take 15 minutes just to look at our dwindling calendar and just block in. I think it's a suggestion we need to look at, but we don't have a lot of dates. I would prefer if we could just take a bit of time—I don't think we need to take an hour—just to say, “We have four dates left; we have three dates left; whatever. What is it that we want to do?”, and make sure we can then block that off.

I think we can get consensus.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think that's an excellent idea because of the fact that we do have a limited number of Tuesdays and Thursdays left. I think it's important for us to be focused. To spend two hours on motions, even though they're important.... I think we have to have a very focused schedule.

So even if prior to our next meeting you could send us a draft of what the schedule looks like from now until the session ends, it would be appreciated.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.