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—
Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

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• (1115)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): Order.

We will consider the motion by Mr. Karygiannis, which reads:

WHEREAS, since January 23, 2006, a large number of undocumented workers have been deported from Canada;

AND WHEREAS there are thousands of skilled undocumented workers still in Canada;

AND WHEREAS there is a need for skilled workers in Canada's labour force; That the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration hold hearings on the issue of undocumented workers; that the Committee invite expert witnesses and stakeholders, including but not limited to, skilled workers and trade unions; and that Members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration provide to the Clerk of the Committee the names and contact information of prospective witnesses by Friday, May 11, 2007.

Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, thank you very much, and all the members, for giving me this opportunity to deal with this matter.

We've witnessed over the last year or year and a half that a large number of skilled workers and tradespeople who have been in Canada, as has been documented over the years, were working toward getting their status in Canada, but deportation started happening and these people and their families were being separated.

I'm asking that our committee look at it and invite the trades and skilled workers, the unions, and the people who have a stake in this, and at the end come up with something to recommend to the minister as a way to proceed, in order to fill the void we have in a lot of our trades in some parts of the country. Some people may say they don't need people, but Fort McMurray and Whistler need tradespeople. Unfortunately, the demand cannot be met domestically, so we have to make sure that the people we have in Canada who can provide that work are nurtured and guided in the right direction in order for them to be landed and be productive citizens.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Chair, I certainly support moving in this direction. It's one of the issues we had prioritized back at our prioritization exercise in the beginning.

The Chair: Yes, in the steering committee.

Mr. Bill Siksay: No, the entire committee had prioritized this issue.

The only suggestion I'd have, Chair, and I wonder if Mr. Karygiannis would be favourable, is that—We had also talked about doing a study on the issue of temporary foreign workers. I'm wondering if we could add in this motion, on the second line, after the word “undocumented”, the words, “and temporary foreign”, so that we're looking at the whole issue of undocumented workers and temporary foreign workers, and begin a study on that on the timetable he suggests. If I need to make that a formal amendment, I will.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Yes, by all means. I have no problem with that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: That's great. I can support this motion, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Devolin.

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): I agree that this is an important issue, and I remember that session we had way back at the beginning where we put this on our list of priorities.

I also think it's a big-picture issue for Canada for many years in the future, and, quite frankly, this has been an issue in the past. So I'd like to support this motion. But I'd like to ask Mr. Karygiannis if he would be willing to delete the first sentence. We can talk about whether things have gotten marginally better or worse since the new government took office, but I think it's fair to say that the issue of undocumented workers has been around for many years in Canada.

The Chair: So you're saying delete the first three or four words, “WHEREAS, since January 23, 2006”? Am I clear on that? Is that what you're asking?

Mr. Barry Devolin: Well, there are a couple of ways to do it. One would be to just delete “since January 23, 2006”, to say, “WHEREAS a large number of undocumented workers have been deported from Canada”, or, quite frankly, to delete that whole first sentence and just say, “WHEREAS there are thousands of skilled undocumented workers in Canada”.

I agree with the intent. I think it's a subject that we need to look at. I cannot speak for my colleagues, but I know that if Mr. Karygiannis would see fit to remove that reference, I would be happy to support it, but obviously I would have a problem supporting it if that stays in.

The Chair: Okay. We only have one amendment on the floor, because I think everyone was unanimous with what Mr. Siksay had to say, so we won't consider that to be an amendment.

But what you're talking about will be an amendment, Mr. Devolin.

I have to go to Mr. Telegdi, and then—

Mr. Bill Siksay: A point of order, Chair.

The Chair: On a point of order.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Are “whereas” clauses debatable on motions that are before the committee? I know often in other settings the “whereas” clauses aren't what you debate; you debate the main motion itself and not the “whereas” clauses. I'm just wondering if that is something we should be doing.

The Chair: The preamble is not considered part of the main motion, meaning that only the main motion may be amended, subamended, and voted on.

Mr. Barry Devolin: Even by the proponent?

The Chair: I guess you could do it by consent, if Mr. Karygiannis was willing to remove the first three or four words.

I'll go to Mr. Telegdi, and then off to you, Mr. Karygiannis.

Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In terms of the motion, I am very much in favour. I think it's worth pointing out that the committee did a fair amount of work on this previously. Last summer, we passed a resolution, I believe at our last meeting, calling on the government to put a stay on deportations as far as undocumented workers are concerned and to use the saved resources to go after serious criminals that we all agree should be removed from Canada.

I think I can support Mr. Devolin, because the previous government was working on regularization, as far as it went with undocumented workers, recognizing the problems and the large number of undocumented workers who are in Canada, numbers ranging anywhere from 200,000, and with families considered, up to 500,000.

I would suggest that that amendment be made, because it reflects the long-term nature of this problem. I think this whole thing was worsened when we introduced the new Immigration Act, which changed the point system, whereby people the economy actually needed are unable to come into Canada legally. I think that went a long way in making the problem even worse. I think that's something we really have to look at—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I have no problem changing it.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: —in terms of getting the people we need here legally, because now it's pretty difficult.

I would suggest that our analyst get that information. There were numerous people and groups that made presentations in the previous Parliament. I think we want to draw upon that information. I think we should pass it on to the steering committee to do some scheduling as to when we can have these hearings.

But I think it's a problem that we all recognize we need to do something about.

The Chair: Okay. So I'm getting the word from Mr. Karygiannis. He's going to be quite magnanimous in this regard, and probably—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, in the sense of cooperation and wanting to move this motion forward, there's no question in anybody's mind that we've seen a large number of people...there were a lot of press reports in February, March, and April of last year of families being separated and people being deported, and there were a lot of resources being put from the department into deporting people.

In order to facilitate, and in order to make sure we don't get bogged down in political corners—and I see the willingness from my colleagues from the Conservative Party to move on this—I would graciously say that we all know that is the case, but in order to save face, I will say what the Chinese say, “Okay, let's drop it off and move on.”

Certainly I would like to thank Mr. Siksay for the suggestion to also have in there people with work permits.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Karygiannis, for that. That makes life a little bit easier.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Can I ask the chair, sir, for one more favour?

Can the chair speak to the minister and advise the minister that this is happening? While this is happening, may the minister find it in her heart to stop the deportation of people until the committee has had an opportunity to deal with this and help people in coming forward. And maybe you can also ask the minister in a friendly way when she's coming to committee.

The Chair: Okay, we can do that.

So the preamble now will be:

WHEREAS a large number of undocumented workers have been deported from Canada—

All in favour of the motion?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have a point to make yet on this.

The Chair: I have already called the question.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: He didn't call the question yet, did he?

The Chair: Yes, I did. I called the question.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The clerk acknowledged me, but I don't want to make a big point of it.

The Chair: Okay, I'll hear it.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Just to add to what Mr. Siksay said—and I think he cleared the temporary foreign workers—one of the other programs that has been established more or less in other provinces was the provincial nominee program.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: It has nothing to do with this.

The Chair: It seems to me we're complicating a simple issue here. We have this motion before us. That would be a separate one, and maybe you could get a motion going to that effect at some point.

The way I'm reading this right now is that:

WHEREAS a large number of undocumented workers have been deported from Canada;

WHEREAS there are thousands of skilled undocumented workers and temporary foreign workers still in Canada...

and as it goes.

I think we should get on to our report here.

All in favour of the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Unanimously carried, I think.

I guess we'll go back to—

Mr. Bill Siksay: Can I just clarify that the “and temporary foreign workers” was added in the body of the motion, not just in the “whereases”?

The Chair: Yes, it was added in the body of the motion as well.

We will suspend for a moment to get back in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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