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## **Standing Committee on Finance**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, May 6, 2008**

**Chair**

**Mr. Rob Merrifield**

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## Standing Committee on Finance

Tuesday, May 6, 2008

• (1230)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order, seeing the clock at 12:30.

Pursuant to our order of reference of October 16, 2008, the committee will now proceed to a clause-by-clause study of Bill C-305, an act to amend the Income Tax Act.

Mr. Wallace has a motion he would like to deal with that's just been put on the table.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me move the motion first and I'll give you my simple reason why I think we have to do this with this particular private member's bill.

I move that, as per the rules laid out in Standing Order 97.1, the Standing Committee on Finance give a recommendation to the House not to proceed with Bill C-305.

The reason, Mr. Chair is as simple as this: we cannot introduce this bill, in order to protect the integrity of the budget framework and the system we have in place for budgetary matters.

**The Chair:** We'll open the floor to debate on the motion.

Mr. Comartin.

**Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to make a statement, because I know the fix is already in between the Conservatives and the Liberals to support this motion from Mr. Wallace. I want it on the record that both leaders of both political parties, historically, in my city, in the city of Windsor, where this bill has its greatest number of victims, stood publicly during elections and said they would fix this and they would find justice for the people who have been victimized by this policy by the federal government.

Now, for the second time, we have a political party reversing itself on that and gutting this bill, in spite of the commitments we had from the Prime Minister in my city during the last election.

So I want to be on the record very clearly—and I had this as a private member's bill at one time as well—that the NDP continues to support the bill, supports the change in policy that will bring some justice to retirees who have suffered so grievously under this policy.

**The Chair:** Mr. Pacetti, and then Mr. Crête.

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** If you recall, I think this bill has a long history. We've looked at it on previous occasions, in the previous Parliaments, and we've always had issues with this bill. My question is not just to the members on the opposite side, but to all members around the table: What took them so long?

If you recall, we had a vote in the House, and I think it was 307 to one. I was the only one who opposed the fact that we should grant the extension. I think this has been a big waste of time, not only for Parliament, but for resources dedicated to these types of bills.

I totally am not impressed with the way we've handled this bill. I think it should never have got to this point. I think for the future, the committee members should consider listening to what I have to say, to not only expedite bills but to also decrease any financial resources that Parliament has put toward these types of bills.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** Is that an amendment?

We always listen to you, Mr. Pacetti.

Monsieur Crête.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Thank you.

I was a member of Parliament when the retirement pension crisis hit the United States. It was a mess, an appalling foul-up. Quebecers or Canadians who had earned their living in the United States were fleeced. It took enormous effort to correct only part of the situation. The bill before us would allow us to finish the correction.

I am very surprised at the government's position today, a position that seems to be shared by the Liberal Party. This is a private member's bill, but we are certainly going to support it. In any event, thanks to Mr. Wallace's motion, there will be a one hour debate in the House.

I think that that is a bad solution. Instead, we could have allowed a motion that would have been opposed anyway, but that would have simply removed the clauses so that the debate could go back to the House. Now we are going to have to declare our positions on the substance of the matter. For the people of Quebec and of Canada, this is perhaps the best solution. It will allow them to see where each of us stands on the way in which we treat our pensioners.

●(1235)

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

Seeing no other debate, we'd ask for the question on the motion that has been put forward by Mr. Wallace.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** I ask for a recorded vote, please.

[English]

**The Chair:** A recorded vote—okay; go ahead.

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti:** Who is registered in for us?

**The Chair:** We will go ahead with the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 8; nays 3)

**The Chair:** With that, the bill does not report to the House. Tomorrow we'll table the report that it not be proceeded with.

With that, I think we're done.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** I have a question on Bill C-50.

[English]

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Yesterday, the session on Bill C-50 was cancelled. Sessions are scheduled for tomorrow, next Monday and probably next Wednesday. I know that we still have to hear from a number of witnesses. We have received a letter saying that the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration will report to us on the 16th.

As I understand it, therefore, we are going to keep hearing witnesses, and the clause-by-clause study will be done later, at the end of May or the beginning of June.

[English]

**The Chair:** As I interpreted the motion that was made here—that we ask immigration for their recommendations on this piece of legislation—it does not bind us to a timeline or to any kind of timing impacting the bill.

I talked to the chair of the immigration committee and relayed that message to him, and he was going to take it back for consultation. That was after we got the letter. Whether they will accelerate their timing or not, I don't know. We have the group of, I believe, about 60 witnesses. We divvied it up proportionally to be able to fill three meetings. Yesterday, unfortunately, we had to cancel one of those. We're trying to squeeze that same number into the next two, which would be on Wednesday and Monday.

We won't listen to the 60. We will listen to a proportionate number to be able to fill up those three slots. It's not going to be 60; it will be—I don't know—maybe 15 out of those 60, based on the recommendations of the individual members here, and proportional to party. That's the way it's going to go.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Chair, it is hard to believe that we will be able to move to clause-by-clause study before the break. I think we absolutely have to arrange the next meetings so that...We will see later where we are with regard to the witnesses. I feel that clause-by-clause study before the break would be too soon.

I would like that question to be clarified and I would like to hear everyone's view.

[English]

**The Chair:** My intent would be to go clause by clause and be out of this. That was the direction I got from the consensus of the committee, which was that we wanted to have it done before the break.

I'm totally prepared to meet all evening Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. If you insist on having more witnesses, let's bring them in; I don't have a problem with that. But I would like to go to clause-by-clause consideration by Wednesday's meeting. That's where I'd like to go.

●(1240)

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti:** To reiterate what Mr. Crête was saying, I think we discussed that we were going to write to the immigration committee and wait to see their response to us. We knew they weren't going to be able to get back to us before May 16 anyway. That's what we had discussed. We said we'd try to get them to respond to us before May 9, and we see it isn't possible.

We also had indicated that since a number of witnesses were willing to appear, if we were going to increase the number of meetings.... We said that once we got those numbers, we would determine how many meetings we'd have and when we'd report back to the House.

I don't see how we can ask the immigration committee to report after debating a motion and adopting the motion—I think everybody was in favour of it—and then turn around and say we're going to ignore whatever they have to say. I don't think that's correct on our side.

All we're talking about is two extra days. It is going clause by clause on either the 14th or the 16th. I think we're just playing with a few—

**The Chair:** Let me do this for the committee. I will again approach the chair of the immigration committee, because it is since we spoke that he was going to take it back. My indication to him was that we needed their input by the ninth or earlier, because our intent was to go clause by clause on the 14th.

I haven't heard back from him since that time, so let me talk to him. They can hold an extra meeting and get that information to us, if the will is there to do it.

If they are just going to drag their feet.... My understanding of what the committee wanted to do was to have this clear committee by the break, so that's the way I've set it up to proceed. But let's see what the immigration committee will do, because I think that may have changed.

Monsieur Crête is next, and then Mr. McCallum.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** I do not in any way recall that we said that clause-by-clause study had to be done before the break. We had said that we would hear witnesses for as long as we needed to. There are important and unique questions in the bill. Even a rather surprising section on immigration has been included.

This committee never said that it had to be finished before the break. There was no motion or no feeling to that effect. My sense is that it will be wrapped up closer to the beginning of June than next Monday or Wednesday.

I would like to hear how other members of the committee feel.

[English]

**The Chair:** Yes, okay.

We'll hear Mr. McCallum—I think he was first—and then Mr. Del Mastro.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** I can be brief, because I was going to say something very similar to what Mr. Crête said. I don't remember any previous agreement whereby we would necessarily do clause-by-clause before the break. I think there's time remaining to consult with the immigration committee to see where they are, and we can decide at a future date according to what they come back with in terms of their timetable.

**The Chair:** Again to address this, I will go back to the chair of the immigration committee to see whether they've accelerated their timeline on it.

Mr. Del Mastro.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I'd ask that you consider setting additional meetings for the committee and extending the hours of the committee so that we can get through this. I think, quite frankly, we know that last year was nip and tuck for getting the budget done before the deadline. We all are mindful of the deadline.

**Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.):** Whose fault is that?

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** Well, Mr. Turner, now that you mention it....

**The Chair:** Please address your remarks through the chair.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** What a piece of work.

My point, Mr. Chair, is that last year the Senate had to sit extremely long hours to make the deadline to get royal assent for the budget. This budget was brought forward in February. There is no reason why at the end of June we should still be forcing the Senate to sit into extended hours and be at nip and tuck, holding our breath, hoping it makes the deadline.

Let's schedule extra meetings. If they want to have a joint meeting with immigration, maybe we should consider that, so that we can satisfy all the various concerns of the members. But let's get our work done. I'm prepared to work as much as necessary to get this done by next week.

**The Chair:** I just need a clarification. There are 60 witnesses on the list. We will ask every one of those to come, but we'll be sitting

late into the evenings and we'll be having it done before next Wednesday, if that's the intent of this committee.

**Some hon. members:** No, no.

**The Chair:** That's not the intent? You don't want to do that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** No, we never said that we had to accelerate things. Someone just made that up.

● (1245)

[English]

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti:** Mr. Chairman, again...and I've had my hand up for a while.

**The Chair:** Yes, you have. Okay, go ahead, and then we'll go to Mr. Menzies.

**Mr. Massimo Pacetti:** I have to share my experience with the rest of the committee members here. We issued a letter, or we passed a motion, and that has to have some type of credibility. We're going to lose all credibility. If we asked the immigration committee to study this bill and report back, we have to respect our decision.

If you're willing to speak to the chair, I have no problem with that, and at that point we'll discuss it. We'll just take another 15 minutes on Wednesday before or after our committee meeting to re-discuss this, and at that point we'll decide whether we should go into long hours.

I think everybody around this table is aware of the fact that we could add additional meetings, but just to give some background to Mr. Del Mastro, the budget bill at every Parliament goes to the last second, because the government is slow and dragging their feet.

If we decide to do clause-by-clause the first day we get back, this could be into the House the day after—I think it's the 26th or the 27th—and we're not going to be saving any additional time.

So there's no problem in timing, but I think in terms of credibility we have to respect the motion this committee passed. That's the least we have to do.

**The Chair:** Let's see what the chair of the immigration committee has to report back to me, and we'll try to respect it and deal with it on Wednesday. I think that's fair ball.

Mr. Menzies.

**Mr. Ted Menzies (MacLeod, CPC):** I'm going to reiterate that I see no reason why we can't extend the length of these meetings to get those witnesses in. With all due respect to the immigration committee's presentation to us, we'll hear it, but the worst thing that could happen is that we're not done and they are. So let's get our job done, and then we'll hear what the immigration committee has to say.

**The Chair:** Fair enough. We'll deal with it on Wednesday, at the end of the meeting. I'll have more information from the immigration committee then.

The meeting is adjourned.





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