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Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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EVIDENCE

Monday, March 8, 2010

—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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•(1535)

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Bélisle): Members of the Committee, as I can see that quorum is present, your first order of business is to elect a chair.

Are there any motions to that effect?

[English]

Do I have motions for a chair? In this committee the chair has to be from the official opposition.

Madam Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I nominate Madam Fry.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations?

[English]

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): I second the motion.

The Clerk: Okay.

[Translation]

As there are no other nominations, I declare Ms. Fry duly elected chair.

The Committee also needs to elect two vice-chairs. The first vice-chair shall be a member of the government party.

[English]

The first vice-chair has to be from the government party. Do I have any motions to that effect?

Madame Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): I move that Ms. Cathy McLeod be vice-chair.

The Clerk: Are there any other motions to that effect?

As there are no other motions,

[English]

I declare Mrs. McLeod duly elected the first vice-chair of the committee.

The second vice-chair is from an opposition party other than the official opposition. Do I have a motion to that effect?

Madame Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): I nominate Ms. Irene Mathysen.

The Clerk: Are there any other nominations?

[English]

It is seconded.

I declare Ms. Mathysen the second vice-chair of this committee.

I have done what I have to do. I am passing it on to the real chair.

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Thank you very much.

We have three motions to deal with. The first is a notice of motion from Anita Neville that the committee request that the Minister of State for the Status of Women appear before the committee before March 26, 2010, on the subject of the supplementary estimates.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I would like to move an amendment. It has been confirmed that March 18th is now the deadline for committee consideration of Supplementary Estimates and for submission of the report to the House.

I have a motion to put forward.

•(1540)

[English]

The Chair: Anita, does that satisfy your motion?

Hon. Anita Neville: To change the date?

The Chair: Yes, before March 26; she said March 18.

Hon. Anita Neville: That's fine, whatever works.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: [Editor's note: Inaudible]. I have an amendment...

[English]

The Chair: Good. That was just a piece of information, but we need to vote on the motion, with the friendly amendment.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The next one from Anita Neville is that the committee request that Suzanne Clément, Coordinator, Head of the Agency, Status of Women Canada, appear before the committee at the earliest opportunity.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have an amendment to move to this effect. May I proceed?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I move that the Committee invites the Minister of State for the Status of Women Canada to appear before it earlier than March 18th, 2010, on the subject of the Supplementary Estimates process. I also move that the Committee ask Suzanne Clément, Coordinator, Head of Agency for Status of Women Canada, to appear before it at the same time, that is, on the same day.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have a question for the parliamentary secretary, for clarification, Madam Chair.

As a committee, we have the authority, for lack of a better word, to invite a senior member of a department, in this case an agency, to appear before the committee to talk about their experience, background, viewpoint. I don't know whether the parliamentary secretary is asking for Suzanne Clément to appear as part of the estimates process. Is it separate and apart from the estimates process, to talk to her about her role in the agency?

The Chair: So you don't believe this is a friendly amendment?

A voice: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: Okay.

Madame Demers has a similar one, does she?

I'm sorry, Nicole. I didn't see your hand up.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: It's okay Madam Chair, I forgive you.

Today is International Women's Day, and I would like to wish all the women here today an excellent International Women's Day.

That being said, Madam Chair, I do hope that we will have enough time for a thorough talk with the Head of Agency for Status of Women Canada because we are not acquainted with her. We know that she is part of the internal bureaucracy, but I'm sure that this does not mean that she lacks proficiency.

We would like to know more about her opinions and her beliefs. We would also like to have a more in-depth discussion with her about the challenges Status of Women Canada is faced with, as well as about our opinions and the position that Status of Women Canada means to adopt in the future. A full two-hour meeting would be essential, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

So you're both speaking against the friendly amendment, so to speak.

Cathy.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, if I recall, it usually takes about an hour to do the supplementary estimates. If we combine them in one meeting, with Suzanne Clément staying for the additional hour, I think we could meet the needs.

The Chair: If we understand that, shall I call the motion? Do we need to have the amendment attached to the motion or is it an understanding—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: —that it will be as soon as possible.

The Chair: Okay, as soon as possible.

Hon. Anita Neville: As long as there's an understanding that they are two separate activities.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right. Those in favour of the amendment? Those against?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now we have one from Madame Demers.

[Translation]

The motion in French reads as follows:

Conformément à l'article 108(2) du Règlement, qu'il soit fait rapport à la Chambre, à la première occasion, de ce qui suit:

Que le Comité tienne une cérémonie de commémoration, le 5 décembre de chaque année, ou la journée la plus rapprochée de cette date si les députés ne siègent pas le 5 décembre, en souvenir de la date à laquelle le projet de loi C-68 (Loi concernant les armes à feu et certaines autres armes) a reçu l'approbation du Sénat et la sanction royale en 1995.

● (1545)

[English]

So it reads:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), that the following motion be reported to the House at the earliest opportunity:

That the Committee hold a commemoration ceremony each year on December 5, or on the day closest to December 5 if the House is not sitting that day, the date that Bill C-68 (An Act respecting firearms and other weapons) was passed by the Senate and received Royal Assent in 1995.

Madame Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, “in remembrance of the date” is missing from the English version, following the text “is not sitting that day.”

You may remember...

[English]

The Chair: It says “a commemoration ceremony”. You would like to add “in remembrance”.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes: “That the Committee hold a commemoration ceremony each year on December 5, or on the day closest to December 5 if the House is not sitting that day, in remembrance of the date that Bill C-68...”

The Chair: All right.

Does everyone have that or shall I read it again? In English, it says:

That the Committee hold a commemoration ceremony each year on December 5, or on the day closest to December 5 if the House is not sitting that day, in remembrance of the date that Bill C-68 (An Act respecting firearms and other weapons) was passed by the Senate and received Royal Assent in 1995.

Madame Demers, would you like to speak to your motion?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. You may remember that on the last day of our fall session, we moved this motion, which was agreed to by the Committee.

Unfortunately, as we did not sit after that, and then there was prorogation, the motion was not brought forward to the House; therefore, we can assume that it died. This is why I would like us to agree to it today—that is, that we agree to it once more—in order to ensure that it can be put forward to the House.

I spoke about it earlier with Ms. Edward, the mother of one of the victims of the École Polytechnique Massacre, and she is very glad that we are putting this motion forward.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. I think the only thing different here is that you wanted it to be reported to the House.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Obviously you would have to do that if you were going to have a commemorative ceremony each year.

Any discussion on this?

Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Certainly I want to acknowledge the very strong feelings my colleague has regarding this issue, but I also hope that if we are looking at doing things that are commemorative in nature, and remembering... This is the status of women committee, and we need to recognize and value that not all women share her feelings on this issue. Certainly many of my constituents, both male and female, have very different views in terms of this.

So with all due respect to her feelings, I would hope that if our committee is doing something commemorative and in remembrance, it could be something that we believe is very widely shared throughout the country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any further discussion?

Anita.

Hon. Anita Neville: I think we have to acknowledge that in part there's going to be disagreement. Just before I came over here, I read a column that polled Canadians on commemorative activities. Certainly some of the issues that were raised in the Speech from the Throne the majority of Canadians do not support in terms of commemoration.

I think we put it out there. If there is a will to do it in Parliament, we do it. If there's not, so be it, but it reflects the majority in this

committee. We've experienced it before. There is a significant difference on a number of issues that may come forward for commemoration, but I don't think it's inappropriate to put forward the majority will of a committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Calandra.

• (1550)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): I wonder if we might also contemplate the fact that right now there is a bill that did pass the House, where the will of the majority of members of Parliament, from all sides of the House, was to repeal the long gun registry. I wonder if we might just wait on this until the House has spoken yet again on this issue. As I said, it was something that was passed by a majority of the members of the House—the Conservative, Liberal, and NDP members; I don't recall any of the Bloc members.

I think it's a bit premature for us to talk about doing something like that until we hear what the will of the House is in the days ahead.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Desnoyers.

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

As Nicole pointed out earlier, before we left for Christmas holidays we had supported this motion. Everybody was made aware of the debate. At that time, we were already aware of diverging opinions, but there is nothing stopping the Committee now from adopting a clear position regarding whether or not the Committee should hold a commemoration ceremony. The motion was clear. At that time, we held a debate, as the Members may recall, and I don't believe that it is necessary for us to start all over today.

We know that this is a sensitive issue and that a great number of people have differing points of view, but here, the majority of people support this initiative.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is somewhat presumptuous to believe that a bill will necessarily be passed by Parliament or the Senate simply because it is a private members' bill and it was agreed to at second reading.

I moved this motion in the hope of also making people remember the event that took place on December 6, 1989. We are reminded that this tragedy was the primary reason why Bill C-68 was adopted in 1995, following repeated requests over several years by the parents of the victims, protest groups and people who were unfortunate enough to lose loved ones on December 6.

I think that it is rather appropriate to want to celebrate the day when the Parliament showed much wisdom in passing a bill that recognized the importance of establishing a firearms registry, which is still used by law enforcement agencies 5,000 times a day.

Madam Chair, I wish to restate my motion and my suggestion that we put it to a vote.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I have just a small point. As Mr. Desnoyers said, the will of the committee is very clear, and to me consensus is clear. When we have a divided committee in which the chair has to break the tie, we certainly do not have a clear mandate. Certainly no one here or I believe in Canada will ever forget the horrific tragedy at the École Polytechnique.

The Chair: We'll have Mr. Calandra and then Monsieur Desnoyers, and then, unless there is any further discussion, I'll call the vote.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I just want to echo what Ms. McLeod said. We rightfully acknowledge every year in the House the tragic events at École Polytechnique, and we should never stop doing that. It is extraordinarily important that we do that.

This motion doesn't do that. It speaks to something else that is in front of the House right now and that has members on all sides of the House talking. There is no unanimity on the particular issue. I think we are unanimous in how we feel about the events that happened at École Polytechnique, and I think that is what we should continue to focus on, not on things that divide us at this point. Let's see how it goes through Parliament.

I agree with you. Committees have an opportunity to do things and to express their will, but on this particular motion, let's continue to keep the focus where it belongs: on those women who were killed and who shouldn't have been. That is what people are looking for this committee to do.

I am new and perhaps I speak out of turn, but that is where I want the focus to remain. I hope that is what we can do, and perhaps there will be a better opportunity to express what Ms. Demers is saying in the future.

• (1555)

The Chair: Monsieur Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers: I would simply like to add to what Ms. McLeod was saying. Earlier, I said that we all had our differing opinions. Our respective positions were clear.

When we talk about the situation of women, about firearms, about violence against women... The Committee has discussed this a number of times and has come to the conclusion that these situations are part of the family environment, in various communities. We have talked about aboriginal communities where a number of women were killed for various reasons and where a number of murders were never even solved or were never even investigated. These crimes were committed with firearms, and handguns were used in many cases.

It is important to commemorate this tragedy. Our Committee cannot allow itself to ignore such an important event. The Committee should be able to commemorate this date. This is the gist of the motion, and the reason why in December, if you recall, we supported this particular stance.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll hear from Sylvie, and then I will let Ms. Demers end the debate and we will call the vote.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I would just like to add that we did indeed debate the matter before Christmas, and different opinions were voiced. However, first and foremost, we need to remember that women are subjected to all kinds of acts of violence. These acts of violence are unacceptable, regardless of whether they involve firearms or physical or psychological abuse.

So what do we want? We want a commemoration for women. This is what we need to do, and it would not just be a commemoration of one specific incident, least others might be forgotten.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Sylvie.

Ms. Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In conclusion, I would simply like to note that Bill C-391, sponsored by Ms. Hoepfner, concerns long guns and therefore does not affect the firearms registry as a whole. If, by some misfortune, the firearms registry were to no longer carry records of long guns, it would still retain records of other firearms. My motion would be relevant, as it is nevertheless appropriate to remember that it is due to the pain suffered by certain people that we have drafted and tabled such an important bill.

In any case, I hope that Ms. Hoepfner's bill will not pass. This is what I hope for. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

All those in favour of Ms. Demers' motion? Opposed?

It's up to the chair to break the tie. I always try to tell you why I'm voting the way I'm voting. I am going to vote in support of Ms. Demers' motion because I think this is to go to the House and the House will decide whether they agree or believe this is important. The concept of going to the House is a flagging of something, an intent of certain people on the committee, and I don't think we should just bury it; I think we should let it out there and see what everyone else thinks. So I am voting in favour.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now I would like us to move in camera, please.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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