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Monday, August 16, 2010

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Chair

The Honourable Michael Chong

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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Order. We're coming out of suspension.

As I mentioned before, we're here pursuant to the request of four members to have a planning meeting concerning the Government of Canada's decision to eliminate the long census.

I wanted to let members of the committee know that I will be adjourning the meeting at five o'clock. I expect that the members of this committee will be able to or will not be able to come to a decision on what they would like to do in this matter, and that the remaining 57 minutes is ample time for the 11 members of the committee to arrive at one decision or another. So I just wanted to let members of the committee know that I will be adjourning at five o'clock promptly.

Is there any debate?

I see, Mr. Garneau, that you have something to say. Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Chair, I would like to suggest that we hold a second day of hearings for witnesses who would like to speak on the topic. I would like to suggest Thursday, August 19, as the date for this meeting, if that is all right with you.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Mr. Garneau is proposing that the committee meet on Thursday.

Monsieur Bouchard.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): I support Mr. Garneau's proposal that we hold a second meeting to welcome other witnesses. We have already heard a number of them and I believe the issue is very important. Given the importance of the topic, I believe it is essential that other witnesses have the opportunity to speak to the change introduced at the end of June, when the long-form questionnaire became voluntary.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): I agree, Mr. Chair, that the continued public interest in this case warrants another meeting at the very least. If not the Thursday, I would suggest that Friday, just

depending upon witnesses and availability, would be my preference. We certainly can accommodate the Thursday, but we prefer Friday.

Aside from that, we believe there still is a general interest. There are witnesses who have asked to appear before us as well, too, so I think it's incumbent upon us to be inclusive.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It seems as though the other three parties have coordinated nicely and come up with a plan. Obviously we're not going to stand in the way of that.

I think what we need to look at is a reasonable date. If this is not simply a political exercise, then we have to come up with a game plan that's going to give witnesses time to make plans to come here. It's very unreasonable that we would plan a meeting for three days from today. By the time the meeting's done.... We're through the business day today, so I don't think that's....

I mean, I'm not saying that this is a political exercise on the opposition's part. It seems that they're somewhat coordinated in their approach, but I certainly wouldn't accuse them of being political in any way on this issue. Perhaps we maybe want to have a reasonable timeframe before we have our next meeting to make sure that we get the best possible selection of witnesses that we can have.

I would suggest that perhaps a suitable date might be the week following the Labour Day long weekend, maybe, when people are actually back from vacation time and the different things that occupy them during the summer. Perhaps that would be a reasonable time to have a meeting.

Maybe we can find some compromise here.

The Chair: So, Mr. Lake, you're suggesting the week of Tuesday the seventh.

Mr. Mike Lake: That would be correct, yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Let's see if we can form a consensus here.

As I understand it, Mr. Garneau is suggesting Thursday, August 19. Monsieur Bouchard is in agreement with that. Mr. Masse is suggesting either the 19th or the 20th.

Mr. Brian Masse: I can do the Thursday if necessary.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Lake is suggesting the week beginning with Labour Day Monday, which is the week of Tuesday, September 7.

Now, there are just two issues as chair that I want to draw to members' attention, before we go to Mr. Wallace. The first is that on Thursday it would be difficult for me to chair the meeting. I have some prior commitments in the riding that would be difficult for me to get out of. I would be available Friday to chair a meeting.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): So not on Thursday.

The Chair: Not on Thursday; it would be difficult. I might be able to rearrange some of the commitments I have, but that's only three days from now, and I've made some significant constituent commitments. It would be difficult for me to try to rearrange that, but Friday I'm currently available.

I am available the week of....

Mr. Lake indicates that he's not available on Thursday either.

Mr. Mike Lake: Not Friday either.

The Chair: Friday he's not available either.

The first point I want to make is that I'm not available on Thursday to chair a meeting, so it would require a vice-chair to take the chair. But later on this month, or early September, I am available.

The second point I want to make is what assurances do we have, since members of the opposition are asking for this meeting this week, that witnesses will actually appear, have the ability to appear, this Thursday and Friday?

Before we go to Mr. Wallace, Mr. Garneau.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, I would like to take a vote on Friday, August 20, as the date for us to hold this, on the understanding that you will be there.

The Chair: Well, let's make sure the debate's exhausted on this first before I call the vote.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Very good.

The Chair: Since, Mr. Garneau, you spoke first about it....

We currently have a motion on the floor.

I'll interpret or read out your motion as I understand it. Your motion is that we have a committee hearing to have a second day of hearings on the issue of the census this Friday, August 20.

There are a number of members who want to speak to that motion still, but before we go to that, I have a second point that I want to draw to members' attention. What assurances do we have, given the short notice, that witnesses will actually appear on Friday if they're called?

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: I am asking the question of members of the opposition because you've requested that we hold the meeting on Friday. What I don't want to have happen is that after this meeting adjourns, if it is agreed that it is Friday, we end up in a situation where my clerk is contacting potential witnesses, and in each and every case they're telling us they're not available because it's such a

short time to appear, so we end up having a meeting on Friday with no witnesses.

Mr. Garneau.

•(1610)

Mr. Marc Garneau: Well, of course, Mr. Chair, we could not give a firm date to our witnesses until we had today's meeting, but we did enter into contact with them and we did point out that it might occur later this week. We feel reasonably confident that there will be...and we have a list here, as you see, of 23 witnesses. We feel reasonably satisfied that there will be a good representation.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for that.

We have a motion on the floor.

We have a point of order from Mr. Lake. Go ahead.

Mr. Mike Lake: I just want to be clear; when Mr. Garneau's speaking and he's using the word "we", he is speaking for all three parties over there, right? Is that correct?

The Chair: I assume he's speaking for himself—

Mr. Marc Garneau: The Liberal Party.

The Chair: —and his colleagues.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay. I just wanted clarification.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have a motion in front of the committee to have a meeting this Friday, August 20, on the issue of the census. Mr. Garneau has assured the committee that he's confident that witnesses will appear.

Mr. Wallace now has the floor.

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

First of all, I scheduled five days of vacation with my family, and today's the first day. So I want to thank you for being my family today.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mike Wallace: I will not be here on Friday. I picked five days well in advance, and I cannot be here on Friday.

Second, whether you've talked to people or not, we have the right also to contact people, on this side, to come and be witnesses. If you're trying to be fair...and I'm assuming you are. Let's just assume you are. To be fair, then, at five o'clock, when this meeting ends, for us to put the list together and get it to the clerk, which will be sometime tomorrow, likely, and by the time.... So that's Tuesday; and for Friday, in the middle of the summer, I'm not sure what the response rate will be.

In the spirit of compromise, I have no issue having another meeting on this. I was unable to make the last meeting due to commitments in my riding, but I would like to be at the next one, if possible. To be realistic, if the week after the Labour Day weekend does not work, why don't we have it the week before the Labour Day weekend? September 1, I think, is the Wednesday, so whatever the 29th is, that gives us a week and a half, a couple of weeks, to get our witnesses and have the staff here.

I know he didn't mention it, but my understanding is that the chair will not be available for a couple of weeks, so we are...we get past that. Otherwise, you guys are chairing the meeting. I'm not sure you want that.

So in the spirit of compromise, my view is that I can't personally support Friday, because I can't be here. I made a commitment to my wife and my children, and I'm visiting my parents. I haven't seen them in seven, eight months, so I'm going; I'm not coming here. I think another reasonable option would be to have it in a few weeks. We all get our witnesses. We all come here and argue about the long form, or the national survey, however you want to phrase it, and we deal with it. I think that's more reasonable, being that it is the middle of August and most are either tuned out or off on vacation. I can tell you by the volume of cars in the streets in Burlington at rush hour in the morning that a lot of people are away.

That is my suggestion, Mr. Chair. I can't support the date. I'm asking the opposition to be considerate of the date in the middle of summer and give us a chance to get some witnesses here.

Thank you.

•(1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wallace.

We have Mr. McTeague, and then...

Hon. Dan McTeague: No, that's fine.

The Chair: Okay.

Then we have Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'd like, if we could get some indication.... I assume that for both the Bloc and the NDP their witnesses have also been contacted and told about this Thursday date. I find that kind of interesting; what a coincidence that all of the witnesses for all three parties would have been called and informed of the same dates and have no problem making it in three days.

On our side, we haven't been so presumptuous. I'm assuming that Mr. Garneau has not contacted those who might be opposed to his party's position and talked to them about the dates.

Again, it reinforces the notion that there's simply a political exercise going on here. In an effort to alleviate those concerns that we have on this side, hopefully we can find some compromise.

As you know, we believe that we do not need this meeting. We already had hearings on this. In fact, you guys already passed a motion after the last meeting, as a conclusion to the meeting.

It seems to me that in the spirit of compromise we might look at a solution. My colleague Mr. Wallace has suggested the week before Labour Day. I'm looking at my schedule, and September 2 makes some sense for me. I'd prefer, personally...and this is very short notice. I've not had any heads-up from the other side that there was a plan to try to push a meeting this quickly, for Thursday or Friday. I have a very, very significant fundraising breakfast for the Autism Society in Edmonton on Saturday that I'm involved in planning. I'd really prefer not to have a meeting on Thursday or Friday this week.

Hopefully we can find a spirit of compromise and come up with a date that actually works for everybody and that gives us a shot at getting witnesses from both sides—if what we're looking for is a fair hearing on this.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll go to Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague: I'm fine, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

We're now going to go to Mr. Garneau.

No? Okay.

Monsieur Galipeau, et puis monsieur Masse.

[Translation]

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I see that we have two local MPs at this table. We usually ask them to participate in committee meetings like this during the summer because the MPs who come from far away have a hard time getting to Ottawa.

I will not be able to be here on Friday. My mother-in-law died a few days ago and my wife's sister passed away last night. I will be attending the double funeral on Friday. I will not be here. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: My condolences, Mr. Galipeau, on your loss.

We obviously have some difficulty here in coming to a consensus on this. As I mentioned before, we have a motion in front of us. Just to focus the committee's attention—before I go to Mr. Masse—the motion is that the committee meet on Friday, August 20, 2010, to hear additional witnesses regarding the long-form census.

Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My condolences as well, Mr. Galipeau.

I, like many members, cancelled family vacation and changed it to be here today. One thing that's difficult in this case is that I don't believe it's the committee members here that I have a particular problem with; it's that the minister and the government continue to move down a road, based upon this issue, that I think is against the interest of Canadians. The longer we hold up having the witnesses who want to come forward, the greater damage we can do to the loss of the census.

Now, whether we agree or disagree, that's a different story, but I think that story has to be told. The longer we delay, the continued government operations continues to erode the possibility of some type of compromise or solution.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brown.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think that unless there are politics at play here, three days' or two days' notice for a meeting is quite unreasonable, especially at this time of year. I personally have no problem being here. Although I do have events in the riding already scheduled for Thursday and Friday, as I do most days through the summer, I would likely be able to be here. However, I don't think it's fair time for witnesses on all sides of the issue to be properly contacted and be available to come.

A couple of weeks is probably not going to make a significant difference in the outcome of this issue. We know that many members of the committee would be available a week from this coming Monday, during the week of August 30, I believe, or also the week after Labour Day, starting on September 6 or 7.

It's not an unreasonable period of time to schedule meetings at this time of year. I think with some compromise here, we can have the hearings we all want to have, and have them held in a fashion that properly represents both sides of this issue.

• (1620)

The Chair: Okay.

Before I go to Monsieur Bouchard, as chair I want to try to get some agreement here. I remind both sides of the following. This particular meeting has been called under Standing Order 106(4), and that standing order was established in order to call for ad hoc special meetings during the summer recess. In order for those meetings to take place, there has to be some sort of consensus on the part of all members of the committee to have that meeting.

Now, I hear a consensus about having a meeting. That's the good news. What I'm not hearing a consensus about is the date. So we need to come to some sort of agreement on the date, because both sides have a veto over the date.

Obviously the opposition has the majority of votes on this committee, so whatever motion is put, the opposition in concert can defeat or adopt a motion, if it so decides. But the government also has a veto, because the rules of the committee are clear: members have the right to debate, and there is no limit on debate. This meeting will adjourn at five o'clock. If government members so wish, they can continue this debate till adjournment.

We have quite a bit of time left. We have 40 minutes left. I hope that in the next 40 minutes we can arrive at a mutually agreeable date. I do hear consensus on the need for a second day of hearings.

We're going to Monsieur Bouchard, *puis monsieur Lake, et puis monsieur Garneau.*

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: If I understood what Mr. Lake said correctly, he would rather not have the meeting on August 20 because, in his opinion, we would not have enough witnesses and the witnesses would not have enough time to prepare. Starting today, the witnesses would have four days to prepare. In my opinion, the best date would be next Friday, August 20.

Mr. Galipeau, may I offer my condolences. I see you are going through a hard time. But we could probably find another MP to make up the Conservative Party complement.

To date, we have three witnesses on our list. Although we have not contacted them yet, I am sure that a four-day notice would be reasonable for these witnesses. The Liberal Party mentioned 23 witnesses. I don't think we can hear 23 witnesses, but we can certainly find a wide selection of witnesses among the 23, and we will have enough for a very full day.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bouchard. I think Mr. Lake sees two problems with holding the meeting on Friday. First, he will not be able to attend because he is participating in events in Edmonton on Friday and Saturday. Second, the government will not have enough time to ask witnesses who support its decision to appear before our committee. I believe these are the two problems raised by Mr. Lake, but thank you for your comments.

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake: Can I take myself off the list? I'll listen to what Marc has to say first, and then I'll come back on.

The Chair: Okay.

Monsieur Garneau.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, I just want to ask you this. Since you said that you would terminate at five o'clock, can I assume that the motion that I put forward will be voted on?

• (1625)

The Chair: If debate has been exhausted, your motion will be put to a vote. The only other option you have is if somebody moves to extend the committee beyond five o'clock to a particular time. However, I advise you that the motion to extend the meeting beyond five o'clock is also debatable and amendable, so....

The long and short of it is that the veto that the government members have, if they so wish, is to continue this debate until five o'clock, at which point I will adjourn. The veto that opposition members have is that the six of you, in concert, have the majority on this committee. So both of you have a certain degree of control. In the interests of compromise, I think we need to arrive at a particular date. We've come to agreement on the decision to have a meeting. I think there's consensus that we should have a second day of meetings on this. The issue now is the date.

We have lots of time left, and—

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: I don't know; maybe we can come to a compromise.

On the point you make about a consensus on having a meeting, just to be clear, I don't agree that we need to have a meeting. We've heard from the witnesses. We're going to hear the same testimony again. I don't personally agree with that.

What I have tried to do is to say that it looks like there's a consensus among the opposition parties to have a meeting, and we don't have the numbers, so clearly we're going to have a meeting at some point. Now we're trying to decide on a date, and this is the back and forth. I'm hoping that there will be some compromise on the other side.

One thing I would say, and maybe there's some room for compromise in this, is that maybe we could call a two-minute time out in the meeting here. If Mr. Garneau gives us the list of witnesses that he's put forward—I assume that in the spirit of fairness he's contacted witnesses on both sides of the debate—and if we're satisfied that some of the witnesses on his list are witnesses on the opposite side from him in the debate, then clearly we can get witnesses who have had some notice. But at this point, it seems like we're being set up by the opposition parties for a debate with absolutely no notice on the other side.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake—

Mr. Mike Lake: I just want to say one other thing, and that's to Mr. Bouchard's point regarding four days of preparation time for witnesses who would be called and haven't had any notice that they're going to be called. It is the summer. Some people take vacation during the summer. If they're on vacation today, a Monday, they're probably still going to be on vacation on Friday. I don't think it's reasonable that in the middle of the summer we would be calling witnesses for a meeting within the same week that we decide on the meeting. It's just completely unreasonable.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

Mr. Lake has suggested that we suspend for five minutes. Is it the wish of the committee to suspend for five minutes so that some informal discussions can take place, and I'll reconvene the meeting in five minutes? Is it the wish of the committee to do that?

Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I wouldn't oppose informal discussions. I think they can be quite productive. But I think we need to also remember that, time and again, we've had meetings convene in the same week. We do that all the time.

Mr. Mike Lake: Not in the summer.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: With three days' notice, which is a full three days' notice, I suspect that we could have a fairly significant brochette of people willing to appear before us having either point of view. So I don't think it's the impossibility of having a meeting on Friday that we're debating; it's the desirability.

Thank you.

The Chair: Just back to the proposal by Mr. Lake to suspend for five minutes, shall we suspend for five minutes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: It is agreed by the committee to suspend for five minutes.

We'll come out of suspension and see if we have some sort of consensus.

Monsieur Bouchard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: I would like to ask a question. If we take 10 minutes for an informal discussion, could we add this time to the end of the meeting?

The Chair: No.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: But if we aren't meeting...

The Chair: The hearing is suspended.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1635)

[*English*]

The Chair: We are coming out of suspension. We have about 22 minutes remaining in this meeting called for this day, upon the request of four members, to discuss whether or not we're going to have a second day of hearings on the long-form census and when that second day of hearings will be.

On my list I have Mr. McTeague as next.

• (1640)

Hon. Dan McTeague: Chair, I think Mr. Garneau may have some comments, but I think we have not been able to find reasonable grounds.

I want to stress something, Chair. I've been here almost as long as, and perhaps longer than, Mr. Bélanger. I know that we have had sessions during the summer; I can only say with absolute candour and clarity that I have never seen a number of people willing to come before Parliament and come before this committee to testify. The sooner we do this, the better.

I want to also signal to you, Chair, that I take it you will not be available next week. We have a caucus the following week. We are now coming dangerously close to backing up on issues that we have to deal with, that we were dealing with in June, for which Mr. Lake, as parliamentary secretary, and I believe you, Chair, pointed out very adequately and appropriately: we're not going to be able to pass even some of the minimal bills brought by private members and the government bills that have been brought before this committee.

The decision to go with changing the long-form census was one conducted by the government in the dead of summer. That it has had such a reaction is entirely the responsibility of the government. We are doing our job as parliamentarians, and not from a partisan point of view, to recognize very much the angst that exists out there. The sooner that is dealt with, we'll be able to get on with other business, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McTeague.

I just want to note that there's nothing to preclude the committee, if the committee agrees today, from meeting next week. There are rules and procedures in place to ensure that the meeting can be held. The vice-chair would have to assume the chair in order to hold the meeting, but there's nothing to preclude that meeting from being held. If the meeting is held, I will make you my commitment as chair that I'll work with the clerk and the other House of Commons staff to ensure that the witnesses you want to appear will appear. So at that point, it's just a question of having the vice-chair assume the chair.

Mr. Bouchard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: I did not ask to speak, but I can very well...

The Chair: You did before the suspension.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: I'm referring to the last meeting we held. I think that was similar to what we're proposing today. Despite the short notice, we all came here and had the meeting. We received witnesses who provided high-quality testimony.

That is why, in my opinion, the time issue is not valid. So, I am in favour of Friday, August 20. We could very well hold the meeting, for example, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. since it is a Friday. I think it is quite reasonable to have the meeting on Friday, August 20, given the urgency and importance of the topic.

The Chair: All right, thank you, Mr. Bouchard.

[*English*]

Mr. Bouchard has suggested that if we do have the meetings on Friday, they be held between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. as a way to try to assist Mr. Lake, who has a significant autism fundraiser in his riding on Saturday morning, I believe it is.

Mr. Brian Masse: We'll all buy tickets.

The Chair: Mr. Lake would otherwise have difficulty getting back to the west, to the prairies, to meet that commitment.

That's a helpful suggestion. Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake: Before I make my comments, Mr. McTeague talked about the Liberal caucus retreat; I'm just curious about what the dates are, maybe, so that when we're having this conversation we know that we're not conflicting with anything.

Mr. Marc Garneau: It's August 30, 31, and September 1.

Mr. Mike Lake: Is that the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday of that week?

An hon. member: Yes.

Mr. Mike Lake: Okay.

It is the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday of next week. So....

The Chair: As chair, I'm not available the Monday and Tuesday either, because I have commitments in Vancouver, meetings that I've committed to with members of the Chinese community.

Mr. Mike Lake: Just to be clear here, the event that I have on Saturday is not the reason I'm opposed to this motion. It's my job to be here. If I have to be here, I'll be here. The point is that the notice is too short to be inviting witnesses.

We don't have the luxury—for our witnesses, the Canadians who actually want to speak in favour of the decision—of having the numbers on this committee that the coalition has. So we can't give them a heads-up, give them notice, of an agreed-upon date that we're going to hold a hearing. We don't have that luxury.

• (1645)

Mr. Brian Masse: That's because they don't exist.

Mr. Mike Lake: So the idea of having a quickie meeting like this, as proposed by the partners over there, is something that is completely political. If we're going to try to take a reasonable approach on this issue in terms of hearing this, we have to work to compromise.

I think any reasonable person understands that in the middle of summer, this is not.... Some of the members have said that we do this all the time. We're not talking about a meeting that happens in October or February, when people generally are working and are not on vacation with their families. It's a lot easier for them to come on short notice then. I would point out that typically when we do that, it's one meeting of several. It's not usually the only meeting that you're going to have on an issue, when someone gets called three days before.

If I'm not mistaken, we're probably planning on having several meetings with many witnesses. If we really want to get a good...I'll use this terminology—maybe the honourable member on the other side doesn't understand it—“representative sample” of witnesses, perhaps there's a fairer way to do it.

We're not looking for a significant number of witnesses here. I think what we're trying to find is a representative group of witnesses on both sides of the issue so that we can actually give a fair hearing and make educated and informed decisions as parliamentarians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

Monsieur Cardin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I find it hard to support Mr. Lake's comments. In fact, the government decided to announce that decision in June, which is when a session normally ends. We know that Canadians are especially divided on this matter, and so people reacted. The matter is of an important and urgent nature. Meanwhile, the government and the department continue to move the issue forward.

I want to reiterate the fact that the government decided to make the announcement in June. You know how many people accepted the invitation to attend the July meeting despite the very short notice. Unfortunately, I was not at the July 27 meeting. Someone volunteered to take my spot, and he did good work. The meeting was held despite the short notice, and right in the middle of the summer holidays. It was not at the beginning or the end of the holidays, it was in the middle, during the most intensive period. You had no difficulty in finding witnesses in such a short time. Why would we now, three to four days before a meeting, have trouble getting witnesses?

I can understand that it would be hard for you to find witnesses who support the government's decision. I understand that, as I have not seen many supporters, aside from the few loyal Conservative activists of the constituency, who are a rare breed. We have the ability to react quickly. At times, when a parliamentary session is in full swing, we may meet on a Tuesday and decide to hold a meeting on Thursday that same week. And we succeed in getting witnesses to appear on two days' notice.

This is a very hot topic, and it is clearly causing controversy. You can obviously get your witnesses to appear if you want to. Regardless of that, we should not lose sight of the key issue, which is that the government is trying to postpone these meetings because they put it in a bad position. I understand that, since the decision under discussion is a bad one.

I think that while we are debating this and the government is trying to postpone this meeting, officials are going on with their work, under the direction of the government. They have perhaps even gotten to the stage of printing the documents. The only compromise I would agree to is to postpone the meeting in return for the government's commitment to postpone or stop the printing of the documents.

The government is saying that our actions are political. So they are, but in the truest sense of the word. Canadians have spoken against the government's decision, and we feel that we must represent their position because time is running out. The government would be quite happy to take up the debate as of September 20. However, how far will the government have gotten by that time? Will the documents already have been printed?

The situation is urgent, and you can get witnesses to appear on Friday, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. I think that we have no choice, this is what we need to do. It is unfortunate for those who can't be there, but that's politics. When there are emergencies, we have to meet; when we can't make the meeting, someone else takes our place. It's that simple.

•(1650)

[English]

The Chair: *Merci, monsieur Cardin.*

Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Could I start my conversation by having you or the clerk read the motion that was passed by this committee at the last meeting? I'd like to know what it said.

The Chair: Which one? There were two.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I'd like to hear them both, please.

The Chair: There were two motions adopted by this committee. While the clerk is getting the actual text of the motions, which I will read into the record for you, Mr. Wallace, we'll go to Mr. Brown—

Mr. Mike Wallace: No, no, it's still my time. While they're looking, why can't I speak?

The Chair: If you wish to add something else to the record, go ahead.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Well, I do. I have lots to add, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Wallace. You have the floor.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Thank you for providing me the floor. You can just interrupt me when you're ready.

First, I was unable to be at the last meeting as an active member of this constituted committee, and I would like to be here for these meetings.

I'm looking at the schedule. You'd like to have a meeting on Friday. I didn't know about the Liberal caucus meeting. I don't follow when your caucus meetings are, so I didn't know about it, and I appreciate that clarification, because I had said something about that week of September before the long weekend.

If the Liberal meeting is, let's say, on the Monday and Tuesday, if we had it on September 2, that's one day less than two weeks from the day that you're going to have the meeting—based on the motion that's in front of us, where it would be August 20, which would be this Friday. I'm saying, why can we not compromise? Nobody on this side is saying that we.... We're not putting our backs up against the wall and saying, "Oh, no meeting, no meeting, no meeting". We're offering to be there, and I'd like to be there. As I said earlier, the chances of me both staying married and coming back here on Friday are probably relatively slim. And I want to stay married, by the way.

I think I have some things to add to this discussion. Since I'm a member of this committee, I would like to be able to add to that conversation and to question the witnesses that I was unable to before.

Do you have the motion in front of you now? Is that why you're looking at me like that, or...?

After you read that, I will come back. Is that okay, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Well, finish your intervention first.

Mr. Mike Wallace: No, my intervention may last longer than your reading that thing.

The Chair: Go ahead. I'll read the two motions when you're finished your intervention.

Mr. Mike Wallace: No, I want to hear the motions now. It might be part of my discussion.

The Chair: Mr. Garneau has asked for the floor as well.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Well, that's his business. I have the floor, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, and I've given—

Mr. Mike Wallace: I'm asking you to read me what was passed at this committee the last time, and I'm still maintaining my position on the floor.

The Chair: You have the floor, because the chair has given you the floor.

Mr. Brian Masse: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: If you have something further to add, then I'll read the two motions and we'll go to Mr. Garneau.

I'm trying to get this meeting—

Mr. Brian Masse: On a point of order, just distribute the motions to him.

The Chair: Just one second—

Mr. Mike Wallace: That would be fine, Mr. Chair. That would be fine.

The Chair: Okay.

After I read the two motions that were adopted by the committee, we'll go to Mr. Garneau—

Mr. Mike Wallace: No. I still have things to say.

The Chair: If you have things to say, Mr. Wallace, go ahead.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Okay. Well, then, you're going to....

Mr. Mike Lake: A point of order.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I have the floor.

What's confusing to me, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Mike Lake: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

One second, Mr. Wallace. Mr. Lake has the floor on a point of order.

Mr. Mike Lake: Mr. Wallace wants to comment on the motions. He asked at the beginning of his time for you to read them.

The Chair: I understand that.

Mr. Mike Lake: Perhaps you could distribute them to him or something so that he could read them while he's making the point he's making. I think it's important to the point he's trying to make.

The Chair: I understand that. I'm trying to get the meeting moving, because we only have six minutes left to this meeting, and I want to afford Mr. Gameau a chance for the floor as well.

So I'll have the clerk give you the text of the two motions.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Isn't Mr. Brown the next speaker?

The Chair: No, the next speaker is....

My apologies; the next speaker is Mr. Brown.

Okay, Mr. Wallace, you have the text of the two motions that were adopted.

• (1655)

Mr. Mike Wallace: Right.

So what happened is that due to commitments in my riding, I was unable to make the last meeting. But as a member of this committee, I'd like to be here if we're going to have further meetings, which I agreed to. I'd like to be here for that.

From reading what happened at the last meeting—it was sent to me, but I didn't bring it here, unfortunately, which is why I asked you to provide it—the second motion was that in relation to the committee's "study on the long-form portion of the census", the minister table all documents and e-mails between Statistics Canada, the Privy Council, and the Minister of Industry. The committee also requested analysis, as part of that second motion.

The first motion was that in terms of the committee's study of the long-form portion of the census, "this Committee notes that, the long-form census is a vital tool for good policy-making and the decision to amend it was short-sighted and carried out without consultation. Therefore, the government should immediately re-instate...."

When I read that—I'll be frank with you, Mr. Chair—I thought, well, okay, the opposition has come together, heard those witnesses, and has moved this motion. Because they have the majority on committee, they have moved this motion and this committee has

dealt with the issue. It doesn't indicate in that motion that there would be.... It actually says, "And, that this committee tables this report upon resumption of Parliament."

To me, it sounded like the issue had been dealt with; that the committee, through the majority opposition vote, had put a position forward; that it was going to be now reported to Parliament; and that the issue has been addressed and dealt with. And now we're hearing that the opposition wants to call more.

My thinking would be that.... I guess it's the committee's right to choose any path that they wish to choose—they're kings of their own domain, I guess you'd say, kings and queens of their own domain—that we do it again. Or is this an additional report?

I'm not sure where this is going.

The Chair: Mr. Wallace, I'd just advise you that there are less than three minutes remaining in this meeting. If you wish to continue your intervention, you have that right as a member.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I will. Thank you, sir.

The Chair: But I'd also remind you that there are two other members who wish to speak and other members who would like to see this go to a vote.

However, you have the floor, as is your right, so go ahead.

Mr. Mike Wallace: I have two more points with regard to the discussion that we've heard.

Mr. McTeague I think hit the nail on the head when he called it the "dead of summer". Well, that's exactly why I think we should push off the ability to take the time to call witnesses and give them a chance to get here. It is the dead of summer, and there may be some difficulty for those who are on vacation or who have other plans to, in three days, be able to drop those plans and make it here to Ottawa for their ten-minute presentation and then a round of questions.

So that is the absolute point I was trying to make, that it is in the dead of summer. Why don't we push it to the end, where there's an opportunity...?

The parliamentary secretary suggested after Labour Day, even, after things sort of get back to normal. Even though we are not sitting yet as a Parliament, as a committee we certainly could do that.

Then the suggestion was, well, we can't interfere with the caucus meeting, which I agree with.

So let's have it two weeks from now, basically. Just over two weeks from now gives us time, gives me an opportunity, as a rightful member of this committee, to be here. That's why I can't support—

The Chair: Mr. Wallace, I just want to advise you that there's one minute left before adjournment.

Mr. Mike Wallace: My last point, which I don't have the answer to, which Mr. Cardin brought forward, and which is an actual reasonable request, is that if the printing date of the forms is not until after we meet, why do we have to meet prior to?

I don't know when the forms that are going out in the spring are going to be printed. I have no idea. If we knew that the printing wasn't until October, then I agree with Mr. Cardin that we can have it later. But I just don't know that fact.

Those are my interventions, and that's why I personally cannot support the 20th, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Brown, you have 15 seconds before adjournment.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to reiterate my point that I don't think three days' notice is a fair time to ensure that we have witnesses on both sides of this issue. I have no problem meeting later this week, or next week. It will cause the cancellation of some of my events that I had already

scheduled in my riding; however, this is obviously an important issue, and there are those who want to have their say. I have no problem with them having their say. Let's just find a date that works for everyone.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Thank you to members of the committee.

I'm going to adjourn the meeting, but before I do, if members call another meeting of this nature under the Standing Orders, I will double up the amount of time that we dedicate—from one hour to two—to ensure that we can come to some sort of consensus in 120 minutes, because clearly we couldn't in 60.

This meeting stands adjourned.

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