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Chair

Mr. David Sweet

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. *Bonjour à tous.*

Welcome to the 50th meeting of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. Our intention today is to go clause-by-clause with Bill C-501, but I understand that Mr. Rafferty has a motion he wants to move right now. I'm certain there will be some discussion of that.

Mr. Rafferty.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair.

I sent a letter to each of the members yesterday indicating that I'm not entirely sure we should go ahead at this time, to give us a little more time to sort this out. When I say "us", I mean me and my office.

Let me first say a couple of things, Mr. Sweet.

First, I see all the folks here today, and I certainly appreciate their interest. Some faces have been here every time we've had a meeting, and I think that's great. Thank you very much for being here for this bill.

Second, let me say, Mr. Chair, that I very much appreciate the extension we have had, the 30-day extension that was approved late last week sometime—I think that's when we voted on it—and also the other opportunity we've had to have more witnesses come forward.

As a result of that, and as the result of the extension that we do have, I'm not entirely convinced that we can't do better on this bill. In other words, I think that with a little more time—and in this case I'm talking about over the holiday period, before we return on February 1—we can do better on this bill. I think we can come forward with elements not only of clarification of the amendments that have been put forward, but perhaps some other opportunities to make this bill the absolute best it can be.

Quite frankly, the people in this room, the visitors and also the members, have told me personally, many times—everybody from all parties here has told me—that one of our jobs is to come up with the absolute best bill we possibly can. That's what this process is for. The folks who are visiting in this room expect no less, and Canadians, quite frankly, expect no less than our absolute best efforts to make our bills the best bills they can be.

What I'm asking for today is perhaps a discussion about stopping this process right here on the clause-by-clause and bringing the clause-by-clause day back in February, when we can make some more adjustments, and as I say, make the absolute best bill we can.

That being said—

• (1105)

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Rafferty.

There are a lot of side conversations, and it's almost impossible for the chair to hear the speaker. I understand you have to dialogue a bit, but just keep it down, if you would, please.

Go ahead, Mr. Rafferty.

Mr. John Rafferty: That being said, Mr. Chair, I am prepared to go ahead today with clause-by-clause. I do want to say that. I am ready to go. But as I say, I'm not convinced that we can't do better on this bill.

I leave that for the discussion with members.

I guess it was particularly clear in the last session when we had our legislative staff and Mr. Charland here, and I thought the amendments put forward were very clear. They provided the clarification we needed for this bill. But when I go over the transcripts and look at the questions of some of the members to Mr. Charland and our legislative staff, there still seems to be some confusion. I would like to ensure that we have an opportunity to make that absolutely crystal clear for everybody on the committee and for everybody here today.

Either way, I'm prepared to move forward, and I do think either step is a move forward.

Maybe a brief discussion would be in order here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rafferty.

I have three people now: Mr. Lake, then Mr. Van Kesteren, then Monsieur Cardin.

Mr. Lake.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Rafferty.

I think it's important to note that this committee has already spent more time on this private member's bill than virtually any private member's bill I've seen in my time here. I think most committee members would agree. I think this is our seventh meeting on this now.

We had three extra meetings. This is our third of the extra meetings. In the last two meetings we pretty much heard what we'd heard over the first several meetings of testimony. I don't think we heard anything really new over the past two meetings, just a reinforcement of what we'd first heard.

Mr. Chair, I voted against this bill in the first place and still intend to vote against the bill as it moves forward, just because I think everything we've heard in this committee reinforces my original thinking on the bill. It's not the right piece of legislation to address the issues. It doesn't do what I think even the original mover of the bill intended it to do. I think we've heard that pretty clearly from the testimony.

That said, I'm glad we actually brought the bill to committee. Originally I didn't feel that way, but going through this process has been very educational I think for all of us. As members of Parliament, we look for opportunities to learn new things. The testimony that we've heard here has been very informative. It's been a great experience. I understand more about the issue today than I did before we started studying it, so I'm very glad we've had the opportunity to do this.

That said, this is the seventh meeting, and it's time to go clause by clause on the bill. I don't think there is any purpose to delaying this any further. We're going to have new business come before the committee. We have one other private member's bill that we have to deal with and a second one that seems to be coming our way pretty quickly for the new year.

Mr. Chair, it's time for the committee to move on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

On a point of order, Mr. McTeague.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): I'm unclear here as to the request by Mr. Rafferty. I know he said a lot there, and it was all well intentioned, but it doesn't necessarily square with the request he made in the letter he signed to all of us yesterday that putting off clause-by-clause is what he is seeking. I'm not sure if he's asked for that here today or if he's formalized that in terms of a motion. You've heard no motion. I was just wondering if we could get clarification again from Mr. Rafferty.

The Chair: Mr. Rafferty, is your motion to put off clause-by-clause now until February? Is that what I understand?

Mr. John Rafferty: It's to put off clause-by-clause until February, but within the 30-day extension period.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rafferty.

Thank you, Mr. McTeague, for making sure we're all on the same page.

Is this a point of order, Madam Sgro?

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): On a point of order, on the order paper this morning there was also a motion referring to the standing order and referencing not going forward with Bill C-501. Could Mr. Rafferty speak to what his intention is?

The Chair: Is that part of the content of his letter? Is that what you're suggesting, Madam Sgro?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Well, he tabled this yesterday, but then on the order paper today, under number 26, under motions—I didn't bring it with me—it was specific to not going forward with Bill C-501 today, a standing order for us not to proceed with Bill C-501. Mr. Rafferty put it on the order paper.

Could he clarify that? He didn't speak to that in his comments.

• (1110)

The Chair: Mr. Rafferty, could we have another clarification in that regard, please?

Mr. John Rafferty: That motion was not to end Bill C-501. The motion of instruction is what you're talking about, right? The motion of instruction was originally put forward to increase the scope of the bill. In other words, what's happened with the bill now is that if amendments were to be introduced now that go beyond the scope of the bill or are judged to be beyond the scope of the bill, the chair would likely rule them out of order, and they wouldn't have an opportunity. The motion of instruction was there in case I wanted to use it to move forward, to possibly bring it forward.

I'll tell you what the intention would be, had I used that motion of instruction. It would have been to open up, I think it's section 136, and move it from "secured" to "preferred". That would have been the idea of that motion of instruction.

I guess the motion of instruction is still sitting on the table, but that's not my intention here today.

The Chair: So there are really two different issues we're talking about here.

Mr. John Rafferty: Yes, they're two different issues.

The Chair: One is an instruction to the House, and of course the member has the option of bringing that forward in the House.

The discussion here right now is to delay this clause-by-clause until later on in the committee's schedule. That's what we're focusing on at the moment. I hope this clears up that issue.

Mr. John Rafferty: I just want to make sure that Ms. Sgro understands. The motion of instruction is not to end the debate or kill the bill or anything. That's not what that motion is about.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll return to the speakers list now. I have two more people right at this moment: Mr. Cardin and Mr. Rota.

We'll go to Mr. Cardin.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Chair, I had quite a specific question, but I got the answer already. So I can pass on my turn.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cardin.

Go ahead, Mr. Rota.

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): I want to clarify something. What Mr. Rafferty is asking for is that we postpone. But on the other hand, he's saying that if we want to do it today, that's okay, and let's go through clause-by-clause. I'd be perfectly willing to go through the clause-by-clause today, if he's ready, and finish off.

In all honesty, I've been here for six and a half years, and this is the most convoluted process I've ever seen. It makes absolutely no sense. It seems that every time we turn around, Mr. Rafferty has something else to bring up or we're off on a different tangent.

If we were to deal with it today, I think we'd know where we stand. I'd be perfectly willing to go with it today, if Mr. Rafferty is fine with that.

The Chair: I believe Mr. Rafferty was looking to proceed in a consensual way.

It doesn't appear that there's any consent on the committee, Mr. Rafferty, to postpone this. It appears that the majority, at least, would like to go ahead with clause-by-clause.

Would you like me to call a vote?

Mr. John Rafferty: Yes, we should probably have a vote on this. Would that be the normal procedure?

The Chair: Those in favour of Mr. Rafferty's motion to delay clause-by-clause until we return in February?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: If there's no further business, the meeting is adjourned.

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