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Chair

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld

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•(1840)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.)): I will call the meeting to order.

This part of committee business was to discuss the work plan that was prepared by the analyst. Thank you very much to the analyst for doing this.

By way of a little explanation, we had given until April 7 for members to submit any suggestions for witnesses. Every witness suggestion that was submitted by any member of the committee is included in this work plan.

We have received correspondence from the Canadian Union of Public Employees requesting to come before the committee. Each of you received that previous to this meeting. I will put that in, in case the committee wishes to take that into consideration when looking at the work plan.

One of the things we looked at was the number of meetings. The library analysts worked backward from the date of June 10, which is when we have to report back to the House and looked at how long it takes for translation, and how long it will take to draft the report, and that left us, after this meeting, with only four meetings when we could hear from witnesses.

You will see there are bullets, and three sections for each of the dates. That's because we were putting them into three hours as opposed to two hours, which would mean the committee would sit from 5:30 to 8:30 on those four days. That's what's proposed in the work plan. That could be changed, of course, if it's the will of the committee.

The other additional piece was that we had invited the three relevant ministers to the committee. We had correspondence back and forth through the clerk and the only time and date that all three ministers are available is on May 3.

That's not a day the committee would normally sit. That's a Tuesday, from 5:30 to 7:30. We had tried to get the ministers, but the earliest would have been May 11, which is after we would give the drafting instructions to the clerk, so it wouldn't have been particularly useful.

That's why we're proposing for your consideration in this work plan one additional meeting on May 3.

Finally, the clerk has suggested that the normal practice in cases where we have multiple witnesses is that if there is the possibility of three or more witnesses on a single panel, instead of 10 minutes, we

would just agree now that we would go to seven minutes per witness. We would do that because the clerk could inform the witnesses ahead of time how many minutes they would have. If it's fewer than three witnesses, they would have the 10 minutes. That's another thing that's being proposed, and I would invite a motion with respect to that while we're discussing the work plan.

That's it. I will put it out to the committee. I'll keep a speaker's list for whoever wants to comment.

Mr. Sheehan.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): About your comment on moving from 10 to seven minutes if we have three or more witnesses, I noticed nodding heads on the other side. I'll put forward a motion to instruct the clerk to do that.

The Chair: Okay. It's been so moved.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): With regard to the work plan, I note that Statistics Canada will be one of our witnesses at some point.

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor now regarding the timing of the witnesses. Is that related to the motion?

Mr. Dan Albas: Yes.

The Chair: Do we need a seconder?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Julie Lalande Prud'homme): No.

Mr. Dan Albas: Do you mean how much time? They have seven minutes in this case. Okay. We'll just let that slide. I thought you meant timing with regard to when they come.

The Chair: No, these would be separate panels. If there is a panel, for instance, on the 18th, it's presumed that the Human Rights Commission would be by itself. Then there's another one with two. But the third one is three. Where we would have the possibility of three or more, they would go to seven minutes instead of 10. Otherwise, we would take the whole hour with the witnesses' presentations.

•(1845)

Mr. Dan Albas: I don't think we need a motion unless someone objects. This seems to be the sensible way to handle it, and it would be faster for us just to move on.

The Chair: Seeing no objections, I will say that's how we will proceed.

Are there any comments?

Yes, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: In regard to Statistics Canada, I've had them come before public accounts, and they're good at what they do. I'm sure the evidence will be very compelling. In this case, I believe it is Minister Bains who is responsible for that department.

Here in the work plan, we have Statistics Canada on May 4. I want to see if there's any opportunity to have Statistics Canada come earlier. We may find that the way they collect their information could be done in a different way that would help us to raise the profile of this issue, but ultimately, they can't do anything without a ministerial directive. At some point, we may want to invite Minister Bains to come in and discuss that department. Perhaps he could lend us his support if there are further changes that can be made, or perhaps he could just give us his opinion on this.

The Clerk: As a point of clarification, Statistics Canada is not going to be ready for next week, and that's why we put them in the following week. But we could put them on May 2, if it's better than May 4.

Mr. Dan Albas: Chances are there's a reason why all three ministers can make it on May 3. But if Statistics Canada tells us we need to talk to their minister about this, we may want to call Minister Bains or his parliamentary secretary. That's another alternative. If the minister can't make it, perhaps we could have the parliamentary secretary. I know Ms. Murray would be fantastic to hear on these issues.

The Chair: So we will instruct the clerk to try to get Statistics Canada earlier.

Mr. Dan Albas: I'm not going to be the tail wagging the dog, Madam Chair, but I would appreciate it if that could be looked at.

The Chair: No objections? Okay.

Ms. Murray.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): I think they were made in good spirit, the suggestions that Dan has put forward.

Having Statistics Canada come early is logical. But we're short of time, and I think the committee might want to hear people who really understand the issues of pay equity, the history. This committee has been given a month to do what a previous Liberal government said would take 14 months. For this reason, I think a general briefing on Statistics Canada by the minister would not be a good use of time. That's just a different opinion.

The Chair: Is this on the same topic, Ms. Benson, or is this a response?

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): No, I don't want to talk about—

The Chair: Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: I can appreciate that. If Statistics Canada comes in and everything they're doing is 100% in the direction of where the committee believes they should be going, I'm fine with that. But if they don't have the authority to say that we need a descriptive path laid out by a minister, I think it's our job as parliamentarians to raise it with the relevant minister. At the end of the day, this is about trying to create awareness. But we also want to be able to say we were proud to be part of this committee. Minister Bains is uniquely positioned to hear our concerns in regard to Statistics Canada. But if

there is nothing there and they are doing everything right, I would be the first one to say that the minister's not necessary.

The Chair: I can inform the committee that just to be prudent, we have added an additional date, the 6th of May, which is a Friday. That's just in case there is something that emerges in the course of our deliberations where we would want to bring in extra witnesses before the drafting instructions.

Ms. Benson.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Madam Chair, I support having as many witnesses as possible to give us the depth and the breadth of not only employers, but also employees.

I like the suggestion of reducing the time so that we can hear from more people. In that vein, my thoughts about the 18th are that the Public Service Alliance of Canada will be the largest group of employees. I would prefer to award them more time, and maybe have the smaller employee group, the financial officers, be a part of a larger panel. I'm asking if people feel that that's appropriate.

• (1850)

The Chair: Actually, I have a list. I have Mr. DeCoursey and Mr. Sheehan and Ms. Dzerowicz.

Is it on this topic or is it on something completely new?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): It was just to square off the previous conversation.

The Chair: Okay, I think we should have one conversation at a time. So let's just—

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Let's go back to the first conversation.

The Chair: We'll see if there's a comment on Ms. Benson's point. Then we'll go back to the previous conversation, and then I'll see if there's any new commentary.

Do you have a comment on Ms. Benson's point?

Mr. Dan Albas: Yes, and while I certainly appreciate that PSAC is one of the largest unions, and perhaps we could find a spot that would allow for them to do a full presentation, I will also say, because I have met with the other union, that they actually have experience in this field, and they have solutions that I think we should be hearing.

I would be really reluctant to say we should listen to them because they're bigger, and discount someone who actually has real knowledge and experience of previous processes that I think we should be hearing. I'm sure other people have met with them as well.

The Chair: I'd like to add that there is the possibility—I know other committees have done it—of going beyond the three hours. If there's ever a point where we would want to have an extra half hour or hour with a particular set of witnesses, that is a possibility.

Is that the wish of the committee in the case of the unions?

Ms. Benson.

Ms. Sheri Benson: I hear what you're saying. I've also met with that group and they do have a particular perspective because they've gone through the process that no one else has. I didn't want to limit them. I just thought the one group would have a longer piece. If we can go longer that day so we can have a fulsome discussion, that would be fine.

The Chair: Are there any objections to adding an additional hour on the 18th of April? We would sit for four hours and we would then allow for the unions to be heard for two hours. We would sit from 5:30 p.m. until 9:30 p.m. on the 18th of April.

Are there any objections?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): May I ask a question on that point? I can honestly tell you, if I look at the different dates, I might say to you that I probably would want to hear a little bit more of that second group on the 20th, and maybe I would want to hear it that night. I wonder, and this is a wonder, whether we can just go through.... We have our three-hour time frame. Is there any way, if at the end of that time frame we're asking questions and then decide we want to hear from a couple of groups more, that we could say we want to stay an extra hour instead of voting in advance? I might feel like I have all the information I need at that time; I don't know. I don't know whether we have to make that decision today or not. It's just a question.

To me it would be the same case for every single meeting. It might be that we get to the 20th or the 2nd or the 4th and we realize there are two people that we really need to hear more from and there are a lot more questions. Can we make that decision in terms of the extra hour then, or is it that we have to vote for all of this right now? I don't know. I'm just putting it out there.

The Chair: The clerk is informing me that would be possible for the third hour set of witnesses, but if, for instance, we wanted more time with the first witness, it would be difficult to ask them to then stay an additional hour or two hours later. What we could do is, if we think there's a particular group of witnesses that we may want to hear more from, we could make sure they're in the third hour. That way, if we inform the witnesses ahead of time that it could extend to two hours just to make sure they're available, that would always give us the flexibility at that time.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: The one other alternative is that we just go ahead with the work plan as is. Then, if we want more information, we can ask that they please send us more information. We also have that additional day, Friday, May 6, I believe it is. If that's in our back pocket, quite honestly, most of the unions—I take it that in this case we're having a discussion about which union should be where—are here in Ottawa. I'm sure they would love to come for an extra day on a Friday, if there is a particular area that we want to investigate more fully.

•(1855)

The Chair: Ms. Benson.

Ms. Sheri Benson: I'm just referring to the fact of what we're asking how long a presentation they are being asked to prepare. That was my point, that a larger organization would be given 10 minutes to give the depth and breadth of the group they are covering, that kind of thing.

As far as being able to talk to them longer is concerned, that's fine, but I think you have to give the group guidance, that they have a 10-minute presentation, or that they have a three-minute presentation.

The Chair: Mr. DeCoursey.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I think we have a rather exhaustive list. I have no issue with sitting beyond three hours, if needed. I have no issue with trying to move StatsCan up a little bit earlier, if needed. To reflect upon whether we need to sit on that Friday, I think it's important that we get this set tonight, because we are working in a tight time frame and need to start promptly next week with these witness lists.

In some cases, if we only have time for them to present for seven minutes, then that's the situation we're in, given the time frame we have to work with.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: This is just a point of clarification. We're all working together to get this finished. We're going to extend meetings from two hours to three. Then, we're all in agreement, I think, in saying that if we need to, on some days we can go to four hours.

I think we're all saying that we probably can get it done on those days, and we have an extra day in our pocket.

The Chair: We are all agreed, then, that we would be prepared to extend to four hours, if necessary. Perhaps we could suggest, since this is the one that came up to the clerk, that we forewarn the unions that this may be a possibility, just so they can plan their time in that particular case.

Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I agree with what you said. Then for April 20, can I suggest that group two, I'll call it, be moved into the group three section? I personally think that's a group for which there may be some extra reason for us.... If Deb Gillis ends up coming, she will be coming in from New York. That's a long way. She has lots of international experience. Mary Cornish has been writing about this for decades. There's also the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

It would be my preference that these witnesses move into group three. Then for the May 2 meeting—

The Chair: Can we do these one at a time and just make sure there's a consensus on each?

Are there any objections to moving that group into group three? Again, the clerk would notify them that it's possible we might go overtime.

Are there any objections?

No? Okay.

Do you have a new point, or is it related to this?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: It's related and it's new.

It's related in the sense that I'm also going to suggest that May 2.... This is when we have, in my opinion, your businesses. I wouldn't mind moving them towards the end, only because I think I might want more time with them.

To be honest, we have three credit unions. I'm not quite sure why we need to hear from all three, but I know that the group in that whole category on May 2 that I'm most interested in would be the private sector, and it's to them that many of my questions will be put.

The Chair: Are there any objections that on the 2nd we would move the first—

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: I'm sorry, Madam Chair, for raising this. I just want to make sure.... I sent a request for the Association of Canadian Financial Officers to appear, and I don't see them on the list.

The Chair: I'll defer to the clerk.

The Clerk: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Dan Albas: Okay. Thank goodness. I just wanted to make sure they were on there.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any objections to moving the first group on May 2 to the third spot?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I don't know whether this involves the first group. It's just that the Canadian Bankers Association, which is part of the first group, and the middle grouping are, in my opinion, the private sector.

I'm not sure. The federally regulated employers are not private sector, are they?

Ms. Sheri Benson: Yes, they are.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: They are? Oh, look at that. The Canadian Bankers Association—

Ms. Sheri Benson: There are two employer groups of federally regulated employers, which are separate.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Part of me is okay with the order of that day. I just wonder whether we should let them know that we might need them to stay. Do you know what I mean?

The Chair: I guess we'll instruct the clerk, then, in every case to alert the witnesses that it could go longer than anticipated.

Is that okay?

Perfect.

• (1900)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I would make one more comment. Just so you know, May 4, that's a powerhouse day. I feel like if I had 1,000 questions they would all be to those people.

The two bodies that actually have pay equity legislation in place are Quebec and Ontario, and then Beth Bilson and Marie-Thérèse Chicha: I kind of feel like....

Anyway, that's going to be a day that I think is...we're ending off very strongly. I think it's a comment of, wow, we're going to have a lot of big discussion on that day.

The Chair: Again, we'll just alert the witnesses to be prepared to stay a little longer if we have more questions.

I'm going to go back to Mr. DeCoursey who said he had a comment on the previous discussion.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: We certainly squared that off somewhere along the way. Thank you, though.

The Chair: It's finished?

Okay, then I have Mr. Sheehan.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Again, I'm hearing tonight about Ontario and Quebec. Is it possible to hear from them earlier in the presentation? I guess the question would go to the clerk.

The Chair: I'll confer with the clerk for a moment.

We'll try to get Ontario and Quebec earlier on the agenda if that's possible, the caveat of course being that this will depend on the availability of the witnesses. We'll give the clerk some latitude in terms of if people are only available on certain days. The other thing that I'm cognizant of, and have already asked the clerk to do, is if there are witnesses we know we'll be hearing by video conference, given the timeslot and that often there are votes, that they be bunched together if at all possible to prevent multiple meetings over in 1 Wellington where we have to take a bus back to Centre Block if there's a vote. Again, these are just things the clerk will juggle while she's trying to determine availability. We will try to do those earlier.

Mr. Sheehan.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: I picked up on that too, the three credit unions. I support credit unions. They're great. We have the Northern Credit Union up in northern Ontario, but there are three here. Is it possible to get a presentation from the credit union with various perspectives on the three with one presenter? I don't know who suggested it.

The Chair: Ms. Benson.

Ms. Sheri Benson: I was just looking for a single employer that had a pay equity regime in place. It was just here, some examples. I think Vancity in British Columbia would probably be the one that would be at the forefront. Then I thought it would be nice to hear from a small employer. It's just the practicality of hearing from someone who was actually trying to implement....

Mr. Dan Albas: Far be it from me to say that any group from British Columbia is going to be a great witness because I'm from British Columbia, so I'm going to have the home advantage here.

I would say that, again, most credit unions are provincially regulated, not federally, so they would come under provincial. Unless we feel there is a particular aspect.... For example, one that has been under the Ontario rules, what has their experience been, and then contrast that maybe with one that hasn't. Whether we need three credit unions or if we just want one, we should be focused on the fact that we'd like to have something that at the end of the day is going to have an impact. Again, we're getting the banks, which are federally regulated. I think it might be a good contrast but maybe only one. Just don't tell Vancity I said that.

The Chair: We are no longer in camera.

Mr. Sheehan.

Mr. Terry Sheehan: I think Sheri agreed to that, that one would suffice.

Dan, I think that we can go down to one.

Ms. Sheri Benson: That's fine.

The Chair: Is there a preference as to which one, or should we leave the clerk to....

Ms. Sheri Benson: The idea is to have an example of an employer that had a regime in place. I like Dan's suggestion that we have one that's operating within a province that currently has an example of pay equity legislation. The Ontario piece would make a lot of sense.

The Chair: That would be Brent Zorgdrager. Is that the one?

Mr. Dan Albas: Vancouver is a large credit union, too, so there are some advantages.

I've never heard of the other one from Ontario.

• (1905)

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

We now have Ontario added to Vancouver. We'll try the one in Vancouver first. If they're not available, we'll go to the one in Ontario.

Agreed?

Is it on this topic?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: No, I'm on to the next item already.

The Chair: Great, and you are next on the speaking list.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I only have a certain amount of brain capacity at any meeting, and I've done this where I've had 18 presentations in one session, and there is a lot to absorb. I would just ask the clerk to maybe relook at May 2, which is a little less brain capacity than the April 20 and May 4 ones. I don't know if you could maybe shift one group down to the 2nd. It's just thinking about the information they're going to be presenting. On the 20th, you have three academics. Then you have four people who have studied this colossally for probably most of their entire lives, and then you have the National Association of Women and the Law. Literally, I don't think I'd be able to absorb everything, to truly appreciate their information. On May 2, we might have a little more capacity.

I just want to put it forward if you could just rethink that slightly, and that's basically it.

The Chair: Are there any objections to that?

Okay, my speakers list is empty if anybody else wants to comment

Mr. Dan Albas: I think the work plan is perfect, or it's as perfect as it's going to get.

The Chair: Fantastic. Thank you.

Is there agreement that this will be the work plan?

Ms. Benson.

Ms. Sheri Benson: What about dealing with the request for an additional witness?

The Chair: I'm sorry, yes. Does anybody want to speak to the request of the Canadian Union of Public Employees?

They sent a letter this week specifically requesting to come before the committee. The letter is here. Did anybody have a chance...? We did send it out prior to the meeting.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Are they incorporated in any of the unions we have here?

Ms. Sheri Benson: No.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Well, not directly maybe, but indirectly—

Mr. Terry Sheehan: The national one, yes.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Which national one?

The Chair: I have Mr. Albas and then Ms. Benson.

Mr. Dan Albas: I was just going to make the simple suggestion for the clerk that if an opening comes up where one union can't make it, they could pop in instead. We want to get as much feedback as possible, but as I was reminded a couple of times, we all had a date to submit our witnesses and whatnot, and we want to get this process rolling.

The Chair: The analyst just told me that they may have experience with the provincial regimes, which would be possibly why they wanted to.... That's just for information.

Ms. Benson.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Yes, they independently submitted and asked to be a part of it with the rationale that they have employees within their union....

My suggestion would be to include them on the day that we're meeting with other public sector and private sector unions. It would be a theme, and I think they'd appreciate that.

The Chair: The clerk just reminded me that we have now a panel that has only one. We could just include them on that panel with the credit union.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Sure.

The Chair: Is that agreed? Are there any objections?

Okay, we will include them that day.

Do we have consensus on the work plan with what we've discussed today?

The Chair: Fantastic.

Okay, there is no other business, and that being the case, I adjourn this meeting.

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