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Chair

The Honourable Rob Moore

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Thursday, October 18, 2012

• (1550)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC)): Order. Just a reminder to committee members that we are no longer in camera.

Is it the will of the committee to adopt the amendment by Mr. Dubé?

(Amendment negatived)

The Chair: The amendment is defeated.

On the motion of Mr. Armstrong, is it the will of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Voices: A motion to adjourn?

The Chair: It was a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Cash.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): I'd like to present a notice of motion that the standing committee undertake a one-day study to invite relevant government witnesses to testify on the process that led to the changes to the naming and the mandate of the Museum of Civilization, given that this plan was never introduced to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage during its year-long study of Canada's 150th anniversary.

The Chair: Okay, that's a notice of motion.

Mr. Andrew Cash: That's a notice of motion, yes.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): We can deal with it now, if you like. I'm willing to deal with it now.

The Chair: Do we want to deal with it now?

Mr. Andrew Cash: No, I'd like to present it and deal with it in—

Mr. Paul Calandra: I would like to seek unanimous consent to deal with the motion right now.

The Chair: Mr. Calandra is asking for consent of the committee to deal with the motion now.

Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): I think it would be a good idea, because there are positive aspects to this and there are some that may be worrisome. I would suggest that we seriously have a look at this, even if it is only one day.

The Chair: We're not debating the issue right now, Mr. Simms. The debate is on whether we deal with it right now. There has to be

consent to do that right now. There has to be consent because the standing orders would require 48 hours' notice to deal with a substantive motion. In this case Mr. Calandra is asking for consent that we deal with it right now.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Okay.

The Chair: Is there consent that we deal with the motion of Mr. Cash right now?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Sure.

The Chair: Do you want to speak to your motion? Do you want to move it again?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Okay, I'll move it. Do you want me to read it? I have copies.

In the interest of transparency, and given the fact that we did an extensive study of the 150th anniversary, and also in light of the comments from the minister during the course of this week when this announcement was made, clearly this never came to committee.

The motion is that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage undertake a one-day study and invite relevant government witnesses to testify on the process that led to the changes to the Museum of Civilization, given that this plan was never introduced to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage during its year-long study of Canada's 150th anniversary.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to speak to the motion?

Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Chair, obviously as was announced by the minister, legislation would have to be brought forward in order to effect change to the museum legislation. That would be debated in the House of Commons and actually brought forward to this committee for review.

I don't think a one-day study would be in order. When the bill is brought forward to the House, this committee will have more than one day to study the bill and bring in relevant witnesses with respect to this decision. For that reason we will not be supporting this motion, but we anxiously await approval of the House so that the committee can study it in depth.

The Chair: Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: Where was I?

As I said earlier, I would like to have this discussion, but in light of that conversation....

The thing is that the discussion that would take place at this committee would be after you either accept it or not in principle. That's a pretty big thing to do after second reading, because you can't make any fundamental changes. It's just minor stuff that you can change, for the most part. You can't change the principles. You can't change the preamble. It's that sort of thing.

In light of what my colleague from the NDP said—he has a point—I think we should look at the merits and the genesis of this before we engage in debate. It's just one day. I think we can sacrifice one day to get a better understanding before there is debate at second reading.

• (1555)

The Chair: Mr. Cash.

Mr. Andrew Cash: I'd echo the words of my colleague. A study that would happen after the government introduces the legislation in the House is a different thing. It's not what we're talking about in this motion. This motion is about the process that led to the announcement.

We're here to keep a close eye on these issues. We heard from many witnesses who would have interesting and diverse opinions on a matter such as this. This never came up in the study. This is what we're here to do.

This motion supports the work of the committee, and it enhances and encompasses the focus that we're supposed to have. This is about the decision that led to the announcement. What my friend is suggesting—and we will clearly participate fulsomely in that matter—is something that's going to happen after.

The Chair: Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra: The museum itself is also undertaking right now coast-to-coast consultations with Canadians with respect to what this potential new museum and the displays should encompass. Changing of the mandate of this museum won't happen by decision of this committee; it will happen through an act of Parliament. Parliament will have the opportunity to debate the matter, and Parliament is the master of legislation.

Once it is accepted, if it is, by a majority of Parliament, this committee can then review all aspects of any potential bill that comes forward and, as we have done with other pieces of legislation, we can make changes to it, if we so desire, or the committee could turn it down.

I think we should wait for the consultations to hear what Canadians have to say with respect to this. All members of Parliament can go to the website, and I assume they have, to participate in these coast-to-coast consultations. They can engage people within their ridings, and I hope they all will.

I would hope that colleagues would wait until an actual bill is before the House and fully investigate what bill is before the House before we come to any conclusions. We will do that.

The Chair: Mr. Cash.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Chair, we just had coast-to-coast consultations on Canada's 150th birthday. In fact, we have a big, fat report on exactly the things Canadians are interested in and concerned about. This was not part of that.

The results of those consultations, one would assume, are going to be distilled by the minister and presented in Parliament in some way, shape, or form as we carry on our endeavours toward Canada 150. This was never part of it. This has come out of the blue.

As a matter of fact, as we've been working diligently here in committee, there has been other work going on that we've not been party to around a very significant piece of Canadian heritage and its direction going forward.

I think it didn't do this committee any service to have this plonked on Canadians, and on us, without any advance notice or any consultations. You want to do consultations after the fact on something you've already decided on, and that seems to be not the way the process should work.

The Chair: Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Chair, perhaps Mr. Cash is misunderstanding. The mandate of the museum will not be changed without an act of Parliament. Right now consultations are being undertaken by the museum from coast to coast to hear what Canadians have to say about this idea of recognizing Canada's history through the Canadian Museum of Civilization. After those consultations are done, the minister will come forward with legislation that he thinks Parliament should have an opportunity to debate.

Nothing has been decided. It's actually your job, as a member of Parliament, after the legislation has been tabled in Parliament, to read it over, see whether you like it, maybe propose some amendments, talk either for or against it, bring it here in front of this committee—that's the job that we actually do—and then propose witnesses who can talk for it or against it. Then as a committee we'll decide as a whole whether we agree or disagree with certain parts of the bill, or whether there should be amendments to the bill.

In fact, what has been done is that Parliament—Canadians—have been put at the front of the line and are being asked for their opinions before legislation is brought forward. Are you asking us to now go back and do the legislation first? That's not the process. That's why we're going through coast-to-coast consultations with Canadians.

We've presented an idea that we hope members of Parliament will take a look at when legislation is brought forward and they are asked for their approval, yes or no. This committee will have, I hope, more than one day to study this, to question the minister, to bring in the director of the museum and other people who might be a part of this museum, and get their rationale for bringing this forward. Then Parliament will make a decision together.

• (1600)

The Chair: Mr. Cash.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Look. This motion is about open transparency and accountability vis-à-vis a decision that was announced already, one that we were not party to. I think Canadians would like to know how it is and in what order this decision was made.

We've spent a year on a study, and the first major announcement had nothing to do with the study. Canadians deserve better than that from the money they spend on this committee and deserve one day to look at that matter.

I hear all of the other things you're saying, and they're fair enough, about what we're going to do once this legislation is tabled. That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about the sequence of events that led to this decision.

I would like to call the vote. Can I do that, or is that you? I don't want to take your job away.

The Chair: Those in favour of the motion please signify.

(Motion negatived)

An hon. member: I move to adjourn.

The Chair: Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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