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CANADA

## **Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Monday, March 30, 2015**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Gordon Brown**



## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Monday, March 30, 2015

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC)):** Good afternoon everyone.

We're going to call meeting number 38 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to order.

Today we are going to deal with Bill C-597. We have Mr. Harris, who is the sponsor of that bill.

We are now in the middle of a half-hour debate on a time allocation motion, with the bells to commence at 3:50. We will get about 20 minutes in before the bells start. The vote is at 4:20. Hopefully, we can have everyone back here as soon as possible and at least get started up again by about 4:50, which will leave us about 40 minutes, so we're going to get one hour to deal with this.

I've already cancelled the second hour where we would have dealt with Bill S-219.

Mr. Harris, you have 10 minutes.

Ms. Sitsabaiesan, you have a point of order?

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** What is going to happen to the first hour of Bill S-219? Is it just gone or is it going to be rescheduled?

**The Chair:** We're only going to get one hour today. We're only going to be having one hour of the two hours because of the vote.

We will discuss that a little later on.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Harris, you have the floor again.

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First off, thank you to all the members for your vote on November 5 to get this bill passed at second reading.

It was a great show of teamwork among all the parties to bring this bill forward, to have an agreement where each of the parties sent up a speaker, and then we moved on, forgoing the second hour of debate and immediately proceeded to the vote. That was a fantastic bit of teamwork that was brought forward and that's why we're here now.

I was very pleased that the bill passed second reading almost unanimously. Moving forward, hopefully we can continue that great work. There's not much time left in the calendar to get this back to

House and off to the Senate to become law before Parliament rises and we end up in an election campaign.

My inspiration for bringing Bill C-597 forward was the year I spent working in Alberta. I'm originally from Ontario, Scarborough born and bred, lived there my entire life, and never experienced Remembrance Day as a holiday. Then during my year working in Alberta, of course it is a statutory holiday there, I got to see some differences about how it's recognized and the importance that people place on it. I thought that might be something we could bring forward at the federal level.

Looking at the Holidays Act itself, I was perplexed to find that we have three holidays. Two of them, Canada Day and Victoria Day, are both listed as legal holidays. Remembrance Day doesn't have the word "legal" and it's simply a holiday. This bill would seek to elevate it to the same status as the other holidays at the federal level.

The great thing with this is that federal jurisdictions, federal businesses, and the government are already shut down that day. Banks are also closed. There isn't a cost associated with implementing this in the same way that you would traditionally have if you were to bring in a completely new statutory holiday.

Of course, the actual recognition of holidays happens at the provincial level. Currently, we already have six provinces and three territories that recognize it as a statutory holiday. Then there is Nova Scotia, which has its own Remembrance Day Act, and Manitoba, which has retail and businesses closed until 1:00 pm.

There are many different things that the provinces can look to do.

In Ontario, for instance, it's generally a regular business day, but the public sector is shut down on Remembrance Day. That's something that was negotiated between the government and their employees. Certainly, if Ontario chose to go down that path, it would be something that would be worth extending to all Ontarians, but, of course, that decision lies with the province.

One of the most interesting things I found, when this debate was taking place, was the national conversation that ensued. From coast to coast, people were talking about our acts of remembrance and what it means and what the best options are. Should this be a statutory holiday everywhere, so that everyone has the opportunity to go and pay their respects if they choose, or should we should carry on as a normal day?

There was lots of back and forth on that, especially in the provinces where it is not a holiday already. There's the debate about kids being in school and the importance of them being able to learn about our rich history through being in school, and observing ceremonies and participating in events. Of course, in the provinces where it is a statutory holiday, they do ceremonies and events on the last school day before Remembrance Day. You're able to commemorate and get kids to learn in school while still having November 11 off. The example I like to use is from Newfoundland and Labrador, where kids have a week of in-class instruction and learn about Remembrance Day, and then have the day off to go to ceremonies with their friends and families if they choose.

● (1535)

There are lots of different ways that we can commemorate, and having that national discussion was a big part of that. One of my local radio stations, 102.1 the Edge, is not a news station but purely a music station. I was surprised to hear even them, when I tuned in on Remembrance Day, talking about the bill and whether it was a good idea to make it a statutory holiday.

Any time we as parliamentarians can spark debate and conversations of this nature, I think we advance ourselves as a society and as a democracy. It helps to remind us of exactly what those brave men and women sacrificed so that we would have the country we have, one where we can have these open, free, and fair discussions without any fear of reprisal. I think that's very important and great.

The other thing we should certainly touch on is the second clause of the bill. There's agreement between the parties to remove that from the bill, but that will, of course, require an amendment here to actually remove it from the bill. I certainly hope colleagues on all sides will be in agreement, because that was really the thing that got us the agreement in the House to move the bill forward.

It's a simple question of protocol with respect to lowering the flag. I heard the arguments and was in agreement that we should actually maintain the flexibility to lower the flag to half-mast whenever we choose, whenever protocol demands it, rather than it being fixed that it has to be at half-mast on November 11 and not allowing for any variations for ceremonies or as protocol would evolve over time. We definitely want to avoid situations where a natural evolutionary process of protocol would require parliamentarians to come back and change the law, because that's a heck of a lot of work for something very small. I heard the arguments about this and was in agreement to get rid of that part of the bill. That will have to be brought forward as an amendment here.

We are short on time, so I want to get to the questions. I don't think you're going to have me back for another meeting, so the faster we get to questions, I think the more we'll get answered.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Harris.

The plan is to come back after the votes.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Yes, but I won't have a problem talking as much as I want.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now move to the questions.

Mr. Dykstra, you have the floor.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, Dan, for your presentation.

You mentioned some of the discussion that has gone on about the bill. Obviously any time people are talking, especially about private members' bills, around the country, it means there's some engagement and interest in what's transpiring here in Ottawa and on the Hill. Those discussions aren't necessarily supportive and they're not necessarily against. They fall under the realm of trying to address what's being presented, in your case this piece of legislation. One of the things I've learned since the passing of the bill at second reading is that there is a tremendous divide, if you will. A lot of folks are supportive, but a tremendous number of folks are not supportive.

One thing that folks asked me to ask you about at committee if we had the opportunity, was your consultation process. How did that begin? How did it evolve? Who did you consult with in terms of your position on the bill?

● (1540)

**Mr. Dan Harris:** The consultative process was undertaken for several months before the bill came before the House. It included letter-writing campaigns to every single legion across the country, because unfortunately—and this was always perplexing—we could never get Dominion Command to return our calls. That was very unfortunate, because you want to be engaging in these conversations.

Through the last couple of years, every time I'd encounter a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, I'd ask them for their opinions on this bill and whether they thought that making Remembrance Day a statutory holiday made sense. I found that the vast majority of them were in agreement.

There are a lot of folks who think it will lose meaning if we make it into a statutory holiday. I know that in Ontario part of the concern was that if kids aren't in school they're not going to learn about it and we're actually going to take a step back. But for this, like anything else we honour or celebrate, it's incumbent upon us to give it meaning. I think that's where the importance is here. As long as we continue to provide great importance to and a focus on Remembrance Day, it will gain in importance and meaning.

The consultative process, though, was not perhaps as fulsome as I would have liked. Certainly, I don't think we're ever able to spend enough time consulting on the different things we want to do or meeting with as many different groups and individuals as possible. I had conversations with the Retail Council of Canada, as well as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and heard from those groups about what they thought. As well, in going to some of their member businesses to see what they thought, although there are certainly a number of businesses that don't want to see another statutory day off, I was pleasantly surprised by the number that did.

Depending on where you are in retail, for instance, this bill might not have much of an impact. One CEO I spoke to told me that people have only so much money to spend, and if they can't spend it today, they'll spend it tomorrow. For his business, he wasn't going to see a negative to bringing this bill forward. With another CEO, it was a question of his grandfather having served in the First World War, and he would have appreciated having the day to pay his respects and to participate in ceremonies and services.

There's a lot of opinion out there all across the way, but I think everybody is on the right track with respect to wanting to find the best way to commemorate the eleventh.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** I notice that, in your being on the presenting side of things, how easy it is to use up seven minutes in an answer.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** That wasn't seven minutes. It was only three or four.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Have you talked to any school boards, or to representatives from the Ontario or Quebec education systems, since they would be the provinces I imagine you had in mind when you drafted the bill? Also, have you also consulted with other school boards in provinces that already have the holiday in place? I know that over the past number of weeks I've heard both positions on the issue from some of the folks I've heard from.

● (1545)

**Mr. Dan Harris:** I didn't speak directly with the school boards. It's very much like having formal discussions with the provinces before we even get past second reading. I saw a little bit as putting the cart before the horse.

I did speak about this to a number of teachers in and around the GTA, many of whom are the teachers who actually end up being the representative at the school who organizes their ceremonies. Typically, in most schools, one teacher is given the task of putting together the curriculum for the day for the ceremonies that are going to be done in schools.

This leaves the situation open, whereby you're going to have a vastly different take on it in every single school. Some schools will do the absolute bare minimum that's required in the curriculum, and other schools will have really great and fantastic services and have veterans in the school to share their stories, impart their wisdom, and remind us all of why war is such a terrible thing and how we should have a world where it isn't needed anymore.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** We've had a number of legions come forward. I know many members of committee and also of our caucus have had their legions come forward to state their opposition to the bill. I wondered whether, before or after second reading, you had endeavoured to consult with the legions, and which ones were supportive. How did those that weren't supportive address the issue?

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** As I said at the beginning, we sent out letters to every single legion across the country. I'm glad you are hearing back from some of them. I wish some of them had contacted me with their concerns so that I could actually address them. The legions in my area have been very supportive.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to move to Ms. Sitsabaiesan and Ms. Latendresse, who are going to split seven minutes.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Mr. Chair, before we start the seven minutes, is it possible to ask for unanimous consent so that we could finish the entire seven minutes? I know that the bells are supposed to be in four minutes.

**The Chair:** Is there consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Harris, my fellow Scarborough MP.

I have just one question, and then I will pass the floor to Madame Latendresse.

In a similar vein to Mr. Dykstra's questions, I've heard from residents in Scarborough who love the idea of this, and there are also some people who are not so supportive. When children are in school, leading up to Remembrance Day they actually learn about it and then they take the time at 11 o'clock to commemorate the history and to participate in a ceremony. Their concern is that if children are taken out of school for the day, some parents or residents, who may or may not be parents right now, are concerned that maybe they won't be engaged.

I'm sure you've heard that, too.

What do we tell people in the community? What is your response to those comments?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Any holiday that we celebrate or recognize or commemorate is not going to have a 100% participation rate. Not everybody participates in Canada Day even. For a lot of us, that's our biggest holiday. It's not the case in all provinces.

I said a lot of us, not everyone, Madam Latendresse.

If kids are not in school and the parents are also off, then in that instance I would say it perhaps falls a little bit onto the parents to impart that importance. We shouldn't say that kids aren't going to learn anything in school. If it's not going to be in school on the 11th itself, then it should be the day beforehand. In the provinces that do have it as a holiday, that's exactly what they do. It shouldn't be about just the one day.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Absolutely. Thank you for that. It's my understanding as well that in communities where the commemorations happen, the onus is on parents to educate their children and to make sure they're participating in these community ceremonies. Schools are doing many events leading up to the event also.

Thank you.

I'll pass the rest of my time to Madam Latendresse.

● (1550)

**Mr. Dan Harris:** One thing that is also really important about the education the kids get in school is that, particularly for new Canadians who come from parts of the world where this isn't commemorated, this is how those families learn about its importance to Canada and about the sacrifice that our men and women have made. The kids learn about it in school, and then they go home and tell their parents. That's often how you'll get uptake with new Canadians who then say, "Well, this is the reason we have this great country, and I wanted to come here. I'll go pay my respects."

[Translation]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a few questions for you, Mr. Harris.

There is a military base near my riding. Many veterans and military members live in my constituency. November 11 has always been a particularly interesting day. A number of events are held, both in the legion and in several parts of my riding. It's an excellent idea to give legal status to that holiday, which is actually more important than July 1 itself in my riding. That is quite impressive.

How could giving Remembrance Day legal holiday status affect the way Canadians celebrate that day? What will the change make possible that is not currently possible?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Remembrance Day is a national event that is important for everyone. In that sense, our system is no different from the American one. The U.S. government started by adopting legislation it enforced on a federal level, and each state then adopted a similar piece of legislation. In other words, the 51 or 52 states have all adopted their own legislation. They commemorate the day, and that is very important. It would be a good idea for us to do the same as a nation, but it's up to each province to decide on the best way to commemorate those events.

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** You mentioned this in your opening remarks, but could you explain a little more clearly why you now agree with removing the second subclause of clause 1 of your bill?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** It's a matter of protocol. Most people won't think of those details, and that is why the provision was originally included in the bill. I am not the only member to make that suggestion. Chris Charlton proposed a very similar provision, and Inky Mark, a former Conservative member, did the same. The idea was to lower the flag to half-mast. Sorry, I can't remember how to say it in French.

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** It's "en berne".

[English]

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Pardon?

[Translation]

"En berne". Thank you. Lowering the flag to half-mast makes sense to Canadians, but the government may want that to happen at 11 a.m., during the ceremony.

[English]

To put it down at half-mast at a particular time of day when it's going to be relevant, and for instance the country is watching, makes more sense than at 12:01 and it having to be put down at half-mast. It also makes sense if protocol were to evolve with time, and we were to change what's appropriate with respect to lowering the flag. It's much better to not have to go back in and have a new law in order to make that change.

•(1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That takes us over the seven minutes.

Bells are now going. I would like to have members return as quickly as they can. As soon as we have a quorum I'll call the meeting back to order.

On that basis, we'll now suspend.

•(1555)

(Pause)

•(1645)

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Harris and I think everyone around this table agrees there's no amount of commemoration and no amount of ceremony that can properly acknowledge the efforts of our veterans; those who didn't return and those who returned to tell their story. There's no amount of compensation that can be paid to them that adequately recognizes the financial needs of those who returned ailing from injuries that are sometimes permanent and some less so. I applaud your efforts through this legislation to heighten the profile of Remembrance Day. I think more days than November 11 should be days in which we recognize the efforts of our veterans.

Having said that, I recall that I am one person at least. I know you consulted many, but I am one you talked to prior to second reading. As I understand the legislation, it would recognize Remembrance Day, November 11, as a legal holiday and that did not import with it that it would be a statutory holiday. In other words it's not automatic that schools and businesses are closed across Canada. That jurisdiction to close schools and business lies with the provinces in all matters except those that are federal in nature like banks and those other types of institutions.

Is that correct?

•(1650)

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Absolutely.

You're quite right. It could never be said that we've done too much to honour the sacrifices that the brave men and women over generations have made for our country.

One of the things they were protecting was government and the jurisdictions that we have between the federal government and the provinces. This would apply to areas of federal jurisdiction who, for the majority, already have it off.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Exactly.

I want to pursue a line of questioning that Mr. Dykstra began.

Some of the different organizations have expressed their concern—I've talked to my own legion in Guelph, the Colonel John McCrae Branch—and there are some that favour a statutory holiday that allows people out of work and out of school. However, a predominant number of people who spoke to me said they have concerns about being out of school and out of work because sometimes people don't associate that day off with the responsibility to properly commemorate our veterans.

Have you heard from people that there is a concern about the statutory holiday nature, which of course this does not create as you've already explained?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** There is certainly that concern and I think that concern is borne out any time any government looks to make a change like this.

There was quite the debate in Ontario when the provincial government decided to implement Family Day. How many families would take the day to spend with each other as a family?

That certainly is going to be a concern and that responsibility has to go back to the individuals. This day will only continue to have meaning for us and for our country if we continue to bring it forward and to impart that meaning into it.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** All right.

For those listening in or those who might read the blues, however many they may be, this does not require provinces to create a statutory holiday by any means.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** By any means and it would be grossly unfair for the federal government to try to take that jurisdiction from the provinces.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Do Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Quebec, the provinces that do have some legislation, but are not complete in offering days off to the schools and to employees, still have that jurisdiction?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Absolutely.

I would encourage those jurisdictions to take the time to have this conversation. In Manitoba and Nova Scotia they've both done their own thing and I think they should be applauded for that.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Okay.

What exactly do you mean by legal holiday as opposed to holiday, which is how it's currently identified, and what does the addition of the word "legal" import insofar as how we celebrate or commemorate Remembrance Day?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** It's not going to change how we celebrate or commemorate Remembrance Day, but what it does is correct an error when the Holidays Act was originally passed that, by not having the word "legal" associated with Remembrance Day compared to Canada Day and Victoria Day, it didn't put them on the same level playing field.

Victoria Day is another good example; not every province recognizes Victoria Day. In Ontario I'd say we take it for granted in terms of it being a day off. In Quebec it's *La journée des Patriotes*, and some of the other provinces don't have it at all. Those are the decisions those jurisdictions have chosen to make themselves.

•(1655)

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Mr. Chair, my questions have been answered satisfactorily.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Valeriote.

We'll now go to Mr. Young for up to seven minutes.

**Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Congratulations, Mr. Harris, on this initiative. I think your motivation is very admirable.

I've dealt with this issue before. I think it was either in 1998 or 1999 at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario when someone introduced a similar bill. At that time I took it to my legionnaires, my veterans, and I have done that again recently. The feedback from them has consistently been, "No, we want the children to be in school, and we're invited in to speak to them about the history and about how we earned the freedoms we all share". They didn't support it for that reason.

I want to tell you about a letter we received from the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, and I'll just quote from it briefly:

It is strongly felt that school boards and the education sector are very effective at commemorating this important day with age-appropriate learning and appreciation activities. School boards are deeply concerned that this day would become a "vacation" for many and over time lose its significance and, for these reasons, we do not support such a change.

As a rhetorical question I'd just like to ask you, "What did you do on Victoria Day?" I can't remember what I did on Victoria Day, but for everybody I know it's a day off and they go to the cottage or they do fireworks. That's a sort of celebratory thing they do on the Sunday night, usually, but there is really minimal celebration of our longest-ruling monarch of the Commonwealth and the work that she did, and celebrating that is really minimal.

What are your thoughts about this concern that people would increasingly see it as just a day off?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** I would say to look to the six provinces and three territories where it is currently a statutory holiday. I don't think we've seen a lessening of the meaning there.

That kids should be in school and learning about this is the biggest swaying argument, I would say, in the other direction. But I don't think it's a one-or-the-other situation. Look at those school boards. What happens when Remembrance Day falls on a weekend and the schools are closed anyway? The schools hold their ceremonies on the last school day beforehand so they're still able to have the ceremonies and still impart the age-appropriate education.

I would argue that we would have opportunities to even improve it more if the ceremonies in the schools were not taking place on the 11th. The vast majority of veterans and Canadian Forces' members, and even reservists who have regular jobs, are not able to take time off on the 11th. They're not able to commemorate the way they'd like. If ceremonies were taking place in schools the day before, you'd actually have a lot more veterans available to go into schools, and we'd be able to improve the education of our children.

**Mr. Terence Young:** You mentioned when the Ontario government introduced Family Day. I remember that, and I think it was part of their election platform—

**Mr. Dan Harris:** In 2003, yes.

**Mr. Terence Young:** Yes, in the 2003 election, and they did it. They didn't consult business people who would have to basically pay for it. It cost them tens of millions of dollars, which was a big concern, and would be a big concern.

The school boards have curriculum in every subject they have to get through by the end of the year. Have you heard any concerns about the school boards getting through the curriculum?

Do you have any numbers on what it might cost business to have a brand new holiday?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Yes, we do have the general numbers of what it would normally cost to create a holiday on the national level.

**Mr. Terence Young:** Do you remember what that is?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Within the province of Ontario, you're traditionally looking at about \$1 billion.

**Mr. Terence Young:** A billion.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Nearly, for the entire province to be shut down, and that's not an insignificant amount.

With a day like Remembrance Day, it's a little hard to pinpoint that number because of all the other factors. Ontario and Quebec are open, but the rest of the provinces and territories for the most part aren't. The United States isn't. Most of Europe is also taking that day. A lot of the regular business that could be done ends up being impacted. I've heard countless stories over the years whereby people call the company branch in Alberta or in British Columbia and when the phone rings, it goes to voice mail, and the call doesn't get returned. The caller doesn't even realize they're off.

• (1700)

**Mr. Terence Young:** At the cenotaph in Oakville, for example, we might have 500 people, if it's not raining. If it's raining, it's 300 or something. I know a lot of them have come out of their offices. They're small-business people and they have taken the time to go to the cenotaph. So I know that's partially true.

Would you like to take a minute or so and summarize why you introduced the bill? I know you did an introduction, but is there a short summary you can come up with as to why you introduced it?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** The shortest summary for me would be the importance that my family has always taken in Remembrance Day, starting with my great-grandfather, who served in both world wars. A great-great uncle on my mother's side was killed in the First World War and is buried near the Somme. I've had a continuous level of service in my family from the Korean War to two cousins who did tours in Afghanistan. It's always been incredibly important to us. Over the years I've certainly made the effort in every instance possible to take the time off to go to the cenotaph in my riding, the one that represents all of Scarborough, to participate in the ceremonies. When my grandmother was in the Canadian Women's Army Corps, she marched to the cenotaph at the first Remembrance Day after the Second World War.

It has great meaning for us. A group of people go to those ceremonies every year, and every year a few of them are missing because they couldn't get the time off work and aren't able to go and commemorate the way they would like. That's employees and owners of small businesses.

This past Remembrance Day, one of my good friends, Stephen Gregoire, who runs Eagle Beaver Sports in the riding, wasn't able to get down to the cenotaph until 10 p.m. on the 11th because of work, but he still made the time to do that. That's where it's important. The people for whom this matters are going to make the effort, and I want to make it easy for them. There are always going to be people who are going to use a day like this as a day off; it doesn't matter what we do. Those aren't the folks I want to focus on; it's the folks for whom this has meaning.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Before we go to Ms. Latendresse, I have a quick question for you, Mr. Harris, or maybe someone else, who comes from a province where Remembrance Day is a stat holiday. I think I already know my answer, but the years when Remembrance Day happens on a Saturday or Sunday, the stat holiday follows on the Monday or the Friday, is that the case?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** That is typically the case. Previous versions of this bill that have been introduced into the House also laid out a provision for it to be on the last Friday before or the Monday after. That was something I sought to remove from the bill. With respect to Remembrance Day, the day itself is what's important. The 11th is the 11th. If it falls on a weekend, that should be the day. Again, it's not about having the day off, it's about having the opportunity to commemorate. If that means that people who work in businesses are there on weekends and end up having that day as opposed to a regular weekday worker who gets the day off, then so be it.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Latendresse, *pour cinq minutes*.

[Translation]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Harris, I would like to come back to a comment you made in response to a question from my colleague, Mr. Young.

You said that our veterans often participate in ceremonies, commemorative events, on November 11. Veterans could visit schools ahead of time to talk about the upcoming day and, on the actual Remembrance Day, the children could participate in the ceremonies and events along with veterans. That would be another reason to make the day a statutory holiday.

Could you tell us more about that? You talked about it briefly in response to one of Mr. Young's questions. It's an interesting idea.

• (1705)

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Absolutely, as I think there is some room for improvement.

A number of our veterans make an effort to speak to students at schools to teach them about what happened during the war and share their experience. Veterans occasionally have to miss the ceremonies to do that. If the school activities took place on the last day of school or on the day preceding November 11, veterans would be able to speak to students, teach them about what happened and then attend the ceremonies. The children could also attend.

During the ceremonies held in my region, grade 4 students always sing *In Flanders Fields*. It would be a shame to lose that. It happens because it's important to their teacher. I'm sure that, even if it was a holiday, he would do the same thing and would invite all the students to attend and bring their families. In fact, many of the parents who are not working come to see their children sing.

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** You mentioned something else earlier.

Could you tell us a little more specifically about the stories you have heard from people for whom this really makes a difference? You mentioned reservists who sometimes cannot get time off from work. They can't really participate in the ceremonies, but I think that should be one of the most important commemorations in our country. Do you have any specific stories to share?

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Yes. I was talking about my friend, who was not a reservist.



I would like to point out that all reservists have regular jobs, like everyone else. They have leave to participate in their training, but not to attend or even organize ceremonies. We know that our reservists are as proud to serve as all the regular forces members. They would certainly be happy to participate in events or commemorations. That would be very important, especially after what took place last October. That's when we saw the potential impact on our reservists. I'm certain that everyone would like to have an opportunity at the next November 11 ceremonies to honour our reservists and soldiers who were killed last year.

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

We'll now go to Mr. Dykstra.

This will be the last five minutes of the questioning

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** I'm going to give Mr. Armstrong a chance to ask some questions; I know he has a few. If he doesn't use up all the time, I will have one more, but he's eager to ask some questions.

**Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for allowing me to jump in with a couple of questions.

Dan, I want to thank you for bringing this legislation forward. I think this is a very interesting discussion.

I'm from Nova Scotia. We have the Nova Scotia Remembrance Day Act. It means a day off school. Businesses are closed. It's a really big event. It's become bigger over the years. I think your legislation is timely, considering the age of our World War II and Korean War veterans. I can remember, as a child, watching the World War I veterans. All of them are now gone. My grandfather was in World War I. I have military history in my family that is very similar to yours.

As a former elementary school principal, I can tell you that the local legions, in the 19 cenotaph services in my riding, are very active in all the elementary schools, the junior highs, and the high schools in the area, but particularly in the elementary schools. The schools embrace the legions. There's a really strong partnership.

On Remembrance Day you'll see a lot of the youth organizations—the Cubs, the Scouts, and particularly the Cadets, of course, because they're involved directly in the ceremony itself—all wearing their uniforms, and they all attend these services. In Atlantic Canada we have a stronger connection to the military, I think, than a lot of other areas of the country do, based on participation. We have 12% of the population, and about 22% of people in the military originate from Atlantic Canada.

Is there a concern that if we were to bring this legislation forward and put it in some of these other provinces, particularly ones with a huge influx of new Canadians who don't have that tradition, that military history within their own families within Canada...? Is that why you think the legions in other provinces are concerned? The legions in Atlantic Canada are fully behind and engaged in this. Can you comment on that a bit?

●(1710)

**Mr. Dan Harris:** I think those are the regional differences. Where it already is a holiday I think it is greatly supported. As you mentioned, after Nova Scotia brought in the Remembrance Day Act the participation rates went up. I didn't talk about that earlier because I don't have any statistics to bring forward to prove it, but anecdotally that's what we've heard in different jurisdictions.

Certainly when you say timely, we are coming up on the 100th anniversary of the First World War and the 100th anniversary of Vimy is around the corner. This is a great time to rededicate ourselves to all those brave men and women who have served Canada faithfully throughout the years.

You mentioned also the cadets. In Scarborough on the last Sunday before Remembrance Day there has always been a ceremony that takes place at the Scarborough Civic Centre. It's one of the most impressive sights I've ever seen, because this is a six-storey structure that is very open-aired and each level is recessed further back so of course you have a great sightline. The cadets all are lined up in uniform along each one of those levels. You have hundreds of cadets lined up and every time you look up you see the great future of our country and the next generation that's ready to take their place in defence of our country. As I've said before, I don't think it could ever be said that we've done too much for those who have put their lives on the line for us.

**Mr. Scott Armstrong:** In my Remembrance Day ceremony, the one where I laid a wreath this year, there were over 10,000 people attending. I would say that of the 10,000 the majority were young people, children. For them to get the opportunity to see our World War II vets, this is an opportunity they're not going to have for many generations in the future, so I do appreciate you bringing this legislation forward. I hope that if it does pass and we have all the provinces embrace this, we do have the participation result from it that we've seen in some of the other provinces.

I'll turn things back over to the parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Thank you, Scott.

Chair, I know that we've tried to deal with a couple of things happening here at committee over the last little while and I do really appreciate Dan coming forward today and presenting.

We have concerns with a couple of things before we go to clause-by-clause on this bill. One, I do believe that we need to potentially bring some witnesses here to committee to speak to some of the things that we brought up today both from a support perspective and there are those who have indicated that they would like to come to committee to speak against the bill.

I also understand that veterans affairs, while the bill is here at heritage, does have an interest in looking at clause 1 of the bill on their own.

So my recommendation, or at least my motion to begin with here, is:

That the Committee request an extension of thirty sitting days to consider Bill C- 597, An Act to amend the Holidays Act (Remembrance Day), beyond the sixty days from the date of the Bill's referral to the Committee, as provided in Standing Order 97.1(1). ), to allow for an examination of the bill by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs (ACVA).

**The Chair:** Mr. Dykstra has moved a motion. Are there copies of that being circulated?

Just so I'm clear, Mr. Dykstra, you are proposing that, first of all, we ask for an extension and secondly that we refer clause 1 of the bill to the veterans affairs committee but we continue concurrently to study this bill as well? Is that the motion?

• (1715)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Ms. Sitsabaiesan?

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** I just have a question probably for the clerk. Two questions.

First, is this in order for one committee...? My understanding is it's not, but I want to hear it from you. Is it in order for one committee to... I know the House has referred this bill to the heritage committee, so is it in order for us to suggest and to allow for examination by the veterans affairs committee?

That's my first question, I guess I'll wait for the second.

**The Chair:** My understanding from the clerk—and it's my understanding as well—is that we can refer it to them to study the subject matter, but it still remains within the purview of this committee, and that's why the motion... It's not in the motion but that's what I was asking for: that we continue to concurrently work on this bill. In fact, I wanted to do a few minutes of committee business where we'll schedule that to keep this moving as quickly as possible.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thank you for that answer, which would then mean that the motion here might need to be amended, because it says, "allow for the examination of the bill", rather than "the subject matter of the bill" in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. That's just a byproduct of the response to my first question from you.

My second question is for the clerk again, I think. With respect to the extension, when does the original 60-day clock end, and then when would this new 30-day clock go to? Could you tell us the dates, please?

**The Chair:** The bill was to be reported back to the House by the April 23.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** So that's the end of the 60-day clock.

**The Chair:** We do have a little bit of time. The motion is to extend it...

Help me here, Mr. Dykstra. Is it 30 days?

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thirty sitting days.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Thirty sitting days, yes.

**The Chair:** According to the calendar, that's June 11. I think we would deal with this in committee business. We would schedule another meeting right away to start to hear from these witnesses.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** No, I'm just trying to understand it. I want to understand what this means before I decide how I'm going to vote on the motion.

**The Chair:** Okay. It means that we would have up until June 11 to have it reported back.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thank you.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Mr. Chair, it's my first attendance at this committee, and I don't want to sound controversial or obstructive, but my line of questioning was designed to make it very clear that this bill does not create a statutory holiday that requires people to be off work and out of school. In fact, as the Veterans Affairs critic for the Liberal Party, I note that this concern, to a large extent, is why we were prepared to support the bill, because there are a lot of people who have expressed concerns.

We're told that the reason for the extension is that we want to hear from more witnesses who have those concerns. Well, those concerns are already allayed by the answers that have been given. That's number one. It would be adding more witnesses at more cost to bring those witnesses before the committee to address issues that Mr. Harris has already clearly addressed.

Secondly, the bill won't get royal assent if we extend this another 30 days. I think that's pretty clear. Anyone estimating the extension of time is going to say that this will never get to the Senate after third reading—assuming everybody continues to support it—in time to get royal assent.

I'm wondering why we would do that when there is a need to increase the profile of Remembrance Day, which is the intent of the bill, without imposing on the provinces the need to create a statutory holiday. I'm wondering if I could ask the mover of the motion, I suppose, about that, because I am concerned, and if I were Mr. Harris or were among those who want to see this bill go through, I would be concerned too.

• (1720)

**The Chair:** Mr. Dykstra, do you wish to answer that?

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Sure. My intention in moving this motion is not to try to delay discussion on this until June 11. I'm happy to try to put some meetings in place. We've had a request from veterans affairs to take a look at clause 1. That's the piece that they wanted to take a look at; they're going to do that.

I certainly understand Mr. Valeriote's point to a certain extent. I can say that while we're always concerned about the fiscal responsibilities we hold as parliamentarians, I find it interesting that any time we move for closure on debate in the House of Commons, the opposition cries foul, says that we're trying to shut down discussion, and that there are many people who want to speak to the legislation that we've introduced. Now I'm asking for an extension so that we can do the very same thing over the next couple of weeks, spend a little more time studying the bill. I'm told that it's not required because they've asked questions, and witnesses can be satisfied that the questions they've asked are substitutes for them as witnesses. Those are interesting points that I may use in the future if required.

There are a number of folks...I can tell you some of the people who are substituted here today, as can my colleagues who have members of their community who have submitted requests to come here to speak and to witness. I think that if we were to take a little bit of extra time here, it would serve us all well to hear both perspectives on this issue, whether in support of the bill or opposed to the bill.

I know we don't have a lot of time left, but I am quite prepared to nail down some dates, Chair, and to make that a project that we undertake in as near a future as possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Latendresse.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to point out that a mistake was made in the French translation. The French text only says 30 days and not 30 sitting days.

That should be changed.

[*English*]

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Yes, you're right.

**A voice:** Is it 30 days or 30 sitting days?

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Thirty sitting days.

That's a request you'll have to make. It's a standard request.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Chair, I would like to raise another point.

As an opposition member who carried her bill through all the stages and brought it all the way to royal assent, I just want to say that I think there is a better way to consider this matter in committee over the next month without necessarily having to extend the sittings. I don't see why we couldn't find some time in the schedule for a few individuals who would be willing to come testify by April 23.

I sort of feel like we are being taken for fools when we are told that the point is simply to allow us to carry out a better study. You say the bill will have to be reported back to the House by June 11, followed by the stage when amendments are considered and the third reading. The report stage will actually come first because amendments will be proposed in committee. Then comes the third reading and the vote. The bill will then move on to the Senate. With all those stages, you are telling me that this bill will be passed before the House adjourns.

I think that is really unrealistic and basically a way to quietly kill this bill. I don't see how we could possibly fail to carry out a study by April 23, as we have been doing with all other private members' bills. That approach works really well.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Stewart.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** I have to agree with my colleague. That's what it sounds like is happening here, having gone through the process myself. Last year, an extension of 30 days would have been no problem, but this is year it is a problem. I think I'm looking at people who voted for this the first time through.

This bill isn't very long, and there was plenty of time to debate it all the way through that stage, so this is obviously just... Everybody understood what it was. It's pretty easy, a very short bill. I'm sure that

your PMO had a look through it. Our OLO did, of course, and we all voted for it. Now you're voting to kill it. That is pretty crappy.

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Mr. Harris.

**Mr. Dan Harris:** Yes, this actually comes as quite a surprise. If more time was going to be needed to study this, I wish it had come to committee a little faster, because second reading was passed on November 5. We're already at the end of March, so it took four months to get here, and there are two months left on the calendar, and we're going to add another month onto this.

If veterans affairs wants to have a look at it, they can invite me to the committee. I'm more than happy to hear from folks about their concerns with respect to the bill. Certainly I'm glad that some members of the government have been getting some feedback. I would encourage them to have those people contact me in my office to discuss it and I think we can seek to get through that in a timely manner.

But, as my colleague said, if it is reported back on June 11, we're going to be right in the middle of a budget.

**The Chair:** Mr. Harris, I didn't want to cut you off...you were to get to answer a question on this.

I'm going to move to Mr. Young.

**Mr. Terence Young:** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to say for the record that I would like to invite representation, probably the presidents from my branch 486 in Oakville and branch 114 in Oakville, to hear from them, because to me they're the most important group to hear from. It's very important to me and I think that's important to the committee as well.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Valeriote.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That would seem to suggest that it could be done, and likely in a sooner period of time. I am wondering if he would consider 15 days rather than a 30-day extension, as a friendly amendment?

**The Chair:** The standing order is that it be a 30-sitting day extension.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** I'm happy to work within the timeframe. I just don't know what the actual physical motion is that you're supposed to put forward. I don't know if you can do one that's only 15 days.

**The Chair:** Mr. Valeriote and Mr. Dykstra, the standing order says that you would get a 30-day extension, but that doesn't mean that the committee can't move it faster. I know that we can have a few minutes of committee business. We can schedule to hear from our witnesses probably as early as the 23rd.

Ms. Sitsabaiesan.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Thank you.

We heard a lot of commentary that people were concerned we may not have the time to push it through third reading and then eventually through the Senate and receive royal assent. If our committee is going to be—I don't want to say the delay in the process—the delay in the process, I wonder if the committee is willing to sit extra evening sittings or longer sittings, or whatever it might be, to make sure that we hear from the witnesses who want to appear.

Can we do the proper study of this bill that is being requested by members from legions, or from wherever across the country, to hear from those witnesses and actually do the work, but do it relatively quickly, so that it can go through the process that it needs to in this House and in the other House also?

**The Chair:** If we vote on the motion, then we can do a few minutes of committee business, and I think we could do that as early as the 23rd.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** That would be perfect.

**The Chair:** We'll go ahead and vote on this.

Those in favour of the motion?

Those opposed?

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Recorded vote, please.

**The Chair:** We've already called the vote.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Sorry, I forgot what it's called.

**The Chair:** Those opposed?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We have a few minutes here just to do some committee business.

I have one piece that we need to bring forward.

Sorry, we have to go in camera to go into committee business. We're going to briefly suspend for a minute.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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