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Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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•(1615)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I'll call the meeting to order.

We begin with what was meant to have been an hour of committee business, and so let us begin with that.

Mr. Seamus O'Regan (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Madam Chair, are we ready to begin?

The Chair: We are ready to begin. We need to discuss the fact that we seem to be in this kind of spot, always caught between votes, and we end up not being able to have two hours of meeting. We end up having an hour or sometimes a half-hour of meeting. We'll never finish anything we're going to do, if this is going to continue.

I would like, before we go any further—

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Why do we want to finish?

The Chair: — to ask, in the name of all that is holy, so that we can finish our media report: can we expand our sitting, so that if we have to go out and vote, we can come back here and continue? Many committees are having to do that now, just because of this situation.

I want to ask you all to think about it, and if you agree with it, maybe somebody can move a motion to that effect in order to finish the current report on media studies.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

With all the other scheduling we have, I still wonder whether we shouldn't just proceed in the normal manner that we've been going forward in, but I'll leave that open.

The Chair: You want to proceed in the normal manner—

Mr. Larry Maguire: Yes.

The Chair: —and not expand meetings? We're never going to finish this report.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: We'll get down to it.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Sure we will.

The Chair: Okay. I don't get a sense from anybody else—

Yes, Mr. Vandal?

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): I would like to begin by talking about a motion that I distributed last week.

The Chair: Yes. We're going to deal with your motion.

Yes?

Mr. Dan Vandal: It's about motion M-103. I distributed, I think last Wednesday, a motion that I think everyone should have in front of them.

The Chair: Excuse me. Order, please.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I distributed a motion. I'm assuming everyone has it in front of them.

The Chair: I shall read it, Mr. Vandal, if you like, as the chair.

We're dealing with the motion in front of us. You have all received it.

The motion from Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital) reads:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and in accordance with a resolution of the House agreed to on Thursday, March 23, 2017, which read:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize the need to quell the increasing public climate of hate and fear; (b) condemn Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racism and religious discrimination and take note of House of Commons' petition e-411 and the issues raised by it; and (c) request that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage undertake a study on how the government could (i) develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia, in Canada, while ensuring a community-centered focus with a holistic response through evidence-based policy-making, (ii) collect data to contextualize hate crime reports and to conduct needs assessments for impacted communities, and that the Committee should present its findings and recommendations to the House no later than 240 calendar days from the adoption of this motion, provided that in its report, the committee should make recommendations that the government may use to better reflect the enshrined rights and freedoms in the Constitution Acts including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The committee commence a study as requested in paragraph (c) of the motion referenced above; that the Committee devote a maximum of 10 meetings to the study using extended hours as necessary; that the Committee schedule witnesses to appear such that it would complete gathering necessary evidence and give instructions to the committee analysts to draft a report with the objective of reporting back to the House its findings and recommendations.

This motion is open, Mr. Vandal, to debate.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Basically, the motion says it all. There has been a lot of discussion on both sides of the chamber on the merits of this motion. It was adopted with a significant majority.

Madam Chair, you spoke to the amount of work we have in front of us. I think one of the key considerations in this motion—and we all know about the content and have discussed it to some degree—is that we have a maximum of 10 meetings to complete the study, including the writing of the report, using extended hours as necessary, because I think there are some occasions when we're going to want to go an extra hour or two to get this done in a timely fashion and move on to other pressing business that we have, and that we schedule the appropriate witnesses—not today, but at some time in the near future—whom we would like to see appear as witnesses to gather the evidence necessary and get going on this important report.

The Chair: Is there anyone wishing to speak?

Mr. Anderson.

• (1620)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you for allowing me to sit with the committee and to be around for this issue. We've seen the motion. We're not going to oppose it, although we do have some questions, and I don't know if they're for you or for Mr. Vandal.

The motion covers about seven different components that we've been directed to take a look at. It talks about eliminating systemic racism in Canada, which I believe is different than talking about religious discrimination. We already have two topics there that need to be studied. Then, of course, within the religious discrimination, there were the instructions on Islamophobia.

I guess Parliament also wanted to see a community-centred focus with a holistic response through evidence-based policy-making. I wonder if we're going to have some sort of a discussion about what that means and what we might expect that to look like at the other end of this project.

Then, we're going to have to give some direction on some sort of system to collect data to contextualize hate crime reports. That's a very different assignment than taking a look at systemic racism and religious discrimination. We're instructed to conduct a needs assessment for impacted communities across Canada.

Madam Chair, that seems to be a very large job to be touching on, with dozens of impacted communities across Canada. Then, we need to present our findings to the House.

We have 240 days to do this. I don't know how we could do this in 10 meetings, particularly if we're talking about hearing the witnesses, completing this assignment, and then writing a report. Typically, reports take four to six meetings, particularly if they have some disagreement within them.

I'm just wondering if you or Mr. Vandal could maybe give us some direction on how it would be possible for us to make a good study that's going to be considered to be useful across this country on such short notice, and with such a short time frame?

The Chair: Well, I would be interested in what anyone else has to say, but I just wanted to say, with regard to the process, that once we get to dealing with the motion, we usually have a meeting—it can be one hour or whatever—to discuss scope of themes and how we do the work we do. The analysts would present some ideas to us on how

we can fulfill some of the questions that you asked about, Mr. Anderson.

I think we cannot change what is in the motion, as you well know, unless we go back to the House. You've commented on systemic racism and religious discrimination. In order to change what is in this motion, agreed on by the House, we have to go back to the House and ask them to change it. I think that's going to take us God knows how long, and so, really, we are sort of stuck in this.

How we interpret it is up to the committee and up to the analyst giving us some advice on how he sees this flowing out. Then, we'll have a full discussion in this committee on what we see.

I think Mr. Vandal made an interesting insert here, which is, "using extended hours as necessary".

It is not without precedent for committees to use extended hours in order to get their work done. We saw this happen when we had the question on the Safe Streets and Communities Act that was repealed. We saw that the committee met for seven hours to get it done in one sitting.

Sometimes, given that we have had, in this particular session, break weeks coming out of everywhere, we have really been held back in terms of getting our work done. Three-thirty means that either we have a vote before 3:30 or we're called in for a vote at five o'clock. We tend to not even do the two hours of our meetings, as we've been noticing in the last while, and that's why at the beginning I talked about extended hours.

I think we need to consider that we need to get the work done, and to get the work done we need to do what is necessary, which is to work at all kinds of new and interesting hours. Finance committee is doing this all the time. A lot of committees do it, based on what they're doing and their ability to proceed.

We have at least three studies on the table. We haven't had the 48 hours yet—I don't think—but Ms. Dabrusin sent us another study. We have museums from Mr. Van Loan. We have Mr. Vandal's motion on aboriginal sports. We have a lot of work to do if we intend to finish it, and, I might add, we have to finish our report on media and communities.

I have to tell you that there is not a day that goes by without somebody in the media calling and asking, "Is your report finished?" I think we really need to get our work done, and I just want to place that on the table in regard to your question, Mr. Anderson, about how we are going to fit this all in. We just have to make a decision that we have to fit it in.

Mr. Nantel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let's not kid ourselves: the votes disrupting our work are meant to disrupt our work. If we extend our sitting hours, it could take bargaining tools away from the opposition. One of your responsibilities, as the government, is to manage the situation and anticipate the consequences.

• (1625)

[English]

That's the name of the game.

[Translation]

I am not really in favour of extending our sitting hours.

It is entirely appropriate for Mr. Vandal to put forward motion M-103. Given the wording, I don't really think it can be debated. It's up to us to decide how we want to approach it.

I implore the committee to adopt an organized approach. We need to clamp down and be more organized. This is our first study, and it is never-ending. We are simply moving in a triangle. We are stalled, and it's complicated.

Nevertheless, we will have no excuse for the next study. I'd like us to agree on a very specific approach as soon as possible. In other words, we should determine the number of weeks, the deadline for proposing witnesses, and, with the help of the clerk, the schedule for the appearance of those witnesses. That way, it will all be laid out very clearly, and we'll have as few surprises as possible.

You are absolutely right, Madam Chair. The media are constantly after us about the study. Imagine what will happen in the case of motion M-103. We have to be disciplined.

I'm going to discuss it with the clerk, Mr. Chaplin.

I expect the committee to be very disciplined. We have to work with that in mind, particularly when it comes to providing our witness lists. We really do need to be as stringent as possible.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

By the way, Mr. Nantel, everyone recalls that last Thursday at 5:00 p.m. was the deadline for witnesses, but since we didn't seem to get a list of witnesses from everybody, we may just have to look at making sure we get one.

The important thing about doing a study or bringing in witnesses is that we need to give the clerk time to be able to call the witnesses so that they have a week, minimum—

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Exactly.

The Chair: —or 10 days in which they can arrange their lives to come here. If we do it today and we expect to be moving tomorrow with witnesses, that's often difficult, unless they're government witnesses from the departments that we need to have come in.

I think you're absolutely right; we need to get all that done. This is where the clerk will be able to assist us, and hopefully the analyst will also give us a list of witnesses who he feels could fit the scope of our study when we're doing it. That's again a traditional thing to do.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm wondering whether it is the practice in this committee for one member to be able to ask another member a question without having to wait for the entire speaking order or seek unanimous consent to allow me to ask Mr. Vandal a question and have him respond to it; or whether that is not permitted, the way this committee works.

The Chair: I don't think we've ever come across that question. Everybody seems to be able to get their turn, and nobody has ever brought this up before. But Mr. Reid, it's your turn now, so if you wish to ask Mr. Vandal a question, please go ahead.

Mr. Scott Reid: Well, the question is just that I didn't actually get a rationale I could establish for the maximum of 10 meetings: why that number, which I must say seems very limited indeed? I was hoping to get a response to that.

The Chair: Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I think it's just a function of the tremendous amount of work that we have to do at this committee. We've been wrestling with the media committee—and maybe that's not the right term—for about a year and a half now. It's very important.

I have a sports and indigenous peoples report that's waiting; we have a museums report that is ongoing; we have a couple of other issues. They're all important. I think, given that this one is...

Mr. Anderson is bang on that there is a lot there. There is going to be some passionate discourse, but if we all bear down, if we're focused, and if we take some time early on—not today, but maybe Thursday—and nail down some terms of reference that are fair and encompassing, I believe we can do this in 10 meetings, and I believe that is why the extended hours are in there as well, as necessary.

It's going to be a challenge. I'm not saying it will be easy, but I think we can do it. It's very doable.

• (1630)

The Chair: Does that answer your question, Mr. Reid?

Mr. Scott Reid: I was seeking his rationale; he has provided it.

I wonder as well, just for purposes of confirmation, is Mr. Vandal merely discussing this right now, or should we understand that he has actually moved this motion? He didn't say those words. He may have intended to do so.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I have moved it.

The Chair: I read the motion into the record.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right, that's fine. That's what I wanted to establish, that we are in fact debating the motion and that the motion is on the floor.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, if I still have the floor—

The Chair: Yes, continue, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I appreciate the importance of all these other items that are on the agenda here, but I will just state what I think would be obvious to anyone. This motion M-103 and the debate over it is the item that has dominated the news thus far this spring in parliamentary proceedings. No issue has attracted more media attention, more public interest. It is hard to believe, given the importance that the Canadian media and public have given to this issue—the importance that clearly others place on it—that it should be treated as something that has to be wrapped up so quickly. I think this just speaks for itself.

Additionally, I can't but notice the very substantial scope of this motion, which makes it inconceivable to me that we could do anything more than the most cursory—frankly, the most disrespectfully brief—treatment of this, were we to do it in 10 meetings. Remember, that's 10 meetings, including the actual writing of the report, the reviewing of the report, and so on, at least the way this is written right now.

This motion calls for us to deal with not merely Islamophobia, but all forms of systemic racism—all of them—and of religious discrimination.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, I'm sorry, I hate to be rude, because I had given you the floor to speak, but the clerk has just informed me that there are four Conservatives at the table, and you have not been substituted in for any member, so in theory you do not have the floor unless you have unanimous consent.

Mr. Scott Reid: No, Madam Chair, I think if you consult the rules—we went through this in the Procedure and House Affairs Committee some time ago—the rules say that I can't move a motion and that I can't vote unless I'm substituted in for somebody, but not that I can't speak. In fact any member of the House can speak at any meeting. I realize this is something that doesn't arise all the time, but it is actually permitted.

The Chair: That is not how we have followed these meetings. I remember that when MPs tried to speak who were not members of the committee, we were not given unanimous consent by the Conservatives at the time, and so we did not allow it to happen.

Mr. Scott Reid: But you can't actually.... My point is that the rules permit me to speak.

The Chair: Now, if you are substituted in as a member, who is going to leave the table?

Larry, are you going? Is that what you're saying?

We cannot have five members—

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Chair, why don't you decide?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, unless the purists come over to our scene, there are only four new seats at the table.

The Chair: Yours are supposed to be three.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I don't have a problem with that, Madam Chair, and I will step back and sub Mr. Reid in for me, if that's what you like—

The Chair: He is substituted for you now.

Mr. Larry Maguire: —but there is an opportunity to speak, not to move a motion, if we look at the rules of the House.

The Chair: Actually, if you recall, we had this issue come up, and Mr. Van Loan, who is a guru with regard to rules, definitely told us that we needed unanimous consent. I checked, and it did say so in the committee rules.

I am just bringing this up because it was pointed out to me by the clerk that we had four Conservatives at the table, and if we were going to ask Mr. Reid to speak, he should have mentioned that he was not substituting for anyone.

It seems to me, without getting too technical about this, Larry, that you are ceding your position to Mr. Reid. Are you? We have a signed form to that—

Mr. Larry Maguire: I'll stay here.

The Chair: Thank you. You can hang out with us, if you like.

Now, Mr. Reid, continue.

Mr. Scott Reid: I must say I don't agree with that interpretation of the rules, but if you wish, Mr. Anderson, who is a sworn-in member of this committee at the moment, could ask whether there is unanimous consent for me to be here.

Mr. David Anderson: I'd be happy to do that.

The Chair: We have it now that you, Mr. Reid, are substituting for Larry Maguire.

A voice: This does not take effect as long as Mr. Maguire is at the table.

The Chair: Can he not just sit there, even if he's not going to speak?

An hon. member: Okay, I'll go.

● (1635)

The Chair: We're sending you to the back of the bus, Larry. I'm sorry.

Mr. Scott Reid: To be honest, I'm not sure whether you would prefer to have me keep the floor or cede the floor and put myself back on the speakers list. I'm open to either option.

The Chair: No, you're already speaking, so continue now. It's all been sorted out. You were asking Mr. Vandal some questions.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's right. I'm actually moving on to propose a counter way of looking at this. I mentioned the importance that Canadians assign to this issue. I mentioned as well the scope of motion M-103, which is very considerable. It's not merely about Islamophobia—not that it could be dealt with quickly—but is also about all forms of systemic racism.

The motion makes a point of distinguishing between that and religious discrimination, so we are talking about two distinct phenomena, although you could argue that they are two phenomena that overlap very considerably, like Venn diagrams. The point is they are two things, both of them vast in scope, given the large number both of different races, forms of racial discrimination, and of religious discrimination that exist both in Canada and internationally.

Then it asks us to take note of House of Commons petition e-411. We have to find out exactly how we ought to do that and what these words mean. Does it mean that the terms of e-411 are equal in merit to this? Petition e-411 contains some subject matter not contained in M-103, which of course is the reason for citing it.

Finally, we are then asked to undertake a study of how the government should:

develop a whole-of-government approach to reducing or eliminating systemic racism and religious discrimination including Islamophobia, in Canada, while ensuring a community-centered focus with a holistic response through evidence-based policy-making....

Now, evidence-based policy-making involves collecting evidence. How one does this in 10 meetings, of which some at least are being devoted to actually writing a report, revising the report, and so on, is quite frankly beyond me.

Then we're supposed to advise how the government could:

collect data to contextualize hate crime reports and to conduct needs assessments for impacted communities....

I think this one would take less time, because this was one of the subjects addressed in the report of the inquiry panel of the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism, the nearest parallel we have to these hearings on Islamophobia and systemic racism, and something on which, Madam Chair, you served as a member some years back and which I chaired.

There we discussed ways in which data collection could be improved. This, then, would not, I think, take too much time. It would still take an entire meeting, if we were to be successful in lining up the people who conduct this sort of data collection—police forces, StatsCan, and so on.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, I was going to make a suggestion about resolving the problem of the number of meetings, but go ahead.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right. That gives an idea of the scope, which is very considerable. Then I want to turn to make the point about just how big our task is compared with that of the hearings of the inquiry panel of the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat Antisemitism. That had a much narrower scope. It was just anti-Semitism. It was not any form of racism, unless you treat anti-Semitism as a form of racial rather than religious discrimination.

At that time we required 10 meetings for evidence collection on its own. I haven't gone back to examine, although the records would exist, how many meetings it took us to negotiate and work on the final report, but certainly it was a number of meetings. I must say, in my memory they seemed interminable, but obviously they were of a fixed number, and we can find that number for you.

That was 10 meetings just for the witness part of the process. Mr. Vandal's approach involves giving ourselves 10 meetings for everything, including the drafting of recommendations. If we take all the 10 meetings for witnesses, it would lead to there being no time at all for preparing a report. Really, then, I think we're talking about something like four or five meetings for witnesses; we're talking about large numbers of witnesses having to be struck from the list.

Madam Chair, I don't know what number of proposed witnesses you've received thus far.

• (1640)

The Chair: I don't know, because we have not yet received any from the Conservatives or New Democrats yet, so I can say to you that we don't know what it would be.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: What? Yes, we have sent them.

The Chair: You have sent yours in?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Yes.

The Chair: When we undertook the media study, we had 350 witnesses, and we sat down as a committee and pared it down. There was lots of duplication. We decided we would list our witnesses according to whether they were academic, whether they were community, whether they were going to speak about X or Y. We were thus able to pare down. Even so, we took a year to do it, but we had other studies in between.

We did that, and I think it's part of what we will do once we are devoting a meeting to the scope of this study.

Have you finished, Mr. Reid?

Mr. Scott Reid: No. Let me ask this question of Mr. Vandal.

The paring down exercise, in which we take all of the witnesses whose names have been submitted—assuming it can be done in one meeting, which is, I would suggest, highly unlikely for the practical reason that there are issues relating to availability of witnesses, and some of these will be persons from overseas.... Scheduling, as I recall from my recent experience in the electoral reform committee, for witnesses who are scattered far and wide as these witnesses would be, involves a series of exigencies based on time zones, availability, booking rooms that have connections for video conferencing, and so on, all of which tends to add to the number of meetings.

Why, then, lock in 10 meetings? We do, after all, have until November.... Forgive me; 240 days takes us to November 25 or 27, or something of that nature. I am at a loss as to why we can afford to give only 10 meetings.

Let me ask another question to Mr. Vandal, if I may. Is the paring down exercise intended, in the wording of this motion, to be one of the 10 meetings, when our witnesses are reviewed together?

Mr. Dan Vandal: I had anticipated that we would discuss this motion today, as we are doing now—and you have brought up some good points. I would have anticipated that, much as was the case for other studies we've embarked upon, we would take an hour or two at an appropriate time—maybe next Thursday or maybe next Tuesday—after everyone has submitted their witness lists. We would come to an agreement on the witnesses and the framework.

There would be another meeting for the terms of reference and witnesses. Then we would let the administration go about scheduling the witnesses in the appropriate time slots, much as we've done with other committees in which we've started studies, both here and in other committees that we're on.

We realize it's ambitious. We are all reasonable people around this table. Ten meetings is going to be a very tight timeline, but I think it's achievable. If it's not achievable, we're going to probably find out around meeting five, six, or seven, when we could perhaps revisit this question, whether it's achievable.

But I think that, by giving ourselves a concrete goal with a set of criteria and terms of reference, which I don't think we will discuss today, it's very achievable. If it's not, being reasonable people we could revisit the issue somewhere before the 10th meeting.

Mr. Scott Reid: In your mind, Mr. Vandal, because you're the one who wrote the motion.... I actually don't know the answer to this question. We have one meeting for what we've called the "paring down exercise", or the review of the witnesses—

• (1645)

Mr. Dan Vandal: —or part of one.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right; that's true, conceivably.

—and we have one or part of one for terms of reference.

Let's say we do them both in one meeting. Do we now say that this is one meeting down and we're only allowed to have nine more, or is it in addition to the 10?

I'm asking this because this is very germane; this is at the heart of it. You've said we should only have 10 meetings, and I'm trying to find out what's in and what's out so that we can govern our own actions and not discover after the fact that we've run out of time.

That's a reasonable request to make. You're free to go either way; I'm not trying to pin you down. I just want to know one way or the other.

Mr. Dan Vandal: This discussion we're having now, in my mind, is not part of the 10 meetings. The discussion we will have on the paring down of the witnesses is not part of the 10 meetings, unless it goes on for the entire meeting and at one point we realize we're having a problem. I think, though, that 10 meetings with witnesses and report-writing is achievable, as per the schedule we have, and if it's not, being reasonable people we can revisit it at a subsequent meeting, before the 10th one—

The Chair: With respect, I may read—

Mr. Dan Vandal: —assuming you're reasonable.

The Chair: When I read your motion, Mr. Vandal, looking at the way it was written I thought that you were speaking of 10 meetings for hearing witnesses, gathering evidence, etc.—because I read it with the commas and semi-colons and stuff—and that then, once those 10 meetings are over, we would look at the drafting of the report and the tabling of the report in the House.

That's how I saw it fitting in. The problem we have is that we still have to finish a report that is extremely important. We discussed at our last meeting finishing our report and said that we hoped we

could finish it today and tomorrow, but unless we agree to extended hours, I don't think we will.

Then we would move straight into this looking at scope, etc., which I didn't count, based on reading grammatically the commas and stuff, as being meant to be part of the hearing of the witnesses. I thought it was a "scope of" meeting thing that we always do. It could take one meeting; it could take one hour, if we're all in agreement with a lot of things and if the analyst—I'm putting him on the spot here—gives us the instructions he thinks we need to move across into this nicely.

Then we get 10 meetings, and I think the "as necessary extended hours" means that it may be that we say, instead of doing two meetings on a Tuesday and Thursday, that we'll do three hours' worth of meetings on a Tuesday and Thursday in order to fit in the kinds of things we need and then get this put away.

I really feel that we have had the patience of Job with some people like Mr. Van Loan and Mr. Vandal and a whole bunch of people who are waiting for now for almost—what?—six or seven months to even get into their studies.

I just would like to see us finish the work of this committee this year, and that means going into the fall. We talked again at the last meeting that going into the fall we would deal with all of our other studies and put everything to bed in the meantime.

Mr. Nantel.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

The motion adopted by the House specifies a deadline for tabling the report, November 23, I believe. Therefore, I don't see why we have to work on it right away.

If we sit until 6:15 the evening of June 23, we will have at most 14 meetings left, if I'm not mistaken. That gives us just enough time to do our work. We have the report on the media, the report on museums, the report Ms. Dabrusin wants to propose, and the wrapping up of the other study. On top of that, we would like to meet with the minister at some point. We certainly have a full plate.

Given all that, could we not postpone this until the fall?

I believe the motion adopted in the House specified that we had to report back by November.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Madam Chair, may I respond?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Vandal. You may answer the question, and then I have Mr. Samson.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

The motion refers to 240 calendar days from the adoption of the motion, which was about three weeks ago. If you add the 240 calendar days, that brings us into November.

We are quite a bit behind on our studies, particularly those dealing with museums, sports, and indigenous peoples. The idea behind the motion is to finish the media study and deal with motion M-103 and, then, tackle the rest. It's just that we have a heck of a lot of work to do.

• (1650)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: May I respond?

[English]

The Chair: You have a second question, because Mr. Samson is next and then Mr. Anderson, but go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: That's very kind. I'll keep it short.

In that case, I would ask committee staff to tell us whether that's realistic and how many meetings it would take. I don't want us to wind up in another hodgepodge, where we meet five times, break, and pick things up in September. Enough is enough, as I see it. We have to clamp down and take a disciplined approach.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I think it's doable with extended sitting hours.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: You know my opinion on that.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Samson.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you.

To Mr. Nantel's point, I would say that we have time restrictions, a deadline, and studies to complete. As committee members, we must make sure that wisdom prevails. We do indeed need to put a structure in place and set aside enough time to hear from witnesses and draft the report. I think it's entirely reasonable to say that between now and the deadline, we can spread out the work over 10 meetings. If a problem arises, we'll take that into account.

I, for one, was not elected a member of Parliament to do half a study on the media and then move on to another topic. It seems to me that we are all professionals with extensive support to do the research and report on our findings. It is our job to decide on the individuals and groups we want to meet with, in accordance with very specific categories; to hear from those people; to ask questions; to report on our findings in a professional manner; and to table the final report in Parliament by the deadline, if not before. If we make just the right adjustments, I think we can complete this work by the end of the sitting in late June. If we make that our goal and structure the work accordingly, we should be able to make it happen.

I respect what Mr. Reid said, but we could debate the issue for two, even three, years. What matters, though, is that we structure the work appropriately, do it effectively and efficiently, and stick to the time frames. We've done some fairly serious work on the reports dealing with the media, women in sport, and so forth. We have no choice but to structure our work to make sure we accomplish what we need to within a limited amount of time.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a suggestion, or maybe a couple of them, that might work with the committee, but I just want to go back. It was Ms. Khalid who moved the motion, and she spoke to it a couple of times.

She said a couple of things. At one point she said we need to make "certain that all voices are able to be heard", and included words about shedding "light on areas in which the freedom of speech of Canadians belonging to racial and religious minorities is currently curtailed".

We have a pile of things here that we need to do and need to cover. Ms. Khalid even talked about taking a look at the charter rights that people have been given. It is one of the responsibilities of this committee to examine those, so that the government has a better idea how they might enforce them.

Another Liberal MP talked about the need to re-evaluate language, saying that we need to talk about language around this motion.

If we're going to go into those areas, we're certainly not going to have enough time with six to 10 meetings to do so. I would like to make an amendment—I'm going to propose it in a couple of minutes—that we just remove the clause "devote a maximum of 10 meetings to the study, using extended hours as necessary", at least until we have our scope meeting. We're going to sit down perhaps this Thursday or perhaps a little bit later to try to put parameters around this study.

What is it that we're trying to do? What are the goals here? There's no possible way we're going to be able to achieve all the things that are on this page in six or 10 meetings. At some point—

• (1655)

The Chair: And your amendment, Mr. Anderson...?

Mr. David Anderson: I haven't made it yet. I'm just giving notice that I'm going to do that, but the reality is that we are going to have to do something other than what this motion has said in order to cover it effectively. We're going to have to pick two or three areas of it that we can actually do, because there are six or seven things there. If you add in talking about language, which one of the Liberal MPs had wanted to do, and if you talk about making sure all voices are heard, we're going to be here for a while. I think we need to sit down with a scoping meeting and figure out what it is that we are going to attempt to reach on this.

I think that taking this clause out, as I'm going to suggest in a couple of minutes, actually removes the restrictions we have on ourselves right from the beginning. We have 240 days to get this done, but the reality is that we should not be restricting ourselves before we even sit down and talk about what is the content of our report and our committee hearings.

We have a maximum of six to 10 hearings, apparently, so far, with six meetings, and probably a maximum of 36 witnesses. Look at the six or seven things we've been assigned to do. You're going to divide that among 36 witnesses. It's just going to be bouncing a stone right off the top of something. I guess I still have that question: can it be done?

I would make a suggestion on timing, if you folks want to wrap up a couple of things. I think we have two meetings before the Easter break. We have Thursday and next Tuesday. I think next Thursday is going to be seen as a Friday, if I'm understanding correctly. There are two meetings. Does that give you the time to wrap up a couple of these things that you've been working on for such a long period of time? If it does, perhaps you can get them out of the way. We can come back after Easter, have our scoping meeting, our witness meeting, and then begin to take a look at this study after that.

The Chair: All right. Before I go to Mr. Waugh, who is next on the speakers list, I'd like to answer a couple of your questions.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay.

The Chair: Have you finished? You were going to bring your—

Mr. David Anderson: Well, before I lose the table, I'd like to make the amendment, so go ahead.

The Chair: Okay.

I just want to say that the reason I have repeated over and over that we can extend our hours, that we can work, is that there's nothing that says these two weeks for Easter are a holiday. We are MPs. We work. Other committees work through it. Last week, when we had the week off, one of my colleagues emailed me something or other and then said he couldn't talk to me on that because he was at a standing committee meeting in the holiday.

I don't want us to ever walk away from the idea that we could work during holidays. Other committees do it. I've done it. I've been here for 22 years. I've done it time and time again. It is in fact in the standing committee rules that one can do this as a standing committee. I'm suggesting that we try to really discuss if we cannot fit this in by extending our hours and by maybe even looking at... We have two weeks off coming up, the weeks of the 18th and the 25th. You know how everybody likes to say that teachers take a whole summer off and never do anything; we don't want people suggesting that as MPs we take all these weeks off and never do anything. We could come for one day and spend five hours.

The other thing is that you don't need to have four people presenting per meeting. I have been at standing committee meetings in the past where we've had round tables. In other words, we would say "let's just do the academics", who were going to give us definitions and so on. They can be a round table; they don't present, but it is an interactive thing where we ask them questions pertinent to what we're doing and they answer them.

There are a lot of ways in which we can conduct this study within the allotted time if we decide that's what we really want to do. I'm suggesting this because as a chair I feel that I've gone through this for all this while and we're still putting a lot of people on hold for this. They have been waiting. When we come back—and who knows when in September we're coming back—we have until November.

We don't have a lot of time to get other people's things done. The other studies are waiting.

I must say that Mr. Van Loan has been extremely generous with us, because we have bumped him over and over. We still have Ms. Dabrusin, and we have Mr. Van Loan, and we have to finish stuff this year.

Anyway, I'm saying that there are ways, Mr. Anderson, in which we can cut our coats to fit the cloth, as my mother used to say. We can fit our work into the time we have.

Mr. Waugh—

Oh, I'm sorry. Would you like to move your amendment now?

• (1700)

Mr. David Anderson: Yes, I would like to move the amendment

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Waugh. The amendment will have to take precedence.

All right, would you please read what it would be like? We then have to debate the amendment and vote on it.

Just a second. Before we do so, I notice that Mr. Waugh and Mr. Anderson are discussing what they're going to do. Maybe we could take a three-minute break for everybody to talk about how they see this and what they want to do with it.

Mr. Nantel, you can speak to yourself.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Waugh: That's what we always do on this side.

The amendment, then, would look like this, if you don't mind.

The Chair: I think we're taking three minutes for people to chat.

• (1700)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1710)

The Chair: Are we ready to resume the meeting?

We have an amendment from Mr. Anderson on the table.

Mr. Anderson, would you read the amendment? Or the clerk can read it. I understand that you spoke to the clerk about it.

Mr. David Anderson: Absolutely, if he would like.

The Chair: Then we will discuss and debate it, if there is any debate on the amendment. Then we will vote on the amendment, and then we will vote on the motion as amended.

Andrew.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Bartholomew Chaplin): Mr. Anderson has moved that the motion be amended by deleting these words:

that the Committee devote a maximum of 10 meetings to the study, using extended hours as necessary

Shall I read it out?

The Chair: How it would read if adopted? Yes, thank you, Andrew.

The Clerk: I will dispense with the reading of the resolution of the House. This would read that:

The Committee commence a study as requested in paragraph (c) of the motion referenced above; that the Committee schedule witnesses to appear such that it would complete gathering necessary evidence and give instructions to the Committee analysts to draft a report with the objective of reporting back to the House its findings and recommendations.

The Chair: Mr. Nantel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: As I see it—

[*English*]

The Chair: On the amendment, please. We're only discussing the amendment.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Oh yes, absolutely, on the amendment.

[*Translation*]

The amendment is problematic because it removes the only parameter: time. What can we realistically accomplish given the schedule? It set a time limit, without which, we'll be looking at another endless study. We could hear from 300 witnesses if we so wished.

What parameter do we use, then? We have to replace the deadline with another parameter. If not time, then what? That is my question for the member who put forward the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, you make a point, Mr. Nantel.

Mr. Vandal, you have to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Dan Vandal: To the amendment, I will first of all address the comments of Monsieur Nantel.

[*Translation*]

We still have 240 calendar days from the adoption of the motion. That gives us until November.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Right.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I think it's a reasonable amendment. We will accept it.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

I will call the vote on the amendment. Mr. Nantel's opposition is duly noted.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now we will vote on the amended motion. Do you need me to read the amended motion again? We voted yes to the amendment.

Mr. David Anderson: Can we still discuss the motion?

The Chair: Well, we can discuss—

Mr. David Anderson: Before we vote, we can still have a—

The Chair: We can still have a discussion if you have other things to ask about the motion, but—

Mr. David Anderson: The amendment has passed.

The Chair: The amendment has passed, yes.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay. I wanted to make a point on the motion itself, because we're talking about scoping it and those kinds of things. This is actually not an order of the House. It's not a government demand that the committee do its thing. If you look at item (c) at the beginning, you'll see that it talks about requesting that the standing committee.... It does not direct the standing committee that this is what we have to do.

When it comes to doing our scoping, I think we need to sit down and, if we're going to do a good study, take a look at which parts of this the committee is going to be capable of doing. It's a request. It's not an order that we have to do each and every one.

The Chair: At the moment, I think that would be a discussion. Right now, we have to pass the motion. We don't have to pass the motion if we want to study it.... We are just going to pass a motion so that we can get on with the analysts looking at the scope and doing all these kinds of things.

Can we vote on the motion?

As I said to Mr. Anderson, we can discuss the scope of the motion in another meeting. Today we just want to pass the motion as amended.

Those in favour of the motion as amended?

(Motion as amended agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

Good. That's that.

We will get to discussing the scope, etc., at another meeting. In the meantime, there is some other business we need to attend to.

As you know, we had passed a motion from Monsieur Nantel that we ask the minister to come and present on the main estimates. We have until May 31 to report to the House, so we need to bring the minister in prior to that.

The minister responded to the letter I wrote on behalf of the committee. She said that she has a conflict regarding any appearance on a Tuesday or a Thursday between now and May 31 because of her timelines. She is asking whether we would consider meeting as a committee on Wednesday, May 10, or Wednesday, May 17, between 12 noon and one o'clock. It would be a one-hour meeting to do the estimates.

I need you to think about that. The minister is suggesting that Tuesdays and Thursdays are already booked for her between now and May 31, but she could look at Wednesday, May 10, from noon to one o'clock, or Wednesday, May 17, from noon to one o'clock.

Can I have some discussion on this? Or will I just pick a day and ask people to support it?

Mr. Nantel, do you have something to say about this?

• (1715)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: I have to check my agenda.

The Chair: Mr. Maguire, since you're the usual person on this committee, do you have anything to speak to on this?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Are we going to let him back in?

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: We would have to consider that. Is your motion to exclude Mr. Maguire...?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Would you prefer May 10 or May 17?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: May 10.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Chair, that would be my suggestion. Just pick May 10.

The Chair: Mr. Waugh is suggesting that we meet May 10, from noon until one o'clock. Does anyone disagree with that timeline? I seem to be getting consensus around the room. Nobody is lifting a hand to speak.

An hon. member: We are agreed.

The Chair: We will agree, then, and I will ask the clerk to let the minister know that on Wednesday, May 10, from 12 noon until 1 p. m., we will hear the minister on the main estimates.

Good. That's another piece of business put to rest.

I would like to suggest, since we've passed a motion for the study, that we now spend the next few meetings to hopefully finish this media study. We've gone page by page, clause by clause, and line by line on this already. I know where we stopped and where we will move to if we want to finish our study so that we can put it to bed.

Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Chair, I have a proposal that you're probably not going to like.

Since we didn't meet our target of February, when we were going to have this report out on media and communities, my suggestion would be this. Mr. Reid did bring up a good point, that motion 103 was very important in the House, and the media did grab it. There has been a lot going on in the last couple of months with the media, and there will be more in the coming months.

I'm wondering if we could move instead to motion 103 right away and delay our media and communities, because we've lost.

An hon. member: Wow.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: We've lost. We can go into motion 103 now, study it hard until the end of June, and do our report in June on motion 103. That would give us at least 10 meetings. We have 14 that we've talked about, from now until the end of June, so we could really study motion 103.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It's a suggestion.

The Chair: Mr. Waugh is making a suggestion. May I have feedback?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It's a suggestion. We have kicked the can here for so long on media.

I don't get the questions that you get on media anymore. We've wasted our window of opportunity. I'm saying that now we move on, do motion 103, and come back to media and communities in the fall.

• (1720)

The Chair: I would like to clarify, though, Mr. Waugh. There's not a day that goes by that everybody is not waiting for this.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Well, I know that in Vancouver—

The Chair: I think they think we don't want to do it.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes, I know—

The Chair: I think they think it's difficult for us.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes. We've missed a window, though, as you've noticed in Vancouver—particularly Vancouver, with the two newspapers and the massive layoffs they've had in the last 10 days, and the same with the television station.

They're going to look at the Broadcasting Act anyway. We heard that when you were talking about the budget. You're going to look at the Broadcasting Act, we're going to look at copyright, so why don't we suspend the media and communities study until the fall? You can look at the Broadcasting Act and at the Copyright Act, and then we can come out in the fall and deal with this at the point we now are.

That would be my suggestion.

The Chair: Now, is there any discussion on this suggestion?

Yes, Ms. Dabrusin.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Just because we're talking about a report that we've been working on in camera and are now in a public session, I would suggest that any discussion we are having about that report be moved in camera.

The Chair: Is that movement in camera okay with everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I accept a motion that we move in camera, and we'll suspend for a minute while we do it.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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