



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 127**

Thursday, October 31, 2024

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Chair: Mr. Patrick Weiler





## Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Thursday, October 31, 2024

• (0820)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

This is meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

As always, I want to start by recognizing that we are gathered on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people and by expressing gratitude that we're able to do the important work of this committee on lands that they have stewarded since time immemorial.

Before getting into the substance of today's meeting, I just want to deal with some unfinished business from our last meeting. At the end of the meeting, Mr. Genuis raised a point of privilege. For members' recollection, he said:

...we had an instance today where ministers were asked direct questions by multiple different members of the opposition. They refused to answer some; they prevaricated in [multiple responses] to others. I believe you will find that this is a matter touching on the privileges of members. If you so find, I'm prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Witnesses are not allowed to just refuse...direct questions. Whether they are ministers or other witnesses, that is the rule of the process—hence, the question of privilege. I look forward to your ruling on that.

I just want to get back to that first. I wasn't quite prepared to make a decision on this at the time because, as many members will know, there are lots of things that are happening in committee at any one time for the chair to be on top of. I wanted to have a chance to review the blues to see what was said and the answers. I hope members know that I took this very seriously. I try to do everything I can to ensure that members have the appropriate time to ask their questions and to get substantial answers.

I think that in this case the ministers did answer the questions. They were maybe not the answers that members were looking for. They were maybe not specific and direct answers, but I do believe that the ministers did provide answers to those questions. In many cases, ministers were actually interrupted in the process of answering those questions, or there were very long questions and then the ministers, as they were answering those questions, were interrupted.

I think there were many questions that were answered where there may not have been a very simple answer to them, even if a yes or no question was asked.

While I do very much sympathize with this motion, and I do believe it's important for ministers and all witnesses to do their very

best to answer those questions, I don't believe that this meets the threshold of being a violation of the privilege of members. There will always be opportunities for members and the committee to reinvoke these ministers or other witnesses to reappear before the committee to answer similar or different questions, if it is the will of the committee to do that.

My ruling is that this is not actually a point of privilege.

I have Mr. Battiste first here with his hand up.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Thank you for that, Mr. Chair.

I agree with you. While the questions being asked seem like they have very straightforward answers, I know that this very topic that Mr. Genuis has alluded to and asked the minister about over and over is actually being discussed in another committee right now.

The basis of his questions is that the minister should or should not know who is an indigenous person in Canada. With indigeneity, there's no one term or description of who is and who isn't indigenous. It covers Inuit, Métis and first nations. Mr. Genuis, by asking questions that seem as simple as “Is this person indigenous? Should this person pay back money?”, pre-assumes that our minister should be able to determine who is and isn't an indigenous person.

The United Nations, in article 33 of the UNDRIP, makes it clear that it is for the nations to decide who belongs to that nation. The UNDRIP is law in Canada. It's important, when we are looking at implementing the UNDRIP, that we don't expect ministers to break from that and to start making claims and answering questions based on their beliefs, rather than what the law is or what those nations say. That's a very paternal way of looking at it. Our government does its best to ensure that paternalistic thinking in the past isn't reflected today.

While they may seem like non-answers for Mr. Genuis on a very complicated subject, the minister was, in fact, doing what's required under the law, under the UNDRIP and under reconciliation. For anyone to state that she was willingly not answering a question that was straightforward and simple is just disingenuous.

I know that's not the case with my colleague, Lori Idlout, who asked questions and didn't get the answers she would have liked, or who thought that they could have been answered better. I'm not going to say that her questions...or diminish the frustration that she has in that.

However, I felt that Mr. Genuis was definitely way off in terms of trying to make something very straightforward that isn't very straightforward in his privilege motion, which seems to be presumptive in saying that ministers should be able to determine who is and who isn't indigenous and the consequences of their indigeneity when it comes to procurement.

Thank you.

● (0825)

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

Next, I have Mr. Schmale.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your decision, but unfortunately, we disagree. We'd like to challenge the chair.

**The Chair:** We're going to call a vote, then.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Dubois-Richard):** Voting “yes” means that you sustain the decision. Voting “no” means that you want to overturn the decision.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Once again, I don't understand what you mean by.... I would vote that the chair did not break any rules.

If I am voting against this motion, then I'm voting against the challenge of the chair. Is that correct?

**The Clerk:** Yes.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Voting “yes” to sustain the decision is voting with the chair.

**The Clerk:** You say that the decision of the chair is correct if you vote “yes”.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** First, I have Mr. Schmale.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you very much, Chair.

On that note, because we are dealing with this business, I'd like to move a motion, if I could. I move:

That Minister Hadju and Minister Vandal be asked to return to the committee within two weeks and for two hours to answer questions, and that, if they do not return as requested, the chair be instructed to report to the House a recommendation that the committee be empowered to order the ministers' attendance, from time to time, as it sees fit.

**The Chair:** A motion has been moved. I don't know if that will be circulated to members. That would be helpful, but I think it is fairly clear. Let me know if we have any debate.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Did we get this in advance under the normal 48-hour deadline? I don't remember seeing this.

**The Chair:** We'll just pause for one second, Mr. Battiste.

Mr. Battiste, to your question, this was not circulated in advance, but it relates to the business that we're dealing with here, so that type of notice is not required in these types of circumstances.

In any event, it would be helpful to circulate that to members here.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Yes. I sent it to the clerk in both official languages.

● (0830)

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I have a question. For clarity, this is not a notice of a motion. This is the actual motion that we're talking about, and it is in order. Are you ruling it in order?

I'm just trying to follow this. We had already voted on the motion of privilege. That has been dealt with, I would assume, because the vote was decided. However, I'm having a hard time agreeing that this is in order, as the motion of privilege was dealt with. This is really not a motion tied to the motion of privilege.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. There was some misinterpretation here of what was said. I think there was a little bit of confusion about what was brought forward.

We have dealt with this. That was actually completed with the vote. There's a lack of clarity here, but this would have to be a notice, because it was finished. I apologize for that confusion.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** If you're ruling that it has to be put on notice, then I will put that motion on notice and it should be circulated.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That is duly noted. We will be able to return to this on Monday, I assume, when that proper notice period has been exceeded.

With that, unless there are any other questions, I would like to get to the matter at hand today.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Before we go on, Chair, I'd like to challenge that decision, please.

**The Chair:** Great. It's one of those mornings here, it seems.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Can I speak to it?

**The Chair:** With that, Mr. Schmale, you may speak to it.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to quickly talk about this motion. Obviously, I think many members around this table felt that the answers were not sufficient for the questions asked. I think they were pretty straightforward questions. Given the fact that there is an indigenous procurement program and the minister herself had difficulty answering questions or avoided answering questions on some of the specifics of the program, we as the opposition felt that was very concerning. That's why we're calling on Minister Hajdu.

Of course, my colleague Mr. Zimmer, who had some questions for Minister Vandal, felt the same way, that his questions were not adequately answered.

I think it's imperative that we get the ministers back as soon as possible and drill down on some of these issues. It's affecting the lives of many, and I'm sure they want the answers too.

Thank you.

● (0835)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Schmale.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lemire, you now have the floor.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to use hockey lingo in my answer.

I believe there's been a violation, because I, too, feel that my questions haven't been answered. I don't get the impression that files moved forward or that the minister's vision was any clearer in terms of her intentions and her leadership on a number of files. That said, I wasn't necessarily in favour of bringing a question of privilege to the House of Commons. That would be like suspending a player or giving him a major penalty. It seems a bit excessive to me.

However, I think it would be entirely reasonable to invite the minister back. That's why I supported the chair's ruling. That said, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I will also support the motion to invite the minister back.

That will give us a chance to ask him questions, and I hope the answers will result in a clearer understanding for us and the first nations people watching us.

**The Chair:** I really like your analogy, Mr. Lemire.

[*English*]

Next is Mr. Shields.

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think I asked a fairly simple question and didn't get an answer. The minister didn't have it. I think it would be an opportunity for the minister to return with that answer.

Secondly, committees are masters of their own destiny here. With this clause in it, it does leave the opportunity for the committee to actually decide what to do with this request.

There are two parts to it. It's a recognition that we didn't get enough answers or the answers that we were asking for. Then in the second part of it, it still retains the power to...the finality of it, for their appearance. It puts the power back on the committee to make decisions, as it should.

I think that's why this is a good motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Shields.

Next on the list, I have Ms. Idlout.

**Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP):** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Chairperson.

I want to speak about this for this reason. I want to put this out there because questions have arisen, and they pertain to the work we are doing. When the ministers don't answer our questions, it hinders the work we do. For example, if we get the correct or right answers for our questions, we can find solutions or strategize.

I asked Minister Vandal about three points. If he was able to answer my questions, I would be able to get more proper information. I would be able to ask questions of my constituents, and I would be able to ask more questions at this committee. However, when they don't answer questions, it essentially stops my role as a member of Parliament. When they don't answer the questions, I am not effectively doing my job.

I agree that the ministers should be answering questions. If they are properly answering the questions, we as members of Parliament would be able to effectively do our work. We need to inform our constituents of the work we are doing. When they are not answering questions, there are roadblocks.

I urge the ministers to answer questions so we can effectively do our work as members of Parliament. For the work we are doing today in the committee, I would like to see this.

● (0840)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Idlout.

Next on our speaking list we have Mr. Battiste.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's important that we get time with the ministers. It's important for members to be able to ask questions of ministers.

As Mr. Shields said, committees are masters of their own domain. However, today we showed up looking to talk about first nations' clean water. As someone who's coming to you from my first nations community, a Mi'kmaq reserve, I can tell you with confidence that probably the majority of communities out there would like us to resume discussion on first nations' clean water, ensuring that, in the future, governments will not be able to abandon their duties on this and that they're going to have regulations. This is what this committee would best spend its time on.

In terms of having questions put forth to ministers and for my colleagues to be able to do their jobs, I put it in three parts.

First of all, the Conservatives are bringing up a question that is currently under study by another committee, which would make answering these questions, before that committee concludes its study, in poor form for ministers. Before the end of an actual study that's going on, ministers are being asked to answer questions.

As for my colleague, Sébastien, one of the things I would be glad to arrange is a personal sit-down with the minister, where he can have an actual discussion and a dialogue. Five minutes or two and a half minutes to ask a question rarely gets good answers and a really good back-and-forth.

If we were genuine in terms of saying, "Here are some of the questions that we have, and we need to have answers," I'm sure the ministers would.... I can arrange gladly for them to sit down with Ms. Idlout and Mr. Lemire in terms of getting answers to specific questions that wouldn't be constricted by the time that we have here for them. I'm more than happy to do that.

However, in order for us to maximize the best time that we have for this, I would not ask ministers to show up and prolong what first nations have been seeking for generations, which is access to clean water. I've done my best in the past not to be hyperpartisan in this committee. We've been very collaborative in the past, but I would ask members to think about what this meeting, and what bringing the ministers in over and over again, would do to delay this important work that we have to do on first nations' clean water.

I don't think any Canadian out there would ask us to have a few minutes of questions for a minister over clean water for first nations communities in Canada.

Thank you.

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

On the speaking list I have Mrs. Atwin, Mr. Carr, Mr. McLeod and then Mr. Zimmer.

Next, we'll go to Mrs. Atwin.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I'll cede my time to Mr. Carr.

**Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I guess there are a couple of things here.

The first is that I think Mr. Battiste just made a very reasonable suggestion, which was to help facilitate a conversation with colleagues around the table with the ministers. That would allow us to bypass the rigidity of the structure that we often have during witness testimony at committee. If the intent is genuinely to engage in a conversation, then the ability to do that is there.

If the desire is to have ministers in front of the camera and to take partisan shots, then that's a different story. Ministers, I'm sure, would be happy to reappear in front of the committee during the study of this legislation, for example. However, I take some opposition to the assertions here, which I think you referenced in your ruling a few moments ago, Mr. Chair, that there is a difference between not liking the answers to questions that you ask and getting answers from the ministers.

On a technicality, Mr. Chair, as you may know, I'm the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, so I was a bit curious about the admissibility of this particular motion, not by virtue of the fact that it was introduced outside of committee business or the relevancy of the discussion at hand, but more so that it asks for the committee to compel ministers. I've checked with the law clerks here. There is nothing in a standing order that gives a committee the power to compel a minister to appear. If my colleagues in opposition can point to the standing order or the precedent that exists to allow for that to occur, I'd love to hear it.

In the absence of that—and perhaps we're getting there—my suggestion would be that we very quickly move to amend the motion as is in order to make it admissible, in my view, and in line with what the Standing Orders allow a committee to undertake vis-à-vis the inviting of witnesses. If not, then my suggestion would be—and I'll come back to the mic if necessary—that we adjourn the conversation so that we can get on with the very important business

of leveraging the expertise and the guidance of our officials, who are here to help us undertake the study on Bill C-61, which matters very much to all of us.

Again, my hope is that we can very quickly amend this and make it consistent with Standing Orders that currently exist. Otherwise, I would recommend to my colleagues that we adjourn debate on this, and if not, then I would like to get a ruling from our law clerks, who just so happen to be here today because of the study on Bill C-61, to clarify for us whether the motion, as currently written, is actually legitimate insofar as it is asking the committee to do something it is not actually within its rights to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (0845)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Carr.

Next on the list, I have Mr. McLeod.

Just so that members know, Mr. Zimmer will be next, then Mr. Lemire and then Mr. Shields.

Mr. McLeod.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be quick.

Mr. Carr covered some of what I wanted to ask. I don't have a copy of the motion, so I'm not sure if the wording was “request”, “ask”, “order”.... Maybe we can get that. I'm not sure what exactly we're asking.

I'm assuming that, if we had the ministers come and we're not happy with the answers, then we're going to ask them to come back again. If we're still not happy, then we're going to ask them to come back again. I'm not sure if that's permissible, but that's likely what could happen if we're going to keep asking ministers to come back and we're not satisfied with their answers.

It leads me to my next point, which is what happens with our study days. Today is going to be taken up with this discussion. A minister's visit that we didn't schedule is going to be added. Are we adding to the study? Is this part and parcel of the bigger study and what we're trying to achieve?

I'm not sure if the ministers have the time, in a two-hour period when we have three ministers, to provide the detailed answers that some of the members are looking for. Maybe we need to add a written question component to this committee's agenda because it's getting pretty complicated. I guess the ask could go to the ministers to come back. I'm not sure if they'll agree because that's opening the door to their being required to come back on and on.

Those are my points.

● (0850)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. McLeod.

Next we'll be going to Mr. Zimmer.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** I have a couple of things. I'll make the amendment as requested. The amended text is as follows:

That Minister Hajdu and Minister Vandal be asked to return to the committee within two weeks, and for two hours, to answer questions, and that if they do not return as requested, the chair be instructed to report to the House that the committee strongly requests the ministers' attendance from time to time as it sees fit.

That is our amended text for the motion.

I still would like to speak to something Mr. Battiste said, but I guess now that this amendment is on the table, I don't know where you want to go from here.

**The Chair:** Again, it'd be nice if that amendment could be circulated just so members....

Members should have that. I'll just pause for a second to make sure members have that in their inboxes.

It has been circulated, so you should have that in your inbox. I'll just give a moment for people to have a quick look at it.

I had Mr. Carr first and then Mr. Shields.

Did you have your hand up as well?

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Yes, I signalled you when Bob was talking.

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll start with Mr. Schmale then. I apologize.

First, we'll have Mr. Schmale and then Mr. Carr.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to Mr. Zimmer for amending that motion.

I know he has more to say on this, but to echo some of the comments, let's get this to a vote on the amendment, to the amended motion if it passes and then continue the business of the day.

We're ready to vote so we don't hold anything more up. Let's go.

**The Chair:** Thank you Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Carr.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad Mr. Schmale brought up no further delays because a concern that I have with the amendment is that it still allows for us to delay the passage of Bill C-61.

I have no concern with the ministers reappearing. My concern is that the timeline is going to likely overlap with the ongoing study that we're doing on Bill C-61. We have a substantial number of amendments.

I would be open to a further amendment that could say, "upon the completion of Bill C-61". My concern is that this is an incredibly important piece of legislation that I think we all want to pass. The more that we kick it down the road with interruptions like this—despite the fact that it's on an important matter, which is the appearance of ministers—the more we jeopardize this important piece of legislation that first nations across the country are looking for.

I'm not going to formally move this as an amendment. I'm just informing the committee. My recommendation would be that we

adopt a motion that says, "following the completion of Bill C-61"—which would mean clause-by-clause and its subsequent passage—we then ask the ministers to appear.

If we don't do that, then the ministers will appear and anything can happen. We can get into a filibuster. We can get into a long, drawn-out conversation. Again, we jeopardize the ability for this committee to swiftly deal with Bill C-61, which is not only a critically important piece of legislation but also has an immense and complicated number of amendments that are going to take us a substantial amount of time.

Further to that, I think that as lawmakers what we understand with the complexity of this is that, if we begin going through a third of Bill C-61, then ministers appear and then we go back to Bill C-61 at the next meeting or meeting after that, we'd be saying, "Where were we on that? Oh, yeah, we did this." We'd lose our rhythm and we'd lose our understanding. It becomes more complicated for the clerks.

Again, my urging to the committee is to change the wording. I'm not officially putting that forward, but it's to change the wording so it says, "following the completion of Bill C-61", the ministers appear. If we are all serious about getting Bill C-61 passed expediently, then move this a little further down the line. You'll get your opportunity to talk to the ministers, but let us pass the legislation first.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (0855)

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

Next on the list, I have Mr. Shields.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I read it, the last clause of this motion is, "attendance, from time to time, as it sees fit." That means the committee would determine at what time it sees fit.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** It says, "within two weeks", though, at the end.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** No, get your legal book out. Those are two different clauses. The second one puts the flexibility on this committee to make the decision as to when that would happen. Read it carefully. It would be the committee that would determine this. The request to the House is in two weeks, but if you read that last clause, it says that it's then the committee that determines when, "as it sees fit".

**Mr. Ben Carr:** The "report to the House" is totally unnecessary.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Whichever it is, there are two clauses in here and the flexibility still rests in the hands of this committee regarding determining when they would appear.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** Take the “two weeks” out and it's good by me.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** It's still there. It's still up to the committee to determine when they would appear.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Shields.

On the list, I have Mrs. Atwin, Ms. Idlout and Mr. Battiste.

Next, we'll go to Mrs. Atwin.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will echo what a lot of my colleagues are saying here.

I cannot support, in any way, anything that would jeopardize the timeline we have for Bill C-61. This is critically important. Indigenous communities have been waiting long enough for this. I think we owe it to them to make this our first priority and to focus on this piece.

If the concern here is about the indigenous procurement piece, we're studying that at OGGO this afternoon. You're more than welcome to join us there and ask some questions. I'm happy, also, to facilitate any further questions or [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] with ministers. Of course, we want to get the answers to questions for colleagues. That's critically important as well.

I think we're close on this. However, for me, any iota of an inclination to possibly use this to delay Bill C-61.... I cannot, under any terms, support that. It's very critical that we're very clear with this. I understand what Mr. Shields is trying to say. However, to me, it still looks like there's that two-week time frame. Again, because of the tight turnaround for Bill C-61's clause-by-clause, I have to see that language tightened up in order to have that assurance.

I think the colleague going after me might be putting forward a subamendment, if I'm not mistaken. It would be to have that clarification piece around the timeline for finishing Bill C-61 first.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Before I go to the next speaker, Mrs. Atwin, are you moving a subamendment or just suggesting one at this time?

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** I kind of danced around it a bit.

I will move the subamendment to insert the piece around finishing the legislation of Bill C-61.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

People are speaking without using the mic. There are discussions going on back and forth. I can only hear the person who is on the microphone, so I'm missing half of what's being discussed here.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod. That's a point very well taken.

As much as possible, can members make sure they speak when they have the floor and use the microphone, so all members can participate as well as the members who are not here in person and joining by video conference?

Ms. Atwin, you are moving a subamendment here. Could you read out the subamendment for members' certainty, before we move to debate on it?

• (0900)

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Yes. Wait one second. I'm waiting for the order of where to put it.

It would simply be, “be asked to return to committee within two weeks...following the conclusion of Bill C-61 legislation at INAN.”

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mrs. Atwin.

Next on the subamendment, my list here says we have Mr. Battiste, Mr. Zimmer and Mr. Carr.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** I support that subamendment. It would go a long way in showing the sincerity of this committee and that we're not trying to filibuster C-61. We're actually concerned about what the genuine point of the original motion is and that it not get in the way of first nations finally accessing legislation that protects clean water for them.

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

Next, we have Mr. Zimmer.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Thank you, Chair.

What troubles me in this conversation about what Mr. Carr has said is that what's keeping the Liberal government from bringing water to first nations communities is this bill.

You've been in government for nine years and you still haven't got it done. You were supposed to get it done in 2021. Now you're pretending that this legislation is holding everything up. Your government could have had it done and should have had it done when you said you were going to have it done several years ago.

I would put forward to the committee that we do have witnesses here. We want to get to the legislation, to the amendments that we've talked about. Let's just get it going. Let's call the vote on the original motion.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mr. Zimmer. I'm afraid we have to deal with the subamendments that have been moved.

Next, I have Mr. Carr.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** I take Mr. Zimmer's point at face value, but whether or not he feels, or others feel, that the legislation could have come sooner doesn't negate the fact that it's here now and that what we're talking about is delaying it. Let's very clearly lay out what we're talking about.



The subamendment says we agree to invite the ministers back, because there have been concerns from some members about the clarity or transparency of their answers. Notwithstanding the fact that I disagree with that assessment, I respect members' rights and their ability to ask the ministers to come back.

What we're saying is, yes, let's do that. We agree. However, before we do that, let's conclude C-61. Let's conclude C-61 before we bring the ministers back. This is what I don't understand from my colleagues across the way. Why is it that they would have a concern with getting C-61 finished first? No one's disputing that the ministers ought to come back. Even if we disagree, we're accepting that. Just get C-61 done first.

The last point I would like to make is regarding something Mr. Shields said to me a few moments ago, and I don't quite understand this. The motion, as amended, says that the committee report to the House that "from time to time" ministers be invited. That's what we do. How do you think we invited the ministers two weeks ago? We didn't need a motion reported back to the House following through on something that some committee previously said—that from time to time we would invite the ministers—and then, in accordance with the written rule of that motion that went to the House, the ministers appeared. They appeared because we asked them to.

This is fluff. It's not necessary. I urge my colleagues to adopt the subamendment, amend the motion accordingly and invite the ministers back, but do it once we finish C-61. There's no hiding. There's no evasiveness. We agree the ministers should come. We just want C-61 finished first.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (0905)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Carr.

Next on the list, I have Mr. Battiste.

No...? Next on the list, I have Mr. Shields.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** Mr. Chair, I move all previous questions.

**The Chair:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Martin Shields:** That's all of them. "All previous questions" means we vote on every amendment and the main motion.

**The Chair:** Mr. Shields, I'm afraid we need to vote on the subamendment.

**Mr. Martin Shields:** That's what I'm saying: "all previous questions". That means all of them.

**The Chair:** For now, we need to finish the speaking list.

I have Mr. Melillo—

**Mr. Martin Shields:** No, I called the vote. If you want me to get the green book out, I'll go get it.

If I call the vote on all previous questions, we start voting now. Then we go amendment-amendment-amendment to the main motion.

**The Chair:** We're going to briefly suspend in order to look at this.

• (0905)

(Pause)

• (0905)

**The Chair:** I had a chance to peruse the green book. It's not the first time this week, I might add.

On page 1068, in chapter 20 on committees, it says:

The motion "That this question be now put" is known as the previous question. In committee, motions for the previous question are inadmissible.

With all of that said, I know we have one more person on the speaking list. Then, hopefully, we can get to a vote on this.

Mr. Melillo, you're the next and perhaps last.

No. We have Mr. Melillo, and after that Monsieur Lemire and then Ms. Idlout.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not sure if all members are back from the time out yet. Nonetheless, I appreciate the opportunity to take the floor.

I have a question about the subamendment brought forward by Ms. Atwin.

I understand we're still waiting for the text of it. I hope we'll be able to get that before we vote on it. As I heard it, my concern is that it places a two-week restriction on completing Bill C-61, which I think is very ambitious. I don't dispute the motive behind it—I'm getting the text now—but that would be a concern for me because, obviously, we have a lot of amendments, as Mr. Carr rightly pointed out. They're very technical, important amendments to improve the legislation and ensure it's the best it can be. I want to make sure this is the case.

I now have the text, so I will review it.

Thank you.

• (0910)

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

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, you have the floor.

[English]

After that, we'll have Ms. Idlout.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In my opinion, the issue is ministerial accountability. It's also important to point out that asking ministers questions is an opportunity for members of the opposition and the party in power to move issues forward and make sure the government is aware of things. Most importantly, public answers to these questions give us a clear idea of the ministers' intentions. They let us see if the private and public meetings we've held with them over the past few months have moved things forward. That's why it's important to get clear answers to our questions. That's not what happened at the last meeting, though.

I also get the impression that the Liberals are filibustering a bit today, even as they criticize us for not allowing the study of Bill C-61 to move forward. That's kind of ironic, because if we had simply settled this issue an hour ago, we would already be studying Bill C-61, and we wouldn't have wasted another meeting.

It's also worth noting that the government cannot be certain it will still be in power after the study of Bill C-61.

That said, the questions I asked at the last meeting call for public answers that will tell us clearly whether the government has a formally stated intention to move forward on issues that are important to first nations. We want to know if we can trust the process or if we need to keep putting pressure on the government.

For these reasons, I will not be supporting the subamendment, but I will be supporting the motion to have the ministers appear over the next two weeks.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

[English]

Next, I will go to Ms. Idlout.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

This was just brought up. It's 9:10. It's a subamendment. This highlights the bill, which I agree with because Bill C-61 is very important to me, but I do have a question.

Will there be an amendment? This amendment, as written, requires the chair to produce a report to Parliament with a strong request to the ministers. Is this normally the process, requesting the chair to produce a report to Parliament? Can you make this clearer?

**The Chair:** To quickly respond to Ms. Idlout's question, it's very rare to have this kind of a motion, but it's not out of order to do that.

Next on the list, I have Mr. Carr.

● (0915)

**Mr. Ben Carr:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I've just sent it to you. It's in your P9. Please share it with the clerk. I wasn't sure where to send it.

It's a subamendment that, if I understand correctly, has been discussed with some members of the opposition and may get us through the impasse.

I've sent this to you, Mr. Chair, in the hope you will get it very quickly to the clerk in order to get it to our colleagues. It effectively reads that Minister Hajdu and Minister Vandal be asked to return to the committee within two weeks and for two hours to answer questions, following the conclusion of C-61 legislation at INAN.

My understanding is that there have been some conversations with members of the opposition, so I'm proposing this subamendment with the hope that this breaks the impasse.

I know there was some confusion from colleagues, Mr. Chair, so while I have the floor, I will take a moment to put forward my two cents' worth.

The way I read this, I want to make clear my interpretation. First, "within two weeks and for two hours following the conclusion" doesn't mean we have to finish Bill C-61 within two weeks. It means that once Bill C-61 is finished, two weeks following that, they would be invited.

Just for clarity, if we have to strengthen that language, that's fine. Again, it's so nobody feels as though we're saying we have to finish Bill C-61 within a two-week period. It means that once it's done, two weeks after that the invitation would take place.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** My understanding is that we can't move another subamendment until we have voted on the one that's currently on the floor right now.

Monsieur Lemire, for clarity—I want to make sure, following Mr. McLeod's point—rather than talk across the committee room here, please make sure you have the floor before doing that.

It may be possible, if there is unanimous consent, for Mrs. Atwin to remove her subamendment and then this one could be dealt with, but that would be necessary first.

Next on the list, I have Ms. Idlout.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

First of all, I just want to thank you, Ben Carr, for the clarification.

I want to put it out there that this is a concern for me. Looking at the amendments for Bill C-61 is a large undertaking.

Will there be a delay when there's a two-week...? I agree with the request from the Conservatives for two weeks. If we are going to request that the ministers come back, they might not come back.

I just want you to be aware that I mostly agree with the Conservatives and the Bloc to request that the ministers come back in two weeks' time, because we need answers. When we don't get answers, our work is not able to go forward.

• (0920)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

Next on the speaking list, I have Mrs. Atwin.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm just seeking the unanimous consent to remove my subamendment.

(Subamendment withdrawn)

**The Chair:** With that, I guess we are.... I'm sorry. I'm going to pause for one second.

I'll move to Mr. Carr, who proposed a subamendment that couldn't be dealt with at the time.

**Mr. Ben Carr:** I won't repeat it, Mr. Chair.

Can members confirm they've received the subamendment from the clerk? Okay. It's just been sent.

I'm sorry, Lori. The one I proposed was inadmissible because Jenica's was there, but Jenica's has now been removed, so I'm going to move mine.

For the benefit of the committee, I will reread it, but it is in your inboxes now. I move:

That Minister Hajdu and Minister Vandal be asked to return to committee within two weeks, and for two hours, to answer questions following the conclusion of Bill C-61 legislation at INAN.

I'll move that subamendment, Mr. Chair.

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

Is there anybody who wants to speak on this, or should we go to a vote? It sounds like we have a vote. I'm not seeing any disagreement here.

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** We'll do a recorded division.

(Subamendment negated: yeas 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** To remind members, because I know there have been a lot of different motions circulating, I'll just read out what we are now going to debate. It is:

That Minister Hajdu and Minister Vandal be asked to return to the committee within two weeks, and for two hours, to answer questions, and that if they do not return as requested, the chair be instructed to report to the House that the committee strongly requests the ministers' attendance from time to time as it sees fit.

I see Mr. Battiste has his hand up, and then I see Mrs. Atwin.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Mr. Chair, I'm hoping we can pause this for five minutes, just so I can confirm with my team the implications of this wording.

**The Chair:** Absolutely. We'll suspend briefly here.

• (0920)

(Pause)

• (0945)

• (0945)

**The Chair:** Colleagues, I'm going to call this meeting back to order.

I understand there have been some discussions between the parties. I'm going to turn the floor over to Mr. Zimmer.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I'll withdraw my amendment to the motion. I think I'll actually ask for unanimous consent to withdraw that amendment to the motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Zimmer.

I'm going to look around to make sure we have unanimous consent for Mr. Zimmer to withdraw the amendment.

(Amendment withdrawn)

**The Chair:** I see Ms. Idlout has her hand up.

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

I move to amend the motion to read as follows:

That Minister Hajdu and Minister Vandal to be asked to return to the committee within two weeks for two hours to answer questions.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** I have just a quick question for clarification, Mr. Speaker.

**The Chair:** It's over to Mr. Schmale, quickly.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** As a point of clarification, my text says "two sitting weeks". I just want to clarify that is the case. It's not two weeks; it's two sitting weeks.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Schmale.

Members, you should have received the text of that motion in your inboxes. With that, are there any members who wish to speak on this amendment to the motion?

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 10; yeas 1)

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** I understand that, at this point, Ms. Idlout has her hand up.

I will pass the floor over to you.

• (0950)

**Ms. Lori Idlout:** [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

First of all, I want to acknowledge that yesterday, and the day before, I was visiting Kimberly Murray, the special interlocutor. The office had a meeting, a conference, and it was dealing with heavy items and topics, so I expect questions to be answered properly.

I also wish to acknowledge that Senator Murray Sinclair is in the hospital. He is in our thoughts. Many people have him in their thoughts, because he's helped many people. I want to put that out there. To the family, we are thinking of you.

I will present a motion, which I submitted on October 30:

That the committee temporarily delay the start of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-61 to allow for sufficient review of the large number of amendments proposed by all parties and to resume clause-by-clause consideration on Monday, November 4, 2024.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

Do any members wish to speak to that?

Can we move to a vote?

• (0955)

**Mr. Ben Carr:** Mr. Chair, I think we're all in agreement.

**The Chair:** It looks like we have consensus around the table here.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** We will start clause-by-clause consideration on Monday.

Before we wrap today, I want to thank our officials for coming today, Mr. Fairbairn, Mr. Barbosa, Ms. Wilkinson and Ms. Blake. The committee is scheduled to end in about 20 minutes. I want to thank our officials, analysts and legislative clerks for being here.

There was some discussion about moving in camera to have a formal opportunity for members to ask questions, but given that we have our officials here, perhaps it's easier to do that informally if you have any questions on the many amendments that have been submitted. We will start our formal process of clause-by-clause on Monday.

For the awareness of members, we have secured additional resources on Monday, so we can go up to 7:30. I wanted to flag that now. There was some concern that time would be lost by not starting this today. I will ensure that the time we had today will be made up at that point, so I wanted to flag that for members in advance.

Thank you, everybody, for being here today, especially our officials.

The meeting is adjourned.

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