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Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

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•(1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. Happy new year to everyone. I hope and trust this committee will have a very productive and positive year. I know I'm looking forward to it.

We start the new year dealing with Bill C-8. We're here pursuant to the order of the House of October 27, 2004, referring Bill C-8, an act to amend the Financial Administration Act, the Canada School of Public Service Act, and the Official Languages Act, to our committee.

Today it's agreed we'll undertake our clause-by-clause study of the bill, unless the committee takes other action before we get to that point, of course. As this is our first experience with the clause-by-clause process in this 38th Parliament, I would like to give a brief description of the process.

During clause-by-clause the committee examines every part of the bill, starting at the beginning, going line by line, if necessary word by word. Amendments can be proposed, debated, and voted on. A member can ask questions about a clause or debate a clause even if he or she has no amendment to propose.

The committee votes on each amendment, each clause, on the schedules and preamble, if the bill has them, on the title, and finally on the bill as a whole. The committee then agrees to present a report to the House on what changes, if any, have been made to the bill.

By way of information, before we embark on the clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-8, I'd like to remind honourable members of our responsibilities as a committee in this legislative process.

According to the rules and practices of the House, committee stage is where the bulk of the amendments to the text of a bill are made. We know there can be amendments made in the House, but traditionally, and certainly recently, more have been made at committee stage.

There is a responsibility of moving further amendments at report stage, but at report stage there are more restrictions on what amendments may be proposed. Speaker Milliken recently explained the situation to the House. As he said on November 15, 2004:

...the main opportunity for amending a bill is in committee stage and not later at report stage in the House. ... Report stage exists as an opportunity for the House to examine a committee's work on a bill. If report stage either duplicates or replaces committee stage, then its original purpose is lost and the valuable time of the House is wasted.

Generally, amendments may be proposed at report stage that challenge or further modify committee amendments, or to make consequential changes to a bill based on an amendment made in committee, or that delete a clause. If an amendment is proposed at report stage that could have been proposed here, it will not be selected by the Speaker for debate and a decision of the House. This is why our work here is important. We must make every effort to consider all possible amendments to the bill here in committee.

Once we get to the clause-by-clause, I will ask the legislative clerk, Joann Garbig, for her assistance and have her come to the chair here. Then we'll give copies of the Speaker's statement as well as a short document entitled "Amending Bills at Committee and Report Stages in the House of Commons".

So thank you very much. We'll start now with the witnesses we have for today. We have as witnesses, from the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, Monique Boudrias, executive vice-president; Jean-Claude Dumesnil, director general for strategic planning; and Carole Bidal, legal counsel, legal services branch.

We'll allow you to go ahead with your comments, and then we'll go to questions, starting of course with the Conservative Party.

•(1540)

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Boudrias (Executive Vice-President, Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of this committee.

As you know, the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada was created by orders in council as a result of the government's reorganization that took place on December 12, 2003. One of the goals of this change was to modernize and foster ongoing excellence in human resources management and leadership across the public service. The purpose of Bill C-8, that I present today, is simply to give legislative confirmation to the orders in council that created the Agency. It does not change powers or functions already conferred on the Agency. It merely enshrines in legislation what already exists in fact. Essentially, Bill C-8 does four things.

Firstly, it adds the position of President of the Agency to the Financial Administration Act, just as the Secretary of the Treasury Board and the Comptroller General of Canada are already identified in the Act.

Secondly, it specifies the nature of the powers and functions that may be delegated by the Treasury Board to the President of the Agency, in the same manner as set out in the FAA for the Secretary of the Treasury Board and the Comptroller General of Canada.

Thirdly, Bill C-8 stipulates that the President of the Treasury Board is responsible for coordinating the activities of the Secretary of the Treasury Board Secretariat, the Comptroller General of Canada and the President of the Agency.

Finally, as a result of these changes, Bill C-8 requires amendments to two other acts. It requires an amendment to the Canada School of Public Service Act to appoint the President of the Agency as an ex officio member of the School's Board of Governors, replacing the President of the Public Service Commission. It also requires an amendment to the Official Languages Act to stipulate that it is the President of the Agency, rather than the Treasury Board Secretary, who will provide the Commissioner of Official Languages with any audit reports that are prepared under the responsibility of the Treasury Board.

[English]

That's the content of Bill C-8. Let me now briefly highlight its main benefits.

First, a legislative basis will provide a greater visibility, legitimacy, and stability to the agency that only a legal framework can offer. This will facilitate implementation of its policies, programs, and services.

Second, a legislative mandate will clarify the role of the agency within the system, including for unions. In particular, it will clarify its relationship within the Treasury Board portfolio as well as with the Treasury Board in its role as employer.

Third, a legislative basis will support better integration of activities relating to human resource management within the Treasury Board portfolio.

Finally, giving a legislative basis to the agency demonstrates the importance the government places on human resource management. It signals government's recognition that its most important and precious resource is its employees, the people who are in the service of Canadians.

The federal public service is Canada's largest employer. Setting up a true human resource management agency for the federal public service sends an unequivocal signal to all managers, public servants, and union representatives that sound human resource management is a priority for the Government of Canada.

This is why, as the public servant in charge of this agency, I'm proud to present this bill. This is another turning point in the history of the administration of the public service, which for the first time has an agency responsible for human resource management.

To conclude, I would like to rapidly bring to your attention some technical aspects of the way Bill C-8 was designed. Bill C-8 was written before we knew the date of the coming into force of section 5 of the Public Service Modernization Act. As both Bill C-8 and section 5 of the PSMA aim to modify section 6 of the Financial Administration Act, coordinating amendments were built into Bill

C-8 so we could plan for this uncertainty should section 5 of the PSMA come into force before Bill C-8—or after. These coordinating amendments are clauses 4 and 5 of Bill C-8.

However, it is now known that section 5 of the PSMA came into force on December 1, 2004. Consequently, since last December, as per the provisions of Bill C-8, clause 1 of Bill C-8 is repealed and replaced by clause 4 of the same bill. Clause 5 of Bill C-8 is not relevant any more and only clauses 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7 will come into force.

In this context there are two options available for the members of this committee when reviewing Bill C-8. Option one is for you to approve Bill C-8 as a whole without amending or voting against clauses 1 and 5. Option two is for you to amend Bill C-8 by voting against clauses 1 and 5, thereby simplifying Bill C-8 by rewriting it only with the applicable sections.

I'd like to thank you for your attention, and I will be glad to answer any questions as required.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

You've laid out a couple of options the committee could take, and I'll leave it to the committee, starting with Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ms. Boudrias.

You'll have to forgive me here. This is something relatively new to me, so if you could, explain a little further. This is sort of doing it after the fact; this bill is coming after the fact. Can you explain the sequence of how this unfolded? Maybe that will help me understand better.

Ms. Monique Boudrias: Is that in terms of Bill C-8 or in terms of the amendments?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Bill C-8.

Ms. Monique Boudrias: When the Government of Canada created the agency and other departments in December 2003, it created them through order in council. Once the order in council created them and we transferred responsibility and the employees, then we drafted the legislation to create those agencies. So what you have in front of you is a legislative basis to confirm what was done by order in council in December 2003.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Is this regularly done?

Ms. Monique Boudrias: Yes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: In these amendments, why would clause 5 of Bill C-8 not be relevant? Why was it included at first?

Ms. Monique Boudrias: It was relevant when we wrote them. We knew we could have amendments coming from another piece of legislation, but we didn't know the date. We created those sections in order to make sure of coordinating amendments. Whenever we came in front of you, either before or after, it could have been as is. The other part of the FAA would have been amended after Bill C-8, so we would have used the other amendments at that time, but it happened before coming in front of your committee. Now we have a bill where you have two options in order to address the issue, as I mentioned to you previously.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You are not suggesting either option.

Ms. Monique Boudrias: I'm putting the two options. I understand from the discussion we had with the legal counsel that it is up to the committee to decide which option it prefers.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Can you tell me the advantages of one option over the other, or the advantages and disadvantages?

For example, on option one, what are the advantages and disadvantages?

Ms. Monique Boudrias: It is a question of drafting. There is no benefit either/or from the agency in terms of the power structure and the creation of the different positions in the agency. It is really a drafting issue.

Maybe my counsel would like to add to my explanation.

Ms. Carole Bidal (Legal Counsel, Legal Services Branch, Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada): What needs to be remembered is that the way it's addressed doesn't have any impact on the effect of the act. When the bill was drafted, we were looking at two possible scenarios, and we had to address both possible scenarios when drafting the bill. The way it's drafted, if it's adopted as is, the ones that are not relevant will fall. The only thing is that when it's registered, everything will appear. If you decide to amend the bill and to clean it up, so to say, then only the provisions that will apply under the scenario that's currently under way will appear when it's published. The effect will be the same one way or the other.

•(1550)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Are you basically saying this is just a housekeeping issue?

Ms. Carole Bidal: Yes.

The Chair: Does anybody else have any questions?

Madam Thibault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Thank you.

My colleagues and I will be moving an amendment which I believe you have all received. This brings me to something you said on page 2 of your opening remarks.

Ms. Boudrias, you made no mention whatsoever of accountability. Was this an oversight on your part—and I'm not being sarcastic in the least—or was this deliberate? A correction was made on the bottom of page 2 and a reference to coordinating amendments was included. Did you not feel that accountability was important as well?

Ms. Monique Boudrias: To answer your question, we're dealing with amendments to the Financial Administration Act where accountability has already been recognized in the case of the President of the Treasury Board.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Nevertheless, coordinating activities must be recognized as well.

Ms. Monique Boudrias: Yes, if you want this provision to be more specific. I understand what you're saying.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there anyone else before we go to clause-by-clause? No?

Okay, let's start the clause-by-clause procedure. If the committee wants to delete any clause, of course, you just vote against it when I call for the vote and that will negate that clause. There are different ways of doing this. I'll start right now with clause 1.

(Clauses 1 to 3 inclusive agreed to)

(On clause 4)

The Chair: We have an amendment.

Would you like to move your amendment?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault: We'd like to propose that clause 4 be amended by replacing line 27 on page 3 with the following:
responsible and accountable for the coordination of activities

Thus, the President of the Treasury Board would be responsible and accountable. I heard some people wondering to whom that person should be accountable. That person would be accountable to Parliament, as always. I believe the correct term in French is "imputable", which means the same as "rendre compte".

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): Would it be better to use the word "imputable"?

Ms. Louise Thibault: I'm sorry, but my motion, as tabled, reads "tenu de rendre compte".

•(1555)

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you understand the amendment? Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Preston.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): The same sentence is used in clause 3, yet we haven't added the word "accountable" to it.

The Chair: We have already moved clause 3.

Mr. Joe Preston: I recognize that. I'm just stating the point that we're amending a clause later on that will say something different from what—

Hon. Diane Marleau: The Financial Administration Act already stipulates "accountable and responsible", so this is secondary, but if people feel better with the words "accountable and responsible" added, that's fine.

The Chair: With unanimous consent, of course, the committee can decide to go back.

Hon. Diane Marleau: I don't think it's necessary.

The Chair: Fine. There seems to be agreement to make that change.

Monsieur Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I have a bit of a problem. I don't have any problem with the word "accountable". In French, I would have preferred "*imputable*". The words "*tenu de rendre compte*" give the impression that there shall be a report.

[Translation]

We could have said "responsable et imputable" in the French version. As I see it, "rendre compte" and "imputable" do not have the same meaning. Maybe it's just a question of semantics, but "rendre compte" implies some kind of relationship, whereas that's not necessarily the case with the word "imputable". There would be a relationship only if one is requested. Do you agree with me, Ms. Thibault?

[English]

The Chair: Madam Thibault, do you want to respond?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I'm not a translator or an interpreter. The motion was submitted to the House translation service and that was the equivalent given for "accountable" and that's the word we use in our motion. Quite frankly, I'd have to check with the language experts on this one. Perhaps the gentleman here could tell us...If he says that he doesn't wish to accept responsibility... However, to my way of thinking, when someone is accountable, it means that I can count on that person to do exactly what I say in French. That's how I understand it and I have no problem whatsoever with the wording.

[English]

The Chair: Are there any others?

Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think Madame Thibault has made it clear that the intent is to capture the matter of accountability and there is not an intent that there should be, in any case, a mandatory report on all of these agencies that are overseen.

If that is the case, however, and if there is any possibility that a reader might read this and interpret it that way, I wonder, Madame Thibault, if the word in English, "accountable", is what the intent is and whether you would consider replacing your phrase with "*imputable*".

I'm not sure, Mr. Chairman, if the amendment was submitted *en français* and translated to be "accountable" for both official languages or if it was the English—

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: We have an answer and I thank the person who supplied it. We checked with the Office de la langue française

and the word "imputable" is no longer considered acceptable usage in French, except when used informally, which is not the case here. I know that we've been using this word for years. The Office de la langue française now favours the expression "*tenu de rendre compte*". That's the wording I used in my amendment motion.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any other discussion on the amendment before we vote on it? No?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Clause 4 as amended agreed to)

(Clauses 5 to 7 inclusive agreed to)

● (1600)

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill as amended carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the chair report the bill as amended to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill as amended for the use of the House at report stage?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, go ahead.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): I don't actually have any problem with that. I think you should order a reprint of the bill. I just have a question after the fact.

Now that we've passed all of these clauses, including clause 5, what happens to clause 5 when you say it isn't relevant anymore? Will it sit there like an appendix or something?

Hon. Diane Marleau: No, it just stays like that. It's just that it's covered by another bill.

Mr. Pat Martin: No, I mean your human appendix. It doesn't do anything.

The Chair: Thank you, everyone. We're finished with Bill C-8.

Thank you very much for coming today. I appreciate that, and I wish you the best in your work throughout the year.

We'll suspend for a couple of minutes and then move on to further business, which I'll explain after just a couple of minutes.

● (1602)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1604)

● (1605)

The Chair: Okay. Is it the will of the committee to go ahead then as scheduled?

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Chair, that's one option Mr. Szabo raises.

If we were serious about the content of Mr. Williams' question, we as a committee could undertake a study to build that answer or to develop that answer. Really, we have two issues here: one is the government disregarding the 45-day rule or failing to comply with the 45-day rule, and the other is the subject matter of Mr. Williams' question, which should ultimately wind up at this committee anyway.

The Chair: If I could just interject, in fact this committee has no authority to deal with the subject matter of the question, only with the issue of the timeliness of the response.

Mr. Pat Martin: I see. Then if I could just finish my thought, that's part one of what I was raising. What I don't want to see is simply giving the government another 45 days to answer the question that they should have answered within the first 45 days. If we are going to send a letter of some kind to the minister, directing him, in the strongest language that we can, to comply with the rules, I think it should be accompanied with strict time limits, and there have to be some sanctions associated with this insult of not complying with the rules of Parliament.

The Chair: What, Mr. Martin, might you have in mind in terms of sanctions?

Mr. Pat Martin: My mind is reeling with potential... I don't know.

The Chair: Okay. We've just circulated some information explaining the options the committee can take at this time. So if we're going to deal with the matter today, as scheduled, maybe I'll give you a couple of minutes to read through the sheet that was just circulated and then you can decide as a committee what option, if any, you'd like to follow through with.

Mr. Szabo, did you have a comment?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Chair, this happens from time to time. Sometimes there are legitimate reasons, particularly when it's not possible to get all the information to fully respond. Sometimes they respond in part and undertake to do it in future.

Whatever the issue, the minister should have an opportunity to respond to this committee as to whether or not there's any excuse. I think the letter should be basically that this has been referred to us, we attach a copy of the referral, and this matter has not been responded to, so we would like an explanation as to why and reasons why you believe this committee should not take any further action—and we expect a prompt response on this matter.

It's not a matter on which there has to be a lot of thinking by the department officials who are going to have to advise the minister on the status of the response. I mean, they either have an explanation or they don't. But I think in deference to the process, I would want my question answered as quickly as anybody else's, if at all possible.

We're dealing with process rather than the substance of the question at this point, so I would like to get a quick letter and request a response as soon as possible, so that the committee can decide if further action is necessary on our behalf.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Szabo.

Monsieur Gagnon, followed by Madame Thibault.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): My question was answered when Mr. Szabo's finished speaking. He started off by saying that there could be legitimate reasons for not responding. However, it's easy for the minister to say that he can't respond at this particular point in time because he needs more information. He concluded his remarks on that note, and so too will I.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Gagnon.

Madame Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was thinking of a compromise to make everyone happy. I don't know if the telephone is recognized as an official tool, but I'd like someone—perhaps the Chair himself or the Clerk—to call the minister and advise him that the committee is meeting again on Thursday and that this will be the first item on its agenda, unless he tells us that his response is in the mail. However, we'd have to receive this response quickly, otherwise we need to examine... I don't know if my colleagues would be amenable to that course of action.

Or, you could send a letter to the Minister, as early as tomorrow morning, requesting a response by Thursday afternoon. Or, the Minister could come to our meeting to discuss this matter and at that time, we could come to a decision, in accordance with our rules of procedure. All of this could be done quickly, because he needs to have a legitimate reason for... If he doesn't, then we enforce the time limit. I won't make any assumptions as to what his response might be. I'd act very quickly on this matter.

•(1610)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Thibault.

If I could respond to that, the clerk has in fact called the departments involved, and all but one department has given the information required. The department that is holding the process up has agreed to have this information by a certain date. Is that right?

I'm told they've now received it, so it's well along in the process.

The thing is, though, that this happens and it seems like the action is taken once an issue is made of it. This happens too often, I believe, but it's up to you as a committee to decide how you want to deal with it, of course.

Mr. Martin, you had a comment.

Mr. Pat Martin: Yes, Mr. Chair. Having had the opportunity now to look over the options and to understand a little better S.O. 39, I point out two things. First of all, under the paragraph "Member advised of meeting", the last sentence says, "The status of the member putting the question appears to be that of participant", not witness. If we do invite Mr. Williams here as the mover of the question, he would actually take part in the activity of the committee and not simply appear at the end as a witness. I understand that now, and I point that out.

But under the identification of witnesses, it really does point out that our avenue of recourse to deal with this in any thorough way is to invite the witnesses to this committee—with Mr. Williams as a part of the committee—to dig deeper and find out just what the barriers and obstacles were that blocked these officials from doing anything for 45 days. I think we should make an issue of this, because you're right, it is happening with alarming frequency. First of all, one of the questions I would like to ask is if there was political interference in them dragging their feet on this politically sensitive question. Is there any crossover with the Gomery inquiry? We know the sponsorship contracts were with the same companies that do the polling for government in many cases, so was there a sensitivity there?

I think this is our duty as a committee: to once and for all get to the bottom of why this government drags its feet when legitimate questions are asked, and in a routine way disregards the 45-day guideline. My recommendations would be, then—to make a long story short—to wait until we have Mr. Williams available so that he can take part in this questioning, and to call as witnesses one or more officials from each of the departments. Whether they have the information ready to give us now or not, we want to know why they took over 45 days to get this information when there was little else to do over the Christmas break.

The Chair: We've heard about three different recommendations here, but the committee can only act if a motion is made.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, that would be my motion.

The Chair: Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Like I said, my inexperience will show, no doubt, but following up on Mr. Martin's suggestion, I just wonder if it would be possible to ask Mr. Williams and some spokesmen from both departments to appear Thursday. Maybe we can get some answers to our questions in an hour or so.

We have a problem if this is an ongoing problem or if it comes up rather frequently. So why don't we address the problem? Maybe there's a legitimate reason, or maybe we can solve the problem for them. When a member asks a question, I think it's fair that he gets an answer in a timely fashion. If there's something preventing that, let's address it.

The Chair: Again, that's another suggestion, but we need a motion for the committee to act.

•(1615)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I would make a motion to the effect that we ask Mr. Williams and representatives from both departments in question to appear Thursday, to get the matter resolved sooner rather than later.

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor. Do you want the motion read back, or is it clear? I'll open it for discussion if you understand what the motion is.

Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: There are many things we can do. My preference would be to carry on with Bill C-11.

I think Mr. Williams has a concern. We don't have the information as to why or what the nature of the delays were. It could very well be explainable, because we're talking about every agency, every

department, every crown corporation, and there's a lot of detail. I don't know how long this takes. I would rather hold on the motion to get into another project until we at least see whether or not there is an acceptable explanation, particularly since all the information apparently has now been compiled. This is not a matter in which a day or two here or there is going to make much difference. I'm not sure we have all the information to make that decision.

I would hope we could table this matter until we get the letter and ask for the explanation, if there is one. The clerk could follow it up, if it's hand delivered, and advise when a response will be available. I can only assume that whoever is responsible for crafting the response, getting the accurate response as to why, would be able to do that within a day anyway. We might in fact have the answer on Thursday.

The Chair: To let the committee know, the committee has five sitting days to act on this if we want to act on it. We can, of course, let it slip by, but that is a decision for the committee to make. I think the fifth sitting day is Friday, so we would have to deal with this Thursday. We could do it towards the end of our regular time for Thursday.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Maybe at 5:30 on Thursday.

The Chair: We could do it a little earlier and give it enough time, but it's up to the committee.

Yes, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: In response to Mr. Szabo, and I don't totally disagree with you, the thing is that, yes, if we get the information this time, that will solve this problem, but if this is a trend or if this occurs frequently, let's deal with the root problem, whatever that problem is. Maybe by bringing it to committee we'll send a message that we have to respond in due course.

The Chair: Is there any more debate or discussion before we go to the vote on the motion? No? Then we will vote on the motion.

Could the clerk please read the motion?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): Mr. Lauzon moves that the committee invite the representatives from both departments in question, along with Mr. Williams, to come before committee and answer questions.

Hon. Diane Marleau: I have a question. "Both departments"—what departments? I mean, this is all departments, all agencies, all commissions, and all crown corporations. Which two departments are you talking about?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Pick two that you like.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, if you could help out...

Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I understand we were getting information from two different departments.

The Chair: Which is the one that had not provided the information within the required time? Which department was that?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Both. There were two.

The Chair: The information from our analyst is that the Privy Council Office and Public Works and Government Services Canada would be the two appropriate departments.

Mr. Martin, you had a question or comment.

Mr. Pat Martin: It's my understanding that this type of public interest polling is purchased through Public Works.

Hon. Diane Marleau: Public Works would do so basically for the departments, but not for agencies, crown corporations, commissions, or all the others. It isn't as simple as that is what I'm saying. Crown corporations do their own thing, depending on the crown corporation. Agencies—again, we don't know for sure what they do; it depends what they are. That's why I'm saying I don't know.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Marleau.

Mr. Lauzon, you moved the motion. Did you have any particular departments in mind?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I was thinking of the two you mentioned, Public Works and the PCO.

The Chair: Public Works and the PCO? All right.

The clerk is tied up for a minute here, so we'll just wait 30 seconds or so.

Mr. Paul Szabo: What did we have scheduled for Thursday?

Mr. Joe Preston: It's apparently a long day.

The Chair: On Thursday we have four witnesses on Bill C-11.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Let me again make a plea here. The five days before we can do anything is really moot because all of the information is available and the response is going to be done. I think the committee has an opportunity. If this is of importance and if this were to be used as a pilot, we might be able to coordinate this and look into it in a more planned way without disrupting any kind of important legislative review. I'm not sure whether all those parties are going to be able to be here at that specified time, but it really doesn't matter. We can do this any time we want. What's the priority? The priority is Bill C-11.

I hate to be a pest about this, but we do have important witnesses, and I don't want to see us leave them every time we have a matter that is not going to go away. This matter is always going to be there with regard to the answering of questions. I'm going to vote against the motion to do this on Thursday for a different reason, because I want to keep the focus on Bill C-11.

The Chair: Mr. Preston, did you have a comment, or should we go to...?

Mr. Joe Preston: As much as I agree with bringing this to some sort of conclusion and maybe trying to find, as Mr. Lauzon said, a root problem or a root cause of the problem so that we can prevent it from perhaps happening, in the end I agree with Mr. Szabo. We have

Bill C-11 witnesses scheduled for Thursday. If we're going to do this, then we need to schedule it for an additional time, not the time we've given to Bill C-11 witnesses.

I'd hate to move one project away. It is the job of this committee to do this work too. If someone does not do what they're supposed to do, apparently it comes to us to do something about it.

Mr. Paul Szabo: We could just stand that motion and deal with it at any time.

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Chair, one doesn't preclude the other. We can deal with this within the five-day time limit in Standing Order 39 and still do a further in-depth study of this deeper problem, but I would be very loath to miss this opportunity to send a clear message to Parliament and to other government departments that this committee is seized of the issue of the government's unwillingness to comply with the 45-day guideline. We have a classic example, we have a case in point right here, so I would strongly urge the members to vote—

Mr. Paul Szabo: The question.

Mr. Pat Martin: Wait a minute. You go on and on ad nauseam and I don't interrupt you. Finally, when I make an intervention, you start calling, "question, question".

The Chair: Please continue, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, I was finished, frankly.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Is there any other discussion before we go to the vote? No? Then let's go to the vote on the motion. Do you understand what the motion is? This is for the Privy Council and Public Works.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1625)

The Chair: We will leave half an hour at the end of the meeting on Thursday to deal with this issue.

Is there any other business for the committee to deal with today?

An hon. member: Do you mean the meeting will end on Thursday at 5:30 p.m.?

The Chair: The meeting has to end by then on Thursday. We understand the travel commitments, including those of the chair, so the finish time is of concern.

This meeting is adjourned.

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