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Chair

Mr. Bernard Patry

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Good afternoon everyone.

Pursuant to the Order of Reference of Tuesday, March 27, 2007, the Committee is meeting to examine Bill C-35, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (reverse onus in bail hearings for firearm-related offences).

[English]

Appearing today we have Mr. Rob Moore, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, and from the Department of Justice we have Madame Julie Besner, counsel, criminal law policy section.

[Translation]

Welcome.

You asked to have the floor, Mr. Ménard. Please go ahead.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Chairman, our job entails taking very seriously the testimony presented by the witnesses. The members of the Bloc Québécois had some reservations initially. We voiced our concerns about Bill C-35 on second reading of the bill in the House. In our opinion, the reverse onus provision was risky from the standpoint of procedural fairness and in terms of the principles of the administration of justice.

However, after hearing from witnesses, the Bloc Québécois plans to support the bill because we now realize that it corresponds to current practices. Even though the government's plans could prove risky if anyone takes advantage of the situation, the reverse onus provision corresponds to a practice that is already accepted by our justice system. I have discussed the matter with my colleagues, with Ms. Freeman, who like me also listened to the witnesses, and with my leader. Therefore—and I mention this to the government as a fine example of cooperation—we will be supporting the bill, which is not to say that you should assume anything about where we stand on issues in the future. That goes without saying.

When witnesses and even defence attorneys agree on the bill, then it is time for us to rethink our position.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ménard.

You have the floor, Ms. Jennings.

[English]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): *Oui.*

I'd like to say on behalf of the Liberal caucus how pleased we are that we are voting in favour of Bill C-35, and that finally it was moved by the government at second reading so that we could debate it in the House. I think all of the opposition parties collaborated very well with the government in order to ensure that it was moved into committee very quickly.

In committee we collaborated to ensure that we heard just enough witnesses to assure ourselves that the reversal of the burden of proof was constitutional, that it was a standing practice that already existed on the ground, and that this would simply be codifying an existing practice. We're looking forward to seeing this move just as quickly back into the House, to debate it quickly at third reading, and to see it adopted quickly.

This is a bill that the Liberals, through our leader, the Honourable Stéphane Dion, officially offered the government to fast-track, and the government did not take up our offer. We were pleased that when the government did finally decide to actually move the bill at second reading, because of the cooperation of the opposition parties, we were able to see it move quickly through the House through all stages, and we hope that will continue at the report stage and at third reading. We hope the government will not let it sit on the order paper, once it has been reported back to the House, for days and days and then turn around and blame the opposition and say that we are blocking their legislation, as they have done with other pieces of legislation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jennings.

Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): First of all, I agree with everything the last two speakers said, in particular in reference to Mr. Ménard. I think the witnesses were very convincing for me, and that's the purpose of committees. I would commend the government members to take the same attitude toward witnesses' evidence when they vote tonight on Bill C-10.

The main thing I want to say is that although I'm supporting this bill, it is with some trepidation, in that we found out—to the shock of parliamentarians and probably to the embarrassment of the government members—that there was no evidence to support this bill, that Canada has not actually collected the statistics of who is on bail, who is not allowed bail, and if they commit crimes on bail. We have a bill here with no evidence before us, and I know all members of Parliament are a bit worried about that. Nevertheless, as the previous speaker said, because the witnesses have convinced me that this pretty well occurs, that it's not going to make a big change, and that it is a useful bill, I will be supporting it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other comments?

Are we ready for clause-by-clause consideration?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Clause 1 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: That's it, that's all. I'm very fast.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Well done.

The Chair: Thank you very much. It was a pleasure to work with you.

The meeting is over.

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