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—
Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): I see a quorum.

I welcome everyone to our meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

There are a couple of things I'd like to bring to your attention before we speak to Mr. Sirman. First of all, I remind the committee that the Honourable Bev Oda, Minister of Canadian Heritage, has confirmed that she will appear before the committee on Thursday, June 1, from 3:30 to 4:30.

Today we are pleased to welcome Mr. Robert Sirman to review his certificate of nomination to the position of director of the Canada Council for the Arts. I'd like to remind the committee of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which outlines the range of the committee's review:

The scope of a committee's examination of Order-in-Council appointees or nominees is strictly limited to the qualifications and competence to perform the duties of the post. Questioning by members of the committee may be interrupted by the Chair, if it attempts to deal with matters considered irrelevant to the committee's inquiry.... Any question may be permitted if it can be shown that it relates directly to the appointee's or nominee's ability to do the job.

We'll be following the order of questions adopted during our second meeting. As such, I will call upon Mr. Sirman to make a 10-minute opening statement, if he chooses.

Welcome to the committee, sir.

Mr. Robert Sirman (As an Individual): Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, members of the standing committee,

[Translation]

may I begin by expressing my sincere thanks for allowing me to delay my appearance before you until today. You will know that I was originally asked to appear before this Committee two weeks ago, but as fate would have it, I was already scheduled on that day to host over 200 senior donors and government funders at an opening gala at the National Ballet School. It would have been impossible for me to be in Ottawa without compromising my responsibilities to my employer, and I am grateful that my appearance could be rescheduled.

[English]

I am greatly honoured to be nominated as director of the Canada Council for the Arts. The Canada Council, without doubt, is the most

important single instrument for stimulating and strengthening the creation, production, and dissemination of the arts in Canada.

Despite the profile of my recent work at the National Ballet School, the majority of my working life has been spent in the public service. For five of those years, I worked as a senior advisor in Ontario's first ministry of culture, and for 10 years I held management positions in the Ontario Arts Council.

[Translation]

During this time, I had the opportunity to work very closely with counterparts in other jurisdictions across Canada, including Quebec.

[English]

I have long had a special interest in arts funding. In 1986 I was fortunate enough to undertake an independent study tour of England and Wales under the auspices of the British Council. The purpose of this tour was to study the funding practices of the Arts Council of Great Britain, the organization upon which the Canada Council was modelled when it was established in 1957.

[Translation]

In 1989 and 1990, I spent five months in France, including three months as an intern in the French Ministry of Culture and Communications in Paris. I was specifically stationed in the Ministry's research department, where I had the privilege of studying the latest research on the relationship between funding and cultural practices in both France and the other nations of the European Union.

In 1991, I took what I expected to be a short break from public service and joined Canada's National Ballet School. I was not trained in dance—my formal education was in the social sciences—but I was intrigued by the challenge the School presented, being at the time in very serious financial difficulty. The School's professional attraction proved greater than I anticipated, and I have been there now for over 15 years.

After stabilizing the School's finances—in large part by reinforcing its national identity and diversifying its revenues—I turned my attention to the deplorable state of its facilities. The result was a 100 million dollar capital expansion program called *Projet Grand Jeté*.

[English]

As of today, we surpassed the 90% mark on both fundraising and construction, and the new facilities have been met with both popular and critical acclaim. The project won an architectural excellence award at the Ontario Association of Architects annual conference held two weeks ago in Ottawa. Also, on June 5, I will receive a national leadership award from the Canadian Urban Institute for my work in using the project to build community.

For some time now, I have made a conscious effort to broaden community involvement beyond my immediate employer. For many years, I chaired the boards of a small dance company in Toronto and a social service agency in the neighbourhood in which the National Ballet School is located. I have also served for many years on the advisory council for the Co-operative Program in Arts Management at the University of Toronto at Scarborough.

Not surprisingly, I have served on many juries for national, provincial, and municipal grant-giving programs.

In recent years, I have also acted as a mentor and facilitator for a number of arts groups, including a national aboriginal theatre school, a dance action committee in British Columbia, a Calgary dance company, and a cooperative venture by the Canadian Dance Assembly and the Regroupement québécois de la danse in Montreal. I am also on the board of a public foundation, the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation, which funds the performing arts, community development, and the environment.

It is this combination of both breadth and depth of experience that I presented to the selection committee for the position of director of the Canada Council for the Arts, and which I present to you today.

• (1540)

[Translation]

As you well know, the Canada Council's mandate is to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts. As it approaches its 50th anniversary, it is only natural that the Canada Council turn its attention to the future, to considering what the role of the arts will be in the lives of Canadians for the next 50 years, and how public funding can invigorate and energize that future.

[English]

The circumstances facing artists in Canada today are very different from those in 1957. So too are the challenges facing public funding bodies. I am convinced that the Canada Council for the Arts can play a significant role in shaping Canadian culture for the next 50 years, as it has in the past, but it cannot do this alone. It will need to work closely with politicians, other funding bodies, the private sector, provincial and municipal levels of government, the arts sector, and of course the citizenry that makes up Canada itself. I am excited by the prospect of helping to lead and inspire this historic process of collaborative transition, and today I respectfully present to you my candidacy for the position of director of the Canada Council for the Arts.

Thank you. Merci.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sirman.

Mr. Belanger, you have the first question.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Mr. Sirman.

I have a rather generic question to ask you, after which, if time allows, I will put to you a series of more specific questions. Otherwise, I would hope to come back to you in a second round.

First of all, could you, in French please, outline for me your vision for your personal future and your vision for the future of the Canada Council of the Arts over the next five to ten years?

Mr. Robert Sirman: That is a good question, Mr. Bélanger.

For me, it is the opportunity to lead, to stimulate the Canada Council of the Arts staff, to work with the arts sector, with the artists and the arts organizations of Canada, to visit the communities, the regions, the villages, all of the places where artists are creating in Canada. It is also an opportunity to offer a vision of culture by giving the citizens of Canada the means to establish links between communities.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

[English]

This is not a criticism directed at your qualifications—please, *au contraire*—but there have been people wondering if your nomination would perhaps cause *déséquilibre*, or too high a concentration.

My understanding from Madam Kain is that she is from the dance world. Is that correct?

Mr. Robert Sirman: Yes, she is.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I believe the vice-chair of the council, Monsieur Simon Brault, is as well. Is that correct?

Mr. Robert Sirman: The vice-chair is not from the dance world. He's from the theatre world, I understand.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: The theatre world, okay.

And you are from the dance world, or you have been for the last 15 years.

• (1545)

Mr. Robert Sirman: For the last 15 years I have led, administratively, a national training institution. It happens that this national training institution trains in dance, but that's not my specialty. Nevertheless, it's true that it is in the dance world.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: What answer would you offer to those who are concerned that there may be a bit of a concentration at the top in one particular field of endeavour as compared with the others?

Mr. Robert Sirman: If I may, the answer, I hope, is my experience. I worked for ten years at the Ontario Arts Council for no particular discipline. I worked in management for all disciplines. I was director of operations for most of that time, and also director of research and strategic policy for the last year and a half.

During that time, I tried to seriously address the need for a balance between the investments in different art forms, the investments in different regions of the province of Ontario, and the strategies for addressing what we called in those days the “supply side” and the “demand side” for arts in Ontario.

I do not believe my experiential base—at the Ontario Arts Council, at the Ontario culture ministry, at the arts administration program at the University of Toronto—is in any specific field other than trying to lead and pull together the various forces that contribute to an effective cultural organization, an effective cultural infrastructure, whether in a particular discipline or in a community as a whole.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Okay.

This question may or may not be appropriate, Mr. Chairman—I'm sure you'll tell me if it isn't—because it doesn't pertain to Mr. Sirman himself. It pertains to the process that got his nomination in front of us.

I'd be curious if you, Mr. Sirman—or someone else, for that matter—could explain to me the process by which the various nominees were sought out and the process by which they were screened. Would you happen to know what that process was?

Mr. Robert Sirman: I can speak from my own experience, if that would be helpful to you.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Yes.

Mr. Robert Sirman: In the fall of 2005 I was approached by an HR firm—what we call “headhunting” firms, in my business—asking me if I would be prepared to compete in a competition for director of the Canada Council for the Arts. It was awkward timing for me, because I was about to open the new National Ballet School in Toronto, but I did go through an interview. I did not actually submit my full curriculum vitae until December.

In December I was told by the outside firm that I was one of a series of candidates that the selection committee wished to interview. The selection committee—when I actually went—was made up of four board members of the Canada Council for the Arts, plus an outside member, former Auditor General of Canada Denis Desautels. I was introduced to these people in my first interview, the first week of January, in Ottawa.

A day or two later I got a telephone call that the pool had shrunk, but there was still a pool and I was still in it. I was told that I would be called for a subsequent follow-up interview. That interview took place the last week of January, in Toronto. My understanding is that they were meeting other people in Toronto and possibly other parts of the country, although I don't know that.

I was subsequently contacted and told that I was the candidate that the selection committee wished to present to the board of the Canada Council for their consideration. From that moment—and I was not an insider in that process, but this is from what I understand—it had

to go to the board, and the board in turn had to recommend it to the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The process went on until...it's here.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Chairman, if it would be of value, it will only take one minute to give a complete answer to Mr. Bélanger, as I have it, relative to the process.

The position was advertised in the *Canada Gazette* and in various national newspapers, with a closing date of December 9, 2005. Forty-five applications were received. Thirteen applications were interviewed by a search firm. Six candidates were interviewed by a selection committee. Three qualified candidates were chosen from that, and the selection committee unanimously decided on Mr. Sirman as the most qualified for the job.

• (1550)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Kotto.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, sir, and thank you for being here. I will be putting to you a few simple questions, and I would ask for simple answers, nothing too involved. I have gone over your curriculum vitae, and I see the path you have followed and your involvement in finance, management and structures.

What is your relationship to creators per se?

Mr. Robert Sirman: That is another good question. I have had two opportunities, in the context of the experience I have had, to deal with creative arts. In 1980, I took five months off to write a play. This experience was for me very important and very nerve-wracking, as you will understand. I finished the play, I had the opportunity to distribute it to theatres in the United States and Canada and I received very positive responses, but I decided to return to my job at the Ontario Arts Council.

I got my start in 1995, but in 2002, I was the librettist for a ballet of the National Ballet School, which was celebrating its fifth anniversary. The ballet was called *The Contract*, and it was a full-length story ballet.

[*English*]

The ballet was performed in Ottawa and in New York, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, as well as its run in Toronto.

[*Translation*]

For me, these two experiences were truly in the field of creative arts.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Have you been in touch with or met the team that is in place at the Canada Council for the Arts?

Mr. Robert Sirman: Only to introduce myself to those people, but not to work.

Mr. Maka Kotto: That was the point of my question.

Do you have any children?

Mr. Robert Sirman: No.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Are you aware of your mandate? Have you been given a precise mandate?

Mr. Robert Sirman: Not yet.

Mr. Maka Kotto: You therefore have not yet been given precise duties relating to the position that awaits you.

Mr. Robert Sirman: There was a job description in the advertisements, but I have not yet met with the board of directors. I have not yet received any mandate from the minister.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Very well.

In the 2004-2005 annual report, Mr. John Hobday, your predecessor as CCA Director, wrote in his introduction to the report:

Many arts organizations, large and small, are finding it difficult to sustain themselves. The proportion of revenue of major arts organizations that comes from the Council has decreased dramatically—from 23 to 7%. A diminishing percentage of artists is able to count on support from the Council and other funding bodies.

Do you share Mr. Hobday's opinion?

Mr. Robert Sirman: I believe that this opinion is factual, that it is based on statistics, but I do not know what the Canada Council for the Arts will do in the future with its extra income.

• (1555)

Mr. Maka Kotto: As you are aware, 50 million dollars have been granted over two years, on top of the one hundred and fifty some million dollars, but this will not be a recurring allocation. The Council will therefore be moving back to a budget that has for some time now been limited.

Mr. Robert Sirman: Yes, I know.

Mr. Maka Kotto: You have heard talk of coalitions in Canada and in Quebec because of a lack of money. Demand is growing and everyone's share of the money available is becoming ever smaller.

What do you plan on doing with regard to this reality?

Mr. Robert Sirman: This is a very serious challenge for me and for the Canada Council for the Arts, but I believe that the CCA must set its priorities so as to use this increase to grant monies to artists and artistic organizations and show the public and the government of Canada the results of this investment.

Mr. Maka Kotto: Such a demonstration will take years.

Mr. Robert Sirman: Yes, but I am very much aware of the fact that 50 million dollars is a lot of money. It is however true that 20 million dollars, namely the increase for the first year, amounts to only 60 cents per person in Canada. That is not exactly a huge investment, but it nevertheless is a significant one for our country's artists.

Mr. Maka Kotto: That is not what we have heard in Quebec.

I have one final question.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll have to move on right now. You'll have another opportunity a little later. I've been very liberal. It's been almost seven

minutes. I've gone over five minutes, but when things are working and you're into it...

It's Mr. Angus's turn right now.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Sirman, for coming before us today. I read your background, and I'm very pleased that you put forth your name for the Canada Council.

I'd like to say at the outset that in 1994 I received a Canada Council explorations grant as an emerging artist for my first book. I'm now on my fifth book. I'm not saying that to brag, but to establish the point of the importance of taking a chance on emerging artists, because each of those books sold very well and helped establish a career that, quite frankly, couldn't have gotten off the ground without the support of the Canada Council.

My concern is the ability of the Canada Council to maintain that kind of outreach to emerging artists because of the growing pressures of the numerous applications that are coming forward and the limited budget. What role do you see in terms of ensuring that emerging artists, those who haven't managed to establish the necessary track record that the larger organizations or established artists have, will still be able to be heard at the Canada Council level?

Mr. Robert Sirman: It's an excellent question, but it's a bit awkward for me to answer because I'm not there yet, and I haven't really been briefed on what the dynamics are in determining how—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'm just asking for your vision, for how you see that.

• (1600)

Mr. Robert Sirman: There's no question in my mind that there has to be a priority placed on new creativity, new artists, new players on the scene, just as there has to be on artists and arts organizations and art forms that have established a track record. It's impossible to trade these two things off in my mind and only fund one and not the other. However, the mechanisms for doing this are challenging in any arts funding body. I have 15 years' experience, as you've heard, in granting specifically in the arts, and I know that during all of that time this was a constant debate, a debate that engaged not only the funding bodies, but also the artists themselves, who were constantly trying to figure out how to make room for new voices in their own art forms. I don't feel that I'm really able to commit myself any more than that and say that I don't think this is a trade-off. These are both priorities for any funding body in the country.

Mr. Charlie Angus: In your previous experience you would have, I suppose, dealt with funding applications for the Canada Council as well as for the Ontario Arts Council. Would that be correct?

Mr. Robert Sirman: I'm not sure what you mean by saying that in my previous experience I would have dealt with funding.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Through ballet and through theatre you would have received Canada Council funding?

Mr. Robert Sirman: The National Ballet School for the first four years that I worked there received money from the Canada Council, but in 1995, my fourth year there, the responsibility for the National Ballet School transferred from the Canada Council to the Department of Canadian Heritage. So for the last 11 years I have had no funding relationship with the Canada Council whatsoever.

Mr. Charlie Angus: You worked with the Ontario Arts Council.

Mr. Robert Sirman: Yes, I did. I was on a number of juries with the Ontario Arts Council, and it was a very efficient process.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I know you can't say what you haven't overseen yet, but I'm trying to get a sense of it. Have you looked at the review process, the mandate process of the Canada Council, and how it is approving grants? Do you have a sense that it's working well? Does it need to be improved? Are there areas when you go in there that you think you're going to be looking at?

Mr. Robert Sirman: I have not identified problem areas, if I can put it that way. Every conversation I've had to date with artists in the community and with people who have worked in the sector has reinforced that the Canada Council has an extraordinary record in the peer assessment process. My experience in the Ontario Arts Council validated that, because we were very much based on the model of the Canada Council when the Ontario Arts Council was established in 1963. There was no question that the issue of the mandate of the Canada Council is something that's *supra* council. It's really a government issue.

The mandate of the Canada Council is set out in legislation, as you know, and I am sure that during my time there will be discussion on this subject, but it will not be driven by the Canada Council as being an issue. We are there to fulfill the mandate of the legislation given to us by Parliament.

• (1605)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Again, I'm asking all hypothetical questions because I'm trying to get a sense of your vision for the arts. There are a great number of funding requests coming to the Canada Council, and they're coming from very divergent disciplines, and some of those disciplines are very costly. Theatre costs a lot more than an individual art project when you take a theatre tour across western Canada.

When you look at the overall view of the Canada Council—of course, we should ask for more funding in every element, but we aren't going to be there today—are there areas that you think need to be addressed? Are there areas that you see in terms of a certain discipline that may be falling through the cracks, whether it's aboriginal theatre or writing? On a global perspective, and I'm not asking you to commit to changing, but I'm just asking from what you've seen.... You obviously must have studied the Canada Council before you came forward.

Mr. Robert Sirman: There is no specific area that I am seeing as a priority for shifting money within the Canada Council at this particular moment. What I'm very conscious of is that although the Canada Council is, in my opinion, the most important instrument for stimulating the creation, production, and dissemination of the arts, it is not the only instrument. The growing proactive work of the Canada Council in recent years in trying to establish closer partnerships with other funding bodies, with other sectors of society,

strikes me as being a very desirable and positive direction for the organization to engage in going forward.

It doesn't address your question singularly, but I'm hoping it addresses the idea that the organization should be trying to find strategies for leveraging more activity in society as a whole, or in the sector as a whole, and not simply seeing itself as the only player.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to put on the record that I'm very pleased that our process has involved a search firm and that the representation that is being brought to us and the candidates who are being brought to us speak very much to the call we put out from this committee in the last Parliament and in this Parliament.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also wanted to thank Mr. Sirman for attending. Given the fact that he's going to be supervising the distribution of resources to many artists throughout Canada, I think it behooves us to become familiar with him and to develop a relationship with him.

As with any changing of the guard, there are going to be some concerns. Is there going to be a major change of direction? Stakeholders obviously want to know. You've indicated in your answers to Mr. Angus that you don't sense, at this point in time, that there is a major change of direction. Am I correct in assuming that? Or is there perhaps a change of direction that you can foresee coming down the line?

Mr. Robert Sirman: Again, these are very telling questions, because it's impossible at this moment for me to know whether there will be a change of direction.

I think I was trying to indicate to Mr. Angus that there is not any specific part of the Canada Council's work that I see requiring, at this moment, a reorientation or a redistribution of resources. However, I don't believe this is an issue of policy. I believe this is an issue of philosophy, so I'm prepared to stick my neck out here.

I believe that the world today is different from the world of 50 years ago, when the Canada Council was founded. If the Canada Council and the policies of public funding in the arts are to succeed for the next 50 years, we will probably have to evolve and shift priorities going forward. This suggests to me that we are not going to just toe the line and hold the course endlessly year over year.

My dilemma and my challenge is to figure out exactly what that evolution will look like and who the players should be in helping to shape the direction for the future. I believe that the next 50 years of the Canada Council should be as significant as the past 50 years. But they will not be if the Canada Council just does more of the same.

Mr. Ed Fast: I'm pleased to hear that you're comfortable with adaptation. I think we need that. You're absolutely correct; our environment is changing rapidly.

One of the innovations you thought might be brought to bear is greater leveraging of resources. That's a statement you've made. Can you show one or two examples, from your experience with some of the other arts groups you've worked for or with, of where that has been done?

Mr. Robert Sirman: Well, I definitely can speak to my experience at the National Ballet School. At the National Ballet School, when I joined the organization, we were far more dependent and reliant on government funding than we are today. The interesting thing, though, is that the government funding has actually increased. The quantum has increased, but the percentage of the organization's budget has decreased.

I think what's happening is that the artistic milieu is getting larger and larger—the number of people who are in the sector, the number of organizations—and they are having to reach out to new partners beyond the traditional funders.

In my organization, the National Ballet School—the one I've been most familiar with for the last 15 years—this meant launching business ventures, for example. This meant taking more seriously the establishment of a foundation, a private foundation, which I established as a parallel foundation to the organization, to hold endowed funds. It meant seriously considering the earned revenues of the organization, not just passively looking at them but actually trying to analyze what other sources of revenue there might be to leverage the public funding I was receiving, which was growing, and make it a smaller percentage of the overall budget. I could actually grow faster than my government funding.

This is an example of the kind of leveraging activity that I believe is happening in society as a whole. No single funder is forcing it on the scene, but organizations in the community are recognizing the need to explore broadening—if I can use this word without being pejorative—the business base of running an arts organization in this country.

I don't use it as a big-B business case. But making sure that these organizations are run responsibly, have balanced budgets, can meet their artistic mandates, make connections with the communities they're trying to serve, do actual audience development—by trying to expand to new markets, for example—and orienting the organizations towards the changing demographics of Canadian society are strategies to allow the public funding to leverage more activity without itself being the sole determinant of the future course of the organization.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Simms.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a fitting day for me, because I received correspondence just a short time ago about a proposal for a particular project in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador. But it leads into a bigger question about this.

I'm not looking for how you're going to enact this, or a vision in this particular role—I certainly appreciate where you are at this

time—but could you give me some insight as to where you would like to go with this issue?

Your experience is in Europe, I understand. Is that correct?

Mr. Robert Sirman: Is my experience in Europe? No, my experience is in Canada.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay, but you have worked with European agencies. Is that right?

Mr. Robert Sirman: Yes, I have.

Mr. Scott Simms: Maybe you could use them as an example; I don't know.

But I'll get to the gist of it, which is basically that the problem we have in smaller communities is a lack of capital funding available through private means, we'll say. The problem becomes not so much the money to help generate a particular project to get it off the ground, but the operational money that is involved.

I personally think there is a way for the government to get more involved than it has been with the arts community. The example I speak of is this. There is a town called English Harbour. There is a church in the small fishing village, which is pretty much a ghost town, given that the fishing industry has gone downhill. Two artists from Toronto bought this church, over 110 years old, refurbished it, and are turning it into a school for artists. It's a fantastic idea.

Where do you see the role of the council in helping provide some operational money for this type of operation—not for that specific example, but for an example like that in a smaller community?

•(1615)

Mr. Robert Sirman: I am going to try to speak to two issues.

There is the example you've used. The Canada Council wouldn't primarily be engaged in a training environment, as I understand it. However, the Canada Council is very present in smaller communities in Canada. You probably know that the grants last year were distributed in more than 560 communities in Canada. My understanding is that the Public Lending Right Commission actually distributes cheques to writers in more than 1,500 communities in Canada.

So the Canada Council is definitely present wherever professional arts activity is going on. The Canada Council does not discriminate between small communities and large communities. What it's trying to track is the evolution of professional arts practice in the country.

Beyond that, I am drawn into a debate about the Canada Council's practices, which I am really not in a position to defend or explain. But I do know that the criterion is not the size of the community; it is the presence of professional activity that has an audience, that has a community it's relating to, that is providing value in that community.

Mr. Scott Simms: Does size matter? Pardon the expression. I'm talking about the size of your audience.

I'm glad to hear that you don't discriminate on the basis of the size of a particular community. I would like to see a more active role. Anything that goes on in smaller communities like these is usually under the guise of economic development, when in fact it should also be under the guise of artistic expression in the far reaches, we'll say. I hope you see that as a sincere expression as well, and that the Canadian government should be more involved in this type of affair under the council as well.

Mr. Robert Sirman: I'll certainly take it under advisement and be conscious of it as I assume these new responsibilities.

Mr. Scott Simms: In your experience in dealing with European countries, what do they do in similar situations? I don't know, so I apologize.

Mr. Robert Sirman: That's a big question. The major challenge here is that the European countries we're most familiar with, the western European countries, make a major public investment in arts practice that far exceeds the investment from any other part of the economy. For example, it would be perfectly normal for a theatre company, a dance company, a symphony, an orchestra to be totally funded by government in a European context, which is not the model we use in Canada and certainly not one we're familiar with in North America at all. It's hard for me to draw a relationship there.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay. I only wanted to hear your concerns about this one, especially when it comes to outside the centre, as we say.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Malo.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Good afternoon and welcome. Mr. Sirman.

During your exchange with Mr. Fast, you inferred that the way in which arts and cultural practice over time must evolve and that the relationship between the state and artists must also change.

Could you indicate to us how these changes might take place concretely?

Mr. Robert Sirman: I will try to answer your question.

Technology has really changed the circumstances in which artists create and communicate with present day society. An artist today does not face the same challenges as those he or she might have faced in 1957. The various challenges have indeed changed. I cannot say exactly if relations between the government and artists have changed, but the circumstances in which these relations have developed have most certainly changed.

[English]

It would be impossible for me to pretend that I understand where it's going for the next 10 years, 20 years, 50 years, but it is not the same, and it is not going in the same direction that it went in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

In particular, this was one of the strongest findings when I was in the research division of the French Ministry of Culture and Communications in 1990. It was absolutely clear that no one in the 1980s had predicted the enormous impact on cultural consumption practices in Europe that the new technologies had introduced. No one was prepared for it, and it had a radical change in the way that people consumed art or the way that audiences chose, through their discretionary spending, the arts they wished to attend or consume.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: Concretely, what roles should you and the Canada Council for the Arts play in this evolution and in these changes, in this a period of turbulence?

[English]

Mr. Robert Sirman: We have to stay with the change.

• (1620)

[Translation]

We must deal with change. The CCA has over the last 50 years established new offices, for the media arts and interdisciplinary art. I believe that in the future there will be further changes that will be just as important but that I cannot predict today.

Mr. Luc Malo: Do you believe that with the emergence of these technologies, artists' needs in their creative work might increase over time in order to maintain the same quality in delivery of culture and the arts?

Mr. Robert Sirman: I do not really know.

Mr. Luc Malo: You seemed to be saying earlier that the 50 million dollars on the table now, the new monies, would be sufficient. Is that still your view despite the challenges that you seem to be outlining for the years to come?

Mr. Robert Sirman: I believe that these 50 million dollars are an expression of the trust the government places in the Canada Council for the Arts and in the artists of Canada. I believe that the government mentioned in its first budget that it would not increase funding outside of its five priorities.

[English]

The \$50 million came as a surprise I think because it's not contained within the five priorities, and it behooves the Canada Council for the Arts to spend the money wisely and to demonstrate to the people of Canada why even more investment would help to improve the quality of life in this country. It would help improve the relationship, the building of community, the investment in the quality of experience that we believe the arts give society.

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to turn the discussion a little bit towards leadership style. I have perhaps one question and then one request.

First of all, have you familiarized yourself with the leadership styles of your predecessor, or perhaps predecessors?

Secondly, could you comment on your leadership style? I'm not asking for categorical references such as collaborative or authoritative. I'm not sure those are helpful. I'd like a little more far-ranging idea of how you would lead your team.

Mr. Robert Sirman: I have not formally studied the leadership styles of my predecessors, but I am familiar with my predecessors and I have a sense of how they led and how they contributed to the evolution and development and success of the Canada Council for the past 50 years.

I believe my own skills and my own predisposition from a leadership perspective is very much one that favours what I call non-directive leadership. It is often more time-consuming as a leadership style, but it does contribute to progressive, inclusive responses to changing circumstances.

As opposed to trying to pull the organization as a leader, I hope I can invest in the organization and the organization will help to push me, as a leader, forward. It's a push-and-pull analogy here.

I am the kind of leader who believes strongly in investing in teams, who believes strongly in encouraging, rewarding, and stimulating the highest possible performance in the people around me. This is a style in which you are trying constantly to recruit people better than you, and this is a style that, because of that, requires a certain suppression of ego and a certain confidence in the bigger vision or the bigger challenge that you're trying to help the organization to address going forward.

•(1625)

Mr. Ed Fast: I'm assuming that would be reflected in the comments of those you've worked with in the past 15 years at the National Ballet School.

Mr. Robert Sirman: Yes, this is a style that I used very much there, and it was a successful style. I call it "working under the radar", because you try not to be the star yourself. You try constantly to come in, perhaps under the visibility of the people immediately watching, but the organization constantly achieves outcomes that observers are surprised by, and eventually they say, "How did it get here?", and they realize there has to be leadership in an organization of this kind.

Mr. Ed Fast: Have you been able to provide the kind of leadership that involves empowerment? I think you are discussing empowerment right now, but in terms of empowering some of those at work under you to move on to greater leadership roles, can you give us a couple of examples, without naming names, of course?

Mr. Robert Sirman: I like to think that I play a mentorship role not only in my own organization, but in the community as a whole. I tried to address this in my opening statements, that I do volunteer a certain amount of time in simply working with other organizations to coach leaders, sometimes middle-management leaders. Sometimes this means that those people leave the organization, which the organization isn't always so happy to experience. But as a career development for the professional, it does generate results for the society as a whole and the community as a whole, as opposed to in that actual organization.

The Chair: We will go to the next round, and I think this will be the last round, and then I would like to have a comment or two as chair, if I may.

Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I must say, Mr. Chairman, I think Liberal becomes you.

I'm very glad, Mr. Sirman, that in your answer to leadership style you didn't make any reference to the hub-and-spoke method.

In the final analysis—and I'm not a linguist—I would say that if you were running for the Liberal leadership right now, you'd probably be a borderline pass in terms of your ability in the other official language of the country. So has this come up during your interviews and during your final recommendations? If so, how are you proposing to improve, if I may say, your command of the other official language of the country?

Mr. Robert Sirman: It definitely came up in my discussion as part of the process itself, and I've made a full commitment to the board of the Canada Council for the Arts and to the minister that (a) I will move to Ottawa—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That's a plus already for you, I might say. I can give you the names of a few real estate agents if you want.

Mr. Robert Sirman: I have done this. I have now put in an offer on an apartment that has been accepted and is conditional on my confirmation in this position. I hope to close on August 2, and this means that I will be a full-time resident of Ottawa. I think this will give me an opportunity to be in a bilingual environment, which is not my experience for the last 16 years.

I know that in the very few hours that I've been in Ottawa in the last month, it is amazing how more comfortable you feel in a bilingual environment when you're actually surrounded by others who are relaxed and at ease and using their language skills on a regular basis. I feel rusty and awkward, but I am also committed and confident, and I feel that I will be able, within a very short period of time, to demonstrate an ease that I do not yet have.

•(1630)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I recognize that you see it's an important matter.

I have a final question. I remember a few incidents where I was sitting on that side, and the people on this side—here and in the House—were severely critical of some of the decisions of the Canada Council for the Arts in terms of its funding and some of the things it funded. And I think Mr. Abbott may remember one or two of these incidents. I think he might have been at the other side of one of those.

My question to you is to what extent is it important for the council to be autonomous in its decision-making capacity? And to what extent are you prepared to defend that autonomy?

Mr. Robert Sirman: I think it's absolutely critical, and I will defend it as long as I am in this position. It was critical for me at the Ontario Arts Council in the 1980s; it was something that underlay my interest in studying the history of the Arts Council of Great Britain, which, as you know, was the first of the arm's-length bodies that we're aware of. I believe it's a strength in Canada that we have the arm's-length principle at play in the awarding of grants to creative works, to new works, to works that have not yet seen the light of day and received the assessment of the court of public opinion. I'm totally committed myself to the arm's-length principle in the funding of creative work.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: On the point of tendering resignations, should there be government interference?

Mr. Robert Sirman: This is speculative, but I experienced—

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Of course it's speculative.

Mr. Robert Sirman: —those debates.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: It's speculative, and where it's not speculative, is on the side of government intervention, but that's neither here nor there.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I'm going to rule that question out of order.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That's fair, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll slip over now to Mr. Warkentin, please.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thank you very much for coming in today. I appreciate the time. Do you feel the heat? It's not only outside, but it's inside.

A voice: Yes, we brought the heat in.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I'm a younger person, and I do have a concern about the arts going forward. I want to ensure that Canadian culture is maintained and that we have sovereignty within our cultural endeavours in this country, because I think it will be important for my children and my children's children.

I know it's very tough to speculate as to how things might turn out 50 years from now, but I would suggest that we are at a very important time in history. There's an increased influence from globalization. The technology that's being put forward is going to change the way—and you talked about this a little earlier—we consume culture and intermingle with culture.

I'm just wondering if you would comment briefly on issues that you'll have to deal with at the Canada Council within the next number of years with regard to some of these impacts we see being placed on us from outside forces.

Mr. Robert Sirman: If I can make a distinction between policy and philosophy, I'm very happy to speak on the philosophy side of the equation, but I can't speak on the policy side.

Philosophically, I believe it's the arts and culture that unite people into a collectivity. I was trained in the social sciences, and my first specialization was in anthropology. It was absolutely clear to me as a student, and it is absolutely clear to me as an adult today, that it is not genetics or politics that unite people, it's culture.

If Canada wishes to maintain its sovereignty as a separate nation in the world, it will have to invest in ensuring that the Canadian people share a common culture. The arts are an important part of that culture, and they are undoubtedly bombarded by the transborder power of present-day technologies, which expose us increasingly—not decreasingly, but increasingly—to outside cultural voices.

I am not sure what role the Canada Council will play for the next 50 years in that debate, that struggle, that challenge, but there's no question that it will have to play a critical role. There's no question that if government and the council do not see culture as a critical component in the sovereignty of the people of Canada, we will not be able to protect our independence as a nation in the long run.

● (1635)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I was just wondering if there are some impacts in the next number of years that you view the council will have to deal with. Is there anything that jumps out as being some of the first challenges you'll have to face in this position? Maybe it's all speculative—

Mr. Robert Sirman: It's awkward. I'm not on the job yet. I haven't actually sat down with my colleagues, and I haven't been able to—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: No, I appreciate that. That's fine.

Mr. Robert Sirman: I know one of the great priorities that I personally have—again, I can't speak policy-wise, but I can speak philosophically—is the accessibility of art to the people of the country. I really believe that ultimately we're going to have to be more proactive in trying to expose people to what constitutes the best of Canadian theatre, dance, music, visual arts, literature, etc. If that's a partial answer to your question, then at least it's a partial answer.

The Canada Council isn't the only player in that field. I will really be promoting the idea that the Canada Council work with partnerships, especially with other agencies in the Canadian Heritage portfolio, to move forward on the accessibility issue as well as the supply issue.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have one more question.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

My question is in terms of the overall budget, because we have \$11-million-and-some for general administration and \$9-million-and-some for the administration of the programs themselves. That's \$20 million for administration. Then there's an additional \$10 million that's kept as a surplus. So that's \$30 million of the budget.

My question is twofold. First, have you looked at the administration costs in terms of the Canada Council's overall budget, and are there areas we can improve on? Second, can you explain to me the need to have \$10 million sitting in a surplus when it's an annual funding program? It's not as if you are running a feeder school or a feeder company and you'd want to maintain a bit of a padding if revenues fell one year. I'm wondering, why is \$10 million kept out of the money that could be used for programming?

Mr. Robert Sirman: In all honesty, I can't answer that question. I'm not inside the organization, and I do not yet have a full understanding of the decisions that lie behind the organization's accounting.

I do know that the administration of the Canada Council is approximately 14% of the budget. I do know from my experience at the Ontario Arts Council that this is a very respectably low number and that it's not viewed on the international scene as in any way being an eyebrow-raising percentage.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus, and thank you, Mr. Sirman.

Now, as chair, I have a minute or two.

I must say that I've been very intrigued with some of your answers today. I come from a small rural area, but with quite a theatrical presence. I live just outside of Stratford, Ontario, which last night had its 54th opening night. They started out very small, and I can tell you how important the arts are to Perth county, to Stratford...not only to Ontario, but to Canada and to the world. We have world-renowned artists who have trained there and have gone forward, and I know that the Canada Council has been very, very instrumental in what has gone on there.

I hear at various times that sometimes people from other countries help us with our arts, and I don't know if everyone understands this. Sometimes they even help secure some of the funding that might be provided here. I know that with the endowment fund at the Stratford Festival, they set a goal a number of years ago of some \$50 million. I was talking to the chair in charge of that endowment fund last night, who had just presented \$1.3 million to the festival for working capital. I do know that there was a couple from Chicago who donated \$5 million to the Stratford Festival foundation that helped with that. It was matched I think through the Canada Council, or by someone through Canada Council.

I met last year with the Canada Council people. I would like to address something that was said earlier about you and the ballet, and primarily from that side. Karen Kain from the ballet...I had arts people, I had writers, I had everyone come to my office. And then I met with Minister Oda, who was our critic at that particular time, with a bigger group, so I know how important it is.

I must say that I congratulate all the members of the committee, and you, sir, for this great meeting that we've had this afternoon.

While you are still here, sir, I would like to have someone move the motion, as follows:

That the Committee report to the House that it has examined the qualifications and competence of Robert Sirman and finds him competent to perform the duties of the position of Director of the Canada Council for the Arts.

● (1640)

Mr. Ed Fast: I so move.

The Chair: Do I have a seconder? It is seconded by Mr. Simms.

(Motion agreed to)

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you very much. I do know how warm it is, and I'm quite sure it was warm for you today, but your answers were superb. I know when you get to your new job there will be a bit of a learning curve, I'm quite sure, but all the best, sir, and give my best to the Canada Council.

Mr. Robert Sirman: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Let's take about a five-minute break before we get to our other business, and then we'll carry on.

● (1640) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1645)

The Chair: Maybe we can get back to business here. We've got a fair bit of work still to do.

The first item on the docket is that at the last meeting, Mr. Kotto moved a motion, and I understand he would like to withdraw that motion.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: It is because the documents have already been sent, is that it? It is not this motion?

[*English*]

The Chair: It is "That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage summon the senior executives of Telefilm Canada, the members of its Board of Directors"—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman, but I thought we were still dealing with the report.

I was indeed informed of the legal opinion. We would obviously have saved time if we had called upon Telefilm Canada's officials to appear in-camera, but since we have ascribed to the logic of transparency, I would prefer to defer until the outcome of the legal process the meeting with that group. I therefore would like to suspend my motion for now.

(Motion withdrawn)

[*English*]

The Chair: Before we do work on your motions, I'm going to bring in the motion on the Banff World Television Festival. It was proposed. What we've done is we have brought two budgets forward here. We've looked at things.

I'm just wondering how it would suit the committee if one member from each party plus the parliamentary secretary plus the committee were to go to Banff. The reason I'm saying this is that the budget for everyone to go would be \$50,000.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chairman, do you have the budget in front of you, because we do not have it in our documents? I do not know if we are going to be talking numbers.

[English]

The Chair: Do you want to explain what we have here?

[Translation]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jacques Lahaie): The budget was presented two weeks ago. The overall budget amounted to \$97,000 and we were asked to reduce it. That exercise having been done, it now amounts to \$50,000. We cut it in half.

If the members of the Committee accept the chair's suggestion to send one representative per party, it would be yet another budget, this time of \$34,000.

[English]

The Chair: I will read the motion:

That the proposed travel budget in the amount of \$34,774 for the committee's meetings with the Industry stakeholders during the Banff World Television Festival be adopted and the Chair present the said budget to the budget subcommittee of the liaison committee.

That was for five members and four staff.

Mr. Bélanger, go ahead, please.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, first of all, I don't know how many of the full complement of members will want to go. That's an imponderable that could be rendered ponderable in knowing, but as it is, it's imponderable.

I do not have the figures in front of me, but if I've just heard right, for \$50,000—which is half of what we originally proposed, and that is in accordance with the wishes of the committee—the entire committee can go. For \$34,000, four plus one can go. Is that it?

A voice: Plus the staff; it's nine.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Fine. I'd have a problem with the second proposal. If we have accepted, after fairly significant discussion, the importance of participating at this event—and I think our research officer has distributed a document that attests to that, and the fact that the minister is going to be there in the afternoon of Sunday making an important speech, I gather, attests to it as well—I would argue that only sending a few members of committee would not be helpful, in the sense that the idea was that we all might be brought up to speed and to the same level, so that we can function better as we embark upon a fairly extensive round of discussions and considerations of broadcasting regulations, of CBC mandate review, terms of reference, and so on. For just a few members to have the opportunity for discussion with the representatives of every group involved in the production and broadcasting of television—and cinema, in this case—and not others would I think be counterproductive.

That's why I'm wondering at the sagacity of sending only five members rather than all of those who may wish to go.

I have many more, Jim.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

• (1655)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I have to be careful, because I haven't had a chance to speak with my other members, who didn't come today, regarding whether they'll be left behind.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Charlie Angus: But I would say, on the principle that my tardy colleagues who didn't come.... Well, I won't ask them to come to Banff now.

On a more serious note, the only thing I would suggest is that perhaps we could do this in a more collegial manner. I recognize we may not need to have everybody there, but there are people from each of the parties who have played a role in the past, and who continue to play a role, who would otherwise not get the opportunity. It's not to say four people or twelve; it's to ask whether there are people who really feel they want to be there. Let's count up how many that makes.

The Chair: Let's just start off with the original one, then, that we wanted, which is half of what it was the last time for everybody to go. We'll have a vote on that, and as far as the motion is concerned, we'll just change the figures. For three days for 14 people, it is \$50,811.

So it would be:

That the proposed travel budget in the amount of \$ 50,815.00 for the Committee's to attend the Banff World Television Festival and meet with Stakeholders of the Industry be adopted and that the Chair present the said budget to the Budget Subcommittee on the Liaison Committee.

That is the motion.

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I suggested we could do a show of hands to see whether there's even any point in bringing this forward. I don't believe we are talking about 14 people right now. If we're talking about six, it's quite a different story, so I would prefer to get a general sense to know whether this motion deserves to even be discussed or whether we're moving on to a much smaller number.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, I'm curious. With the number of people who are going to be in Banff, and given the fact that this event is going to be taking place next week and that there are, I presume, going to be a couple of thousand people coming to Banff, could we presume there's even going to be accommodation for us, deciding to go at the last minute, in any event? That's a practical question.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Perhaps that could be directed to the clerk, but it's not next week; it's the week after.

The Chair: Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast: As another practical question, I'm assuming that the committee will not be meeting during that week. Is that correct?

The Chair: The meeting will be in Banff.

Mr. Ed Fast: No, I think that would be inappropriate. I'm not sure that's part of the original motion. I haven't heard that articulated here.

The Chair: Well, there are going to be meetings held in Banff.

Mr. Ed Fast: I understand that, but they'll not be formal committee meetings such as we have today.

• (1700)

The Chair: They're not formal; they're informal meetings.

Mr. Ed Fast: I just wanted to put that on the record.

Again, I will restate my reasons for voting against sending a delegation at this time.

It's not that at some date in the future I wouldn't find this to be quite helpful for myself and for the committee, but I'm just in the process of completing reading through the Lincoln report. It's exceedingly helpful, and as I mentioned in my response to Mr. Bélanger's motion today, there are a number of recommendations that I support in that report.

I find that particular study, which is 800 pages long, comprehensive. It provides us with much of the information that we would base our decisions on, and given the fact that there may be a motion going to the minister referring that report to her for a response within 120 days, this trip, in my opinion, is premature. It's not that I oppose it in principle; I just oppose it at this point in time.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Fast, what we'll do, then, to answer Mr. Angus, is have a show of hands of those who would be going to Banff.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: In our case, I believe Ms. Dhalla and Mr. Scarpaleggia also had indicated an interest in going.

The Chair: That's four—

Mr. Jim Abbott: I would have to go.

The Chair: Yes, and I would have to go. There would be seven of us, and four.

What would we have to do, then, to change this? Can you put a budget together? Can you change the budget somewhat?

The Clerk: Yes. We will subtract three members and then we'll come up with a better figure.

The Chair: I need it for—

The Clerk: Thursday.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Submit for the whole group, and those who don't go don't show, then, as an expense.

The Chair: Then that's what we'll do. We'll go for the whole group.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: For confirmation, what are the official dates we're looking at now?

The Chair: June 11, 12, and 13.

What we'll do is present a budget for \$50,815, and it will be adjusted if those three people don't go. If we are three or four people short, it will be adjusted when things are finished.

The motion, then, is:

That the proposed travel budget in the amount of \$50,815 for the Committee's meetings with the stakeholders of the television, broadcasting, and film industry during the Banff World Television Festival be adopted and that the chair present the said budget to the budget subcommittee of the liaison committee.

Mr. Ed Fast: Can we have a recorded vote, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: We can have a recorded vote if you want.

Mr. Ed Fast: Yes, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus: You're not going to be sending ten percenters into each other's ridings now, are you?

(Motion agreed to: yes 6; nays 4)

The Chair: We'll take that Thursday to the Liaison Committee.

Now we get to Mr. Kotto's motion. It reads as follows:

That pursuant to Standing Order 32(5) on reports and returns, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage forward a copy of the documents to the members of the Committee.

• (1705)

Mr. Jim Abbott: May I ask for some clarification, Mr. Kotto? I am just curious. I'm trying to get our process here. Considering that it was a matter of asking if we could have a copy of the Lincoln report and the various reports, what was your thought process in coming forward with a formal motion to do that? I'm not being critical.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: It is the rules that require this. At the beginning of a new legislature, it is normal practice to supply to all committee members the documents pertaining to the work accomplished in the previous legislature. You could have moved the same motion. I am not seeking any glory in this; it is a simple procedural matter.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I would like a bit of clarification. The Canadian broadcasting system—that's the Lincoln report, correct?

Mr. Maka Kotto: Yes.

The Chair: I know the first time we got a response from the ministry, it was three pages in English and three pages in French. Then we reintroduced that last year, and did we not get a stack back about like that? Would we not get that same thing back?

My suggestion is that I don't think, other than if someone got a copy of the response.... Is that all you're looking for—a copy of the last response we had, to be distributed to everyone, or do you want to get another...?

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: I do not think that these are responses. These are documents: the Lincoln report and the report on film that we produced. I believe that this was distributed to all MPs, especially those newly elected and the new members on the Committee.

The motion that follows deals with the point you make, with the Canadian film industry. This motion deals with tabling a report in the House in order to obtain a response from the minister.

[English]

Mr. Jim Abbott: Isn't that the point the chair is raising, if I understand it?

The previous government, in its various incarnations and various parliaments, ended up issuing, I believe, two responses to the Lincoln report. Is it your request that the current government issue yet another response?

The reason I'm asking is that there's a fairly large bureaucracy at Canadian Heritage, as there is at all the departments. They're all involved in their own jobs. If, in addition to doing or overseeing the mandate review of the CBC, there is your request with respect to Telefilm, your request with respect to the report—everything just gets bogged down with report after report after report. What more can be said about the Lincoln report?

The Chair: Mr. Kotto.

[Translation]

Mr. Maka Kotto: If we do not obtain a response from the government with regard to these two reports... The Lincoln report came back to us during the last legislature with Bill C-60 on copyright that died on the *Order Paper*. It was the beginning of a response. We have the report on the film industry, but if we obtain no response from the minister, what good will all of this work have been? And what good will the work we will now undertake be if there is an election and we move into a 40th legislature? I believe that this is simply follow-up work. The clerk might be able to enlighten us. This is a perfectly normal process.

[English]

Mr. Jim Abbott: I realize I'm getting things a little mixed up, but I'd just like to respond as well, seeing as we're talking about getting reports back, on the new report on feature film policy. I've written down a couple of things so I'd have my thoughts straight, and if you don't mind I'll just share them with you.

The government is presently considering the two studies. It has done a series of proposed adjustments it would like to make to the policy to improve effectiveness. It's important that stakeholders in the industry have their chance to comment on these proposed adjustments to maximize their impact before they're made and before a government response to the standing committee report is made. The Department of Canadian Heritage must be allowed to complete its process with a final consultation with industry stakeholders this summer. A discussion paper will be released that will present the proposed adjustments to the policy and call for comments.

After this process, the department will be able to provide an enlightened government response to the standing committee's report. A revised Canadian feature film policy would then be ready in early 2007, bearing in mind that I'm suggesting that the first part—that is, something that would be enlightened by further response from the industry, being able to speak to the stakeholders over the summer—would be a more conclusive thing for the committee to consider.

If instead this committee is going to say, “Give us a response to this study that has been done, boom, that's it”, then we'll get that. But it won't be nearly as complete as it would be if the department has an opportunity to take more input from the stakeholders.

So this would really slow things down tremendously and complicate things and serve no useful purpose, in my judgment.

• (1710)

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I had understood from the word go that what this committee wanted was a response from this government to both of those reports—the Lincoln report and the one on the film policy. And if this committee tables those two reports from the 38th Parliament in this 39th Parliament—as it is allowed to do and capable of doing under the rules—and asks for a government response, the government, according to the rules of the House, must respond within five months. If I follow Mr. Abbott's timeline, five months takes us to somewhere in October, and that's after the summer and after the department has had the time to do all the consultation he was talking about. If the government has not totally finished, it can

respond at the time, perhaps seek from the committee a delay—or not—file a report, and then file an addendum later on, or a policy.

With all due respect, Mr. Chairman, I'm not concerned that much right now about bogging down the department. They can handle these requests from Parliament to committee. It is their duty to respond to these reports if the committee so requests it.

So if the department has a difficulty in responding to legitimate requests from the Parliament of Canada, that's entirely another matter, which we can deal with. But that should not be what's driving our desire to obtain responses from the current government.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Well, Mr. Chair, having come onto the committee after the Lincoln report was done, I can say there was a sense out there that all this work had been done, and now we're in a new government, a new Parliament, and all that work is put by the side. We had reintroduced that in the last Parliament because we felt it did deserve a response from the government, because it laid out a plan, a road map. And it was very important for us to hear from the minister where she saw the Lincoln report fitting into government strategy.

I think at the end of the day we still felt we never did get a really comprehensive commitment on the Lincoln report that was worth the work that had gone into it.

I certainly don't think, from my experience in the 38th Parliament, that making that request ground down the heritage bureaucrats to the level that they couldn't function any more. My God, we'd be in a pretty sad state of affairs if asking the heritage ministry to respond to a document that everyone is very familiar with and asking this government where they're going, how they see the Lincoln report, how they see the feature film study is going to throw all the consultation out the window. I can't see that happening, quite frankly.

Consultations are ongoing. Direction is being taken. I think what we're asking is how do these reports, which involved a great deal of work and effort, fit into that broad picture? That's what we're asking for, and I think it's a fairly straightforward, reasonable request.

• (1715)

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast: This is not a question but a comment. Is there a middle way of addressing this? I found the Lincoln report to be an intriguing read. There's a lot of good material in there, and given the fact that one report has come back—am I correct in assuming that?

Mr. Jim Abbott: Two reports have come back.

Mr. Ed Fast: I thought one died.

The Chair: One was very big.

Mr. Ed Fast: One wasn't big? Perhaps we could simply request that the minister confirm whether those responses reflect her present views on the report. If not, she would have to go beyond that.

What we don't want to do is plough new ground. But at the same time, we should have a response to that report.

The Chair: I know I'm the chair, but I think if there was a regurgitated report, and most of what's there is the way the government feels right now, it wouldn't take terribly long to get a response, with a bit of copying of those responses.

I do understand that it costs a lot of money and time—a year and a half, I think—and speaking as a former member of this committee, I know it was our intent when we brought it back last year that it not be wasted.

My suggestion would be that we call a vote on this, and if the ministry is bogged down and can't get the report back by October, it could ask for an extension. There's nothing the matter with that, if there's too much work.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, I want the committee members to be clear on what they're asking for. If it's the wish of the committee, clearly the committee has the ability to do that.

If the committee decides to retable the scripts, screens, and audience report, the ministry will then develop a response to the report as tabled—period, full stop, end of statement.

Alternatively, if the committee does not ask for this, there will be further consultations with the stakeholders over the summer months. Those consultations, along with the process, will then be able to be tabled. It will not be the response to the scripts, screens, and audiences. It will be a combination of that, together with the consultations with the stakeholders.

So if I may, and I apologize if this sounds a bit harsh, but what we're basically saying is: here is a document; report on it, and by the way, don't bother with the further consultations over the summer.

I am making a statement that this will happen, which doesn't make any sense to me.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, you have the last question. Then we're going to vote on this.

All we seem to be doing is debating motions here. We haven't accomplished too much yet this year.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I want to put on the record—because I do find this offensive—that what's being said here is that if we ask to table this, as is our right as a committee, then this consultation will not happen. I want it to be made very clear that this is what's being put forward on the table, and it's something we cannot accept.

We have a job to do. We put together a report and it has to have a response. If the minister decides that she doesn't want to bother meeting with any stakeholders because we've put this forward, that's her business. I can live with that, and I'll sleep very well at night. But I would like to think that Minister Oda, having been part of the process with us, understands the value of that and of ongoing input from stakeholders from all arts groups.

The Chair: Okay, I'm going to call the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1720)

Mr. Jim Abbott: Now that was the motion with respect to the film. Is there another motion with respect to Lincoln?

The Chair: No, it's for both.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Thank you.

The Chair: We now have a motion from Mr. Angus. It's dated Tuesday, May 16. We won't get into that argument, because it said 48 hours.

It's in both official languages:

That the committee should examine the impacts of GATS negotiations on the Canadian television industry, and specifically: the impacts of GATS negotiations over stripping foreign ownership restrictions on Telecom that could have major implications for broadcast policy given the convergence of broadcast, telecom and cable distribution; the impacts of GATS negotiations on Audio Visual services, which are underway and could strip domestic content quotas, favourable tax regimes for film and domestic rights for language and other restrictions; that we request the presence of senior members of the negotiating team and senior heritage and industry officials to face questions on the file.

This is moved by Mr. Angus. Is there any discussion?

Mr. Abbott.

Mr. Jim Abbott: It seems to me that we've had a very interesting debate in Parliament today, the initial interchange between Mr. Bélanger and me over the UNESCO agreement.

As I indicated to him in a previous incarnation when we were in opposition, I was representing the official opposition at that time and was fully supportive of that UNESCO agreement. I was fully supportive of the minister's efforts. I don't think anybody on the committee will have heard the current heritage minister say anything to the contrary.

The Prime Minister, having taken specific action with respect to the place of Quebec at the UNESCO table...I can't imagine there's any question about the fact that our government is completely, utterly, and fully, in every conceivable and possible way, committed to treating culture as culture and is very sensitive to it within the general agreement on trade in services.

The situation at GATS right at the moment, as I understand it, is that the whole thing is bogged down. The Doha round is all bogged down as a result of discussions over agriculture. We have no idea if the nations are going to see themselves as successful when coming out at the other side.

However, I am having a little difficulty understanding the necessity or value in this motion, which is to presume that foreign ownership restrictions will be stripped. To quote the motion, "could strip domestic content quotas", and so on and so forth.

I don't really understand what the value of this motion is, but I do understand that in negotiating, if I were a negotiator, I would be very interested in reading the transcripts of any of these hearings at this committee, should the committee decide to do it. We would do a very good job of washing our domestic laundry and weakening the position of the Canadian negotiators.

We know where the Canadian government is coming from on this issue, as stated. I am therefore not really sure what the value of washing our domestic laundry would be in handing those Hansard copies from our committee hearings and our testimony to the other countries as they negotiate against us.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chair, I'm not totally insensitive to the argument that Mr. Abbott has made in terms of discussing negotiating mandates in public. I can understand there would be some concerns. Perhaps we can accommodate that if the will of the committee is to hold such a meeting in camera. I think it's a legitimate point.

The other concern I have would be to express a preference to my colleague, Mr. Angus. In the last bullet it says, "we request the presence of senior members of the negotiating team and senior heritage and industry officials". I would prefer that we start with senior heritage and industry officials, on the premise that senior members of the negotiating team may be involved in negotiations, and bringing them in from wherever the negotiations are currently going on is perhaps a disruptive matter. For the time being, I would be prepared to start with the senior officials from both the industry and heritage departments in order for them to explain to us the negotiating mandate that's been given to the negotiating team.

I don't know if my colleague would be amenable to that, and that we do it in camera, if that is the desire of the committee, in order to protect...and for obvious reasons.

• (1725)

The Chair: We're going to have two questions here. We're got five minutes left. Mr. Kotto first, and then Mr. Angus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chairman, given that Canada has worked very hard to gain adoption of this agreement on cultural diversity at UNESCO and given that Canada is one of only two countries in the world to have ratified this agreement, I fail to see why we would wish to debate this issue behind closed doors.

I believe that we should show transparency, given that this debate does not simply revolve around numbers. It is a debate on our society, on our values. This is why I support the idea of discussing this openly.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I appreciate this.

Yes, Doha is grinding down and there are two schools of thought. One is that they're going to declare victory and walk away from whatever little they get. The other is there is going to be a greater impetus to try to cobble something together. But regardless, GATS goes on. GATS is a separate round. And it is an important issue. I don't think it is the issue of airing our dirty laundry, because having been on the agriculture file, the agriculture sector continually asks the questions: where are we going at Doha and where is our position? And we got very clear responses from the present government in terms of supply management. We will defend supply management. We will defend these rights internationally. Those

commitments came because questions were asked and it gave people confidence.

I'm open to the suggestion that we begin with officials at the level of Heritage and Industry, because traditionally there has been a divide between Heritage and Industry on a lot of these issues, and we know that. Will the Heritage officials come forward and say, do not worry, we know where we stand in terms of cultural product? That could end the discussion right then and there.

My concern is that we know that Canada is a requester nation at the GATS right now on the telecom, and telecom has been an Industry file, but because of convergence and because of the implications for broadcast, what steps has the ministry taken? What steps are they looking to take to ensure that our broadcast policies are still intact if GATS goes ahead? As well, we are on the receiving end of the GATS request on audiovisual, and those raise all the fundamental issues. Whether it's the Lincoln report, the film industry—anything we've talked about around this table is being discussed at Geneva.

I think it would be incumbent upon us to hear from those officials. I don't believe we need to hear from those officials in camera. I think if there is something that is raised that they want to give us a further briefing on, or a separate briefing, and we would go in camera, I'm fine about it. But I think an initial briefing is to get a sense of where we're going. I would defer on the issue of the negotiators at this point if we can hear from ministry officials.

The Chair: Mr. Fast, as the last speaker.

Mr. Ed Fast: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm prepared to support the motion if it is in camera, and I think it would be helpful for it to be a unanimous vote of this committee. My fear is that if we don't go in camera, we won't be getting any information, if not an outright refusal to appear. And if they can't refuse to appear, they'll simply show up and say, "I'm sorry, these are confidential negotiations and we're not going to give you any information". I want to have them here and I want to be able to discuss this pretty frankly with them, get as much as possible, so that we understand at least somewhat the direction that the negotiations are going in. I'm supportive of dealing with this, but it had better be in camera.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Can I put forward, then, as a friendly—

The Chair: Yes, you can.

Mr. Charlie Angus: As an initial briefing—because again this might lead to a whole series of questions further down the road—I'm more than willing to do it in camera. If it means that's our first step, we can see whether or not we're all satisfied or as a committee we have to follow up with further questions down the road with other officials.

• (1730)

The Chair: So if we do it in camera...?

Mr. Charlie Angus: That we request the presence of Heritage and Industry officials to face questions at an in camera session.

The Chair: Does everyone understand that? All those in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: It's 5:30. We've run out of time. Thank you, everyone, for your cooperation today. We got some business done. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned to the call of the chair.

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