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Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

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• (1135)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): Our meeting will now come to order as we consider a couple of notices of motion.

The first one we have is from Mr. Jaffer, that the committee invite the members from Eglinton—Lawrence.

Anyway, I'll pass it over to you, Mr. Jaffer, to present your motion.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): I think it's pretty clear. I know the committee indicated the last time that they didn't think it was necessary to bring in the previous Liberal members on another issue dealing with the appeal division. We've spent a fair amount of time in this committee on the issue of lost Canadians. He's not here today, but Barry Devolin raised a very interesting question that made me realize it might be interesting to hear from these previous ministers. The committee may recall that Barry's question was pretty clear: why was there nothing done by the previous ministers on this particular issue? What was their hesitation?

I don't think the meeting would be very long. It would be very focused on trying to hear from them directly what the challenge was and what they saw internally as a problem. It's also an issue that we could ask our minister, the current minister, about when she comes here to deal with the estimates. We could ask her what holdups she's seen so we can compare her position with that of the previous government, and just find out what the holdup was.

The motion's pretty straightforward. As it's written, it just says "invite the members from Eglinton—Lawrence...York West...and Bourassa...to discuss the issue of lost Canadians and the actions they undertook to deal with this problem while serving as Ministers of Citizenship and Immigration".

I just thought it would be useful to hear that, namely because of what Barry Devolin had asked of the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jaffer.

You've heard the motion. Do we have any further discussion on the motion?

Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): The comment I would make on it is that one of the problems we have had is that under the Liberals we had six ministers in 12 years, and under the Conservatives we've had two ministers in 14 months in total. I think the problem is that the ministers didn't have the grip on

the portfolio that they really should have. This is a standard kind of situation, so it doesn't make any more sense to call on Monte Solberg than to call on Denis Coderre and the whole batch of them. Denis Coderre, when he introduced it, said we were going to have it within a year. So outside of taking up some time, I don't know if we're really going to resolve anything around it.

The legislation was drafted and passed by Parliament. Accommodations were made. Boards with two members went down to one with the understanding that we would have the appeal division, and it didn't transpire, notwithstanding that Parliament passed legislation.

I just don't know what they're going to contribute. What I told Mr. Devolin is that we have a problem in terms of having real direction for the department. So I think the ex-ministers' coming forward is not going to really address that.

I'm not laying any blame on the Liberals or the Conservatives. We're the only two groups that have been in government since this thing came in. I think we should just proceed and get it done, and find a way of putting in a mechanism with which we can make it work. I really think we can.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Siksay, please.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Chair, I don't support the motion. I don't think that bringing in the former ministers helps us solve the current problem. The problem can be solved by the current government. Those are the folks we need to be discussing. I don't want to see this deteriorate into some kind of partisan bickering here at the committee. The reality is that the former government didn't solve the problem, but hopefully we can contribute to finding that solution now.

I think it might be interesting to hear from the former ministers, but I don't think it's determinative of what we do now. What we have to figure out is the current government's attitude to it and how it sees the current situation, and make recommendations to finding the solution now. I don't think either Mr. Volpe or Ms. Sgro can add significantly to our discussion of that issue.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alghabra.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think the purpose of this motion derives from either political theatre or really getting to the perception, or the point of view at the time, of former ministers. In terms of the latter, we've already heard from the department, from the current minister, on the department's point of view. Obviously the glaring absence of Monte Solberg, the former minister, leads me to think that it's just partisanship theatre.

So we have a job to do. We heard the testimonies from the department. We heard the minister's opinion. We just need to find a way to solve it now.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Faillie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): With regard to citizenship, the bottom line started in 2005 with the provision requiring that one has to apply within 28 years in order to retain citizenship. Some problems also arise in view of the fact that under the new regulations and the need to harmonize our policies to those of the United States, people must apply for a passport. The problem is more recent but it nevertheless has been in existence since the implementation of the legislation in 1977.

I think that we would really limit the scope of our study by asking these people to testify. Although it existed at the time, the problem was perhaps less significant. The legislation should have been rewritten in 1997 or 1998, but the legislator never introduced a new bill on citizenship. According to my experience in this committee, I would say that as of 2004, we really thought that a new bill on citizenship would be introduced.

Under these circumstances, we don't want to pursue the idea that we should request previous ministers and a limited number of ministers to come and testify before this committee. That might not be fair, in view of the fact that some problems which go back to a much longer time, should also have been dealt with by previous ministers. This is the reason why I do not support this motion.

• (1140)

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the motion? If not, I will call the question.

(Motion negated [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Next is a motion by Mr. Telegdi, that the committee receive testimony from an additional group of individuals.

Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Basically, as I said before, Mr. Chair, we really need to try to do some reconciliation between what we heard from the groups and also try to answer some questions. For example, how many people have their cases on hold because of the Joe Taylor decision that's before the courts?

When we come in with recommendations, we have to have an understanding as to what recommendations to make and what might be possible. For instance, do we recommend that a moratorium be put on anybody having this issue affect them until such time as legislation has been passed? We could make allowances for cases

that are extreme or whatever. I think we really have to have an understanding before we come in with the recommendations, and I think there's a great deal of knowledge in the department that we haven't had the benefit of hearing.

For those reasons, I would like to see these folks be brought before committee and to have them appear as witnesses so that we can come up with recommendations that are going to be realistic at the end of the day, and we address the problem.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Madame Faillie—

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Let me just add, Mr. Chairman, that over my years on this committee—I think Rahim will probably agree with me here—I have never ceased to be surprised about the kind of stuff that comes out. When the lost Canadians first came forward, I was totally flabbergasted. I was sitting on that side of the table the first time Mr. Chapman came here. Genuinely, this was a real shock.

How is it that one can be on this committee and not even know about it, not even be warned by the bureaucrats about it, not even have it raised as a problem that this committee should be looking at to try to redress? When I think about the thousands and thousands of people who have been caught in this, it's downright frightening. We heard from the witnesses about some of the really debilitating situations this puts them in.

So I think we have to hear from them to be able to do a report.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Faillie, and then Mr. Siksay.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: I am going to support Mr. Telegdi's motion. Department's officials appeared before us. I think that these people's opinion can help us come to a decision.

However, I was wondering whether Mr. Telegdi would agree to an amendment to his motion so that we may invite someone from the institute of Canadian citizenship to appear. This institute was set up by the former governor general, Ms. Adrienne Clarkson.

[*English*]

The Chair: That would be an amendment to your motion, Mr. Telegdi. You will accept that?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Chair, I strongly support the motion as well. I think this would add to our consideration of this important issue. But I want to ask Mr. Telegdi about the last two points in his motion.

You say in your second last point, "A representative from the Citizenship and Immigration Canada Case Processing Centre—Sydney." But there are already at least two folks from the case processing centre on the list. Do you have someone specifically in mind, or is there a category of official that you have in mind?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: No, actually it could go.

Mr. Bill Siksay: So we don't need that reference? We could strike that clause?

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: That's right.

Mr. Bill Siksay: You also mention Hugh MacDonald. The name rings a bell for me, but I'm not sure who he is or why he's on your list.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: It rings a bell for me too—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: —but I don't have that information right here.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay.

The Chair: I'll call the question, then, if there is no further discussion.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): I would probably take the comments that Andrew made in respect to Mr. Jaffer's motion and have him apply them to this one too. There is always useful information you can get from somebody. But we've had the minister here, and the deputy minister, and certainly any information that's required can be provided.

We've also had an expert, Mr. Edmondston, testify before this committee. In fairness, the minister indicated the number of calls that are coming into the ministry with respect to this issue, not identifying the specific numbers of people who might be affected. Mr. Edmondston, whose job it is...and I understand he was tendered by Mr. Telegdi as an expert. He gave the types of people who might be in this category, and then when it was drilled down to how many would be affected, he was not able to put specific numbers on that.

So we've had witnesses on this very issue. You're talking about reconciling, but I'm wondering; there is nothing to reconcile between Mr. Edmondston and of course the witness who talked about the Mennonite situation and who provided numbers. There is no reconciling that needs to be done.

We understand that there is an issue and a problem. We understand that there are categories of people affected. Even the experts can't give a specific number. This calling of various levels of individuals from the department probably has little to do with that. It perhaps will involve some political theatre, and perhaps some mischief, but even so, I don't know that all of these witnesses would be necessary. So we would oppose that motion.

I'm wondering if Mr. Telegdi would be prepared to go witness by witness and indicate the purpose of their testimony and what the testimony will be when they're called, especially where there might be duplication. Again, for someone who wanted to have this done sooner rather than later, and with the availability of the deputy minister and the minister, I have to wonder about Mr. Telegdi's purpose in having these additional witnesses. I would like him to indicate the purpose of each, if he could, before we vote.

The Chair: Mr. Temelkovski had his hand up. Okay.

●(1150)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's nice to be back once again to this committee. I see some recognizable faces and items that you're still dealing with.

I would like to know from Mr. Telegdi how much of the committee's time it will take. I think what's most important is that we table the report with some good recommendations, because this has been worked on for many years. I'm familiar with the issues. It's nice to see some of my old colleagues from the past.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Thank you very much. It's certainly good having you back to the committee, Lui. If I may say so to members of the committee—and Mr. Jaffer and Nina will attest to this—he used to keep the parliamentary secretary in line. He was of great assistance in that.

I think we'll probably need about two meetings.

I think one of the problems we have, and we have had over the years, is that you have a minister and you have a deputy minister. The deputy minister has a short tenure, and so does the minister. Essentially I don't think they are capable of providing the kinds of answers you might be looking for.

I want to see the department officials who make the decision to reject somebody's citizenship on the basis that they are born out of wedlock or have not applied before a certain date to retain citizenship. I want to see those folks, and the policy folks in the department, and the legal advisers in the department who come up with the decision that we're going to take one of the Clark children and try to revoke their citizenship.

Quite frankly, I don't know why the parliamentary secretary is offering up the minister as a sacrificial lamb in this, because quite frankly she had nothing to do with creating the problem. It's a problem that she inherited, and it's a problem, unfortunately, that successive governments have inherited.

I think we have a right to have the folks who actually are making these decisions in front of us. This is the best list that I was able to come up with. May I say that, to the credit of people in the department, my office has had communications from people in the department who are rather upset going to work every day and seeing the injustices that occur. These were the names I was provided with, names of people who are most likely to help us find answers to the problems. If you want to go beyond the source, I'm not going to name any sources.

The Chair: Okay.

Madam Faillie.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: I would like to add to Mr. Telegdi's comments with regard to having the people who are closer to the operations, appear to answer some questions.

For example, as I mentioned earlier, Newfoundland became a Canadian province and the act was in effect in 1947. Then what happened between 1947 and 1949? Why have those people lost their citizenship, when, Newfoundland became part of Canada in 1949, they were told that they were Canadian citizens. Therefore, when it comes to operations, they might be able to give us their interpretation.

Often, those are technical questions which the deputy minister cannot answer. In a very recent past, the deputy minister actually misled us on a matter as simple as the department's effort, in terms of advertising, to inform people. Should we have much more specific and detailed questions, who will be able to answer them? Who will be able to give us a correct answer? I think therefore that it is quite appropriate to have someone who is still closer to operations and decisions, appear before the committee.

• (1155)

[*English*]

The Chair: Maybe we're ready for the question on the amendment. The amendment was from Madam Faille, that we

include in the list of people who will come before our committee a representative from the national citizenship institute.

(Amendment agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The question is now on the main motion, that the committee receive testimony from the individuals whom you have before you, Mr. Telegdi's motion.

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

The Chair: That completes our agenda.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Can I ask a question?

Chair, will you be presenting, in the tabling in the House, the report on the Kingston Immigration Holding Centre today, or when do you plan to do that?

The Chair: I have it here, so I'm going to present it today.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Great, terrific.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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