



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 030 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

—
Chair

The Honourable Judy Sgro

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• (1245)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.)): Order, please.

Ms. Stronach.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to go over this motion with the intent that it could be studied and, hopefully, included in the final report from the committee. It was brought up more towards the end of the number of witnesses we saw, and it's on the positive impact of having a national rapporteur on human trafficking in Canada. Since we've heard throughout our witness testimony about the lack of education and the lack of statistical data, and just to make this a priority issue for the country to show leadership on, I think this suggestion is very worthwhile studying and that it should not be overlooked.

The Chair: Would you read the motion into the record, please?

Hon. Belinda Stronach: The motion reads as follows:

That the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women considers studying the possibility of establishing a National Rapporteur on Human Trafficking in Canada. The study would provide information on the role of the Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking to continue to examine ways and means of overcoming existing obstacles to the full and effective protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this?

Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): I just wanted to say that I support the motion. I think it's a very good idea.

Further to that, I was thinking that we might even consider it as part of a first report, as part of one of two reports maybe, or something of that sort. Maybe we could extend our hours and proceed with scheduling hours to study this specifically around the table, but in addition, consider other witnesses with respect to human trafficking.

I have a motion here that I'd like to hand out, and we can talk about it now and include it in this, or we can do it another time. A woman by the name of Linda Smith, who some of us may or may not be familiar with, would probably have some great information to add to Ms. Stronach's suggestion for her study. I'd like to see her called as a witness before us, and perhaps we could identify other witnesses, and support this motion.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Hon. Belinda Stronach: I thank the member for her comments. It's part of the motion.

I think it would be a shame if we weren't able to include this in this comprehensive study done now, because I think it really goes to the core of what we've heard throughout in terms of information and coordination. It's a way of linking together a lot of these activities that we've heard of. If this government wants to show leadership on this issue, I think it's a really positive step forward for you to deal with it by highlighting that.

So I'd like to see it included in this report.

The Chair: You're suggesting that this be considered a recommendation in the report?

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Yes.

The Chair: Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I'm not opposed to that, but I do have some concern. I think we haven't heard enough information in order to give a solid recommendation on that, specifically on a national rapporteur. Maybe if that's what we're considering, I think we should indicate in the report that this is an interim report, a first report, and that we are going to do further study.

The motion says that we should consider studying the possibility. Yes, we've gone through a big study, but I think this motion suggests that we need even more study. It recognizes that perhaps we haven't done enough, or else it would have been included already as a recommendation based on a number of witnesses' testimony.

So maybe the first report can be an interim report, with the full intent that we'll be coming forward with more information on this, in addition to the witness I'm talking about—Homes of Hope and Linda Smith. I'm sure the good work she's done will support Ms. Stronach's recommendation. I don't think we can just throw it in there as an add-on; I think it deserves a little more recognition than just adding it as a recommendation at the end. I think we should be having another report come forward.

The Chair: But in reading the motion, it does say that the "Committee on the status of women considers studying the possibility of establishing". It sounded, from the information we received from the witnesses, that it is something else that would help us achieve the goal we're trying to deal with.

I have Ms. Smith, Ms. Stronach, and Ms. Minna.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): I like this motion. It has lots of possibilities, and I like the idea of studying it. However, if we think back to our witness who talked about the Swedish model, she had mixed reviews about that initiative. Also, in our own report, we recommended that a special office be set up, and that office would make these decisions. So I would hate to put...

I think this is a very well-intentioned idea, but I just think that even if we had one meeting afterwards on this particular issue, we could have a better assessment of it. It was mentioned once during the presentations and it had mixed reviews. I would hate to actually recommend something because, in talking to people outside this office or committee, there were mixed reviews of it as well.

So as much as I like the motion and its intent, I think we do need further study of this, even if it's only for one or two meetings.

The Chair: Ms. Stronach, and then Ms. Minna.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: I'd be fine with a meeting or two, just as you suggested, and then if there is enough will among the committee members, it would be considered to be put into this report.

Ms. Helena Guergis: So will we be holding off, then?

The Chair: Can I just ask a question? Ms. Guergis had also submitted a motion. It wasn't within the 48 hours, but it is pertaining to what we're talking about here. Can you distribute that motion?

I'm not going to deal with it. I just think that the committee might as well look at it so that we can save time while we deal with the rest. The idea would be, at our next meeting, when we—

I'm sorry. Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Chair, I just want to say two things.

First, obviously we tried to get this motion into a report, if you recall, last time. I'm still of the opinion that this would be good. I don't mind having the researchers come back to us when we meet next time to give us an idea of how it has worked elsewhere and what kind of mandate this particular position has. Then we could decide whether we wanted to include it in the report. But I do not want to spend time and make this report only an interim report where we come back and study it all over again.

Frankly, we've looked at it. We want to make recommendations and move on. The only thing we need to do when we come back is, with additional information from our researchers, decide whether we want to put this into the report. It's as simple as that, and the report then is done.

•(1250)

The Chair: We could have the clerk arrange for the analyst to get some information over the holidays, possibly, and bring all of that to our first meeting when we're back, so that we could hear from a witness or two, and the analyst, on the impact of this. Then at the end of that meeting, when we go back into the draft report, we could decide whether to include it and, at the same time, be able to deal with another issue.

Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I want to point out that the idea of an interim report was simply that I didn't want to see us delay the report. It wasn't for any reason other than that.

But if we are going to delay just for a meeting to hear from the witness I've suggested and perhaps other information from the researchers and such to help with Ms. Stronach's motion, I'm happy to wait before we put it in and have it completed the way we want it to be. I just didn't want to see a delay, that's all.

The Chair: So in adopting this motion and Ms. Guergis' motion, which ties into a similar thing about one more meeting for a couple of witnesses, the analyst would get us some additional information so that we all fully understand the benefits of having a national rapporteur and we can make that decision at the end of that meeting. Then we would have one more meeting to go over the final draft report. So we'll allocate that way.

We move adoption of Ms. Stronach's motion.

I'm sorry. Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Madam Chair, I agree with the commentary so far by the committee members. However, it has been indicated that we should really be considering having this included in report recommendations. That's not stated in the motion. It's not clear in the motion.

I wonder if we could add a phrase that would consider that, after the review of this issue by the committee in one or two meetings, those committee recommendations in respect of this issue be included in the report.

The Chair: Yes, good.

Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Madam Chair, I only ask for one meeting. We can't keep hearing witnesses. This motion leaves the field open to hear witnesses concerning human trafficking. I would like to table the report as soon as possible.

[English]

The Chair: We're talking about having one meeting. We'll have a couple of witnesses pertaining to this whole issue of the benefit of a national rapporteur, and Ms. Guergis has a motion here asking that a specific witness also come. So it would be very limited to those, and then we'll move on with our report.

We don't need to do any more studying. We just want to clear up this issue.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Can we agree to table the report, at the latest, on the second week of February? I hope that this will not take us as far as the end of February.

[English]

The Chair: I hope so. I don't think any of us want to lose time. If we have to have some extra meetings, we're just going to have to do it in order to move it forward.

Hon. Maria Minna: I suggest that we work until midnight to finish it. I suggest that we do an evening meeting when we come back, whenever, and work as long as we have to.

I've been involved, Madam Chair, with hearings for finance where we go from 9 in the morning until 10 at night. We don't have to stick to a plan. I think when we come back, we should work and finish it.

The Chair: Can I make a suggestion that Monday, and maybe the Tuesday, if we have to book two meetings...? But then it doesn't work for a lot of the other members.

Let's see whether we can find extra time to get this thing wrapped up the first week we come back and agree that we don't go home until we finish it that week.

Ms. Helena Guergis: On a lighter note, we have to make sure we have something other than sandwiches for dinner.

The Chair: Have you got that? We want healthy stuff.

We need to adopt Mr. Stanton's amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

Whose motion is the next one?

Ms. Mathysen, would you read this into the record, please?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is "That the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women to appear before the committee to clarify the 2007-2008 budget of Status of Women Canada."

• (1255)

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this?

I see Ms. Guergis' hand up first, and then Mrs. Smith, and then Ms. Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Madam Chair, I have a point of order. Mrs. Mathysen's motion and mine are exactly the same.

[*English*]

Ms. Helena Guergis: Yes, but mine hasn't been dealt with, and we didn't finish mine.

The Chair: When we had Ms. Guergis' motion—which technically wasn't in order, because we didn't have 48 hours—I referred to that motion as covering the same time that we're going to have some people come in on the national rapporteur issue. I put both of them at the same time, because there's the same intent. I don't think anybody was objecting to that.

Ms. Helena Guergis: No, but we should clear it up and ask whether everybody is in support of hearing from Linda Smith. At least we should do that.

The Chair: I have to deal with the ones I have in line here, before I get to yours.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I have comments on Ms. Mathysen's—

The Chair: Okay. So I'm back to Ms. Mathysen's, and it is five minutes to one.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I'll be quick.

I just want to point out that on November 21 Minister Bev Oda actually e-mailed the clerk and provided three proposed dates when she wanted to come before the committee. I'm not sure why we didn't hear about that here, but the date was the end of November, and she said either mid-December...and she requested the date of February 1.

I don't know whether we really need to discuss those motions, because she actually did offer to come. She hasn't heard anything, so she was a little bit concerned as to why she didn't hear a response to her e-mail on November 21 to follow up calls.

The Chair: She indicated she could come November 28?

Ms. Helena Guergis: Yes.

The Chair: We weren't sitting.

Ms. Helena Guergis: But she also gave three dates in that e-mail. She gave mid-December, and she also gave February 1. So we can discuss the date of February 1.

I'm not sure why those dates weren't given to us, but perhaps we can clarify that with the clerk.

I would think that because this was sent to the committee long before the motions were put on the table, we should discuss the date of February 1, since that's the only one of the three days that is left. I think that's only fair. Why are we asking her to come when she has already offered to come? Let's try to agree on some things here.

The Chair: It's just that I have not seen that communication.

The question is, the members are asking her to come. February 1 is the first that she would be able to come, if she is offering to come February 1.

Ms. Helena Guergis: That's right. So you say yes.

The Chair: So we will respond and say, yes, please come February 1.

Ms. Helena Guergis: So the motions aren't required.

The Chair: The minister will confirm that.

What do we need to do here? Does Ms. Mathysen—

Ms. Helena Guergis: It's unfortunate they weren't given the information.

Hon. Maria Minna: I have a point of order. I have to clarify something. It bothers me that there is a member—and I respect the member—who says there was a letter; however, the chair obviously has not received any letter from the minister giving her three dates. My understanding is that November 20 was all she had, and nothing but that.

I don't think it's fair to make assumptions that there was a letter when we have seen no such letter. I have not seen one, and the chair says she has not received one.

The Chair: The clerk tells me that it would have been brought forward if we ever got into future business, but because we have been tied up with the report, she did not bring the e-mail forward with the minister, because we haven't dealt with future business. That's the reason; otherwise she would have brought it forward.

Let me keep going. I think we have gotten our points across.

I have Ms. Smith, and Ms. Mourani. Ms. Smith, you're first.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you.

I have a copy of that e-mail that went to the clerk on November 21 asking for these dates. Just to reiterate, it's very timely, because these two motions have been on the table with the request for the minister to come. So I would ask that we talk about February 1 to have the minister come, if that is okay with the committee.

The Chair: If the minister's offering to come February 1, which is great, would you like to withdraw your motions?

No? All right.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: No, I want it to be very clear that we need to speak about the budget and, as Ms. Mourani has indicated in her motion, the new criteria for the women's program, the mandate. I think, in light of all of the confusion and the concern we've heard from across the country, that those are important topics and that the minister should be prepared to speak on them.

The Chair: Okay, we will confirm with the minister for February 1.

I have this motion from Ms. Mathysen on the table. Is everyone in agreement with the motion requesting the minister to come before committee? That's what's in front of us. I have to have a vote on it unless it's withdrawn. Those are the rules here, and I have to move forward on this.

Ms. Guergis.

• (1300)

Ms. Helena Guergis: I just want it on record that I believe it's an attempt to make the minister appear as though she hasn't been willing to come before committee, and the clear evidence here states that she has been willing to come. It's unfortunate—

The Chair: But I don't have that before me.

Ms. Helena Guergis: It's right here.

The Chair: But I don't have it. I've never seen it and I had never heard of it until you brought it up.

Ms. Helena Guergis: It's unfortunate. The clerk will have to answer to that at some point.

The Chair: You might want to table that e-mail with the clerk so that we'll have it done.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Madam Chair, there is no such attempt, and quite frankly, I find that offensive. The purpose of this motion is to bring the minister to this committee so that she can talk to us about the change in the budget, or clarify the budget, and clarify the Status of Women.

In terms of this e-mail, I've not seen it either.

The Chair: That's right. It was all done in good faith, because that letter is very different from what we have here.

I have Ms. Mathysen's motion. Are we ready to vote on this?

Ms. Mourani, you want to speak to this.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I would like to state clearly that I have no ill intent, since I didn't even know about those emails. I want to remind you, however, that both motions, mine and Ms. Mathysen's, are similar. The only difference is that I added the new criteria for the Women's Program.

Will we adopt Ms. Mathysen's motion, or amend it? I'm open to all proposals.

Would you like to adopt each motion, one after the other? I'm open to this too.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, they stand alone, so they would have to be voted on individually.

Okay, I have Ms. Mathysen's motion.

(Motion agreed to)

Please note that the government abstains.

That was Ms. Mathysen's motion.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I do want it read into the record, because I agree with my colleague Ms. Guergis. I do think this is an attempt to really discredit the minister. She's wanted to come and meet us. She wants to answer everything, and wants to work with the Status of Women. So this side of the committee has abstained, because we really think this is totally unnecessary. She will be here February 1.

The Chair: In fairness to the committee members, they and I were unaware of any letter or e-mail, and I believe they would have put this in good faith. They placed it. We have to vote on it if it is not withdrawn.

Ms. Mourani, would you read your motion into the record, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: It reads:

That the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women ask the Honourable Bev Oda, Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Status of Women, and Status of Women Canada to appear before the Committee to discuss the budget and the administrative cuts at Status of Women Canada and the new criteria for the Women's Program.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right, does anybody want to speak to this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

Now, it's 1:05. I have several motions here. I'll deal with one more, and then we're going to have to close off.

Ms. Minna, please read it.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women add additional televised hearing days, beyond the two already allotted, allowing for more women's organizations to appear before the committee to discuss the impact of recent budget cuts to Status of Women Canada.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Hon. Maria Minna: I could explain it.

The Chair: There's no time.

Is everybody in agreement? Do you want to discuss this, or do we want to call a vote on it?

Ms. Guergis, to Ms. Minna's motion.

Ms. Helena Guergis: I only wanted to say that I think this would be a great idea.

I was hoping we could hear from the minister before we proceed with other witnesses. Considering there's been so much misinformation put out there, perhaps we could have all of the information for the witnesses before they come to the committee. We could hear from the minister and maybe from some officials again to clarify everything.

We need to make sure we have that information before we continue to hear from witnesses. There is a lot of misinformation out there, which means their testimony isn't really on the mark.

•(1305)

Hon. Maria Minna: We already said that February 1 would be for the minister. It would actually be the first meeting.

The Chair: Yes, the minister is coming on February 1, and that's great.

Is there any discussion on Ms. Minna's motion? We'll move adoption.

(Motion agreed to)

I'm going back to the motion by Ms. Guergis, which I'm not supposed to do because it wasn't put here in time, but it's related to what we decided on earlier.

Are there any comments on the motion by Ms. Guergis?

Ms. Helena Guergis: I want to find out if we can get an invitation to Linda Smith as soon as possible. I don't want to give her a last-minute timeframe on when to be here.

The Chair: Our next meetings are going to be the at end of January.

(Motion agreed to)

We can't continue any further. There isn't any more time. It's 1:10 already.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Madam Chair, this will only take one minute. I have a motion that has not been addressed.

The Chair: Your motions are not as simple as the other motions we dealt with, which only took us two minutes. Looking at both of them, the first one you have before us and the second one, I believe they are going to take lengthy amounts of time to discuss.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I don't think it would. I'd like to read it into the record, if I could.

The Chair: You gave one within sufficient time, but the other one was not given within sufficient time, Mrs. Smith. If you want to, you may read the initial one into the record.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I would like to.

The Chair: You can read the first one into the record.

Mrs. Joy Smith: We started our meeting quite late because members opposite were not here. We agreed to that.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but you had several members not ready.

Mrs. Joy Smith: We were ready to go.

The Chair: I was being more patient waiting for Ms. Grewal and Ms. Guergis to get here, so that you had a full house.

Mrs. Joy Smith: We were ready to go, even without our members.

The Chair: You need to read this into the record quickly, because I'm going to adjourn the meeting.

Mrs. Joy Smith: This is the motion:

That the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women consider prostitution to be an activity that sexually exploits people, primarily women, and that produces and promotes unequal relationships between men and women in society, and thus recommend that the government not legalize the activities associated with prostitution in Canada, and that the adoption of this motion be reported to the House.

That the Committee therefore recommend to the government and to the House that they take—

The Chair: No, Mrs. Smith, it's only the first one.

Mrs. Joy Smith: This is the first one.

The Chair: Don't read the second one. You did not give me 48 hours' notice.

We are already well beyond our time. It's my responsibility to get you out of here at one o'clock, and it's now ten minutes past.

Mrs. Joy Smith: But I'm asking you for five minutes, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I don't have five minutes. Many of us have to participate in question period, which means we have to leave.

You read this into the record, as you asked to. It will be discussed at the next meeting, along with the other one that you have tabled.

Mrs. Joy Smith: With all due respect, when Madam Stronach brought her motion and she didn't give 48 hours, you gave her the consideration to address it.

The Chair: We did not address it. It was addressed today.

I'm reminding the committee that we have public hearings tomorrow from 3:30 to 5:30. I hope to see you all there. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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