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Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)): I'd like to bring this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security and our 32nd meeting.

I am a bit pressed for time today, so I can't be here the whole time.

You have before you the orders of the day, starting with committee business. I'm going to turn the floor over to Ms. Barnes, who can explain the motion she has before us.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I talked to most of you last week. My understanding is that this committee is now getting the report. We don't have the full contents of the subcommittee report; the minority pages haven't been given to us. I just got them at my office last night, but we're still lacking part of them.

The House order, as I currently understand it, says we're supposed to have the full committee report back to the House by Wednesday of next week, which would give us one day to review a report that I haven't even received yet in full. Even though I will probably spend most of this weekend working on it, not everybody on the full committee, including me as critic, was a part of the deliberations of the subcommittee. And although I've read the Hansard, I think it will take some time to go through the work people have done. I would like to do it as fast as possible, but we have a break week the following week. What I've done will give us until the Tuesday, or three meetings after the break week, to get it back. Hopefully we can easily do so in that time. It might even be possible to do it before then; I just don't know at this stage.

Garry, I just wanted to put some things on the record. We're going to have a Supreme Court decision coming down tomorrow that could potentially impact whatever is in this report. It may or may not; we don't know. We may or may not decide that our report will take that decision into account. I don't know at this stage of the game, and neither does anybody else.

I just think people have spent time on this and we should do it properly. Even though all the critics and the parliamentary secretary have said they're amenable to this, they may have changed their minds; I don't know. I want to stress that the full committee's report deserves some attention and should not be done in a way that we don't understand what we're doing here.

Also, Garry, I know that the House order has to be done, so if we pass this motion and the House leaders don't give us the extension, we'll still be working on Tuesday.

The Chair: I don't remember your putting the motion before us, so I'll just read what you have here.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Oh, I'm sorry. It's been circulated.

The Chair: Yes, it's been circulated.

Hon. Sue Barnes: It is that the committee request an extension from the House of Commons so that the committee be authorized to continue its deliberations relating to its review of the Anti-terrorism Act beyond February 28, 2007—which is the date now—and to present its final report no later than March 27, 2007.

What I would point out is that it is really only three meetings, because of the House break.

The Chair: I just wanted to make sure that's in the record, because some people will only have the written record.

Monsieur Ménard and Mr. Comartin, you have finished your minority report, but we don't have it as a committee. Apparently it's at the translators. Is that right?

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Right.

The Chair: When might we be getting it?

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Ask the clerk.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Once it has been translated.

[English]

The Chair: Friday, or maybe Monday, is what I am told.

Phil, do you have any comments in regards to this whole process?

Mr. Philip Rosen (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Chair.

What I can tell you is that there's a parallel exercise going on in the Senate, as you know. There's a special Senate committee that has also been looking at the Anti-Terrorism Act. Its mandate ends on March 31; however, it will be tabling its report on the same subject matter this afternoon. It will presumably do other things until its mandate runs out on March 31.

As I said, it's a parallel exercise to what the subcommittee is engaged in.

•(1110)

The Chair: Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have spoken to our House leader and we have no objections from this side in accepting the recommendation or motion here, and we would support it.

The Chair: Okay.

Well, if there's agreement all the way around, we probably don't even need a vote. Do I see any other objections to this?

Hon. Sue Barnes: It's unanimous, sir.

The Chair: Okay, I will then—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: I completely understand why one would agree to this... We must realize that this is one of the most difficult laws to read. Only fiscal laws are more complicated. I think that M. Mackenzie and M. Norlock, who had to read the law this summer, have a good understanding of the needs that are expressed.

I find this request reassuring because it shows that other Committee members want to form their own opinion. If I understand correctly, we would have until March 27th to discuss this matter.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, and if we adopt this motion, I assume it would almost answer the second part of our meeting, the future business of the committee. This is what we're going to deal with until that time.

I think, Sue, you've counted the days. There are only three or four days that we would have to consider this, because of the break.

Hon. Sue Barnes: If you present your final report on March 27, that's only three days after the break. We might not be ready next week to talk about this, unless we want to start on it; it's a matter of studying it. Do we want to have a conversation before we've had a chance to really impact on it?

There are some things I've seen that we may want to look at. We're in an open meeting right now, so I'm not sure I want to put them on the record right now. I've just had a chance to skim the recommendations, but...

The Chair: Okay, let's do one thing at a time here.

Hon. Sue Barnes: There's the confidentiality of the report.

The Chair: Can I get agreement from everyone around the table to ask for the extension?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I see we have agreement.

Do we then want to start with some preliminary considerations on Tuesday? I don't know, but are there officials who might want to brief us on this? Where do we go from here, then?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: My suggestion would be this. Certainly the two authors of the dissenting report are present, and they've been through the hearings. Mr. Norlock, Mr. Brown, and I have been involved in the report up to this point. So I would really think the more difficult time is going to be for the members of the official opposition to get up to speed on the whole report. So I'd really take their counsel—

The Chair: And defer to them.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Yes. I'd take their counsel on what they would like to do, because I think it's important they feel comfortable with the report, before we—

Hon. Sue Barnes: I think the whole point of this.... I haven't read it yet, so I can't comment on what I'm going to have to say. I can assure this committee that I've read every Hansard of the subcommittee hearings, and I'm taking a suitcase full of the acts home this weekend to checkerboard what the recommendations are in relation to the other acts, but that's going to take some time.

Perhaps it wouldn't hurt to have an in camera meeting of our committee to go through it with the people who were part of the subcommittee, as they understand their recommendations and can explain their vision and why they did it. One of our members here was part of that and can explain their reasoning.

But I don't have a problem with doing a briefing on something else on one of the days next week that we were looking at, so we don't waste time. In fact I don't mind doing that and postponing this until afterwards. But I might be able to give you more direction on Tuesday, because I will spend most of the weekend looking at this.

•(1115)

The Chair: But practically speaking, shouldn't we decide today what we're going to do Tuesday?

Hon. Sue Barnes: I think we should have a briefing on Tuesday, unless you want—

The Chair: Are there officials who would be able to come before us? What kind of briefing are you expecting?

Hon. Sue Barnes: I thought the briefing was on a totally different issue.

The Chair: Oh, I thought you meant a briefing on your motion.

Hon. Sue Barnes: No, no.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Sue Barnes: I'm just saying let's take some time. The only briefing I think might potentially be relevant is something from Justice on the Supreme Court decision, whatever that will be.

The Chair: Boy, that's pretty short notice.

Hon. Sue Barnes: That's why I'm saying they're going to have a time, and just reading that decision is going to have an impact too.

The Chair: How would they be able to give us a briefing worth anything with hardly any time to prepare?

I'm going to ask the clerk to explain to everybody what she just told me.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Louise Hayes): I can suggest to the committee that we had arranged tentatively to do some briefings. One of them was on no-fly lists and the other one was on counterfeit goods. What I could suggest to the committee is that given the two meetings we have next week, we could spend one of those meetings as Ms. Barnes suggested and hold a briefing from members of the subcommittee on how they saw the report and their recommendations. We could do that on either Tuesday or Thursday.

If we were to do it on Tuesday, we could then decide either to consider the draft report on Thursday and formally begin that process, or if, for whatever reason, members of the main committee did not feel ready, we could do a briefing on no-fly lists, for example, following that meeting on Thursday.

The Chair: Are you willing to tentatively put that before us?

So on Tuesday we would have a briefing on...

Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Just let me understand what you're talking about. Who would the briefing be with?

The Chair: I'm trying to get that too.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I think the chair might be thinking we're having a briefing on the subcommittee.

The Chair: And that's not the case; we wouldn't be dealing with that at all. The briefing would be—

Hon. Sue Barnes: This is our regular business.

The Chair: Who would do the—

Hon. Sue Barnes: We're doing other regular business, as we agreed earlier, which is the briefing on the no-fly lists that the clerk just mentioned. And remember, we probably won't even have the minority reports until Monday.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I understand that.

Hon. Sue Barnes: So we'll have two regular meetings on our regular other business and then would return, I would suggest, to this on the first Tuesday we are back. At that time, we may or may not be able to wrap it up on the Tuesday and Thursday, though I hope we'd be able to wrap it up at that stage.

The Chair: Would somebody be able to give us a briefing on no-fly lists? Would they be ready by Tuesday?

The Clerk: I could try.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Do you agree?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I thought that's where we were at.

The other thing, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Repeat where you believe we're at; just repeat it for the record.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I believe that when Ms. Barnes talked about a briefing, it had nothing to do with this. It was a briefing on some other issue.

Hon. Sue Barnes: That's right. I just don't want to lose the time in the committee.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: And I agree with her on that.

The other part is that I think the clerk may have heard back from the minister's office. Could I tentatively say that the minister would appear on March 1 with regard to your request on arming border guards?

The Chair: March 1 is the Thursday one week from today.

Would you be amenable to that?

Hon. Sue Barnes: Sure.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: That's just tentative. I understood that's a possibility, so if we just—

Hon. Sue Barnes: Is one of the briefings off?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Well, he tentatively would be available for an hour on March 1, which would still give us an hour for—

The Chair: As I see it, we would have a briefing on no-fly lists on Tuesday, and we would ask the minister to come before the committee on the issue of the arming of border guards on Thursday. Then after the break we would start considering the report.

• (1120)

Hon. Sue Barnes: I think we should try to do the report as fast as possible, and we now have two weeks over the break to really try to understand it.

The Chair: Does everybody on this committee agree to that?

Hon. Sue Barnes: Mr. Chair, I have to tell you that all these plans will fly up in the air if the House leaders don't agree.

The Chair: Yes. Well, then we will meet again.

Hon. Sue Barnes: We would know on Tuesday.

The Chair: We will meet on Tuesday at 11 o'clock, regardless.

Hon. Sue Barnes: As a courtesy—

Mr. Serge Ménard: You only have to tell the House leader to read the law and he will understand we need time.

Hon. Sue Barnes: It's not going to be an issue.

The Chair: No, it's not going to be an issue.

Are there any more comments?

This meeting stands adjourned.

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