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—
Chair

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz

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Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC)): Members, let's reconvene.

Mr. Ménard, you may introduce your motion. Go ahead whenever you're ready.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Chairman, in accordance with standing order 122, I move the following motion:

That the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security consider and report to the House of Commons of the security issues raised by the relationship that the former Minister of Foreign Affairs had with a person with ties to organized crime, by inviting witnesses to appear, including: Prime Minister Steven Harper, Maxime Bernier, Julie Couillard, the Privy Council officials responsible for appointments and the RCMP officials responsible for security screenings, the Minister of Public Safety and Michel Juneau-Katsuya.

This is a recent matter which has developed very quickly, but which led to the resignation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It is therefore a very serious issue. There is no doubt that there was a breach of security. Thus, it is important for us to understand the scope and limits of that breach as quickly as possible.

That is why I am asking that the committee proceed with this investigation quickly.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I have one person who has indicated they want to comment.

Ms. Thi Lac, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I agree with my colleague, Mr. Ménard. However, I would like to amend his motion by adding the following: "and that the study begin on Monday, June 9."

[English]

The Chair: We have an amendment here to suspend our study of tasers and all the business before the committee and to instead do this examination.

Ms. Priddy.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Does the amendment not take precedence?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Mine is not on the amendment. It's on.... Or does the amended...?

The Chair: We vote on the amendment first. If you want to speak generally, you may.

Ms. Penny Priddy: So we don't have to vote on the movement of the date before we can move to the motion, or move to speaking to—

The Chair: Does anybody want to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Dosanjh.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): I'm just wondering whether the member would add a friendly amendment to the amendment. That would be to add "by inviting witnesses to appear before the committee, including", and then all the witnesses who are mentioned.

There might be other witnesses we might want to hear from, and we should not be limiting ourselves.

The Chair: That's another amendment, so maybe you just want to rephrase that. How does that go again?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Chairman, that is not an amendment, but would be a translation error. The French text does contain the word "notamment", and I pointed out earlier that that word had not been translated.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. So the translation is not correct.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: It should be corrected.

The Chair: We're going to go with the French motion, then, which mentions "including". So your suggestion is not necessary.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I'm satisfied.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen is next on my list.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Actually, that was my same point, that we shouldn't be limiting it to just the people listed. So that deals with that.

The Chair: If there's no more discussion, we can vote.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Chair, if we're going to talk about timing, the clerk has a table or a schedule of what the committee had already set.

The Chair: Do you want me to distribute this?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I think we should, because I think people should know what will happen.

The Chair: This schedule starts next week. Today we were going to deal with the drafting instructions for the taser study, and then Wednesday....

I wish to inform the committee that our witnesses for the next meeting have all been confirmed, the six witnesses from the various first nations. That may help in your decision here.

Also, the clerk informs me that the people from the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board have been confirmed. They were to come next Monday.

Mr. MacKenzie.

• (1540)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: My only comment, Mr. Chair, in looking at this is that if we've asked these people to be here on Monday... I know that everybody talked about how important the taser study was before, but if we're prepared to move it off on the Wednesday....

I'm rather reluctant to tell the folks whom we've asked to attend before this committee on June 9 that now we don't want them to be here on June 9. That's my only concern. It looks to me as if no other witnesses are scheduled on Wednesday.

The Chair: Are you talking about Wednesday, June 11?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: That's right.

The Chair: We were going to continue our consideration of the draft report.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: But it's not causing a problem for witnesses whom we've already confirmed and asked to be here on June 9; that's my point.

The Chair: I should point out that if we go ahead with this, then in all likelihood we would not complete our taser study, because we'd have to have that to the people here to submit to the House. We wouldn't get it done if we put this off.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: If that's the wish of the committee, then that's the wish of the committee.

The Chair: All right, so the committee realizes that if we go ahead with this, we're not going to get the other priority that was so important, that we were pushing for.

Ms. Priddy, are you finished?

Ms. Penny Priddy: No. I have two things. I am also waiting to actually speak to the motion, but I realize we're speaking to timing because the amendment takes precedence.

I need some clarity on what you are saying. I heard earlier—as a matter of fact, at the last meeting I was at—that people were prepared to sit extra meetings for all kinds of other reasons that were being suggested.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): That's correct.

Ms. Penny Priddy: I would be reluctant to call the first nations and say we are delaying their appearance for a variety of reasons. I'm not as concerned about other witnesses who might be booked, but they have been here several times and made a number of requests, and I think they are central to that particular discussion.

I'd like to know from you how it could be accommodated. Somebody was saying something about moving them....

So we would not have to do that?

Okay, fine.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Barnes.

Hon. Sue Barnes: I was going to suggest we sit an extra meeting on Tuesday.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Next Tuesday?

Hon. Sue Barnes: Next Tuesday, yes.

The Chair: So you're changing the amendment—

Hon. Sue Barnes: I was going to suggest it.

The Chair: —to June 10 from June 9.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Yes.

Is that okay, Serge?

Okay, he's in agreement.

The Chair: You didn't make the amendment.

Hon. Sue Barnes: I will move an amendment to change the date from Monday to Tuesday, and I understand that my colleague from the Bloc is in agreement.

The Chair: Is there any more discussion before we have the vote?

Okay, your amendment, then, is to begin these hearings on June 10. That's contingent on whether the main motion passes.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: My only comment is let's make it for certain that we're talking about one day on June 10. Do you want to have an extra meeting every Tuesday from now on?

Hon. Sue Barnes: Yes.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: If I may, Mr. Chair....

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Well, you have to make up your mind. You can't have it both ways.

The Chair: Mr. Dosanjh.

Let's keep order here.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: We should consider Tuesday, June 10, the first meeting, and every Tuesday thereafter there'd be a special meeting of this committee to deal with this issue until fully exhausted. It may be two, three, or four weeks. That way, we won't interfere with other work that we're doing and we'll be able to pay attention to this at least one meeting per week and deal with it.

The Chair: You've heard the amendment to that.

Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: The reality is that you haven't anything scheduled most other Mondays. I don't know why you want to add a Tuesday when the regular scheduled day is Monday. There's one day that we have witnesses coming.

• (1545)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I'm happy to reverse and say, when Monday becomes available, Tuesday folds. I don't have a problem with that. We're now talking mechanics.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Yes, you are, but you have to be fair to the clerk who is going to have to tell people when to be here, or ask people to be here.

The Chair: And book rooms. If it's so loosey-goosey as "Let's meet whenever we can meet", in all fairness to the way things are run on the Hill here, that would not be very orderly.

Are there any other comments or questions? Mr. Cullen.

Hon. Roy Cullen: I wonder if, presumably, we could have some assurance from the clerk or yourself, Chair, that we could get a room on a Tuesday.

The Chair: This is what I mean. If it's so loosey-goosey that we're going to meet whenever we can meet, how can you give a directive like that to the clerk? He can't set anything up if we're not even sure what we want to do.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Does he anticipate any problem?

The Chair: No, there's nothing happening around here. I mean, how could you have a problem?

I don't even know if it's fair to ask him to comment on that. How does he know what rooms are available, Mr. Cullen?

Mr. Roger Préfontaine (Clerk of the Committee, Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security): We don't have priority.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Chairman, we have nothing scheduled for June 16 or for June 18. We could therefore set aside our meetings on Thursday, June 10, Monday, June 16, Wednesday, June 18, and if necessary Wednesday, June 19, for these proceedings.

[English]

The Chair: Can you repeat that? Wednesday is June 18, not June 19. There was something lost in the translation here, because the dates didn't match the days. Please say it again.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: We could very well begin on Thursday, June 12.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: No, we would begin on Tuesday, June 10.

Mr. Serge Ménard: True. We could begin on Tuesday, June 10 and continue—

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: On Monday, June 16.

Mr. Serge Ménard: —and even on June 17 and 18.

[English]

The Chair: All right. The proposed dates are June 10, 16, 17, and 18.

Mr. Ménard, do I have that clear?

Mr. Serge Ménard: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, four days.

Is there any further discussion? Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: I have just one more question. I'm wondering if the other side is prepared to sit if the House rises.

Some hon. members: Yes.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: You're prepared to sit through the summer?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: The question is, are you?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Yes, of course.

The Chair: Okay. Coming back to our discussion—I'll come to Ms. Priddy in a moment—the way I understand the motion is that we're going to meet on June 10, 16, 17, and 18 at 3:30 in the afternoon. Is that clear? It's the same time that we currently meet. Okay? The clerk has to know this in order to set up the rooms and so on.

Ms. Priddy, please.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do support the motion, and I'm clear on the dates. I just want to be very sure that we are not going to then hear, "Oops, we can't finish the taser report because, gosh, there was that one more meeting needed." I just want to put on the table that it's extremely important and urgent that the taser report be finished.

I expect it must be, because nobody has said we need those meetings or those days for that, but I need to have that reaffirmed for me.

So it will not in any way interfere? We will not hear back that it will interfere?

Okay.

• (1550)

The Chair: Mr. Mayes, you're next.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Madam Thi Lac has made a motion. She has to withdraw her motion before we move into a motion to have those days set aside.

We already have an amendment on the table that hasn't been withdrawn. That has to be withdrawn first before we get into a new amendment to the motion.

The Chair: What I'm doing here, Mr. Mayes, is going by consensus. Does anybody object? I hope Ms. Thi Lac goes along with what we're planning here. Please say so if you don't.

If anybody has some strong objections... I'm trying to draw together what we're saying here, and have everybody agree. It's probably not the best way to do things.

Mr. Dosanjh, please.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I was going to respond to what Ms. Priddy was raising.

I'm not concerned that the taser study won't be completed. If there is any fear that it might not be, we can add extra meetings to make sure it happens.

Ms. Penny Priddy: I want to be very clear about it.

The Chair: Yes. Okay.

The way I understand it is that the amendment is to meet June 10, 16, 17, and 18, at 3:30 in the afternoon, to fulfill the motion that Monsieur Ménard has brought forward, which we will vote on right after we're done this amendment.

Is there any more discussion on the amendment?

Hon. Sue Barnes: It's from 3:30 to 5:30.

The Chair: I think I said that.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Until 5:30.

The Chair: Okay, two hours. Yes.

Ms. Thi Lac.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Could the clerk try to book a room where the hearings could be televised, please?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. That's a suggestion for the clerk.

Is there any more discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Colin Mayes: Can I hear it a second time, please?

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Thi Lac, can you revisit your amendment? They want to clarify what the amendment is.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: When I moved the amendment, we had not received the schedule. The date of June 9 is no longer correct, since we are being told that we will be hearing witnesses on that day. My amendment was aimed at moving things forward quickly by establishing dates for the meetings that could be set aside to continue the study. I believe that June 10, 16, 17 and 18—

[*English*]

The Chair: I just need your amendment. I don't need a long explanation.

I think your amendment—as we drew a consensus—was on four dates and times, so that's all I was asking you to do, just put it together so that you are clear and the rest of us are clear.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: The amendment would read as follows: "and that the study begin on June 10, 2008, and continue on the 16, 17 and 18 of June, and that the meetings be held from 3:30 p. m. to 5:30 p.m."

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. So it's from 3:30 to 5:30.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now the discussion, if any, will proceed to the motion.

Is there any discussion on the motion?

Ms. Priddy.

Ms. Penny Priddy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I support the motion at the table, but I do have to preface my support with one or two comments.

My preference would be that this was dealt with by the RCMP. I know it has been referred to the RCMP, but I also know there hasn't been a response. I know there is not a great eagerness, probably, on the part of the RCMP to accept these kinds of referrals, so I don't know what the answer to that will be. Therefore, not having any assurance that the RCMP, which I think is a much more appropriate body to be doing that, will do it, I will be supporting this.

The second point I want to make around this is that it is extremely important that Canadians, all Canadians, can trust that the security of their country is being dealt with, with dignity, respect, and thoughtfulness. I do not want to see this turn into—particularly with Ms. Couillard included in the list—some kind of circus where we find ourselves diverging off into what is in her wardrobe and what she wore where. I don't think this is about satisfying a prurient interest on the part of the public that seems to be fairly well established at this time out there.

So when the discussion is at the table, I, and I'm sure others, will be making every effort to ensure that it stays focused and that it does not turn into a circus, because that does not in any way establish in the minds of Canadians that we can look at these issues and do this in a serious, thoughtful way that respects the democratic process and respects the security of Canada.

Thank you.

• (1555)

The Chair: Mr. Dosanjh.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Chair, thank you.

First, I wholeheartedly support this motion.

Let me explain what the preference of the Liberal Party of Canada would be, what the best option would be.

The best option would be, number one, for the RCMP to investigate this matter. But understanding that the RCMP only engages in a narrow investigation to determine whether or not there has been criminal activity, that in itself would not be exhaustive enough to deal with all the issues that have been raised. Therefore, a full public inquiry is appropriate.

We know that, so far, the Prime Minister has refused to call that full public inquiry. Therefore, in the interim, we support this motion. We know and we recognize that these committees, by their very nature, don't have all the tools and the structures necessary to fully pursue all the issues in an exhaustive fashion. Therefore, with the reservation in mind, with the fact that the Prime Minister has not called a full public inquiry and may never do so, this committee will do the work that it can do in the interim.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any more discussion? Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you, Chair.

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

Well, the Prime Minister is taking this matter very seriously and has asked Foreign Affairs to review the situation. That's what needs to be done and that's where it should be.

The Chair: This part of the meeting is over. We will now clear the room and go in camera.

The Chair: If there are no more comments, I'll call the question.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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