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Tuesday, April 21, 2009

—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

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•(1105)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): We're a little bit behind schedule, and our chair is going to be late, so we will start. I call the meeting to order.

The first thing is the public portion with notice of motion, the first one being from Madam Demers.

Madam Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

When I gave notice, the subject-matter of the motion was quite timely. Events were unfolding. Right now, only the last part of the motion is relevant. I would like the consent of member to delete the first part of the motion, because the Government of Canada has already advised the Karzaï government that it needs to review the proposed legislation.

I would be prepared to delete the first part of the motion and to have us focus on the second part. I will explain why later.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): What would your motion read, Madam Demers?

She's going to read it as she would like it.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I don't have the motion with me.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Does everybody have a copy of the motion?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, this motion is no longer relevant, because the Vatican has admitted and acknowledged that the young Brazilian girl, the doctors who performed the abortion and the girl's mother should not be excommunicated. Clearly, this motion is no longer relevant because the Vatican overruled the statement made by Archbishop Sobrinho of Brazil. Therefore, I can simply withdraw the motion.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Would you like to withdraw your notice of motion?

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Yes, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Okay.

Everybody agrees?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Agreed.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Could I clarify that the motion regarding the Vatican is being withdrawn?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): That's my understanding, yes.

That's agreed? The motion is gone. We will move on.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I'm sorry, I was distracted. Are we totally withdrawing Madam Demers' motion?

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): That's what she said.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Do you want me to read the motion? I assume everybody can read.

•(1110)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): I think everyone has a copy of it. Just tell us which one you're referring to first.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have the motion on the Winter Olympics first.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): All right.

Hon. Anita Neville: Half a second, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): The two week-break must have rattled us. Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Ms. Chair, can I just read a point of order.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Yes.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: It had to do with the motion that Madam Demers just removed and that we all consented to. I think it was a very good idea to withdraw that motion, so I support you in that.

I just wanted to correct the way that Madam Demers explained the reasoning, which is that the Vatican had changed its mind or withdrawn the excommunication. The Vatican hasn't commented any further. They never made a comment on the excommunication of the girl. I just wanted to clarify that. With Madam Demers' comments, it sounded like there had been a change, a recent event, that had brought about this, and I just wanted to clarify that it was not the case.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you. The motion has been withdrawn, so we're not discussing that issue now.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: That's fine.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): We're on to Madam Neville's motion.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you. Perfect.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Thank you.

Hon. Anita Neville: I appreciate the opportunity to put this motion forward. Those of us who were on the committee last year undertook a study on human trafficking. I remember the shock when we heard the comments that Vancouver was a sex destination, so designated throughout the world by those who know. Then we got into a discussion of what the impending Winter Olympics was going to create in Vancouver, since major sporting events are often hubs for trafficking and sexual predators. So we passed a motion out of this committee that went to the House asking the government to develop and implement a plan. It's here in the body of the motion.

A couple of week ago, I had the opportunity to attend a citizens summit in Vancouver on human trafficking. It was a very powerful event. It was attended by about 150 people, and out of it came a declaration signed by the 23 or 24 sponsoring organizations as well as others in attendance. I'd be happy to share this declaration with members of the committee. I did not bring copies of it, although I have it with me. It was a good reminder of how important it is for this committee to be vigilant in holding the government to account in respect of the activities it is undertaking that relate to the 2010 Olympics. We still have a lead time of some months. It's clear that the many communities of Vancouver are fully engaged in this issue. In this motion, I am asking that we hear from the appropriate government officials on the measures they've put in place to curtail trafficking, to secure their communities against trafficking, and to make this a lasting legacy of the 2010 Olympics.

I would ask for the support of the committee. I don't think it should be a contentious motion, but I think it's an important one.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Discussion? Questions? Comments?

It looks like we're ready to call the question.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Anita Neville: That was carried unanimously. I don't remember anything being that easy.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): Neither do I.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

• (1115)

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): And now we'll move along to your second one.

Hon. Anita Neville: If anybody is interested in a copy of the declaration, I'll be happy to make copies and distribute it.

The Vice-Chair (Mrs. Patricia Davidson): I think the committee members would appreciate having copies.

Hon. Anita Neville: Okay, I'd be happy to do that.

The next motion, Madam Chair, I had prepared to put forward two weeks ago. I'm putting it on the table right now, but I have to tell you that I'm not happy with putting it on the table. For me, it has been unprecedented, in terms of asking for information from government, to have this kind of delay, or whatever, put forward. I began my progress with the minister in my first meeting with the minister in January, just after we came back, and asked for a list of projects. She indicated she too had asked for it, and I asked if we would be able to get it. I subsequently met with the head of the agency, and she again indicated a request for a list of projects as well as the varying criteria. My understanding is that the criteria have been changed at least three times in terms of evaluating projects.

We asked for that and we also asked for a list of those projects that had been denied and were told that was not possible because of privacy issues, so I asked simply for a list of the number of projects that had been denied.

I was going to table this motion two weeks ago in the committee, just before we broke. As a courtesy, we let a representative of the minister's office know we were doing it, and we were asked to be given a little bit of time for us to receive this information, so we didn't table it at that time. We waited for it during the break period. We were told it was in the mail, which I find odd, given our offices are three floors apart in the Confederation Building, and to date we have not received this information. I am aware of the information on the website, but we had asked for a list of it.

When we talk about transparency in government or when, as we have, we receive a letter from the minister asking for cooperation, I think this is a very basic level of cooperation that can be extended not only to the official opposition but to all opposition parties, and I don't understand why the delays have taken place. I don't understand if there is a perception that we are asking for something that is inappropriate or unusual.

As I said, I put this motion on the floor reluctantly. We've just been advised that this information will be coming today, and if this information comes today I'll be happy to withdraw the motion, but we've been told this before. There is a credibility gap, I guess, is what I'm saying.

I'd be interested in hearing the comments of colleagues. As I said, if this information is truly going to be forthcoming today I will withdraw the motion, but I will expect it in our office at the end of the day.

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Thank you, Anita.

Some information just came from the agency that the documents are on the minister's desk right now for her signature and that it should therefore be coming. I will just put that there as a piece of information, and then you can continue to move your motion.

I heard you when you said that you've heard this before and you would like to make that decision now whether to keep your motion or not to keep your motion. That's just information I'm giving you. I'm not trying to tell you how to deal with the issue.

Hon. Anita Neville: In other words, this information—

The Chair: It is on the minister's desk. The person from the department is here.

Excuse me, someone from the department this morning said—

A voice: It's not me. It should be someone from the minister's office.

The Chair: Yes, okay, but we got an e-mail to that effect last night in the clerk's office, that it is on her desk for her signature.

I don't know if Madame Boucher has any further information with regard to this.

• (1120)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have the same information as you.

The Chair: Ms. Neville, given what you have said, I will allow you to make whatever decision you see fit. As you said before, this has been told to you many times.

Hon. Anita Neville: Madam Chair, with the permission of the committee, I will withdraw this motion until Thursday, at the next meeting. If we have not received this information, then I would ask that it be put back on the agenda.

The Chair: All right. Ms. Neville has withdrawn this motion—until when?

Hon. Anita Neville: No, I'll move to table it.

The Chair: Well, no, remember we sent this note about tabling. The rules—

Hon. Anita Neville: Okay.

The Chair: I suppose, if there is unanimous consent for withdrawal until Thursday, you can just do a friendly withdrawal until Thursday. It is your motion, and—

Hon. Anita Neville: Then I'll operate that way.

The Chair: Do we have that agreement from everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Good, thank you. This is stood until Thursday. That's great.

Yes, Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I just raise the issue, though, of why we have to go through this protracted effort to get information. I don't know whether it's another discussion, but I raise it as a concern. And I don't like being told "It's in the mail", when we hear today that it's on the minister's desk.

The Chair: Thank you. Your point is noted.

We will be going in camera in a minute to talk about the planning of future business. I hope you all have the little list we originally drafted of the priorities we have. Does everyone have a copy? No? Okay, let's get that while we're preparing to go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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