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Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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Monday, June 7, 2010

—
Chair

The Honourable Hedy Fry

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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• (1650)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): We will begin with a notice of motion from Ms. Neville, dated Friday, May 28. The motion reads:

That the Minister of State for the Status of Women appear before the committee to explain the manner and criteria by which funding is distributed by Status of Women Canada through each of the Women's Community Fund and Women's Partnership Fund.

I do not like the words “condition féminine”. Sorry, this has nothing to do with the motion. It should be “la situation de la femme”. “Condition féminine” sounds as though somebody is sick. Anyway, whatever. It always bugged me when I was the minister.

This is the motion before you.

Ms. Neville, you wanted to speak.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I do.

Very briefly, Madam Chair, we had anticipated and hoped that the Minister of State for the Status of Women would be present at the meeting at which we had the four groups. For whatever reason, she was unable to do it. I'm appreciative that Ms. McLeod asked her a question about funding cuts during the maternal health discussion, but I think it's really important that as a committee we understand how funding is determined or not determined both in the community fund and partnership fund.

We heard from groups that had been longstanding recipients, that met the criteria, that met the needs of the community, and there was no obvious reason their funding should have been denied.

I think we need to have a full discussion with the minister. It's a new minister. She may be going forward in a different manner, but I would like to have it at this committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there discussion?

Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): I think the flip side of that, Madam Chair, is that we didn't have the opportunity to hear from organizations that did receive funding. I think it was a very unbalanced demonstration of what was available out there.

As I said in the past, when an organization has been receiving funding for 20 years, what that funding has become is part of their general revenue. There are other organizations that have obviously put forward very good proposals, new ideas, and new directions that

have been deemed as having a good opportunity for the people in their community.

I think if we had heard from those other organizations, we as parliamentarians would have been able to determine what those organizations are doing in our own communities. That would have given us the balanced approach.

I'm very sorry, as a member of this committee, that we didn't have any representation from the other side to come in and tell us what they're doing.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brown.

Are you making an amendment to this motion?

Ms. Lois Brown: I'm not sure how it's helpful to have the minister come in without our having heard from the other organizations that did receive money. I personally would rather hear from them what their objectives and goals are in our communities before we do anything else.

The Chair: Ms. Neville will speak, but in my opinion, the motion does not ask about who is funded and why; it just wants to know what are the criteria and methodology of the department and the minister. So this is a separate motion from whatever you're discussing, but you make a good point.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you.

Actually, you made my point, Madam Chair. This is not an issue of who got funding and who didn't get funding. I want to know how we're moving forward, how the funding is going to be given out, what criteria are going to be used. Will the minister again be the last one who says yea or nay to funding? Will she go on the basis of the recommendations made by the bureaucracy? If she chooses to proceed in the manner of the previous minister, what criteria will she in turn be using?

I think it's important. We're opening a new page in this area and I want to know how we go forward. I think too many of the organizations out there are confused. We heard some of the issues of confusion here. We heard that there was no indication that priority was given to previously unfunded organizations. We've heard from organizations that they had every reason to expect their funding and at the last minute didn't get it. I just want clarity on it.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, thank you.

I look at our schedule and I know that we have many important meetings between now and when the House rises. I also know that we just had the minister here. I know a call for proposals will be coming out in the fall, so perhaps the fall, when the proposal calls go out, would be a very timely opportunity to have the minister come. The organizations will be able to hear at that time. It will be fresh in their minds, and they'll be able to hear what the minister has to say. I think we should wait until fall.

The Chair: This has no timing in it. It has no time limits on it, so the first thing is to agree with the motion as it stands, which is that we want to have the minister come and explain, generally speaking, how her system works. Then we can decide when we do it.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: If it had criteria that indicated it would be in the fall, I would support it, but I'd have trouble with leaving it open. If the minister doesn't come before we rise....

Hon. Anita Neville: I have a comment, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I have no problem with holding it over until the fall. I just want a motion on the books that she will come. I can see how jammed this agenda is, and I want to add something else to it as well, in addition to this.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Will you accept a friendly amendment for this fall?

Hon. Anita Neville: I have no problem with that, but it's to be early in the fall.

The Chair: We would interpose that, so the motion would read, "That the Minister of State for the Status of Women appear before the committee early in the fall...".

Hon. Anita Neville: It would be early in the next session, or whatever it is.

The Chair: No, we won't say the next session. It will be "...early in the fall session to explain the matter", blah, blah, blah.

Go ahead, Madame Demers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Madam Chair, once we have met with the minister and she has explained how she achieves her objectives, I, too, would like to meet with groups who have received funding. So I am in favour of Ms. Brown's motion. I would be very happy to meet with groups. We could see what is being done, where and how. It would have to happen in the fall, however.

[*English*]

The Chair: There's nothing that stops Ms. Brown from making a motion to that effect eventually, but we're discussing this one right now.

Does anybody else wish to discuss this motion? The amendment was a friendly amendment, so we're not going to debate the amendment. Shall I call the question on this now?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: The question, as you know, is:

That the Minister of State for the Status of Women appear before the committee early in the fall session to explain the manner and criteria by which funding is distributed by Status of Women Canada through each of the Women's Community Fund and the Women's Partnership Fund.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: It's not the Minister of State, just Minister for....

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: She is the Minister of State.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): No, she is the Minister for Status of Women.

[*English*]

The Chair: Oh, she has two headings. Yes, I suppose so. It's the Minister for....

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We could have left the wording as is.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, it's Minister of Public Works and for Status of Women.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: I think the former Minister of State would like to appear. After hearing her speak in the House, I am certain of it.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will call the question.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We have a second motion on the table. It was sent Friday, June 4. The notice of motion is from the Honourable Anita Neville. The motion reads:

That the committee examine (a) the climate change impacts on women, and their adaptive and mitigative capacity; (b) the manner in which a gender perspective should be included in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of national environmental policies, in particular strategies related to the impact of climate change on women and the allocation of resources with respect to sustainable development; (c) whether a gender-based analysis of Canada's policies concerning climate change and sustainable development has been conducted, and if so, its conclusions; and (d) Canada's role in ensuring that a gender perspective is included as part of the international community's response to global climate change.

Do you want me to read it in French? This committee is conducted in both official languages. Will the Bloc need it read in French, or are you fine?

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, it would make me very happy if you wished to read it in French.

[*English*]

The Chair: I am asking you as the Bloc.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, read it in French. You do it so well.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Chair: Okay. It's long, that's all.

[Translation]

That the Committee examine: (a) the climate change impacts on women, and their adaptive and mitigative capacity; (b) the manner in which a gender perspective should be included in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of national environmental policies, in particular strategies related to the impact of climate change on women and the allocation of resources with respect to sustainable development; (c) whether a gender-based analysis of Canada's policies concerning climate change and sustainable development has been conducted, and if so, its conclusions; and (d) Canada's role in ensuring that a gender perspective is included as part of the international community's response to global climate change.

Some hon. members: Well done! Excellent. Congratulations.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay. Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll be very brief.

I am well aware that we have a very full agenda of issues and studies to undertake, and I suspect there may be more coming to us from the government, but I think increasingly that this is an important issue. We've been compiling a collection of articles and writing on climate change and the particular impact on women in various manifestations, and it's a very multi-levelled discussion. But I would like to see this as one of the issues we will consider in our prioritization for the fall, should we still be here, as an issue that we might give some serious consideration to. I think the motion is self-explanatory, but I would like to see it as part of the list for discussion.

The Chair: Mrs. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I know we talked about looking into Afghanistan at the last meeting. I think we perhaps need to defer all our subjects of conversation to our planning meeting in the fall because there might be other issues evolving at that time. So, for that reason, I think we need to leave our work plan and tackle it in the fall, so as not have motions that direct us prematurely.

The Chair: Noted, Madam McLeod.

This motion does not direct us in terms of when we do it. It's just directing what we do.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: My point was to do it in conjunction with a prioritization, with everything in the basket; that we talk about it at the same time.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay, but I think this motion can stand as it is now, and we won't discuss it.

Madame Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I smiled when I saw the motion. I am speaking for myself; I do not know about anyone else, but I smiled.

In fact, I, Sylvie Boucher, think there are much more important issues we should be studying instead of climate change. I think it should go, first and foremost, to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development. There are issues that concern women that should take priority. I think the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development has obligations in that regard. We have a lot of issues to study that concern women.

Personally, I am not at all comfortable with this kind of motion. I was a bit upset to learn that much more important issues to women were cast aside.

That goes strictly for me, not anyone else. Just me, myself and I.

● (1705)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Boucher.

Mrs. Simson.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): With respect to Madame Boucher's observations, obviously I disagree. I agree with Ms. McLeod that what we're doing is putting this in the basket to prioritize for the fall.

I certainly don't think that would be any reason not to vote in favour of this motion. I'm sure there will be a steering meeting. There are issues on the table, and this is just one of them. And climate change is extremely important.

The Chair: To let you know, Ms. Simson, we do not have a steering committee on this.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Sorry, I apologize.

The Chair: It was decided at the very beginning that the committee as a whole would decide what it wishes to make as its priorities and not a steering committee.

Madame Demers.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Thank you, Madam Chair.

At first glance, I would have smiled too. But I realized that....

On the weekend, I read an article that said climate change affects women more than any other group. In the Arctic, for example, the polar ice cap is melting and animals are having a hard time surviving—the polar bear is now an endangered species, as are a number of other animals.

I realized it was having a real impact on women. If nothing is done to address the situation, it can also have long-term effects. And if there are long-term effects, women are the ones who will suffer, because very often, they are the ones who look after the families, who are responsible for growing vegetables in the gardens. They are the ones who look after all that. So it has rather serious consequences.

Water levels that fluctuate significantly also have an effect on women, because they are the ones who will have to deal with the consequences. Personally, I think it is important....

This proposal, this motion is very broad. Perhaps Ms. Neville would like to reframe it so we can be more specific in our study. I think it is worthwhile.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: What bothered me when I read it was the fact that it is not just women who suffer as a result of climate change. Everyone is suffering: men, children, young people, and the list goes on.

When I read the motion, I got the feeling that.... First of all, I think it is too broad. Second, it puts women in a sort of ghetto, which I refuse to support because it is not only women feeling the effects of climate change; there are also young people and children. Climate change affects everyone.

Personally, I am not comfortable with this motion.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Boucher.

Is there any further discussion?

Ms. Mathysen.

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

I think this gives us an opportunity. When we think about climate change we tend to think of it in a linear way. We think about the rising of the oceans and the impact on animals. I think this gives us an opportunity to take the issue and examine impact that gives us more depth.

I think it's very worthwhile. I would say it provides another opportunity to look at a serious problem. While it does indeed impact every human being on the planet, I think we have been limited in the way we approach it.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Neville, did you wish to close the discussion?

Hon. Anita Neville: I will, briefly, Madam Chair.

I'm astounded when I hear Madam Boucher say there are more important issues than both climate change and the impact on women's health. There are no issues that are more important than our health, and we know our health is affected by climate.

Madam Chair, if there's any desire for it, I would be happy to table the articles we have gathered so far for members of the committee. There is increasing evidence that shows that climate has a disproportionate impact on women, through a whole host of different ways, from what it does on others.

As Ms. Mathysen so accurately pointed out, it's not a linear issue, it's a multi-layered issue. It involves decision-making. It involves government policies. It involves government representation. It involves governments and not-for-profits working together. It's a

complex issue, and I think it's one that is worthy of some study by this committee.

I would urge all members to look at it and to put it on the menu of studies to be considered. At least it will be there to show this committee is aware of it as an issue. When we get to it, we'll get to it.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Ms. Simson, and then I'll call the question.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you, Chair.

I just quickly want to add that I believe my colleague Ms. Neville is trying to bring to everyone's attention the fact that, on a lot of issues, whether it be climate change or economics, there has been too little regard for gender-based analysis and how it can impact particularly women. You could make the same argument with respect to the economic meltdown, that it affected all Canadians, but I think our job is to examine and study various issues that may disproportionately affect women and how we can look at these issues. The only way of doing it is through gender-based analysis. So I totally support my colleague's motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

The Chair: We have passed that, and I think Ms. McLeod mentioned an important consideration, that when we get back after the summer we should really look at what we have to do, look at the lineup of things and how we redistribute them based on timeliness, priority, and there may or may not be new things that pop up that would require to be dealt with in a timely manner.

I want to have you look at the committee's tentative schedule. Because of the fact that there are many votes happening, we have decided that it would be easier if we left our travel to a Thursday and a Friday. We've shifted where we're going.

As you can see if you look at the pages you were given, on June 7, which is today, we have what we're doing.

On June 9, we have a teleconference with the Labrador witnesses. These were aboriginal women in Goose Bay and in Happy Valley who were not able to come down, for various reasons, to meet with us in the Labrador City meeting, so we're going to do a one-hour teleconference with them. Then we have one hour of committee business, which I think should finish up our maternal health report and put that to bed.

On June 10, which would be the Thursday, we will be travelling to Montreal. We will go by bus. We will leave Montreal and go to Quebec City, where we will stay on Thursday night, and on Friday we will be doing Quebec City. What you see here is June 10 and 11.

Then we come back, and on Monday, June 14, we will look at the draft report on maternal and child health. Hopefully we have put that away and will be able to look at non-traditional occupations. We might be even be able to do some of that this Wednesday, but let's take it as we see it. We will do that on Monday, the 14th, and on Wednesday, the 16th.

Then, on June 17, we will travel to Maniwaki, and on June 18 we will travel to Brantford.

June 21, when we come back, which would be the Monday, we will study the draft report on women in non-traditional occupations and we'll be continuing that report writing. We need to put that report to bed on that Monday, because if the House rises that week, I have to table the report in the House, so it is best that we have Tuesday to table it, just in case.

Then we have a little bit of time and we need to sit down and start to talk about the travel that everyone says they'd love us to do in the summer. We need to decide when in the summer we will do it, and then we need to decide what we're going to be doing. The clerk, the analyst, and the logistics people have been working with me on this to package it in a way that, if you recall, as we said, in order to bring down costs, when we go to the west, the western people will do the west; the eastern people will do the east; the Ontario people will do Ontario, etc. That way, we don't have a bunch of people travelling all the way across the country.

We have no choice in the case of Ms. Mathysen, because she lives in Ontario. To come to the west, she will have to hitchhike across there by boat or bus or something. We're not letting her fly.

Of course, Madame Demers or Mr. Desnoyers, or whichever one from the Bloc, will still have to come to represent their party back east, but if we can get the bulk of people coming from where their region is, that would help us a lot.

We had a little glitch with the plans we made to go to Resolute Bay, which is a tiny community, so tiny that people did not want to come and let anybody know that they talked to the committee, because it was very sensitive. So we've taken Resolute Bay out of the mix and we're looking at whether we need to throw in Rankin Inlet instead, which is a much larger community, and we heard reference to it when we were in Iqaluit. We may talk about rolling that into our summer travel as one leg of one of the two pieces that we're looking to do in the summer. Hopefully they would be concurrent. People can just fan out and take a few days and do what they have to do.

Madame Demers.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, on that matter, I just wanted to let you know that I will be in Regina from July 11 to 17. If the committee were to travel right after that, it may be cheaper for me to meet up with you.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, that sounds like an idea. That's a good time.

I'm just telling you that we need to discuss this, and this is what the rollout is going to be from now to the end of this session. Then obviously we need to fix on a time in the summer, and Madame Demers has just given us a good idea of when she will be in the west.

Madame Boucher.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have a question.

We are going to Maniwaki on June 17 and 18. Are we coming back to Ottawa, or are we going directly to Brantford?

[English]

The Chair: I don't know. That is being drawn up. We're looking at the cheapest and easiest way to do it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So we are coming back to Ottawa on the 17th. Early the next morning, we leave for Brantford, and we come back to Ottawa on the 18th. Is that right?

[English]

The Chair: We are coming back to Ottawa from Maniwaki on June 17, and then we're going to Brantford.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: So we'll be coming back to Ottawa.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay, thank you. I will be there.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: I wonder if the clerk would be able to provide us with times in terms of the bus travel, so that I have a sense of timing there.

The Chair: Do you mean this coming Friday and Saturday? It's Thursday and Friday of next week.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Yes.

Also, it might be prudent to have individuals in the committee submit the times in the summer that they're not available, due to whatever obligations or constraints, so that we can figure out what's doable, what's possible.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you. That's a very good idea, Ms. Mathysen, that people submit times when they know they have a wedding or they're going to be out of the country, or whatever, as much as possible, to facilitate members to come on these trips.

That would be a good idea, if you could all just send it off to the clerk as soon as possible. We have to get this done in a timely manner. We want to start putting this to bed, because I have to take it to the liaison committee and give them their stuff.

Is there any more discussion?

All right. That's basically it.

Did you have anything you wanted to present on where we're going?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Julia Lockhart): No, I'll have that on Wednesday.

The Chair: Okay.

I just want to tell you that, as you had seen in some of the things we discussed the last time, we are looking at the prairies, obviously, and northern Ontario as a block. That would be Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, and Sioux Lookout, as well as Meadow Lake in Saskatchewan, and maybe Poundmaker's Lodge, although that's more west.

We can flip it around, but we still have to go to Vancouver as well, to Penticton, Williams Lake, Port Hardy or Port McNeill, Whitehorse, Yellowknife, and maybe Rankin Inlet.

Those are the two pieces of travel left to do. We would have completed the rest of it and will just have two chunks of travel to do.

Monsieur Desnoyers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Chair, I received a document asking us to be in Montreal on June 10. We will be in Montreal, that is for sure. We will leave Ottawa in the morning in our vehicle. So we will not need a chartered bus. Montreal is our city, and Quebec is our region. I will not be in Quebec City, because I will be in Vancouver, but I will be in Montreal.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Demers, did you want to say something?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Chair, we are not coming back to Ottawa. We will stay in Montreal. We are going to Quebec City and coming back to Montreal. So it would be absurd to take a bus.

[*English*]

The Chair: The bus will be chartered anyway, so we'll pay for it whether it's full or empty. That's the bottom line.

Much of the support staff that comes along with us, the interpreters, etc., do have to come back to Ottawa because they

live here. So it doesn't matter; the bus will be coming back. If people want to make their own arrangements to come back from Quebec City and go home, wherever their home is, it's up to them.

We're trying to leave on June 10, which is Thursday, at 7:30 in the morning; and then on June 11, we will be going directly from Montreal. The reason we're not staying overnight in Montreal but we're staying overnight in Quebec City is that the Grand Prix will be going on in Montreal and there is not a bed available. We're going to have to just take over that evening and drive off. It's a two-and-a-half-hour drive, not far, and kind of pretty country, so that will be fine. It's not winter.

So that's that.

On Wednesday, we will have a proposal for you for summer travel. You will, in the interim, hopefully have sent off the times you cannot at all be available to travel for the summer, so that we can start planning.

Thank you very much.

Does someone want to move that the meeting adjourn?

Ms. Lois Brown: I so move.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brown.

The meeting is adjourned.

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