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Chair

Mr. David Sweet

Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC)): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. *Bonjour à tous.* Welcome to the 26th meeting of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

Madam Sgro.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): I'll try to make this quick as I realize we have a limited amount of time.

I had two motions before the committee. I've asked the clerk to withdraw one.

I would like to move and ask for a vote on the request that the committee undertake a study to modernize and articulate the objectives and effectiveness of the Standards Council of Canada Act. It has been 15 years since that act has been reviewed.

I'd like to ask that we vote on this, and the committee can then deal with this in the fall when we come back, if that's appropriate.

The Chair: Madam Sgro, my understanding is that you need unanimous consent to withdraw a motion. Is that correct?

A voice: No, because she hadn't moved it.

The Chair: Okay, so that's fine.

A motion has been moved that the committee undertake a study to modernize and articulate the objectives and effectiveness of the Standards Council of Canada Act.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo): Mr. Chair, could the clerk please explain when this motion was tabled?

The Chair: When there was notice of motion?

Mr. Peter Braid: Yes.

The Chair: March 3.

Mr. Peter Braid: Okay.

Is there any additional background on the purpose of the study?

Hon. Judy Sgro: I've spoken to a couple of people about the issue. It has been 15 years since that particular federal act has been reviewed or looked at seriously. I thought it might make a good project for us to do, with two or three meetings in the fall.

If we dealt with it today, then the department could be looking at it to be able to give us a presentation in the fall. It would take two or three meetings to do it.

I have had it sitting here for quite a while. I thought that since this is the end of the term, we should decide to do something with it, either vote for it or against it, so that we clear the deck. You never know who might be sitting around this table in September.

Mr. Peter Braid: Yes.

I am only an occasional visitor at the industry, science and technology committee. Although Industry Canada oversees the work and the mandate of the Standards Council of Canada, to my knowledge there are no particularly compelling issues to deal with regarding the Standards Council of Canada.

I know that my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, was particularly concerned and interested in proceeding with the study before us today, and that the study be thorough and comprehensive. I struggle with understanding the compelling need for this particular study or motion, and having it interrupt this important study on pipeline technology, which has already unfortunately had some hiccups early on because of the hurly-burly nature of Parliament as we approach the end of the parliamentary session in June.

In addition, Mr. Chair, this sort of discussion would typically be done under the rubric of committee business.

We have witnesses before us who, as I understand, appeared at the most recent industry committee meeting, and that proceeding was interrupted. Now that we have the witnesses before us and we only have a short period of time with them and we're going to proceed right away to questions, we're further distracted by this particular motion and a discussion about it.

The Chair: Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Chair, I was just going to add to what my colleague was saying in that, as Ms. Sgro said, we don't really know who will be around the table, or whether or not the committee will want to take that up in the fall. Obviously there is only a possibility of this meeting and perhaps two more in this session of Parliament. While I'm not a regular member of the committee, I would think that you'd want to proceed with the study that you're currently undertaking, and if Ms. Sgro actually wants this to be studied, that she take it up with the committee in the fall.

Just looking at the witness list for today, which we aren't going to get to, if those witnesses are recalled, that's going to take you another meeting or two anyway.

I think the timing on this is wrong, and certainly I don't think that I can support this motion.

The Chair: Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Through you, Chair, I'm wondering if Ms. Sgro could explain to the committee what the intent was. I'm a new member to this committee. I remember years back when I served on industry, I think the work that we did with the Standards Council of Canada involved a study that revolved around the price of gas. I'm curious. What would be the objective? Why are we doing this? I'm not suggesting that the Standards Council doesn't have issues, but what issues is she most concerned with that she feels we as a committee need to study?

The Chair: I would usually open it up for a response, but Mr. Côté might have a similar question, so I'll let him go ahead first and then I'll have Madam Sgro respond.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A question occurred to me as I was reading the wording of the motion again. You or the clerk can confirm this for me, but, if I am not mistaken, the motion does not ask for the study to be conducted immediately. So there would be no time constraint.

I also wonder what the interest might be in undertaking this study right away, but I am not inherently opposed to it.

I listened to what Mr. Braid said. He mentioned interrupting the pipeline debate. It seems to me that the wording does not force us to undertake the study in question immediately and interrupt our other one.

Am I wrong?

[*English*]

The Chair: As far as I'm concerned, but I'll let Madam Sgro respond to everything that's been said.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Chair, again, I don't want to take up a whole lot of time.

First, it's been tabled with the clerk since March 3. Second, it simply asks the committee to undertake a study at some time to look at the whole issue of modernization and articulation of the Standards Council of Canada Act.

It was brought to my attention that it has been 15 years since there's been a serious look at it. It makes sense. It's the kind of work we do here. I think all of us in our role on the industry committee get a variety of issues brought to our attention. It was brought to my attention. I thought it made sense.

I simply brought it forward today, given the fact that it's the end of this session, and thought that if this was the direction in which the government thought they wanted to go, we'd simply be able to support it and move it on. It's either remove it from the agenda by

voting it down, if the government doesn't think that it's on their priority list and they have other things that they choose to do....

I simply wanted to clear that up for the clerk so that you don't continue to have a pile of motions sitting there for months at a time, and I had two that I wanted to remove from the clerk's responsibility.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Sgro.

Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid: I would respectfully provide two options through you, Mr. Chair, to Ms. Sgro.

Had I personally been aware of this motion, we could have perhaps had a more fulsome discussion about it, but at this particular point in time, I think it's fair to say that the government side won't be supporting this motion. We can either proceed with a vote if you wish and dispense with the issue, or defer discussion on this until the fall when the regular members of this committee are sitting in these chairs.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I would prefer, Mr. Chair, to dispose of the motion, if we could just vote on the motion today.

Mr. Peter Braid: Very good.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I may not be here in September.

The Chair: Okay, there doesn't seem to be any more discussion.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: Okay, I've done a little bit of math, and it looks like we'll go four minutes, with the opposition starting first, and the government may get some time after that, so share it as you wish.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Côté, you have four minutes.

[*English*]

You may ask questions of those who have already given their opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We really do not have a lot of time.

My thanks to the witnesses for their participation.

Mr. Chair, I am going to try to focus my time so that I can make some available to my colleague, Mr. Atamanenko, so that he can ask a question.

My question goes to the representative from the National Research Council.

I gather that you conduct research into the safety and the quality of materials. Could studying work and safety protocols be part of your mandate? With some spills, especially major ones, like the serious one into the Kalamazoo River, we were able to see that the human element played a significant role.

Is that something you could consider?

Mr. John R. McDougall (President, National Research Council of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Côté.

•(1545)

[English]

The NRC's responsibility is to undertake research largely of a technical nature.

In the case of issues where there has been a spill and we're trying to assess the nature of the material spilled, the mechanisms that might be used for environmental remediation and cleanup or containment, even for identifying the possibilities, and so on, we would develop technology to do it.

Our job would not include the particular protocols that the companies might apply in terms of using technology. They would more likely relate to organizations like the Transportation Safety Board or others to sort out whether their approaches are rational and appropriate for the safety level that's desired.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Thank you very much.

I give the rest of my time to Mr. Atamanenko.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Côté.

[English]

Thanks, gentlemen, for being here.

I'm not sure who would be best to address this question. When I was in northwestern British Columbia a couple of years ago, and of course talking about a northern gateway pipeline—and the debate on the tanker traffic, but that's another day and another place—people had concerns about the pipeline going through the mountain terrain. Would it withstand avalanches? Would it withstand landslides? Would a pipeline like this be above ground? It probably would be because it would be kind of hard to put it underground.

Are there similar areas in North America where pipelines go through, and if so, what are we looking at as far as accident rates are concerned? I know there were 11 pipeline accidents in 2013. That's the concern of those people who don't want that pipeline going through that area. I'm just wondering how justified that is.

The Chair: Could we have an answer? The bells have started to ring.

Mr. Jean Laporte (Chief Operating Officer, Transportation Safety Board of Canada): From the TSB perspective, we are not responsible to look into the design and construction of new pipelines. The National Energy Board would have to approve the design and construction of any new pipelines. That would include the specifications that apply for mountainous terrain and the environmental considerations and geotechnical considerations are all factored in.

The companies would have to present their designs, and get those approved. The construction would be inspected and approved by the NEB before they would be allowed to operate any pipeline.

The National Energy Board would be the best organization to provide you with details of how they would do that, and the extent of their review and approvals.

The Chair: Thank you very much to the witnesses.

Colleagues, I apologize. My math wasn't all that good. I looked when the notice came out and anyway, the bells are ringing now, and we're at a remote location. Regrettably, that means that by the time we vote, etc., and try to get back here, I think it calls for the meeting to be adjourned. We'll try to make up some time again.

I know that our witnesses are very busy. We've already had them twice. I would hope that if there is any flexibility in your schedule, we might be able to have you back once more.

We are adjourned.

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