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Wednesday, June 13, 2018

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Chair

Mr. Bill Casey

Standing Committee on Health

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• (1620)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.)): We'll bring our meeting number 110 to order.

Before I go into anything, I want to apologize to Mr. Davies. I cut him off last week when we ran out of time. I'll keep that in mind.

If there's some way to recover it, I will, but I wanted to acknowledge that you lost your question at the end of the meeting.

Mr. Eyolfson, I understand you have a motion.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Yes. Thank you, Chair.

I would like to table this notice of motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study on the violence faced by healthcare workers in hospitals, long-term care facilities and in home care settings in order to develop recommendations on actions that the federal government can take, in partnership with the provinces and territories, to improve violence prevention in health care; that the Committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee request that the Government table a comprehensive response to the report.

The Chair: Is there any debate?

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thanks.

Maybe Mr. Eyolfson can tell us a little more here. Obviously there's what happens to health care workers in hospitals and other facilities, but is he talking about doing a report about the injuries that health care workers suffer, or is he talking more about the legal side, about changing elements of the Criminal Code? What is he trying to get to here?

The Chair: Mr. Eyolfson.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This would look at what factors might be contributing to the problem and whether there are any actions the government can take, whether through policy or laws. It's open to whatever action can be taken at the federal level to help address the problem.

The Chair: Are there other comments?

Ms. Leitch.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask the member opposite about this. He speaks to violence but he doesn't address issues around harassment or bullying in the workplace. Most importantly, does he understand that under Labour Canada's regulations for the federal jurisdiction, there is an outline of which specific areas the federal government does and does not have jurisdiction in? I wouldn't want to be putting the Government of Canada at odds with any of the provincial labour ministries with regard to their provincially regulated space, which obviously includes health care facilities, as he should know, as a physician like me.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Yes. In response to that, again, it includes the phrase "in partnership with the provinces and territories". This would not be treading on anyone's jurisdiction, but if there is any leadership role in guidance on this issue, then it would be appropriate for the federal government to study this.

The Chair: Mr. Lobb?

Mr. Ben Lobb: I'll just pass this on to Ms. Leitch. Sorry.

The Chair: Ms. Leitch.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: Then I would leave a question for you, Chairman, and for the members opposite, on whether there would be involvement by the Minister of Labour at this committee, and therefore also provincial ministers of labour, with regard to the appropriately regulated jurisdictions. I think it's exceptionally important if we're going to be speaking to issues that concern section 2 of the Canada Labour Code in particular. If the intent of the government is to change that, obviously the Minister of Labour would want to be represented and also consulted with in regard to changes to the labour code of Canada.

The Chair: From my local point of view, I've been approached by people in health care who are really concerned about their safety in hospitals and the fact that there are very few controls.

I don't know, Dr. Eyolfson, if you're hoping that this will lead to a motion or legislation or something. Or is it just to put a spotlight on it?

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Well, it's partially to put a spotlight on it and partially, again, to explore what options might be available. This does not commit us to getting the yes or no as to whether this would get any labour ministers or departments of labour involved. Basically, it would be a study of the problem to see if there is a place for any federal leadership in this.

The Chair: Dr. Leitch.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I would then just like to specifically ask and place here on the table for the record that the Minister of Labour be one of those individuals who absolutely would need to speak to this issue and should present to this committee on the file.

The Chair: Mr. Eyolfson.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: If I may, Mr. Chair, I think that would be premature. I think we have to draft the terms of what this study would be. Again, I don't think that would be ruled out, but I think it would be premature at this juncture to be making that determination.

The Chair: You have a motion, though, that says we're going to do the study, not draft a—

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: Yes, we'll do the study, but if we're going to be inviting witnesses, then certainly this can be determined then. It can be discussed at that point.

The Chair: Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Eyolfson, I think 2018 is booked up. The fall of 2018 is booked up. Is this a 2019 project you're looking at? And how many meetings do you think it will take?

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: There's no timeline on this. When or how long it will take is not specified in this. That can be determined later.

The Chair: I'll bring it to a vote, then.

Mr. Doug Eyolfson: May I have a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: Certainly.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 9; nays 0)

The Chair: That was a “close” one.

I think it will be an interesting study, and I think a lot of people will appreciate it.

Mr. Oliver, do you have a motion?

•(1625)

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Yes, I do.

This deals with trying to bring to a close the food guide review that we were doing and the consultation that we were conducting. As I said at the last meeting, the consultation website the government had opened is now closed. Over the summer they'll be working on the food guide, so if the testimony we heard is going to be included, we need to finish this before the end of this session.

A number of witnesses we had scheduled have not been able to provide testimony. Some were cut short because of the bells and the votes that have been happening. My motion is to deal with that, to make sure that the witnesses we have not heard from are welcome to submit written submissions to the committee, and that the chair then write to the Minister of Health. Our letter to the minister would be more just a summary of testimony versus any conclusion by the committee. It's just a recording of what we've heard from the witnesses we've had.

That letter could be sent in by you, as the sole reviewer, because it won't have an opinion. It would be just a summary of testimony.

The motion is as follows:

That the Clerk of the Committee write to all witnesses who were scheduled to appear before the Committee to testify on the study of Canada's Food Guide and

were unable to do so because of the schedule of the House to ask for written submissions to the Committee; that the analysts prepare a letter from the Chair of the Committee to the Minister of Health that contains a summary of evidence from all testimony and briefs received by June 22; that the letter express that the Committee has received said testimony and briefs and would like to make the Minister aware of the testimony; and that the Chair review and approve the letter on behalf of the Committee, ensuring that it contains only a summary of evidence; and send it to the Minister of Health.

That's the motion.

The Chair: Are there any comments or questions on the motion?

Mr. Webber.

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Just for clarification, you're saying that this letter should contain all testimony, all written submissions, and not just from the witnesses who appeared before us. Correct?

Mr. John Oliver: Yes. We're expressly asking everybody who didn't get a chance to testify to make written submissions. That would be included in the summary of evidence.

Mr. Len Webber: Excellent.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-Hélène Sauvé): Perhaps I can clarify.

We have already undertaken to contact all the witnesses who were scheduled to appear. They have all sent in written submissions. Some have been distributed already to all committee members. The other ones are awaiting translation and should be ready by the end of the week.

The Chair: How many?

The Clerk: I think we're still waiting on two or three.

The Chair: How many would there be altogether?

The Clerk: I have not counted.

The Chair: What's your guess—six, 10...?

The Clerk: There would be 12 to 14.

The Chair: Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I wonder if the committee has any interest in perhaps having a meeting early in July. It could be late June as well—I won't judge—but I feel that it's so important that we have the guests, or at least offer an invitation to the guests, who weren't able to appear, for parliamentary reasons I guess, so that they have an opportunity to appear before committee.

I say that because the ones who were on the list...and then there were some industry groups who probably would like to have attended, but they just couldn't for a number of different reasons. Even though they're submitting a brief, I think it would be a disservice to the guide and to them, the industry, if they were not able to present their briefs in person, answer some questions, and provide, perhaps, a little more detailed information about how serious the proposed changes are.

For example, last week when I asked the minister a question about Mr. Eyolfson's private member's bill, Bill C-228, about the cost the industry would face for reformulation, retooling, etc., which was \$1.8 billion, it appeared that the department was either completely dismissive or unaware of the cost to industry.

I would ask if my Liberal colleagues would be interested in holding even a day of meetings, or however many we could fit into a day, to make sure that everybody who wanted to have a say would have a say. I think if you polled those who are in the industry—which obviously represents the farmers and growers who produce the food the industry does process—they would indicate they didn't feel as though they'd had their fair say. I also think they would feel that, whether it's the minister or the government or the departmental officials behind it, the outcome was determined before the process began.

I think they would like to have an opportunity to appear and have their say. I know I can speak for my two colleagues beside me here, but I can't speak for the Liberals or the NDP as to whether they're interested in it. I know that if they can't appear, there are likely MPs in their respective parties who are close enough that they could appear for a day of meetings.

• (1630)

The Chair: We have Mr. Oliver's motion on the floor at the moment. You're talking about a completely different motion. Are there any more comments on Mr. Oliver's motion? They don't have to be mutually exclusive. We can do both, but it's Mr. Oliver's motion that we're considering right now.

I share your concern, Mr. Lobb. It's my intention as the chair to phone 14 people, the 14 organizations that were denied the opportunity to speak. That's my goal. I'm going to do that. I feel it would take three or four meetings, or maybe even more, to cover all the people we missed. If there are 14 presentations to be heard, that would be three or four meetings. I just don't know if we can do that. It's going to be up to the committee. It's my intention to contact them. I've already contacted some of them and I'm going to contact all of them, because I share your concern that they have not had an opportunity to present their case. Mostly I'm going to reach out to them; I'm not going to take testimony from them. I'm going to tell them how the committee misses their testimony and we're sorry that it happened the way it did. That's my intent.

Mr. Oliver has a motion on the floor. Is there any other debate on the motion?

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Before we vote on this motion, is there any interest from the Liberals in having the guests or the witnesses who were on the list and weren't able to present to appear? I'm curious about that before we vote on this.

The Chair: Are there any comments on the Liberal side?

Mr. McKinnon.

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): My schedule is pretty tight from now for a month or so, but I think the point of Mr. Oliver's motion is that in order to get this evidence before the people who are going to write the food guide, so that they can have some input into it, we have to take this step.

Even if we did have one or more meetings over the summer to write a report, that report would probably land after the food guide is launched, so it wouldn't provide any input to the food guide. I think this is an unfortunate circumstance, but it's one we have to live with. I think the best way to deal with the issue is to get the evidence

before the people who are going to write the food guide, so they know what we've heard and they can act accordingly.

The Chair: One organization that I was hoping to hear from was the Dairy Farmers, and they were on the list to be invited. It was insisted that they be taken off the list, and that was very disappointing.

Anyway, Mr. Oliver, go ahead.

Mr. John Oliver: I think Mr. McKinnon said it. It's an important topic; there's no question about it.

We aren't providing opinion; we're providing a summary of the evidence as submitted. While I would have liked to hear from all of the missed witnesses first-hand, I'm not sure.... I mean these are expert people; they're professional people, and they know exactly what their industries are about and what their issues are. Even if we had the time to do a Q and A—because that's really all we are missing, since their evidence is being submitted in written form—I just don't think having that would add to the summary of the evidence they'd be providing.

As I said, these are professional people. They know their business. They know what they need and want to say about the food guide, and I think the written summary would be good. If we were providing opinion or if we were trying to corral a committee response, I think that might be different, and the Q and A would help us formulate an opinion, but as my motion says, we are really just going to submit a summary of the evidence—unqualified and unedited.

That being the case, I don't see a need for the Q-and-A component of a formal sit-down with the committee. It is an important topic—I don't disagree with you—and I think all witnesses should have an opportunity to make their submission.

• (1635)

The Chair: Will this be public? Are you proposing that the letter be public?

Mr. John Oliver: Well, I think it would be as it's a summary of evidence, so I think it should be posted on the health committee's website, like any other report we do. There is no committee opinion being reflected. We're just giving a summary of evidence. I think all the witnesses have been in public to date. All of the meetings have been public. I don't see why the written submissions then would not be made public.

The Chair: Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Right. I have one last comment.

I can understand if Mr. McKinnon's schedule is full—it is a busy time of the year, and I wouldn't question that for a second—but I would say that if you had a meeting.... It sounds as though the Liberals are not interested in it, and that's okay. There could be a meeting next week, because a lot of the people who would be presenting would be in either Toronto or Ottawa already or the following week. I'm sure they would be happy to attend, and I know there are Liberal members of Parliament, surprisingly enough, who represent rural ridings. I know there's one east of here in Ontario. I know there are some just over the border in Quebec. As well, there are some in eastern Ontario that have beef or dairy cattle, and some others have chicken and layers as well. I know that if they were called by their local representatives to appear, if the members here—and I realize that not everybody is from right around here—that at least we shouldn't let all of our schedules and all of the impossibilities be that, because it is such a significant issue. I know I've had enough calls to my office. I know that other members of Parliament have, and especially if you're from a rural riding, it will definitely make an impact on the way things are done, and the way the processing plants are done.

I can see that it's not going to go our way, but I just want to express that about schedules for MPs, because there should always be three or four members of Parliament from all parties, who would want to make sure that their rural representation has been heard around the table.

So, that's it.

The Chair: Dr. Leitch.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I just want to echo what my colleague Mr. Lobb has spoken to.

My understanding is that as members of Parliament we are responsible for actually being available to the Canadian public and hearing what their viewpoints are.

We have members of the public here, individuals who represent a wide range of industry, and quite frankly a wide range of Canadian families, who want to present to us as parliamentarians. I thought that was our job. I thought we came here to actually hear what Canadians had to say, and then to bring that forward to ministries so a change could take place.

What I am hearing from the Liberals is that we're not interested in listening to Canadians as they profess in the House; we're just interested in making sure we get through the process.

I would encourage my Liberal colleagues that they might want to practise what they preach in the House of Commons, and actually listen to Canadians who genuinely want to present to us as parliamentarians.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I am sitting in on your committee and I find it very fascinating. I will keep my remarks short, as I haven't been involved in the larger discussion. I would just say two things.

One, I represent a rural region. The issues of farm communities and food safety are huge. This is the bedrock of many of our

communities. The second thing I find confusing concerns the role of a committee. I wasn't elected to be a technocrat. I wasn't elected to be a bureaucrat. I wasn't elected to provide notes to a minister. I was elected to be part of a process where the Canadian public can hear the discussions, hear debate, and hear ideas put forward with recommendations. That's the role of a committee, having representation from each party.

I'm just surprised that we would take written evidence, not bother to hear from people, and not be able to even question them. To me that is not the role in terms of what committees have done in the past, and to me it would set a concerning precedent.

• (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I have some questions on the motion. In this process, is there a time when we would be able to see this letter? Is there a time when we would be able to critique this letter? What documentation would be attached to this letter?

Perhaps we can have a little bit more information regarding that.

The Chair: Mr. Oliver.

Mr. John Oliver: The motion says:

that the analysts prepare a letter from the Chair of the Committee to the Minister of Health that contains a summary of evidence from all testimony and briefs received by June 22

Therefore, I think it would be up to the analysts to prepare that summary of evidence and have it reviewed by the chair.

I don't know if the analysts want to add any thoughts on how they would prepare the summary of evidence.

Ms. Karin Phillips (Committee Researcher): I think one main question we would have is about the length of the letter or summary of evidence. Some of the briefs we received are quite fulsome. Having some guidance from the committee about the length would help us with deciding how much information to include in the letter. That would be the main issue.

Usually summaries of evidence contained in a letter would look very similar to what would be in a report, just without recommendations. As this would maybe be a bit of a different format, we would need guidance on the length, because it could end up being quite voluminous.

The Chair: Would it be different from a typical report?

Ms. Karin Phillips: It would be different in the sense that the process is different. For a report, there's a very formal process of adoption. As you know, in the past we've written summaries of evidence just for the committee. I think the difference between them is that we would write a summary of evidence, but it would be the contents of a letter that would then be addressed to the minister.

The Chair: Okay.

I'll call for a vote on this motion.

Yes, Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I don't know that I got a clear answer on the actual letter. I understand that there will be some sort of document, but I don't know that we've actually determined what is in that document. Are we going to attach with that letter all of the submissions that were presented, plus all the submissions of people who weren't able to appear? Are we going to attach all of those to the letter?

Again, I'm not critiquing you, I just want to get clear what I'm hearing, that it's similar to a report but without recommendations. I think we all know around this table how much critiquing all the MPs like to do with a report. If Ms. Gladu, for example, wanted to critique something in the letter, how would that process work? I don't think you want 10 MPs emailing you all summer with critiques. Maybe you do, but I don't think you do.

The Chair: I would assume that the actual reports would be included with the letter and that the letter would be the summary, the interpretation. I think all the reports would have to go into the department.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Then I'm wondering if it's your interpretation, Chair, that the letter would say, "Dear Minister: Here are the reports we received from committee. Have a nice summer."

The Chair: No, no.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I'm not trying to be smart here.

The Chair: I know. I think we—

Mr. Ben Lobb: I'm just asking, is that the brief letter you'd like to see, or are we talking 10 pages of review with everything attached?

The Chair: I'm just reading the motion, and the letter will be a lot more than "Have a nice summer." I do think the total submissions should be included. That's my opinion.

Mr. Oliver.

• (1645)

Mr. John Oliver: I agree. I think there should be a summary of the evidence prepared by the analysts, but the full reports could be attached.

Just on the approval process, the motion says that the chair will review and approve the letter on behalf of the committee, ensuring that it contains only a summary of evidence, and that it be sent to the Minister of Health. If you want, we could add to the motion.

Do you want to make a friendly amendment that the written and oral submissions be appended to the letter?

The Chair: Do you want to do that?

Mr. Ben Lobb: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Lobb has proposed a friendly amendment.

Mr. Ben Lobb: After the review by the chair, will that be sent around? Or does the chair make a unilateral decision on the letter?

Mr. John Oliver: The motion would read:

that the Chair review and approve the letter on behalf of the Committee, ensuring that it contains only a summary of evidence

—and I'll now add—

and that written and oral evidence be appended

—and it would conclude as it currently does—
and send it to the Minister of Health.

It's the chair who has the review and approval on behalf of the committee, so that we can get it in without our having to wait to come back and meet in September.

The Chair: Ms. Sidhu.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I agree that submissions should be sent so that they can look into the details.

I'll agree to that if we can add Mr. Lobb's idea.

The Chair: Send it to all members of the committee?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: No, to the chair. The chair can look into that.

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Leitch.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch: I'd like to put forward a friendly amendment that the vice-chairs also have an ability to review the letter, as well as the chair. Not necessarily everyone on the committee, but at least the vice-chairs would have an opportunity to review the letter.

I'd put that forward as a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Oliver, do you accept that friendly amendment?

Mr. John Oliver: Absolutely. It's a summary of evidence. There's no opinion being expressed in it. It would really just be reviewing the summary of evidence.

I'd have no problem with the vice-chairs being part of that review, Mr. Chair, if you're okay working a little extra on it.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. John Oliver: I think it's an important topic. It would be good to make sure that everybody has had a chance to look at it and that all sides are comfortable that it is just a summary of the evidence and nothing more.

The Chair: It's very unfortunate that we didn't have our scheduled meetings on schedule. I think we all feel that way. We all miss that testimony. I think this is second-best. It's not as good, but it's second-best.

I'm certainly glad to work with the vice-chairs. I appreciate it. In fact, I like it better than it being just me. I'm only one person, and I might have a different perspective from each of the other parties.

Are we ready for a vote? I have no more names here.

All in favour of Mr. Oliver's motion—

Mr. John Oliver: As amended twice now.

The Chair: —as amended twice?

Do we have the amendments, just so that everybody's clear?

Mr. John Oliver: Do you want me to read them?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. John Oliver: It's the last sentence:

that the Chair and Vice-Chairs review and approve the letter on behalf of the Committee, ensuring that it contains only a summary of evidence and that written and oral evidence be appended; and send it to the Minister of Health.

The Chair: All in favour of the amended motion of Mr. Oliver?

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

The Chair: I still intend to personally contact each of the parties on behalf of the committee and express our apologies. The way the House operated meant that we didn't get to hear them.

We'll now suspend and go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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