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Thursday, November 1, 2018

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Chair

The Honourable Judy A. Sgro

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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• (0925)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): Mr. Aubin, we're moving on to your motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): As I said earlier, Greyhound's service in western Canada ended yesterday. Market forces being what they are, the most lucrative routes are sometimes taken up by other companies. They might not offer exactly the same type of service, but the service will cover 80% or 90% of the routes. That means that entire communities, mostly rural ones, including indigenous communities, will be left without service for the remaining 10% to 20% of the routes.

Right now, we have no idea what Transport Canada intends to do to resolve this situation. I consider this an essential service. All communities need the service for reasons of work, health, family travel, and so forth.

In question period yesterday, I was just stunned when the Prime Minister answered me by saying that we “[...] are open to considering avenues toward finding effective solutions [...]”.

We have known for several months now that the service will be ending. When we hear the day after the service ended that we “are open to considering avenues toward finding effective solutions”, that means there is nothing on the table.

I still hope I am wrong, and that is why I would like to hear from the minister so we can discuss this.

My motion is as follows:

Given that public transit is an essential service and that the end date Greyhound announced for its bus services in some Western provinces has arrived, the Committee requests that the Minister of Transport appear before the Committee as soon as possible to share his solutions.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

On November 22, we will have Minister Garneau here. He has unofficially confirmed for an hour, but he will be here on the 22nd. If he can come earlier, I guess he'll have to let us know.

Is there any further discussion on Mr. Aubin's motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We will move on to Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Yes, Madam Chair. This goes back to a motion we discussed but didn't act on a number of months ago, with respect to a study of bus passenger safety. I believe we have tabled it.

I would like to move it, but I believe one of my colleagues has some friendly amendments to it.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Madam Chair, I watched a TV show about school bus safety a few days ago with great interest. I'm not sure if it was *The Fifth Estate* or *Marketplace*. They talked about many jurisdictions where school bus safety has been improved by introducing seat belts on school buses. When I watched and heard the numbers of children who had been tragically killed or severely injured, I thought that maybe this was something our committee should take a look at.

The current rules were done back in the 1980s, and I think today, with the changing world we're in, particularly in rural Canada.... I have children now in my riding who are travelling up to an hour a day on busy highways, under some very difficult conditions in the wintertime. It concerns me. After watching that show, I felt that we should at least give this thing some time and attention.

I'm recommending that we look at Mr. Hardie's motion and amend it to say “no less than four meetings” and that we include school buses.

That is the amendment I am proposing to this particular motion.

• (0930)

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have no problem on the substance of the motion or with the proposed amendment. I am concerned, however, that work is piling up on our desk and deadlines are getting tighter. I would remind you that I tabled a motion and that it was adopted. The purpose was to conduct a study of rail passengers in particular. Now it is being postponed more and more, but not eliminated. I know it is still in the cards and on your mind, Madam Chair, but we all know that we will be leaving in June to prepare for the election. Can we look at our order of business?

I have no problem being hurried along when the House refers bills to us. That is expected. That is our job. On the other hand, we are tabling motions and thereby creating work for ourselves. Perhaps we will never have too much work, but I think we have to at least follow the order of business our committee has agreed upon.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would say on the record that we certainly do support the motion that Mr. Hardie has brought forward, as well as the amendment to it.

Once again, we recognize that this was a motion that we were asked to consider six months ago. Due to sensitivity and Mr. Hardie's graciousness in setting it aside, we said we would revisit it later. It was something that was highlighted half a year ago, albeit on the heels of a bus tragedy.

I would suggest that if we do think this is something that is urgent, we may want to put it onto the agenda sooner than some of the other studies that have been recommended. I would suggest that, given the investigative report that was just made public, we need to be paying attention to this issue and studying it sooner rather than later.

The Chair: Mr. Aubin, just to go back a bit to the rail issue, if you recall, we had one meeting on the rail safety issues to try to make sure we were being sensitive as we did our trade corridors study by including rail as part of that once we moved forward. It wasn't that we didn't want to do it. We were just trying to involve many things together so that we were respecting everybody's wishes.

Is there any further discussion on the amendment by Mr. Rogers?

(Amendment agreed to)

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

The Chair: Next we have the invitation from finance to study clauses 668 to 747 of Bill C-86.

We should probably go back in camera. Does the committee want to go back in camera for the discussion on Bill C-86?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (0930) _____ (Pause) _____

• (0935)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Chair: We're in an open session again.

We've had an invitation from Finance to study clauses 668 to 747 of Bill C-86. It is up to the committee. I understand that there have been tentative conversations. The committee is prepared to take up this invitation. We will book a three-hour meeting next Tuesday, so that our meeting will be extended an extra hour next Tuesday morning.

We have received some witnesses. We haven't had any witnesses from Mr. Aubin yet, but we have received witnesses from both

Conservatives and Liberals. Transport Canada has unofficially confirmed that they would be here for the first hour. We're still looking for six more witnesses if we're going to do two panels of three, if that's the direction.

Kelly.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I recognize that the practice of breaking out parts of the BIA legislation is a practice that's been taking place, certainly since the last Parliament. We're pleased to study these particular clauses in BIA 2. I can well imagine why the finance committee has asked us to take this task on, given the very large size of BIA 2. I think it is now the largest omnibus bill around a budget implementation act that this Parliament may have had put to it.

We agree to do this. I would, however, say that I think the timelines are very tight in terms of being able to do meaningful work. We are trying to get this done in one meeting. I would suggest that we should not schedule the Department of Transport for a whole hour, given that we are only giving three hours to this meeting. That would allow us to hear from more witnesses in terms of the impact that this legislation might have on their industry.

I would suggest that we try to ensure that we hear from as many witnesses as possible, thereby limiting what we hear from the Department of Transport to a much shorter time period.

• (0940)

The Chair: Mr. Liepert.

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Yes, I just want to support what my colleague said in terms of the study of this bill. When I was first elected three years ago, I had the pleasure working on the finance committee. We on the finance committee asked, I think on the first budget, something like six committees to study parts of the bill because it was so voluminous. I think only two of the committees took it up. I'm pleased to see that this committee is prepared to study it.

I am concerned, though, of the timeline, and I'm wondering if there's any ability to ask the chair of the finance committee, considering the fact that we have the break week in there, if they could give us a little more time. From what I see of these particular sections, I envision that some of the testimony we could receive for this study could help us in our corridors study, because we are talking about, if I understand it correctly, marine traffic in that part of the bill.

I think there would be some other benefit to other work that we're doing, but quite frankly, we're going to have a tough time getting much in the way of input in one meeting. Because of the short notice, I suspect that people aren't going to be available.

Would the chair consider asking the chair of the finance committee if we could have additional time? I don't know what we have scheduled right after our break week, but is there a chance we could get at least one meeting that week devoted to this particular study?

The Chair: They have asked us to report back by 4 p.m. on Tuesday, November 13.

Mr. Ron Liepert: That's the middle of the break week, Madam Chair.

The Chair: That's right.

We're going into November 6 now—

Mr. Ron Liepert: I'm sorry to interrupt. If we're to report back, when do we get to at least discuss what we're reporting back?

The Chair: The first two hours would be witnesses, and the third hour could be the balance of the report that we were going to send back. When we did this once before, the letter went back to them saying that we had...

Do you want to speak to it? How did we handle this the last time?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur): Just to clarify, clause-by-clause will be done in finance, not at our committee. The committee can also do a subject matter report if they wish, like a separate report or a substantive report like they would usually do.

The process we did in March 2017, I believe, was simply a letter back to the chair of finance with our findings.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I'm still having some difficulty. Can we just walk through this step by step? Next Tuesday—if everything goes well—it's been suggested that we have transportation folks for the first hour. Then were you suggesting two hours of witnesses?

The Chair: There would be two panels of three, which would give us six more witnesses, over and above Transport Canada.

Mr. Ron Liepert: How long would that be?

The Chair: It's two hours for the two panels.

Mr. Ron Liepert: Two hours takes up the whole meeting. When do we get to approve the documentation that goes back to the chair? Is that something...?

The Chair: It would simply be a letter back to finance saying that we did look at those clauses in particular and we are making the following recommendations, or we're sending it back with no amendments suggested. People can go to finance and make suggested changes directly, if they choose, as well.

Mr. Ron Liepert: When do we get the time to discuss that, though?

The Chair: That has to be part of the three hours we have in total.

Mr. Ron Liepert: How can we actually have a recommendation back to finance, when we only have three hours and they're already all taken up?

● (0945)

The Chair: I am suggesting maybe we can have.... It depends on how many witnesses everybody submits as well.

Mr. Ron Liepert: Madam Chair, how can—

The Chair: We can do it in two and a half hours.

Mr. Ron Liepert: That's not the point I'm trying to stress. We will be hearing witnesses. When do we actually compile what we've heard and make a recommendation based on that?

The Chair: Are you suggesting that you'd like to add another hour onto it?

Mr. Ron Liepert: No, I think we have to add another meeting.

Again, if I follow it step by step, we have witnesses on Tuesday. I'm assuming we have analysts who are going to try to give us something back on.... I don't know what this letter to the chair of finance is going to look like, and I don't know how we can prepare it in half an hour after we hear the witnesses. That's virtually meaningless.

The Chair: In trying to see if there's an opportunity for additional time, I can suggest it for the next meeting on the 8th—next Thursday. We have the Parliamentary Budget Officer coming in. It was easier to add an hour on to make a three-hour meeting and not disrupt the Parliamentary Budget Officer coming, because we have been waiting for that for some time, as well.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I'm thinking out loud here without discussing this with my colleagues. If we were to add another hour next Thursday, and at that hour something was put in front of us that said that this is what we heard and this is what we recommend to finance, I'd be a lot more comfortable with that. I don't know how we would prepare the other outcome.

The Chair: The other is simply to acknowledge that we've done a hearing and—

Mr. Ron Liepert: I see no point in that.

The Chair: We'll have Mr. Hardie and then Ms. Block.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I have just a couple of thoughts.

We could probably deal with the Transport Canada input or discussion with them in half an hour, and leave two and a half hours to spend with witnesses. I like the idea, then, of adding some time subsequently to consider what we're going to send back to finance.

I'd also recommend that we ask the Transport Canada people to be here in the room to hear what the witnesses have to say, rather than just coming in for their slot. I think that will build a context and make that part of the meeting more efficient.

The Chair: Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to support my colleagues. I think what I am hearing is a recommendation to add some time.

Perhaps during my intervention you could clarify for us how long the Parliamentary Budget Officer is going to be with us on Thursday. Was that going to be the full two hours? Typically, I think, when legislation is referred—

The Chair: We're having the Parliamentary Budget Officer for two hours, and then we'll go back to airport noise.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Typically, when a committee is reviewing legislation, you do a study of that legislation. You have time in between for each of the parties to determine whether they want to make amendments to that legislation. They then come back and propose them during clause-by-clause.

I think you're suggesting that after we've heard what we need to hear on Tuesday it's incumbent upon each party to submit amendments to the finance committee. If that's the process that's in place, then we probably don't need to come back on Thursday. If we wanted to come back and share the amendments that we wanted to put forward and see if there is any agreement on that, then we need some time on Thursday to do that.

The Chair: Following this discussion, any of us can submit amendments directly to finance for consideration prior to clause-by-clause. We can acknowledge the fact that we had a three-hour session or whatever, and refer it back with or without amendments. There is the possibility that we could take that second hour from airport noise on November 8 if there was something that we wanted to submit to finance—not to take away from the PBO's presentation—but we would have to do it no later than November 8.

Mr. Aubin.

• (0950)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will be brief because Mr. Liepert said a lot of things that I agree with.

Personally, I think that, on one hand, there is definite interest in the committee doing this study. On the other, there is obviously also some discomfort with taking part in what is a bit of a charade. We are working on the biggest budget bill in history and want to get it passed in two weeks, with the committee studying it for three hours from start to finish. In other words, there would be hearings and a report. If that is truly the proposed order of business, I am withdrawing because I do not want to be party to that charade.

I am really interested in the substance of the matter, and it takes a certain amount of time to consider it. It would be rather absurd for the committee to send a letter, saying that we have held a three-hour meeting on the matter, but that we do not have any recommendations because we did not have time to come to an agreement.

Moreover, that would diminish our work. If we do not agree on a certain number of recommendations at the end of a discussion, if certain parties also send their own recommendations, that's fine, it is part of the game and the way things are done.

If, however, we have just three hours to consider the matter, and then send a letter to the Standing Committee on Finance, saying simply that we met for three hours and have nothing to say, I repeat that it would be a charade and, in that case, I no longer wish to continue.

If, on the other hand, we find the time that is needed, the amount of time that we seem to be freeing up, I am on board.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to suggest we go forward with the three hours that we said. We take the second hour of November 8 that we would have been spending on airport noise and use it to be able to put forward any suggestions based on the testimony we heard in the three hours, and we circulate any suggested amendments to the clerk as soon as possible. That way, we all know what the thought process is, since we will only have that one hour.

Does that sound like something that satisfies everybody?

Ron.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I support that. I just want to make the point that if we can, as a result of the testimony we heard, make a recommendation from the committee versus individual members, it has much more strength.

That, I would suggest, would be the purpose of the committee doing the study.

The Chair: All right, good.

Is everybody in agreement with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I have just one more question.

With regard to airport noise, what are we going to be doing next Thursday?

The Clerk: We just have witnesses on airport noise, which I would have to reschedule for the 27th or the 29th.

Mr. Ron Liepert: Are they coming from a fair distance, or are they local?

The Clerk: They're mostly from Montreal and Toronto, I believe.

Mr. Ron Liepert: I always hate rescheduling people when we ask them to come to appear before us. I don't know if this is going to be very popular or not, but what about adding an hour that day, versus cancelling the airport noise witnesses?

I never feel very good about cancelling people we ask to come on a specific day.

The Chair: Thank you. That's very considerate.

What is everybody's schedule? Would we want to add another hour to the meeting on November 8 in order to accommodate all of the things we're trying to do? I don't know what everybody does in the next hour after they leave here.

There's been a suggestion that we add an hour on November 8.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, so we're going to add an hour on to the November 8 meeting. If that's okay with everybody, that's what we're doing.

The November 8 and November 6 meetings are both going to be three hours.

Go ahead.

• (0955)

The Clerk: I have a question on the process that you have in mind.

Is it just a general discussions on recommendations, or do you want to go clause-by-clause to see—

The Chair: No, there will just be recommendations that come out as a result of what we hear in the three-hour session.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Could I follow up on that suggestion by asking that the order of that day be the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the legislation, and then our witnesses?

We're just pushing them back one hour. Do you think that's going to affect their travel?

The Clerk: I would need to ask. Some of them have very tight schedules, but some of them are flexible.

I would need to ask them individually.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Could we do that?

The Chair: Could you check to see if they have the extra hour so that we can put them in the last hour? We can do the PBO, and then any amendments on Bill C-86, and then we would move to....

The Clerk: If not, should I reschedule them?

Mrs. Kelly Block: No. I think that if the committee has agreed that we lengthen the—

The Chair: We've agreed to do the extra hour.

The clerk will work with all of us. We'll try to be as accommodating as possible to make it all work.

All right, what else do we have on here?

There's M-177, which is a study on flight schools. The second hour is scheduled for November 22. The clerk has asked that we have witness lists by next Thursday, November 8.

For November 8, can we have any suggested witnesses for M-177, the motion from MP Fuhr on flight schools?

Mrs. Kelly Block: When are we starting it?

The Chair: We start on November 29. We should get it November 8, for November 29, which gives them two weeks' notice. We'll see how that accommodates everybody.

Supplementary estimates will be on November 22 with Minister Garneau. Infrastructure has confirmed that they're going to send the deputy minister for supplementary estimates. Minister Champagne will be here on December 6, in Centre Block, for that meeting.

There's one other thing I want to raise. The trip that we were talking about to St. John's, Newfoundland, the last week of January, has not seemed to be received very well out there.

Go on, Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Madam Chair, I want us to go to St. John's, Newfoundland, but given Newfoundland winters, I'd much prefer that we reconsider the time frame and look at maybe April. The chances of getting to the province at that point would be much greater than in January, when at any time you could have a snowstorm that interrupts the trip. I suggest we look at April.

The Chair: The idea would be to withdraw this from the Liaison Committee request and resubmit it for the April 1 segment and aim for the first opportunity in April to do that travel. Would that be okay with everybody?

Ms. Geneviève Gosselin (Committee Researcher): Also consider that if you want a report after that, you may want to do it in early April if you want to table something before June.

The Chair: We'll be putting in a request for that first week in April for this travel to be done, because we postponed it.

Is everybody all right with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to adjourn the meeting.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Chair, I have a question.

This is in regard to the November 22 meeting when the minister will be appearing. I would like to put forward a request that this meeting be televised.

• (1000)

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you. Do you need to receive that in writing?

The Chair: The clerk has put it down, but any time we have a minister come, we do ask to be put in a room that can televise it.

I'm not seeing any other discussion. The meeting is adjourned.

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