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• (0915)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. It's in public.

We're discussing Bill S-202. The witnesses present on the bill are the two sponsors of the bill. From the House of Commons, it's MP John Aldag. From the Senate, it's the former senator the Honourable Patricia Bovey.

I would like us to start the meeting on time so we have a chance to ask questions. Otherwise, we'll be cutting it really fine.

As per usual, the witnesses are going to have 10 minutes to present and then we'll open it up to questions.

You may begin, Mr. Aldag. Welcome to the committee.

Mr. John Aldag (Member of Parliament, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair and colleagues. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to present Bill S-202.

Bill S-202 is an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act to create the position of parliamentary visual artist laureate. The parliamentary visual artist laureate position would be an officer of the Library of Parliament, like that of the current parliamentary poet laureate position. The selection process for this role would consist of the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons acting together to select three artists to reflect Canada's diversity. A committee chaired by the parliamentary library and composed of the director of the National Gallery of Canada, the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada, the chairperson of the Canada Council for the Arts and the president of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts—or their designates—would select one artist for the role.

The mandate for this laureate position is to promote the arts in Canada through Parliament, including by fostering knowledge, enjoyment, awareness and development of the arts. In carrying out the mandate, the laureate may “produce or cause to be produced artistic creations, at the request of either Speaker, especially for use in Parliament on occasions of state”. They may also sponsor artistic events such as art exhibitions. The laureate can also advise the parliamentary librarian regarding the library's collection and acquisitions to enrich its cultural holdings.

As for the tenure of office, the parliamentary visual artist laureate would hold office for a term not exceeding two years, at the pleasure of the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons acting together.

This bill defines “arts” as “drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, design, crafts, photography, videography and filmmaking”. Canadian artists' contributions to our society and national identity cannot be understated. Art comes in all forms, and this legislation's definition of art broadly encompasses what the artist laureate will focus on.

As we struggled through COVID, many of us turned to the arts to cope with the loneliness, fear and anxiety that came with the pandemic. The arts provided a respite during this time and continue to do so. We should remember that Canada's arts community suffered these same symptoms but continued to produce their works for all of us to enjoy.

We should also keep in mind that the economic downturn affected our cultural community drastically. The arts are resurgent and have been recovering slowly but surely.

Canada needs a strong and vibrant arts sector. Part of the power of the arts is its way of breaking down barriers between people. Canada is a multicultural country, and art provides a creative outlet to help us understand each other. Artistic expression can be understood without using words, which allows us to learn and understand stories and perspectives across linguistic barriers.

The creation of a parliamentary artist laureate builds on the government's support for the arts since 2015. The parliamentary visual artist laureate would complement these commitments by creating an opportunity to celebrate Canadian visual arts and artists, and project a global image of open-mindedness, creativity and innovation.

Canadian artists from across the country—whether lifelong Canadians, immigrants, indigenous people or others—will benefit from having a parliamentary artist laureate in Ottawa. The appreciation of the arts unites us, and, in a multicultural country such as Canada, we should promote our many different art forms at every opportunity.

In summary, supporting Bill S-202 recognizes the importance of visual arts to the Canadian creative economy. It supports diverse artistic expression by Canadian artists and raises the profile of Canadian visual arts in Canada and abroad.

I look forward to the discussion we will have here today. I hope that Bill S-202 will receive support from each of the members of the committee, as well as the parties represented in the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I'd like to see it get back to the House so we can continue on with this.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you. That was excellent, Mr. Aldag.

You took only three minutes and 44 seconds out of 10 minutes. That's great.

Mr. John Aldag: It's not my first time.

The Chair: Right.

Now, I don't know if Senator Bovey is on. She isn't. Senator Bovey, who should present to us, is on the phone with IT. Apparently there are some glitches in getting her on board.

Let's go to questions. We'll begin with Mrs. Thomas. We're going to a six-minute round.

Mrs. Thomas, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Aldag, for coming and presenting on this bill. I understand it originated in the Senate, and it's gone through quite the journey to finally get to this place. You stand, of course, as the House of Commons' sponsor for the bill, so we're pleased to have the opportunity to chat with you about it here today and then, of course, to see it moved forward.

Before asking any questions in public, I want to give notice of tabling a motion. The motion that I am bringing forward for the committee's consideration reads:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage reaffirm its commitment to freedom of speech and denounce the decision by the Peel Regional Schoolboard Libraries to remove thousands of books published before the year 2008 and deemed by the school board to be culturally irrelevant; and call for all removed books to be immediately returned to school libraries.

The reason I am tabling this motion is that there have been many students, many parents and many community members, as well as teachers, who have spoken out with great concern regarding this.

The thing that is of concern is not that some books are being taken off the shelf and there's this replenishment process. That is normal. In this case, though, what the school board has described as its criteria is of great concern, because one of its criteria is whether or not these books are "culturally relevant" or whether or not there is "misinformation" or "misleading" information in these books.

This poses great questions with regard to freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Who gets to be the czar of truth? Who gets to determine what is culturally relevant? It's rather rich, actually, for this school division to think that it can make that Trumpian decision.

Interestingly enough, there was a Japanese student who was willing to be interviewed by the media concerning this. She raised some really good concerns. As a Japanese student, she was curious as to whether or not books having to do with Japanese internment camps would still be preserved, or if those would be removed from

the shelf. She wasn't able to find any. For her, that's culturally relevant, but to the Caucasian man who decided to take those books off the shelf, maybe it wasn't relevant.

Who gets to be the czar of what's relevant and what's not? Who gets to determine what is true and what is not?

There is great purpose in protecting freedom of speech and allowing divergent viewpoints to be expressed. The way we do that is by allowing a multitude of books to remain on the shelf and allowing robust debate. That's to say that, yes, there will be conflicting ideas expressed, but that's what allows society to progress. That's what allows one idea to rise against another and new innovation to transpire.

I would ask this committee to consider this motion I am tabling today and to stand together, united in our advocacy for freedom of speech.

● (0920)

The Chair: To clarify, Mrs. Thomas, are you suggesting that we do something about this, or just make a statement as a result of it?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I think as the heritage committee at the federal level, we have an opportunity to make a statement with regard to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the fact that it is the supreme law of the land, and this school board should heed that law.

The Chair: Thank you.

You're giving us notice. When will you bring this forward? Will it be at the next meeting on Thursday?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry. I'm only permitted to give notice of this today—

The Chair: Yes, you are.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —so I will move it at a later date.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Good.

Are there any questions for Mr. Aldag?

Go ahead, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, MP Aldag and the former senator, for bringing this out.

I spoke to Bill S-202 in the House of Commons a while back. First of all, I want to state that I think we all agree here that we support arts and culture in this country and the diversity around it. I was glad you mentioned, Mr. Aldag, that art comes in all forms. It's changed quite a bit in this country. Since COVID, it's digital and everything's changed.

Are you open to some of the amendments coming forward for this bill?

Mr. John Aldag: This is the Canadian heritage committee. I think that each of you have excellent perspectives to bring to it, so yes, we are open to amendments.

This bill has been before the House three times. It's been through the Senate three times. There has been lots of discussion on it.

It was first put forward by Senator Moore in the 42nd Parliament. Then, former Senator Bovey, who has extensive—decades—of experience in the art history field and has worked at many museums, took the bill and brought it forward. She thought the elements that were put forward were reflective of the visual arts and how they're defined.

I would say that, yes, we are open to other art forms being included. That would strengthen the role of this position and strengthen the role for providing a profile to the Canadian arts community and Canadian artists.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aldag.

That puts an end to the six minutes of questions from the Conservatives.

We now have former Senator Bovey on the line.

Senator, you have 10 minutes or less to present. John took three minutes. We're not pushing you on anything here, but go ahead and begin, please.

Hon. Patricia Bovey (Former Senator, As an Individual): Madam Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, I want to thank you for the invitation to speak to you today regarding my senate bill, Bill S-202, the parliamentary visual artist laureate.

I also thank MP John Aldag for sponsoring this bill in the House of Commons and for his articulate summation of the bill, the role of the proposed visual artist laureate and the means for the selection of this two-year position. I won't repeat what he said, but I would like to underline its importance.

In 2016, in introducing the visual artist laureate bill for the first time, Senator Wilfred Moore spoke of the very real boost this position would give to the arts in Canada. He underlined the significant role of the arts and their truly positive economic impact in Canada. I can add that the life-saving role the arts had for many Canadians during COVID-19 was truly vital.

In supporting the bill, Senator McIntyre noted the ability of the visual arts "to shape the spirit of our society and great nation...[it being] a portrait depicting our lives and history; a powerful way to bring communities from coast to coast to coast together and create a shared vision of ideals, values and hopes for the future."

Senator Ataullahjan talked of the situation in Afghanistan and the burying of the rabab as a significant act. She said, "The strings of the rabab pull at the heartstrings of everyone for that region. For me, it signifies the burying of the heart and the soul of Afghanistan."

Honourable members, the visual arts are powerful, meaningful and one of the three international languages—the other two being music and movement. They connect people of all languages, cultures, ages and geographies.

In today's Canada, the visual artist laureate on the Hill will bring the public perspective of Parliament, the importance of our democracy today, and the issues and work of parliamentarians to the fore for every Canadian in ways that will communicate to all—to life-long and new Canadians, immigrants and refugees—regardless of their mother tongue.

The visual arts are a powerful way to tell our stories and to show our diversities and how we work together.

Indigenous artist, Christi Belcourt, who was the Ontario Arts Council's artist laureate in 2014, did compelling work. Indeed, her window in our Parliament Buildings talks about the issues of residential schools and reconciliation.

Many artists across this country have given their insights on many societal needs, like residential schools, substance abuse and housing. In this position, the visual artist laureate will assist in conveying your work on all issues and will also reach beyond the Hill.

[*Translation*]

Art is a lever for change, and it has often been seen as the most powerful tool we have to bring about social change. As we address issues of poverty, racial discrimination, crime prevention, health, and so much more, we need this tool more than ever.

[*English*]

That role was recognized by the 1999 report of this committee, "A Sense of Place, a Sense of Being." It noted:

The role of artists is not only to mirror the values of the society in which they live, but also to reflect on the issues that society must address if it is to know itself better.

I hope you agree this bill acts on that reality.

The visual arts also have the power to teach and inspire. I believe the visual artist laureate will be a bridge to our youth regarding the role of democracy, the workings of Parliament and your commitments, and will assist in addressing the gap in knowledge about civics. It would be a connector across this country and across generations, and open doors to bring us together at a time when that has never been needed more.

Art, as a mirror of society, is not a lie, an exaggeration or a fleeting, impermanent digital commentary. It is permanent, good and an important part of our heritage and ongoing history, portraying honestly what we are and what we are thinking.

• (0930)

[*Translation*]

In these difficult times, artists are paying attention. Artists from all disciplines have told me about the importance of this legislation. Its adoption would constitute a vote of moral confidence and recognition for them and for Parliament itself. As you know, I consulted with over 600 artists.

[English]

In closing, I want to thank members of all parties in the House of Commons, and all groups in the Senate of Canada, for their support of this bill in its earlier times—times that were truncated by prorogation and elections. I want to thank you, and I hope this bill will have your support now.

Thank you most sincerely.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Senator Bovey.

We're going to move now to the question and answer section. We've already had the Conservatives for a six-minute round. We're going to go to the Liberals and Lisa Hefpner for six minutes.

Please begin, Lisa.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Senator Emeritus.

Thank you, MP Aldag, for being here to explain this bill to us today.

John, I want to hear from you personally on why you decided to take on this project and support this legislation. What does it mean to you?

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

First of all, I have to say that I have the highest respect for our colleague from the Senate, former Senator Bovey. I've known her, and of her, for decades, having been involved in the arts community myself. I followed this bill through its progression through the House a couple of times, and then was actually able to pick it up. Mr. Shields was the original sponsor for the House and he kindly allowed to have it passed to me to finish off.

Mr. Shields, I thank you for that.

It was very personal—being able to work with Senator Bovey on this, and knowing that my colleague from the 42nd Parliament, whom I highly respect, also had an interest in this. It would seem to be a very good fit.

During my time out from this place from 2019 to 2021, I worked as the cultural services manager for the Township of Langley and was able to work very closely with the arts community. Again, we were in COVID, and I was able to see how important the arts are to society.

In order to pick this bill up for its fourth attempt to come through the House, I'm determined to work with members and get this done. I think it's a very good bill. I thank the senator and her predecessor Senator Moore for having originated this idea and concept.

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: You spoke a bit about what this would look like in Parliament. You mentioned, I think, state visits and expanding our cultural holdings.

Could you get into a bit more detail about what people might see in Parliament with this position?

Mr. John Aldag: Not being an artist directly, I think there is a world of opportunity for the person to curate exhibitions or com-

mission pieces of work. I don't know whether any of you have had the chance to visit the restoration in Centre Block that's happening, but I was part of a tour recently. When Centre Block was constructed, blocks were left for future art to be added. I could see this position playing a role in helping to determine, through a consultative and collaborative process, what those pieces of art in Centre Block would look like when we move back.

I also think there's perhaps some opportunity to showcase artists and the great work they do here in West Block—our temporary home, as we call it, until we're able to move back to Centre Block. I think there's a lot of opportunity for exhibitions, but it's also about the conversations and showcasing the best of Canada.

I'd love it if you would allow Senator Bovey to also speak to this, because this is her field and I love her vision for what this could accomplish.

• (0935)

Ms. Lisa Hefpner: Please, Senator, and I would also like to hear, while you're at it, how this would impact art communities across Canada, not just here in Parliament.

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Thank you, Ms. Hefpner.

Thank you, Mr. Aldag.

This is a really important opportunity for Parliament to showcase the discussions that are being had, the societal issues that are being discussed, using that international language of visual art to engage Canadians, immigrants and refugees with the important work that goes on in Parliament. Having been both in the arts and on Parliament Hill, and chaired boards nationally and regionally, I can tell you that this language really does reach people that everyday words don't. That's one thing.

In terms of the support across the country it's huge. I was really thrilled, as I was consulting with artists across the country on a variety of things, and with arts organizations, and I've met with kids from high school right onto nonagenarians who have worked in all arts disciplines, all kinds of arts organizations, that every single discipline told me that the passage of this bill would be a very positive voice of support for the arts across the country. I've had musicians tell me this. I've had playwrights tell me this. They all understand the power of the visual word.

Madam member, I hope you feel that not only will this be a voice for what goes on on Parliament Hill but it will engage Canadians. It will encourage exhibitions elsewhere. I hope there will be some on Parliament Hill as Mr. Aldag has said. It gives the opportunity for commissioned works to be given to special visitors and heads of state as they come. There's nothing more valuable in terms of a relationship than sharing of one's soul and the art and soul of this country. The arts express the soul of this country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hepfner.

I will now go to the Bloc Québécois, with Martin Champoux for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Aldag and Madam Senator, thank you for being with us today to discuss Bill S-202.

I don't have many questions. I think this bill is very relevant and will be welcomed without any problems. We want to make sure that Parliament contributes to the promotion of arts and culture in general.

I'd like to ask a quick question about the second point of the bill, namely, artist selection, and the francophone fact, of course.

We want to make a lot of room for Canadian diversity, but we sometimes forget how important it is to protect the French language. In some organizations, there is a tradition of respecting the principle of alternating between a francophone and an anglophone in certain positions. This is a practice, not a rule or obligation. Generally speaking, the principle is fairly well respected. I'm afraid that by opening up the process even more to Canadian diversity—and I have nothing against that—we're somewhat eliminating the importance of also highlighting francophones in this process.

My question is for my two colleagues, Senator Bovey and Mr. Aldag.

Do you think it would be possible to add a specific mention in Bill S-202 regarding French and the importance that French should have in selecting candidates for the position of visual artist?

What do you think, Madam Senator?

Hon. Patricia Bovey: I think it's a good idea. Moreover, Jean-François Bélisle, the director of the National Gallery of Canada, is francophone.

• (0940)

[*English*]

The chair of the Canada Council for the Arts is of course an indigenous writer now, and I think you're absolutely right that the selection should be respectful of the diversity of this country linguistically and culturally. I also feel that the opportunity for people to apply should be open to all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you.

I'd like to ask another question. However, I'm not passing judgment.

It seems to me that while there may be a lot of goodwill in the creation of these positions, there really isn't an obligation, as far as I know.

The position of poet laureate was mentioned earlier. I'm convinced that works have been produced by poets laureate. They are

expected to produce works or promote art, but there is no obligation to produce results, and it will probably be the same for the parliamentary visual artist laureate. There is no indication of what is actually expected in terms of the production of works by the people who will occupy those positions.

Don't you think they should be told that during a two-year term, for example, they're expected to propose two or three works that can be permanently installed to promote arts and culture?

Shouldn't we specify something like this in our expectations of such an appointment?

[*English*]

Mr. John Aldag: Maybe the senator could start off. This is her field. I can speak to some of my experience within the museums and arts settings after, but it might be beneficial to hear from the senator first.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: What do you think, Senator Bovey?

[*English*]

Hon. Patricia Bovey: I certainly appreciate where you're coming from.

I think it's hard to quantify in advance that a person should do one, two or five pieces, because we don't know what discipline they're going to be working in. I think the bill does state they are to “produce or cause to be produced artistic creations” and support and “sponsor artistic events”. It's clear that work is to be produced.

I have worked with the poet laureates in my years in the Senate, and they produced amazing work and have done some for me. George Elliott Clarke wrote a poem in support of this bill.

I have no difficulty with saying, “Yes, work must be produced”, but I do have difficulty quantifying it, because we don't know if they're going to do many drawings or they're going to do one big film. I think we have to be very careful not to quantify what somebody can do with the discipline that they work in.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Senator. You raise an excellent point.

It's true that we can't ask for 14 giant sculptures of public figures be made within a two-year mandate. I fully agree that this should be framed a little more realistically.

I have only one concern. If I were to propose an amendment at a later date, it would be to ensure that French is properly protected as part of the selection criteria for the visual artist laureate.

Thank you. I'm finished, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have finished your questions. You have one minute and 20 seconds left, Martin, but it's okay. That's great.

We shall go to the New Democrats for six minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Peter Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): It would be seven minutes and 20 seconds, Madame Chair—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Peter Julian:—because we work co-operatively. My time is your time, and their time is my time.

I appreciate our witnesses' being here.

I want to give notice of motion of an amendment to Mrs. Thomas's notice of motion. I'm glad she raised this issue. I was concerned as well about what was happening with the Peel District School Board.

The Toronto Star indicated that the chair of the Peel District School Board cited inexperienced staff rushing to execute a directive from the education ministry itself in Ontario. The board chair said, "does the minister really know the directive that was put in front of the board?"

My notice of amendment would be, if the committee chooses to examine this issue, that we convene the Minister of Education in Ontario. We've seen a lot of chaos in Ontario schools and in Ontario school libraries. I think that, if we choose to investigate this subject—and I think there may be reason to do so—it would be very important to have the Minister of Education come forward and explain how it is that this government in Ontario has caused this chaos within school libraries, which are such an important source of information for students and young people in Ontario. That's my notice.

I will now move on to our terrific witnesses. I appreciate their being here.

An hon. member: Chair, can I ask a question about the notice? Is that possible?

• (0945)

The Chair: We're not discussing the motion right now. It's just a notice of motion. We have 48 hours to look at it.

Mr. Peter Julian: Being a neighbour of the riding of New Westminster—Burnaby, Mr. Aldag knows fully well that New Westminster—Burnaby is the most diverse riding in the country. There are over 150 languages.

You cited in your introductory comments the importance of multiculturalism and that mosaic. We feel it keenly in New Westminster—Burnaby, where English and French, of course, are very present but so are numerous indigenous languages. Really, the diaspora of the world comes to New Westminster—Burnaby.

I want to ask you a pointed question, but it's also in the spirit of supporting the bill.

How do we reflect that kind of multiculturalism, that incredibly broad presence of the world in communities in Canada, through one position, a visual arts laureate for the Parliament of Canada? How can we ensure that multiculturalism is reflected?

Mr. John Aldag: It's a very fair question.

I think the important consideration here is that this position would become part of the institution of Parliament and would be here for the long term. Having that longevity, that permanence, would allow the arts from various aspects of current Canadian culture, including all of the world that has come to call this place home, to be reflected over time.

I don't think it's realistic to have every culture, every art form, presented, showcased or highlighted in a one-year or probably even a two-year term. It's about having the position carry on over time to showcase various aspects. As the senator said, art is often a reflection of the discussions, the conversations and sometimes the turmoil that are happening in society at any given moment, so this position would be able to reflect whatever was happening in Canadian society at the time.

To your point, I don't think it would be realistic to expect it to do all of those things at once, but to look at what's happening in society and what the relevant conversations are and how to reflect those things in art would probably be a realistic expectation.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, you have two minutes left. Would you like the senator to weigh in, or would you like to ask another question?

Mr. Peter Julian: I have another question.

That went by remarkably fast, Madam Chair. Seven minutes and 20 seconds and we're down to two? I don't understand.

The Chair: You had six minutes, Mr. Julian.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: My next question is along the same lines as Mr. Champoux's, and it's for Senator Bovey.

There's a bilingual presence in the country. The francophone community in British Columbia is growing every year. There are more and more francophones in the province. The vitality of francophone communities is evident across the country.

How can we ensure that this linguistic reality, this presence of Canada's francophone communities, is reflected in the position of the parliamentary visual artist laureate?

[*English*]

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Sir, if I may, I lived and worked in British Columbia for 20 years as director of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, and I did a lot of work in the British Columbian francophone community and have worked with artists of all disciplines and all diversities.

I think you'll find that the work of francophone artists in British Columbia is strong and there's a very real parallel with much of the work that's being done in the province of Quebec. I have to say that I, sitting here, am not worried about this becoming a matter of provincial delineations.

The way it's established, with the Canada Council representing somebody on the search committee, the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, the National Gallery and official languages, I think we have the stopgap measures to ensure there's a fairness in approach for those people who apply.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you.

You have five seconds, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks to both of you.

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Thank you.

The Chair: We're now going to move to the second round, which is a five-minute round, and we'll begin with Ms. Marilyn Gladu of the Conservative Party for five minutes.

Thank you, Marilyn.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to MP Aldag and the senator.

Our committee has just been through an exercise that many of the legislators are going through in terms of trying to make sure we reflect digital progress. We had Bill C-11 and Bill C-18, and you see the competition bill, the digital bill and everything else coming before the House.

In this description of “arts”, I think one of the things that might be missing is digital arts and things like animation. We talked about online creators and everything. Would you be open to an amendment that would add digital art so that we can make sure that it's good not just now but as we progress in the future?

Hon. Patricia Bovey: If I may jump in, yes, that's an inclusive list of art forms and, as we know, art forms always change. Digital art is absolutely critical. There are printmakers who engage in digital forms. You have photography there. You have videography. You have filmmaking. I think it's all implied and all included in what's there, if I may. Absolutely, digital creation is critically important. Also, it's picked up by people of all generations. It's absolutely inclusive.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Excellent.

I'd like to build on the comments from Martin Champoux, because yes, absolutely, we want to see the French language represented. However, as with other discussions at this committee, we want to be inclusive, as well, of indigenous languages, and perhaps there are languages that would reflect the diversity of Canada.

If there is an amendment that would go in, perhaps it could be something that would say “in languages that reflect the diversity of Canada” so that we capture official languages as well as indigenous languages and other languages in which art may happen, such as films, etc.

Mr. Aldag, do you have a comment on that?

Mr. John Aldag: I think that's a very fair consideration, and I hope you discuss it when you get to reviewing the bill.

When I looked at sponsoring it from the Senate, I took it in its existing form. I do liken it to a bill I took through the House in the 42nd Parliament related to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and how commemorations of persons, places and events of national significance happen. In that case, we were looking at changing the board composition to include one first nations representative, one Métis representative and one Inuit representative.

I think that through the senator's comments we already have indigenous representation through the appointments into these positions. However, that is, I think, a bit of a concern. You could have indigenous languages or indigenous persons not represented, depending on how that appointment process... I hope we would never have the absence of French. It does open a bit of a hole in how we make sure that inclusivity is part of this.

Therefore, I would welcome any debate you could have on that point and for you to see if you can strengthen the bill from that perspective.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Very good.

I would not be a prudent Conservative if I didn't ask the cost-benefit question. For this role, we have the poet laureate, and he or she gets a salary, a certain travel budget and a budget to do his or her work. Is the thought that this individual is going to get a similar salary or a similar budget? It's not in the bill. I guess that's my question, because that's on the cost side.

On the benefit side, I remember being at a dinner where the poet laureate was introduced. I'm on the heritage committee, and I have no idea what the poet laureate has actually done for poetry in Canada. We should be receiving something like that. What kind of benefits or updates should we expect from this role?

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Do you want me to weigh in? I would be happy to.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Sure, Senator.

Hon. Patricia Bovey: One of the big benefits is going to be the work that's created, which will go into the Library of Parliament and become a tangible aspect of the heritage of Parliament itself. This is an amendment to the bill so, as we understood it to be and were assured it would be, it's as per the poet laureate.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you.

You have 15 seconds, Marilyn. Do you have anything you want to do in 15 seconds?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: I'll just say thank you. I do think we need to be concerned about the budget, because art can be quite expensive. I think there needs to be some parameters there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now go to the Liberals for five minutes and Michael Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to both of our presenters today. Senator, thank you for being here.

The first question is whether there were other jurisdictions around the world that you looked at to get some ideas on what this position would entail. Either of you may answer.

Hon. Patricia Bovey: If you're asking me, the answer is yes. I've looked at various countries. I've looked at the States. I've looked at children's drawing laureates. I've looked at the City of Toronto. The City of Victoria did a wonderful one for Canada 150. They actually had two indigenous visual artist laureates to celebrate Canada 150.

Yes, I've looked at many and looked at both the tangible effects and the longer-term and maybe not as immediately tangible effects, and they're very strong.

There is one laureate in Britain who was the children's laureate, and he drew. He got kids reading. He got kids drawing. He got an engagement, and some school divisions that monitored it recognized an improvement in the kids' learning abilities.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I noticed in the actual bill it's a two-year timeline.

Why is it two years versus four years or whatever?

Hon. Patricia Bovey: It's because we were doing this as an amendment with the poet laureate, which has a two-year time frame. The idea is rotating different ideas and different perspectives so that it has multiple voices and multiple approaches.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I like that idea.

You wouldn't see the person being reappointed. It would be more a matter of changing it to better reflect the country and the different regions with diversity.

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Yes.

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's great.

Did you get a lot of support from the arts sector? What were some of the notable names, comments or perspectives that were shared with you in regard to this initiative?

Hon. Patricia Bovey: I've had huge support from artists in all disciplines—visual arts disciplines and other disciplines. They understand the international linguistic power of the visual arts, which transcends words. That's been very much recognized.

Quite honestly, they say, if Parliament can support this, they feel it will really help the moral support for the arts across this country. They're looking forward to being able to engage. They often feel cut off from Parliament. Through this process, there's been an engagement that I feel has been very enriching from coast to coast.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I noticed that there was a trend provincially in different provincial legislatures to bring in poet laureates because of the initiative that took place here federally.

Did you get any indications from any provincial jurisdictions that this was something that they would be interested in? Is this the first, or are there any other provinces that have this type of position?

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Some of the arts councils do. Several cities do, but this is the first for Canada this way. I've had people tell me from very... I have been meeting with some of the provincial art councils in the last few months. They're looking at this as artists in residence.

We have galleries and museums across the country. We have dance communities who are beginning to think of visual artists in residence, so I'm seeing this as a bringing together of what used to be seen as silos of expression, because all the arts together express the soul of who we are.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Senator, I want to thank you personally.

I'm a big supporter of the arts. I think art, in general, allows people to connect. It provides support. It builds community. Even the economic development aspect of it is quite remarkable across this country.

I just want to say thank you to both of you for bringing this initiative forward. I think it's something that I support, and I'm sure many members on this committee support. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to building a better country.

• (1000)

Hon. Patricia Bovey: I thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to the Bloc Québécois for two and a half minutes with Martin Champoux.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'll be brief, Madam Chair.

I thought the study of the bill would be easy and that everyone would agree to pass the bill. After listening to the discussions, though, I realize that there are some interesting points to be raised.

Earlier, Ms. Gladu raised the issue of the budget that would be allocated. There are all kinds of visual arts and disciplines. Production costs won't be the same from one work to the next. If I'm selected for the parliamentary visual artist laureate position, you can be sure that I will be a marble sculptor. What's more, I'm going to make sure that I make a 20-metre-high sculpture in Italian marble. The costs won't be the same if I'm a miniaturist painter and create tiny pieces. So it will be important to frame the budget to ensure that we don't go overboard. Having said that, I'd like to thank the honourable senator and Mr. Aldag again for introducing this bill.

Madam Chair, I'd like to take this opportunity to propose a motion that I put on notice on May 30. It relates to what Ms. Thomas proposed to the committee earlier. I'll read the motion again:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of six (6) meetings regarding the protection of freedom of expression and the means the Government should have at its disposal to ensure its exercise.

What Ms. Thomas was saying earlier is absolutely true; there is a growing concern among the Quebeckers and Canadian about freedom of expression. The very concept of freedom of expression is not clear to everyone. Many people have questioned the notion of freedom of expression in recent years, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis. This concept needs to be clarified.

Of course, as parliamentarians, we work on bills, and we know that these bills are always subject to paragraph 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, it's not that clear to the general public.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I am tabling a motion, Madam Chair. So I imagine you will open the discussion on that.

[English]

The Chair: You're giving us notice.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: No, I tabled a notice of motion on May 30, and I'm moving it officially now.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: As soon as we've set our agenda for the fall, I'd like the committee to undertake a study of at least six meetings to address the issue of education and book censorship. We've seen this in Quebec, too, Madam Chair. Comics have been pulled from the shelves because people found them offensive. There's a whole debate to be had on this and many things to clarify, and I think it's our committee's mandate to address that.

I'm open to questions and comments.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Peter Julian for two and a half minutes, for the New Democrats.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: With all due respect, Madam Chair, aren't we supposed to be discussing the motion?

It's not a notice of motion; it's the motion I am proposing.

[English]

The Chair: However, you have to give us 48 hours.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Okay.

[English]

The Chair: You're giving us notice that you're going to do this, so we cannot discuss it yet.

Thank you.

I'm going to Peter Julian for two and a half minutes.

I'm sorry. Go ahead, Rachael.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: If I may give further clarification, I think what Mr. Champoux is saying—not to speak for him—is that the motion was already tabled in the spring, and now he's wishing to move it.

Is that correct?

The Chair: Are you moving it right now for discussion?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'm told that this isn't possible when we're not discussing committee business, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: I'll read the motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of six (6) meetings regarding the protection of freedom of expression and the means the Government should have at its disposal to ensure its exercise.

Go ahead, Peter.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Chair, I don't think Mr. Champoux meant to be rude. That's not his style.

I had some questions for the witnesses, so I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to have the floor for two and a half minutes. Then, if Mr. Champoux would like, we could start discussing his motion.

[English]

The Chair: Do I have unanimous consent to have Peter ask his question?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Julian, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The issue that we haven't gone into any detail on is indigenous languages.

We have over 60 indigenous languages in this country. Some of them are, quite frankly, on the verge of extinction. We need to be taking initiatives to ensure that each one of those languages is enhanced and that the new generation of indigenous kids can learn the languages that were often simply beaten out of them, tragically, in residential schools.

You touched on that, Mr. Aldag, in your introduction. How do we ensure that indigenous languages, through the means of the visual artist laureate, are promoted and preserved right across this country?

I ask both you and the senator.

● (1005)

Mr. John Aldag: I'll be brief, because I'd love to hear the senator's comments on this.

The languages in their pure form would not necessarily be supported by this position. I think, however, that the art forms of indigenous peoples in Canada would be. As languages are very vulnerable, so are art forms. We know the indigenous communities across Canada have amazing forms of art. I think of Inuit art and some of the art forms that have come from first nations and Métis, who have their own cultural traditions. This would help preserve those very distinct art forms among the indigenous peoples who have lived in Canada since the beginning of time.

I see languages as being somewhat separate, but the importance would be through the ongoing support for art forms.

I welcome our senator's comments on this, as well.

The Chair: You have 27 seconds.

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Thank you. I'll be quick.

I agree with what Mr. Aldag said. Indigenous visual art forms across this country are diverse. They're rich and amazing, and I am very hopeful that indigenous artists will come forward to become our visual artist laureate. I work very closely with them.

Mr. Julian, if I may, one of the things I'm working on now is against the international fraud rings that are now harming Canada's indigenous artists significantly.

The Chair: Thank you, Senator.

Now we will go to the motion on the floor. The clerk has sent it off to you. If you check your emails, you will see it. However, as chair, I will read it:

[Translation]

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of six (6) meetings regarding the protection of freedom of expression and the means the Government should have at its disposal to ensure its exercise.

[English]

Mr. Champoux.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Congratulations on your French, Madam Chair.

I'd like to apologize to the committee. As my colleague Mr. Julian said, I didn't mean to be rude by taking up the committee's time to move the motion. I moved this motion on March 30, 2023, at a time when the concept of freedom of expression was being challenged. I explained this earlier during the question period.

I think everyone understands the principle of the motion and the intent behind it. So I'll let my colleagues ask questions, if they have any.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[Translation]

I will support your motion.

[English]

The Chair: I had my earpiece off. I did not hear that.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: She said that she'd support the motion.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Hepfner.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm just wondering if maybe we could talk a little bit more about what this motion is about. It's quite a broad motion, and frankly, I don't remember talking about it at the time. It was a while ago. I think we need a refresher to understand what the parameters are. I think the new members of our committee would also appreciate a little bit more insight. We have some new members on our side. I don't think it's quite clear right now. Maybe you could give us a little bit more insight into exactly what you're hoping to accomplish and the context in which you're raising this.

The Chair: Thank you.

Martin, before you begin, I think we should thank Mr. Aldag and the Senator so that we can move on to deal with this issue.

Thank you very much, Senator.

Thank you, Mr. Aldag, for bringing forward this Bill S-202. We will be dealing with it further, in terms of amendments, later on.

Thank you very much.

● (1010)

Hon. Patricia Bovey: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, all.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Martin, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for the question, Ms. Hepfner.

Earlier, I briefly outlined the intent of the motion. The concept of freedom of expression is obviously not clear to everyone. With regard to the measures put in place during the pandemic, some people felt that their freedom of expression was being curtailed or that they were being censored. Those are comments that have been made.

We dealt with the broadcasting bill, Bill C-10, which became Bill C-11. It was passed in 2022. This bill also seriously challenged the concept of freedom of expression. People accuse the government, rightly or wrongly, of intending to curtail freedom of expression.

I think it must be clearly established that, when a bill is passed in the House of Commons, it must comply with the rule concerning respect for freedom of expression, as set out in paragraph 2(b) of the Charter—that's one of the intentions.

We need to have discussions about this. Our responsibility as parliamentarians is not only to ensure that people understand what we're doing here, but also to provide a framework for decisions that are sometimes made in a very questionable way. I'm thinking here of what has happened in the education sector in recent years. There has been censorship of works, which were often rather playful books, if we're talking about comic books, or works of a cultural nature, that might offend certain beliefs but were entirely faithful to others. We need to have this discussion, but we didn't have it while the debate was raging.

I think it's up to the committee to talk about this and to welcome people who have questions about the concept of freedom of expression. Some people may say they don't agree with certain criteria or definitions of what freedom of expression is—and that's what I'd like to see.

I think this is going to be a very relevant, very interesting and very constructive discussion. The perceptions of the Liberals, Conservatives, Bloc and NDP are different. Everyone has a vision of

what is acceptable and what is not. However, within what is acceptable and what is not, depending on a person's perception, there is a core that is the right to freedom of expression, which can take many forms. I think that's what's going to be interesting in the discussion.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. We are now at 10:15, so we may have to adjourn and come back to this at another meeting.

I will note that Peter and Marilyn had their hands up, and also Michael and Mr. Noormohamed.

Everybody wants to speak to this, obviously. It's a motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: That's what I said.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right.

This meeting is now adjourned. Thank you.

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