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Thursday, February 14, 2008

—
Chair

Mr. Gary Schellenberger

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•(1635)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC)): We'll call the meeting to order.

Just before we start our committee business, there's one other thing. I think everyone has been sent suggested titles for the report, if we do the report. I'd ask that you just take a look at them over the break. They're only suggestions. If people have others or you want to jiggle them around a little or something, we can do that. Think about that over the time too, because that's something we'll be looking at on Tuesday.

We have a notice of motion to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage from the Honourable Hedy Fry, MP, February 7, 2008:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage recommend that the government bill entitled "An Act to amend the Copyright Act" for which notice was given on December 7th, 2007, once introduced and read a first time, be referred to a special joint committee made up of members of the Standing Committee of Canadian Heritage and members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology before second reading.

Would you like to speak to your motion, Ms. Fry?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to speak to this motion.

I think we have heard repeatedly on this committee that one of the greatest challenges to copyright is the advent of digital media, and that this in fact seems totally insurmountable and uncontrollable because people are downloading intellectual property of creators and artists on iPods and everything they can. That has left us with a huge copyright vacuum.

I think the way Industry Canada may look at this would be very different from the way Heritage Canada would look at this. I believe the things that concern us at Heritage Canada and this committee here are the issues of pure intellectual property. When someone uses their intellectual property to invent a new piece of technology or widget, patent laws and all of those other things can come into place, because you can see the thing, hold it, feel it, touch it—like the BlackBerry, for instance. When you write a play or a song and someone picks it up on an iPod or on whatever and there's piracy going on and all of those things, that is really harming the creator, the artist. Therefore, I think we need to be at that table. We need to inject this perspective into any discussion on any copyright legislation.

It's most important, especially since we know that the CRTC has given an indication that they don't intend to deal with anything to do

with the Broadcasting Act or copyright for the next 10 years. We are already the only one of the industrialized nations that doesn't have a copyright act that deals with these issues.

I'm hoping, and the reason I put in the words "made up of members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage" is that I feel those of us who are on this committee have heard presentations—we may not be experts—and we understand this issue better than other members or members of any other committee.

I would like to see this accepted. I think it's very important.

•(1640)

The Chair: Mr. Siksay, then Mr. Fast.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I think it's a very helpful suggestion. The only thing I would ask is that it maybe say "members or associate members" of the committee, just so that it expands the pool a bit in that case. I do think it's very helpful to suggest that this be a joint committee that looks at the legislation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): No.

The Chair: Oh, nothing?

Well, the thing to do is take a vote.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I'd like to say I accept the friendly amendment of "members or associate members".

The Chair: Okay, are there any further friendly amendments?

If that's the case, then we'll vote on the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, will you be reporting on that motion?

The Chair: I'll have to report on that motion. The motion is through.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Did you want a motion to that effect?

The Chair: I'll take a motion to that effect.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I move that this be reported to the House.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: It will be reported to the House.

Mr. Malo.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Chairman, before we move on to the next motion, I would like to discuss something with committee members. Today, all of us received some documents advising us that a Canadian citizen who works for the CBC has been suspended, all because he submitted some questions to this committee. My colleague Ms. Mourani decided to take him up on his suggestions and he was subsequently suspended for his actions.

According to the documents we received, you were the one, Mr. Chairman, who provided a copy of this person's letter to the CBC. In my opinion, by doing so, you sent a message to public servants that they are better off not getting in touch with their elected officials to let them know about situations they consider worrisome.

Mr. Chairman, can you tell us why you forwarded this letter to the CBC?

[English]

The Chair: Just one second, we have a point of order.

Mr. Fast.

Mr. Ed Fast: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I have no idea what he's talking about. I haven't received any documents that he is alleging have been received by me. If Mr. Malo could—

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger, have you folks received any...?

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I have no idea what we are talking about. According to my assistant, no such document was sent to my office. That's why I'm completely in the dark here.

Mr. Luc Malo: I received an e-mail from Mr. Alex Levasseur addressed to Jim Abbott, Bill Siksay, Andy Scott, Gary Schellenberger, Mauril Bélanger, Maria Mourani, Gord Brown, Hedy Fry, Francis Scarpallegia, Dave Batters, Ed Fast and Luc Malo.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: When is the e-mail dated?

Mr. Luc Malo: It's dated February 14 at 10:24 a.m.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: I haven't seen it, Mr. Malo.

[English]

The Chair: We'll wait until the next meeting to entertain your message.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Malo: The document was only in French, Mr. Chairman. I am somewhat perturbed to note that an e-mail was sent, but that my colleagues' assistants did not pass along the information.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. It wasn't received by the clerk.

We move to a notice of motion on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage from the Honourable Jim Abbott, a PC MP, on February 7, 2008:

That the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage examines Canada's policy on half-masting of the Canadian flag in relation to provincial, territorial, and international practices.

Mr. Abbott first, please, and just speak to the motion.

● (1645)

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Chairman, this motion is a continuation of suggestions that I have informally made to the committee about the issue of half-masting.

I have been advised that the government is very interested in receiving a report of this nature from the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, as we see this issue as truly being a totally non-partisan issue. We take a look at the motion that's presently before the House in the name of Mr. Telegdi, which has a tremendous amount of merit, but we believe that in taking a look at it, if we're only taking a look at the Peace Tower with respect to that motion, indeed it's probably deficient, in that we have to take a look at the entire practice, because what happens off the Hill and what happens on other public building will relate to what is happening on the Peace Tower.

That is the reason for the timing of the motion. It's something we have discussed for a period of time, and I would like to see this move forward in due course.

The acceptance of this motion, should it be the wisdom of the committee to vote in favour of this motion, does not imply that we would instantly drop everything, forget our CBC report or whatever else we are doing. It's one of the items of business. What it would be an indication of is that it's one of the items of business that this committee would undertake in due course, as time is available. That's the full extent of it. I think it's something that is overdue.

I might advise the committee that the government would be prepared to give the committee whatever assistance from whatever research that might be available from whatever sources and make it available so that we can have a very meaningful and very fulsome contribution. The committee would have a fulsome contribution to this question.

The Chair: Mr. Bélanger.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Chairman, you may recall that a couple of weeks ago another member of the committee also recommended a motion relating to a study that we should undertake as a committee, and at that time I moved to table. The argumentation was that we really need to finish this report.

We're very near finishing this report, so I would imagine that if a similar motion was put forward and adopted we'd get to it, perhaps even as early as the week we're back. But I really don't believe we should detract in any way, shape, or form from finishing this. There's been almost a year and a half invested in it by various members.

For that same reason, and it's not to belittle or to deny the importance and the significance of the motion that Mr. Abbott has put forward—I think the committee will in due course deal with it—but for the time being, I would move to table.

The Chair: It's moved that this motion be tabled.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, there's an item of business that I think we have to consider. I would be happy to provide notice of motion, so we can deal with what I'm going to talk about here on Tuesday, except that I think we may have unanimous consent to deal with it without that formality.

This is the issue of Bill C-327, which has been referred to this committee. Bill C-327 might loosely be called “violence in television”. It is a motion of a Bloc member. It passed second reading. We are now reaching a point at which, if we do not have a 30-day extension, the bill will be referred back to the House unamended. Unless I'm mistaken, there was broad consensus that the issue is very important, that it's very important that we have witnesses and that we take a look at all of the ramifications of the bill.

Logically, because we have been time-constrained with the CBC consideration, we haven't gotten around to this bill. But according to my understanding of parliamentary procedure, if we do not have this extension, the bill would automatically be referred back to the House without amendment and the House will have to deal with it. I don't think that was the intent of the members of the House.

• (1650)

The Chair: March 5.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: So you're seeking a 30-day extension.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Yes, a 30-day extension, and basically all I'm saying is that I can table the motion or we can have unanimous agreement for the 30-day extension today.

The Chair: Have we unanimous agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

We have unanimous agreement to seek extension. I'll have to table a report. I can do that tomorrow also.

Thank you. I will table that report tomorrow.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: You should get the motion adopted, though. We've only got—

The Chair: I didn't adopt the motion, okay. I'm sorry, I'm ahead of myself here.

The vote is on the extension, the motion put forward by Mr. Abbott.

(Motion agreed to)

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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