



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on International Trade

CIIT • NUMBER 073 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Friday, July 21, 2017

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Chair

The Honourable Mark Eyking

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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.)): I'm going to start this meeting pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). I'll open the floor to discussions.

Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I move:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on International Trade invite the Minister of Foreign Affairs and government officials to appear before committee on August 14th for one hour to provide the Committee with a summary of Canada's priorities in the upcoming North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) renegotiations with the United States and Mexico.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on this?

Mr. Hoback and then Madam Ramsey.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): First of all, Mr. Chair, on behalf of the Conservatives, I just want to pass on our condolences to you and your family on your mother's passing. It must be a little bit of a tough time you're going through and we just want to acknowledge that.

Second, we appreciate the motion regarding August 14. That's a good first step for sure. Now we had requested that some other ministers be involved in those meetings too. Would you be willing to entertain including them, and then having the officials stay the extra hour as historically is done when the ministers speak for the first hour? The second hour we usually have officials answer any questions.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you, Mr. Hoback.

Along with Minister Freeland, the lead minister on this file, I believe that we've been working on this since May 6. We've had many meetings and heard many witnesses. The minister is seized with this and understands the officials who would best be able to inform this committee. As well, we know that the first round of negotiations is starting on August 16. Therefore, to bring in the minister on August 14 for that hour is the right thing to do. It's the right time and the right minister, who will be able to come in and inform us where we are at before the negotiations start on the 16th, as well as the officials she would bring with her.

The Chair: Madam Ramsey.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to echo my condolences on the loss of your mother.

I gave notice of motion yesterday to the committee, but I think we haven't been given given notice for the motion just moved. So I would like to read into the record the notice of motion I provided to the committee yesterday, July 20, 2017:

That the committee, in light of the comments he made on Wednesday, July 19, 2017, stating directly, "we are more than happy to sit down with opposition parties and discuss the approach we're going to take on negotiating, renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the best interests of all Canadians", invite the Rt. Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, the Ministers of International Trade, Foreign Affairs and Finance, and Canada's Chief Negotiator for NAFTA to appear before the committee no later than Tuesday, August 15, 2017, and provide a detailed summary of Canada's negotiating objectives and expected outcomes in the upcoming NAFTA renegotiations with the United States and Mexico.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask for unanimous consent for my motion.

The Chair: We have two motions on the floor.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, a member cannot move a motion when another motion has been tabled.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: You haven't given notice of your motion, though, and I've given notice. So it's an official notice. Yours is actually out of order. I'm willing to entertain it. I think it's a good motion.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Mr. Chair, can I distribute my notice?

The Chair: I can check with the clerk here, but it has to have 48 hours' notice unless we can take this motion and people want to work on it. That's my solution.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: I've also asked for unanimous consent for my motion, please.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Just a point of order, Mr. Chair. I think you have to deal with the first motion that's on the floor before you can deal with the second one.

The Chair: That's what I figured.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: If I could distribute it...

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I guess the question I have is on the same point of order. The overall goal of this meeting is to set a date to bring the minister forward, and we'd like to see more people than just the Minister of Foreign Affairs, because it's not just a trade issue. The border adjustment tax, though it will have an impact on trade, is also a finance issue. The Minister of International Trade also deals with Mexico whereas the Minister of Foreign Affairs is responsible for just the U.S. That is why the former needs to be included as well in these talks. I think it's important to have all three and then have the second hour for the officials to basically dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s and answer the questions that maybe the ministers just don't have the details and breadth of knowledge on, which we wouldn't expect them to have.

That's why I think it's a very practical request if we could work with you, Peter, on changing your motion to include all three ministers, with the first hour for them and the second for the officials. We'd have a full meeting at that point in time, which would give us a really good overview of what to expect as you move into the August negotiations.

The Chair: We have confirmation from one minister so far. I don't know if there would be any big harm in the motion's asking the others if they could come too. We could find out, but we have one's attendance nailed down so far. I'm not trying to jump the gun, but I'm assuming that we're probably going to have a meeting then with at least one minister.

I'm assuming that if this motion goes through, which is fine, you're asking for the other two and the chief negotiator. Is that it?

•(1210)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes.

Is Steve Verheul confirmed as the chief negotiator?

Andrew, can you confirm that for us?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Orléans, Lib.): The prerogative of the chief negotiator, and who might arrive, I would respectfully submit would be left to the decision of the minister—

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Andrew Leslie: —but I certainly understand the intent.

Mr. Randy Hoback: So we don't have confirmation yet of who our chief negotiator is?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: I know who it is.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

Hon. Andrew Leslie: You do as well. But—

Mr. Randy Hoback: It hasn't been made public yet?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Yes.

Mr. Randy Hoback: And it will be made public between now and the 14th?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

The Chair: I know it's important, but we're getting into the weeds and I'd just like to deal with this motion first—

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Yes, that's okay.

The Chair: —because it looks like we're working on something. We are a committee that works well together. We've worked well together on this file right from the get-go and this is an important meeting that will move us forward. I like where we're going here, so if we could get some consensus on this motion, then we could move forward on other motions.

Mr. Fonseca, are you willing to have something added to your motion?

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, I still have a comment on this motion.

The Chair: Yes, okay. Sorry.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: I just want to ask if you can consult with the clerk. Can we amend this motion as is and then move forward with that amendment, because I think there are amendments being proposed? Is that something we can do? Can you consult with the clerk?

The Chair: Sure. It's a work in progress.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Chair, I believe the motion as is provides the broad latitude to have the minister come in to inform this committee. It opens it up to the officials, as we just heard, in terms of who would be the negotiators, etc. I respect the judgment of the minister, that she would look to bring in those who would best inform this committee and provide us with all the information we're looking for.

Mr. Randy Hoback: So you're telling me you're not willing to entertain any amendments to your motion and that's the way this is? Has it come down from the PMO that this is it?

Mr. Peter Fonseca: I think we're talking about a quite narrow window. We're looking at the minister coming in on August 14, and two days later they're starting the first round of negotiations in Washington, D.C. At this time I think it would be prudent for us to bring in the minister. The minister is open to coming in and informing us and addressing the committee, as well as with officials. I think it would be the right way to start to do this with the lead minister on the NAFTA file, as we know.

The Chair: Parliamentary secretary, do you have a comment?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: If I may, Mr. Chair, just as a reminder to all of us, the Minister of International Trade does not actually have specific responsibilities for NAFTA. That resides with the Minister of Global Affairs.

There may well be scheduling conflicts with other appropriate ministers. The lead minister is the Minister of Global Affairs who has been very much seized with this issue, and I'm sure the professional civil servants she'll bring with her will be able to adequately answer your questions.

The Chair: Are there any more comments before we bring this to a vote?

Go ahead, Madam Ramsey.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: I would just like to say that I support the other ministers' coming as well. This trade agreement touches nearly every portfolio. To be honest, we could invite the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Science, Innovation and Economic Development. Every single portfolio is going to be impacted by this, and so the NDP supports expanding it to include the couple of ministers who are being proposed. We feel it's important that they come to talk about their priorities as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

You can have the last comment because it's your motion.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: The minister has the breadth of knowledge. At cabinet I'm sure that many of these issues have been discussed and the minister will be able to inform the committee, be it on something that touches agriculture through NAFTA, or finance through NAFTA. The minister will have that knowledge and the appropriate officials—and it's good that it's been brought up—to take that deep dive if that's what you're looking for.

The Chair: Okay.

Do you have one quick comment, Mr. Hoback?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Again, I'll just make one more pitch to the Liberals here. I remind you that the Prime Minister is on the record that he would provide these three ministers to consult with the opposition parties. He's on the record in the media stating that, so we would like him to come good and clean on that. The other thing is that the TPP is the basis for a lot of negotiations that could happen with NAFTA. The Minister of Foreign Affairs would not be as privy to that information first-hand as the Minister of International Trade would be; thus we have requested that the Minister of International Trade appear given the Mexico angle. Anything to do with the Pacific Alliance or the TPP would be in the Minister of International Trade's portfolio, which is the reason for him to be here.

I'm not asking him to come here just because it will be a nice day and that he and the Minister of Finance should therefore be in Ottawa. I'm asking because we have serious, legitimate questions that we feel they would be the best people to ask. I talked about the border adjustment tax and excise taxes and the de minimis issue, which are finance related questions. That's why the Minister of Finance should be here to answer those types of questions. I'm not saying that the Minister of Foreign Affairs isn't capable of doing her job. I'm not saying that at all. I think she's been working with us relatively well. I'm just looking for a little bit more leeway to get some questions answered in some of these other areas that would not be her expertise. It is a custom and tradition at this committee that the officials stay that second hour to answer whatever questions that may come from the committee members on all sides on the process and procedures and details that the ministers would not be obviously aware of. I don't think I'm making an unreasonable request. I'm just asking for some goodwill on the other side to do the right thing and bring them all here.

• (1215)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Mr. Chair, I am listening to Mr. Hoback. Luckily for us, the Minister of Foreign Affairs who is responsible for NAFTA was also the Minister of International Trade prior to her new portfolio and would have that deep knowledge around the TPP that you're requesting.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I remind you that a lot of things have changed in the TPP since the U.S. pulled out of it. So, no, she wouldn't have the relevant information since the changes that have been made. Again, I'm not making an unreasonable request. I think it's a very reasonable request, but the ball is in your court, as you have the majority of the committee. We recognize that.

The Chair: There aren't any more comments from the Liberals, so I'll bring this to a vote.

Do you want a recorded vote or just by a show of hands?

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Just by hands.

The Chair: All in favour?

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: What are we voting on?

The Chair: It's the motion by Mr. Fonseca.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: As is.

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

The Chair: Ms. Ramsey, you have the floor again if you want it.

But first, if I may say, we have to have unanimous consent to entertain this motion.

I don't hear any nays, so go ahead.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: I'm asking that the committee entertain this motion, which basically expands the previous motion to include not only the ministers we just discussed, but also the Prime Minister who offered publicly to come to meet the opposition parties. I think it is important to have the Prime Minister come here. Canadians would like to see the Prime Minister come. They'd like him to come and provide what we're hearing from the U.S., namely, the priorities. We have received 18 pages of priorities from the U.S. and Canadians are left wondering what our priorities are and what we are going to do with this. I was very pleased when the Prime Minister said what he did to the media. So I would really strongly recommend that we take him up on his offer and at his word and have him come before the committee.

The Chair: Are there any more comments on this motion?

(Motion negated [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Is there any more discussion or updates?

Go ahead, Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: In light of Mr. Fonseca's motion being passed, is it fair to say that you're only offering the minister and the officials for an hour? Are we going to have the officials for the second hour?

Mr. Peter Fonseca: For two hours, Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Two hours.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: It will be the minister for the first hour and then the officials for the second hour.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

The Chair: I think the other ministers have been asked, so if something happens we'll let you know.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Chair, can I just make a comment on that?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Randy Hoback: If that should happen and the ministers feel that they're willing to come, we would accept them here.

An hon. member: Absolutely.

Mr. Randy Hoback: So if they have a change of heart and want to be here, we would include them here.

The Chair: We're a very flexible committee, but we'd have to have a little bit more time and we'd have to see if that happens.

Mr. Randy Hoback: You have 14-plus days.

The Chair: If I may say, we're definitely looking at the 14th at 10 o'clock, if the parliamentary secretary is okay with that. We're looking at those two hours, folks, so if something else comes up, we'll stretch our time.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

The Chair: I have other new business to go in camera for, but does anybody have any more discussion on NAFTA?

We're going to suspend for two minutes and go in camera to discuss some future business on our trip that we'll be making to Mexico and the central United States in September.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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