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Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Wednesday 30 March 2011

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Mercredi 30 mars 2011

**Standing Committee on
General Government**

Subcommittee report

**Comité permanent des
affaires gouvernementales**

Rapport du sous-comité

Chair: David Oraziotti
Clerk: William Short

Président : David Oraziotti
Greffier : William Short

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
AFFAIRES GOUVERNEMENTALES**

Wednesday 30 March 2011

Mercredi 30 mars 2011

The committee met at 1605 in room 151.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Standing Committee on General Government. We've got a subcommittee report here. Can I get somebody to move that? Mr. Bisson.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have to move the whole thing first.

Your subcommittee met, and we have 13 recommendations in regard to the subcommittee report. I'll just read them for the record.

Your subcommittee met on Tuesday, March 29, 2011, to consider the method of proceeding on Bill 151, An Act to enact the Ontario Forest Tenure Modernization Act, 2011, and to amend the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, 1994, and recommends the following:

- (1) That the committee meet in Toronto on April 11 and 13, 2011, for the purpose of holding public hearings.
- (2) That the committee request authorization from the House leaders to meet the week of April 25, 2011, for the purpose of public hearings.
- (3) That the committee, with the authorization of the House, meet in Pembroke, Timmins, Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie the week of April 25, 2011, for the purpose of holding public hearings.
- (4) That the committee clerk, with the authorization of the Chair, post information regarding public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel and the Legislative Assembly website.
- (5) That interested parties who wish to be considered to make an oral presentation contact the committee clerk by 12 noon on Thursday, April 7, 2011.
- (6) That groups and individuals commenting on the bill be offered 15 minutes for their presentation. This time is to include questions by committee members and may be increased, subject to demand.
- (7) That in the event all witnesses cannot be scheduled, the committee clerk provide the members of the subcommittee with a list of requests to appear by 1 p.m. on Thursday, April 7, 2011.
- (8) That the members of the subcommittee prioritize and return the list of requests to appear by 9 a.m. on Friday, April 8, 2011.

(9) That staff of the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry be invited to provide a technical briefing of up to 30 minutes to the committee at the commencement of the public hearings.

(10) That the deadline for written submissions be 5 p.m. on the final day of the public hearings.

(11) That the committee meet for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 151 on Monday, May 2, 2011.

(12) That the research officer provide the committee with a summary of presentations.

(13) That the committee clerk, in consultation with the Chair, be authorized, prior to the adoption of the report of the subcommittee, to commence making any parliamentary arrangements necessary to facilitate the committee's proceedings.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Thank you, Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just for the record, my druthers would have been—I've said this in the House, and I just want to make it clear here in committee—I believe that this bill should have been held over until after the fall. I don't believe, quite frankly, that there is enough time to contemplate the type of change that we're trying to do now, that the government seems intent on trying to make happen this spring. This is an issue that is going to either plague or help northern Ontario for years, depending on what side of the issue you're on. I think to try to give this short shrift is really not the right thing to do for the north.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Any further comments on the existing subcommittee report?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes, I'd just like to follow up there a little bit. This bill will have significant, profound and long-lasting effects on northern Ontario. It's certainly something that I believe we all have a very powerful obligation to consider, and consider thoughtfully, just what this bill is going to do to a very important sector of northern Ontario, forestry. It's not to be taken lightly. It's not to be taken in a rash or quick method. This is time for thoughtful deliberation and to ensure that we do hear from those people who are going to be affected and whose livelihoods are going to be impacted by this bill.

So I really do concur with the member for Timmins—James Bay that this is moving a very fundamental change of forestry through in a very short period of time, and for the members of the government side to keep that thoughtful deliberation in mind, just who and how this

bill impacts and what length of time it will take to modify things if we don't get it right this time around.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just a quick point of order to the clerk: The House is not sitting now. We finished the leader of the official opposition's remarks. Can we continue sitting?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. William Short): Until 6 p.m.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Is the House adjourned?

Mr. Steve Clark: The House is adjourned.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm ask just asking the clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. William Short): We're prepared to sit until 6.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Okay. I was just double-checking. I just looked over and—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, I couldn't hear, I'm sorry. I couldn't hear that part.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Thanks for your comments and your comments. Further comment?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I'm not exactly clear on the procedure here, Mr. Chair, but what I would like to do is move an amendment to the subcommittee report, striking numbers (2) and (3), providing an amendment to the date in number (11) from May 2 to April 18, and adding one amendment calling for the cut-off for amendments to be Friday, April 15, at 5 p.m.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Further debate on that?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Could you reiterate that? Then we would have some clarity. Go over that once again.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Mr. Brown has moved an amendment, and he has tried to clarify the specific points from this report that he would like changed, so I'll ask him to reiterate that if that helps for clarity's purposes here.

Mr. Brown, do you want to just go through that again?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Striking points (2) and (3); substituting "April 18" for "May 2" in number (11); adding a new number (14), that the cut-off for amendments to be filed be by Friday, April 15, at 5 p.m.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Further comment or debate? Mr. Clark.

1610

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I certainly didn't expect those amendments to come from the parliamentary assistant. I was going to speak in favour of what Mr. Bisson and Mr. Hillier spoke about earlier. I haven't been on too many road trip committees; in fact, I haven't been on any since I started. But I know that on the Far North Act, for example, I talked to people after those northern hearings were cancelled. There was a gallery full. I talked to one lady outside; she was crying because we refused to go to the north.

I agree with what my colleagues were saying: We need to slow down this process. You need to do it right. This is a major piece of legislation. For the three of us to be on one side and to have an amendment like this that would cut out those hearings in the north is absolutely

ridiculous. To speed up the time from May 2 to mid-April makes no sense whatsoever, Mr. Chair.

To me, we need to plan. We need to go and listen to people. In fact, I think we should be going to a heck of a lot more places than what was on number (3), not strike out (2) and (3) altogether. That's a slap in the face to northern Ontario. I'm surprised that the government would even propose such an amendment. It makes absolutely, positively no sense whatsoever.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Mr. Clark, thank you. Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can I ask the parliamentary assistant one question? Would you agree with my characterization that this bill is a fairly weighty bill as far as the changes it will make to the forest tenure system?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It absolutely is an important bill—and subsequently, hopefully, an act—that will change the way that tenure is established, and therefore will change the way that our forests are—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So it's fairly significant.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: It is a very significant one. The government has gone through, as you know, a large consultation program that has extended for a long time now. I know I was in your community in Timmins. The minister himself was in many communities. I don't have the list of everywhere we went, but we do have a large input not only of people whose business is determined by timber and how it's cared for and how it's allocated, but the very communities are decided by this kind of bill.

The government rejects what we see as not further public input but foot-dragging on the part of the other parties. This is a democracy. At some point—this bill has received second reading. It was not under closure. Members all had their opportunity to say what they wanted to say, and it shut down when people had no more to say.

We are at committee. We are about to hear, hopefully, two full days of public presentations to us. People can do this. This is 2011. Hopefully, we can do some of these things by audiovisual means, some of them perhaps just by audio. Many will want to come here. Many of the companies that are involved here are not unacquainted with the city of Toronto and the environs. These are very large companies.

So I think we need to proceed. The government is saying that we think this can happen in the time frame we are suggesting and that, given the times it's been in the public domain, people have had adequate time to make their presentations, and we're providing another opportunity on the dates we've described. So that's where we're at.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So, to my point, the parliamentary assistant agrees with me that this is significant legislation.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Yes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So therefore, I think that trying to rush this process—it's not a question of foot-dragging, but trying to rush this process of changing the entire forest tenure system by April 18 is a little bit beyond the pale.

To say that you've consulted—yeah, that's true. You did go out and consult. But I've heard from the Ontario Forest Industries Association, municipalities and others who say that what they see in this legislation is not what they talked about. What they wanted when they presented at these consultations is quite different. So this is a significant change not only in the legislation as far as how we change the tenure system and the allocation system, but it's also a change from what people originally conceived would be coming through as a result of the consultation.

I want to say categorically, this is not about my wanting to foot-drag. You can categorize it like that if you want. It is a democracy; you have the right to your opinion. But to me, it's not a question of foot-dragging. We're going to be changing the allocation system and the tenure system dramatically, and it will have effects, one way or another. There are people who are going to come to this committee who are going to say terrible things and others who are going to say wonderful things. The point is, when you have such a divergent view about what this is going to do, it seems to me we shouldn't be trying to rush the process.

I say to the government, I think this is wrong-headed. I think that people in northern Ontario—and I'm trying to be as un-rhetoric as possible here—feel very slighted by governments, particularly right now by this government, but in the past others who did not listen to what the people of northern Ontario had to say. There's been a long history of decisions over the last little while coming out of Queen's Park, decisions such as the Far North planning act that was to the chagrin of many, and now the forest tenure act and changes to the Mining Act. People get a sense that they're not being heard, and this is just another way that northern Ontarians are being told, "Do you know what? We know better at Queen's Park. We're smarter than you. We can come and implement a system that's going to solve all your problems. Don't worry your pretty little heads about it. We can fix it all down here at Queen's Park. We don't need to go to northern Ontario and hear what you have to say; you can call us by phone or do a videoconference and it can all be done in two days." I'm going to tell you, people aren't going to buy it.

I'm asking the government, for its own good, to back down on this thing. I don't think this is a fight that you want going into the next election. I would ask you to reconsider.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Further comment? Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. To characterize the opposition and the third party as foot-dragging on this when we're just beginning to speak about the first government amendment—it's not the opposition parties who have advanced this amendment that we're discussing right now; it's the government side—but to characterize wanting to have the people who are affected by this bill engaged in the discussion and the debate is absolutely atrocious.

As the parliamentary assistant did say, it is more than just individuals and companies; it's the very communities

in northern Ontario. This is not to be taken lightly. The parliamentary assistant said, well, we can have these hearings here in Toronto because the very large forestry companies know Toronto and they may have offices down here. Well, I'm sure you realize there are a lot of small communities in northern Ontario which find it difficult and expensive to come to Queen's Park. I'm sure you've heard that on many occasions. Even at significant annual events such as ROMA and OGRA, a number of communities can't attend because of the cost. So you're being very dismissive of those very communities that you spoke of as you moved this amendment.

This bill is not just about Weyerhaeuser; it's not just about AbitibiBowater; it's not just about the large corporations. This bill is going to impact everyone. To suggest that two days in Toronto would be enough is very, very dismissive, once again, of northern Ontario.

I will say this: I attended those meetings earlier on the forest tenure review as well. It was not held just in Toronto; the parliamentary assistant knows that. You heard, if you attended a number of them—I've heard it—the government had to change their ideas after hearing the people of northern Ontario speak during that forest tenure review. And that's why we've seen this now being advanced in a much more pilot-type program arrangement, because I think it's obvious that the minister and the ministry, the government, were taken aback at what they actually heard in those communities during that forest tenure review process, and I'm still hearing from those communities.

1620

I am absolutely confident in saying that we're going to hear some different things if we take this committee to northern Ontario, to the communities that we've identified. These are the same communities that the forest tenure review was held in—and not just northern Ontario. I don't consider Pembroke northern Ontario, but forestry is a significant aspect and industry in Renfrew county and Pembroke. It would be worthwhile and reasonable to go out and visit those people.

Let me be very clear: Each one of these areas has its uniqueness in forestry. The forestry industry is not homogenous by any means. Presently, there are different tenure models in different areas. The companies, in how they do business, are different, and I think it really behooves us to go out and actually listen to them.

Once again, to reiterate this, this is going to have a huge impact for a significant period of time on forestry. We have an obligation to do everything to assure everyone, to our utmost ability, that we're going to get it right, because—heaven forbid—if we don't, it's not you and I who are going to face the consequences if we don't get it right. It's going to be Little John Enterprises, it's going to be McKenzie Forest Products; it's going to be all kinds of people who are going to feel the hurt if we don't get this right. I would really like to see the parliamentary assistant take those proposed amendments off the table.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Any further comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's a huge disappointment. I would like, for once, that what comes out of this place is something that everybody can buy into, that at the end of the day is to the benefit of northern Ontario.

The government has an idea about how to change the forest tenure reform. I'm sure that if we travel to northern Ontario, we're going to get quite a few who will speak opposed to it; you might even get some who speak to it. But the point is, it seems to me that we have a product here that at the end of the day is yet again going to divide us.

I don't know what the upside is in dividing the north from the south. It's really the sense in the north that, "Here we go again. Queen's Park is going to tell us what's best and we're going to be there, trying to pick up the pieces when everybody's gone." I just get really irked as well, as I think most people in northern Ontario do, that we're put in this situation again.

So I'm just asking the government: You have a number of seats in northern Ontario; you have more seats than we have in northern Ontario. I would just ask, on behalf of other northerners, that you consider allowing this to have some form of hearings now, but put this off until after the next election. It's not as if you need this to get you over to the next election and this is going to be a big win for you. There's no upside here. You do this change, you throw the change down—if you try to force the changes on northern Ontario, it will just backfire on you in the next provincial election.

This is a good exercise, to consult people on what you've worked on up to now, as far as what you think needs to change. Let's have some of those discussions with some hearings in Toronto and northern Ontario, and at the end of the day, let's not be in a rush to get this whole thing done, because it's not as if this has to happen now.

Number two, at the very least, if you're going to make this happen this spring—and that is not my wish. I hope to heck we don't do that, although it does look as if that's what you're going to do. I don't understand how you can do this without going to the north. You can make the argument that, yes, we've had consultations before, and in drafting the legislation we've had all these public meetings—and there's no question you had those; I'm not saying you didn't. They're not a figment of your imagination; they actually did happen. But the point is that what has come out is very different than what people were expecting.

I have people, on the one side, who represent the forest industry, who are mad as hell at this. I have people on the other side, who expected to see some sort of community forest model, and it really isn't there. You've got both sides, quite frankly, that are unhappy with the end product.

I don't understand how you can go forward and try to force this thing by April 18 and say, "We don't even have to go to northern Ontario because—you know what?—they can talk to us by phone or maybe they can have a videoconference if they can get to a Contact North site" or whatever it might be. And that should be suffi-

cient? I think that just flies in the face of the respect that we have to show the people of northern Ontario. I ask the government to reconsider on both points.

The Chair (Mr. David Orazietti): Okay. Thank you, Mr. Bisson—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Otherwise, we will have a fight.

The Chair (Mr. David Orazietti): Mr. Clark.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm calmed down now; I've taken a breath. I want to ask the parliamentary assistant: Your quote, if I get it correctly, is you've consulted up in the north; debate has collapsed, so you think you can proceed. Did I get that? Did I understand that right?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Yeah.

Mr. Steve Clark: So all of the emails that I've received from people asking—I think there was one that I read this morning that talks specifically about Thunder Bay, asks about Thunder Bay. You all have got the same emails that I've received, so I just fail to understand why, in such a significant piece of legislation—I guess I echo what my colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington said about being reasonable.

To me, especially after what I experienced on this committee in regard to the Far North Act, Bill 191, and the many people that I met for the first time and that I talked to about significant impact on the north, whether you've extended consultation or not, you have to agree that when you have a bill of this impact—as Mr. Bisson talked about, a significant impact for both sides of the issue, both in favour and against the issue. When we receive these types of requests, we should give them due diligence, and we should deal with them. I just believe that it's very premature for us to be striking out all of these committee hearings given the fact that there are a number of members who may not have participated in the debate because they felt that we would have committee hearings—which is the norm—and then come back to the Legislative Assembly.

Listen, I know that my municipal life is a lot different than my life as a provincial politician. But I have to tell you, when I was involved with municipal governments—and I was involved in our association, in AMO—I travelled to the north. I valued that opportunity because, if I've learned anything, I've learned there are different challenges that face northern communities. I think we all agree, on this side, that having a consultation, having a hearing like we experience here in Toronto up north, I don't see, personally, the downside of that. I see it as a very positive experience.

As Mr. Bisson said, we're going to get people from both sides of the issue. I think the debate that we've had in the Legislative Assembly needs to be followed up by some citizen comments.

Again, I guess I echo the comments from Randy and Gilles in saying let's back off these recommendations. To me, they're counterproductive to this committee's operation.

The Chair (Mr. David Orazietti): Okay. Thank you, Mr. Clark, for your comments.

The amendment is on the floor right now. The amendment is what we would be voting on at first—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Are we not going to get a response back from—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I've said what I needed to say. We need to move on. Northerners have had ample opportunity to comment on this.

I represent one of the largest forestry ridings in the province. The minister represents one of the largest forestry ridings in the province. The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources has a constituency that is very dependant on natural resources. I hear, in my constituency, about these issues all the time. My friends and colleagues hear about these issues all the time. It's not as if we're coming to this as a government uninformed.

People have the opportunity—I think you're missing this—of two days of public hearings to put forward views we haven't heard yet. They have the ability to put them in writing. They have the ability to make whatever comments they wish, if we can schedule it, by audiovisual or by phone, if necessary. What we don't need to do is delay this any longer.

1630

If the opposition has amendments they would like to make to the bill, I would be thinking about those today. I think the government is thinking about them today. We will be able to listen to the presenters and read their presentations and have plenty of time to come to a conclusion by April 18. The government continues to move on this amendment. I just really don't know what more there is to say from either side on this subject. It's time to go. It's time to move. It's time to do something.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Okay. So—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You provoked me on that one. I recognize—

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Is there anything new—obviously you can continue to comment if there's something new to add to the discussion.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm not going to be long; I'm not going to drag it out. I'm just going to say that I recognize you come from a riding that has a large forestry sector, as the minister does and as I do. But I just got an email from one of your constituents in Dubreuilville. What is it all about? It's about wood allocation.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: That's about allocation; it's not about tenure. Don't confuse the two.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's about wood allocation. This particular bill will deal with how wood allocation happens in this province. There are plenty of people who are concerned in regard to what this is going to mean to their communities, and there's a lot of people who fear that at the end of the day, this is not going to fix the type of things that people think need to be fixed when it comes to communities like Dubreuilville and Wawa and Sioux Lookout and Smooth Rock Falls and the 30 communities in northern Ontario that are looking at how they're going to survive after the economy turns. This bill, in its present form, I very much fear is not going to do very much to help them. That's the view of a lot of people from northern Ontario.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'll just go back to the parliamentary assistant's comments that the government has heard these views and we don't need to—we're talking about constituents in forestry—and that there's no need to go much farther. It's already heard it. That, to me—but we're willing to still hear the views down here in Toronto from some people, some people who will be able to afford to and who have access to coming here to Toronto. But all those other people, all those other communities—your own constituencies—won't have that opportunity. I just find it incredible that you could have that position that you've heard it all and you don't need to hear anything else, but you're willing to allow the Abitibis of the world and some of the larger corporations to have face-to-face time with this committee.

Everybody who's travelled to the north, every member from the north, knows that the overriding sentiment in northern Ontario is that the people feel that they're not being heard, that they're not being respected, that the decision-making is happening down here in Queen's Park without regard for their very livelihood. The only way that that is ever going to be overcome is if we actually take the elected representatives to northern Ontario and have those open, honest, thoughtful discussions and demonstrate to people that they are, indeed, part of this process—they're not excluded from the process; they are integral to the process.

You don't have to be a wealthy individual or a large multinational to have the ear of elected representatives. Everybody can have the opportunity to express themselves to demonstrate how this piece of legislation is going to affect them. That's the important thing: How is it going to affect that person, so that we can mitigate those consequences with reasoned amendments when we go into clause-by-clause. How are we going to provide those reasoned amendments in clause-by-clause if we're just going to exclude 75% or 80% of the people who are impacted by this piece of legislation? The answer is obvious: We're going to come up a day late and a dollar short on this piece of legislation because we won't have done our due diligence.

Whoever the government of the day is down the road, they're going to pay the price. They're going to pay the price of having to clean up and wipe up the mess that's left behind from pushing forward with legislation that has not been clearly thought out and has not provided that opportunity for individuals to provide their input.

Once again, we haven't heard everything and we are not going to hear everything if we remain cloistered in Queen's Park and don't give northern Ontario communities the opportunity for this committee to go into those communities and actually hear the people on the ground, how they're going to be affected, and once again, the communities themselves, who can't afford to come down here.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Thank you, Mr. Hillier.

I think everyone's points, at this point, are on the record and clearly noted.

The amendment is before us, so I'll call for a vote—

Mr. Randy Hillier: I wanted to call for a recorded vote.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just one second. There is a difference in regard to, should we—if the current recommendation of the subcommittee is voted down and we want to do an amendment, then there's some other things that I want changed. I don't want to vote on this as a package because if you're telling me you're not going to northern Ontario, then we've got to talk about what we can do that would be different to accommodate northern Ontario. That's not being done in these recommendations. So can we go one at a time?

You're proposing, basically, that we adopt everything but (2), (3); an amendment to (11), an add of (14), and I would argue that what we do is, we exclude (1) for now—

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Sorry; just to stop you there for one second.

Mr. Brown has an amendment on the floor right now that deals with the items that have been brought forward. To be clear, the proposed amendment by the government is to eliminate point number (2) and point number (3), change number (11) to April 18 and add an additional point that says amendments need to be filed with the clerk by Friday, April 15.

If that amendment, which is on the floor right now, passes, that's not the only amendment that we could consider.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I understand that.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): If you have an additional suggestion that you want to add something in, we need to deal with the amendments one at a time.

We can deal with the amendment that's on the floor, and if that is the outcome of that, we can move on to the next proposed amendment before we agree to vote on the entire subcommittee report, because we need, ultimately, to have, at least at this point, two votes now: one on the amendment and one on approving the subcommittee report.

What's before us right now is the amendment that Mr. Brown has put forward. We're going to vote on that first, and if you have items that you'd like to add or amend, we can do that as well.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Go ahead, Randy. You were going to say something?

Mr. Randy Hillier: No, no, that's fine.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: First of all, we've already sort of had the debate, but essentially, what these amendments do is take away the ability of the committee to be able to travel to northern Ontario.

I just want to clearly put on the record, for those particular amendments, that we, the New Democratic Party of Ontario, on behalf of Andrea Horwath, our leader, and myself as critic are opposed to this by the government. We think that the committee should go to northern Ontario. Not doing so, we think, is wrong-headed on the part of this government and is not giving northern Ontarians

the respect that they deserve when it comes to this particular bill and to be heard on it.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Okay. I think the point's been made. You're on the record on that on a number of occasions. I think we're clear.

We're going to vote on the government's amendment at this point. A recorded vote has been called—

Mr. Randy Hillier: A recorded vote, and I'll call for a 20-minute recess for the vote.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Okay, a 20-minute recess. A recorded vote has been called for on the government amendment. Please be back at 5 o'clock so we can vote.

The committee recessed from 1639 to 1659.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Okay, folks, we're back to the amendment that's before us. A recorded vote has been called for on the government's amendment to the subcommittee report.

Ayes

Brown, Hoy, Levac, Ramal.

Nays

Bisson, Clark, Hillier.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): The government amendment to the report is carried.

Further debate or comment on the report?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to move a motion, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Just one moment. The clerk is going to hand out the subcommittee report with the modifications so that everybody can have a look at that, and if there are any further proposed amendments, you can base them on that.

Mr. Hillier, you have an amendment?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I haven't got the revised one yet. Oh, there we go.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Mr. Hillier, you have a proposed further amendment?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. I would move a motion that in light of the changes to the report of the subcommittee, our committee be live streamed and also that Skype facilities be set up in a central location in Pembroke, Timmins, Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, so that individuals who cannot attend, who are being prevented from being face to face with this committee—once again, the motion is that the committee be live streamed on the Internet and Skype facilities be set up in a central location in Pembroke, Timmins, Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Mr. Hillier, thanks for your amendment. I think that committee members are aware of what you're asking for. Traditionally, we've offered video conference or telephone conference capabilities. You're requesting a live Internet/Skype type of approach. We'll have to take a brief recess to determine whether that's possible and get back to you on that. I'm

not sure if the government has any comments on the proposed amendment.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Clearly, we want to hear from as many people as we can. I'm not exactly aware of what technological opportunities may be available. Certainly we, as a committee, should try our best to ensure that people have the ability to communicate with us, either to attend here in Toronto or by audiovisual or any manner we have the technical capacity to do. The clerk could check with other communities to see what they've been able to do in this regard.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Okay, we'll take a brief recess. Please don't go very far. We should have an answer for you very shortly.

The committee recessed from 1704 to 1715.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Thank you for your patience.

Mr. Hillier has clarification on his amendment. If he wants to reiterate or clarify any aspects of the amendment he proposed, I think this is a good opportunity, and we can provide what information we can with respect to the technology that can support the committee. Go ahead, Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Is it possible that I can amend my own motion? I'll go for it: "That the committee be live streamed and Skype facilities be set up where possible through locations in northern Ontario."

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just a question for clarification. That would mean that somebody sitting somewhere—wherever—who has a computer with a camera on it could do it from their own home, right?

Mr. Randy Hillier: That's right.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Effectively, that's what it means; right?

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Right.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes. And from the perspective that we've talked about, to me, the live streaming is a given. We do that every day for question period. We've done that in the past for the budget, prior to question period being covered. That's a given. It's the other issues that Randy's talked about that would provide the Skype facilities. That's the other point. There are two real points.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Agreed.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Any further comments? Mr. Bisson.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The fact that the parliamentary assistant is agreeing is the reason I'm speaking.

Listen, I see this for what—

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Be careful what you ask for.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Exactly; that's exactly the point.

I see what the Conservatives are asking for is an opportunity for northerners to participate in these hearings from northern Ontario using technology. Although I think that's an intriguing idea, and we've done it before on different committees when it comes to the opportunity for people to present, the issue for me is that it doesn't give—what we're essentially doing is precluding the opportunity for the committee to travel to the north.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, but I'm just saying—let me just finish. I want to put on the record very clearly that I don't see this as a substitution for what should happen. What should happen is that this committee should travel to those communities in northern Ontario and give northerners an opportunity to come and present, like we do in every other committee. Failing to do so—I've already put on the record why I think it's wrong—I think this particular move, although interesting, puts us back in the government's court, and in a funny kind of way, they get what they want: They get a couple of days' hearings; they don't travel to northern Ontario. I don't see this as a big victory.

I hear that you're trying to move forward and the Conservative caucus is trying to put forward a proposal they see as helpful; I understand that and I recognize what Mr. Hillier and Mr. Clark are trying to do. But although I love technology, I'm going to vote against it on the basis that it basically doesn't give northerners what they want, and that is for committee to go to the north.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Okay. Your comments are noted.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Record the vote, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Hold on.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I do want this comment on here, because Mr. Bisson does make some very valid points. I also want to reiterate for my own purpose here that this technology solution is only being offered up due to the intransigence of the Liberal Party to take these live to northern Ontario. This is not a substitute; it's not meant in any fashion for future committees of this House to think that technology can be used as a crutch not to travel to those communities.

I do want to just put that on the record. This is a way to mitigate the failure of this committee.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): That point has been discussed amply today and voted on. You're offering up an opportunity for discussion and participation by northerners as part of this process. That amendment is on the floor.

Mr. Bisson?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Very quickly, Chair: I'm not going to take more than a minute. I just want to make perfectly clear that I appreciate what the Conservatives are trying to do. They're trying to help northerners get to the hearings the only way they can, which is either to travel here, to come by Skype or to come by television. But I want to be clear: I'm voting against it on the basis of how I really don't believe this is the solution that we were looking for. What I wanted was for this committee to travel. On that basis, I'll be voting against it.

I'll ask for a recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): A recorded vote has been called for.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can we have a 20-minute recess?

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Yes, you can have a 20-minute recess.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): The committee will be finished at 6 o'clock this evening, for members, so any business that is not completed today will be carried over.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, that's fine.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): Folks, can you be back at 5:40 for a vote on the amendment?

The committee recessed from 1719 to 1739.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): All right, folks. What we have before us is the Conservative motion or amendment proposed to the subcommittee report. It's number 13 that you should have in front of you:

"That, if possible, the committee facilitate live streaming and Skype to locations in northern Ontario."

You called for a recorded vote as well.

Ayes

Brown, Brownell, Clark, Hillier, Hoy, Levac, Ramal.

Nays

Bisson.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): The motion is carried. The subcommittee report is amended and also includes that.

All in favour of the subcommittee report, as amended?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: A recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): A recorded vote has been called for.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Twenty minutes.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. David Oraziotti): We'll have to come back to vote on this.

Thank you. Committee is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1741.

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