

Canada's International Relations

That the Committee submit an interim report on Canada's participation in research on the Strategic Defence Initiative and on Bilateral Trade with the United States no later than August 23, 1985;

That, notwithstanding the usual practices of this House, if the House is not sitting when an interim or final report of the Committee is completed, that the Committee shall report its findings by depositing its report with the Clerk of the House and that it shall thereupon be deemed to have been laid upon the table;

That the Committee present its final report no later than May 31, 1986; and

That a message be sent to the Senate requesting that House to unite with this House for the above purpose, and to select, if the Senate deems it advisable, members to act on the proposed Special Joint Committee.

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, there are two matters I wanted to raise with the Government House Leader (Mr. Hnatyshyn) before the motion is put. Clearly we intend to give consent, but I wanted to say that I think it is the hope of all Parties that, although the time limit is short for deliberations, there will be adequate time for the extensive consultation we know is necessary. I also want to ask the Government House Leader to verify on the record that, recognizing the extensive nature of the travel involved in order to hold hearings and achieve the necessary input from the public, a reasonable substitution of Members on the Committee will be permitted from time to time as necessary in order to accommodate the hearing process.

There is one final matter. I believe the Government House Leader intends to assure this House, perhaps by reading into the record the letter from the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) to the Opposition House Leaders, that the Government does not intend to move on any verification of any arrangements between Canada and the U.S. on either of the two questions the committee has been asked to deliberate upon until after it has tabled its report in the House of Commons.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, when we heard that the Government wanted to propose that the House and Senate create a special joint committee to hold hearings lasting up to a year on its Green Paper on foreign policy, we took a firm position that this committee would be of no value either to Parliament or the Canadian people unless the Government gave an undertaking that decisions would not be taken on at least two key issues, the Special Defence Initiative, known as star wars, and the matter of bilateral trade relations with the U.S., until the Canadian people have had a reasonable opportunity to present their views on these issues to the parliamentary committee. At first, the Government, to say the least, was reluctant to—

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Come on, Herb.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West):—give such an undertaking. But I am very pleased to note, through the motion presented today, that the Government is prepared not to make such decisions until after August 23. I understand that the Government House Leader is prepared to table certain letters confirming that undertaking. In those circumstances, I am pleased to say on behalf of the Official Opposition that I give our consent to the motion just read out by the Government House Leader.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Hnatyshyn) wish to comment on the remarks of the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans)?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Yes, Mr. Speaker, It is with mixed feelings that I rise at this time. I had rather hoped we would not get involved in the political rhetoric of the House Leader of the Official Opposition on this matter. I think this has been addressed in Question Period and I am not going to comment other than to say that the consultative process we brought forward in the Speech from the Throne is a precedent. This Government has to apologize to no one with respect to participation by Members of Parliament in the consultative process through parliamentary committees. I think it is important to understand that we have been delayed by the actions of the Opposition for one month when we could have had important meetings with the people of Canada. But I will not say those things because I do not want to get involved in political rhetoric on this issue.

In response to the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain, I think we will be able to work out, and I am quite prepared to do so, a sensible and reasonable arrangement with all Parties concerning membership on the committee—and the necessary substitutions. He will understand that on these joint committees, because of their nature, there are some difficulties with respect to substitution. Having said that, I can give him the assurances, as I have done privately to both him and the Official Opposition House Leader, that I am very much interested in making sure that we make the best use of Members of Parliament from all Parties. If there is a reasonable proposition to be put forward, we will of course agree because we are able to do that in so many instances.

I have documents here which I propose to table with the unanimous consent of the House at this time. The first document is a memorandum which I sent to the opposition House Leaders outlining the confirmation of the agreement. The second document is a letter which I have from the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. Clark) which has been circulated to Hon. Members, and I think I can read it into the record now so that we will understand what has been agreed to by the opposition Parties and the Government. The letter is dated June 10, addressed to myself, and reads as follows:

I am pleased at the progress you are making in discussions with House Leaders of the other Parties respecting the reference of the Green Paper to a Special Joint Committee of the House of Commons and the Senate.

I understand the other Parties want a reliable assurance that the hearings and the interim report will be considered by the Government when we take decisions on trade arrangements with the United States, and the American invitation to participate in SDI research. Please assure them that I see no circumstances that would require us to take decisions on those questions before August 23; indeed, I would welcome the observations of the Committee and the interested public, before any decisions are taken on those questions.

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,
Joe Clark

With the consent of the House, I will table those two documents.