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Chair

Mr. Leon Benoit

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• (1715)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)): Order, please.

I'm going to take that amendment as a request.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): I won't read the whole thing. It reads as it should.

The Chair: The motion is in front of us then.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): It would be helpful to understand the reasoning of the member in raising this motion.

The Chair: Actually, it is Mr. Poilievre's—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): I'm about to give you an answer to that question.

We have a land deal with Liberal Senator Massicotte's company. He is president and chief executive officer of Alexis Nihon. This particular building remained completely empty for the first year, while taxpayers were paying \$575,000 per month in rent. We feel this was an egregious waste of tax dollars. In the six months that followed that first year, the building was half empty while taxpayers continued to pay the full price.

It's an issue for Public Works, which of course is responsible for renting the property, and we have jurisdiction over Public Works in this committee. As such, in the interests of openness and transparency, we ought to call on Mr. Massicotte to come to offer his explanation.

I also referred to section 14 of the Parliament of Canada Act in the House of Commons today. It forbids any member of the Senate from doing business with the Government of Canada. I further add that the section of the act to which I referred does not stipulate that business can occur between a senator and the Government of Canada if the senator is appointed after the business commences. There is no exception for that.

So I think it's only fair that if this deal is as transparent and defensible as my Liberal friends allege it is, they will certainly want to support this motion, because it will give them an opportunity to air their defence of the deal in public light. So I'm sure I'll be seeing unanimous support from the Liberals on this motion.

The Chair: Madam Thibault.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): If I'm mistaken or if this is not the moment, you will certainly tell me.

I would like to propose an amendment to call in the minister of Public Works and Government Services.

An hon. member: Yes, not the senator.

Ms. Louise Thibault: Dear colleague, we are going to examine a contract. I suggest we question the person who signed that contract, from the federal government point of view, so that he can explain us what has been done. After that, if you wish to invite the senator—I don't think we can summon a senator—, you can represent us.

As a first step, I think it would be interesting to be totally factual, without implying there is something behind all this. Let's examine the facts first: the contract, the amount, is the building occupied or not, what for, has it been renovated or not, etc. You can then do your follow-up if necessary.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Thibault, excuse me, that was an amendment proposed. What is your amendment exactly?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I propose that we invite the minister of Public Works and Government Services to come and explain us what has been done exactly in the case of the rental contract for a federal government building, etc.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Thibault, is your proposed amendment to go at the end of this amendment? Where do you want that?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Thibault: I propose that the committee invite the minister of Public Works and Government Services to come and explain us the contract concerning the rental of the federal building mentioned in the motion.

[English]

The Chair: The discussion is now on the amendment. We'll hear from Mr. Szabo, Mr. Poilievre, and then Mr. Martin.

Mr. Paul Szabo: There's probably no disunity to get the facts. What's been proposed is actually another motion, not an amendment. If you wanted that to be an amendment, it would say that the committee requests the minister—blah, blah, blah—and if necessary, send for...and pick it up. If that's what we're talking about, it's that plus the preamble. Get the facts from the minister, and if necessary—

The Chair: Madam Thibault, is that acceptable to you?

Is there general agreement then? There seems to be.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): The words “if necessary” put a bit of an editorial bias on the motion. For the motion to be clean and unprejudiced, it should say “invite the minister and the senator” subsequently.

I do want to hear from the senator, frankly, regardless of what additional information we find out. This is an alarming revelation that we've come across here.

• (1720)

The Chair: We're on the amendment, Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: The point of the amendment is to get the facts. The motion itself gives a fact that the contracting parties are a corporation and the Government of Canada, not a senator. The member over here lied to the committee and lied to the House today by totally misrepresenting—

The Chair: I think that's out of order, Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Paul Szabo: No, Mr. Chairman—

The Chair: I believe it's out of order.

Mr. Paul Szabo: I'm sorry, but if the contractor turns out to be a corporation and the Government of Canada...then there's absolutely no need to bring a senator who happens to be employed in some fashion.

Many of the senators are directors of various corporations. By the rules the member seems to be following here, anybody who has a position in any company contracting with the Government of Canada can't have that position. Well, that's just not the case. They cannot be direct contractors. That's the difference. The member has misled the committee and the House.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: It says “indirect” in the bill.

Mr. Paul Szabo: No. You have misled the House.

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Szabo, you know it is out of order to accuse any member of the House or the committee of lying. Stay away from that, or I will cut you off in the future.

Mr. Preston is next on the amendment, then Mr. Poilievre, I believe.

Mr. Joe Preston: As it's been stated, it sounds like the amendment would work to answer questions about this agreement. That is what the motion is for. We're here debating the intent, and that's why we want the people at the table here as witnesses. We're asking for this motion to be put so the Minister of Public Works and the senator will come here to answer questions about this agreement. If indeed it's true that it's a numbered company and we're going to

hide our ethics behind numbered companies, we can do it then. The motion is to have them come here to answer questions.

The Chair: Order, Mr. Szabo.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Chair.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Fine, let him go.

The Chair: Sorry, on the list I have Mr. Poilievre, but he is deferring to Mr. Boshcoff.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Out of gentlemanliness, I will defer.

The Chair: Mr. Boshcoff, sorry, we missed you.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: I have to say this is a troubling way of putting motions on the floor. Accusations and statements are made. Even in spite of the fact that the minister has already replied, people choose to misrepresent what was said in the ministerial reply, which should be taken for some measures of standards.

Now we're debating the innuendo here, and I have to say this is pretty disgusting for a committee like this. If you really truly want to get to the facts, some of these things that are being said here.... We're essentially debating and trying this issue, and we're not doing it through democratic process. People should know better.

The Chair: We will follow the democratic process, and right now we're having debate on the amendment.

Mr. Poilievre, go ahead, please.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: As I understand the consensus the opposition MPs have arrived at, the amendment would read that the committee would send for the Minister of Public Works and subsequently invite Senator Paul Massicotte. Is that acceptable to the opposition? Okay.

That was just a point of clarification on the wording of the amendment itself.

The Chair: That is the amendment, then. Can we go to a vote on the amendment?

Sorry, Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I want to finalize my statement.

In fact, the reference I made to the Parliament of Canada Act was perfectly accurate. It actually has the words “directly or indirectly” in the law itself. Mr. Massicotte is the president and CEO of the company in question. It's public knowledge. He's admitted it. He also has a \$30-million interest in the company—also public knowledge, which he's admitted. This law is perfectly applicable, and I told the truth. The member, if he decides to eventually read the Parliament of Canada Act, will find that out.

Once again, I think this is a perfectly reasonable amendment. I think it's reasonable to call upon the Minister of Public Works to come here before us. If by some miracle he should explain away all the confusion about this deal, perhaps the committee will decide not to even bother calling the senator, but right now I don't see why we can't agree that subsequent to hearing from the Minister of Public Works we would invite the senator to come before the committee.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Godbout, go ahead, please, regarding the amendment.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I would love to vote on the amendment. I would like to get the facts. Obviously we don't have the facts. I will not summon a fellow parliamentarian, whether it be an opposition member, a member of Parliament, or a senator, unless it's necessary, because it creates that innuendo that something happened. I would have supported the amendment as it was first stated. Let's get the facts from the Minister of Public Works, and if necessary, and if the committee finds in the second step that we need to see that senator, we'll see the senator.

May I remind you when that contract was awarded he was not a senator. Maybe Mr. Poilievre thinks he's a lawyer, but I'd like a legal opinion on that, rather than listening to Mr. Poilievre say that he holds the truth.

The Chair: Just for clarification, this committee has no authority to summon a senator. We're asking for an invitation, and that's what was in the motion.

Mr. Marc Godbout: For clarification, Mr. Chairman, before we have the facts it's not right.

The Chair: We'll get a vote on it.

Could you read the amendment?

The Clerk of the Committee: The amendment is that in the motion we add that the committee request that the Minister of Public Works appear before the committee and subsequently invite the senator to answer questions about this agreement.

The Chair: No, that's not the amendment.

Okay, do you—

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: I ask that it be voted on in two parts, then.

The Chair: We're on the amendment.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: It's a reasonable request.

The Chair: We're on the amendment.

The amendment is adding the minister to the equation here. To send for the minister, that's the amendment.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: So the second half of that is that we invite the senator, and so I'm asking that we vote on that in two parts.

The Chair: That will be determined by the vote on the main motion.

The question is on the amendment.

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

The Chair: On the main motion, is there debate?

Mr. Marc Godbout: I would propose that we invite the senator, if necessary.

The Chair: The amendment proposed is, "if necessary" instead of "subsequently".

Yes.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): We have a new amendment, is that the idea?

The Chair: A new amendment is being proposed.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I want to say that I appreciate the spirit Madam Thibault has brought to this. The member is acting in an objective manner and is seeking the truth, not grandstanding.

If we want the truth, there's a way to go about finding it. If we want to make headlines, there's another way to go. This is really the debate here: do we want the truth or do we want to make headlines? That's why I will vote for this amendment that my colleague has proposed. His amendment does not block any course of action. It simply urges us to proceed in a fair and gradual manner to find the truth without sully anyone's reputation. If there's reason to invite the senator, we will see that when the minister is here.

So I would say to Mr. Poilievre, if you're seeking the truth, follow Madam Thibault's path. If you're looking for headlines, then vote against this amendment.

• (1730)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: In another committee I'm on, we approached the Clerk of the Senate and the senator about coming. There is a process for that, is there not?

The Chair: We understand we can't require them to come. The motion actually says that we "invite".

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Then the overtures we made to the Clerk of the Senate, which were not done by motions, are out of order. They were done through the clerk's office, but not in a commanding way. So I would say that this part of the amendment, inviting by resolution a member of the Senate, is outside the rules of Parliament and not applicable.

The Chair: The clerk has said that we can't compel but we can invite, which is what is being done in the motion.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Following up on what my colleague said about getting to the truth, if there's a deal being made with the Minister of Public Works, who represents Public Works, and the CEO of this company, it is reasonable to have both parties involved. There are two parts to the deal. You get one side of the story from the minister, then the other signatory to the deal will explain their part. I think that's very reasonable.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: There are two parties to the deal. This gentleman happens to be the CEO and president of the company in question.

There's no reason to put in the superfluous words, "if necessary". If it were not necessary, this committee could easily rescind its invitation. Furthermore, it is, after all, an invitation. We're not compelling him. He could very easily come before the committee. He could very easily refuse to do so. So "if necessary" is nothing but superfluous language meant to confuse the motion.

The Chair: Are we ready to go soon to the question on the amendment?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: What is lost by proceeding gradually? What is lost?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Scarpaleggia, I thank you for trying to help put it together, but the words “if necessary” have no interpretation either. How will we determine what is necessary? The way the motion would now be read, we invite the senator after speaking to the Minister of Public Works, if it's deemed necessary.

Mr. Paul Szabo: But it says “subsequently” you will do not. Read the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Szabo, you're out of order.

Mr. Joe Preston: We're adding the words, “if necessary”.

Mr. Paul Szabo: No, it says “subsequently”. How do you determine that?

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Paul Szabo: That's prejudged. It says subsequently you're going to do this. It doesn't matter if you hear from the public works—

The Chair: Mr. Szabo, you're out of order here. Please, order.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Preston apparently hadn't finished.

Mr. Joe Preston: I could tell that, because I hadn't finished talking.

The Chair: Sorry. Mr. Preston.

Mr. Joe Preston: The point here is that we're adding the words “if necessary”. I'm asking the group, how do you determine “if necessary”?

Mr. Paul Szabo: If we get the proper answers, then there's no need to bring him. That motion says we're bringing him anyway.

Mr. Joe Preston: I'll refer back to Mr. Poilievre. He just said the same thing.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Adding the words “if necessary” effectively removes the purpose of the motion. They say at another time we might have another motion that might invite him. The purpose of the motion is to invite him now and for that invitation to be effective subsequent to the minister's presentation before the committee. If we say “if necessary”, then essentially what we're guaranteeing is that we're going to have to go through this entire discussion all over again right after we have the minister here. Effectively, the words “if necessary” ensure we're going to have to debate this motion again and waste more of the committee's time.

(Amendment negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

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

● (1735)

The Chair: We have one more motion to deal with. I think we had better deal with it at the next meeting. We are well past the time.

This meeting is adjourned.

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