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•(1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Chair, I happened to bump into our committee chair this afternoon as I was making my way to the House. He informed me that he might have to be in the House until 3:25 or 3:30 in order to listen to Mr. Harper's speech and that Minister Prentice would likely be in the same situation. That's all he said to me. I didn't even have time to tell him that I'd like to hear Mr. Duceppe's speech and that my colleagues likely also wanted to hear their respective leaders speak.

I don't know what to say. It's very regrettable that we were not advised of this earlier, since all of the witnesses are here. If the Prime Minister's speech lasts 15 minutes, the Minister will not make it here until 4:15 or 4:30. That will leave us with only one hour with him. It's very important, however, that we hear from the minister at this stage, because we're beginning our work. After listening to some excellent presentations from departmental officials, I have some very important questions for the minister. I would imagine the same holds true for my colleagues. Furthermore, there's the fact that the Auditor General tabled her report yesterday. If the Minister addresses the committee for 10 or 15 minutes, we'll be left with only 25 or 30 minutes to ask him questions.

Personally, I think we should have rescheduled the minister's appearance and adjourned today's meeting. This is a highly unusual situation. With all due respect to the Prime Minister, even in the previous Parliament, when the Prime Minister was scheduled to address the House, some committees would continue to sit, but at other times, when the Prime Minister was scheduled to make an important speech in the House, committee meetings were cancelled.

I'll leave it at that and listen to what my colleagues have to say.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell): Thank you very much.

I have Jean Crowder and then Anita Neville.

Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Chair, I want to echo Monsieur Lemay's comments. I am greatly disappointed that the courtesy was not provided to this committee to request either a different time or a delayed start. It shows disrespect for the committee's time and for the energy and attention to some very important issues that are before us. Certainly the Auditor General's report yesterday highlighted some matters of serious concern.

I would urge the committee to adjourn and request that the minister come at another time, when he can give us the full two hours. There are a number of matters that require this committee's attention, and we need to hear the minister's priorities in a full discussion.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell): Thank you.

Anita.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I share the concerns of my colleagues. Today there is a very important debate in the House of Commons, and every member who is attending here today wants to attend to hear not only their own leader speak but the leaders of all parties.

Mr. Prentice's appearance here has been long anticipated. We were anxious to hear him. We were anxious to ask him questions. This has been an issue that's been very much front and centre for all parties over the last number of weeks.

I share the concern that the amount of time we are going to have is certainly not going to allow for the kind of contact and in-depth discussion we would like.

What concerns me also, Madam Chair, probably more than anything, is the lack of respect shown both to members of the committee by the non-attendance of the government side and the minister and the lack of respect for the issues that we're dealing with here today.

I would endorse my colleague's suggestion that we adjourn at this time and try to reconvene another meeting with the minister so that we can have the full two hours.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell): Thank you. I think all parties have said the same thing.

Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Before we adjourn, if that's what colleagues ultimately decide to do, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Horgan, since this is likely the last time we'll be seeing him as Deputy Minister and since he'll be taking on new challenges. I want to thank him on behalf of the committee for his work for communities over the course of many years. At least we'll have accomplished one thing today by thanking him for his good work on many files. Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell): Thank you, Mr. Lemay.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I was remiss in not doing what Mr. Lemay did, because we do know, Mr. Horgan, of the enormous efforts that you put in on behalf of aboriginal peoples across the land. On behalf of my colleagues, I'd like to thank you for your efforts, and I wish you well in the new challenge you're taking up.

Thank you.

Mr. Michael Horgan (Deputy Minister, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Canadian Polar Commission): Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell): I think we're all in agreement that we've been here over 30 minutes, which is more than enough time to....

Yes, Mr. Lemay.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Madam Chair, could we not attempt the impossible and try to have the Minister appear before the committee next week. He could appear on Monday...

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell): It's a break week. You can be here if you want, but the rest of us will be away.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I'm going to be alone here. I'd have the full time to ask questions.

[Translation]

I'm asking because we have begun our work and received some very good instructions. Again, I'd like to thank Mr. Leblanc and his team of associates who were here on Monday.

Before we go any further, I think it's important for us to hear from the Minister and to have him share with us his vision, in light of what the Auditor General has told us. I feel we need to meet with the Minister first this coming May 29. That would delay our agenda again by one meeting. In my view, it's important that the minister be the first person we hear from when we return to work.

•(1605)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell): So we'll get the message to the minister that we'd like him to appear at the first opportunity, preferably May 29, and give direction to the chair to work with the clerk to confirm that with the members.

Can we now adjourn this meeting, Mr. Lemay?

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: I'm told the minister will be here in ten minutes, at most. What do we do? I don't want to be the one to decide.

We have on the table a motion from Ms. Neville that we need to address before we adjourn. What do we do with this motion that had been deferred? Do we defer consideration until the next meeting, that is until after we've heard from the Minister?

[English]

Hon. Anita Neville: After that next meeting, Mr. Lemay.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell): We had already agreed that it would be dealt with after the minister's intervention at this committee.

It is moved by Todd Russell and seconded by Jean Crowder that we adjourn this meeting. Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell): The meeting is adjourned.

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