



House of Commons  
CANADA

## Standing Committee on Health

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HESA • NUMBER 045 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, March 21, 2007**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Rob Merrifield**

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Wednesday, March 21, 2007

• (1545)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order. We are now not in camera; we're in a public meeting.

Mr. Fletcher, there is an issue of somebody from your staff accused of taking a picture at an in camera session. Would you like to respond?

**Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC):** This is the first time I've ever heard of this. I'll get her now. This is the first time I've heard of this. If she did it, it's wrong. What else can I say?

**The Chair:** So we will have the individual come forward, if that's what you want to do. That's not a problem.

Ms. Brown.

**Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.):** I would like to put this little episode on the record.

**The Chair:** I think it is. It's a public meeting.

**Ms. Bonnie Brown:** But it has not been described carefully.

All my colleagues will recall that the regular meeting of this committee on Monday afternoon was cancelled because of the budget, and that our chair asked us to come instead on Tuesday afternoon, either at 5:30 or after the vote, which we all did. Unfortunately for the Liberal members, there was a reception and group photo planned at the same time. We decided to forget the reception, which was to honour our retiring colleagues, and instead we asked permission of the chair to absent ourselves for 10 minutes in order to participate in the group photo. The chair graciously agreed, and when we got the signal from our whip—we were trying to keep our break as short as possible—he graciously called a break and we left.

We left our papers and we left our cards in front of our chairs on the table. We came back and carried on with the business of the committee. It has been reported to us today, by a representative of our whip's office, that someone came and stood behind the Conservative bench and took a picture of our empty seats with our name tags still in front. Everyone who needs to be elected, such as all the experienced politicians at this table, understands the implications of that.

I would also remind my colleagues that the meeting was in camera, and therefore, to that end, I have registered a letter with the Speaker of the House with the complaint that our privileges as

parliamentarians have been transgressed and asked him to investigate.

But seeing as I would prefer to keep the collegial atmosphere that we have achieved, both in the past and in the current membership, I am also asking that the chair and the clerk investigate this scenario and that perhaps this staff person could be brought back about 10 minutes before the usual closing of this meeting. I understand the staff person who was seen with the camera is working for one of the members who sits on this committee, and I'm sure her time can be easily directed by that member, to come and accommodate his colleagues on the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fletcher, and then we'll proceed.

**Mr. Steven Fletcher:** I wonder if we can move in camera.

**The Chair:** We'll move in camera for the report, and at the end of the meeting we can move out, as they request. I think it's a fair request that we'll leave, hopefully, 10 minutes at the end for having this individual come and explain what did or did not go on, and why. Is that fair enough?

Penny.

**Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I did come in just to hear the end of it. But I would then want to be sure that we actually then adjourn the meeting 10 minutes early, not just hope that we have 10 minutes at the end, and have it slide over and it doesn't happen.

**The Chair:** Fair enough. That's what we'll do. Is that fair?

[Translation]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** We hope that the photo was taken without any ill intent. If the photo was taken in response to a specific order, that is something else again. That is the question we have to ask.

I feel somewhat uncomfortable seeing that an employee has to explain her conduct as if she were before the courts. I would rather see the member speak to the employee, to determine whether the employee acted on her own initiative, perhaps as a joke. But we must ensure that the photo is never seen or used outside these proceedings.

There's something I'd like to add. I understand that we gave Liberal members permission to be absent, but this has penalized us. In the future, that sort of...

Mr. Chairman, this does not concern the young woman in question, but rather the permission we gave. If the Bloc Québécois had asked to be absent from a meeting for 15 minutes, I don't know whether such permission would have been granted. So we were penalized because they were absent for 15 minutes—we had to go back over everything we discussed during that time. In the future, we will not be able to grant such a permission.

[English]

**The Chair:** Absolutely everything that was described here is as it was. The Liberals had asked to go across the room to have a quick photo. We thought we would have to adjourn the meeting, but there was some general discussion that we allowed during that time. They were only gone a few minutes; it was a very short time period.

We have the young individual here now. Why don't we just get this out of the way right now and be done?

**Mr. Steven Fletcher:** This obviously is a very serious accusation, and it's the first time that the members on this side of the room have heard it. I hope there will be an apology on both sides for making the accusation, because it's very serious.

**The Chair:** All right. Let's draw this to a conclusion. Now that the young lady is here, let's bring her to the front of the table and let's deal with this right now instead of doing it at the end of the meeting. I think that's appropriate. It's Ms. Courtney Banman.

Courtney, perhaps you could describe what happened yesterday and why the accusation may or may not have been levelled at you.

**Ms. Courtney Banman (As an Individual):** Sure.

My colleague had asked me to bring my camera to her. She had needed it earlier, and I brought it to her. We were just looking to see if it worked.

There were no pictures taken on it. It's my own personal camera. You can check; my personal pictures are on there.

I did not take any papers or anything with me, nothing that could possibly compromise anything of this committee.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** I'm going to open it up for quick questions, if you want, but I think that's an explanation of what happened.

She has given me the camera here. We can feel free to examine it if we like, although they're saying that it's a digital camera and so they could have erased a picture, and I think that's a concern.

We're actually taking you at the testimony that you have. Are there any questions for her?

Go ahead, Susan.

**Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to ask you what colleague asked you for the camera, if you can.

**Ms. Courtney Banman:** It was Pam.

**Mrs. Susan Kadis:** Okay.

What was the purpose of bringing the camera to the committee?

**Ms. Courtney Banman:** I'm not entirely sure. It was just—

**Ms. Pam Miles-Séguin (As an Individual):** I asked for it earlier.

**Mrs. Susan Kadis:** We're confused as to why it would be needed at the committee in camera.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, we'll have to allow Ms. Banman.... We can have Pam come to the table, if you like.

Pam, would you come? We have to have you there. Perhaps you could just take a seat and explain it.

That sounds like the explanation. Pam, if you have anything to add to that as to why the camera was asked for—

**An hon. member:** Can they just introduce themselves, please?

**The Chair:** I've introduced Courtney Banman. This is Pam....

**Ms. Pam Miles-Séguin:** I am Pam Miles-Séguin.

**The Chair:** I believe they both work in Mr. Fletcher's office.

**Mrs. Susan Kadis:** I'd just like you to clarify or elaborate on why the camera was needed at an in camera meeting.

**Ms. Pam Miles-Séguin:** I had asked for the camera earlier for something else. Steven had left the meeting earlier to meet with the mayor of Vancouver, and I had asked for a camera, but by the time she came in, he had come back. Everybody had left. We showed it....

But there were no pictures taken. I can guarantee that. She left with no information from the committee. She had no documentation—nothing.

**Mrs. Susan Kadis:** In responding to that response, I think it's important to clarify this with the person representing our whip's office, who had perceived that a picture had been taken. I think that's a very important part of the process as well, Mr. Chair.

**Ms. Pam Miles-Séguin:** There was no picture.

**The Chair:** That's fair enough. There was no picture taken. That's the testimony of the two people here. There's actually no rule about whether you can bring a camera into a room; you can't use it in here during an in camera meeting.

Go ahead, Mr. Fletcher, very quickly. I don't want to draw this out any longer.

**Mr. Steven Fletcher:** This is actually outrageous. I'm very disappointed in the colleagues. This could have been dealt with very easily. We were just in the House together an hour ago. You could have come and talked to me then, or you could have called me. If there was—

**An hon. member:** We didn't know who it was.

**Mr. Steven Fletcher:** A letter has gone off to the Speaker. You could have talked to anyone on this side of the House to clarify. To make this accusation is—

**An hon. member:** It's not an accusation.

**Mr. Steven Fletcher:** It is an accusation, and a false accusation. You guys—

**The Chair:** Order.

**Mr. Steven Fletcher:** I'm sorry, but Mr. Chairperson, what has clearly happened here is that the members of the opposition thought they had some sort of scenario—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Let's not ascribe motivation.

**Mr. Steven Fletcher:** Well, you made that accusation on our side not five minutes ago. I am really disappointed in a former minister of the Crown. To attack an employee on no basis—

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** That's not what we were doing.

**Mr. Steven Fletcher:** Well, you made insinuations—

**The Chair:** Order.

**Mr. Steven Fletcher:** —and you were wrong. You were wrong and you should be ashamed of yourselves.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fletcher, fair enough.

Listen, we're going to have this back and forth, and I'm not going to put up with any more accusations of any other motives.

We wanted to just bring the facts out. We have the witnesses at the end of the table. I will not allow any talk back and forth, and this is going to be drawn to a conclusion very quickly.

Ms. Bennett, very quickly.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Chair, and to the clerk, I would hope this wasn't seen as an accusation. It was a clarification, and there was the fact that there was a query.

We weren't in the room at the time. There were three different people who saw what looked like a picture being taken, because the camera was held up. There were three people who reported this to us.

We weren't here. We wanted you and the clerk to investigate it, and that's it.

● (1555)

**The Chair:** Okay. We've done that and we have the facts on the table, and I think we should move on.

Mr. Dykstra, very quickly.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** The fact is that we don't even know who actually has said that they saw people taking pictures, because none of the members sitting next to the Liberals saw anyone take a picture.

**The Chair:** No, it's a representative of the whip's office who was here. That was clarified earlier.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** So it was that gentleman and Odette.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** So your staff...?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** No, Odette, the researcher—

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Saw a picture taken?

**A voice:** A flash.

**Mrs. Odette Madore (Committee Researcher):** No, I didn't see a flash.

**The Chair:** No, she didn't see a flash.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Okay, that's fine.

**The Chair:** She said there was no flash.

I think we've heard all we're going to hear. If there is any more, fair enough; you have a full right to talk to the Speaker, and we'll investigate it further if that's the direction you want to go in. But we've heard from this, and we're not going to take any more time here.

We'll entertain a motion to move in camera.

**An hon. member:** I so move, Mr. Chairman.

**The Chair:** We are now going to move in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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