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## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, May 4, 2006**

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**Chair**

Mr. Shawn Murphy

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•(1105)

[English]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms Danielle Bélisle):** Honourable members, I see a quorum.

Your first order of business is to elect a chair.

[Translation]

Are there any motions to that effect?

[English]

**Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC):** I would like to nominate Mr. Murphy.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Mr. Lake that Mr. Murphy be chair.

Are there any other motions to that effect?

I declare the motion carried and Mr. Murphy duly elected chair of the committee.

**Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC):** I have a point of order, Madam Clerk.

First of all, I'd like to congratulate Mr. Murphy on this onerous task that he has taken upon himself by this election. However, given the record of the Liberal Party in the past, I just wondered if you could rule that it is appropriate that a Liberal be in the chair for the next year or so, so that we do a complete investigation of the record of the past governments as well as the one that's in place today.

**The Clerk:** Unfortunately, I'm only a clerk. The clerk cannot receive any type of motion and cannot entertain points of order nor participate in any debate.

**The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** As chair, I will take that motion under advisement and rule on it at a later time.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** And any friendly amendments that come along with it.

**An hon. member:** And the Mulroney days.

**The Clerk:** Could we proceed to the election of the first vice-chair?

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** I nominate Brian Fitzpatrick as the first vice-chair.

**The Clerk:** It has been moved by Ms. Ratansi that Mr. Fitzpatrick be first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any other motions?

Seeing no other motions, I declare the motion carried and Mr. Fitzpatrick duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Now we'll move on to the second vice-chair.

Monsieur Nadeau.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ):** I nominate Mr. Benoît Sauvageau.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Nadeau moves that Mr. Sauvageau be elected second vice-chair of the committee. Are there any other nominations? No.

I declare Mr. Sauvageau elected second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

I now invite Mr. Murphy, as chair of the committee, to take the lead.

**The Chair:** Thank you, first of all, for your support.

We have a few routine motions to deal with. The clerk is gathering the documents right now for circulation. While she's doing that, the first item I want to deal with is to thank John Williams for the service he's given this committee.

I don't know whether everyone is aware or not, but John has been the chair of this committee for the last nine years. That's totally unheard of in Parliament here, where they revolve committee members and chairs quite frequently—actually, too frequently. John has made the workings of Parliament and the workings of the public accounts committee his passion for the last nine years and he has certainly done a terrific job.

John, on behalf of the committee—in fact, all of Parliament—I want to thank you very, very much.

I want to tell you, John, that nothing would make my heart warmer than to have you back in the chair.

Unfortunately, John right now is not eligible, but if we all do our work as parliamentarians, John will be back in the chair and we'll all be happy to see him here.

**Mr. John Williams:** Not if everybody does their part, only if the other parties do their work and defeat us. But that is, as you all know, a long shot.

**The Chair:** To the new members of the committee, I do want to welcome you, and I think it's going to be a very interesting committee.

If anyone's been following the developments of the committee over the last 24 months, you'll know we've gone through a very challenging and interesting time. Certainly with the sponsorship inquiry and some of the other inquiries we did, it was very interesting. I believe we're in a period of transition. For those of you who are not aware, a lot of the recommendations that arose out of the Gomery commission actually came from this committee. The ones that I consider to be the three or four most important ones came about as a result of this committee, and we didn't spend \$82 million doing it. Anyway, that's the long and the short of it.

I would refer the members of the committee to the recommendations of the Gomery report dealing specifically with the public accounts committee, especially those urging the government to give this committee more resources. The second recommendation is that the people appointed to this committee serve for the life of the Parliament. I forget the third one, but it's all there in the Gomery report, colleagues. I think it's important that we look at it and follow up so that we do get a response from the government on these particular recommendations.

Again, a lot of the recommendations that follow from Gomery are actually included in the Accountability Act that is now before Parliament. I'd urge the newer committee members to read the previous reports of this committee, especially the last two or three we wrote regarding the accountability in government and the accountability of deputy ministers and the government's response.

I've been on the committee for five and a half years, and I've enjoyed it immensely. I've learned a lot in the committee. On certain occasions during the sponsorship hearings, the issue of partisanship did arise, but by and large there has always been a non-partisan spirit in the committee, and that's when it works the best. Most of our reports—and I think it's all but one or two over the last five and a half years—have been unanimous reports, including the last two reports, which we did a lot of work on.

There are a couple of other housekeeping matters I want to point out. It happens by total coincidence that the annual meeting of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees that revolves from province to province each year is being held in Charlottetown this September. I believe the dates are between September 10 and 12. I invite every member of the committee to attend that, and I'll certainly host you when you get there. I think it will be very enjoyable.

That concludes my remarks. Again, I think you're going to enjoy it, and I hope we all do what we're supposed to do. I certainly will do my very best. If I don't, I have Mr. Williams watching over my shoulder.

I'm glad, John, that you're on the committee. I think you'll add a lot to it.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Williams.

• (1110)

**Mr. John Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Again, I want to congratulate you on your appointment as chair of the public accounts committee. Your work as a vice-chair in the last Parliament was much appreciated. Your support in ensuring that the

committee did its good work on a largely non-partisan basis was much appreciated.

I've said that the public accounts committee has enough work focusing on accountability without getting into the partisan politics of policy—we don't deal with policy—and that's when the public accounts committee does its best work. I certainly look forward to participating on the committee under your leadership.

Thank you very much, and congratulations again.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, John.

Mr. Christopherson, go ahead, please.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Right at the get-go, maybe it's good for the new members to hear a representative from each caucus chime in that indeed as much as possible in the last Parliament—not every time, but just about every time—we were able to reach unanimous consent. For the most part, there is really an effort to try to be non-partisan. When we do become partisan, it's big time. It follows what's happening in the House, and it can get ugly. But those moments are rare, acute, and they don't last too long.

I wanted to emphasize that certainly from my personal view, I specifically asked my leader to put me back here, because I enjoyed it and the fact that it was more than a partisan wrestling match. We actually do work that for the most part is important enough that it goes beyond partisan activities. It's about the institution of Parliament and making sure that, no matter who's in the chair and who's in the government, the institution serves the government that's elected, serves the members of the House, and most importantly, serves the people of Canada. In the last Parliament, certainly in the last committee, every one of us believed that.

With that, I'll only say how thrilled I am that you're in the chair, Mr. Murphy. I have every confidence that you'll do an excellent job. You have huge shoes to fill, but I have no doubt that you'll give us the leadership we need. I think it is helpful that Mr. Williams is here, given his vast knowledge of all these areas.

With that, I will again congratulate you and thank you.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Sauvageau.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Christopherson is entirely correct. Since I'm seated right beside him, I would also hope that we remain on very good terms. We mustn't get into any arguments, otherwise it could prove dangerous.

First of all, I want to congratulate the chairman. We've had the opportunity to serve on the same committee. In fact, I also sat on the previous committee. I hope that we can engage in non-partisan debates as often as possible. Indeed, more often than not — and we'd have to check into that — we have tabled reports for which there was unanimous consent. That's very positive. We will seek out cooperation and good will as long as the committee operates. However, disagreements may arise from time to time. When that happens, we mustn't indulge in partisan politics, but rather, be receptive to different values and opinions.

As usual, rest assured that you will have our full cooperation.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sauvageau.

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** I perhaps have a point of clarification. Following up on Mr. Christopherson's comments about huge shoes to fill, I'm sure you'll be able to do that.

One thing that I don't think you'll be able to match is Mr. Williams' collection of ties. But I am thankful that he is on the committee, because I've never seen such an amazing selection of pink ties. I'm glad to see both of you here.

**Mr. John Williams:** David is trying to solicit me for an NDP membership, but I have refused—at least so far.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** It's only a temporary setback, John.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

The next item of business, colleagues, is the routine motions, if I can say a few words. They're been circulated. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems to me that all but the last one are extremely non-contentious. It's something the committee deals with each and every year. I propose, if it's the will of the committee, to deal with them fairly quickly, and then perhaps we may want to leave the last one until the next meeting.

Does anyone have any difficulty with that?

**Mr. John Williams:** You want to leave the last one for the next meeting.

**The Chair:** You may wish to adopt it now, but again, the caucuses may want to look at it.

**Mr. John Williams:** Why don't we have a discussion? That might be more fair, if we're not ready to make a decision.

**The Chair:** That's on the last one.

Colleagues, what I propose is to deal with all routine motions, and I invite a motion. I propose that all routine motions, except the last one specifically dealing with time allocation, be dealt with by this committee now.

Mr. Sauvageau.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau:** I agree with what you've said, except in the case of the last two motions. If you have no objections, I'd like to quickly review the notice of motion provision.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's agreeable with the committee.

**Mr. John Williams:** Will we adopt them all with just one motion?

• (1120)

**The Chair:** I think that's the way to do it—except for the last two.

**Mr. John Williams:** The one question I have is on the reduced quorum, which I think is the third item. If I recall, in the previous Parliaments we dropped quorum down to five. If after 15 minutes there was nobody within the quorum, we dropped it down to three. It seems to me we went along those lines.

Do we just go down to three right away?

**The Chair:** I'll consult with the clerk.

Mr. Williams, according to the information from the clerk, what is present here is what we adopted last time.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** This reflects what was there last time. At the risk of kicking off the debate, on the last item—I guess the clerk is different, so the corporate memory is much with Mr. Williams—it seems to me that toward the latter part of the last Parliament we did incorporate the five minutes for the NDP into the second round.

So from a procedural point of view, Chair, I'm just wondering if the starting point, as you just said, shouldn't be where we were last time. Last time the five minutes wasn't optional, it was built in. If I can make the pitch, certainly with a caucus that's 50% bigger, at the very least the starting point should be where we were last time.

**Mr. John Williams:** That sounds quite reasonable, Mr. Chairman, but I don't know whether the Progressive Conservative Party is entitled to some time here. Is that a typo, or has somebody made a Freudian slip here?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** It's definitely wrong; there is nothing progressive about it.

**The Chair:** There are no Progressive Conservative Party members here.

**Mr. John Williams:** Conservative Party.

**The Chair:** Previous members?

**Mr. John Williams:** It's the Conservative Party of Canada, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I recommend that issue be dealt with at the next meeting, and perhaps the steering committee can.... If that's okay with you, Mr. Christopherson.

If it's okay with the committee, we will now invite a motion dealing with all the motions except the last two, specifically notice of motions—that's the 48-hour requirement—and the part dealing with time allocation. The first eight will be dealt with as one aggregate motion, if someone is prepared to make that motion.

**An hon. member:** I so move.

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

**The Chair:** At this point I will ask the researchers to come to the table. I will ask the clerk and the researchers to introduce themselves, starting with the new researcher.

**Mr. Alex Smith (Committee Researcher):** My name is Alex Smith.

•(1125)

**Mr. Brian O'Neal (Committee Researcher):** My name is Brian O'Neal.

**The Chair:** Of course, Brian has been with us for many years.

**The Clerk:** I am Danielle Bélisle.

**The Chair:** Danielle is our new clerk.

**Mr. Roger Préfontaine (Procedural Clerk):** I'm just here to give Danielle a hand for the very important event of electing the chair. I'm clerk of the aboriginal affairs committee.

**The Chair:** Welcome aboard.

I have just spoken with the clerk on dealing with future business. As I believe everyone is aware, the actual agenda items are decided by the steering committee.

The committee meeting dates are Tuesdays and Thursdays of each week from eleven o'clock until one o'clock. The Auditor General is doing a lock-up on Tuesday, May 16. She will be filing her reports at that time.

**Mr. John Williams:** Is that at nine o'clock?

**The Chair:** We would have our meeting at eleven o'clock.

What I would recommend, and I invite comments from committee members, is that next Tuesday at eleven o'clock we have a meeting of the steering committee, then the following Thursday, May 13, have the first formal meeting of the committee. Of course, the following Tuesday we'll be into the full swing of things with the report of the Auditor General, and then the lock-up and the report of the Auditor General. Then on Thursday, May 18, we'll have the first chapter, which we're going to deal with, from the Auditor General.

Does anyone have any issues with that suggestion?

The general consensus is that it has been agreed, and we'll accept that as an agreement.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** You will send it as a notice to us.

**The Chair:** I'm going to ask the clerk to send out the recommendations from the Gomery report and the copies of the last two reports, just so that every committee member has that going forward.

**The Clerk:** Those would be the conclusions and recommendations and perhaps the chapter dealing with our committee.

**The Chair:** That's right.

**Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC):** On a point of clarification, Chair—and maybe I'm kind of confused—does the committee usually meet on the day the Auditor General gives her report?

**The Chair:** Yes, we sit as a committee. Sometimes not as many members show up, but that's what normally happens. She gives her report. We have questioning, usually for an hour, on the actual numbers.

**Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick:** Okay. Thank you very much for bringing me up to speed on that item, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Sauvageau, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau:** Mr. Chairman, I'm a member of the legislative committee on Bill C-2. On looking at the calendar that has just been distributed to us, I note that I have a scheduling conflict. For example, next Tuesday, I could be here for the start of the meeting. However, when the legislative committee meeting convenes, could Mr. Nadeau possibly replace me on the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, or steering committee?

**The Clerk:** You will need to complete and submit a substitution form.

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau:** To the steering committee as well?

**The Clerk:** Yes, to the subcommittee.

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau:** Understood.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Is there any other new business to be brought before the meeting? Anything else? If not, we'll adjourn the meeting.

I remind the steering committee members that we have a meeting next Tuesday at eleven o'clock, and we have a formal committee meeting next Thursday at eleven o'clock. Of course, notices will be sent out by the clerk.

Thank you very much.









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