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# **Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, February 12, 2009**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Derek Lee**

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## Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Thursday, February 12, 2009

•(1105)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Colleagues, we'll be looking at future business. We're in a public meeting now, so unless there's a motion to put us in camera, we'll be dealing with future business in public, on transcript. I prefer not to do this, but there are some members who like to do this in public.

Is there a motion? There is not. Okay, so let's proceed.

We'll look for an economy of words. I'm ready to recognize anyone who wishes to discuss future business.

Before doing that, I'll ask the clerk to outline the one, two, or three packages of work that I think we've already identified. We haven't given them time slots yet, but if he would identify them, that would at least get us started.

Can you do that, Mr. Clerk?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michel Marcotte):** Thank you.

First and foremost, there's a novelty. Since 10:02 this morning, supplementary estimates (C) were tabled in the House. They were still not available before this meeting, but eventually we'll have to study them. We have to report by March 23, unless this changes.

You have also received a few documents by e-mail. There's a list of orders of reference, along with copies of the documents.

[*Translation*]

There is also a draft blank calendar so that we can lay out the committee's work schedule until June.

[*English*]

You also received a separate e-mail, a note prepared by the analyst, stating the topics.

There's the federal procurement process. We already have two motions on this, the second one being more precise in the scope of the study. It might be interesting to know what kind of timeframe you're looking for.

**The Chair:** Members will have this very good list in front of them. I suggested that we bundle the procurement issue into a couple of meetings, but we all accept that there may be more than two meetings involved. Can we ask the clerk to schedule two meetings on that?

If we go ahead, do we have a focus on who we would want to invite as witnesses? This is on procurement, focused primarily on small and medium-sized enterprises.

Can we ask the researcher?

•(1110)

**Mrs. Lydia Scratch (Committee Researcher):** If we have two meetings on the small and medium enterprises and federal procurement study, the committee could hear on the first day from the office of small and medium enterprises at PWGSC. It's an office that focuses on reducing barriers and simplifying requirements for the small and medium enterprises that want to do business with the Government of Canada. There's also the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, which is a lobby organization for small and medium organizations. They have been around for 35 years, and they lobby for small and medium businesses at the federal, provincial, and local levels of government.

So maybe the first day we could just focus on the small and medium enterprises, and then on the second day we could have the acquisitions branch of Public Works come in to talk more about the procurement processes and whether there are any things they can do to favour small and medium enterprises.

It might also be good to hear from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade about our trade obligations and how that can limit or constrain procurement with small and medium enterprises.

**The Chair:** Okay, that's a good list. That involves four hours of committee time, which is a lot for four witnesses. I suppose if you asked each of these organizations to synthesize their issues to the smallest usable bullet of information, they could probably do it in five or ten minutes. The rest of the committee time would then be back-and-forth questioning and answering, which has its value.

But my sense is that we could get a bit more meat into these two meetings. I'm happy to go ahead with that, but with just four witnesses it might be a little light in cost-benefit.

Does anyone else have a suggestion for witnesses at those two meetings?

Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Just to add to the mix, we've been lobbied quite heavily lately by a group of small IT contractors who feel they've been squeezed out of the process quite a bit, by about \$2 billion worth of activity lately, and they don't feel they're getting their fair share. So after we have the general picture perhaps from the groups that the researcher recommends, I think we could have a tangible example, a case study of this one sector that feels disadvantaged by the process and unable to elbow their way into some of the work that's being meted out.

**The Chair:** Would you pass on a reference for that group to our researcher?

Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Chair, speaking in a similar vein, I must say that I totally agree with my NDP colleague. A number of business representatives met with the committee last June, but we did not finish studying their concerns. Is that not correct, Mr. Clerk? These witnesses were not just IT contractors, but representatives of businesses in general. Do you think that we could possibly extend an invitation to them? My assistant could supply you with the names of a few businesses, that is companies that have contracts with the government valued at \$10 or \$15 million, companies that are currently encountering problems with the International Trade Tribunal.

Pat Martin mentioned IT suppliers, but there are also other businesses to consider, specifically those that we began looking into last June. My question is for the clerk. Can I put my question through the clerk, or do I need to go through the Chair?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I was just checking with the researcher. The committee did have evidence from IT suppliers in the last Parliament, and some did appear as witnesses, so could I ask members to go back and look at that evidence that has already been placed? We are in a position to bring that evidence forward into this study. I'm generally not in favour of giving witnesses a second kick at the cat. There wouldn't appear to be a need, but could I ask members to go back and look at that evidence that was received in the last Parliament? There is no need to have the evidence come back in again, in my view.

Mr. Warkentin.

• (1115)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think it's important, if we're going to allow companies to come forward with grievances or concerns—and I think it's important that we do that—that we also give an opportunity for the department they are working with to have a transaction.

What we found in the last Parliament was that our chair at the time, who had been a minister previously, identified a situation in which, while she was the minister, an IT company was outraged because of their inability to get a contract with the federal government, and because of legal constraints she was not able to respond to it. In fact, the reality was that the IT company had never been able to demonstrate that the product they were trying to sell the

government actually worked. So for months upon months, she was crucified by this company in the media, but because of legal obligations she was unable to respond.

So if we're going to give, in this case, a platform for somebody to bring a grievance, I think we have to think about legal considerations and we also should think about the response, if there is a way to give a response. I think what we all want to see is that medium and small businesses have full and unlimited access to contracts within the federal government, but we don't want to just be a platform for grievances, and sometimes unfounded grievances, to be aired.

**The Chair:** To the extent that there are small and medium-sized companies that feel they've found a problem, couldn't we have them and Public Works at the same meeting? The difference of views would become apparent very quickly at that meeting. It may require future meetings to get a resolution from our point of view, but that might be a simple solution.

We have possibly one group identified here by Mr. Martin. I think we'll try to bring them at the same time as Public Works is here.

Are there any other witnesses on this? We're still at two days. Can we start with that?

**An hon. member:** That's fine.

**The Chair:** Did you want to say something, Ms. Hall Findlay? On this issue, did you want to speak?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Actually, I want to support the effort to bring in witnesses—

**The Chair:** Oh, good.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** —but since what Mr. Warkentin said is now on the record, I want it to be on the record as well that an awful lot of other people have raised this concern. The suggestion was that it's one particular case, and I just want it on the record that it's not. There are a lot of different cases, and a lot of people are involved.

**The Chair:** Yes, we accept that it's a generic issue. We have identified an apparent group of people who can speak to it as witnesses, so we'll have them come.

Have we covered that? Okay.

Let's go ahead. We have two meetings. If members have suggestions, we might have room for maybe one more witness on one of the two days. We might or we might not, but feel free to suggest it to the research staff and to the chair.

Ms. Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Mr. Chair, we were discussing IT contractors. We will examine the topics suggested by our researcher. That's fine. I would like us to invite officials from certain departments so that they can explain to us how they work. What interests me in particular is the veto right enjoyed by Public Works that allows it to pass over certain business and favour others. Maybe that is the problem that has led us to this point.

I would also like to give some representatives of companies that have had their contracts cancelled by Public Works the opportunity to come before the committee and discuss their situation. I hope, Mr. Chair, that in your infinite wisdom, you will agree to allow these representatives to speak to the committee and tell their story, so that we can get a clear idea of how Public Works Canada conducts business.

• (1120)

[English]

**The Chair:** As to first part of your submission, I think we have covered that off adequately with the witnesses proposed so far.

The second part of your submission suggests that there are parties whose contracts for supply of IT services were terminated or interrupted in some way. That pertains to contract administration. It may or may not be relevant to what we're doing here.

If there is a particular generic situation that you're familiar with and you want the committee to be aware of, and you have a witness who can speak generically or at least inform us of those types of problems, then this party could be added as a witness. But I'd ask you to source that, and the availability, and then contact our researcher or clerk. It would be a good idea to canvass the issue with the researcher first and then, depending on the outcome of that conversation, let the clerk contact the witness if the witness is to be invited.

Is that fair? Okay.

Mr. Anders.

**Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC):** If we have ideas on this, is there an e-mail address we should send it to?

**The Chair:** If there is a suggestion for a witness, discuss it with the researcher. I want the witnesses' evidence to fit within what we're doing. Then at some point the clerk will speak to me, and then we'll invite witnesses as appropriate.

**Mr. Rob Anders:** We'll get that e-mail address.

**Mrs. Lydia Scratch:** It's [scratl@parl.gc.ca](mailto:scratl@parl.gc.ca).

**Mr. Rob Anders:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin, on another subject or the same one?

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Another.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** First of all, I think we should hold off, even the area of study we just talked about, on placing it in the boxes on the calendar until we put forward some other ones. I actually believe point number three on the second page recommended that the stimulus package might be the most interesting thing for the committee to start with in its early stages. It's timely, it's topical, and it answers important questions for the politicians and the general public. It's an unprecedented rollout, and I think we have a duty and an obligation to investigate the efficacy of such a rollout as it pertains at least to Treasury Board and Public Works and Government Services.

**The Chair:** If no other committee is doing this, I think we'd probably be doing the House a favour if we monitored it closely. At the risk of our being seen to be harassing the government or the

Privy Council, work on monitoring the stimulus package would seem to be appropriate. But let's hear from members.

Mr. Warkentin, on that.

• (1125)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I think we're in full agreement that we should speak to people from Public Works and whatever. I think this is probably going to be an ongoing discussion, so if we were to have a preliminary meeting at this point in terms of getting a comprehensive picture as to what's in the stimulus package for the respective departments, then I guess we'll get feedback as it progresses. I'm not sure that we'll learn a whole lot more than just what the mechanics will look like at this point, but I think we're in agreement that it's important that we keep an eye on this.

**The Chair:** The witnesses who came to our last meeting, colleagues, at least opened up the subject, but I did not get a clear picture of a coordinating mechanism. There was a meeting of deputy ministers that the Privy Council witnesses referred to, but beyond that, this may be a work in progress. Keep in mind that this particular committee, in terms of mandate across departments and around government, can actually go pretty far, if not the distance. On something like this, a stimulus package that cuts across many departments, I think we have ample mandate in the Standing Orders to actually canvass that.

Mr. Warkentin suggested Public Works. They may be the big one, and Transport—

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I was going to say Transport, maybe Public Works, and Treasury Board. Let's get them all before us at this point to get a clear picture.

**The Chair:** I was sort of hoping there would be a coordinator somewhere, somebody, some secretariat in the Privy Council or the Treasury Board, who had been handed this brief and told, you guys are in charge of this for six months; don't come back until you have the \$6 billion out the front door. That may not have happened yet. There was some sense of that from the Privy Council witnesses who were here. I thought they were very good, but they weren't able to show us the operations panel with all the push buttons on it yet.

Let's schedule another meeting on that, the subject being coordination of the stimulus spending. We can bring the same witnesses from Privy Council, and we can do a bit of research.

Do you have something to say on that, Ms. Scratch?

**Mrs. Lydia Scratch:** I have one thing to add on that. Some of the funding that was included in budget 2009 is going out in Bill C-10. Most of the money, or a lot more of the money, will start to flow out at the beginning of the fiscal year, April 1. The supplementary estimates that come out in May should show quite a bit of stimulus spending. So that would be an opportunity, when we have numbers in front of us that are going out the door by department and program, to have them come in and ask them how they are getting this money out. To have further coordination and maybe some real numbers on things that are going out may be useful.

**The Chair:** I kind of forgot—I'm sorry I keep jumping in like this as chair—but we in Parliament haven't actually passed the authorization to spend any of this money yet, so it's a little early for us to be looking for chapter and verse on the mechanisms.

Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** We also haven't seen any kind of realistic flow chart, yardstick to measure progress by, or realistic prospects of results. The general public and we as their representatives have been asked to sign a blank cheque. If we spend this money here it will have  $x$  results, but no one has even told us what the  $x$  results should be or what the expectations are, or given us a realistic timeframe or a yardstick to measure progress by. We had very vague language in the Speech From The Throne and then in the budget, but we haven't seen any hard numbers.

I don't think we should wait until May to see whether or not it is a reasonable plan, because these things can still be tweaked, even after the enabling legislation has passed. There can still be modifications, for instance, in how municipalities and provinces are to come up with equal funding. These things can be tinkered with to ensure easy flow of this money.

The efficacy of it hasn't been explained to anybody's satisfaction. I think if you look at the mandate of our committee, that's exactly within government operations—the analysis of government operations to ensure that taxpayers are getting good value for their dollars, and that there's a realistic plan with outcomes and a yardstick to measure progress. That's how I'd sum it up—as a really good use of our time for quite a few meetings at this early stage.

● (1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. McTeague.

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** If the committee is going to assume responsibility in its role of watchdog of these moneys, as it has in the past, you raise a very valid point on the enabling legislation not being passed.

On the second problem I think you're going to have, with all due respect, from the way we saw Statistics Canada respond to some of the pertinent questions we asked on how they benchmark trends and where money is best spent, I think it's very clear that we could be asking questions for which there are no answers at this time.

I understand we're trying to fill a bit of time here, and we have other pieces of information or ideas that we were going to work on through motions and resolutions. We may want to bide our time with that up until just beyond the supplementary estimates (C), which will probably take us into the first weeks of April. At that point I think we'll have a much better picture of how money is being allocated and its direct impact on stimulating the economy. In the meantime, I think we're trying to fill time here and it's going to be an exercise in futility. I don't mean to be disrespectful, but I don't see how you're going to have witnesses coming forward saying, “Yes, this is how it's going to be spent” with the kinds of targets we want.

**The Chair:** We clearly need a meeting on this, although not our next meeting. Let's give Bill C-10 an opportunity to get through the finance committee. It's also worth noting that there are spending authorizations in the current fiscal year that involve infrastructure investments that haven't gone through yet. I don't know the total, but it's a billion or two. That money is kind of going through the system, and Mr. Martin's questions about stimulus spending could apply just

as much to that currently authorized money as to the Bill C-10 stimulus money.

So I suggest we have a meeting on this about the middle of March, give or take a week. The clerk is suggesting March 10 or 12, if that's acceptable. We'll firm it up later. Is that okay, or do you want something more precise?

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I'm just wondering what we're doing on February 24 and 26, then, and on March 3 and 5. Were you going to do this—

**The Chair:** Oh no, we're just giving some time for the pot to boil.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Okay. I just think there are still questions that the Statistics Canada people could have answered in brief, such as, do you get a better bang for your money spent building a bridge or raising EI benefits? Frankly, our research shows that you get a 2.5% more return on putting money in the pockets of a person on EI than you do building another CN Tower. Those basic policy questions have yet to be answered to see if we're even on the right track.

**The Chair:** Well, I think they had a sense of what an answer might be, but they were reluctant to step up and say with precision. They were reluctant perhaps both as economists and as public servants. I don't know the answer to that, but you think it should be moved up a bit closer. Okay, that's good enough.

Are there other comments on the timing of that meeting?

Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I think we can decide as it moves along. I have no problem as to when it's held, but I think there are other things we can discuss. In the other meeting, Mr. Martin had questions with regard to government-owned real estate and their retrofits. This is something that we discussed in the last Parliament in this committee—the disrepair of real property in the federal government's holding.

Certainly I think we could do at least one meeting on the federal real estate property plan in conjunction with the efforts to green government operations in general, because the two are very related and do have a strong relationship. We really haven't held any type of query, especially in recent months since the sale of properties that did take place, as to what Public Works' efforts are in greening the real estate of government. I think that if we expect Canadians to respond differently and to improve their own real estate, we should lead by example in government. I think we should speak to Public Works on that part.

We may want to talk to the NCC as well, because they have a responsibility, at least here in Ottawa. Although they don't have a significant real estate holding in comparison to Public Works, they have an interesting responsibility in that whatever they do is very high profile. I just think of the discussions to improve 24 Sussex Drive or different things like this. If they're not leading by example in terms of demonstrating that the greening of real estate is important to them and to us as government, then Canadians don't have anybody to lead by example.

So it would be an interesting meeting to have, to speak with Public Works on the greening of the federal real estate holdings and possibly other aspects of that.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Okay, now you're into another subject, another meeting.

Ms. Hall Findlay on that or something related, yes.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Well, it is related. Can I just ask a procedural question? Pardon my lack of understanding of the process yet; the learning curve's still pretty straight up and down.

Are the decisions we make today on this carved in stone, or as issues come up, are we able to put some flexibility into our meeting schedule in terms of content?

**The Chair:** Oh, at this point flexibility is always available; we're not locked into anything. But if members decide, then they have decided. I see around the table a fair bit of room for flexibility.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Right. That's my sense too. I just wanted to make sure.

On that point—we're talking about federal real estate—we did have some questions at another meeting about the disposal of assets, which for the most part would be real estate, just given relative values. Part of the answer I got was no, we have no plans for the next tranche. When we have a political commitment to book \$2 billion of net sale value, I really would very much like...and I don't think if you combine it with greening there may be enough time. My focus on the real estate piece would be the general asset sales.

**The Chair:** Okay. I thought we were bundling for one meeting, but you're not. We're getting strung out on a tangent.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** We are talking about federal real property. I couldn't—

**The Chair:** I want to go back two steps to Mr. Martin.

Let us have a meeting the first week of March on stimulus, as early as March 3. Is that okay? We'll go back to the stimulus package and refocus on it. Okay, that's done.

Now, Mr. Warkentin raises two issues. I think we can run in tandem the issues of greening of the federal real estate and sale-leaseback as a financing mechanism for greening or updating or retrofitting. It seems to me they're pretty close. At the same meeting, there's no reason we can't deal with the current policy on disposal of unneeded real estate assets. I think that's what you were getting at.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I wouldn't necessarily say unneeded. It would just be generally a commitment to sell assets that would likely be predominantly real estate.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Okay, then we're moving out of real estate.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** We actually don't know what those assets are yet.

**The Chair:** Generally, you don't sell the real estate unless you need it, unless it's a sale-leaseback. However, if you're talking about other assets now, we've expanded the envelope into other assets. So if you want to study other assets as well as real estate, you can. You can suggest it.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I think that is what I suggested, and Mr. Chair, it relates specifically to the government's commitment to a sale of assets to realize \$10 billion over the course of five years. So I think it's incumbent on this committee to investigate what those assets are, what review is being done to determine what those assets are, valuation, etc. My suspicion is that most of those assets will be real estate, simply given the values involved, but they may or may not include other assets. Part of the problem is we don't know what those assets are yet.

**The Chair:** Public Works is the ministry that handles most of this, but other ministries do manage real estate as well—for example, Transport—so I'm going to suggest that we have a meeting on that, and that may cover off some of the questions you have, but it won't necessarily cover off other assets.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** But we won't know that until we actually have a chance to investigate.

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

Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** May I step in here? I appreciate the questions you're asking.

I don't speak on behalf of the minister. I don't speak on behalf of anybody other than myself. My sense or my suspicion is that not all the real estate being considered has even been identified, first of all. Second, I would suggest that it isn't just real estate, and I would imagine that it's not just Public Works, so I would suggest that it's an important meeting to have, and I think we absolutely should be made aware of anything and everything that's being considered. Canadians deserve to know about it. But I would suggest that maybe this is a meeting that we have to wait some time for. Certainly we can get initial responses from the relevant ministers and ministries, but I'm just not sure that we'll get a whole lot of clarity in the coming weeks or months. We may be able to get an answer that satisfies us, and it may not take, by any stretch, a meeting. It would simply be that the review is being undertaken, and they might be able to tell us what departments those assets fall under. That might be all we would get for some time.

If we want to do a larger study, if we want to bring in people from the private sector, that might be a study we would want to look at—the question of whether government should ever sell anything—but we did a significant study in the last Parliament regarding sale-leaseback, and we found some very interesting things. I'm just not sure we'll get the answers in the short term that you are looking for.

**The Chair:** Ms. Hall Findlay.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I would actually insist on a meeting fairly soon, at the very least to determine that there are no answers. It is the government that has committed to the sale of assets. We don't know what they are. Again, my assumption is that a predominant portion of that would be real estate simply because of evaluations, but you can't not know for several months what the assets are if in fact you're planning to book a net increase of their value of \$2 billion. That's a lot of money, and it has to be the net.

So I would strongly ask that we have a meeting fairly soon, at the very least to determine what progress has been made in identifying those assets.

**The Chair:** The sales envisaged are about spending reductions, which governments have been doing around here for 10 or 12 years. Every year there are spending reductions; they look for savings every year, every budget. It's routine now. Across the whole breadth of spending, governments look for savings. They also look for revenues from disposal of assets in an orderly way.

So I'm going to suggest we do this. Let me just go back and recap where we are.

We're going to set aside two meetings for procurement. I'm suggesting February 24 and 26, when we come back.

The first week of March, we go to the stimulus package meeting to get an update on coordination.

On Thursday, March 5—and this is not a priority—I'm suggesting we go to the Public Service Commission. Well, I don't know if that is a significant priority. I was going to bundle the Public Service Commission and one of the appointments related to public service renewal. There was an appointment by the Privy Council. We should from time to time be looking at these appointments so we know that they know that we look at them. That is supposed to have the effect of improving the quality of these appointments.

We have a meeting on March 5. Do you think we could get a meeting to deal with the questions that have come up on greening, financing, and disposal of real estate? That's won't fully deal with all of Ms. Hall Findlay's questions. We could look for a subsequent meeting after that, depending on what evolves from that meeting. Definitely we need a subsequent meeting to look at other asset disposal issues.

Mr. Warkentin.

• (1145)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I was thinking that there may be a different way to bundle this. We could do greening in government, have some discussion with regards to the real property plan, and—some of this is going to play into that second meeting—maybe we could talk about the disposal of inventory.

You were speaking about saving money. We may want to speak to Treasury board about the expenditure review efforts they are undertaking within the cross-government effort. It may be an opportunity to discuss, at the same time as the real estate review, the expenditure review that's happening simultaneously. Both of those are an effort to come up with additional capital for the government to reallocate to other places. I don't know, but that may be a better and more appropriate match.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** My only concern is the amount of time, but I don't disagree at all.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I was thinking about your discussion, and real estate and the greening of government are two different sets of witnesses. I suspect that maybe the other two would be more appropriate to bring in together.

**The Chair:** We've got a handle on that. We've have taken four issues and turned them into two meetings: the greening and financing of real estate, and then disposal of assets and expenditure review.

Go ahead, Ms. Hall Findlay.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I think Mr. Warkentin was actually saying that the expenditure and asset sale piece were more tied together than the greening piece.

**The Chair:** That's right. I thought that's what I said. You're on the money; we're okay.

Those are two meetings we've bundled. Right now we're getting into timing issues. I'll ask the clerk if we have any deadlines—and I know we do; that's why I'm asking the question.

**The Clerk:** The only deadlines so far are for the supplementary estimates (C), which should be reported to the House before March 23. In order to do that, we would need to meet before March 12, because there's a week off after that, the week of March 16. In order to report, we'd have to report on March 13, which is a Friday, in the morning. That's the only thing.

There's another deadline if we want to study any of the appointments that were referred to us, those in the table I sent by e-mail. Those are due on March 27, so we would need to study them before then. The last day would be March 24 in order to report to the House on March 25.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Yes, the people who are appointed are just as nervous being reviewed after the deadline as before.

Anyway, there is a deadline, so we have to look at the supplementary estimates. We have March 10 and March 12.

By the way, did I not just receive the whole bundle of performance reports?

**The Clerk:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Members have received the performance reports. I'll let you have some time, colleagues, to read all of them. If any issues come up in the reading, we can discuss future meetings on that. All right? Thank you.

Where are we heading on this now? Let's hear from Madame Bourgeois.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** First of all, I asked to be recognized earlier because I wanted to lend my support to Ms. Finlay.



The greening of buildings and the sale of buildings are two different things. I think we will need to set aside more than one meeting to discuss these topics. In the case of greening operations, money is being invested, while in the case of real property sales, buildings are being sold for a profit. We need to be certain that we're not confusing the two issues.

Secondly, I would like to suggest an additional possible topic for future study. The Canada Public Service Agency is slated to disappear. Its demise was reported in the Ottawa newspaper *Le Droit* this week. Our committee is responsible for issues affecting the Public Service. On the one hand, the Agency is slated to disappear, while on the other hand, we have learned that about two weeks ago, the Public Service awarded contracts valued at \$55 million for staff recruitment. This is another aspect of the recovery plan that we could focus on. I would like us to look at turnover rates.

[English]

**The Chair:** All right. We were looking for a day to have the head of the Public Service Commission come in on the subject of the annual report and the appointee on public service renewal, and we could also address the same question as Madame Bourgeois has raised. Also, there are some questions about turnover. The clerk has just distributed a report on the issue of public service turnover. I expect colleagues to religiously read that report.

Madame Bourgeois, we'll have a meeting with the Public Service Commission at which all of these issues can be raised. We just have to pick a day. It could be March 5. Is there any objection to March 5 for the Public Service Commission? There isn't. Okay, it's March 5.

Now we go to the next week, March—

I'm sorry?

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I thought we had March 5 for the asset sales and the—

**The Chair:** We hadn't locked in, to my recollection; at least, your chair hadn't written it down that way. But if you want to have the real estate that day, that's fine. This is the issue of sale of assets, with a brief look at expenditure review. Actually, maybe that's all there is to do with expenditure review: to simply look at it quickly. Yes, so it's asset sales and expenditure review. Is that—

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I thought we had actually set down that date.

**The Chair:** Okay, March 5 is good. Is that all? That's easy. March 5 it is. Done.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** For the Public Service? We have week-long break...

[English]

**The Chair:** That is now March 10.

If the chair doesn't know, the chair doesn't mark it down.

Is there anything you wanted to say?

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** The House is not sitting from March 16 to 20. That will give us time to familiarize ourselves with the large

report. Then, on the 24th, we can discuss turnover rates in the Public Service.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, so you don't want to question anything we've done so far; you're just looking further ahead. That's fine.

Now we're moving into the week of March 23. I'm just going to get the clerk to outline what's still to be done. We need to have the Public Service Commission in for that bundled item...or no, we've done the PSC. That was on March 10.

Does anybody here want to do appointments? There are about twenty of them. We do have one random victim, Patricia Hassard. She's a long-standing public servant, and she's excellent. We do want to have an appointment. This is with the Public Service Commission. She will come in at the same time as the Public Service Commission, and you'll get to ask your questions. That is March 10.

• (1155)

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I'm sorry, but my colleague here was saying that because the report was so thick, it wasn't necessarily an immediate priority. We have a break week in the middle of March, and the recommendation was that we do the public service piece after the break, after we've had a chance to absorb the report.

I thought that's what I had heard her say.

**The Chair:** I didn't hear that, but I'm happy to take notice of it.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** That gives you more room, Mr. Chair. That should be a good thing. It gives you a little more flexibility.

**The Chair:** Timing, that's all it is.

Now I would invite you to fill in the March 12 date.

**An hon. member:** You mean March 10.

**The Chair:** What do we have for March 10?

**An hon. member:** *Nada*.

**The Chair:** You have to work with me here.

**The Clerk:** What about the supplementary estimates (C), Mr. Chair? We will need to report eventually.

**An hon. member:** That makes sense.

**The Chair:** Do you want to do the supplementary estimates (C) on March 10?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Everybody's still happy?

So on March 24, we're finally at the Public Service Commission. We'll leave March 26 for kickback day.

Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Are you looking for additional issues now?

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** No, I agree, I think we should wait, but let me put in my two bits for having a discussion at some point with Madame Barrados with regard to the turnover within the public civil service. But it's not something we need to discuss today.

**The Chair:** No, not now, but we do have a date for that.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** We do? Perfect.

**The Chair:** Now, at the invitation of Ms. Hall Findlay and Madame Bourgeois, it's March 24, because it gives us lots more time to read those reports. March 26 is unallocated.

Does anybody want to walk through this again, or are we okay?

Order.

The researcher has asked if we're going to do any reports. We won't actually know until we get there, but it doesn't look like we're digging into these things any more than about six to eight inches deep. Should we find something that we want to look at more closely, we can, but at this point we're surfing right through our mandate and doing what we're supposed to do. I don't see a need for a report.

Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** To answer your question, Mr. Chair, all of the topics listed here are extremely important, in my view. We should produce a report on each individual topic.

That's why I always hesitate to say that we will devote only one or two meetings to each topic. For example, with respect to the sale of buildings, it's quite possible that we could request more time to study this file. Also, it is quite possible that we will need to devote more time to our study of the topic suggested by Mr. Martin, namely information technologies.

Personally, I would like us to draft and table a report that proves we take our work seriously.

• (1200)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** If we can cobble together something useful in a report, I'm sure colleagues will want to do it. As we tackle each issue we may or may not catch any fish, if I can put it that way. We'll wait to see how these things evolve. I'll be delighted to table reports from the committee. Keep the cards and letters coming.

Are we okay on this? We have a good raft of future business.

Mr. Anders, do you have something to say?

**Mr. Rob Anders:** No, I'm just stretching. Sorry.

**The Chair:** He's happy.

That's great, colleagues. I look forward to seeing you.

It's not a week off, Mr. Clerk; it's a week of work in the constituency. I look forward to seeing you all after the constituency week.

Mr. McTeague has a another comment.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** I have an observation, and I leave it for all committee members.

We seem to be working well together, despite some confusion on dates. Mr. Chair, the steering committee has within it members of all parties, with you representing the Liberal Party. But even in the steering committee, I think it puts you in the enviable position of having to act as both a partisan person and chair. I know that other committees—perhaps public accounts would be an example—might accept one or another of the Liberal members to sit on the steering committee. But we're virtually shut out by virtue of the fact that you're the chair. It's something to consider, Chris, and it's up to you.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Did we not pass that it in the routine motions? It would have been an omission. I think it's appropriate in the steering committee that you, Mr. Chair, not have to work in a partisan nature, but simply facilitate the meeting and allow one of your colleagues to represent.

**The Chair:** That would be great, but keep in mind that the steering committee isn't really going to do anything. In theory, if you have a steering committee and you have a vote, you end up with three opposition, one government, and an opposition chair. So it's not a forum where you can have any kind of vote. Whatever product the subcommittee has would have to come to the main committee.

The colleagues around the table are very easy to work with here and we got along pretty well, but I did find it impossible to drive any kind of Liberal opposition bus when I was chair of the subcommittee.

Mr. Anders.

**Mr. Rob Anders:** I came in at the very end of the steering committee discussion, but I thought it was a pretty fair rendition, etc. I prefer not to complicate my life with more steering committee meetings, please. So if we can deal with future business here with all of us present, that's fine.

**The Chair:** Okay. I appreciate your comment.

**Mr. Rob Anders:** If we're going to be doing formal, informal, or whatever you want to call these steering committee meetings, hopefully they'll be at a time in the week when we're all likely to be here. I had to make arrangements to come from Toronto to be here just for the meeting, which I came into late, as you know. On Wednesdays there are often votes; those are pretty good. Mondays and Fridays are a little more difficult.

Those are my thoughts.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** I was thinking of Sunday, actually.

**The Chair:** Through the cooperation of the members, we got off the ground early and quickly. We reviewed the estimates and reported them to the House, and we have a working agenda. We're in good shape. I take your point, and we'll try to proceed in that fashion.

Mr. McTeague.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Mr. Chair, should there be a steering committee meeting, do we wait outside? Do we show up? I'm not clear as to what the procedure is.

•(1205)

**The Chair:** I think there's an acceptance that a Liberal could attend and drive the Liberal bus. Is that okay?

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Off the cliff.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you, colleagues.

We've managed to do this in an hour, which is pretty good. Thank you very much. We'll see you at the next meeting.

We're adjourned.

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