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# Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, May 7, 2009**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Derek Lee**

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Thursday, May 7, 2009

•(1110)  
[English]

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

Colleagues, we're continuing our consideration of Bill C-18. Today we're scheduled to do clause-by-clause consideration of this bill.

Ms. Hall Findlay has a point of order.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.):** Yes. This is on a motion that I raised at our last meeting, hoping to have it raised at the end of the meeting, but we ran out of time. We now have the 48 hours' notice. I'm asking the chair and my colleagues if we can deal with this motion at the beginning of the meeting rather than waiting until after clause-by-clause, just due to time constraints.

**The Chair:** If the chair saw consensus or agreement around the table, he'd be happy to deal with the motion, provided there was an ironclad commitment from all the parties that we could dispose of this reasonably quickly—in other words, in five or ten minutes. If that is not ironclad, I'm just not going to take this as a point of order, and I'll go right to clause-by-clause.

On this point of order, Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Lee, in general, I'm in full agreement. There are some questions with regard to timing and the rest of it that I think would require some discussion, so if we can fit it into the discussion later on.... In principle, we support the motion. We believe it's important that these folks come forward. We're happy to accommodate that and work with all members to make that happen, but there's just a timing issue.

**The Chair:** Okay. Do we want to let Ms. Hall Findlay put the matter on the agenda and get the debate started? Then after five minutes, if it's not concluded, we will defer the matter to later on in the meeting and go to clause-by-clause.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** In principle, we support it, but we don't support certain specific dates that are outlined in it, so I'm not sure. This may continue for some time.

**The Chair:** If we can't dispose of this in five minutes, I'm not going to let it pre-empt our agenda. In the event we haven't—

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** If I may, Mr. Chair, we can ask Michael for his opinion—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I'm happy to listen to you, but please hear your chair out. I am suggesting that in the event we have not disposed of this within five minutes, we will take a pause, suspend the debate on it, go to clause-by-clause, and come back to it before

the end of the meeting. At least it will be on the floor. Is that okay with you?

So we have five minutes. I'm going to change the agenda slightly to allow Ms. Hall Findlay to put a motion for which she has provided previous notice.

Ms. Hall Findlay.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Given that this motion was circulated, do I need to read it, or is everyone all right with the written version that was circulated?

Shall I read it, then? It states:

That the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates (the "Standing Committee") (i) request that an appropriate official from Industry Canada appear before the Standing Committee for the first thirty minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Tuesday May 12, 2009 so as to provide the Standing Committee with an update of the expenditure of stimulus funds by Industry Canada pursuant to Budget 2009 and Treasury Board Vote 35 of the Main Estimates for 2009-2010; and (ii) request that an appropriate official from Human Resources and Services Development Canada ("HRSDC") appear before the Standing Committee for the first thirty minutes of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Tuesday May 26, 2009 so as to provide the Standing Committee with an update of the expenditure of stimulus funds by HRSDC pursuant to Budget 2009 and Treasury Board Vote 35 of the Main Estimates for 2009-2010.

•(1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you for sharing that with members prior to moving it. We can now debate or discuss the motion.

Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** In principle, I think it's a great motion if we feel we have the time to undertake these two studies. I have spoken with officials and folks and have concerns about the specific dates that are prescribed in the motion, simply because there's certainly information that won't yet be available with regard to vote 35 on those specific dates.

If it be the will of the committee that we remove the dates and still call for this motion, that would be, I'm hoping, a friendly amendment. I can't guarantee which dates those folks will be available on. I'll tell you that in principle we support it, but not necessarily with the prescribed dates.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** I'm just a little confused as to your status, Chris. You seem to be the spokesperson for the Government of Canada and not a member of this committee. We're not asking your permission for whether we do this—

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** No, no—

**Mr. Pat Martin:** —and it's not really up to you to contact government officials and arrange dates for them to appear before this committee. I get a little bit tired of the role you've taken on in this committee. I don't know if you're a parliamentary secretary or if you just think you're the spokesperson for the Government of Canada, but we'll decide what we study and we'll decide what witnesses we call. It's not up to you to go and do it for us and check their availability. We have staff here on the committee, such as the clerk, etc., who will do that for us.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Martin—

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I have the floor. You have the floor about 90% of the time in this committee. I have the floor right now.

I agree with Martha Hall Findlay's motion. I think we should vote on it and go ahead.

**The Chair:** Okay. On these issues, we'll go to Mr. Warkentin, again.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** It absolutely is not my intention to do anything other than serve as a member of the committee.

Mr. Martin, I have the floor now. You had a complaint earlier, when you were being interrupted. I have the floor now.

We on this side of the table have a reason for voting against something when we know that the dates prescribed do not coincide with information being available. That is the reason we would choose to vote against it. The only reason we're choosing to vote against it is if in fact those dates are the ones that are included.

I'm letting you know that we can work by consensus, as we have in the past, to simply work out the dates so that we can ensure that everything happens. Or we can simply remove the dates, as we have in the past, and work together in a manner that's more consensual, and we can move forward. That's the only point.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Ms. Hall Findlay.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** I will just say that the dates are there for the specific reason that vote 35 was the request to approve a very large sum of money—\$3 billion—without the detail. These are unusual circumstances. The fact that we're going to be getting supplementary estimates in due course may answer some of those questions, but these dates are here specifically because of the request to support this large amount of money without the normal process. The timing is actually critical.

I will volunteer that if you cannot support this with those dates and would require those dates to be removed or to have later dates, that's an amendment we would not accept.

If that's the case, would it just go to a vote?

**The Chair:** This vote could end up in a tie, and I'd rather not have to break a tie.

I'm a little confused as to why we couldn't reach some agreement on the dates. This particular motion feeds into a matter that the clerk will be raising later in terms of our future business and our review of the stimulus package. We should take some care.

I think we're actually fairly close on this, given that we have not allocated meeting time. We have some unallocated meeting time on the 14th and later. I think we should be able to discuss the broader

picture of future business on the stimulus package and the motion together, unless, Ms. Hall Findlay, you—

• (1120)

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** Mr. Chair, I understand your concerns, and I understand that it's never comfortable for a chair to have to cast a deciding vote, but I do wish to have this motion voted on at this point.

**The Chair:** All right. Well, we can take a vote now.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** At least it will get within the timeframe.

**The Chair:** We've had the motion read. I'll ask the clerk to walk us through the vote.

First, I'll just call for a show of hands. All those in favour of the motion, please indicate by raising their hands.

The vote is five to five. It's a tie vote. We don't need a polled vote. Let me just check with the clerk.

In exercising the casting vote here at committee, both the Speaker of the House and chairs of committees attempt to follow a kind of protocol or convention. One of those conventions, which I intend to subscribe to at this point, would allow the chair to maintain what is called the status quo. There being a motion out there and this motion having encountered a tie vote, the status quo would be to not support the motion and to allow the status quo to prevail.

I hope members will understand my logic. I will therefore cast a vote in the negative.

(Motion negated)

**The Chair:** However, the substance of the motion, as I pointed out, is going to come up in discussions that I hope will follow our current business on clause-by-clause of Bill C-18. All is not lost.

Go ahead, Ms. Hall Findlay.

**Ms. Martha Hall Findlay:** May I just express my appreciation to you and my colleagues for allowing us to address this at the beginning of this meeting due to time constraints? Thank you, and thank you, everybody.

**The Chair:** I'm breaking out in a cold sweat, so I don't know who I want to thank here.

Let's look to our witnesses. Colleagues, we'll now embark on clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-18. We actually began on the record with clause-by-clause, but we didn't get too far at our last meeting, so we'll continue from where we left off.

First, the witnesses here today are, with one exception, the same. They are Ms. Rossignol and Mr. Wyczynski. We also have the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Mr. Dave MacKenzie, member of Parliament, and he is here as a resource representing the government in the clause-by-clause consideration of this bill.

If you will prepare your documents, colleagues, we'll now go right to clause-by-clause. Sometimes these things can move very quickly, so I will call clause 1.

(On clause 1)

**The Chair:** Mr. McTeague.

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Chair, there are some speaking notes here from the parliamentary secretary. I had one question to put to him.

**The Chair:** No, Mr. MacKenzie will not be making an opening statement.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** At least, I'm advised Mr. MacKenzie—

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety):** I think time is of the essence. We need to get moving on this, and I don't think you need—

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

(Clauses 1 to 7 agreed to on division)

**The Chair:**

May I move the carriage of several clauses at once? I'm sorry, I'm advised there is an amendment coming.

Shall clause 8 carry?

(Clause 8 agreed to on division)

(On clause 9)

**The Chair:** I have a notice of an amendment on clause 9. This amendment is proposed by Monsieur Ménard.

Monsieur Ménard, would you introduce your amendment, please?

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ):** Yes. This was suggested to us by Mr. Delisle who appeared before the committee yesterday. I'd like to summarize my take on these lengthy discussions.

RCMP members can surely empathize with Mr. Delisle. Right away, he noted that until quite recently, collective agreements contained a number of orphan clauses. In other words, in order to secure certain advantages, union members—and we saw this with police unions as well—accepted agreements where new members would not have the same advantages as older ones. This practice was widely criticized and ultimately abandoned.

Mr. Delisle views the current situation as an offshoot of this practice. Back when he was an RCMP cadet, he and his fellow cadets were paid and contributed to the superannuation plan. Upon retirement, the months in training were taken into account in the calculation of the number of years of service. At some point, all that changed. He said he understood the concern for fairness. Obviously, there were far more cadets than actual graduates from the academy. Therefore, it was unfair to make those who didn't graduate contribute to the superannuation plan, even though they would not benefit from it. To rectify this situation, it was suggested that rather than pay the cadets, they be provided with a weekly honorarium of \$500. Consequently, when the time came to calculate the pensions of new officers, they were not given credit for the six months of training, unlike the officers who had graduated before them.

This is what I mean when I say it resembles an orphan clause. The time has come to correct this injustice whereby the six months of training undergone by new RCMP cadets are not credited toward pensionable service, whereas they are credited in the case of members of other police forces who join the RCMP. New RCMP cadets will not be credited for these six months, whereas officers from other forces who join the RCMP will be credited for their time in basic training.

It's time to correct this anomaly. It is truly not fair that RCMP officers are deemed to have six months less seniority than officers from other police forces who join the RCMP later on in their career.

I'd like to call to mind the suggestion made by Mr. Delisle. He proposed that clause 9 of the bill be amended by the addition at the end of section 31.1 of the Act of the following: “[must] apply also to RCMP members in respect of service spent as cadets at the RCMP Academy in Depot Division for the purpose of becoming a constable”.

• (1130)

Of course, this amendment would not recognize cadets as having participated in the superannuation plan if they have not contributed to it. The purpose of the Act is to give cadets an opportunity to buy back, at an opportune moment, the contributions that may not have been deducted, given that during their six months of training, they were paid an honorarium, not a salary.

This is exactly in keeping with the spirit of the act. It would mean that the pensions of all eligible RCMP members would be calculated in exactly the same way. This method would also be used to calculate the pensions of new officers recruited from other police forces.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We may want to hear from our witnesses on this, but I'm happy to recognize Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Exactly, Mr. Chair. I was wondering if we could have our witnesses comment with regard to what this would in fact change. My understanding, from the testimony in our last meeting, is that a change such as this would not be accepted by CRA, and that is where the root of this problem or this change would come from.

Perhaps you could elaborate on what in fact the change would do. And would this act be all that would need to be changed in order for what has been identified by Mr. Ménard to be a reality, in his mind and I think a lot of people's minds, to be satisfied?

**Mr. Marc Wyczynski (Counsel, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Department of Justice):** I think it would be difficult to proceed with the amendment as suggested.

Proposed section 31.1 falls under part 2 of the act. Part 2 of the act does not deal with service-related benefits. It deals exclusively with, as the part is entitled, "Benefits in Respect of Injury or Death on Service". That part incorporates the Pension Act, which provides for duty-related benefits in case of injury, death, disability, or disease. It has nothing to do with service. Service is covered under part 1. So the objective wouldn't be attained.

**The Chair:** Mr. McTeague.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Mr. Wyczynski, are you suggesting that despite the proposal to amendment here, it would be ultra vires the act? You're saying that we have not opened up section 1 of this act. Is that your interpretation?

**Mr. Marc Wyczynski:** I'm saying that clause 9 falls under part 2 of the act. And the amendment to the section would fall under part 2 of the act, which does not deal with service-related benefits.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Let me put something to you.

The amendment is carried. It is passed in Parliament. What occurs after it is gazetted and brought into force? It seems to me that whatever act this committee or Parliament passes takes precedence over any regulation. Is that correct, Mr. Wyczynski?

**Mr. Marc Wyczynski:** It's an act of Parliament. Absolutely. It's paramount.

**Mrs. Shelley Rossignol (Senior Analyst, Pension Policy, Royal Canadian Mounted Police):** Could I add some clarification?

• (1135)

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Yes, please.

**Mrs. Shelley Rossignol:** The problem is that this amendment under clause 9 of the bill is amending section 31.1 of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act, and it's saying which definitions apply of service in the force for purposes of part 2. So the definitions are provided on page 2 of the bill. It extends the definition of the term "service in the Force" to periods of prior service. Ongoing RCMP service is already covered, so we have to say which types of prior service count as service in the force for these disability payments.

And if you refer to the definition of service in the force, on page 2, the cadet time is not there. So it's not recognized as service in the force in the first place in order for part 2 benefits to apply to it. It wouldn't function.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** It's a bit of a wobbly duck. However, if it is passed, how would you implement it?

**Mrs. Shelley Rossignol:** It wouldn't function. It wouldn't work within the legislation because it doesn't form part of the definition of service in the force in the first place.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** That's it for me.

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I was simply going to ask our technical experts. In order to achieve what Mr. Ménard very capably laid out, what change could be possible within the context of Bill C-18 to enable this, to have the period of time as a cadet be considered and added to your pension benefits?

**Mrs. Shelley Rossignol:** It's not within the scope of Bill C-18. The reason is that we would have to have a brand new clause to

allow members to elect for cadet time to count as pensionable service and service in the force.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** That would be ruled out of order because it wouldn't be an amendment to the bill, would it, Mr. Chair?

Just before I cede the floor, I think part of the problem is that the people who crafted the bill in its original form didn't consider that period of time that you were a cadet as being time as an employee. I think modern labour relations jurisprudence would consider that if that cadet, for that six-month period, is under the direction and control of the RCMP and they're getting any kind of remuneration for that time, they are for the purposes of any employment standards act, federally or provincially, an employee.

I'm a carpenter by trade, and the period of time that I was an apprentice was certainly a time.... Even though your employer is not paying you for the period of time you're an apprentice, it's all part of your employment history, and those periods of time are part of your pensionable service later on.

I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. MacKenzie, did you want to add something?

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** Maybe I can cloud it even more.

What happens here is not unique. Quebec has the same thing. La Sûreté du Québec and I believe the Montreal Urban Community Police have the same thing. They are not considered to be employees during that training period. I think what happened is that you had somebody bring something forward to you and you maybe haven't had enough time to look at the broad aspects.

In 1995 the change came. Up until 1995 the RCMP cadets were a part of the force employees, if you will. With all due respect, Mr. Martin, police officers are different from carpenters. There are issues with respect to employment and disemployment that are totally different. Police agencies, for a variety of reasons in a number of locations, including in Quebec and the RCMP, changed these systems. Consequently, they are not considered to be employees, and the money that they receive, which we instituted a year ago, the \$500, is considered an honorarium.

Now, the other part that is a bigger picture of this is that all the police agencies have something different. Some of them pay for their tuition. Some of them pay for their accommodation. To try to put this into this context is impossible, and I think the technical people here can tell you about a whole variety of other issues that would be raised.

I think what's happened is that it got sidelined a little bit because of one aspect that maybe should be dealt with at some other place at some other time, if that's the will of the people representing the members of the force.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Monsieur Ménard.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Ménard:** I understand your argument. This definition could affect other parts of the act.

The provision in question begins with: “For the purposes of this Part [...]”. This part deals with superannuation. With respect to incorporating officers from other police forces, a different definition than the one that applies pursuant to section 31.1 pertaining to superannuation would apply.

This definition is therefore limited to this particular part of the act and does not apply to any other parts. It applies only to superannuation and covers officers who join the RCMP in mid career, but not cadets who went through RCMP training.

The proposed clause 9 reads as follows:

31.1 For the purposes of this Part, paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) of the definition “service in the Force” [...]

The definition applies solely for the purposes of this part, not other parts, of the act.

[*English*]

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie:** I think the issue is that the bill just deals with the transference of retirement benefits. The section that you're dealing with here deals with disability. That's what is creating some of the confusion.

I suggest to you, sir, that you're not entirely wrong. But there is another time and another place that this issue should be brought forward, and it's not in this bill.

**The Chair:** I think the departmental witnesses here are trying to signal that Monsieur Ménard's amendment would change the definition in part 2. But merely changing the definition in part 2 would not allow him to achieve the objective he has of allowing the accrual of pension benefits, as would normally happen and as he apparently wishes to provide for here.

The section looks like it changes the definition of service for the whole act. It doesn't. It would only apply to things like death benefits rather than the pensionable service benefit.

So it doesn't mean it's out of order. It doesn't mean we can't pass it. It probably means it doesn't accomplish the objective that I think Monsieur Ménard was looking for.

The chair has noted potential difficulties in relation to the Income Tax Act in relation to the royal recommendation and in terms of the scope of the bill. But could I confirm for the record that adopting this amendment and implementing it—whether or not there would be a charge to the consolidated revenue fund—might trigger the need for a changed or additional royal recommendation.

**Mrs. Shelley Rossignol:** The problem is that putting an amendment in there to refer to the cadet time won't function in any manner because it's not part of service in the force to begin with, because they're not sworn in as members of the force. That is where it does go back to that income tax issue in order to solve that.

We would have to have a brand new provision in the act to allow cadets to elect for that time. That is where we did the research, consulted with CRA, and we were unable even to contemplate that because of the tax restriction, because they are not an employee.

**The Chair:** Monsieur Ménard, do you have any other questions on this?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Serge Ménard:** No, but I would be prepared to withdraw the amendment in exchange for some guarantees. I'm not sure how that would work, but if we could get some assurance that this thorny issue will be addressed and a satisfactory resolution sought as quickly as possible, then I would be willing to withdraw the amendment. I would imagine that an undertaking given here would serve the purpose.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** There's an offer to withdraw the amendment. With the consent of members the amendment can be withdrawn. Is there consent to withdraw the amendment?

(Amendment withdrawn)

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

The chair will just note that there's a perception among members here of an inequity related to service as a cadet with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Mr. MacKenzie is aware of it, the witnesses from the department are aware of it, as are the members here. So at the last meeting I indicated we might seek a way to flag and communicate this issue, either to our sister committee, the public safety committee, and/or to the minister, and/or to the House, depending on the rules.

So if that's acceptable, we'll do that.

Mr. McTeague.

• (1145)

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** Mr. Chair, on your point, I would just take the word “inequity” and replace it with “inequities”. I think several have been raised.

I appreciate Mr. MacKenzie's explanations. What we were looking for two days ago would have been very helpful. It would equally be helpful, at the direction of the chair, that... Mr. MacKenzie, if I could...

**A voice:** Sorry.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** No problem.

If your gentleman wants to come before us, I'll ask him a question as well.

Mr. Chair, I just want to make it clear to Mr. MacKenzie that the committee has heard and has received several concerns with respect to civilian versus rank and file—civilian issues dealing with merit and bonus pay, as well as the issue that is before us with respect to the six-month period.

I would hope that you would take back to your minister in the very strongest terms the concern the committee has that these things ought to be addressed forthwith. I of course accept the withdrawal of Mr. Ménard's proposal.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** The amendment BQ-1 to clause 9 having been withdrawn, I'll put clause 9 unamended.

(Clauses 9 to 17 inclusive agreed to on division)

**The Chair:** Shall the title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the bill carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report the bill to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** That would conclude our business.

Thank you, colleagues.

Thank you, witnesses.

At this point on the bill, the witnesses may withdraw and the committee will continue with other business.

Colleagues, this is a good time to address future business. Ms. Hall Findlay is about to be wheeled out of here—

**An hon. member:** She's self-propelled.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Martin, on future business

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I would like to add a matter for consideration for future business. I don't know if we have the attention of the committee at the moment, but I would like us to entertain the idea.

In our thinking, nothing offends the sensibilities, maybe second only to—

**Some hon. members:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Martin, we do hear you. It's okay. We all do hear you.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Second only to out-and-out corruption, nothing offends the sensibilities of Canadians more than patronage: the impression that there's still the “who you know” style of politics in Canada and that appointments are made based on something other than merit. Therefore, I think we're overdue to revisit the Public Appointments Commission, which we've recently learned isn't dormant. It's up and running and being funded, although they have nothing to do. People go to work at the Public Appointments Commission every morning and stare at the walls, I suppose, and wait for something to happen.

Notwithstanding the million or so dollars a year that's funding a commission that's doing nothing, I think we should be revisiting the whole notion. Being the oversight committee that deals with public appointments, I think it's our duty to study and comment on the creation of the Public Appointments Commission and urge the government to have a study of it and then a report. I think we'll probably conclude that we would urge the government to get busy.

If I could, then, I'll leave that as an item for consideration for future business: a study of the Public Appointments Commission.

•(1150)

**The Chair:** I'll ask our researcher this: do we have in front of us estimates from the Public Appointments Commission?

**Mrs. Lydia Scratch (Committee Researcher):** Yes.

**The Chair:** All right. Yes, even though the train has not left the station, they have provided for some spending in this fiscal year. We might wish to look at that issue as an estimates procedure rather than embarking on a sidebar study. If that's okay, I'll ask research to do a bit of a workup and see where we can build that in before we break for the summer.

Now, I want to hunker down here and take a look at our calendar so members will know what's coming down the pipeline. Maybe the clerk can speak to it, because this is a bit of a moving target, and everyone is operating in good faith here with the valuable assistance of Mr. Warkentin.

I just wanted to say to Mr. Martin that, on occasion, Mr. Warkentin's efforts have speeded up the reply communication from some of the government ministers, and it's been helpful to the clerk, but he is absolutely not trying to control the witness agenda here.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I might just say that it's worth all of us taking note of the point that when we walk through that door as part of this committee, we leave some of our baggage at the door.

We do have parliamentary secretaries on the committee who are, in a way, representing cabinet, but there's no way that any of us should be negotiating or speaking on behalf of the government when we're at this committee. That's the beauty of committees. We're at arm's length. We're stand-alone.

It isn't your job, Chris, to rush to the defence of the government at every opportunity. I'd also be interested in hearing from some of your other four colleagues from time to time. You seem to be the spokesman for the Conservative Party.

**The Chair:** Okay. We have a well-functioning committee and a great clerk. Now I want to hear from the clerk about our future agenda.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michel Marcotte):** I'm sorry, the agenda before you was printed at 10:32 this morning and there have been three changes already, and it's still a moving target. Follow me, please.

On Tuesday, May 12, we have confirmation that the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, *la commissaire à l'intégrité du secteur public*, Madame Ouimet, will be here.

On the Wednesday I remind you there's an unofficial meeting with the parliamentary delegation from Pakistan. You all have the invitation.

On Thursday, May 14, I'm trying to have a stimulus package and supplementary estimates (A), considering they might be tabled in the House at 10 o'clock or 10:05. Since our meeting is at 11 o'clock, we could go ahead and study these. Why has it moved so quickly? It's because we received confirmation from Mr. Vic Toews that he will be here for his main estimates on Tuesday, May 26.

Last, on Thursday, May 28, Minister Christian Paradis will be here for his main estimates on Public Works.



**The Chair:** Okay, that's not too bad. We have ministers ready, able, and willing to appear.

I want to make reference to Ms. Hall Findlay's motion, which was not adopted, and I don't recall the specifics or particulars of it, but it urged a focus on the stimulus package in these upcoming meetings. If these supplementary estimates are introduced into the House at routine proceedings on Thursday, May 14, that will allow us to look at them. In fact, as we were advised by witnesses earlier, those supplementary estimates will contain what we've sometimes called listings or lists here, or something equivalent to that, of projects and program enhancements that may in part relate to vote 35, \$3 billion, and additional types of spending.

I think there will be a lot of information in those supplementary estimates that will feed the curiosity and the public interest objectives of members around the table. That being the case, that meeting on May 14 could be very important. If there were to be any hiccups, any game-playing in the House—you never know, this is politics—this would handicap us significantly in the event that those matters were not tabled at routine proceedings. That might impair our meeting.

I'm going to ask the clerk, if those supplementary estimates are tabled, who should we have here before the committee at a minimum to answer questions on it?

• (1155)

**The Clerk:** Since we're having President Vic Toews on May 26, they will probably say he's busy. We might try for the secretary, Mr. Wouters, or other officials from Treasury Board. We've had numerous officials before, but never the hierarchy. That might be an option.

Another minister might come and talk about the package.

**The Chair:** Let's have some comments and polish this up.

Mr. McTeague.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** I'm led to understand Mr. Wouters was just appointed.

**An hon. member:** July 1.

Okay, from that point. So that will not interfere with this. Thank you.

**The Chair:** It shouldn't, but you never know. Maybe he has to go to Clerk of the Privy Council school or something.

Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I'd be interested in hearing Minister Baird. I think he would be the most useful of the ministers if we're going to talk about the stimulus package, because he is actively negotiating deals right across the country. I think the most current report on stimulus would come from his office, as the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

**The Chair:** Yes, I think we all accept that the biggest job multiplier out there is construction projects associated with infrastructure improvements and investments, but it's not the only piece of the stimulus package.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I would suggest they would be high up on that list.

**The Chair:** Let's focus on Mr. Baird's ministry. He might have a very viable parliamentary secretary who might love to join us for the event. I don't know. Is that okay? Can we...?

Are members prepared now to warmly welcome Mr. Baird on that day?

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Mr. McTeague.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** I echo Mr. Martin's comments and your comments as well. I think it's absolutely vital. I don't mean to disparage parliamentary secretaries, but I do think we want to hear from the genuine article. We're talking about a lot of money here. It's Parliament's best bullet to try to fend off a declining economy. It's absolutely important, as far as tying trust in our institutions and the credibility of these expenditures to the announcements that we hear from the minister and nothing less than the minister is concerned.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Chair, personally, I have no objections to hearing from the three ministers. Since June will soon be upon us, I just want to be sure that we will have time to hear from witnesses in June. The committee has two reports to prepare.

Ms. Barrados has sent us a letter that answers some questions and a report long-awaited by SMEs should be tabled any day now.

We need to be sure, Mr. Chair, that we leave ourselves time produce two reports.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I would concur that we do have some outstanding work that needs to be completed, specifically the issue of procurement. If we schedule that in June, we'd have all relevant reports that we've been waiting for. But we may want to have at least a day of witnesses before we have that completed. I know there were some suggestions from Martha Hall Findlay and me with regard to possible witnesses for a final day. Then, of course, we have to consider the reports sometime after that. I know that we are running out of days. Then, of course, I have a motion that I'd like to.... Remember that we have the whole issue of the aging demographics. It's something we had hoped to at least start to consider before the summer break.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** I was hoping to address our procurement SME study when we finish this stimulus package discussion today too. That's fine.

Do we have a crisp articulation of your...? Oh, we do have it here.

June could be busy for us. Can we move from this to SME procurement now?

I was hopeful that we could begin to try to give some preliminary focus to our researcher here on SME procurement. As you all now know, this is a very big and complex subject, and every time you open one door, two more doors open. If we aren't prudent in how we handle this, we'll never finish and get something tangible done. I think it's the view here that we can finish this and get a report into the House before we break for the summer. I'm sure we can. But in order to do it, we're going to have to limit how many of the chains we keep pulling on.

We have an hour. We don't have to use the whole hour, but could we go around the table and I'll recognize anybody who wants to offer a suggestion or thoughts to our researcher on how we want to frame our report, the focus.

Perhaps I could start. It was my sense that we have identified up to half a dozen principles or dynamics that we are very concerned about as members of Parliament. I think we should be able to flag those and give examples and explain why these criteria and principles are important to Public Works when they design procurement strategies.

Ms. Scratch would love to have some articulation of those. I'm not going to mention them now. Members will design this; I'm not going to do it. If that's okay, I'll go around the table and recognize members at random. Or I'll follow the normal order, if you want.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** As you wish. We have lots of time.

**The Chair:** So it's Mr. McTeague and then Madame Bourgeois.

**Hon. Dan McTeague:** I hear from others on this, but I think the position—certainly the Liberals have taken this—is that we do appreciate the cadre of recommendations, particularly as it comes to the approach that they have taken in terms of looking not so much at service-based projects but more at the idea of projects themselves. I suggest that if we're looking to draft something down the road, this is one that certainly interests us. But I have a few more comments I want to make in just a moment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Madam Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SMEs need to be protected at all costs so that they can at least continue to operate. We want to be very clear from the outset that we

are not opposed to rationalizing services or to combining 125 cable services into one. However, we mustn't lose sight of the fact that SMEs are the driving force behind the Canadian economy—this according to Industry Canada officials. Therefore, it is vitally important that there be a place for them in the economy.

Another important consideration is duplication of services. That was clear from the assistance that was supposedly given to SMEs by the Business Development Bank of Canada and MERX. Another very important topic to examine is the Small Business Office which, I hate to say, appears to be made up of people who are looking for some direction at this time. They do not seem to have defined their mandate very clearly.

According to recent newspaper reports, Public Works and Government Services Canada appears to be willing to truly target or acknowledge SMEs. The department's efforts in that regard should be encouraged. Witnesses have suggested to us various small ways in which their efforts could be supported.

Ms. saint pierre appeared to have a firm grasp of the problem, but I got the impression that someone higher up on the ladder had changed opinions. So then, I say that we should help Ms. saint pierre. She seems to have clearly understood the issues. We need to come up with some arguments.

Finally, on an entirely different subject, I would very much like for us to have a steering committee, Mr. Chair, so that we can communicate with one another.

I have nothing further to add.

● (1205)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's music to my ears.

Colleagues, we're sort of in a drafting report mode now, although we're just giving preliminary instructions. Normally we would go in camera. It's just easier to do it, and we don't have to burden the public record.

Could I have a motion that we go in camera now? Mr. McTeague.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]







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