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Chair

Mr. Mervin Tweed

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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• (1625)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Welcome back, everyone.

Just to complete the discussion that we had in the previous meeting, you were all given a subcommittee report. It starts out “Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure”, it's the third report. If you turn it over to the second page, item 5, the only thing that has changed from our discussion is the date on which we will first entertain Bill C-310. Originally in our subcommittee we had talked about October 7. Based on the committee's decision today, it's now November 2.

All I would ask is that the committee as a whole give approval to this as amended.

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

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now moving into the second part of our agenda, we have notices of motion to deal with. We have two notices of motion from Mr. Kennedy. I'm not sure in what order they were received.

Mr. Kennedy, do you have a preference as to how you would like to deal with each motion?

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Yes. The motions aren't numbered, but there's one referencing the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and I would prefer to deal with that first, followed by the one dealing with Gordon Landon, regional councillor for the Town of Markham.

The Chair: Mr. Kennedy has introduced a notice of motion:

That the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, be invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities at the earliest opportunity to discuss his knowledge and analysis of the Government's infrastructure spending.

Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you for this opportunity. I moved this motion regarding Mr. Page so that we could discuss his ability to review stimulus spending on infrastructure in Canada. I think it is very important that this committee, the only parliamentary committee that is accountable to the public for this type of spending, conduct a review, as one committee member already mentioned, several months after the launch of a program described by the government as the most

sizeable infrastructure spending in Canadian history. I hope that we will be able to agree to invite the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Mr. Page, to appear before the committee given that the independent position was created by the government.

[English]

I believe it's quite important that this committee, the only committee with a mandate to oversee what the government calls its largest outlay of infrastructure spending, do so at a juncture now where the government has filed certain information, but where we have not had an independent review of whether or not the infrastructure program, at a cost this year in the order of \$9 billion, is actually accomplishing its objectives. I think that the particular responsibility, almost a fiduciary responsibility, for this committee is unique.

Through the clerk, Mr. Chair, I'd like to table some documentation *dans les deux langues*, a report that I did in my capacity as critic, called “Breach of Trust on Jobs: The Status of Infrastructure Stimulus Spending in Canada”, Not that this would become a committee document, but simply for the benefit of the committee members, we culled 1,000 projects in the course of a couple of weeks to determine the status of infrastructure spending. Again, my point today, and the motion today, is about bringing in someone independent. I don't expect members opposite to agree that every finding we put forward is one they're happy with, but I do expect no one on this committee to shy away from the findings and the explanation and the requirements of the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer. To do less, frankly, is to say to Canadians out there that not only should we simply not have the oversight this committee has in terms of the dollars that have been voted, but that we don't have the sense of responsibility towards them to give them the assurance that this very large historic outlay for...

To be clear, all parties, I think, have agreed that there is a circumstance in the country that required a stimulus to take place. But I would suggest to you that on its face—and this is in support of the motion—there is at least a reason given in the report I've put up for circulation to have this kind of examination at this time.

There are two findings in that report. One is that only 12% of the funds have actually reached the stage of creating jobs, contrary to some published claims by the government. The second is that there are questions that can be raised, from the limited data we have available as members of the committee.... I assure you that we have asked the committee for both briefings and have been denied on several occasions now. We have filed Order Paper questions—and I'm happy to make those available to members of the committee—many of which were left with large gaps in terms of information. It is the responsibility of someone in government to have available full information about the status of these large outlays of funds. Again, I don't ask the members of the committee to accept the findings of the effort I put forward, but I would say to you that there are things there that should be concerning.

The second concern is that the dollars were allocated and targeted based not on economic need but rather on political considerations in at least several of the programs in several of the provinces and, in fact, in each of the programs and provinces that we have been able to obtain public numbers for.

I suspect that it's in the interest of the government, in particular, to clear the air and put forward its own version of things in detail. It's something that on at least two occasions, both the Prime Minister and the minister responsible for the conduct of the infrastructure program have said they would make available. I think it would be passing strange if it were not this committee, with the expertise of the people around the table and the engagement they had with the minister and other people early on in the discussion of the infrastructure program, that would express that interest.

Again, the motion is quite simple. It's that the Parliamentary Budget Officer come and tell us about his knowledge and analysis. I'm not asking him to entertain anything other than that. I think that is in keeping with the responsibility we have, given the size, the scope, and perhaps some of the questions that have been raised about the infrastructure program. I think it's simply good government—and some level of accountability—to have Mr. Page perform his duties in front of this committee with respect to this particular outlay.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. *Merci bien.*

• (1630)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank Mr. Kennedy for his motion, because quite frankly, I had an opportunity to review parts of the information Mr. Kennedy has tabled—I believe it's the same report—and I would recommend that he get his facts correct before he tables this, because quite frankly, we've received more motions from Mr. Kennedy than from any other member of this committee, including the government, and his attendance is less than any other member of this committee. I know that Mr. Dhaliwal wants to come to his rescue once again, but Mr. Kennedy is quite capable of taking care of himself that way.

We have actually—

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman. Just for the purposes of civility, the same rule that applies in the House applies here as well, and that is that we

avoid making references to people being present or absent. That will probably keep the discussion on the basis of rational debate.

Mr. Brian Jean: Well, my rational debate is going to continue on another basis.

The Chair: It's not a point of order, but it's a point well taken.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: My point is this. As I mentioned before, we had a trip to the United States. We studied high-speed trains, and what we found, the conclusions we came to as a committee—and we've heard from the Bloc and the NDP and the government side—changed our entire focus for that particular study. And indeed, no Liberal member from this committee came on that study, and it was very important that they did, and that's—

Hon. Joseph Volpe: None came as a Liberal member.

Mr. Brian Jean: Right, none came as a Liberal member from this committee. That's why it's so important. In this case, Mr. Kennedy points out that there are 135 projects in British Columbia. There are actually 300 projects under ISF alone. Since January, this government has initiated another 496 projects under other programs.

He claims that \$383 million has been spent or is being spent under ISF. It's actually \$740 million and nearly a billion dollars for 188 other projects, such as the Evergreen Line, which he doesn't refer to. If instead of making your phone calls from the secretary of state of infrastructure development that some of our offices received, instead of having your staff doing—

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): They were calling from their office.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: I have a point of order.

Mr. Jean neither amuses nor intimidates, but he ought not to make points in error. No people from my office ever identified themselves. Mr. Chair, I expect you to make sure that debate remains free of insults and gratuitous comments. That's more a reflection of Mr. Jean—perhaps he is putting his character on display. But there is a role for you, Mr. Chair, to make sure that debate stays on the motion. I won't have my office taken to task on frivolous matters simply because Mr. Jean is unable to deal with the matter in hand.

I'm sure you want to see a debate on this issue, Mr. Chair. But when Mr. Jean attempts to put falsehoods into the record, I look to you to protect the rights of members. I don't wish to interrupt Mr. Jean, much as I may disagree with him. I will have my opportunity. But on a number of occasions he raises things that are unparliamentary in nature, and I look to you to protect the privileges of the members of this committee.

•(1635)

The Chair: Mr. Bevington, do you wish to address the same point of order?

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): No.

The Chair: I will rule.

It isn't a point of order; it is a point of debate. I heard the Speaker say today that it is not his role to interpret what the truth is or is not; it is to hear the arguments from both sides. You have had an opportunity to present and you made some comments about government, without interruption or contradiction. I'm going to allow Mr. Jean to make his comments as well.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: For future reference on this point of order, a tone of debate that involves the calling of names or casting of aspersions has in previous situations been considered a matter for the chair, and I would invite the chair to look for this distinction. I am not asking him to adjudicate facts.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: If the thousand phone calls were made and the callers from your office—I thought you mentioned it was your office—didn't introduce themselves as an infrastructural investigation team or something of that nature, then I apologize. But that is the information we have from some of our members of Parliament and other people.

I was going to suggest that instead of making phone calls, the member could simply go on the Building Canada website. I have in front of me some 97 pages listing what's happening in Ontario. I don't have it in both official languages, but it is available on the website in both official languages. It lists all the different projects for which funding has been given or announced. They are significant with regard to what you're suggesting has taken place in Ontario and in British Columbia. You admit yourself that some of your numbers are ambiguous. But you can find the correct information just by pointing and clicking on the map of Canada. That is available to you. As you are aware, you voted for this budget, on which we are, as agreed, making quarterly reports to Parliament.

So you have the opportunity to find out how things actually stand. We are making good on our promises and we have received a 90% rating. I disagree with bringing in Mr. Page, and I would suggest that in the past we've had a very cooperative committee. Mr. Volpe, Mr. Laframboise, and all the other members have gotten along very well. We actually accomplish a great bit of work, the members who show up. I would recommend that you get the facts straight before you try to pass motions that are not helpful to the committee's work.

The Chair: Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Both the government and Mr. Kennedy submitted figures. I take both sets of numbers with a grain of salt. The purpose of the motion before us is to call Mr. Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, before the committee. Before we invite him, I would like to ask him if he is able to answer our questions. Theoretically, the Auditor General should be the one who conducts the audit, and we cannot interfere with her work. She will no doubt do it, but she is

probably waiting for more projects and spending. At some point, she will table a report on infrastructure spending.

I would say that those who would have good reason to object would be municipal officials. In Quebec, the infrastructure program is working fairly well, even though federal authorization can sometimes take a while. The Quebec government is the one setting the priorities.

I would prefer that we write to Mr. Page to ask if he is able to answer certain questions that we have and, if so, how much time he would need to do so. I would not want to waste his time, since he has other files that already take up a great deal of it. We want him to appear before the committee so that he can talk about his knowledge and analysis of the government's infrastructure spending. If he needs to do three months of research before he can answer our questions, I want him to say so, and we could invite him in three months' time. I do not want him to come here for nothing. I would prefer that we write him, but that is not what the motion says. We could agree to ask Mr. Page what he is able to do, if he has the time and the staff to do it, and how long he would need.

You can be certain that I am against this motion as it stands now.

•(1640)

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to reiterate that indeed the economic action plan our government put forward.... The opposition had requested that we put forward three report cards, as it were, and we were on probation—I believe that was the word being used—until those reports were brought forward. Our government, on its own initiative, offered a fourth report card, and that report card has now been delivered to the Canadian public in the form of the economic update. We are putting forward those numbers on a regular basis.

About this report that the member opposite has compiled, I too have been made aware of phone calls that were made under the auspices of an infrastructure secretariat doing a review, but the number went back to his office. So I question the report. How else did he compile those numbers? That would be my question.

But my third point is that the people who have been in attendance at this committee on a regular basis have made the decisions on the issues on which we want to go forward. We've been discussing high-speed rail. We have a major project there that has been undertaken. We have spent public money on that trip to the United States, and that needs to be dealt with. We have Bill C-310 coming forward. We have the legislation on the capital commission that needs to be done. And those of us who were here had made the decision quite some time ago that we were going to be discussing the Arctic, and that is nowhere on our agenda at this point in time.

I suggest that this is an inappropriate motion for us to be discussing, and I am going to be voting against it.

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

To my mind, most of what's been said here would lend itself well to the Parliamentary Budget Officer speaking before us. I think Mr. Laframboise has a good point, that the motion may not outline exactly what the Parliamentary Budget Officer would bring forward to discuss his knowledge and analysis of the government's infrastructure spending. So he's going to come before us to explain what he understands of his knowledge of that infrastructure spending. It would probably be a good thing to have that identified, as well as the analysis.

Over the past six months, I've made requests as well that we have the criteria for the infrastructure program early in front of this committee. That was stonewalled by the government, by the Conservative members. I feel we've neglected our work in this area right from day one with the infrastructure spending. We didn't bring these new programs in front of this committee for examination. We didn't understand what the criteria were for the distribution of funds and how those funds would impact the development of infrastructure in this country. We chose not to look at it at all.

This committee made a choice in April and May not to examine the infrastructure spending, and I can refer to the records on that. I think both Mr. Kennedy and I made representations at the time that it would be a useful thing to do. Now I think it would be useful and would clear the air. If the government is so proud of its record in infrastructure spending, I don't know why it wouldn't want to see the Parliamentary Budget Officer here, describing to all of us exactly how the expenditures have been taking place—an independent analysis that we can all trust so we can all put this to bed.

I see this as being a win-win situation for the infrastructure committee, and it could be a win for the government as well. I don't understand the reluctance of the government to see this kind of endeavour take place. Then we could get the actual numbers out there and understand the regional distribution and the kinds of arrangements that were set up between the provinces and the federal government to make these funds work for Canadians. I assume that is part of the work that is very important for us to do as the transport and infrastructure committee.

So I could support this motion. It could be fleshed out with the particular details through an amendment perhaps. But I don't see this as something we should be avoiding.

• (1645)

The Chair: Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

I am disappointed. It would appear that some members of the committee are afraid to get the facts on infrastructure spending.

[*English*]

Given concerns and the accountability dogma that some people have, it is passing strange that nothing Mr. Jean has said is actually available. The hard data is there, and I refer people to the website where they can actually see lists.

On the government website, the pricing of each program is set as between \$100,000 and \$1 million. Between \$1 million and \$5 million there's a breathtaking lack of accountability. Given previous

statements by members here, I thought members didn't necessarily want to be complicit in anything about hiding the failure of the job creation program. I think good reasons can be put forward. There can be explanations. There are things that can be gainsaid by someone sitting in that chair and giving us the opportunity to get at actual facts.

Mr. Jean has given several numbers on British Columbia, all of which contradict information from his own department. In other words, the ISF program is not the size he indicated. The number of projects can only be validated if... The government, in one press release, says it has adopted a program that is actually the British Columbia government's infrastructure program from March 13.

Now, I say to the members opposite and

[*Translation*]

and to the member from the Bloc Québécois, with the utmost respect,

[*English*]

that we don't have to agree with one another to not be able to find grounds under which facts will have themselves on the table. I invite Mr. Jean to any public forum that he might wish to attend to debate the veracity of facts and opinion. I think it would bore this committee; it's not what I'm proposing. What I'm proposing to this committee is that the duly appointed officer...and with greatest respect to Mr. Laframboise,

[*Translation*]

the Auditor General has a different responsibility in terms of expenditures, once they are complete.

[*English*]

And the question right now, while this program is in progress, is whether this unusual outlay of funds, this unusual program that was put together to do it, is working for Canadians.

Right now we have 408,000 more people unemployed in this country than last October, and 175,000 more people have lost their jobs since the budget. In the construction industry, which you'd think we would see impacted, anything that Mr. Jean, or the Prime Minister, or the minister have given us by way of assurances... Again, 80% is the number people keep using, Mr. Jean, and up to 90% today. But if that were happening, then the number of people working in construction would surely be impacted, and yet the only discernible impact is that there are 108,000 fewer people working in construction, according to Statistics Canada numbers, than this time last year—and 75,000 fewer since the budget.

And again, given the lack of concern or curiosity being expressed so far, I would think that if the members of the government were truly confident their program were working and if they could produce the numbers and list to back up those claims, they would not be afraid of the Parliamentary Budget Officer being the arbiter to make sure those are done in an independent forum. I think it really and truly does beg the question

And I would say, Mr. Chair, this is a very modest request. It doesn't require anyone here to change their idea about the efficacy of government. It affirms a position that various people from various parties have said they would like to have, and I understand that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has prepared information and is prepared to put it forward. I think he's prepared it for the finance committee and has served notice to that committee that the information is forthcoming, and he's been in discussions with the chair, who's working with him very cooperatively. But on the particular matter of the overall infrastructure stimulus program, if it doesn't come to this committee, it's only because this committee is afraid to see it.

This is the infrastructure committee. How could it be that for all of these months, the infrastructure committee is afraid to look at what's happened with infrastructure spending? How could that be possible? Under what possible grounds could this committee give up its responsibilities towards the Canadian public in that regard? It's the only committee in Parliament that can accomplish this, and I would say, with the greatest of respect, that I appreciate the work being done on high-speed rail. I appreciate that we're also working on it at the very same time as there is a study taking place, and the parameters for that are set for one year. If there are problems with infrastructure—if there are—then it's important that they be dealt with now, because there are hundreds of thousands of unemployed Canadians who should not be forced to go through a winter without jobs if there should be some correction done to these programs.

I would say, therefore, not to take away from what the government has put forward so far as its agenda for this committee, there should be more than room for these people and dollars to be examined.

So Mr. Chair, I look forward to Mr. Jean taking me up on my challenge to come and meet me in any public forum, under any set of debating rules, and table before the public his numbers from the government, because unfortunately from the standpoint of the assurance from Ms. Hoepfner, when you look in the actual report tabled in Saint John a week ago, there are no claims made in it about jobs created by the infrastructure stimulus program. They're entirely absent. Only a handful of other ministries, for example INAC, puts forward that they've created 150 jobs in their clinic program, 150 jobs in their other program. Those are the numbers, and at least they're there and are straightforward. That's not what the ministry of transportation and infrastructure put forward in its report on infrastructure. Not only is there no basis for the numbers, but there is no number being forward in terms of the number of jobs being created.

I think for an allocation of money to be made on the premise of creating jobs...and here we are eight months later without the government so far having put forward any numbers or any justification. When members of Parliament are given the chance to be here in committee and spend their time looking at useful things, to say that's not useful...I do not know what the members of the government are afraid of. What do they think they're going find if the Parliamentary Budget Office comes forward with numbers?

I think this is your chance to be vindicated from all the calumny that Mr. Jean and others are alleging is taking place. And here's the other thing I would say to the members opposite: when we were calling the various offices of municipalities, who were very

cooperative all around the country, they were being followed by phone calls from the Department of Infrastructure, so we know the Department of Infrastructure was making phone calls. We know they have a database. And on September 16 they told the Parliamentary Budget Officer that he can't have their database.

• (1650)

So despite the act of Parliament that says the Parliamentary Budget Officer should have access to the information within government—according to rules that protect the operation of government—they have been denied access. But he does have information, he does have value to bring to this discussion, and I would hope the members opposite would reconsider.

I'm happy to take any alternative motion they like. They can put any safeguards in they want, as long as the Parliamentary Budget Officer can bring forward what he knows and look at the programs. I'm very happy to accept any amendments whatsoever from the government that would make sure it's a fair examination, scrupulously fair to the government and scrupulously fair to its objectives, and so on.

In its absence, it speaks volumes for why the government would not want to hear from this officer of Parliament.

• (1655)

The Chair: I have five more people on the list and then I'm going to close debate and ask for the question.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeffrey Watson (Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've listened to the original defence of the motion put forward by Mr. Kennedy. He mentioned large gaps. I thought he was going to link that to his attendance record at this committee, but sadly he did not. The only thing missing at this committee, to answer Mr. Kennedy, is usually him.

I note that the media are here today, which is a rarity at this committee. And why is that so, Mr. Chair? That's because most of the work we do is not politically sexy, though it's important to the interests of the country. We have a very solid record at this committee of doing an awful lot of things. I find the media only show up when Mr. Kennedy shows up. Quite frankly, that's an offence to this committee, every member sitting around here, and the hard work we do.

I will say that the only time they show up is when it's an opportunity to politicize the work of this committee. For example, when Minister Baird comes to the committee, suddenly Mr. Kennedy is here, media in tow. Or today, with an opportunity to flog his specious pet project, his little report, here come the media in tow. Quite frankly, it hurts the good reputation of this committee, and quite frankly, if it was up to me, he wouldn't be on this committee. But that's the choice of his leader. It's a poor one at that.

We have just finished approving a very ambitious agenda. We have lots of important issues to tackle; legislation is coming to this committee, and an important high-speed rail study. I can tell you that people in Windsor are looking forward to the report on that. That could very well affect our future there. We have other important work with a lot of investment in it, and quite frankly, in the interests of redeeming the reputation of this committee in the public eye with the media watching, I suggest it's time to get on with the important work of this committee and reject the motion in front of us right now. I will be voting against it in the interest of upholding the good name of this committee and the work we do here.

Let's get off the politicization of this committee and get back to the work people that expect us to do. Some of it is, again, not politically sexy but nonetheless very important to communities all across the country. So I will be voting against it.

I encourage Mr. Kennedy to show up a little more at this committee and participate in some of the other maybe more mundane and less politically sexy work we do here. I would strongly encourage him to do that.

I'm actually glad, Mr. Chair, that we tackled this issue in the second hour and not the first hour, because I'm sure Mr. Kennedy would have left the room after the first hour. I'm sick and tired of it. It's an insult to the committee and the work we do day to day when he's not here.

Mr. Chair, I'll be voting against the motion.

The Chair: Ms. Hoepfner.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would agree with my colleague Mr. Watson. I will not be supporting this motion.

I think there is a high level of frustration on all sides, because we are working very hard on this committee. As Mr. Watson said, it's not always popular, extremely interesting work. There is not media here covering it, and it's not a joke. These are serious issues we're dealing with.

We have an obligation to reflect the priorities of Canadians, not our own political agendas. That's something we've been very careful to do here. We really want to listen to what Canadians are talking about and reflect on what they want us to speak about.

My concern is that this is just another attempt on the part of some Liberal members to try to find a way to force an unnecessary election. They have no reason. Canadians don't want an election, so what are they trying to do? They find a little pet project or a little pet issue they can wave around and try to get some media attention.

The fact is that we are hearing from mayors, reeves, and premiers across the country who are thrilled with what we're doing. They're thrilled with the stimulus package. Finally somebody is paying attention to the needs they have. They've been ignored for 13 long years. Finally we're responding to them. We're getting this money out faster than any government in history. And what are we doing here? We're taking time to argue a political point, which is ridiculous. So I will not be supporting it.

I would encourage you, my honourable colleague, to come to the committee. Again, we have some really strong goodwill on this committee. We've travelled together, we've done this work together, and I think it would build the credibility that you would have on the committee if you would show up a little more often.

• (1700)

The Chair: Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would agree with Mr. Bevington and Mr. Kennedy, because when it comes to telling us we affect the credibility of the committee, we can ask the Parliamentary Budget Officer to come and appear before us. In fact, it would give us the credibility that we are committed to accountability and transparency. In fact, if that is the model Mr. Harper hangs the election on, then his team should not be worried about bringing that accountability and transparency to Canadians, and the priority for Canadians is the stimulus funds. I can tell you, I can speak for my riding, I can speak for Surrey and North Delta, by saying only 16% of the funds that were promised have gone into that community. I can tell you there are two ridings there that got zero projects. Most of the projects that are allocated are to the Conservative ridings. If you are not worried about that, then let the budget officer come forward and bring that truth forward.

Mayors and councillors—Mr. Chair, I'm talking to the same mayors and councillors and they are telling me one thing, that there is only one model, and that is the gas tax model brought in by the Right Honourable Paul Martin.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order has been made. Mr. Mayes is on a point of order.

Mr. Colin Mayes: There are two motions before us and Mr. Dhaliwal is speaking to the second motion, isn't that right?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: No.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Then why are you talking about the allocation of the infrastructure money, that it's not being allocated equally? That is what you were talking about a minute ago. Is that correct?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Again, I may—

Mr. Colin Mayes: That's going to be dealt with in the second motion, is it not? We're now dealing with the motion that says that Mr. Kevin Page be invited to appear before this committee.

There are two different issues here and two different motions, so let's speak to the motion that we're dealing with now, the first motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Chair, both motions are very related, because it's all about infrastructure money that we're talking about. I personally see that if the committee members on the Conservative side are not worried about the accountability and transparency of the government and the minister, they should welcome this decision. So I will be supporting this motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier, I reached out to the government. I still hold that I would prefer that we write a letter to Mr. Page to explain what we want, ensure that he is able to answer and find out how much time he needs to do it. I know that he is very occupied with other committees. That was the reason for my suggestion, but it was rejected by the Liberals.

I repeat, I am against this motion. I will ask the parliamentary secretary to look into it and see whether this could not come from the government....

I do not want to call on an official or a department head without giving him time to prepare so that he can answer all of our questions. He should have the chance to tell us in writing what he will need before coming here. This is how the Liberals do things, and we can see where it gets them. Personally, this is not how I do things. For that reason, I am reaching out to the government. Think about it, and get back to us later.

If Mr. Kennedy wants to move another motion, he can do so. He has the right to give 48 hours notice, and he can move one motion per meeting, if he wants. But, if possible, I would like to know whether Mr. Page can answer certain questions that we have and how much he would need to do so. I will give the government time to get back to us on this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Jean, and then the final comment to Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you, Mr. Tweed and Mr. Chair.

I just want to say this. First of all, in response to Mr. Kennedy's comments, it's here in www.buildingcanada-chantierscanada.gc.ca regions. It's all here. You mentioned it wasn't available. It is available on the website. If you can't find it, I'd be happy to help you do that.

I'd like to table that, Mr. Chair—it's not in both official languages—or at least table the first page of it, so that Mr. Kennedy can access the website.

My issue is this. I think the best article I've seen on this particular issue is from the *The Record* in the Waterloo region, from Gord Hobbs, the director of engineering services at Jennimark Inc. in Cambridge. He explains in this article that first the municipality generates an application for funding, submits it, and awaits approval. That's one month minimum.

Second, the city's engineers specify exactly what work is required and issue tenders to a minimum of three competent contractors. That's another month.

Third, contractors assess the requirements and respond with fixed pricing. That's one more month.

Fourth, the city's engineers review the bids and negotiate changes, and the winner is selected. That takes another month.

Fifth, the selected contractor's engineers design the repairs, meeting all applicable safety codes, and plan the day-to-day work to be performed. That takes two months, minimum.

Sixth, specialty materials and components are ordered, received, and checked for compliance. Add on another two months.

Seventh, machinery and people are scheduled to assemble at a given start date. That takes another month.

Finally, workers start digging.

If we sum up the contributions to delay, as Ignatieff in this case refers to it, we see that it's improbable to have publicly visible progress on any project in less than nine months. Since the stimulus package was announced on January 27 and voted on later by the Liberals who agreed to it, I quote Mr. Hobbs: "it would be a miracle if work had started before October 27th. I think it's remarkable that 12 per cent of this work is already under way! Obviously many people have been working overtime", referring to our government.

Seven billion dollars has been committed this year so far. The most the Liberal government ever did was less than \$3 billion. So \$7 billion has been committed already by this government. But the most important issue here is that Mr. Page has to bring forward.... And I think all of you have to recognize that it's amazing, but MPs don't go out and dig. In fact, we don't have anything to do with the implementation of the work. It's the municipalities, it's the provinces, it's the cities, it's the towns, it's the hamlets. It's our partners. We are funding partners. We are not the people who get out there and do the projects. So it is their responsibility.

Is Mr. Page going to make a thousand phone calls and cite himself as the infrastructure secretariat? My question—and I think the real question here today, and the question I want answered by Mr. Kennedy—is who did he represent, who did his office represent themselves to be when they made these phone calls, and who did he call? That's the question I have for him, and I really think, in all honesty, that's a real question. Who did his office represent themselves to be?

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll defer to Mr. Kennedy for a closing comment. I ask that you try to be brief if you can, please. We have another motion.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Certainly, Mr. Chair.

It is very difficult to understand that if members opposite really have the conviction that there is a program out there worth celebrating, that it actually can be substantiated as opposed to advertising bought for it or expensive money spent on announcements and signage—everybody is required to put up signs even if their project isn't under way, and so on—if that's the real intent of the government, for what possible reason could they be afraid? Except the constructive suggestion of Mr. Laframboise....

[Translation]

Perhaps that is another way, but today,

[English]

I think it's very important for government members to express themselves as to whether or not they have that conviction. This doesn't in any way threaten a government that really believes that what it's doing is creating jobs; it doesn't have any impact on whether the government itself will actually function. But it does say that for all these long months, the government, through your participation here, is afraid to actually review its own actions.

I would say to people who would say that the government has nothing to do with it that your own Treasury Board guidelines require you to be involved. Your own instructions—and in fact contractual arrangements with the municipalities and provinces—require it to report.

I would say to the members opposite who marvel at the fact that the Department of Infrastructure would make inquiries that they have made inquiries. I would say that if Mr. Jean, who didn't respond to that point, is not aware of this, then it's unfortunate that they don't brief the parliamentary secretary. They have made hundreds of phone calls.

They have a database. That database, under the act of Parliament, is supposed to be shared with the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and yet on September 16, they said no. So this is a chance not to politicize but rather to depoliticize.

I don't know why Mr. Jean disagrees so vehemently with Mr. Flaherty. Mr. Flaherty said clearly to the Canadian public that 120 days after the budget, the project should begin. That was May 26, and at that date—we have information from another department that tells us about the money spent—almost zero money was spent on stimulus, almost zero.

We are happy to be corrected by a government prepared to be forthright, honest, and transparent. But what we say here is that Mr. Flaherty's commitment to target is also important at this committee. The conditions were set by Parliament in a variety of ways—we are that branch that votes the money and sets conditions—and we accepted Mr. Flaherty at his word. He said those two things: he said it would start within 120 days, and he said it would target families and communities based on needs.

I would say to you that all of the available information on the website.... We have all of the information from the website, and it's significantly incomplete. But what is complete is that there are provinces such as British Columbia, for example, in which three to four times as much money is being given to the Conservative ridings. It's absolutely clear: it's published; we put it on the website.

If Mr. Jean or anyone opposite actually has the confidence, then publish the data. The data isn't there. You'll find in days coming—in fact, tonight on various media, and so on—that people have been looking in good faith. My opinion is only the opinion of one member of Parliament, and I don't expect it to be followed. But I do expect a committee of Parliament not to back away from its responsibilities in this regard. It's an easy and simple way. All the time we spent today on your refuting what I'm about could have been done much more authoritatively and much more effectively—and much more building the confidence of the public in this particular program—by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

It's passing strange that this is the approach the government seems to want to take. I certainly will take up Mr. Laframboise's invitation or suggestion that at another time, if this motion doesn't succeed today, we bring it forward, because I believe this is the essence of government: being accountable, making people see what's going on, shedding some daylight on what's going on.

Washing your hands, folks, isn't going to work. If you think you can wash your hands of the infrastructure programs, I think you're going to find yourselves mistaken. That's my guess.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

●(1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

The motion is as follows: That the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, be invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities at the earliest opportunity to discuss his knowledge and analysis of the government's infrastructure spending.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: The second notice of motion presented today by Mr. Kennedy is,

That Mr. Gordon Landon, York regional councillor for the Town of Markham, be invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities at the earliest opportunity to discuss his knowledge of the practices of the Conservative government in regard to riding-level spending on infrastructure projects.

Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, this is a chance for the members of the committee to put their views on the public record in the atmosphere of a committee where all sides are able to ask questions and ascertain their version of what actually happened. A former colleague of the members opposite who has become an unintentional whistle-blower about the practices of the Conservative Party has made public comments, on television at least, to say that in order to get funds for projects in local ridings it is vital and in fact essential to be Conservative, because Liberals, in the case of the town of Markham, aren't able to get the same consideration.

Now, I think Mr. Landon, who has since stepped down or been stepped down—it's hard to say exactly what happened there, but he is no longer the candidate—has said at a number of points that he has been influenced by the Conservative Party itself and has not been able to speak his mind.

I don't know whether that's true, but this is a chance for the Conservative Party to show whether or not they agree that Mr. Landon should be stifled in any respect. His words on a television program were that the news he learned had to be sanitized first by the Prime Minister's Office. I know it sounds somewhat provocative, and I'm not subscribing 100%, but I think it's on the public record in the media. I think Mr. Landon would be an instructive witness to this committee in terms of the practices—because he has proclaimed knowledge of those practices—of allocating funds to ridings.

I would suggest again that the dollars that are at stake here for infrastructure are serious, are large, and any member of this committee who wishes to can look at lists and can see essential evidence that there are massive skews, not targeted based on families and communities and need, but rather, skewed to Conservative ridings as a whole, particularly to those of cabinet ministers in some provinces and in some programs, and to recently acquired ridings, and so on.

Again—this is simply for the furtherance of the public debate—to hear from someone who to the best of my knowledge is still a card-carrying member of the Conservative Party himself and who may in his fulsome statements, as distinct from the ones reported in the media, have other explanations and things to add.... Mr. Landon has shown a willingness to speak out publicly and has an independent cast of mind, and I think he would make a useful witness for a committee interested to know whether the program has gone awry and whether there are influences at work that take these funds away from the purposes for which they were voted, which is to create jobs for unemployed Canadians based on need.

•(1715)

The Chair: To comment, we'll hear Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: I have to tell you, Mr. Chair, I think this is nothing short of a witch hunt and, quite frankly, very humorous. I've never met Mr. Langdon; I don't know Mr. Langdon.

Landon? I'm sorry; it shows you I haven't met Mr. Landon. You refer to him as a colleague, but as I say, I've never met him. I've been with the infrastructure department since we came into government. I've been the parliamentary secretary for four years and I have a pretty good idea of the practices, so maybe I would be a better witness, but I'm not going to stand there either.

Mr. Landon, I would suggest, knows nothing about it, and it is a witch hunt, and you're trying to politicize another situation. Quite frankly, I find it a little bit repugnant. As I said, I've been here for four years as the parliamentary secretary and have worked with all parties.

In fact, I'd like to say that the Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, Minister Baird, gave me the ability to administer and research and manage a particular fund, that being the green infrastructure fund. We've actually been fortunate enough to announce two projects, one to an NDP riding and one to a Liberal

riding. I can give you the amounts: \$137 million to the Northwest Transmission Line, taking a huge amount of greenhouse gases off; and \$71 million to Mayo B, in a Liberal riding in the Yukon, which takes five communities off diesel and saves taxpayers \$8 million a year in transportation costs of diesel. No money has gone to a Conservative riding yet under that particular fund.

So I think you're wrong, frankly, and to put it quite bluntly. Knowing what's happening with infrastructure and the communities component of this portfolio, you're just incorrect. I don't think Mr. Landon has anything to add. He's a private citizen. He's no longer a Conservative candidate, and I think he would offer nothing except for a little dance and a jig and maybe some help in some newspaper reporting.

The Chair: Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: First, I had a chance to read Mr. Landon's comments. I do not think that we will learn anything else from him. What is done is done.

I still have one other comment to make. I had the chance to discuss it with Mr. Kennedy. In Quebec, the dollars have been distributed pretty fairly, which is why we did not jump on this bandwagon. Things are somewhat balanced in Quebec. So far, I cannot say that we are totally satisfied, but there is a balance. And so long as discontent does not spread among mayors....

Earlier, the parliamentary secretary said that the federal government was supporting provinces and cities, because they are the ones—along with the municipal officials—making the decisions. In Quebec, they are all on the campaign trail. If the program was not going well, we would hear about it. We are not hearing about it, and it is going fairly well. It seems to be a settling of political scores. There are other arenas for this; I think Mr. Kennedy is well aware of that. Using the committee for this....

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I have nothing to say on this motion.

The Chair: Mr. Kennedy, do you have final comments?

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Unfortunately, there is no public information on funding for the various programs. No exact figures are posted on the Conservative government's Web site.

Quebeckers should know that there is a major delay in announcements, and I am keeping an eye on it. I am not passing judgment on the situation in Quebec, as the information is not available.

I do hope, however, that the government is interested in ensuring that the process for all programs is democratic, honest and transparent, in order to assure all Canadians that the program is pretty fair.

• (1720)

[English]

And on the idea that we don't have any of the information, Mr. Jean is welcome to table with the committee the projects in Quebec, most of which have been announced very late, as in British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Alberta, month and months and months later, when in fact if there had been a gas tax transfer, which in Quebec is handled in a certain kind of way, it would have been part of the budgets of municipalities.

They came to Ottawa—as did the Canadian Construction Association—and said expressly, “If you want to help Canadians get jobs, please put this with a gas tax transfer. It will be in our budgets April 1. And here”—and I believe Quebec municipalities were as forthcoming—“are 1,000 projects that we believe could have shovels in the ground this construction season”.

I agree that it is a little different from province to province, and that's why the Parliamentary Budget Officer would have been helpful. And I agree that Mr. Landon is not going to add to our understanding of the situation in Quebec, and I appreciate that, but he might help us get clues to why there was such a long delay, four or five months, before any dollars were announced. We understand that the ministry did not do its due diligence of the type it described to us in briefings before, and that in fact this did not meet the standard of previous infrastructure programs.

Mr. Landon is, I think, a legitimate, credible person. He is a sitting elected official. He was until very recently acceptable to the Conservative Party as their candidate. He was, I assume, nominated. I don't know if he was contested. He was certainly vetted by the party and seen to be someone who could be their standard bearer, so I don't think his character per se has been brought into question. It's a little ambiguous from some of the comments on the other side, but I never heard anything that would say that. So he's simply someone who could help shed light on some of the practices. He can put to bed some of the concerns, if the members opposite aren't shy or afraid or unable to agree to hear him.

Mr. Jeffrey Watson: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, the internal mechanics of the political party are not relevant to the work of the committee. Were that so, maybe we'd want to call Martin Cauchon to talk about what's going on in Outremont. But that has nothing to do with the business of Canada, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Kennedy, I'll just ask you to wrap up your comments, please.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Again, I appeal to the sense of fairness of the members of the committee. This is the one place we have to bring matters so as to create confidence in this infrastructure program on the part of the public of Canada. The government has an equal opportunity here. Outside of this committee, it really just comes down to an advertising campaign and, frankly, a one-sidedness that could exist.

You want to dispute my numbers. I've put mine up on our website. If you do the same, then people can evaluate, but I think it's better for both of us and for the public that someone independent have a chance to do that. Someone like Mr. Landon gives us a chance to adjudicate whether or not there really is a bias landed within the Conservative Party to allocate the funds in an arbitrary way and to specifically ignore or undermine the unemployed who happen to live in ridings that did not vote Conservative.

The Chair: The motion is put that Mr. Gordon Landon, York regional councillor for the town of Markham, be invited to appear before the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities at the earliest opportunity to discuss his knowledge of the practices of the Conservative government in regard to riding level spending on infrastructure projects.

All those in favour of the motion?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Dhaliwal, we're in the middle of a vote.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: —can we record the vote?

The Chair: I'm in the middle of a vote. I have to complete it.

All those opposed?

(Motion negated)

The Chair: Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Can we record the vote?

The Chair: I couldn't go back. Sorry.

I have a motion from Mr. Volpe. I'll look for direction from the committee, as I know there is a time limit. In order to entertain the motion, we would need to have unanimous consent of the committee to have someone present it on his behalf.

I presume you're here to do that.

Do we have unanimous consent?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Volpe can table his own motion.

An hon. member: That's right.

The Chair: There is no consent.

Mr. Jean.

●(1725)

Mr. Brian Jean: I would like to make a point with the motion. In reference to the motion—

The Chair: It can't be debated.

Mr. Brian Jean: I wasn't going to debate it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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