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CANADA

## Standing Committee on Natural Resources

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, March 23, 2010**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Leon Benoit**



## Standing Committee on Natural Resources

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

• (0900)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC)):** Good morning, everyone.

I think you have all seen the agenda for today. We will be continuing with our discussion and our votes on the main estimates. After that we will deal with the budget for the Chalk River travel. The clerk has indicated, by sending information to you, the potential dates for travel to Chalk River.

We of course open by continuing with Mr. Martin on vote 10.

Go ahead, Mr. Martin.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to make my remarks brief. I only want to summarize my rationale for submitting the motion to remove an amount of money equal to the subsidy to the Asbestos Institute. I would appreciate the time of the committee for about five minutes to go through some of my rationale.

First, Mr. Chairman, I draw your attention to a lead editorial in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* of April last year. I'll read one paragraph from that journal:

In a practice that reeks of hypocrisy, Canada has limited the use of asbestos to prevent the exposure of Canadians to the danger, but it continues to be the world's second largest exporter of asbestos.

It goes on to say:

Canada's government must put an end to this death dealing charade. Canada must immediately drop its opposition to placing chrysotile under the Rotterdam Convention's notification and consent processes and stop funding the Chrysotile Institute. More importantly, Canada should do its part in alleviating the global epidemic of asbestos-related disease by ending the mining and export of chrysotile, as the WHO recommends.

I draw your attention as well, Mr. Benoit, although it's not necessary because this letter is addressed to you as of March 17 of this year.... I'll read only the opening line. It says:

It is to our great disappointment that we are having to write to you again this year to express our dismay in the fact that the federal budget allocates \$250,000 a year to the support of the Chrysotile Institute.

It goes on to say:

We are profoundly disappointed in the federal government's continued support of the Chrysotile Institute and we are asking that the Standing Committee on Natural Resources to recommend that this funding be redirected towards the adoption of a comprehensive strategy to address other aspects of the Asbestos Institute including: immediately setting a clear timetable for phasing out the use and export of asbestos; the implementation of a national surveillance system to track the

health outcomes of people who have been exposed; the creation of a public registry of buildings that contain asbestos;

I should note, Mr. Chairman, that I know most of us do support the Canadian Cancer Society, because they're not only a reputable organization, but they're very cautious in taking strong positions because they know the weight their opinions have. They have such credibility that they're reluctant to speak openly against one substance or another because of the powerful weight they have in the marketplace and commercially for those products. After great deliberation they took this strong position not only to stop funding the Chrysotile Institute but for Canada to join in the global ban on all forms of asbestos.

I draw your attention to a letter from the Université Laval. They open their letter to Prime Minister Harper by saying:

We are profoundly disturbed that your government plans to continue to fund the Chrysotile Institute in the new federal budget.

They go on to say:

It is time to stop this wasteful use of public funds which is harming Canada's scientific and moral reputation around the world and exposes innocent people to harm from asbestos.

That's signed by Dr. Fernand Turcotte, professor emeritus in the Faculty of Medicine at the Université Laval, and Dr. Pierre Auger, professor of preventive medicine at the Université Laval. It's also co-signed by Dr. Colin Soskolne, School of Public Health, University of Alberta; Dr. John Last, of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Ottawa; Dr. Tim Takaro, the Faculty of Health Sciences of Simon Fraser University; and Dr. Murray Finkelstein, Department of Family and Community Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto.

I simply point that out to show that this is a cross-country initiative, not isolated to the Université Laval, to try to convince the government to stop funding the Asbestos Institute.

• (0905)

I draw your attention to another document, Mr. Chairman, that I'm happy to circulate in both languages, if necessary. It's from the Environmental Health Trust. Again, I will read just the opening paragraphs:

As scientists from twenty-eight countries, dedicated to protecting public health, we appeal to you to respect the overwhelmingly consistent body of scientific evidence and the considered judgment of the World Health Organization...that all forms of asbestos have been shown to be deadly and that safe use of any form of asbestos has proven impossible anywhere in the world.

We appeal to you to act honourably and to listen to Quebec's own public health experts, prominent health experts across Canada, as well as the Canadian Medical Association, the Quebec Cancer Society, and the World Health Organization... who have all called for use and export of asbestos to end.

This is signed, as I say, by 120 scientists from 28 different countries around the world.

I also have a letter from the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, addressed to Mr. Ignatieff, but equally applicable here. It states:

On behalf of the 4,700 members of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, I call upon you to honour your commitment that the Liberal Party no longer support the asbestos industry....

Cutting off support to the Chrysotile Institute is one way to show tangible opposition to the export of asbestos. The people of Quebec, Canada and the world deserve no less than unequivocal opposition to the mining and export of this deadly substance.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I need only a few more minutes here to go through this.

I have a letter from a Mr. Marc Hindry, a professor at the Université Denis Diderot in Paris. He was sued by the Chrysotile Institute for saying that Quebec asbestos causes cancer, a known fact, and the Chrysotile Institute used Canadian taxpayers' dollars in a slap suit to silence this university professor in France. I was a party to that suit as the witness in the court case. We found it appalling that Canadian tax dollars are being used to silence legitimate scientists and activists around the world, who are simply pointing out the obvious, but that's the nature of the thuggery of the Chrysotile Institute and how they use our tax dollars.

I would point out that the *Times Colonist* newspaper had a lead editorial called, "End asbestos support now". The opening paragraph reads:

The federal government's inexplicable support of the chrysotile asbestos industry is an appalling example of pandering for votes in the face of scientific proof of the substance's health hazards. Ottawa should recognize the dangers posed by the substance and immediately end its export....

That support has to stop, as do our deadly exports of chrysotile. These practices have tarnished Canada's reputation on the world stage, with no gains except profits for a fading industry. That's support of the Chrysotile Institute.

*La Presse* of September 2009 states that, according to the Chrysotile Institute, only "miniscule ideological groups and extremists oppose asbestos". It says:

Nothing could be further from the truth. The organizations calling for a ban on asbestos are amongst the most well-known and respected organizations in the world—the World Health Organization...the Canadian Cancer Society, the International Labour Organization, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Medical Association, the International Trade Union Confederation....

It goes on to say:

This infamy is no longer defensible....

It's time to align ourselves with the truth.

This was an editorial signed by 16 university professors, doctors, toxicologists, and occupational hygienists in Quebec: Pierre Gosselin, Dr. Fernand Turcotte, Dr. Benoît Gingras, Évelyne Cambron, etc. Several are professors at universities at Montreal, Laval, and Sherbrooke.

There's a lead editorial of the *Ottawa Citizen* called "Immoral exports". The opening paragraph reads:

For too long the federal government, to its shame, has denied and avoided evidence about the dangers of chrysotile asbestos, a product that Canada mines and exports around the world....

Canada's reputation as a moral player on the international stage is being jeopardized by its willingness to ship asbestos to some of the poorest parts of the world....

Canada's willingness to peddle asbestos to the world's most vulnerable populations, all for the sake of a few dollars in Quebec, is a long-standing disgrace. The current federal government is notorious for its ability to dismiss empirical data and the counsel of scientific experts, but perhaps the recent Health Canada report will be one study that even this government will be too embarrassed to ignore.

● (0910)

There was an open letter to Michael Ignatieff, again, from a woman who asked him a question at a town hall meeting in Victoria:

There can be no question, therefore, of the Liberal position on the upcoming vote on March 23, 2010, of the standing committee on natural resources to approve yet another annual allotment...to the Chrysotile Institute.

The world of independent scientists, preeminent health organizations, victims of asbestos disease, and concerned citizens everywhere are relying on your active leadership TO VOTE AGAINST THE CONTRIBUTION OF ANY FURTHER FUNDS TO SUPPORT CANADA'S SHAMEFUL ROLE IN THE PERPETUATION OF THIS MORAL INFAMY.

That's Christine Anderson from Victoria, B.C.

I'll close with one final letter, from Michaela Keyserlingk from Ottawa, who we have been working with for quite some time because her husband was dying of asbestos-related cancer. The letter, written on Thursday, March 18, says:

Yesterday I received a hand written note from Mr Ignatieff with his condolences at the death of my husband a recent chrysotile asbestos cancer victim. In his letter he assured me that the Liberal Party will no longer support the chrysotile industry, which clearly includes the Chrysotile Institute. To my great disappointment I learned today that a motion to cut the funding to the Chrysotile Institute was not supported by the Liberal Committee Members Alan Tonks, Navdeep Bains and Geoff Regan. I assume that this was just a breakdown of communication and that you will rectify this situation at the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources....

Please let me know as soon as possible that this misunderstanding has been resolved,

Yours sincerely, Michaela Keyserlingk.

With that flurry of communication, I would like to appeal to the committee one last time that we send a symbolic gesture to the asbestos industry that the Government of Canada will no longer provide what I call corporate welfare to these corporate serial killers. This is a time of economic restraint where we are all supposed to be tightening our belts, where every government department is supposed to find ways to trim their budgets. Why in God's name would we be handing out significant amounts of money to people who I call a bunch of thugs?

As I know Clément Godbout, the chairman and CEO of the Chrysotile Institute, I can say without any hesitation or fear of contradiction that the guy is a traitor to the working class, a thug, and a shill for an industry that's unworthy of the support of this government. So I'd like to move my motion, or if I've moved it already, ask you to put it to a recorded vote as to the will of the committee to continue this support to the Chrysotile Institute.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Regan.

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Can you read the motion before we vote?

● (0915)

**The Chair:** Yes.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Vote 10—Grants and contributions.....1,877,636,000

**The Chair:** Pat Martin has moved that vote 10, in the amount of \$1,877,636,000, be reduced by \$250,000.

A recorded division has been asked for.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Are we voting on vote 10 or the amendment?

**The Chair:** We're voting on the amendment proposed by Mr. Martin, and there is a recorded division.

Thank you, Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** I've asked for a recorded vote.

**The Chair:** We'll have a recorded vote.

(Amendment negatived: nays 9; yeas 1)

(Vote 10 agreed to on division)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Atomic Energy of Canada Limited

Vote 15—Payments to Atomic Energy of Canada Limited for operating and capital expenditures.....\$102,452,000

Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission

Vote 20—Program expenditures.....\$40,630,000

National Energy Board

Vote 25—Program expenditures.....\$46,205,000

Northern Pipeline Agency

Vote 35—Program expenditures.....\$1,203,000

(Votes 15, 20, 25, and 30 agreed to on division)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the main estimates 2010-11 to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We have one other order of business.

Mr. Tonks.

**Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.):** I have a point of order.

Mr. Chairman, I know it can't be recorded in the minutes, and I'm sorry that Mr. Martin has left, but when we are having a vote, and out of respect for the members of this committee, and in fact out of respect for the issue that has been represented by Mr. Martin.... When a member voted, Mr. Martin made references such as "Why don't you stand up? You have no backbone. Why don't you stay vertical?" I will say that I take great exception to that, and I hope the committee does as well.

I stood up. It's not because there's any less empathy, compassion, or understanding for the issue that he has put on the table. This will be a continuing issue. It's not finished yet. But as of this moment, the committee in its wisdom and I as an individual have exercised what I take to be a great responsibility.

That kind of characterization is the very thing Mr. Martin was accusing the industry of doing, calling them shills, thugs, and so on. For him to then use the same tactic with members of this committee, I find it most regrettable. I wish he was here, because I am going to tell him the way I feel. I'm quite overwhelmed by it. In 35 years I've experienced a great many personal attacks, with the characterization of being inhuman and so on, but not very often from colleagues.

I'm putting that before the committee. For what it's worth, I will talk to him. I find it so regrettable.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you for bringing that up, Mr. Tonks. I heard the comments. Had they continued I would have made an issue of it, but I'm pleased you did.

Let's move now to the discussion on Chalk River.

Mr. Harris.

● (0920)

**Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** I think I'd like to go on record as well, following Mr. Tonks' comments. I heard the comments of Mr. Martin as well. I'm not astounded by Mr. Martin's display of hypocrisy. He is the same person who stands up to the media and so proudly says the decorum in the House of Commons is appalling, we need to act like grown men and not like children, etc. For him to then display this type of unacceptable behaviour towards his colleagues is hypocrisy to the greatest extent that I can think of. He should be ashamed of himself.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Madame Brunelle, you've asked for the floor as well, and then Mr. Cullen—

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Mr. Chairman, I think these are points of privilege more than they are points of order. I don't think there's any order that's been broken. Just for the clarity of our conversation, if what members are suggesting is that their privilege has been tread upon, I think we should say that just to correct our conversation rather than say that there is any order broken.

**Mr. Richard Harris:** Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** It could probably be considered either, Mr. Cullen.

I have Madame Brunelle on the list. Then hopefully we can get on to the next issue of business.

Madame Brunelle, maybe you are bringing up something else.

[Translation]

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Point of order, Mr. Chair. A document has just been handed out in English only. It is an email from Doug Christensen on Chalk River. That is not acceptable.

[English]

**The Chair:** I believe it is in both official languages, Madame Brunelle. It might just be an error in distribution. We'll see. We'll try to get that rectified. Of course, we do have a rule that anything distributed must be in both official languages, and appropriately so.

To the dates on the Chalk River trip, we have to approve the budget if it's your wish to do that. The clerk has been in touch with AECL and they suggested the week of April 12. So either day the week of April 12. Is there any discussion?

Mr. Cullen, and then Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** I have a small question, through you to the parliamentary secretary, and even Ms. Gallant, who might know. AECL recently announced they will not be opening Chalk River on the expected date. Are they expecting to be open by April 12? Are we going to be able to see a functioning reactor or are we going to be seeing a place still in repair? It changes the orientation of our study if the thing is actually working or not. So I'm wondering whether Mr. Anderson or Ms. Gallant might actually know the latest or current state of the reactors or an expectation for April 12?

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson is on the list to speak. It may be about that or it may be about something else.

Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I'll respond to that, but I do want to speak as well.

As far as I know, the public declarations by AECL, which are their weekly update, say it will be sometime in May or towards the end of May when the reactor will be up and running again according to their latest projections.

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

**Mr. David Anderson:** As far as we're concerned, I think the week of April 12 works, except for the fact that we did ask Mr. Martin if he would let us pass the travel budget at a previous meeting, and the Liaison Committee was meeting that day. I don't know when they're meeting, but this has to go through here first and then go to the Liaison Committee when they meet. So if they're not meeting until after April 12, we will be delayed until after April 12. If they're meeting before, I assume we can take it to them, and it doesn't look, from the size of the budget, like this should choke them up too much.

I will just point out that we made the request to Mr. Martin that he allow us to pass this and he was not willing to give up the floor on Thursday, so there may be a delay because of that.

**The Chair:** We can't be certain that the Liaison Committee will have an opportunity to pass this before April 12, although I have gotten some word that it might be. We'll see. We'll sure try to have that happen if those dates are acceptable.

Is there any further discussion on the dates?

Mr. Regan.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Chair, I'm going to suggest April 13, the Tuesday, as the Thursday is a problem for me.

•(0925)

**The Chair:** Is Tuesday, April 13, acceptable, assuming we can get the approval of the Liaison Committee on the budget for travel?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Seeing no disagreement, that is the date we will try for.

I think you've all seen the budget. It is for \$3,204. It is dated for the spring. Is that acceptable?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Seeing agreement, I will submit that to the Liaison Committee.

That is the business of the committee today.

Thank you all very much for your cooperation.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** What's happening Thursday?

**The Chair:** What's happening Thursday? We're still looking to get the final approval. We're trying for the three groups and we'll see whether we're successful. It looks like two have been confirmed, and hopefully we'll have all three.

I will see everyone on Thursday.

This meeting stands adjourned to the call of the chair.

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