



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 060

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Monday, April 17, 2023



Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 60 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, a.k.a. the mighty OGGO and also known as the only committee that matters.

I have a few things to go through first before we start recognizing folks. If you're sitting at home enjoying this, please like and subscribe to the OGGO channel.

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, March 22, the committee is meeting today to discuss committee business. I have a few things I need to go over first. They're all non-controversial, simple ones, but we need guidance for scheduling matters and other issues.

The first one is the President of the Treasury Board is available to come to the committee for the main estimates on May 3.

I see everyone's perfectly fine with that. Thank you very much.

Another issue, just going back to ArriveCan, is that the Auditor General is studying ArriveCan as well. I would like committee's approval that we make all of the ArriveCan documents, the unredacted ones, available to her office so she does not have to go through the whole process and the cost of getting the documents as well.

Are we fine with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I suspect, when the time comes, we'll ask the same for the McKinsey ones, but that she's doing ArriveCan first is my understanding.

We have a couple of budget items to go over. The budgets have been distributed by the clerk. The first one is Bill C-290, an act to amend the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act. It's \$14,000, but because it's all internal—I think the witnesses are all going to be in person—I don't think we'll spend any of it. However, we need the committee's approval for that.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you very much.

The second one is for the main estimates, 2023-24, study. It's \$3,000. It's the same thing. It's all internal people, but we need that approved.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Excellent.

The third one is the never-ending shipbuilding study. Because of the dates around what we approved for the last one, I need committee's approval for the clerk to redraft a new budget by May 19. This will just be a backstop in case we decide to travel from July to December. We're just updating the numbers from the last time around. Are we all fine with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Wonderful.

Now, before we get to anyone else, I'm going to turn things over to Diana who's going to give us a brief on the updated report.

Ms. Diana Ambrozias (Committee Researcher): Hello.

There were a number of changes that you requested we make to the report, a handful of them. The first one is that we are proposing a title, which is to be more in line with other similar reports in the House. The title proposed is "Question of Privilege on Providing Documents to the Committee."

Another change we made was, since the last report, another department, ESDC, finished their submission, so we updated the number of departments that had not completed.... The number that have not completed is now eight instead of nine, and we updated the date of that to April 6.

We also removed the annex because that, again, is not a normal procedure in a report to the House. It doesn't really have any extra information that the House needs to make a finding of contempt or lack of privilege.

Then, we added several paragraphs from Ms. Vignola's motion about the quality of the French-language documents. We singled out three organizations: Canada Post, Public Sector Pension Investment Board and ESDC. The first two submitted unverified AI translations, quite openly. They acknowledged that's what they did. ESDC had English pages where French pages should have been submitted. There were a number of English pages in the French version of the document. When they resubmitted it, with all the extra 227 pages, those English pages were still there.

Then finally, we added an explicit statement that we would like to draw a breach of privilege to the House at the very end.

That's it.

The Chair: Thank you, Diana.

Now, I see a couple of people already, but I have to mention a couple of things.

The motion from Mr. Barrett under consideration was:

That the clerk of the committee send further correspondence to the departments to have them comply with the order from the committee; and that those departments who do not comply with the committee's order by Wednesday, April 12, 2023, be reported to the House.

That is the outstanding motion, but I have to rule it out of order because obviously the date has passed. That was from March 29. We're past that date. Given that the proposed motion is no longer valid, I rule the motion out of order. If there are any motions for the draft report....

I see Mr. Barrett, and then Mr. Johns.

● (1545)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the work the analysts undertook over the course of the last two weeks. We received this halfway through the last week, so they did it with two fewer working days than they would normally have—the Good Friday and Easter Monday holidays, which I hope they were able to take while preparing this.

I'd like to draw attention to the section on the disregard for the requirement for ESDC to properly respect their obligations to provide documents in both official languages. That is a critical component of the breach of privilege that occurred here. Of course, we hear the terms “breach of privilege” and “contempt”, and sometimes they are used haphazardly. When it comes to the power of a committee to send for persons and papers, that is not negotiable, though we have negotiated and given multiple opportunities. Those dates are very carefully, meticulously outlined in this report. The same is true with respect to the attention paid to the disregard for the obligation to respect both official languages. I don't need to give anyone lessons on minority language rights, but it sounds as if someone needs to give a lesson to ESDC on minority language rights.

That's why I move that the seventh report, as tabled by the analysts today, be adopted and reported to the House.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

I'm sorry. Is that as amended? Just to verify....

Mr. Michael Barrett: Indeed.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, you had your hand up after Mr. Barrett. Was it on this issue or was there something else?

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): I had a motion I was going to move, but it sounds as if there's a motion on the floor.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, perhaps you can help us, actually, while I have the floor.

Have you checked to see how much money we've spent in this committee to get these documents, or does the clerk have a rough estimate of how much money we've spent? It's a lot of documents. We're talking thousands of pages of documents from departments, and it takes time. We know that. It's evident that five weeks was not enough time for what we were requesting, given the limited resources the government has, especially the translation bureau. I completely support what Mr. Barrett said around respecting minority rights, as well as Ms. Vignola's concerns. They are all of our concerns. The quality of translation is completely unacceptable. When our office has ATIP requests, they often take months to get back, even for just a small number of documents, let alone tens of thousands of pages, even in their original language and not translated.

Can you share whether you—or the clerk—have a ballpark figure of how much money has been spent to get access to these documents? Are we into the tens of millions of dollars, right now?

I don't want us to be spending more money getting these documents and getting them translated than McKinsey got in contracts from the federal government. I want to be mindful of taxpayers' dollars and where we're going. Initially, this whole study started with concerns there was a link from the government to McKinsey. Later, it became about McKinsey and their connection to the toxic drug crisis. Now, it's about parliamentary privilege. I'm not saying these aren't valid concerns, but I am concerned about the time this committee is spending, where we're going with this and the amount of resources we're spending.

I take my part of the responsibility here, as well, on this committee. However, I'd like to get some idea of where we're going and how much money we've spent. It is important we get an idea, in order to make some sound decisions here at this table. I know our greater committee concern—

• (1550)

The Chair: Do you want me to actually address the question or are you going to—

Mr. Gord Johns: Sure.

Before you do that, I know that our committee's goal is to look at outsourcing as a whole. We need to get to that and I want to get to that. We're spending a lot of time on this.

Yes, if you could answer, that would be great.

The Chair: I don't have it, but you can submit an Order Paper question, I'm sure, and get the answer.

I'm not sure, Madam Clerk, if you would have a response.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aimée Belmore): I'm looking to see whether or not I have a response. I'm checking currently, but what I would ask for is clarification. Are you asking specifically about the McKinsey documents that the committee was obligated to translate or the greater documents that the government was also obligated to translate?

There are two streams of documents: one that arrived to us translated and one that the House of Commons or whatever person it comes out of is paying to translate. I'm just looking to see—

Mr. Gord Johns: The translation is essential, so we have to do that.

The Clerk: Absolutely.

Mr. Gord Johns: I guess both. It would be good to get an idea of what we're spending overall right now on this study, on this motion.

Maybe, Madam Clerk, you can also share.... I have been on committees for years. I have never seen a committee ask for this volume of documents.

Mr. Chair, you've been around for a while, so maybe you can share your—

The Chair: No, I think the public health ones we did for COVID were greater than this.

Mr. Gord Johns: I was hoping that you would enlighten us on your experience around it—

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*] but I don't think we do.

Mr. Gord Johns: This, to me, just as someone on the committee feeling the volume of documents being sent to us, it is quite substantial. I'm just trying to get an idea of how much money we are spending—of taxpayers' dollars—on this right now. I'd like to get an idea. I'm going to move a motion following the discussion on this motion so that we get an idea. I want to know, you know, before we keep spending money.

The Chair: You can do that. Obviously, you can do an Order Paper question, but most of the—

Mr. Gord Johns: I'm going to move a motion.

The Chair: I will speak out of turn. Most of the documents that are being withheld from us, despite the committee order, have already been translated. They're already ready to go. They just require the departments to do so.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, I want to make sure that it's heard and said that I also want to see those departments in front of this committee so that they can explain themselves, especially on the poor translation that's happened, so we can ask questions and certainly give Ms. Vignola the chance to ask them very direct questions about why her privileges are not being met here at this committee. I think that's important.

The Chair: It's everyone's privilege. It's not just hers, but I understand what you're saying.

Mr. Gord Johns: It's in respect to her.

The Chair: I have Mr. Housefather and then Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleague and friend Mr. Johns for advancing, I think, a very legitimate point.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that I also accept responsibility. When we created this list of documents, this incredibly wide-ranging list of documents, I never in my life thought that McKinsey would be producing 91,000 pages and that the government would be responsible for producing multiple times that, and what the costs were in terms of manpower hours going into finding everything and producing it and the cost of translation both for the government and at the translation bureau.

This is an incredible amount of production that in the end I don't think was really warranted in any way. Having listened to the witnesses from McKinsey and having looked at what we've received, I don't see that there's a smoking gun there that really required this level of scrutiny by this committee.

What I think, Mr. Chair, is that we all can learn a lesson from this, which is that.... In the same way, at the public accounts committee, which we were both talking about here, a specific number of vaccine contracts were requested. There was a clear reason for requesting those specific contracts. Here, it wasn't requesting specifics. It was a random request for production, hoping that something would be found in hundreds of thousands of documents. I think the committee and all committees should learn a lesson from this and do better in terms of trying to narrow the focus of what should be received.

I agree with what Mr. Johns said. I think the correct approach should be to bring here the most egregious violators and the departments that were disrespectful of official languages—ESDC and whichever others the analysts would identify as being the three or four worst violators—to talk about official languages and the respect for official languages, and those who redacted the most or refused to provide documents to explain their rationale and to defend it before an entire committee in public. I think that would be the correct approach, as opposed to referring this to the House, where I can see many hours and days of lost time in dealing with this issue, as opposed to dealing with legislation and the budget.

Mr. Chair, that would be my position at this point. I don't support Mr. Barrett's motion, but I will support other motions to do the two things I've mentioned, which are to bring witnesses before us to explain themselves—and we can take whatever action we want after we hear from those witnesses—and to support Mr. Johns' request for an accounting of what has been spent in light of the production request.

Thank you.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Ms. Vignola, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will start out by saying that I'm perfectly capable of expressing my own needs and desires. I do not need anyone to mansplain things to me.

If the departments had provided the documents from the start as we requested, we wouldn't be having this discussion. We wouldn't even be talking about the report, apart from the terrible quality of some of the translations provided. I see a passage right here that wasn't even translated. Yes, translation cost money. But I'm not quite ready to say that we've been going around in circles up until now and getting nowhere fast.

I'm not saying that I've read all 90,000 pages from McKinsey and the tens of thousands of other pages, because I also have a busy life with four children. I was able to discover, however, thanks to the documents as well as the witnesses, that the contracts specified English as the sole language for the deliverables. When we put the question to the department, the answer was that it is the supplier that decides what language is used, but when we go to the supplier, they say that it is up to the department. So something is just not adding up here.

It is also possible to establish links between the findings contained in certain studies and the decisions made by the government afterwards. Some of the recommendations that were made became policy, but some recommendations did not take at all into account the fact that French is an integral part of Canada. I'm not just talking about Quebec either.

As to the quality of the translation, it is not just a breach of my parliamentary privilege. Truth be told, I always put myself last, it's

the way I am. People have tried to change me, but I am pretty stubborn, as stubborn as a mule, I guess. All that to say that I am not the most important person, here. That said, this is not the first time that such a situation has cropped up. These documents are not in the public domain, but some others are, and francophones from everywhere in Canada, not just Quebec, will have access to documents that have unfortunately been badly translated.

I am not pointing the finger at the interpreters and the translators. There are currently 825 language employees, whereas 20 years ago, that figure was 1,200. We are lacking resources and these people do what they can. Consequently and regrettably, we are turning to technological tools that are not reliable. I can guarantee that if I had seen the expression “deep dive analysis” translated as “*plongée profonde*” when I taught English as a second language, I would have noticed. I think that even my students would have noticed.

I know it costs money, I do understand. That said, even if there had been fewer documents, we still would have been required to have them translated. Saying that costs are high due to translation is not acceptable. If the documents had been provided solely in French and we had said to the anglophones that they wouldn't get translated documents because translation costs too much money, would that have flown any better? I don't think so. It doesn't fly with me when you say that the costs are exorbitant.

Yes, there are indeed a lot of documents. I am keenly aware of this, because I have been reading them. It is also unacceptable to say that we are incurring costs because we were forced to have things translated and we are giving francophones the right to access information in their mother tongue, and then conclude that for these reasons, we can't go any further and we have to stop the study, forgo the report and not get worked up about the fact that what we requested has not been provided.

I will not say sorry for being francophone and for wanting to communicate and receive information in my language, no way. Personally, I have been reading all the documents twice over, because I have to double-check with the English. I fully understand that there are costs involved and I think you know me sufficiently well to know that I am also cognizant of the need to spend taxpayers' money wisely. It's a priority for me.

• (1600)

We do, however, have the right to request and receive documents of good quality. It isn't just a question of parliamentary privilege, it's the privilege of Canadians, and the government has to acquiesce. I've said what I had to say.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks, Chair.

The motion we're voting on, hopefully, is to approve the report from the analysts. I would ask other members what they disagree with in the report from the analysts. If it's nothing, if the concern is cost, there is no cost to report on this to the House.

If we want to bring public servants or departments to committee to admonish them or to ask them tough questions, why? If we don't accept that they breached the privileges of this committee, why would we ask them to come here? They did or they didn't. I don't understand why we would want, as a committee, to whitewash the situation.

Has there been a breach of privilege or has there not? If there has been, why wouldn't we report that to the House?

Those would be my questions. I imagine this is going to be discussed for quite some time.

What is incorrect in the report prepared by the analysts? That's question one. I have not found anything. Question two is, with no additional cost to the committee, what reason do we have to not report this breach to the House?

If we're going to plan to call bureaucrats here, again, I just don't understand what our questions would be. We either agree with the report or we don't. For it to properly be followed through on.... That exceeds the authority of the chair of this committee and it must be referred to the Speaker of the House.

We're either for the rules or we're not. There has been a breach of privilege. The House should take the measures it deems appropriate. I concur with the seventh report as amended and as prepared by the analysts, and I'm prepared to vote to that effect.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Barrett.

Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: To respond to that, I think it would be the right thing to do to have the public servants come so that we can ask questions. Why? Why haven't they produced documents? Why are there delays? I don't see anything wrong with that whatsoever, and then we can decide where we want to go with it and whether we refer it to the House or not.

I think having them, at least, here at committee so that we can ask them direct questions and get some answers would be the right step to take at this point in time. Let's get them here and ask them questions. Have them very explain to us what their obstacles or delays are, or why they're refusing.

We can go from there. I think that would be a natural step.

• (1605)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree wholeheartedly with what Mr. Johns just stated. This is an opportunity to engage directly with the officials from the departments, ask them very difficult questions and shed some light. I want to highlight that these are also meetings that would take place in open sessions.

Again, I think we're missing a step here. I agree wholeheartedly with what Mr. Johns has brought forward. Quite frankly, I don't un-

derstand why the members of the Conservative Party would not want to take the opportunity to, again, question the officials—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Because they already broke the rules—

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, let him finish.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I don't know what they're afraid of in terms of taking that step, having that conversation, engaging with the officials directly, having them respond and having them respond on the record. I agree wholeheartedly with what Mr. Johns has brought forward. I think it's a practical step.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, let others have a say.

We'll go to Ms. Block.

Please put your hand down, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would concur with my colleague Mr. Barrett and his observations on what the motion is calling for and what the really direct questions are.

If we want to get into delaying what we obviously know is a breach of privilege, I would like to ask the analysts how many times the departments have been contacted to get the information that we've been asking for and whether we've received responses from the department as to why documents aren't forthcoming or if they have provided any sort of excuses as to why they aren't being presented in the form that we have asked.

Thank you.

The Chair: Our clerk can answer that.

The Clerk: Thank you very much, Ms. Block.

Yes, the departments were contacted on a couple of occasions.

There was a first volley of letters that were sent, and all the responses have been distributed to members of the committee. There was a volley of letters in the name of the chair, and then a volley of letters in the name of the committee after the motion was adopted, I believe. I'd say March 6, but I'd have to verify the date. All of those responses were distributed to members of the committee. There were a variety of different reasons given, but they all followed the same pattern of—I don't want to put words in the departments' mouths—protection of personal information, contracts and confidentiality.

I'd be happy to redistribute the letters to the members of the committee, if you like. I've written over 90 pieces of correspondence for the committee, so there has been correspondence sent to the various departments. When I say departments—I'm sorry—I also mean Crown corporations and agencies. Just to be clear, there are 21 departments, Crown corporations and agencies that are tagged in this motion.

The Chair: If you don't mind, can you redistribute them?

The Clerk: Okay.

The Chair: If I recall, one of the departments, off the top of my head, claimed that it was the Constitution—

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Chair, I have a quick follow-up.

Did you say that there were over 90 pieces of correspondence that you had sent to departments, agencies and Crown corporations?

The Clerk: Specifically on this study, yes. That would also include correspondence to McKinsey for the study.

• (1610)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Have you reached out 90 times?

The Clerk: No, there were 90 different pieces.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Given that it is rather unusual that we would submit a report to the House of Commons, I have a few questions for you. When we submit a report, what rules of procedure apply to the debate that follows, if there is such a debate? Do the rules allow for a never-ending debate, or do they state a set number of hours?

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are you referring specifically to this motion? If so, the motion can continue generally forever, unless we vote on it.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: When a report is submitted to the House of Commons, will a debate follow? What are the rules concerning a debate at the House of Commons?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to refer to our clerk for that, because she's a bit more knowledgeable. We'll put her on the spot.

The Clerk: I'm very on the spot.

I apologize. My knowledge of procedure in the House is not at the level where I'd want to give you an answer at this moment. I will happily look into it.

[*Translation*]

I can tell you that the act of submitting a report is not a sufficient enough reason for there to be a debate. Someone must raise a question of privilege in order for the House of Commons to be seized. That would be the first step.

[*English*]

I can come back to you with more precise information if you would like, Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

[*English*]

The Chair: Mrs. Kusie, you had your hand up earlier.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My colleague Mrs. Block asked how many times we had asked for.... I want to thank the analysts, because it's outlined very clearly. The first time was in the initial response. The second time was when you personally went back and gave them that reminder. As well, it's been reported in the media that you chastised witnesses for not having responded in full. The third time was in the March 6 correspondence. That's three times already.

All parents use the three strikes, you're out: "I'm telling you once. I'm telling you twice. I'm telling you three times." I know, as a mother, I sometimes use this.

The time for chances has run out. In my opinion, there's no question about it.

As for Mr. Johns' comments regarding the cost, did he not know what we were requesting in the first place? Did he not anticipate the magnitude of documents we would receive? Did he not appreciate the value that those documents would have in shedding light on not only this study but, in fact, democracy and, in fact, the entire way this government and the Government of Canada conduct themselves? We've seen in many other formats that the government is really trying to hide things. This is no different.

Mr. Johns, I'm incredibly disappointed in you today. It's very evident to me, and to my colleagues, what you're doing. You, like you do in all other places, are going with the government again. I'm not sure what it has promised you, or what it said you should do. In fact, it would actually be better for us to pass this motion, have it go to the House and get the documentation, so we could finally finish this study. We could uncover, not only for this committee but for Canadians, what this government is trying to hide, but today you have changed your mind. You have decided that something else is more important than that. It would actually be to your benefit to vote on this motion—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have a point of order. This is ridiculous, Mr. Chair.

A member is upbraiding another member in a way that is totally unacceptable. Please call this to order.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: It's not unacceptable. I'm making my point.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That is not acceptable.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I'm making my point.

The Chair: Let me speak. I appreciate what you're saying, Mr. Housefather. I have not heard any upbraiding. I've heard—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

Mr. Gord Johns: When I do it you shut me down if I respond to the heckle—

The Chair: Let me finish, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: —and then this is what I get. Great job.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, you'll have a chance to rebut afterward.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: To rebut, you will have a chance.

The Chair: I would ask that we all watch ourselves, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much.

It would be to your benefit, Mr. Johns, to actually pass this motion so that it could be referred to the House. We could get the documentation in both official languages, which, by the way, if you really respected it, you would have the expectation to receive. We could review those documents and hold this government to account, which I know you are not akin to doing—you and your colleagues. Finally, we could move on to the larger study, which I know you are very excited to do.

I'm not sure. I don't believe your intentions are good, Mr. Johns, showing up here today and suggesting that—

• (1615)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. Now she's impugning.... It is ridiculous that this is being allowed.

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt.

I'm going to agree with you there, Mr. Housefather. If we could just stay on topic—

Mr. Gord Johns: It's funny when the Conservatives say there's a gong show going on. What kind of gong show are you allowing here, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Mr. Johns—

Mr. Gord Johns: This is a gong show.

The Chair: —I have sat and I have heard—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I'm looking for transparency, Mr. Johns.

The Chair: Mrs. Kusie, please, I have the floor.

Mr. Johns, I have the floor.

You can say it's ridiculous. I have heard rather disagreeable—I could use a different word but I won't—comments made from all parties. I'm not going to single them out, but I've heard them from all parties. Sometimes we just roll with it, and sometimes it gets a bit heated. However, I've heard it from everyone, pretty much.

I understand it's a bit heated. It's not how I would go, Mr. Johns. I am happy to discuss some of the comments you've made in the past, but I don't think that will add to it, Mr. Johns.

You're welcome to rebut Mrs. Kusie.

The second time around, Mr. Housefather did have a point. We're not going to agree with everything that's going on today, but I would ask that we just stick to being a bit more polite to each other, for lack of better words.

Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I wasn't done, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: If you could stay on topic, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much.

We can certainly leave it here. We will see how you vote on this motion. It's very clear you'll be voting against it. It's very clear.

I feel that we've tried to count on your support, several times over, only to be disappointed or to have Prime Minister Harper—

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt and ask that we stay on topic and not be chatting sidebar or directly to others about this. Direct it toward me, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In summary, we've asked three times. Three times is more than enough. The costs that have been expended are a result of the bureaucracy not providing us with the documents we requested. This consideration of cost is not surprising; it is disappointing. I think it is indicative of what we've come to see in this committee and in the House, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, you're welcome.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

After the assaultive accusations and already deciding on my vote, I will respond.

The Chair: I appreciate where you're coming from, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I put forward a motion to expand the outsourcing companies to five. I didn't ask for all the documents specifically, because I was worried about the costs associated with that and the time. We'd be looking at a year from now. We'd be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, potentially.

It's funny when the New Democrats are worried about the cost of spending, and the Conservatives want to take ownership over that.

Look, all I'm asking for are some simple answers. I don't want the delays any more than anybody else. I don't want this report to go to the House with any appearance that this is an open matter as well. I think it would be good. We'd get written responses and evidence from the departments of their refusal to comply with the requests of parliamentarians so Canadians can see that.

If we send this to the House right now, we're giving these departments basically the chance to say that they were going to submit the rest of these documents, that they were pending *x*, *y* and *z*, or whatever. I don't want any more delays or extensions.

I think we should ask each department whether they're going to comply and submit these documents unredacted or refuse to adhere to the request of this parliamentary committee. We should get them here so we can ask them directly why they're holding back.

I will respond to the many accusations first.

We're trying to be respectful here. We had a member of the Conservative Party interrupt a committee member while speaking and trying to speak. If this is the decorum we're going to have here, we're not going to do well. I'm not saying I've been perfect here either. I had a bad day. We know that. I'll take ownership of that. I had two young people die in my home community, and I had to come to this committee right after. It wasn't easy.

I think things can get heated here, but we want the same thing. We want to stop the extreme out-of-control outsourcing.

With McKinsey, it started with trying to get to the bottom of why McKinsey had this acceleration in outsourcing. Then it turned into a witch hunt about the Prime Minister's connections to the former head of McKinsey, Mr. Barton, who probably has more ties to Mr. Harper, actually, than Mr. Trudeau, so that got thrown to the side. Now it's that McKinsey is responsible completely for the toxic-drug crisis.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Gord Johns: I know I'm getting heckled again.

Clearly, on McKinsey's involvement and the pharmaceutical industry's involvement in the toxic-drug crisis, taking them to court is not going to solve the problem. We know that.

Now we're into parliamentary privilege.

Look, I just want to get the departments here so we can ask them questions. Why the delay? I want to get an idea of how much money we're spending on this. I didn't mean to insult anybody here by speaking in support of them or not, or whatever. I'll be more careful with that. Thank you.

If we can get them here, we can maybe revisit this. If we're going to vote on this today, yes, with this kind of energy, I will vote against it 100%.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: You were voting against it before.

The Chair: Ms. Kusie, please....

Mr. Gord Johns: I don't appreciate that. I was open. I was trying to bring an open way forward, a pathway forward to have a proper conversation on this, which I felt was the right thing to do after seeking advice from many people who have been behind the scenes working on ATIPs and working on many studies that are a volume in size and scope. They were saying that this is unreasonable and that we should be asking the departments to come here to sit before us before we take it further. That's what I think we should do.

• (1620)

The Chair: I appreciate your words, Mr. Johns.

Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I have been sitting on this committee for nearly four years now. It has always been a pleasure. We have dealt with each other with respect, even if we didn't always agree. We must continue in this way. No one has any business making accusations or insinuations. Someone might not be happy about something that has happened or been said but they should be able to state their point of view without making any personal attacks. This is extremely important to me. It is a mark of respect that everyone is entitled to. We shouldn't forget that we should hold ourselves up as examples for people in the community. If we are not able to rub along, how can we ask members of the public who might have opposing views to get along without resorting to violence?

That said, the report will state that our parliamentary privilege has been breached and that contempt has been shown. If we vote against this, we are opening ourselves up to a breach that could be used going forward. Future parliamentarians will also see breaches of their privilege. This should be unacceptable to us, and unacceptable for future parliamentarians. We have to think long and hard on this. We can't just indulge in navel-gazing. We also have to take future parliamentarians into account.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Housefather.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank my colleague, Ms. Viola, for her comments.

I would like to mention something before I dive into the topic at hand.

I often say, and I actually did say this when I was speaking on the telephone to Scott Aitchison, that we can disagree without being disagreeable. By that, I mean that discussions mustn't become personal. It is a shame when people do that, because it isn't necessary. I hope that everyone from every party will take that into consideration.

Let's get back to the motion. As far as I know, if the committee does pass the motion, someone will raise a question of privilege in the House. The Speaker will decide if it is indeed a question of privilege and if he does, there will be an unlimited debate during which speeches can be made and this debate will take precedence over other debates in the House.

The committee can always decide if it is necessary or not to refer something to the House. There have been many cases in the past where parliamentary privilege was breached and the committee did not feel the need to refer to the House, so I don't agree at all with the opinion that this would create a precedent. This does not mean that the committee considers that contempt has been shown, but simply that the committee prefers not to refer to the House, because we all know what will happen if we refer the question of privilege to the House right now.

As for myself, I do hope that we can agree to summon witnesses before the committee in order to ask questions and let them explain why there have been so many problems. I think part of the difficulties lie in the fact that we have requested hundreds of thousands of pages and given too short a turnaround time.

As far as I know, when the Government of Canada does issue contracts, it lets the suppliers choose if the contract is to be drawn up in French or in English. It is always the supplier who decides the language of the contract. The Government of Canada has no policy requiring the translation of all contracts. Certain contracts are drawn up in French, others in English.

When documents must be submitted to our committee, I agree wholeheartedly that this must be done in both official languages. Neither anglophones nor francophones should be disadvantaged when reading a contract. However, the committee must recognize that it should shoulder part of the blame. I accept part of the blame, because I did not appreciate the vast volume of documents that the committee had requested.

I have a second point to raise.

As for the committee's request, I read the sixth point of paragraph d) of the motion, which asks that McKinsey provide all records concerning subcontracts issued by McKinsey & Company in relation to each contract. In the example of the Canada Pension Plan, the refusal to disclose documents to the committee is perhaps linked to the fact that some of the McKinsey documents are of an extremely sensitive nature in the eyes of third parties. I think that we should ask the company to come and explain why it's so reluctant to provide those documents to our committee.

I therefore believe that the committee has another step to take before raising a point of privilege in the House which, I fear, would lead to a never-ending debate. I just wanted to explain to my colleagues why I believe we shouldn't be carrying this motion right now. I would rather that we follow the suggestion of my colleague, Mr. Johns.

Thank you.

• (1625)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Johns, go ahead.

Mr. Gord Johns: Regarding parliamentary privilege, I know it gives us priority and it's different from ATIPs for sure, but the scale of work we've requested is monumental and the resources are still the same. We should be given priority as parliamentarians and have the reasonable right to receive these documents in a timely way in both languages, but we recognize that it's still time and work being

done by people who are only human. I just want to make sure that we're taking that into consideration.

My other concern is.... Anyway, I've said enough. I hope we get those departments here, which I think would give us a pathway to where we go next.

The Chair: Sure. I appreciate that.

I will address the comments or feedback we've gotten from the departments.

The documents are ready. They're translated. There was the ES-DC issue, but the documents are ready and translated. Many departments have just flatly refused, saying we do not have the right or privilege to see the documents, despite the order from the committee. That's the general feedback from the departments. They state that the ATIP law, for example, supersedes parliamentary privilege.

It's not a matter of their not having the resources to get them to us. They are ready. They're just refusing to, for various reasons.

I'm sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Gourde.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): I'm going to weigh into the debate, because I have already seen this type of situation. I think it was on this very committee and it was either 2007 or 2008. We were dealing with a lot of documents, thousands of pages worth. At the time, certain members of the committee had expressed their wish that part of the documents not be translated. That didn't fly, however, because the fundamental right to obtain information in both official languages was upheld in the end. The committee lost an enormous amount of time due to systemic obstruction that went on for three or four meetings. In the end, we just waited to get the translations that were provided in due course and then worked with the translated documents.

It seems that we could draw out this discussion, but the result would no doubt be the same at the end of the day. The precedent proves that you have to translate all the documents. I am here today standing in for a colleague. I don't know how the committee wants to go about it, but it would be dangerous to create a precedent. Historically speaking, we have always translated all documents, regardless of the time that takes. This is what I wanted to say.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'd just say that in two weeks' time since our last meeting.... In that last meeting, members who were not in support of reporting this to the House, based on their comments, said they wanted one more letter to go and that it was about just giving one more chance. That's different from what we've heard today. There's been an evolution. Now it's more meetings, more witnesses, more excuses.

To be crystal clear, that's as predictable as this happening today, after those departments had an additional two weeks to comply with their legal obligation to provide documents to this committee following those meetings, as sure as those two weeks didn't provide enough comfort for members to support the objective fact that departments are refusing to provide documents to a committee simply because they don't believe the committee has the right. However, they're wrong. It's not a debate. There's no question on whether what they're saying is right or wrong. What they're saying is wrong.

We heard it from officials before, and we heard it from a minister here that they were going to see what they could do. The only thing they can do that is compliant with their obligations and with the law is to give us the documents—of course, being mindful of redactions for the protection of personal information or private information. That's been allowed for. This is a refusal. It's a refusal, and it creates a precedent. This is going to be a problem.

I can only guess that the thinking of some members would be that they're going along to get along and that this is going to keep people happy in Langevin Block, in the PMO and PCO. However, what is the effect if we're disregarding the precedent and the law just to say that this is politically inconvenient for the current government, when it's strictly an accountability measure? People talk all the time about being concerned about Canadians' confidence in public institutions. This is the exact opportunity that everyone has to demonstrate that this place works. We asked for information. There's been no judgment made by this committee about the information that was provided except for the absence of information that was ordered and wasn't given to us, that was not in the acceptable form and that was not in both official languages, in spite of the capacity for those documents to be tabled in both official languages.

If you, Mr. Chair, were in receipt of a letter and informed this committee that the departments—all of them—had said that there is one reason they haven't provided this information to us in a fulsome way in both official languages and that it's because of time, that they don't have enough time, I could wholeheartedly support an extension. It would be disappointing, but I could support that. However, you don't have that letter. They haven't sent it because that's not why we don't have the information. It's because they don't believe that this place matters. They don't believe that the powers of Parliament matter.

• (1635)

The way for them to show that was to have respected the obligation they had to table the appropriate documents in the appropriate form with the clerk of this committee.

I've read the analysts' report. Like Ms. Vignola, I did not read every single character that was tabled with this committee. I didn't read it in both French and English. In some cases, that wouldn't be possible because they didn't give it to us in that format. I did read every word of the report that is the subject of the motion on the floor that we're about to vote on. Since my last intervention, I haven't heard anyone take the opportunity to tell me what the analysts got wrong.

I listened for it, but I stepped out for a minute.

I'll just look at my colleagues. Was a response offered to my previous question from any of the other members that information the analysts included in the report was incorrect? Did that happen?

Mrs. Kelly Block: No.

Mr. Michael Barrett: They've indicated that it wasn't the case when I stepped out of the room, just so I'm certain.

This isn't about putting a dissenting report forward because we disagree or someone disagrees with the majority view of the committee about what we learned in this study, or giving drafting instructions or doing clause-by-clause with analysts. This is just saying that, even though it's a fact that they were required to give us the documents and they didn't do it, some members of the committee are going to make the choice to send the signal to the entire bureaucracy that, for all time, if they don't feel like it, they don't have to send documents to committees of Parliament. That is the message for every future government.

When committees have this issue in the future, the bureaucracy can always look back to OGGO.

You know, Chair, you might have to modify your opening. You might have to call it the "once mighty OGGO" because we can't even demand papers from the government departments and have them send them to us. It turns us into a joke.

When we give witness lists to the clerk and they call for witnesses, why would anyone come? We'll issue them a summons—so what? We have the power to send for papers and people. No, we don't. We demonstrated that ourselves.

What's that phrase that I hearken back to? Maybe it was a lesson that I got when I was a young guy: I'm not mad; I'm just disappointed. Yep, I'm just super disappointed.

I can't speak for anyone else, but when I visit a schoolroom and the kids ask me why this job is important, I say it's because our democracy is so important. I had the privilege to visit two schools in my constituency last week. One was in Brockville and one was in Westport. I just said that our democracy is what makes Canada special.

I was elected in 2018, 2019 and 2021, and in none of those elections was there bloodshed. Nobody was jailed and not a shot was fired. It was peaceful in those cases, even if, much to my chagrin, it was a continuation of the government. Before my time in politics in 2015, there was a peaceful and orderly transition between one party to another because we have traditions, laws and past practices that guide us. The underpinning of all of that is that this place matters.

When people see that it stops mattering and they continue to centralize the power so it's just a few individuals and everyone else just becomes window dressing, then I think we'll find that's not something history looks kindly on in a broader sense.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: All I'm trying to do here is get....

I have two things.

First is a question to you, Mr. Chair.

Have you written to these departments, and have they written back, in writing, stating that they refuse to supply these documents?

The Chair: Yes, and the responses have been shared with the committee.

Mr. Gord Johns: For me, I'd like us to write a letter to these departments and invite their staff to come before the committee, so we can have them explain themselves. There are seven. We should have them appear before the committee.

The Chair: There are 16 departments.

Mr. Gord Johns: Wow. Let's start with the biggest violators. Starting with them, let's get them here to explain themselves. We should consider, before we take this to the House, have some discussion and at least be able to ask those questions of those public servants. What are the barriers? They can then provide us this information.

That's what I'm hoping we can do in a pathway to getting a result in order to ensure that our privileges are being respected. Taking it over to the House on this matter, without doing this due diligence, would be unwise.

The Chair: Seeing no one else, we'll call the vote.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: No, I have some more to say before you call the vote.

Yes—

The Chair: Colleagues, I'm just going to interrupt quickly.

Please put up your hands so I can see, so we're not repeating this, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I apologize.

The Chair: Please address your questions to the chair.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Yes, thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I'm not certain. This seems like an unnecessary delay tactic. We asked them three times for these documents, but there is the sincere possibility—as we've seen with many other witnesses we've invited—that they will take the decision to not even show up. They will make the decision to not come. It seems as though we are giving one lifeline after another to these organizations when, really, they owe us the documents and what we requested. I don't see why that isn't clear, frankly, to all of my colleagues.

My colleague Mr. Barrett referred to an adage he learned when he was young. You know, we all learned some. What I learned is, "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." We're definitely getting to the stage where we have to be clear to these departments and agencies that we had very clear expectations: "This is what we want to receive and what we expect." I don't understand why this isn't.... Actually, it is clear to me why it isn't clear to people, because, as I said, I genuinely feel as though they're not in favour of transparency for Canadians. I don't deny this and I won't. I feel this. Anyway, we'll say it's very clear. In an effort to have the clearest transparency for this study and government, we require

these documents. We asked for these documents three times, as I indicated, and this is what we want. We want the documents.

You can only allow someone to explain something so much. Sometimes, you just have to ask them to put up what you asked for. You know, we're talking about expenditures here today. You know the saying, "Show me the money," in popular culture. It basically means, "Show me what I'm asking you for". I think that is what we have come to expect here. It's so very clear. If we want to talk about money and expenditures, this is a very good case. We're having endless conversations about something that should have been very straightforward. In fact, it was made straightforward to these departments and agencies on more than one occasion.

I guess I'll say, in closing, that there's no need to ask them another time or ask them to come and explain themselves. It's very clear. They don't want to hand the documents over. They're unwilling to, as we've determined through this motion.

Mr. Chair, you have exercised the highest level possible of your authority. It's time to refer this to the House. That's what I'll say in closing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to summarize.

• (1645)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'll try not to delay this thing any longer.

It's unacceptable that these documents are coming in redacted, but I also want to recognize that a lot of the redactions are likely personal information and whatnot.

We started this study with a focus. For us, certainly, we wanted to know what harms were being done to the public service and to taxpayers around outsourcing, and I was excited about us pursuing that. I'm worried about where the scope of this study is going right now.

We know something has to be done around outsourcing—certainly around these redactions as well—but it can't be at the cost of getting answers to Canadians about what the initial intent is. We've learned a lot from these documents and we need to talk about them. We need to not delay the conversation that needs to happen around outsourcing. I'm really concerned that's what's happening now. We're not talking about the problem.

Having them come and testify here, getting the answers from those violators and having them explain themselves so that we can move on.... Whether we move forward with this motion...and I hope this motion can wait until we've had them here. We can make that decision after we've had a chance to hear from them, but I really want us to get back to work on outsourcing, what we're doing here and the broader situation.

I hope that we can have them appear here, get some answers and then start to proceed. I'm not at all afraid to revisit this conversation on this motion by Ms. Kusie so that we can bring it back and have a more detailed conversation after we've had them here. I think it's beneficial to this committee to have them here to ask them, "Why are you doing this?" and say, "We can't have this happen again."

Have them here so that we can ask questions here at committee. I think that serves Canadians and our democracy even better, because we can ask direct questions to them here at committee that can't be asked of them in the House. That's what I would hope for.

I hope that Ms. Kusie will consider that. I don't want to vote against this motion today. I want us to try a different path and then bring it back. I know there's more time. I know that's frustrating. I appreciate the frustration. I do.

● (1650)

The Chair: Are we ready to call the vote? I think we are.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 4)

The Chair: I won't add fuel to the fire—and I will get to you, Ms. Vignola and Mr. Johns—but I will note that I think concerns about this issue spreading are valid. We saw earlier today in public accounts that PSPC refused to provide or follow a direct motion from the public accounts committee, so I express my great concern that this is a great victory for the bureaucracy and the public service in defying Parliament. I hope we will get back on track to where Parliament is supreme, not unelected people within the bureaucracy.

I have Ms. Vignola and then Mr. Johns.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: All members received in an email the text of the amended motion on Bill C-290, an act to amend the public servants disclosure protection act. The motion has been submitted in both official languages. I will read it out:

That, pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, February 15, 2023, concerning Bill C-290, An Act to amend the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, the Committee invite the following witnesses to appear regarding the protection of federal public servants who disclose wrongdoing:

- a) Pamela Forwards, President of the Board of Directors of Whistleblowing Canada;
- b) Joanna Gualtieri, lawyer;
- c) Luc Sabourin, former employee of the Canada Border Services Agency;
- d) Julie Dion, former employee of the Canada Border Services Agency; and
- e) Tom Devine, Legal Director, Government Accountability Project;

That the Committee allocate Wednesday, April 19, 2023, and Wednesday, April 26, 2023, to hear these witnesses.

It's basically the same motion that we started to discuss a few weeks ago, and we seemed to have a consensus.

The only difference of note is simply that the dates have changed for the witnesses. The witnesses are aware that they may be summoned in the very near future to testify before the committee. They are looking forward to it, and many of them will propose solid amendments to the bill.

This act is very important in terms of protecting our public servants, citizens and employees, as well as the quality and integrity of government services provided to our citizens.

I hope that the consensus is still there, given that only the dates have changed somewhat.

● (1655)

[English]

The Chair: Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just have a question in regard to the last point that Ms. Vignola made in regard to the calendar and how this might impact the calendar going forward.

Can you give us some idea about what fitting in the witnesses appearing on April 19 and then again on April 26 does to the calendar?

The Chair: It works with the calendar that we have open. The only thing I would suggest is perhaps someone offer a friendly amendment to allow other witnesses to be added as well, if Ms. Vignola is good with that.

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: That's exactly where I was going.

I totally support the motion here. I just want to clarify whether this is all the witnesses to the bill or if we have an opportunity to submit some further names.

The Chair: If so amended, yes. Otherwise, no.

Can I assume that's your offer of an amendment, Mr. Johns?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes.

The Chair: April 19 I think is already set, so can we set perhaps Wednesday, for added witnesses for the April 26, at noon to keep our clerk happy? A couple of days is fine. As always, we'll be as flexible as we can.

Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: I have not dealt with very many private bills in committee in my time. If members wanted to have witnesses appear, would we have had to submit our own motion to have members appear on this study?

The Chair: No. Usually the motions have "and other witnesses as desired" added onto motions. That's how we usually—

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay. I'm thankful that Mrs. Vignola has agreed that this is a friendly amendment to add witnesses. I was just wondering how we would have gone about requesting witnesses to appear on this piece of legislation.

The Chair: I have Mrs. Vignola, then Mr. Johns and then Mr. Jowhari.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I agree with a friendly amendment that would mean that we would add any useful witnesses that my colleagues may suggest for the purposes of our study of the bill.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: I have Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I think you already did. Thank you.

The Chair: Now I have Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We support the motion for moving the dates and the friendly amendment that we invite other witnesses. I believe that once all the witnesses come we may be in a position to need to consider more than two meetings, so I'd like to keep that option open. One meeting is already gone with the number of witnesses, and if we need other witnesses to come in we may get into the third or fourth—

The Chair: Nothing on this committee is ever done in two meetings, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I didn't want to say that, but I just want to acknowledge that, as the witnesses are going to come from all other parties, we may be in a position to look into a third or fourth meeting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Yes, we have a possibility.... We have to approve this first. Then, when we get to other items on the line-by-line and amendments to it, there is a possibility, if that's still the case, that, as we have that day set aside for the GG recommendations, we can move that back. I'm sure we can accommodate, as we normally do with OGGO.

I have Mrs. Vignola and then Mr. Johns.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: As to the equally friendly amendment from my colleague about the number of meetings, I'm open to the idea that we add the number of meetings necessary. We do, however, have to keep in mind that the study should be finished before the end of the parliamentary session in June. We just have to make sure that we finish on time.

[English]

The Chair: Colleagues, are we okay with the amendment?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. Mr. Johns moved a friendly amendment—

The Chair: Yes, the clerk has that. We're going to vote on the original motion and then the amendment, or the other way round.

I'm sorry. It's the amendment and then the motion.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Do we need a recorded vote or all we all good? I think we're good with the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: That's perfect.

Before we get to you, Mr. Johns, there are a couple of things that I need to clear up with Bill C-290, and I'd like to do that while we're still on track there, if you don't mind.

On the deadline for amendments on Bill C-290, an act to amend the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, I would like to set it for May 3, 2023, by noon, if that's fine with everyone. The committee will commence clause-by-clause for Bill C-290, an act to amend the PSDPA, on Monday, May 8, 2023. We have May 10 being held as well if we can't get through that on the clause-by-clause. Are we all comfortable with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We had the GG for May 1. We'll just play that by ear now for witnesses as we see. That's perfect.

Just quickly, for the rest of May, we have four open dates. We've confirmed the Treasury Board. We're just waiting to hear from PSPC on the date for one of the meetings. There will be three open meetings. The next one is for the PBO.

Actually, there will be three open meetings, one for the PBO and one for PSPC. Then, colleagues, could you give this some thought? Traditionally in the past for the main estimates, we've invited the other departments that report to OGGO. We've had PCO. We've had Canada Lands in the past. We've had PSPIB in the past. We've had the secretariat that looks after meetings. Perhaps colleagues could give thought to that, or to Canada Post, which we haven't had for a while. Give it some thought. We can discuss at the very next meeting, about filling in the last spot for the main estimates, but we can discuss that on Wednesday, please.

Ms. Vignola, is the translation okay?

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: Good.

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I think earlier we talked about the cost of the studies, and I just want to get an idea because I think it's important for us to be prudent.

Mr. Chair, you did talk about a previous study that required more documents than this study on McKinsey, which really helps to give us some scope on things.

I want to move a motion, and I have it ready to be circulated to the committee. It's in both official languages.

The Chair: This isn't coming from ESDC, is it?

Mr. Gord Johns: No, it's not.

The Chair: Would you like to read it into the record, Mr. Johns?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes. I move:

That, in regard to the motion adopted on January 18, 2023, for the committee to undertake a study regarding the federal government consulting contracts awarded to McKinsey & Company, the committee request the total cost to date and estimated costs to complete parts (c) and (d) of the motion, broken down by cost type and by each department, agency, or Crown Corporation, and that this information be provided by 5:00 p.m. EDT on May 5, 2023.

The Chair: Is there debate, anyone?

We'll go to Mrs. Block and then Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Johns, would you like it in both official languages, and would you like it unredacted?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes, very much so. I still want the same thing you do.

The Chair: Colleagues—if you'll allow me—there are a couple of items, and I'll mention this to you and Mr. Johns. I don't know if someone wishes to amend this or if you wish to withdraw it and redo it, but we could actually ask the PBO to do it, because the PBO would provided it in this timeline and in a non-partisan fashion.

One of the things I will note on this motion, Mr. Johns, is—having submitted many Order Paper questions—the costs, as in added costs as opposed to costs that they would have incurred anyways. For example, five full-time employees assigned to it would have been a sunk cost to us anyway. Order Paper questions have come back very murky unless you're a lot more detailed in your request. This is more of an FYI.

Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I don't think I would have an issue with the PBO's taking this on by this date, if that's something that my colleagues here would be open to supporting.

Actually, I really appreciate your thoughtful feedback.

The Chair: Yes. It's just that, having done very similar OPQs on this, it's not going to come back in a readable fashion, I suspect.

Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Are you suggesting that Mr. Johns withdraw this motion and take it back and call for the PBO to undertake to do this on behalf of the committee?

The Chair: Sure, or someone could just offer a friendly amendment to change it.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes, I'd move that.

The addition, Mr. Chair, would be that it would read “the committee request the Parliamentary Budget Officer provide total cost to date and estimated costs to complete”.

• (1710)

The Chair: I'm sorry. Was there someone on the Liberal side who had a hand up? I heard “Mr. Chair”, but I didn't look up in time.

Are we comfortable with that, colleagues?

Mr. Johns, we're going to read it back with the amendment.

The Clerk: The motion would read:

That, in regard to the motion adopted on January 18, 2023, for the committee to undertake a study regarding the federal government consulting contracts awarded to McKinsey & Company, the Parliamentary Budget Officer provide the total cost to date and estimated costs to complete parts (c) and (d) of the motion, broken down by cost type and by each department, agency, or Crown Corporation, and that this information be provided by 5:00 p.m. EDT on May 5, 2023.

Is that correct?

The Chair: Are we fine with the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: We have a few more minutes.

Mrs. Block, did you want...?

We have the outstanding motion. Before I hand it over to Mrs. Block, this is a motion that was passed in the public accounts committee from the government side, if I recall correctly, that just directs the departments. Sitting in public accounts, it's very helpful in getting information back from the departments.

I'll turn it over to Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that reminder.

Colleagues, you may recall that I introduced this at one of our committee meetings, and it's been on notice for some time. It simply reads the following—perhaps you already have a copy of it:

That, when undertakings are given by witnesses at committee meetings to provide further answers to questions or follow up information, the witnesses be given three weeks to provide the committee with a written response, if a response is not received within the specified time that the committee invite the appropriate accounting officer to appear before the committee to explain why the information has not been provided in the time requested.

As Mr. McCauley pointed out, I was chairing the public accounts committee when they adopted this motion.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Go ahead, Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Could the clerk send us the text of the motion, so that we may be able to read it?

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll send it out.

We had sent it out previously about three weeks ago, but we'll send it out again right now.

I'll just add my commentary to this. When we do have officials with us, and we ask them to get back to us, they're not being forced to. This takes the onus off our clerk for tracking them down, or for you to keep track of these requests and ask the clerk to track them down.

I think I can say, Mrs. Block, it works very well in public accounts.

Are we okay to move forward with this? Colleagues, are we in agreement?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you very much.

I will thank colleagues again for the wonderful change of tone afterwards. I know it's very difficult. I'm just as guilty of that in the past and sometimes present, so I appreciate the change of tone.

Unless there's anything else, we're adjourned.

● (1715)

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