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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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•(1100)
[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): We'll get started. We simply have committee business today.

I see a couple of motions.

Mr. Lukiwski, I think yours is first today. We're going to start with you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, before we get under way, is it the intent of the committee to just deal with the two motions today? Can we get a sense of what it is we would like to accomplish today? Are we looking at setting the agenda for the rest of the session, or are we just debating these two motions and then we'll call it quits after that?

The Chair: I was going to do a little bit of committee business afterwards and talk about a steering committee meeting for Thursday, so we could then look at.... We have a number of private members' bills that are in order to be discussed. We have the main estimates, and some other things.

It was my intent, Mr. Lamoureux, to get to that piece of committee business after this piece of committee business. It looks like we'll have a meeting with the steering committee on Thursday. The first hour of Thursday will be taken up by the group on private members' replenishment. Is that right? Then the steering committee would meet for an hour on Thursday.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Is there any benefit in our dealing with what we need to do as a committee prior to getting into the discussion on the motions? My concern is that we would get bogged down with the motions and we wouldn't finalize anything that's necessary. It's just a suggestion for what it's worth.

The Chair: I have no real concern as to which order we do it in, but why don't we just try and deal with these and see where we are at that time.

Mr. Lukiwski, on your motion.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): I want to make a few comments. Obviously, the NDP and the Liberals will also want to speak to the motions, so I'll try not to hoard my time.

Quite frankly, the purpose of this—

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): When did you want me to raise my point of order?

The Chair: If you have a point of order, you can raise a point of order.

Mr. David Christopherson: Should I do it now, before we begin discussion?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, I did want to raise a point of order and I asked for the opportunity, and you said to hold it off until the actual motion was here. It's here now, so I guess this would be the right time.

I'm just making the case that the motion is predicated on the fact that the government believes that the official opposition was doing something outside the rules. As I understand it, the BOIE had to change the rules to put what we were doing outside the framework of the rules.

The Chair: Would you get to your point of order?

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, I appreciate the latitude. I'm about to move to the "therefore".

Therefore, in my view and my submission to you, this is out of order because it's moot. The rules that the government is saying were broken couldn't have been broken since BOIE had to change the rules to make what was currently being done outside the rules.

Why would we hold a hearing about something that did not violate the rules, was not wrong, and immediately upon the rules being changed, we said that, of course, we would respect them and adopt that? Why are we even allowing this motion, given that there is no issue? There is no infraction.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Christopherson is absolutely right about what the BOIE said on April 8, 2014, and the rule changes that came into force on April 14. No rules were broken. It's very clear that the BOIE changed its rules. This was announced on April 8 and came into force on April 14. I simply want to support what Mr. Christopherson said.

•(1105)
[English]

It's important to note that we're talking about new rules that were brought in, announced on April 8, and brought into force on April 14. Mr. Christopherson's point about the motion being moved is absolutely appropriate, in that we're talking about new rules that were being brought in.

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, the members are ultimately arguing that this motion is out of order.

I would suggest to you that we're having to deal with the motion because of an action that was taken from the House where we were actually requested to look into the matter at hand.

As such, the motion, what I understand from doing a quick read of it, deals with our having the supportive information, so that we're in a better position to ask questions at a future meeting. I would suggest to you that it is indeed in order. I do have a number of questions that I would like to ask the mover of the motion.

I would suggest that we rule it as being in order.

The Chair: We'll get to that.

Mr. Lukiwski, on the point of order.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Chair, in my opening comments I was going to speak directly to what David had been arguing, but if you would like me to do it in response to his point of order, I certainly will, and that is simply this. Literally, I think it would be impossible for the Board of Internal Economy to try to anticipate what transgressions might occur and put in rules, procedures, and bylaws in advance of those. It just doesn't happen. Clearly the board felt that what the NDP had been doing was outside the norm, and therefore, to try to clarify that, enacted their new procedures.

I would point out that prior to that, even though Mr. Christopherson and Mr. Julian argued that it must have been okay because there wasn't a rule preventing them from doing it to begin with, which I think is a very specious argument.... I would point out the example of Mr. Duceppe, when he basically was doing the same type of thing. If you recall what Mr. Duceppe was doing, he had hired the executive director of the Bloc Québécois to be his chief of staff here in Ottawa and was paying him through parliamentary resources. Then, of course, he argued that he would have the chief-of-staff hat on when he was here in Ottawa, and then when he'd go back to Montreal, he'd put on his party hat, his executive-director-of-the-party hat, but he was still getting paid out of parliamentary resources

The Board of Internal Economy took a long look at that, felt that the actions of Mr. Duceppe were inappropriate, and issued a ruling. I want to quote the last—

The Chair: I think that's beyond the point of order. I'll let you get back to the debate side of this.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Okay, if that's how you wish to do it.

The Chair: Look, we have a reference from the House that gives us the direction to study this issue. We've already suggested that it's okay. This motion asks for the production of papers and sets the timeframe for when that will take place, so I certainly rule this in order.

Now to the debate; I have Mr. Lukiwski first on the debate.

We'll let you go on with debate.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Then I'll just continue with what I was saying on the point of order.

The Chair: I thought you might.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: In the ruling of November 27, 2012, the Board of Internal Economy issued a statement. They reviewed the entire Duceppe affair, which, as I said, has great commonality to

what the NDP were doing. After they ruled that the actions of Mr. Duceppe were inappropriate, they said, "The Board is confident"—and they put some steps in place to make sure it didn't happen again—"that these additional steps will ensure full compliance with the spirit as well as the letter of the current rules." That's the point I make, Mr. Chair: I believe everyone knows the difference between right and wrong. But for the NDP to suggest that while technically they might have been in order to do what they did, everyone knows that you can't use, and the spirit of the rules is that you certainly can't use, parliamentary resources for party activities.

Now, the NDP will argue, I'm sure, that even though these individuals were housed in satellite offices paid for by the party, they were not doing party work. I believe there will be evidence that we will be able to produce when Mr. Mulcair appears before this committee that basically contradicts their claims, but not wanting to spoil any surprises, we'll wait until Mr. Mulcair shows up to produce that evidence.

Suffice it to say I think everyone in Parliament recognizes the fact that it is inappropriate to use House of Commons resources, parliamentary resources, to do anything remotely resembling partisan work. To suggest that the individuals in question, even though they were housed within a party-paid-for satellite office, were not doing anything that could improve their political fortunes in those two centres, i.e. political work.... I think that to suggest otherwise is, frankly, being more than slightly disingenuous.

I would also point out, of course, that in Saskatchewan, where they had housed a satellite officer and set up a satellite office, they don't hold any current members of Parliament. There are no sitting members of Parliament there. Interestingly enough, but I think obviously, the reason they set up their office in Saskatoon.... Due to the boundary redistribution, the one seat that seems to be in question, which the NDP would appear to have a fairly good chance of being competitive in, at least, if not outright winning, is a new seat called Saskatoon West. That's why they were setting up a satellite office there, I contend, Mr. Chair, to be able to conduct partisan activities to try to enhance their chances electorally come the next election. Unfortunately, while they are fully able to do that, they cannot use House of Commons resources to do so.

Hence, that was the genesis of this motion. I think I'll refrain from making any more comments now, because I know that David probably, and maybe Peter, and certainly Kevin, would want to speak to this, but I think that when we have Mr. Mulcair appear before this committee on the 15th of May we will have a number of questions specific to the satellite offices, and I look forward to his comments.

● (1110)

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, you mentioned that you were changing the date in this motion to the 15th.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm sorry, yes. I had asked David to do that when we discuss that, but the government is in full agreement to change it to the 15th.

The Chair: Thank you.

David—oh sorry—Mr. Christopherson, you're next.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that. Let's stay with the friendly part of this for as long as we can because that's the part that feels real good.

We did have a discussion and I mentioned to Mr. Lukiwski that it's not unusual for committees to accommodate ministers given their busy schedules. I reflected the same thing about Mr. Mulcair and was able to show him copies of an event that's happening, an economics event where he's one of the scheduled speakers. I asked if the government would extend the same courtesy to move it from the 13th to the 15th. They agreed they would. So at this time, Chair, I'll move that.

I have nothing to say about that further, but I would appreciate a chance to speak to the amended motion, assuming this passes.

The Chair: That is an amendment. Are there any speakers to the amendment? The amendment is changing the date.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: We're on the amended motion.

Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks, Chair, and so much for the nice-nice part.

Make no mistake: this is a political witch hunt. Mr. Lukiwski just talked about the Duceppe matter, but as I recall, Mr. Duceppe wasn't hauled in front of the committee. This is a government that has taken on virtually everybody and everything that they see as being in their way, the latest being the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. They have methodically gone after every single bit of authority that is a legitimate check and balance on a democratically elected government in Canada. They have total disdain for those constitutional checks and balances to their authority. This is just one more example of that, one more manifestation of it.

A majority government is using a Board of Internal Economy matter as a pretext to bring in the leader of the official opposition and do everything they can to just play total partisan politics. We're running out of words to describe the actions of this government and their absolute disrespect for our democracy beyond the part where they get to form a government. After that, they have no interest in democracy, no interest in the Constitution, no interest in fairness, no interest in anything other than spending the next four years in the pursuit of repeating their capture of power. This is just one more example. It's not so much a precedent, but it's certainly a dangerous example to be put in motion, quite frankly, because it generated the motion that I brought. I have substantive parts to my motion, too, but—I make no bones about it—it was a political response to a political partisan move by the government. We're the official opposition. Do you think we're just going to sit back and let the government steamroll over us by using the tyranny of their majority to do whatever they want? That's not on.

The government is creating a climate in which this committee is turned into a kangaroo court, where the majority government wants to bring in the symbol of the legitimate opposition that exists in the House of Commons, and they want to go after that leader, regardless of whether it's my leader or not.... That's why it's so disappointing to see the Liberals in on this. I know they see an opportunity to draw

some blood, but I have to tell you, what goes around comes around. The day it happens when it's their leader at the end, they're going to want to know where their friends are in their time of need.

But make no mistake—and I'll wrap up with this—this is silly-bugger politics. It takes what some would argue is the premier committee of the House of Commons—it's certainly the committee that deals with macro issues that affect the House, and it's seen as a very important committee—and here it is now being reduced to sleazy partisan politics, a witch hunt in a kangaroo court setting. This is just one more example of this government trampling over traditions that are respected in this place, and in particular, the respect that is owed the leader of the official opposition.

I mentioned the Prime Minister in here. At the end of the day, committees know that they don't bring in the Prime Minister. Quite frankly, it's not unusual but it's not regular for us to bring in ministers. Why? Because it immediately becomes partisan. Yet, here we are right now in the process of the government using their majority, the tyranny of the majority, to whipsaw the leader of the official opposition to come in here and face a grilling in a kangaroo court setting where the government controls everything that's done. I'm just putting the government on notice that my motion, although it has substance—and I make no bones about it—is a political response to a political attack. It's wrong, and we ought to get off this, because it's a downward-spiralling torrent that's just going to reduce this committee to nothing but partisan politics.

Our colleagues deserve more from this committee. The Canadian people expect more from this committee.

• (1115)

As long as the government continues to go down this road, I can guarantee one thing: every time they take an attack on us, they're going to be met with a mutual attack.

But at the end of the day, it's the public that loses. It's our democracy that loses. It's one more shameful chapter in a whole book of shame that this government has written for itself.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Julian next on the list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's very clear that we are talking about a change to the rules. Mr. Lukiwski can try to change the process, but we know, since the BOIE told us, that a change was made to the rules. Anyone following this issue knows that no rules were broken. The BOIE issued new rules and we will abide by them, as we abided by the previous ones. There's no doubt about that.

However, the BOIE's change was very partisan. I also deplore the fact that the BOIE has become a partisan tool, just like the other institutions of government. It's not right for a majority government to use all of these institutions as it sees fit and to serve its own interests.

•(1120)

[English]

Mr. Chair, Tom Mulcair has been in front of parliamentary committees. He has no problem doing that and responding to the committee.

This government is using its majority to push pretty inappropriate ways of using the institutions to try to crush opposition. Mr. Mulcair, of course, joins what is really good company. We saw the government acting the same way with the Parliamentary Budget Officer, with the Chief Electoral Officer, and now we're seeing it with the Chief Justice, which is unprecedented. Even with Sheila Fraser, who is a personal hero, we have seen how the government treats her. So he's in good company.

The reality is that we're seeing the government using its majority on the BOIE, on the procedure and House affairs committee, in Parliament, to try in some way to push back on somebody like the leader of the official opposition, who has been an incredibly effective questioner in the House of Commons.

It's smoke and mirrors rather than dealing with real issues. If the procedure and House affairs committee were concerned about real issues, the motion that my colleague is bringing before us, which I think is a result of hundreds of pages of information that we've seen in newspapers across the country on the misuse of CIMS, that is something the procedure and House affairs committee could choose to tackle. But we're talking about a majority government using its will to try to deflect from its own shoddy actions.

It's no problem for the leader of the official opposition to come before committee. He's done it in the past. He's done it in a political environment in Quebec City, often with the PQ government using it in somewhat the way the Conservative government tries to use its majority here. That's not the problem. The problem is that the process is inappropriate, and even though answering questions is no problem for the leader of the opposition, I think this government should have thought twice before using all of the tools it has to try to crush opposition.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I'll go to Mr. Richards next, and then Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Chair, I do have an amendment, but I'll make a few brief comments on the motion first.

I think it's one thing for a party to... When we look at some of the things that the NDP proposes, their political philosophy certainly seems to be to just tax the pants off taxpayers, because they know better than Canadians how to spend their money for them. That's quite one thing. You know, it's certainly something I completely disagree with, and it's certainly something I hope taxpayers are never subjected to. But that's quite one thing.

It's quite another, on the other hand, to have such a disrespect for taxpayers' dollars. When we look at some of these things that are alleged here, it certainly seems to me there's a misuse of taxpayers' dollars. At the very least there's a great disrespect for taxpayers' dollars.

They can sit here today and try to claim that somehow they didn't realize they were breaking the rules or whatever argument they want to try to conjure up here. The bottom line is that everyone in this place understands that there is always to be a delineation between the activities that we undertake here as parliamentarians and the partisan activities that are paid for, of course, by political parties. The NDP clearly doesn't seem to understand this distinction or chose to ignore it. That's more likely the case. It's a huge concern. I think it's very important that their leader does come here to answer for those things.

Now, I'd like to get to the amendment that I'd like to make. Certainly what I would be doing is adding a part (e), after part (d), obviously. I'll read it slowly so that the interpreters have a chance to provide the translation for it. As I say, it's adding a part (e):

from the House of Commons Administration, any documents or materials (including but not limited to emails, briefing notes, meeting notes and reports, and memoranda) produced or obtained relating to the subject matter of satellite offices; and

Then it would continue into the final paragraph of the motion. I can provide a copy as well.

To speak to that very briefly, it certainly seems as though the NDP has been caught trying to pull one over on taxpayers, and it's important, in order to ensure that the committee has all the materials it needs prior to this meeting... We want to ensure that every possible material that could provide information that the committee would find useful is available, and therefore the addition of this part (e) would be helpful in that regard, for the committee to be fully prepared for the meeting.

•(1125)

The Chair: We have an amendment and it appears okay with me.

We're now on the amendment. I have a speakers list for the main motion as amended. Did I see a hand?

Mr. David Christopherson: I put mine up.

On the amendment.

The Chair: On the amendment?

Mr. Lamoureux, do you want to speak to the amendment, or wait?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I'll wait.

The Chair: I think I saw Mr. Opitz also. Would you rather wait, or speak to the amendment?

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): I'll wait.

The Chair: You'll wait. Great, then we'll go to Mr. Christopherson, on the amendment.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

My first thought on listening to the amendment on top of everything else the government's doing here was one of lamenting, wishing that the government would spend one one-hundredth as much attention investigating where the missing aboriginal women have gone in this country as they are in terms of a witch hunt on this issue. Make no mistake; that's what this is, it's a vicious witch hunt and everyone can see it and the government knows that's what they're doing, but we know they don't care about these things.

I want to underscore again to my colleagues, and I want to make sure I say it too, that Mr. Mulcair has no problems coming here and answering these questions. If the Board of Internal Economy had found any kind of wrongdoing, trust me, it would have been leaked out and it would have been in the headlines a long time ago. The government is just trying to change the political channel from all the negative press they've been getting around virtually everything they do, the obvious ones being the temporary foreign worker program, Bill C-23, and the attack on the Supreme Court. None of these things are doing them any good, so they try to create a diversion.

The media, of course, has to report what happens here. This is a man bites dog type story, so it gets lots of coverage. The government knows exactly what they're doing. However, the cat needs to be belled here.

Specifically to the amendment, it's just one more vicious piece of rooting around doing the best they can to cause as much damage as possible with no real intent to get to the bottom of anything, no intent other than changing the channel and trying to do everything they can to use their majority at this committee to put the leader of the official opposition under the gun. Demanding this kind of detail leaves no doubt to anyone paying attention exactly what the government is about here.

As I said, make no mistake; while they have a majority and they can use that majority, there will be responses when the government lowers themselves to turning this committee into a political attack dog for the Conservatives. That's what's happening and it's wrong.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Julian on the amendment.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, it's just more piling on. We saw it with the attempts by the government over weeks and weeks to say, "There's something wrong. They're breaking the rules. They're breaking the rules." Then they realized that, no, the NDP weren't breaking the rules in what they set up to reach out to people right across the country, ensuring that Canadians actually had access to contact with parliamentarians from the NDP. They weren't breaking any rules at all, which is why then we saw the government force its majority on the BOIE in secret backroom meetings. They changed—

• (1130)

The Chair: I have to correct you. I've served on the BOIE. There is no majority on that committee.

On the amendment, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair, I would profoundly disagree with you and what we're seeing now is the BOIE being used for partisan reasons.

What we're seeing is they changed the rules. We respect the new rules, but, Mr. Chair, what we're seeing is it's never enough for this government in its witch hunt. First they tried to say we weren't respecting the rules. Then they realized we were, so they changed the rules. We're respecting the new rules, so now they're doing a witch hunt, and the amendment that Mr. Richards is offering is in that same vein. It's let's just load up every document and material everywhere we can in the House of Commons. Let's shut down any other work

that can actually help benefit Canadians and let's just turn things over to collecting tons and tons of boxes.

The reality is we respected the rules, as you know, Mr. Chair. BOIE knows we respected the rules. We're respecting the new rules. The rules were changed to try to monkey-wrench our outreach to Canadians and Canadians having access to parliamentarians, and it's completely inappropriate. It's a witch hunt, as Mr. Christopherson said. The whole government is focused like a laser on attacking any of its opponents, whether that's Sheila Fraser, or the Leader of the Opposition, or the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and it's deplorable.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lamoureux, did I see your hand on the amendment?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Chair, I'll speak briefly.

I listened to the amendment, and it seems to complement the main motion itself; therefore I will be voting in favour of the amendment.

Having said that, Mr. Chair, I reserve my full comments until we get to the motion itself.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Opitz, we are on the amendment. Keep it to the amendment, please.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Yes, Mr. Chair.

This reminds me of something written in a play once, "thou dost protest too much". Mr. Julian said a little while ago, "If our leader shows up, it's not a big deal." Then what is the big deal? I hear all kinds of metaphors—dogs, people biting each other, belling cats—and see the waving of the hands and accusing the BOIE of unfairness.

Mr. Chair, they should approve this. To Mr. Julian's point that there's no particular issue, that his leader could sit here and clear it all up, I say, then fine; let's just get on with it.

The Chair: Okay, that's a great way to segue into this. I have no more speakers on the list on the amendment.

Mr. David Christopherson: Could we have a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: Certainly. I got used to that last week.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 3)

The Chair: On the motion as amended, I have speakers on the list still.

Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, I have a few thoughts that I'd like to share with the committee with regard to the process in itself.

Albeit that I have never sat on the Board of Internal Economy, in my former life as a member of the Manitoba legislature I had the good fortune to sit on and observe, in both an official and an unofficial capacity, what we called the Legislative Assembly Management Commission, which is the equivalent of the Board of Internal Economy. My understanding is that they operate in many ways in the same fashion.

Now, I've been informed, I've listened, I have picked up some from reading the news, some just from discussions that have taken place, and a good part just in reading the motion that has been presented. I understand that there were some fairly contentious issues being discussed in the Board of Internal Economy. I think a good number of Canadians would be aware that there is something there. We're not sure exactly what it is, but we recognize there is something there.

It wasn't that long ago that in this committee we were talking about the Board of Internal Economy and we were trying to come up with a way in which some of the discussions within the Board of Internal Economy would be not held in camera but in fact would have been open to the public.

This is the point at which I find this becomes interesting. If you look at what the Board of Internal Economy is, one of its primary responsibilities is for the way we spend tax dollars as independent members of Parliament and in leaders' offices and so forth. A big part of it is that we have parliamentary resources allocated to us as individual members of Parliament and as offices. We all have a responsibility to make sure to the very best of our ability that we are in compliance with the rules that are put in place by institutions such as the Board of Internal Economy. I trust that when there is a violation of those rules, that violation has been given attention.

I have sat, as I indicated earlier, in the same sort of committee when examples of questionable expenditures were brought up, and the issue was dealt with. It was pretty much straightforward: there was consensus among the different parties, and the issue in essence was resolved.

Not having sat on the Board of Internal Economy, I suspect that on occasion the board has had to deal with expenditures that members of Parliament in particular have made, and that a consensus evolves as to how such matters should ultimately be resolved. Quite frankly, I suspect there may even have been members of Parliament who have had to pay back claims, for example; or you might get a member of Parliament appealing a decision as to why they were not able to claim something.

But there are some rules that are very clear, one of them being about party activities and having individuals who are being paid through parliamentary resources have offices that are paid for by a political party.

I'm not 100% sure, I don't know whether it was I or someone from the office who made the inquiry, but shortly after being elected as a member of Parliament, I was looking into the possibility of using my own party office as a place where I could have one of my workers who would be paid with parliamentary resources. The response I received was that no, I wouldn't be able to do that. I was fine with that. The question was just left, and I continued. That was shortly after I was first elected.

● (1135)

Then, Mr. Chair, when I start to read some of the newspaper reports of these "satellite offices" out there, and that, in fact, there are parliamentary resources being used to staff these offices—and I made reference to this in a speech I gave in the House not that long ago—that, indeed, would be inappropriate. There were the two being

cited, one of which is located in Montreal. I believe the other one, as you pointed out, Mr. Lukiwski, is in Saskatoon. All I know is it's definitely in Saskatchewan. I had even seen some sort of an NDP job search letter or qualifications which talked about what it is that person would be doing, and it sounded very political.

When finding out this, it raised a number of red flags that something could be wrong. Then, when I read the motion itself, it talks about mass mail-outs. Mailings have always been a keen interest of mine. The ability to communicate is of critical importance, not only for an individual member of Parliament, but also for critics, for portfolios, for leaders to communicate with people beyond their own boundaries. Mailings are very important, and I support the principle of critics and leaders being able to communicate with Canadians beyond their own constituency, but one would like to think it's done in a reasonable, non-abusive fashion.

When I saw those mass mail-outs being brought in, I was very curious in regard to what had taken place. I suspect one political party has probably spent more on direct mail in Winnipeg North than I have as the incumbent member of Parliament for Winnipeg North. I don't know for sure, but I do know there was a mass mailing into my area, and three or four envelopes went to one house. I do know it takes place, but I don't know to what degree.

It seems to me that something, again, has taken place in the Board of Internal Economy. The problem, as I've pointed out in the past... and the NDP used to believe this. They had an issue with in camera meetings of the Board of Internal Economy because they believed that the public should be entitled to know what was taking place in the Board of Internal Economy.

I don't want to claim to know. I wasn't at the meeting. I don't know why there hasn't been more transparency with the public on this particular issue, Mr. Chair. I think that would have gone a long way in possibly resolving the situation itself, just being more honest and transparent about what has taken place. Right now we really don't know, and the reason we don't know is that the Board of Internal Economy has been very tight-lipped on the issue.

I suspect at the very least there is credibility to the argument that there may have been some serious abuse of tax dollars. One of the ways we can do what the NDP used to advocate for, and that's an open process in terms of the Board of Internal Economy...this could be a very good case in point in terms of saying that here's an issue that went to the Board of Internal Economy....

In certain ways, I hope the New Democrat representatives are correct in that there was no taxpayer abuse here. I hope they are correct on it. Then they will be able to level that at the government, and so forth. Suffice it to say that in order for us as a committee to be able to deal with the issue, we do need to get information.

● (1140)

This issue was first raised publicly when the government moved a motion in the House and it ultimately passed. Now as a committee we are obligated to review the issue at hand.

When I look at the motion, my understanding is that what has been requested here would be made available to us as committee members no later than May 9. I'm going to assume that, and at the conclusion of my remarks, Mr. Chair, could you give an indication as to whether or not it's reasonable for us to expect we'll be able to get that information? I think that's really important. If we have it today, I would be interested in receiving it today. I don't think we have to wait to receive it if it's already prepared.

I have a number of questions. For example, the lease in Montreal. In this amendment it's saying a lease agreement from the official opposition or the New Democratic Party, as the case may be. If there is no lease with the parliamentary office and the lease is with the New Democratic Party, how do we go about getting a copy of that lease? Has a letter been written? What sort of information that's within the motion would we be requesting the New Democratic Party to provide us as a committee? Has that been done? Can we anticipate that some direction to be able to deal with it will be coming from you as the chair of the committee?

In short, Mr. Chair, we support the motion because we believe there may have been a serious violation, using parliamentary resources for party activities. There seems to be a significant indication that may have been the case. The NDP as the official opposition has made it very clear that they would like their leader to come before the procedure and House affairs committee. I applaud them. I think before the leader gets here, it's only fair to members of the committee that we be provided the supporting documents to ask the type of questions we would like to be able to ask to get to the truth.

From the outside looking in, because I don't know per se what took place in the Board of Internal Economy, it looks as if something went wrong. I'm very interested in knowing if the New Democrats or the government are slightly exaggerating. I think Canadians deserve to know the truth because we're not talking about a few thousand dollars, but from what I heard, the potential that hundreds of thousands of tax dollars are being used inappropriately as parliamentary resources.

I would think that much like the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party would ultimately want to get the truth on the table.

I will conclude, Mr. Chair, because we have another motion following this motion. I was a bit concerned when Mr. Christopherson said that the only reason he's bringing this motion is the motion for Mr. Mulcair. It seems to me that Mr. Mulcair wants to come before the PROC committee, that the NDP have a vested interest in trying to expedite the process.

I'm not too sure if we should even be dealing with the second motion today. It's an issue I have a great deal of interest in. We spent a lot of time talking about it. I'm sure if we get on to it today, as I'm anticipating, I'll have a lot to say about that motion too.

● (1145)

I don't think it should take away from what it is the House itself has asked us to do. I do believe that is of a higher priority in the sense that it's a direction that's been issued from the House, and Mr. Mulcair himself has indicated that he would like to come before the committee.

In fairness to the leader of the New Democratic Party and to committee members, as a general rule, if we do have information that can be given to us even before May 9, I'm game, especially if there are areas dealing with the mass mail-outs that have been referenced here.

I don't really know very much at all in regard to that. I would welcome any additional information on that because I would like to be prepared for when the committee meets next week.

The Chair: To answer your questions on that, Mr. Lamoureux, before we go to finishing the speakers list, this motion has to pass for this information to be generated. My understanding is that the resource people would put it together, aware of the motion, and are already planning what they will do on the May 9 date here and then have it back in our hands for the committee to prepare for the 15th. That is well within the scope of reality. But until this motion passes, we are not promising you anything.

Next is Mr. Opitz, on the motion.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I'm done, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, on the motion.

● (1150)

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, just my last thoughts because I think we're coming to a conclusion on this. I find it incredibly—I don't know if you'll allow this word—hypocritical to make the argument about wasting taxpayers' money when we take a look at a process that is a witch hunt and it's going to cost money.

Just calling these committees together costs considerable money. Not only that but it's pretty rich coming from a government that has a track record of fake lakes, gazebos, not to mention the amount of money they are spending on their economic action plan. You wonder if they are going to spend money on ads on this to advertise the witch hunt here.

In response to Mr. Lamoureux, the only thing that's worth commenting on is the fact that I am equating my motion with Mr. Lukiwski's motion to the extent that you can stand it alone and say there are substantive parts to it and therefore it's a credible motion that way.

But make no mistake. It's politically motivated. This motion is politically motivated and it has to be responded to. We're not just going to lie back and let the government use their majority to run roughshod over the opposition the way they run roughshod over virtually everybody else, especially those that are powerless to respond to them.

We may not have the ultimate power as the official opposition, but we are not powerless. Therefore, when these kinds of cheap attacks are taken, especially against our leader.... Just to make it clear, our leader said he was quite willing to come because the motion was there and it wasn't that the committee was doing him some favour by acquiescing to his request to come here. So this Liberal thing again of trying to find the little sweet spot, make no mistake: they are part of the gang up and their day will come too. Mark my words.

I've said what I needed to say. This is a farce. Everybody knows it. We'll go through it and it will be behind us, but what a waste. What a clear indication that the government has every intention of continuing their modus operandi, which is, "You're in my way. I'm moving you." No matter who it is, what it is, and how legitimate it is, if it stands in the way of where they want to go, it gets removed. That seems to include even the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada for God's sake.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, on the motion.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, the first thing I want to mention here is what we're talking about. I mean, it's just amazing to see the Conservatives try to throw out all kinds of mud. The reality is that what the Conservatives didn't like was that party resources were being used to support parliamentary work, because it's smart when party resources, instead of taxpayers' resources, pay for the offices and the workers inside. After all of those investigations, after the witch-hunt investigations that were launched, there was nothing; there was nothing, no indication at all that the resources were being used for anything other than parliamentary work.

We're not talking about parliamentary resources being used for the party; it's actually the exact opposite and it saved taxpayers a pretty penny. The BOIE in saying that they can no longer work in offices paid for by a political party, it means that now the taxpayers would pick that up.

Now, nothing in the BOIE motion that was adopted, in a very partisan way...and I know, Mr. Chair, you expressed your opinion. I can tell you that having had the interviews with the Clerk around the issue of the BOIE...which we believe should be abolished, because it's secretive and now partisan. We'd already seen indications that the government was moving towards a BOIE that was partisan. That has not been the practice in Parliament. It is the practice under this government, in the same way that there's the new practice of attacking the Chief Justice, of attacking the Parliamentary Budget Officer, of attacking the Chief Electoral Officer, of even attacking Sheila Fraser.

That's part of how this government deals with what they consider to be dissent from the Conservative line. That's why this government will be thrown out in 2015. I can tell you that the Conservatives in my riding aren't going to be voting for Conservatives, because they're upset about all of the repeated breaking of promises and the scandals.

But the real kicker here, Mr. Chair, is that in this amendment, this big decision brought out by the partisan Board of Internal Economy—secretive, behind closed doors—they said we'd change rules as of April 14, 2014. They changed the rules because they realized that the NDP wasn't breaking any rules. Here's the kicker. I'll read it out to you, because it's interesting reading for those who actually follow this thing: "This section"—in other words, this new provisional amendment—"is repealed effective on the dissolution of the 41st Parliament."

In other words, it's a temporary rule. They changed the rule, and they changed it temporarily.

• (1155)

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Lamoureux, on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Chair, on a point of order, Mr. Julian is actually quoting a specific letter. I'd love to have a copy of that, because no doubt it's something that's pertinent to the debate at hand.

If that would be possible, I'd really appreciate it.

The Chair: I know that Mr. Julian, being the generous person he is, would be happy to share it with you.

Mr. Peter Julian: To my understanding, Mr. Chair, it was already sent to all MPs. This came from the Speaker's office, and it was already sent to Mr. Lamoureux's office. So he has it; he just has to go through his incoming mail. It was sent out on April 8.

It's a temporary rule that automatically is dissolved the moment the writ is dropped in the next election. Now, this can't add more cynicism to the whole issue: we didn't break any rules, so they brought in new rules. But then they said, "Well, we'll bring in these new rules, but they'll be temporary rules, just for 16 months, or 12 months; after that we'll go back to the old rules that allow for what we did."

Mr. David Christopherson: What a farce.

Mr. Peter Julian: What a farce. What a joke. Temporary rules; provisional amendments that are no longer...

We're not talking about suspended: repealed. They no longer exist as of the dissolution of the 41st Parliament.

Now, if that is not the height of cynicism, Mr. Chair, I don't know what is: "We'll bring in a new rule, but then we'll just repeal it once Parliament is over."

The Chair: Bring it to the motion, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: That's very much to the motion, Mr. Chair, because the reality is that—

The Chair: Well, I'll make the ruling on that. I think you strayed from the motion, so let's get back to that.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Getting back to the motion, then—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Peter Julian: —the witch hunt I think is reaching levels that we never expected the Conservatives were capable of. That's why they keep falling in the polls, and that's why they'll be replaced next year. Canadians who are fair-minded see a witch hunt for what it is. It's when you go to the House of Commons administration and they say, "Oh yes, the NDP followed the rules"; when you go to Elections Canada and they say, "Oh yes, the NDP of course followed the rules"; and then, when you go to the BOIE and the BOIE realizes, oh gosh, yes, the NDP followed the rules, they say "Let's invent new ones and let's make them provisional." Taking it to PROC is just a witch hunt at another level.

But it's undermining their own government. The more that people see Conservatives engaged in witch hunts rather than doing the job they were supposed to be elected to do, I think the less that Canadians will see Conservatives as a viable alternative in the next election.

Mr. David Christopherson: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, in an attempt to extract at least a small shred of civility and fairness, I'm assuming—and I would seek clarification—that Mr. Mulcair would be treated the same as ministers who are asked to come in, and that it would be for one hour. I'm assuming that at least that element of fairness will be applied to Mr. Mulcair, so I seek clarification.

The Chair: It's up to the committee. Our meeting for that day would be two hours, and the motion from the House simply says that we will have him at one of our meetings. I look for direction.

Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Is Mr. Mulcair suggesting that it would be only one hour? Is that what he would like?

Mr. David Christopherson: No, I am. I'm raising it, as a member of the committee, and I'm just seeking fairness. When we bring in ministers at virtually every committee, it's for one hour, so I'm just saying Mr. Mulcair is paid at the rank of a minister. I am assuming he'll be shown at least as much respect as we, as the official opposition, offer to every minister of this government. That's the least they can do.

The Chair: Mr. Reid, on this point.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Chair, on this exact point, I recall no such solicitude from the New Democrats when they were purporting that the Conservative government was in contempt of Parliament in the last Parliament over the issue of supposedly having a \$1 billion off-budget prison building program for that, as well as a number of other purported contempts of Parliament, all of which, of course, were completely unfounded. As I recall, they summoned ministers back from the airport for multiple hearings, and so on.

I'm glad to see that Mr. Christopherson has developed such a finely tuned sense of solicitude for the well-being of his leader, who, no doubt, like brown sugar, would simply melt if confronted with the second hour of hearings, but I only wish that the same level of concern had been expressed on previous occasions.

I'll stop there.

• (1200)

Mr. David Christopherson: No, listen. In fairness, we just did Bill C-23, a 242-page bill. We accepted that the minister came in for one hour.

Mr. Scott Reid: On the same point—

Mr. David Christopherson: That's exactly what I'm talking to. We could have easily kept him there.

I'm just about done, and then you can have the floor, Scott.

We agreed. Why? Because that's the tradition. Would we have loved to have him here for two hours or more to grill him? Absolutely. But we did respect the fact that it is normal procedure. It does happen—and I've been part of public accounts in minorities that have called ministers back, etc.—but the normal procedure most recently followed by this very committee on Bill C-23 was that the minister came in for one hour. That was it.

We are just seeking the same fairness for Mr. Mulcair that this very committee and which this very opposition extended to Mr. Poilievre.

The Chair: I'll go to Mr. Reid and then Mr. Julian.

Let's try to finish this up.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm just going to observe that Mr. Christopherson demonstrates his own example that one can talk for six hours without end if one is tough enough.

With regard to the other point, look, if he's to be taken at face value, Mr. Christopherson is confident that at this time two years from now, Mr. Mulcair will be prime minister of Canada. At that point, we can worry about giving him his one hour.

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, I've been here for 10 years and I've never seen a minister of either the former Liberal government or the current Conservative government be present for more than an hour. I think we have an understanding that ministers have schedules. Even under minority governments, Mr. Chair, under which committees could have compelled ministers, I gather, I cannot recall a single instance where a minister was called in for two hours. One hour meets the criterion of the House order.

Mr. Christopherson is underscoring what has been the tradition and practice of this place. We bring in ministers for an hour, because we understand that is their availability. The Leader of the Opposition would have about the same availability as any minister, I think. In fact, I would argue that his willingness to be there on the 15th—we just voted for the amendment to make it the 15th—already does mean some changes to the schedule.

Mr. Christopherson reminds me that he is also a member of the Privy Council.

My assumption all along has been that Mr. Mulcair is happy to come to answer questions in the same way he has as a minister in Quebec city—

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): That's when he was a Liberal.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, but—

Mr. David Christopherson: Ignore him. Everybody else does.

Mr. Peter Julian: I can only assume that we're talking about an hour, because that has been the practice in the 10 years that I've been here.

The Chair: On the motion.

Mr. David Christopherson: Can we get a clarification?

The Chair: My clarification is, we have an order from the House to call him to committee, and when we're done with speakers on the list, we'll let Mr. Mulcair leave, just like we would with any other witness.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'd like to move an amendment that Mr. Mulcair be invited for the traditional one hour.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I think it's a new motion.

Mr. David Christopherson: It is. I just said so. It's an amendment.

The Chair: Where are you adding it in the motion?

Mr. David Christopherson: At (f).

The Chair: Okay.

On the amendment.

Mr. David Christopherson: A recorded vote.

The Chair: I have to make sure that's in order.

I'm being told that's a document section. Find a better place to put the time.

Mr. David Christopherson: Fine, a new (a), new (b), new (c). I seek some advice. Apparently my motion is in order; it just needs to go in the right place. Can I seek some assistance from the clerk for advice as to where that might be?

The Chair: Where the date is at the top, if you added—

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, great, Chair, then that's where I'll put my amendment.

The Chair: On the amendment, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I did ask Mr. Christopherson if this is what Mr. Mulcair's desire was, just one hour. His response was that this was more his personal opinion and based on his experience with ministers who come before the committee.

I do want to suggest that, given the nature of it coming out of the House, we do have a number of questions that we as the Liberal Party would like to be able to ask. We're quite comfortable with not having it limited to the one hour. Given Mr. Mulcair's willingness to come before the committee, and there's no clear indication from him that he just wants one hour, I think we should just stick with the... until the questions have been answered.

•(1205)

The Chair: Thank you.

On the amendment, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I am very surprised, Mr. Chair, but we have always had a respect for parliamentary institutions here, and sometimes we agree or disagree on things, but there's certain pretty fundamental issues that we've never questioned. One is the minister's availability.

I have never, in the 10 years that I have been here, seen even a minority Parliament committee, where most of the members are not from the ministerial side, insist that they are not going to give the normal courtesy of the one-hour appearance. It just never happens. When a minister appears before a committee, there has always been on all sides—and even at the time when the Bloc was an official party here—I'd say among all the recognized parties, there has always been—

Mr. David Christopherson: Used to be.

Mr. Peter Julian: Well, up until this moment there has always been respect, and you respect the minister's schedule. To suggest, as you have, Mr. Chair, that somehow it's an open-ended appearance—12 hours, 15 hours—because, Mr. Chair, you just said until everybody has finished questioning, I mean, that is absurd, absolutely absurd.

The Chair: Nice of you to be calling your Chair absurd.

Mr. Peter Julian: It's an absurd notion, Mr. Chair.

I found you to be a fair chair. I don't find your comments around this particularly fair and I find it absurd to say this is some kind of kangaroo court that continues on forever.

The reality is, in the same way that a minister appearing before a committee has availability issues that have always been respected by all parties, Mr. Mulcair has availability issues. To be here for an hour, certainly; there's no doubt about that. An open-ended appearance, I think, Mr. Chair, quite frankly, anyone would see through that as a kangaroo court set-up. It is completely inappropriate.

Mr. Chair, what we have is a kangaroo court appearance that the Conservatives seem to be putting into place. It's completely inappropriate.

I'll seek direction through you, Mr. Chair, to the clerk. I'm not even sure that it is even appropriate. If you're saying open-ended... If we're saying an hour, I think there's availability there, no doubt. In fact, I know as Mr. Christopherson offered the amendment and we all voted for it, that Thursday, May 15, is available.

There's question period to prepare for. The leader of the official opposition has other responsibilities. I'd suggest, through you, first to the clerk, that to have a motion like Mr. Christopherson's is completely in order. Second, to my other colleagues around the table, I don't think it's a winning strategy to say, "We're going to do a witch hunt and we're going to bring our pitchforks and torches," and not extend the normal courtesies that all parties always extended to all ministers, whether Liberal or Conservative, in the past at all times. This is a huge change and it would be very unfortunate.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I have no other speakers on the list.

The motion is in order. As the chair, I'm always open to the committee making its own decisions rather than the chair making them. The vote is on the one hour that Mr. Christopherson has proposed.

•(1210)

Mr. David Christopherson: A recorded vote, please.

The Chair: It's a recorded vote.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 3)

The Chair: That's defeated.

As the motion now reads, Mr. Mulcair will be invited to the meeting of Thursday, May 15.

Mr. David Christopherson: A recorded vote, please.

The Chair: On the main motion?

Mr. David Christopherson: This is on the main motion as amended.

The Chair: It's a recorded vote on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 3)

The Chair: That carries and so we're all set for May 15. We can ask the House to prepare the documents that have been asked for by committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, in terms of receiving the documents, are they going to be sent by e-mail? With these whole new iPad requirements, I'm not perfectly clear.

The Chair: You're not paperless yet?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I'm somewhat paperless now, but do I have to come back in on the Friday in order to download it onto my iPad? How do I get that information?

The Chair: If it's suggested by the 9th, I would suggest the first of the week is when it will be sent to all members. As soon as we're all done but no later than accumulated by the 9th.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: So we'll receive some paper copies?

The Chair: There'll be a package going out to the members. What do you think?

That's the suggestion. A package will go out to you. It may go out electronically or it may come to your office.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: If I could be e-mailed, because I want to be prepared for the meeting....

The Chair: Let us ask that question and at Thursday's steering committee meeting we'll be able to answer it more fully.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, I had a notice of motion. Again, we're still going to try to stay with fairness as much as we can as official opposition. In fairness, I said to Mr. Lukiwski that we would look for one hour at his motion. We talked about the amendment going through. We did agree on that. We're now actually a little bit past that, so in recognition of the commitment that I made on behalf of the official opposition to keep this meeting to an hour, in order to honour that, I will not be moving my motion today, but will move it at the first opportunity after today.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are we good with that?

Seeing nothing else on our agenda, I will say that we will have a steering committee meeting in the second hour of the meeting scheduled for Thursday, the 8th. From noon until one o'clock the members of each party on the steering committee will be here. We'll discuss what private members' bills and work this committee has, taking it through until the summer. So come prepared to look at each of the items that we have out and we'll meet here.

Is there anything else for the good of committee today? I see nothing.

This meeting is adjourned.

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