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Chair: Mr. John Williamson





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• (1105)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)):** Good morning, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 87 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Hold on a moment please, Mr. McCauley.

The committee is meeting today to discuss committee business.

[English]

Go ahead, Mr. McCauley. You have the floor.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC):** Thanks, Chair.

I'd just like to table my motion that I put on notice last week. I understand the NDP has already submitted some lengthy amendments. I'm wondering if perhaps we could distribute that to everyone and then take time reading it.

**The Chair:** Why don't you just take the 30 seconds—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Sure.

**The Chair:** —that you need to read your motion. Everyone has had it for a few days.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Sure.

**The Chair:** It will give the Canadians who are watching an awareness of what's happening.

I'll turn to Ms. Ashton right after that.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** To both Canadians who are watching on CPAC right now, thanks for tuning in.

The motion is to have a study of GC Strategies, a value-for-money study, on the \$54 million spent on ArriveCAN. It's mostly specifically around the contractors, GC Strategies, which received the bulk of the contracts. They then turned around without doing any work on the ArriveCAN app itself, added their 15% to 30%—which turned out to be about \$11 million of taxpayers' money—and then subcontracted the work out to other companies, including very large companies like BDO, which then turned around and re-subbed the subcontracted contracts for the ArriveCAN app, adding even more money for work not done.

It's just a simple study. I think we owe Canadians a value-for-money study on ArriveCAN and GC Strategies.

Thanks very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I will note that you're wishing to call the cast of *Ben-Hur* to committee. We'll see what members think of that.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** We asked for Ben-Hur, but apparently he's dead, so we've taken the cast.

**The Chair:** Yes, I said the cast.

I will turn now to Ms. Ashton.

Welcome, and thank you for joining us today. You have the floor, please.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** Thank you very much.

I believe that the text has been or is being circulated. I'll read out the full language of the text. It is that given the fact that:

GC Strategies, a two-person company that does not perform any actual work but exclusively subcontracts contracts they acquire, has received \$59 million in taxpayer dollars from 2017 to present; and

decades of unchecked spending on outsourcing—which accelerated in 2006—has cost Canadians tens of billions of dollars while creating a shadow public service that works alongside the real public service—but without the same hiring practices or transparency requirements; and,

despite government promises to reduce outside contract spending, the recently released supplementary estimates (C) show an increase in contract and services spending of \$1.2 billion

That the committee initiate a two-meeting investigation concerning the value for money the Government has obtained through contracting GC Strategies – and through the practice of contracting and sub-contracting since 2006 - and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

To facilitate its investigation, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1), the committee order the production of all contracts with the Government of Canada from 2006 to 2022 in an unredacted format.

The witness list include the following:

1. All GC Strategies employees (Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony)
2. And any other witnesses that the committee deems fit to call.

As many of you know, I am here to replace my colleague, MP Blake Desjarlais, who is very keen to expand on this and further discuss it. Obviously we share members' outrage that this waste of Canadians' money is happening and this disrespect of the public services is occurring.

I do, however, want to make sure that my colleague Blake Desjarlais has the chance to speak to this more fully when he is back, so I therefore move to adjourn debate.

**The Chair:** Just one second, please.

I will call the question on that, please.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

**The Chair:** The decision to adjourn discussion on this motion and its amendment has passed.

You will note that the clerk has tabled two documents for you to consider when we next review this.

The first is a clean copy of what Mr. McCauley's motion would look like if these amendments were accepted. The second copy is a "track changes" one, just so you'll be able to see very quickly what Ms. Ashton and Mr. Desjarlais are proposing we consider.

Thank you very much, Ms. Ashton.

I have a list here.

Mr. McCauley, you had asked to be recognized, but I suspect that has been dealt with now. If it has, I'll turn to Mr. Stewart. Do you wish to take the floor, Mr. McCauley? The floor is yours.

• (1110)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Unfortunately, it has been dealt with. It's disappointing that we've adjourned debate, but that's life.

**The Chair:** That is democracy in action.

I will now turn to Mr. Stewart. You have the floor, sir.

**Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to move a motion:

That the committee call on the Auditor General of Canada to audit the National Capital Commission's \$8 million dollar Barn project.

Mr. Chair, we have now heard officials at the Treasury Board and Public Works tell us that the National Capital Commission would answer all the questions from all members of the committee. We did learn from them that the National Capital Commission is a Crown corporation with a lot of flexibility on how they manage projects, and they do not have to follow the same procurement rules governing federal departments.

We heard from Tobi Nussbaum, the NCC CEO, who said that the Auditor General has not raised any concerns in audits over the past five years.

We then heard from the Auditor General, who said that they did not audit this specific project. She said that any financial transactions would have been checked to see if they were valid, but the auditor has not done a performance audit to see if the project delivered value for the \$8 million of taxpayers' money.

Also, the NCC has now come back to me asking which of the more than 30 questions we asked the Treasury Board, Public Works and NCC we want them to answer, which of course is all of them. At this point, Mr. Chair, we now have more questions but no an-

swers. Canadians need the expertise of the Office of the Auditor General to examine this \$8-million expenditure.

As a note, the communications at the NCC is quite interesting, considering they have to hire additional comms persons to deal with a barn project.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor, please.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** I'm sorry. I thought it was Ms. Shanahan first.

**The Chair:** Pardon me. I did not see that, but I am more than happy to hear from Ms. Shanahan. I'll turn to Ms. Khalid afterwards.

Pardon me, Ms. Shanahan. The floor is yours.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.):** Thank you very—

**The Chair:** Okay. I'm sorry. I actually jumped not one.... I was so excited to see Ms. Khalid here today. Hold on. I actually did have Mr. McCauley first, then Ms. Shanahan, whom I neglected, and then Ms. Khalid.

[*Translation*]

Then it will be Mrs. Vignola's turn.

[*English*]

Mr. McCauley, you have the floor. I apologize. I will have a cup of coffee now.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** If I were you, I would skip over me as well, Chair. Don't worry.

Thanks, Chair, for that.

I want to thank my colleague for bringing this motion forward. I think this is an important motion and it's an important issue that we should study.

There are a couple of things I wanted to highlight that are not included.

The annual corporate report from the NCC clearly states that they are blaming Parliament for not appropriating enough money for the NCC to properly maintain the buildings. At the same time they are claiming that Parliament is cutting their appropriations for maintenance, they are spending \$8 million of taxpayers' dollars on a luxury barn on the Governor General's property.

We saw in this meeting the NCC come and, I think, less than honestly try to deflect and claim coverage for their spending by using the Auditor General's audits.

Now, it's very clear that the Auditor General doesn't audit luxury barns; she audits the overall books. I thought it was rather disingenuous for the NCC to quote the Auditor General 12 times, or bring her name in, to deflect from their actions.

Getting back to the luxury barn, we heard it was \$8.1 million for a relatively small barn. I went looking on Realtor.ca. In Edmonton's River Valley, I saw a house at about \$5 million. It's \$3 million less than the barn, including buying the property on the River Valley near where Daryl Katz, who owns the Oilers, lives.

It has an eight-car underground garage. The luxury barn has an underground. It costs a lot more to build down. Having built hotels, I know that. The house has an eight-car underground garage, a 30-foot indoor waterfall, six bathrooms and what looks to be about half an acre on the River Valley. It's one of the most expensive properties in Edmonton, and it's still \$3 million less than building a luxury barn that we didn't have to buy land for—we already own the land.

Here we have a house with a massive garage, prime real estate and a 30-foot indoor waterfall, and we could actually buy almost two of those for the price the NCC paid to put up a luxury barn.

I think when we have record numbers of Canadians accessing food banks and we have people struggling with mortgage rates, spending \$8.1 million on a luxury barn needs to be looked into so that we can put a stop to this practice.

Thanks, Chair.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mrs. Shanahan, I apologize again. The floor is now yours.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I recall the testimony we heard and many of the questions that were asked at the time of both the Auditor General and the officials from the NCC. The thing that was most concerning to me, and I think to other members here on the committee, was the issue of deferred maintenance and how putting off work for years, and even decades, adds to the cost of a project. Indeed, at different times it was with the objective of being what I would call penny-wise, pound foolish that projects were put off.

We all know what has happened to the costs of construction, costs during the pandemic and so on. That's where we find ourselves today, but it's not just with the storage facility that was discussed at Rideau Hall, which serves other buildings as well; it's other heritage properties, such as Stornoway, the residence of the official opposition leader, and other heritage buildings.

I propose an amendment to this motion. Once amended, it would read, "That the committee request that the Auditor General of Canada investigate the long-term financial impact of deferring maintenance on federal heritage buildings such as 24 Sussex Drive and Stornoway."

**The Chair:** I'll come to you in one second, Mr. Nater.

Thank you, Mrs. Shanahan.

I just want to make sure that the clerk or someone captured that amendment.

Is there any chance you have something in writing or in an email?

That's perfect, then.

First I'll hear the point of order on the amendment to the motion.

**Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I look to you for guidance. I was wondering whether the amendment would be out of order because it's beyond the scope of the original motion. It really changes the dynamic of the actual motion.

**The Chair:** I'm going to have a look at it. Give me one second.

Ms. Shanahan, do you have it in front of you? Would you mind reading it again?

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** I have notes on it, so—

**The Chair:** Could you read it again into the record?

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Okay....

• (1120)

**The Chair:** I'm going to suspend for a minute.

• (1120)

(Pause)

• (1120)

**The Chair:** If members could take their seats again, I'm going to call the meeting back to order.

Ms. Shanahan, I'm going to rule this beyond the scope of the motion.

You are certainly welcome to come back with this motion. I have the clerk looking up the rationale, if you would like to hear that, or we could just proceed with the debate on the motion. Of course, you are welcome to bring this back at any time.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Could I hear the rationale?

**The Chair:** Yes. We'll have the clerk.... I probably should have given the clerk another 30 seconds to slip through his well-used O'Brien and Bosc.

**An hon. member:** Is this a challenge to the chair?

**The Chair:** No, it's not a challenge. This is a friendly inquiry. If that ever happens, I'm sure we'll know.

I'll just suspend again for one minute, please.

• (1120)

(Pause)

• (1125)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

This is probably a bit of overkill. I have ruled that this amendment exceeds the scope of the motion before us, but just to reinforce the decision, Clerk, could you please just highlight for folks the page and section you were referring to in advising me?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Cédric Taquet):** Yes. It's the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, chapter 12, "The Process of Debate", page 541. It states that:

An amendment is out of order, procedurally, if:

it is irrelevant to the main motion ([meaning] it deals with a matter foreign to the main motion, exceeds the scope, or introduces a new proposition which should properly be the subject of a separate substantive motion with notice);

It raises a question substantially the same as one which the House [or the committee] has decided in the same session or conflicts with an amendment already agreed to;

it is completely contrary to the main motion and would produce the same result as the defeat of the main motion;

**The Chair:** There are a few points there to hang the hat on.

That is my ruling.

Mrs. Shanahan, we'll go over to you, please.

Do you want the floor? If not, it's your call.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** If you have something to say further on that—

**The Chair:** No, I don't.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Okay, very good.

Chair, it's a learning moment. Certainly my intention is to improve upon Mr. Stewart's motion, because I think we did learn quite a bit during that testimony, and there's more that we would like to learn.

I would like to take this time to propose alternate wording.

With the amendment that I am proposing, the entire amended motion would read as follows: "That the Committee call on the Auditor General of Canada to audit the National Capital Commission's storage maintenance facility and the impact of deferred maintenance on federal heritage buildings in the National Capital Region."

I think we can furnish some ad hoc French wording.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I'll hear your point of order, Mr. Nater.

**Mr. John Nater:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just seek your guidance as well on whether this amendment would be not permissible for a reason similar to what the clerk just ably read out.

**The Chair:** This one I will rule in order. It might need a little work, but I think it is broadly in order. I will allow it. It is an amendment to the motion. The clerk will type it up as quickly as he can and send it around.

Would you still like to speak to it, Mrs. Shanahan, or should we let things rip?

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** We'll let the clerk do his work, in fairness to everyone.

**The Chair:** I'm going to let him do that, but do you still want to speak to it? If you do, the floor is yours, but if you don't, I'm going to move on to another member.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** My intention here is to discuss it in broader terms, because that is very fitting in our role here in public accounts. We're always seeking to have better practices and to extend the recommendations that the Auditor General will make towards any given agency or department that would better help other departments in the public service.

The issue of deferred maintenance is a key one. It has plagued many different projects and many different departments over the years. It is one that is irrespective of the government in question. It goes toward a tendency of short-term thinking, which too often results in long-term potential disasters when buildings such as 24 Sussex are actually termed as unsafe for human habitation.

With that, I hope the new wording captures that intention. We're asking the Auditor General to look at this issue of deferred maintenance for all heritage buildings, including the storage facility we studied in depth. That will be very helpful. It will certainly advance the work that we do here as a committee and be of benefit to this administration and future administrations.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I will recognize Ms. Khalid next. I will just check in with the clerk.

Mr. Stewart, do you have a point of order, or is this a request for the speaking order?

**Mr. Jake Stewart:** I was just going to speak to it.

**The Chair:** I have you down, and you are number two after Ms. Khalid.

The clerk is just working on the translation, and we'll send it out momentarily. In the meantime, Ms. Khalid, would you like to speak to the amendment to the motion?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Yes, absolutely, Chair.

You know, last week I wasn't here. I missed two very important meetings, I think, in this committee. I was in England as part of a Commonwealth delegation. I was participating at the Westminster buildings in London, England, where you really get to understand and appreciate the heritage sites and how well they're maintained. You see the plaques from the 1800s. You see the statues from the time democracy was first established and Westminster was established in London, England.

I couldn't help but compare that with our heritage sites here in Canada. As part of the Commonwealth delegation, earlier this year I went to the Ontario legislature to see how they're dealing with the maintenance and upkeep of their legislative buildings in terms of including new traditions while preserving old traditions as part of the heritage and as part of what represents our democracy in our country and our province. That delegation looking at the Ontario legislature also included members of provincial parliaments from all across the country. They shared their experiences in how they preserve their heritage sites and how they ensure that they are inclusive in a way that maintains not only the culture and the heritage and the history of who they are and what they are and what they represent but also embraces new cultures and new traditions in accordance with how our democracies are evolving.

It's really interesting, Chair, that at the Commonwealth in London, I did ask one of the staff there how much they spent in the regular upkeep of all their heritage buildings. Obviously, they're quite elaborate and quite beautiful and very, very well maintained. The gentleman gave me this reply: "MP Khalid, they are well worth the money we spend. We maintain them very regularly. That's for efficiency purposes. We don't let them crumble, because they are part of our history. They are part of who we are as Londoners and as part of the U.K. and the Commonwealth. It is well worth the money we spend."

When I asked him if the citizenry had any objection to that, he said absolutely not, because people know and understand the value of maintaining that heritage and that history.

When we had that meeting here, we heard from the NCC about how we can endeavour not only to ensure that we are preserving our history and our culture and are working with Canadians to ensure that we're being inclusive with all of that maintenance, but also that we talk about how we can be more efficient.

We've heard stories and reports about how 24 Sussex, for example, is completely uninhabitable. I think we as parliamentarians, as part of our job and our role, have an obligation to ensure that our history and our heritage and our culture are maintained and that we are spending money efficiently. A dollar spent today saves us from spending two dollars tomorrow on the exact same thing.

I think this study, with these amendments that Ms. Shanahan has proposed, is actually a pretty decent one for us to enter into. How can we make sure that we are being efficient? How can we make sure that we are preserving our democracy? These heritage sites are part of who we are as Canadians.

I really don't think, Chair, that anywhere in the world would have any objection to spending that kind of money, but I do take the point that colleagues across this table have raised, which is that it needs to be efficient.

Again, I want to support Ms. Shanahan's amendment to the main motion. Yes, we need to preserve, but we also need to find efficiencies. I'm looking forward to working with colleagues to find that synergy between the two.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Khalid.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vignola, you have the floor.

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

I understand the importance of the motion and the amendment.

The original motion focuses on a garage that cost \$8 million and is located on the site of an old barn. Is that cost due to the time it took to build it? Is it because of the number of subcontractors? It cannot be argued that the cost is due to the heritage aspect of the garage, as that was not taken into account at all. In fact, the photos show a building further away that has preserved its heritage aspect.

Personally, I have absolutely nothing against spending \$8 million on a building if the craftspeople chosen to do the work respect its original character. As Ms. Khalid said, we have to preserve this type of building's historical side.

However, I find it quite surprising to spend \$8 million on a garage with an elevator, concrete and checker plate. So I understand that my colleagues from the original study want to focus specifically on that aspect in order to understand what happened and to ensure that it doesn't happen again.

I also understand the need to include in a budget the costs of restoring heritage buildings and their daily maintenance. I also understand the need to calculate how much it would cost per year if it was decided to act preventively rather than reactively.

Frankly, I am very surprised to see that this is not already the case and that heritage buildings are not better maintained, better protected and better regulated. For many years, there has been talk about renovating the Prime Minister's residence, but things are being let go, regardless of the party in power. This has been going on for decades. If I remember correctly, when Stephen Harper was in power, it seems to me that it cost about \$180,000 to renovate the kitchen at the Prime Minister's residence. It wasn't even the main kitchen, but rather a secondary kitchen. Everything had to be re-done: cabinets, electricity and plumbing. Heaven knows, and the devil may guess, that when you start opening up the walls of a heritage building, there are never-ending problems. Costs are rising astronomically because there has been no prevention.

So I understand my two colleagues' objective concerning this. However, I wonder whether it should be part of the same motion. The objective is more or less the same.

On the one hand, we are trying to understand how expenses could have gotten out of hand so much as to go up to \$8 million for a checker plate building. On the other hand, we are trying to understand how prevention can save us money.

Is it prevention in the case of the Prime Minister's residence? No, we are at the stage where the disaster must be managed. Does that mean that everything will have to be demolished and rebuilt, while respecting the original character and making improvements? Apparently, it wasn't a very functional building. I wouldn't know, as I've never been there.

I think we should instead make two separate motions, since the objectives are not exactly the same. So I suggest that we make two different motions, since the topics are similar, but not really interrelated.

• (1145)

**The Chair:** That's very good.

I would like to say something before I give Mr. Stewart the floor. This is something the committee is going to have to discuss. The objectives are indeed similar, but they are not quite the same.

It's not really a heritage building with the original dimensions, but it still has to do with the issue. In addition...

I'll stop there because I don't want to get too political.

That's something the committee is going to have to decide on.

[English]

Mr. Stewart, you have the floor, please.

**Mr. Jake Stewart:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Although I don't think any of the members of our team are against studying a few more assets over there, and that's for sure, with respect to the language of the amendment, I think we're probably far from finished.

The National Capital Commission, in their original communication with the original diagrams and ATIPs were the first to refer to it as a barn. We will likely end up voting against the amendment just because of the language, although we don't necessarily disagree with including a few more assets.

I just want to draw your attention to a couple of things. In my riding, just for an example, the community of Doaktown built a brand new modern state-of-the-art hockey arena, and it was under \$7 million. Picture that. Kids from the rural community of Miramichi as well as from Doaktown and from as far away as Blackville and Renous sometimes use the arena as well.

The barn at the Rideau property cost more than a brand new modern hockey arena. Think about that. Think about it for a minute. Think of the two biggest projects for the City of Miramichi in the past 10 years. Dredging the river was going to be paid for by a private company. It was a \$12-million cost. The river had been dredged probably since it was first possible, maybe in the late 1800s or early 1900s, but by 1994 it wasn't dredged anymore. We were a port town originally, my community.

The member from Beauséjour saw to it that a \$1.5 million ask just to fix the navigational aids, which had deteriorated from the 1990s, was declined by this very government, as well as \$5 million for the Northern Energy Solutions pellet mill that was going to be situated in Newcastle on the former Repap properties. That was going to be for tools, equipment and jobs. The total project was around \$80 million, as I remember.

If you look at rural Canada, some of the larger projects that get completed.... I helped get a nursing home when I was a provincial MLA. It was 30-bed nursing home. I believe it cost \$9 million or something.

If you look at the cost of a \$8-million barn, nobody can understand the concept of that. We still don't know the square footage. We still don't know how many floors go underground. We still don't know what's down there. Most people have a barn; they just don't have it laced with fibre optics, underground tunnels and elevators. Most people where I live could never understand it.

People, quite frankly and properly so, are sick and tired when they look at an expenditure of this magnitude. This Rideau property is literally just one big racket. It's the racket at Rideau. It should be a series of novels that we're probably going to write in due time. There's no value for money.

One other thing I noticed, and I think it's really interesting, is that if you look at the ATIP, you see that it listed all of the companies and expenditures. It listed Pomerleau as the main contractor—they would say the primary contractor. When it was going to list what they were going to accomplish, that was the only thing on the document that was redacted. That was the only thing. It was very clear that they won the bid. It was very clear that they were the primary contractor and that they would handle some of the other contracting, or maybe all of it, but it wasn't entirely clear what the purpose or scope of their employment would be. I thought that was interesting.

That's the end of my comments. We'll be voting against the amendment.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thanks, Chair.

I have two points to make.

One, I just want to speak to Madam Vignola's comments. First off, I really appreciated them. I thought they were very thoughtful and very engaging and added to the conversation.

The reason I don't think that these should be two separate motions is that the majority of the witnesses who would be attending on both of these issues would be exactly the same. I think these issues are very intrinsically interlinked with each other. It just makes sense for us to be efficient and deal with this matter all in one motion.

Second, Chair, I'm not sure if you're familiar with the game of cricket, but the grounds of Rideau Hall host the oldest cricket pitch in our country. Earlier this year, I was able to bring together parliamentarians and our diplomatic corps of the Commonwealth to come and play a friendly game of cricket. Canada won, in case anybody noticed or wanted to know—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I have a point of order, Chair. Relevance...?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I'm getting to my point, Chair.



While I was there, we saw that the little clubhouse they have for the grounds was in a significant state of disrepair. I was talking to the Ottawa Cricket Club, which is managed by volunteers. They said that if the maintenance had been done a decade ago, they would not have to spend so much money now. Now they're stuck in this limbo, where they don't have the funds, or the funds that they would need to restore this beautiful property would be three, four and five times the cost had they been able to restore it back when it was needed about a decade ago.

I'm just adding that, Chair. I would appreciate it if we could call the question and see if we can get on to other business.

**The Chair:** All right.

I just want to make one point of clarification: This motion is not about a study with witnesses before this committee. This is to refer it to the Auditor General for review. It's for that office.

I think, Ms. Khalid, that you're aware of that, but I caught that reference, and I just wanted to make sure that no one else was deflected by it. This is for an Auditor General's audit.

Go ahead, Mr. Stewart.

**Mr. Jake Stewart:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. There's one other point that I wanted to make.

I was looking at the transcripts. Public Services' Lorenzo Ieraci said that in 2021-22 the National Capital Commission's budget was \$239 million in total. At one point, I heard that 24 Sussex was going to be a \$40-million to \$50-million upgrade. Like Ms. Khalid, I think Canadians' heritage properties are important—and as a baseball player, I secretly always wanted to play cricket—but I will tell you, Mr. Chair, that there's something that strikes me as really interesting. When the National Capital Commission was here, I asked them who was in charge of making the decisions. What they told me was that an independent board makes all the decisions. In another question—and I never got back on the floor to ask this part of it—in another segment, somebody else asked about 24 Sussex, and the National Capital Commission said they're waiting on the government to approve that building.

I've been thinking about it ever since, and here's why. This is the point I want to make. I walked these grounds recently. It is a beautiful property, full stop, and Canadians should be proud of it. This is about value for money, clearly, so if the National Capital Commission is truly an independent board, independent and fully competent to make their own decisions, why rely on the government for a \$40-million expenditure that's now likely \$70 million because of the inflation that the government so aptly caused?

My point is very simple: Why rely on the government for a decision that you can make yourself? Why run the cost of 24 Sussex up through the roof in the eight years that you neglected it? If it cost \$40 million to fix 10 years ago.... Let's just say that. Let's use that as an example. Nine or 10 years ago, it would have cost \$40 million to fix 24 Sussex. They have the \$239-million budget to fix it. They can put it in their budget to do it, yet they're secretly relying on the government to make the decision for them.

Keep following: Why would the National Capital Commission spend \$11 million that we know of at the Harrington Lake luxury

cottage or chalet, or whatever we're going to call it over there, and \$8 million on a barn, that we know of, while all the while having a problem with assets and deferred maintenance, yet leave aside the biggest decision on spending \$40-million on a place where the Prime Minister normally resides, which apparently is rat-infested and has gone by the wayside? Why would they spend all this money on other random projects and not put the money on the residence of the Prime Minister, if in fact it is a heritage property included on the Rideau Lake properties?

You can see very clearly that when the Treasury Board and Public Works came here, they said that everybody else—the NCC—can answer every question. They didn't. They had contradicted themselves so many times before they left that I think ultimately we're going to have to bring them back in here for a week to sift through some of it. Now they don't want to answer the 30 questions I submitted to them. I'm going to submit 30 more after today.

Mr. Chair, I think there's something inherently wrong at the Rideau estate properties. I know it, and we're going to continue to fight for it. We're against the amendment.

Thank you.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Clerk, we're going to call the question on the amendment, which I will read here.

It is to remove “Barn project” and replace that with “storage maintenance facility and the impact of deferred maintenance on federal heritage buildings in the national capital region”.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Very good.

The amended motion now reads, “That the committee call on the Auditor General of Canada to audit the National Capital Commission's \$8 million storage maintenance facility and the impact of deferred maintenance on the federal heritage buildings in the national capital region.”

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** I would like to refer you to the original amendment.

I don't believe the \$8 million was in there.

**The Chair:** It wasn't, but I picked it up. As I said, the vote was to delete “the Barn project” and replace that with “storage maintenance facility and the impact of deferred maintenance on the federal heritage building in the national capital region.”

Now I see that you were correct. I stand corrected.

The amended motion now stands as “That the committee call on the Auditor General of Canada to audit the National Capital Commission's storage maintenance facility and the impact of deferred maintenance on federal heritage buildings in the national capital region.”

Is there debate on this question?

Let's call the vote on it.

• (1200)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Can you read the full motion back?

**The Chair:** I will cue this up again and we can restart the vote.

The motion reads, “That the committee call on the Auditor General of Canada to audit the National Capital Commission's storage maintenance facility and the impact of deferred maintenance on federal heritage buildings in the national capital region.”

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Just to confirm, we did take out the \$8 billion, and this is the final....

**The Chair:** That's correct.

If I may say so, you're all welcome to use any language you like to describe this building.

You will note that when I posted the notice for this original meeting with both the NCC and officials, I used language that was more parliamentarian. As I said, you're welcome to refer to it however you like. This is how it has been referred to.

Mr. Stewart, go ahead on a point or order only—not a comment—because the vote's been called.

In fact, the vote has been called, so let's hear the vote, please.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 9; nays 1 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Very good. This will now be referred to the Auditor General's office for consideration.

Mr. Stewart, you have the floor. It is my intention to turn to line-by-line study as soon as we can, but of course we're in committee business, so go ahead.

**Mr. Jake Stewart:** Mr. Chair, I just want to say for the record that it was the communications brilliance at the National Capital Commission that determined to refer to it originally as a barn. It was the NCC itself that disclosed the egregious \$8-million figure. It's difficult for us, because we want the audit to get done, so we had to support it in the end. Why the government officials and the NDP would band together and be hiding the very words that the National Capital Commission itself used.... I find that very interesting and suspect.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Are there any other comments?

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

I just wonder who Mr. Stewart is referring to as “government officials”. I don't see any here at this committee.

**The Chair:** Why don't we all just say, “Hurrah, we passed a motion for the auditor”?

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** The auditor will consider it, given that it was nearly unanimous.

With your permission, I will suspend this part of the meeting so that we can come back in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]







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