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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Thursday, May 9, 2024

Chair: Mr. John Williamson



Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)): I now call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 120 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Before we begin, I would like to remind all members and other participants in the room of the following important preventive measures.

[*English*]

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times.

As you're aware, the following measures have been taken to help prevent audio feedback incidents. We're now using black earpieces that are of higher quality. Please use those. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of a meeting.

When you're not using your earpiece, please place it face down in the middle of the sticker for this purpose, which is generally on your right on the table. Please consult the cards on your table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and to reduce the chance of feedback from the ambient earpiece.

These measures, of course, are in place so that we can conduct our business without interruption and protect the health and safety of all participants, with a special attention to our interpreters.

[*Translation*]

I thank you all for your consideration.

The committee is meeting today to discuss committee business.

[*English*]

As some of you are aware, I'll start with ArriveCAN.

For our study on ArriveCAN, the following witnesses have declined our invitation: Harriet Solloway, from the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada; John Ossowski; Paul Girard; and the RCMP.

I think correspondence has been sent to you on at least three of these four. We'll send you the fourth one as well, once that is translated.

The Ethics Commissioner has not declined, but has indicated that they're not available until June. Of course, I'm prepared to work with that.

I'm going to move into a discussion.

Mr. Nater, I'll recognize you first.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the update from you.

I'll make my remarks very brief, and I do have a motion.

I think it's unfortunate when witnesses decline—

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There is a point of order, Mr. Nater.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Chair.

My apologies if I haven't kept up with the notes here. I realize that in our notice of meeting we're supposed to be in camera, but I notice that we're not in camera. Can you explain that quickly?

The Chair: I'll have the clerk explain that.

I believe the line is in camera for the in camera business. Perhaps I'll have the clerk speak to that, because I don't have the notice right in front of me.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Hilary Smyth): The notice was redistributed this afternoon and published to the website. The top header indicates that it's webcast for the first portion. We'll be moving in camera for the second portion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nater, you have the floor.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair.

Again, just briefly, I think it's unfortunate when witnesses decline. Obviously, an invitation means an invitation, but I think, as you've mentioned, it's slightly stronger than a simple invitation. The two individuals that I'm most concerned about are John Ossowski, who was the president of the CBSA during the time period of ArriveCAN, and Paul Girard, who was mentioned very clearly in the testimony of Mr. Firth at the bar.

I think those two individuals in particular are very key to our study, so I would like to move a motion:

That John Ossowski and Paul Girard be summoned to appear before the committee on Thursday, May 16, 2024, in relation to the study on “Report 1—Arrive-CAN, of the 2024 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada”.

I believe the clerk has that motion in both English and French and can distribute it.

Very simply, I'll just say a couple of sentences on it.

I think that when we have key witnesses who are refusing to come, who have key testimony related to this study, their attendance ought to be required. I would have hoped, frankly, that Mr. Firth's testimony at the bar might be a cautionary tale to those who would rather decline the authority of Parliament, but I think that at this point we have to move to a summons for those two individuals.

I will leave my comments there, Chair, because I don't want to eat up any more time of this committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

I've checked my email, and I see that the motion has been sent out.

I'm going to say a couple things off the top.

Mr. Nater, I do note in your motion you're giving it one week. That is fine.

Just so folks don't begin to go down the path and debate the timing, it is my intention to have a meeting next Thursday anyway with this committee, with witnesses who have already been agreed to by the committee. Regardless of what happens to this motion, we will be meeting next Thursday, at 10 in the morning, with witnesses.

That notice will be sent to you once the witnesses are confirmed and I have the paperwork in. We're working on that right now.

Without further ado, Ms. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mr. Desjarlais, I do see your hand up, and I'll go to you next.

Go ahead, Ms. Shanahan.

• (1540)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): In your opening remarks, you mentioned the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, and I think you gave some information around ethics.

Could you go into the responses of each one of these witnesses and where they sit?

The Chair: I will summarize them briefly.

The Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada—and, again, you have the correspondence and you have the full letter—is currently doing an investigation of ArriveCAN and felt that it would be best not to appear. I will let you dive into the letter to see the details.

Concerning Mr. Ossowski, again, there's correspondence on that. I don't want to prejudice, but he feels he does not need to appear.

Mr. Girard is similar, and he claims that he has a medical issue that he is dealing with. I've already pre-emptively asked for information on that.

As for the RCMP, you have correspondence on that as well.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our Conservative colleagues for bringing this motion forward. I will, of course, accept this motion.

However, Chair, I'm getting more concerned about the cost to taxpayers that these surprise meetings are having. I know that we've had many of these meetings that send MPs from their home riding. We're all going home on Friday on flights, and the taxpayer pays for all of the Conservative members and everybody to go home, and then they pay for those flights again just to sit for two hours.

I think it's a concern to taxpayers that in a Conservative-controlled committee, we're continuously piling on these costs to taxpayers over and over. I'm fully in favour of the motion, but I think we can do this work during regular times when we have resources and MPs are gathered. I appreciate Mr. Nater's comment and his motion, but I don't appreciate the tax burden, the cost to taxpayers, that these extra meetings continue to put on everybody.

I would ask the Conservatives to think about that, about the impact on taxpayers. We're in an affordability crisis right now. It's a very important issue, and we're talking about the cost to taxpayers, but how can the Conservatives continue to justify these extreme expenses? We're talking thousands and thousands of dollars to host these meetings for two days, to fly Conservatives into Ottawa, have all the interpreters and have all this work—thousands of dollars. We must be approaching hundreds of thousands of dollars on extra meetings that could be done during regular business hours because of the Conservatives here.

Chair, I think I find it appropriate that we should start documenting these extra associated costs, so I would like to amend Mr. Nater's motion to include a cost analysis of that meeting to Canadian taxpayers, and I'll give you notice that in any other surprise meetings that are going to burden the taxpayer, I will be asking for a cost breakdown and analysis for these costs, because I want to be able to make sure that we're being reasonable with the money we're spending on behalf of Canadians.

We have a meeting all day today when we could be talking about this. We could be talking about it a week from now. We have two more meetings scheduled. I just want to make sure that we're getting the best value for Canadians here.

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, could I get some language in? You would like to make an addition that says what? Would you like the analyst, the clerk or the chair to provide an estimate of the meeting cost?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Yes, there are the extra meeting costs and whether or not members will be attending in person or virtually, because for some members, it's thousands of dollars extra to fly all the way over here. We're talking about \$50,000 or \$100,000 if we start flying everybody back from their constituencies when it's not a sitting week.

• (1545)

The Chair: Sure. Then you would like the amendment—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Canadians are concerned about it.

The Chair: The amendment is to provide a cost estimate—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: It's to provide a cost breakdown. It could also be, maybe not a motion, but I just want the chair to take into consideration my concern about extra costs like this and the impact to our budgets.

Also, could you please tell us before we vote on these extra meetings how much they are costing the taxpayer? That would give me and Canadians a fair estimation as to why we continue to have extra meetings, because I think we have to balance the cost of these things. I know this work is important and I support the motion, but I'm getting nervous about these costs. We're doing studies on cost of living and we're doing studies on affordability, and I agree with those things, but we're also impacting the taxpayer here. I think the Conservatives, of most people, should take this into better consideration.

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, I need to be clear, because I think you said to maybe deal with a budget afterwards, so is there an amendment, and what is the amendment? Is it to provide this committee with a summary of the cost of the meeting?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: It's for the cost of extra meetings, yes.

The Chair: Well, let's just deal with this meeting. I mean, unless you—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: You called the meeting, Chair, and there are costs associated with it.

The Chair: You can either add it on to this motion or you can come back with a fresh motion, I suppose, that is universal, but it seems that right now you're asking for the cost of this Thursday meeting. Is that right?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: It's for all the meetings that are not regularly scheduled. This is a regularly scheduled meeting. Mr. Nater of the Conservative Party is asking to spend more money.

The Chair: No, Mr. Nater is not actually asking to spend more money. I've already said that there will be a meeting next Thursday, so I'm asking.... I am calling this committee back next Thursday period.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: How much will that cost? That's an extra cost, Chair. How much is it going to cost the taxpayers for that extra meeting?

The Chair: Let's agree on some wording, Mr. Desjarlais. Your amendment is that the committee provide members with an estimated cost of the meeting.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Yes, that would be great. I think that would go a long way to show just how important these meetings are and to try to balance our decisions with the cost breakdown for

Canadians, because Canadians expect us to be frugal. They expect us to be reasonable. They expect us to use money for really good reasons.

I appreciate the Conservative motion. I'm going to support it, but we have to be more reasonable. We have to actually look at the bottom line for regular people here.

The Chair: Okay, I'll just pause for one second, Mr. Desjarlais. I'm going to make sure that the clerk has my words, which you, I think, agreed with, and then we can keep moving. I have a list here already. Ms. Khalid will be next.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair: I'll just say that we are now debating the amendment. Pardon me.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That's exactly what I was going to talk about, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your pre-empting me.

Again, I really take Mr. Desjarlais' point here. We are talking about costs, but we're also talking about members' time and time in our constituencies. Yes, we do spend significant amounts of money in coming here, but then there's also that aspect of having surprise meetings. On this one, we had an opportunity to discuss this in the subcommittee meeting, and then we had an opportunity to discuss this in the surprise Monday meeting we had, which was a very short one, yet here we are, on a Thursday evening, planning our weeks out in our constituencies and now being told that we have another surprise meeting on a Thursday.

We are facing five back-to-back sitting weeks in Ottawa after this constituency week, and we will be here. We should, Mr. Chair, be using our allotted resources in a responsible manner.

I agree 100% with what Mr. Desjarlais is saying, which is that responsibility is fiscal. It's about taxpayer dollars and how much work we are able to do here for two hours, just so that you're able to have these surprise meetings that, completely honestly, could be scheduled during the sitting weeks as well, while we're here and while we're doing the work.

You have the opportunity to schedule extra meetings while we're in Ottawa as well, but you're choosing to bring us back during a constituency week. I really find that to be a misuse of the resources of the House of Commons and of taxpayer dollars in transporting members, especially the Conservative members, back here to Ottawa for those meetings.

Therefore, I absolutely agree with Mr. Desjarlais' amendment. I think that should definitely be there and that we should make that a consistent thing as well, so that we do recognize that when surprise meetings happen, taxpayers should know what the cost is to them to have an hour-long meeting when we're bringing in people from all across the country to sit here and do the work we could have done during a sitting week.

This is not a Standing Order 106(4) meeting. This is a meeting called by you at your discretion, Mr. Chair, and I completely respect your discretion, but I would appreciate it if you could be a little bit more judicious with taxpayer dollars in the discretion you're taking to call meetings, especially as a surprise.

I've said this time and time again, Mr. Chair: Can we please be a little bit more collaborative when we're scheduling meetings? Can we please be a little bit more efficient while we're here in Ottawa to get that work done? You called a surprise meeting for Monday afternoon. It was a very short one. It used House of Commons resources, yet here we are dealing with another surprise meeting.

I will leave that there, and I am absolutely in support of Mr. Desjarlais' motion.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

Just so we don't keep bringing it up, I will just gently... The refusal of these witnesses was not known to me on Monday. This has happened over the course of this week. I believe the clerk has been sending the correspondence to you, as we've received it—right away, if it came in both official languages, or as soon as possible, once it was translated. I've addressed the issue of trying to get additional resources during the weeks. It is very difficult. I'll say nothing more on that because I don't want to become part of the debate here.

You're on the list, Mrs. Shanahan.

Mr. Nader, go ahead.

Mr. John Nater: I'll be very brief, Mr. Chair.

Actually, I was going to make the point that resources during sitting weeks are incredibly difficult to come by. We've seen committee meetings having to be cancelled because of lengthy committee meetings in other committees, so it is difficult to make this....

I will make that point first. We all have things we need to do in our ridings, and there's no question about that. It is a challenge. That said, we are parliamentarians and we are legislators, so committee business and committee work are a key part of our job. We do have the option of hybrid settings, for those who prefer not to travel.

Briefly, to Mr. Desjarlais' point about the cost, I would just indicate that I would hope the cost analyses would be the incremental costs of an additional meeting, not the costs that would already be baked in, whether or not the House is sitting on a break week.

Obviously, some costs are borne by each of our individual MOBs, our members' office budgets. Some costs are borne by our TSEAs, our travel status expense accounts. Obviously, I would be looking for the incremental costs for an additional meeting on a break week.

That's all I'm going to say. I really don't want to waste too much time of the committee's work here.

The Chair: Mr. Stewart, do you wish to speak? You have the floor.

Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC): I agree with Mr. Nader on the incremental part.

I think it's unfortunate for all of us when people decide at the last minute that they don't want to show up to committee. It causes disruption to clerks, analysts and chairs. It causes disruption in all of our lives.

This is a unique project. We know that it cost over \$60 million. We know that some of the individuals who are declining our invitations to come here were specifically named in documentation and were believed to have aided GC Strategies in receiving these big scandalous contracts. As a committee member, I feel that it's very important that we get to the bottom of where that money went and how it was arrived at, regardless of which party affiliation we have here today.

I don't think it's the fault of the chair or of anybody in here. People simply don't want to show up because they've been named. That's too bad. We have a role to play to keep people accountable, and it shouldn't be any different for them.

That's what I have to say. Thank you.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Desjarlais, Ms. Shanahan and Madame Gaudreau.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I agree that ArriveCAN has been brutal. Since 2011, there have been a billion dollars of contracts, according to the most recent supply from our request for information. That's Conservatives and Liberals.

I'm very concerned about this. As a member of the New Democratic Party, I'm concerned about this, so I really want to investigate this issue, but I'm concerned about the underlying nature of extreme expenses being borne by our government to do this work.

It seems ironic and in conflict to me. On the one hand, we tell Canadians that we care so much about taxpayer money and how important it is. I agree with that sentiment, but I also practise that sentiment, which is not what I've been seeing in this committee so far. What I've witnessed that we care when it's convenient.

Look at the motion itself. Mr. Nader's motion speaks specifically to a time when we're not even sitting. It names a date out of the blue when we're not sitting, when we're in our communities.

I appreciate his comment on aggregate costs, or whatever that was. It's important that we be transparent with all the costs associated and borne against taxpayers. It's not my MOB. This is taxpayer money at the end of the day, no matter what.

For the extra meetings that the Conservatives and the Conservative whip's office have asked for, I want every single dollar accounted for. This is because this is a big party thing. The whip's office has asked the Conservative members of this committee to not think of these motions in their own mind but to think of this as a matter of partisan interest. That's the part I'm upset about. I'm upset that we're spending money for partisan interest, and Canadians are being tricked by that.

Look at the motion. It was moved by Mr. Nader to spend a bunch more money to fly everybody in next week when we're not even sitting.

My God, I want every single dollar accounted for. If members fly in, I want to know the costs of those members flying to Ottawa on taxpayer dollars to have a meeting that we have resources for today, we had resources for on Tuesday, and we had resources for on Monday. We have scheduled two more meetings in two weeks on Tuesday. We have two more meetings after that. The week after that, we have two more regularly scheduled meetings. The week after that, we have two more scheduled meetings. The week after that, Mr. Chair, we have two more scheduled meetings. Actually, I missed one. The week after that, we have two more scheduled meetings.

Canadians are fed up with this. They're fed up listening to parliamentarians spend all their money because the Conservatives' whip's office really wants that.

It's a shame that you're spending money and playing games with Canadian taxpayers' dollars. Come on, guys, let's get serious here, honestly. I'm trying to work across the aisle here to get value for Canadians.

Mr. Chair, I hope you can take this seriously. I'm honest about this. Stop spending a bunch of money. We have all these meetings. We have over a dozen meetings scheduled on our calendar. They're all empty right now. Half of them are empty meetings. Let's schedule one of those.

Mr. Nader, I'm happy to support your motion, but please think about the Canadian taxpayers. This stuff is serious.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desjarlais.

Ms. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I have to thank Mr. Desjarlais for this amendment. I don't think it's lost on us. We're here, we're the public accounts committee, and we rail against government departments week in and week out for accountability on how they spend their money and making better choices, etc., yet here we are in this situation, and it's not the first time or the second time. There have been multiple times now.

Up until a certain point, we've been working together, either through the subcommittee or the committee, to come to ground on our calendar, on how work would be allocated. On ArriveCAN, I think there have been something like 15 meetings and counting, and over 65 witnesses. I have the calendar that I asked for this Monday, and I was very happy to see it. I was thinking that we were going to have new reports from the Auditor General. We were going to be able to deal with those reports, hopefully. Certainly I'm

looking forward to getting some reports out the door, but that's not happening.

I am definitely supportive of this amendment. I think that the public needs to know. I think the public accounts committee needs to be transparent and say exactly how much it costs, and I think it's going to shed some light on some of the other work or some of the mismanagement, let's say, of committee work that we can see across Parliament. I think Canadians would be very surprised at the duplication of work, because when I see the list of witnesses—and thank you for giving us a summary—I was wondering why we were calling these witnesses when the ethics committee is running its own studies with the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner and the Ethics Commissioner.

I don't see the letter from Paul Girard. You said that it had to do with medical information. Maybe it's in translation, but then, how is Mr. Nader able to make a motion? How is it that some members here have privileged information before other members? It's very concerning, and again, I for one certainly support the amendment that has been brought to this motion.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First, with regard to the subamendment, taxpayers have a right to know where their money goes. They are probably wondering if we are going to vote, and if we are going to have to start counting the time we spend filibustering in committee.

I am the only one here who is not forced to act in a partisan manner and filibuster. If we agree, let us vote. Then there will be a result and you can do what you like with it. I will let you have fun.

On the other hand, when witnesses do not show up after being summoned, there is obviously a scandal. I think that in five minutes, we could adopt this proposal.

I came here to look at the reports and get things moving. So when you repeat yourselves, as I am doing now, you should know that it costs money too. Think about it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Stewart, do you have your hand up to say something?

Okay, go ahead.

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

Once again, it seems that ArriveCAN is causing some random health problems among some of the most unruly, unco-operative and disruptive witnesses, who clearly don't want to be held accountable by this committee. I think we spend dollars on behalf of the taxpayer to find out why 60-some million dollars of their money went to people who disrupted their lives, people got contracts from the very people who are declining our invitations. I think that speaks volumes.

Again, I'll support the motion as long as it's incremental, as Mr. Nater said, but I want to repeat this again: These are unruly witnesses, and there's a very good reason that they're declining our invitation. It's because they're guilty of something, and everybody knows it.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Just one second, Mr. Stewart; I have a point of order.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes. I'd like to hear Mr. Stewart on the amendment.

The Chair: No, you can add yourself to the list. That's not a point of order, asking for a clarification.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: It's to relevance.

The Chair: Oh, it's on relevance. That's different. Okay.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: You made it very clear that we were to speak on the amendment.

The Chair: Pardon me. I thought you were looking to ask a question of Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Stewart, I think you're done. I'm going to move to—

Mr. Jake Stewart: I think I was building some statement around my support of the amendment, so long as it attends to the incremental aspect that Mr. Nater put forth.

The Chair: Look, the amendment to the motion is clear—I see you, Mr. Desjarlais—and the analysts will do their job without further guidance unless they come back to us and seek it. I will not be dictating to them based on the transcript. They can refer to this. If they have questions, they'll come back to us.

How does that sound?

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Williamson—

• (1605)

The Chair: Oh, pardon me. It's Mr. Desjarlais next. I thought your hand was up from before. Mr. Desjarlais had his hand up. Let me turn to Mr. Desjarlais, and I'll come back to you.

Mr. Desjarlais, go ahead.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm opposed to this idea of an incremental cost to try to find a way to hide public tax dollar expenditure just because the Conservatives want a trip to Ottawa in a week we're not in Ottawa. I'm opposed to that.

We need to actually be transparent. My goodness, this is the transparency committee. I want to know every single dollar that goes into this expenditure. I'm against any kind of approach that would have Mr. Stewart hide how much it costs taxpayers to ship them over here. I want to know exactly how much it costs the taxpayers to do that—every single dollar. I want to know every dollar that goes into these extra meetings.

Taxpayers are frustrated about the cost of living crisis. They're frustrated that parliamentarians get to sit around a room and talk about the fact that since 2011 the Conservatives and the Liberals spent almost a billion dollars in subcontracts. Someone could look at that.

For example, Mr. Stewart and Mr. Nater, I suggest you look at appendix B, contract values for GC Strategies, Dalian and Coradix. Since 2011, government under Harper and Justin Trudeau has cost us a billion dollars. I'm more interested in this than anyone else—

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, let's come back—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I'm happy to do this work, Mr. Chair, but I'm not happy about wasting Canadian taxpayer dollars.

The Chair: Fair enough, Mr. Desjarlais.

I would prefer that we not go down and try to overly define the analysts' work. I think the amendment is before the table. While there's been some voicing from the official opposition as well as others, I think the amendment to the motion is clear.

Mr. Desjarlais, for example, you're not asking for the cost of the air conditioning to be included. As I think the Conservatives would say, that's part of running the building. You're talking about the actual cost of running the meeting. I think that's clear. The analysts will pull together a cost estimate for us as best they can.

On that note, I will turn to Mr. Sorbara, please.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Williamson, as I recollect—I'm from the finance industry as well—I believe you served in various capacities in which you examined the use of taxpayer dollars and expenditures from the federal government. I think you are just as committed as I am to ensuring that we utilize the funds of the taxpayers in the most efficient manner and in the most proper manner. Like you, I've served for a number of years in this Parliament, like many of us here. I think you served before, before coming back, if I remember correctly. You can correct me if I'm wrong.

Yes, having a meeting during a non-sitting week happens through Standing Order 106(4) or if there is something of paramount urgency, but I'm really quite surprised about just having a meeting and pulling this out. As well, we've received correspondence from the two individuals in terms of their two situations, so I'm not too sure where we're going with that.

I'm really at a loss as to why we would utilize the resources of the House on a non-sitting week when, as other members have commented, we will be here for five weeks in a row, minus the Monday of the Victoria Day long weekend. There will be ample opportunity to meet on various topics that the committee itself deems to be important. We know that the committee is the master of its own domain, with you as chair at this current moment.

I'm really trying to grasp why we need to use resources. I applaud the member from the New Democratic Party for referencing the use of taxpayer money and so forth and how we must be judicious on that front.

I did want to mention that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Shanahan, go ahead.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I want to mention that I see that I have the letter from Mr. Girard in my box. We got it at 3:54, which was 10 minutes ago. How is it that Mr. Nater had a motion prepared about the appearance of Mr. Girard? Does he have special powers?

Chair, I'm very concerned here. It's not fair to all members of this committee that some members have access to information before others.

An hon. member: It's a question of privilege.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: It is a question of privilege.

The Chair: Is there anything else? Thank you.

I will call the vote on the amendment by Mr. Desjarlais.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We now return to the motion as amended, which you will see in your inbox. It includes Mr. Nater's motion as well as the NDP amendment to that.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

● (1610)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to propose another amendment. It would delete the date of Thursday, May 16, and replace it with Thursday, May 23.

Mr. John Nater: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: What is the point of order?

Mr. John Nater: The point of order is that if the date is changed, it then negates the amendment we just passed. It becomes a normal meeting, and there is no cost analysis required for that.

The Chair: Mr. Nater does raise an interesting point. The amendment will stand, at the risk of bumping the...

The meeting we currently have scheduled for the 23rd is the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act. You are addressing one of the challenges the chair has, which is...

Pardon me: It bumps the proposed scheduling of the auditor's report on transportation corridors. That is currently scheduled for the 23rd.

I suppose in doing this, the member is pointing out one of the challenges I have. We have only so much space. If you prefer to have not one meeting with witnesses but two on ArriveCAN, we can do that, but it will move others down or off the agenda, at least until the summer.

Is the amendment to change the date to May 23? It will impact another study that the government had requested.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, my apologies. I had an outdated version of the work plan.

If it's okay with you, I'd like to change the May 23 to perhaps the 28th or the 30th.

The Chair: Your amendment is to...?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: It's to change the date from what is currently proposed in the motion to the 30th, I'll say.

The Chair: Are you proposing "by", such as "by May", or a date?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm proposing it for the date of May 30.

The Chair: I have an ArriveCAN meeting scheduled then that the subcommittee and this committee agreed to. It will be very difficult to move that. Those witnesses have been very hard to secure. We have been waiting a month for that.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, I'm looking at the calendar and I see a number of open slots—June 11, 13, 18 and 20.

The Chair: Well, I'm asking you for a date and I'm telling you why the dates you're proposing don't work.

First, you're bumping into a government meeting. Then you're bumping into another meeting that has been approved by this committee.

I will reiterate that we are meeting next Thursday. We can do it all at once and get it done, or we can have two meetings.

● (1615)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, to clarify, if we don't have the date proposed in this motion, if it still passes, or whether it passes or not, we're still going to be meeting on the Thursday.

The Chair: That's correct.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: What would be the agenda for that meeting?

The Chair: It is with a witness that this committee has approved. I don't believe I'm at liberty to announce that person, because it is not all tied together. It is in the course of getting done. Rest assured that it is a witness that this committee has approved, subject to the motion that was passed.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: All right. Then I withdraw my amendment, Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Desjarlais, go ahead on the motion as amended.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciated Mr. Nater's submission on behalf of the Conservative Party that makes mention of the fact that these are extra costs borne by taxpayer. Considering the fact that you may have already invited them for next week, that you've already spent the taxpayer money without notifying us on this before the vote, and that you've already spent that money on behalf of taxpayers without notifying us, then it may as well be that we have this meeting, but I would suggest that we still have an opportunity to save Canadian taxpayers thousands of dollars by doing this meeting at a regularly scheduled time, Mr. Chair.

I trust you and I know you're really good at this work. I know you're a fantastic chair. You have all my confidence to use most appropriately your ability as our chair on behalf of all of us, to use the resources that you have to make certain that any of the days when we have no scheduled witnesses.... I could read them if you like: They're the 21st, which is the Tuesday after Thursday, and the 28th, which is the next Tuesday. June 4 is empty, June 11 is empty, June 18 is empty—

Mr. Jake Stewart: I have a point of order.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: —and June 20....

I'm sorry. Too many regularly scheduled—

The Chair: I'm going to hear the point of order first, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Stewart, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I just hope it's relevant, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: So do I.

Mr. Jake Stewart: I'm sure it is. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think this is extremely relevant. We have an unruly, unco-operative, disruptive and potentially very guilty public safety witness who has declined their invitation to be here today, and the fact that we're having a conversation of kicking it a month down the road is quite substantive to the members.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Four days isn't a month—

The Chair: That's a topic of debate.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you.

I would suggest that four days isn't a month, and I could bring out a calendar for Mr. Stewart to count the days. I can count for him the difference between what is on a Thursday next week to what is on a Tuesday the following week.

Mr. Stewart, do the math. You're someone I know who's a very incredible member of our Parliament, and you're very honourable, and I know that we've worked together on holding the government accountable when it came to the barns study, for example, the fiasco with the expenditure of taxpayer dollars for barns.

I hope you can see the same relevance here, Mr. Stewart. I don't think your constituents—and I'll speak directly to your constituents—expect you, on one hand, to hold the government accountable for expenditures that are inappropriate, and then at the same time ask the same taxpayer to pay a bunch of money when you could have had that same work done four days later.

Come on, guys. You know what game you're playing. Let's vote on this and just get this over with, because I agree with my Bloc colleague. She's raised an incredibly important point, and I think we have to be able to balance resources with what's needed on behalf of Canadians.

I'd even suggest, Chair, that we strike the date altogether and give you the power, Chair, because I trust you, and you're a great chair, to find a date out of any that I've mentioned. That's most appropriate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair.

Given that there was obviously an uneven distribution of knowledge in this committee and that clearly Conservative members had access to information before any other members had access to information on this and they came prepared with a motion, came prepared with a meeting already scheduled, I would agree with Mr. Desjardins to amend the motion and strike the date from it and replace it with "on any sitting week before the end of this session".

• (1620)

The Chair: It is, of course, your right to do that. You are—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'd like to speak to that.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: It is also possible, if you've invited somebody for the Thursday of a constituency week, to move that witness to any of the other open slots we also have from now until the end of June. I don't think we need to go through all that trouble, as Mr. Desjarlais outlined, for just four days. It really doesn't make sense to me. I'm hearing from my colleagues as well that it is quite perplexing as to why we're doing this.

I would move that amendment to strike out the date and to replace it with any sitting date from now until the end of this session.

The Chair: Let me just comment, because both you and Mr. Desjarlais mentioned this.

I think you're overstating the days that are open. On June 4, the Auditor General will be tabling three reports. That's why I've been working to try to get reports done line by line and to free space in June for those three audit reports.

This is where the committee kind of pulls and pushes at the same time, wanting maximum meetings on studies—we have to catch up line by line—but also rejecting recess sittings, and now potentially turning what I viewed as one meeting into two. That is the committee's right to do.

I will say this: If this motion passes, certainly I'll find space for it, but it will be at the expense of one of the meetings currently scheduled, and we'll still be here on Thursday of next week. It's well within the committee's right to decide and to dictate to the chair. I do find it unnecessary, because it means having not one meeting with individuals but two.

On that note, it is your choice how we proceed.

Your amendment is to strike the date altogether and to add "to have these two members not sit in a recess week".

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, I will again reiterate that I think you have the discretion—just as you had the discretion to try to schedule this meeting during a constituency week—to also move the one witness you have appearing for the two hours to come during a sitting week as well to save the taxpayers their dollars and to save all of us the four days that you're trying to....

I'm really not sure what the objective is here, Chair. I am looking at the calendar. I am looking at the work plan. I see that it is manageable. It is doable. I would appreciate and would encourage you, although we are talking specifically about what Mr. Nater has proposed, that if you do have something scheduled already, which we're learning about kind of at the last minute, to move that into a sitting week as well, so that you don't have to do the two meetings. You have the ability and you have the flexibility to do that. We are here to work with you on it.

You called a special meeting during a sitting week anyway this week. Why can't you do that for the five upcoming sitting weeks? It would be a lot more convenient, I think, and a lot more efficient for not just members in this House but also for the witness who is appearing and for the House administration, who are putting in all this extra work so that we can do the work that we do in public accounts.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm not sure if.... Is the amendment to strike the date and for these two to sit in a sitting week?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Is that clear, Clerk?

I have to suspend for a few minutes. We're looking for some procedural guidance here. Typically, summonses have specific dates or the word "by" in them. Of course, I want to be guided by the best parliamentary practices we have. Our clerk is looking for an answer to this right away.

I will suspend for a few minutes. Please don't go too far. I will call the meeting back to order once we have an answer.

This meeting is suspended.

• (1625) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1630)

The Chair: Having consulted the clerk, I'm going to rule your amendment out of order, Ms. Khalid, because the committee exer-

cises its powers by adopting a motion to summon one or more individuals to appear before the set date and time, and what you propose does not do that.

I will recognize Mr. Desjarlais. We're back to debating the motion as amended by you, sir.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In consideration of the schedule—I'm looking at the 21st, when we have spring cleaning, which I know is probably not nearly as important as the work on ArriveCAN—I suggest we actually move that meeting to the four days from the date on which Mr. Nater moved to summon them during a non-sitting week, when it would cost taxpayers thousands of dollars to ship Conservatives back to Ottawa at taxpayers' expense.

Instead of doing that, I suggest that we have the regularly scheduled meeting, at which we'll all be sitting, on Tuesday, May 21. It's a reasonable date. It saves taxpayers spending thousands of dollars to have Conservatives sit in Ottawa for the two hours, and we will get what we need to ensure that we have accountability on what is an extremely serious situation for consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments that have spent nearly a billion dollars on outsourcing.

I think it's reasonable to suggest, Mr. Chair, that four days past the date Mr. Nater has recommended is soon enough to have the level of work that we need done, and it's a free day.

I'm happy to do that in co-operation with my honourable colleagues.

The Chair: I can assure you that the analysts do not view that as a free day, because, as you know, we spend that time following up on departments. That being said, we can do anything the committee decides.

Mr. Nater, you have the floor.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair.

I guess we'll have two ArriveCAN meetings. We'll have a meeting next Thursday with the witnesses that are already confirmed for that day, and we'll have another ArriveCAN meeting on the following Tuesday on—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: On a point of order, Chair, did Mr. Nater just confirm that there's a meeting you've already declared before this motion has even passed?

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, at the top of this meeting, to bring things into focus, I said I was working with the clerk right now to have a meeting next Thursday. Regardless of whether this motion is approved or rejected, there is going to be a meeting next Thursday at 10:00 a.m.

If the committee decides to break it up.... I'm trying to be as efficient as possible with witnesses, to have—

• (1635)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: You've already spent the money. Is that what you're saying?

I'm curious about the money. Who is spending the money? Who spent the money? Did you spend the money? If you have spent the money already, because Mr. Nater—

The Chair: You had a point of clarification. I'll come back to you.

Mr. Nater, you have the floor.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Chair.

As you mentioned at the top, you scheduled a meeting for next Thursday with the witness you've already confirmed. It was going to be more efficient to have these two called for that date. I think that's the most efficient option.

I'll jump in my little Hyundai Elantra and get here. I don't fly across the country. That's the option. There's also the Zoom option for those who would rather do that. I think this is about accountability. Taxpayers expect us to do the work 365 days a year, regardless of when the House of Commons is in session.

I go back to the fact that additional resources, whether they're interpreters or House staff, are more available during weeks when the House of Commons is not sitting. We've seen meetings cancelled on a number of occasions when the House has been sitting because of the extreme demand on staff. I think it makes sense to do it. If there's going to be a meeting anyway, let's make sure we get it all done at once.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, you have the floor again.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that.

I just wanted to confirm something. I know that you are going to get back to Mr. Desjarlais, but you said there has been no witness confirmed. You're going to have the meeting on this constituency week regardless. You're saying there's no witness confirmed.

Mr. Nater is saying there is a witness confirmed and he was trying to be more efficient by calling in this motion to schedule in meetings when the rest of the committee members, other than the Conservatives, did not know anything about this at all. Am I right? I just want to clarify that this is exactly what I heard. That is what committee members are trying to get to you.

I want to add to that, Chair. This agenda for today's meeting has had so many changes. In fact, the last-minute changes are unreal. The original notice of meeting for today's meeting actually had witnesses on it. We went to committee business. Then we went to draft reports. Now we're in a public committee business setting. The draft reports we were supposed to review today are dated February. We received them yesterday. There are over 50 pages here that members have reviewed over the past evening.

I'm just really perplexed here as to what exactly is going on. Do you have a witness for Thursday or do you not? Are you just trying to have a meeting for the sake of having a meeting? That calls into question what Mr. Desjarlais was saying: Are you just spending

taxpayer dollars for the sake of it? Why can't we be more efficient in how we're scheduling these meetings? We keep moving things around. Quite honestly, the way it seems, with the 15 ArriveCAN meetings and all of these others that we've had, with seven during constituency weeks, I'm trying to understand this.

You know, Chair, I thought in a public accounts committee we were trying to do the non-partisan thing and really make sure we were being fiscally responsible in how the government spends money, working with the Auditor General and working with all members of this committee, so what exactly is happening? Why is it that certain members of the committee have information before other members of the committee? Why are we waiting constantly? Why are we continuing to have to change our plans at the very last minute in terms of how things are going to progress?

I'm not sure if it's at your whim or the whim of your whip or what's happening here, but I really would prefer some clarification here, Chair.

The Chair: I will let the clerk address the timing of the reports. It wouldn't surprise me if you received documents only yesterday. I will let the clerk, if she's able, just touch on the witnesses who were previously in this slot.

I will just remind everyone that at the very top I said there would be a meeting Thursday. I have secured an understanding with a witness who was approved by this committee. I do not have the papers for that yet, so I'm not in a position to announce it, as these calendars are all confidential.

• (1640)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Then why are we having a public meeting?

The Chair: It's because we're adults and we can talk about things that we can keep confidential.

I said that right off the top. Mr. Nater is just repeating what I said. That's where that came from. I said it right off the top to help focus attention.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor—no, sorry. I was going to give the clerk a chance to speak. Pardon me.

Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk: In regard to the notice of meeting, it was originally published on Tuesday at 5:59 p.m. with the three draft reports on it. Any indication for witnesses would originally have been on a draft calendar that was shared with the committee.

In regard to reports 7 and 8, they were only distributed yesterday. That was an oversight on my end. Because of the reports, we wanted to make sure we were studying them soon before distributing them to ensure that members had them readily available. Of course, this was an oversight on my end, and for that I apologize.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you, Clerk, for that. I really do appreciate your apology. It's a level of accountability that I think we can all learn from on this committee when being accountable for our actions.

Mr. Chair, you've already taken the action of spending taxpayer dollars. You've already asked us to come to committee during a non-sitting week, and it's a Conservative-controlled committee. I understand this is a Conservative-controlled committee, and they get to spend how much money they want, so I feel I'm outnumbered and out-gunned here.

For those reasons, I'll have to submit, as well as taxpayers, to the Conservatives' demand to continuously spend their money. I don't see the logic in it, trying to investigate \$60 million and spending \$60 million to do it. It doesn't make sense to me and it doesn't make sense to Canadians, but I'm happy to have the meeting since it sounds like, Mr. Chair, if you can confirm, that you've already spent the money. The money's been spent for next week, and we have to have that meeting no matter what, so I'd say let's just call a vote.

I really do think my amendment to the motion is a good one, and it should have us reflect on the kinds of ways we're spending taxpayer dollars, particularly in this Conservative-controlled committee.

I'm happy with going forward, Chair, with next week. You've already spent the money. Let's do the meeting, but let's really be serious about this going forward. Let's be serious about how much it costs taxpayers to have these meetings.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: First, I would like to know if I am the last one on the list.

The Chair: For the moment you are, but it could change.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I will be quick, because we have 45 minutes left.

We are trying to put people on trial instead of doing what we are here for: to get to the bottom of things and ensure accountability. So I ask all my colleagues to think of the taxpayers who are watching them. There are not many of them, but they are watching us all the same.

I think we are ready to vote, Mr. Chair. I invite my colleagues to put partisanship aside, so that we can work constructively and study the reports, which after all date back to February. I only just found out.

So I hope we can move forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Madam Shanahan, we'll go over to you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I would like some clarification, because I think the way information is transmitted is a pretty serious matter.

Could the clerk confirm what time the PDF file containing Mr. Nader's motion was created today? We see that it was created at 2:33 p.m. In other words, this means that some committee members had this information before the meeting even started.

● (1645)

[*English*]

The Chair: What's the mention of a PDF you received?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: The PDF of the motion was apparently created just prior to the meeting, at 2:33, which means that Mr. Nader had the information about Mr. Girard prior to your speaking to us about it at 3:30.

The Chair: Mr. Nader, go ahead.

Mr. John Nater: Yes, absolutely, we created that notice of motion prior to question period today, because we had no confirmation that Mr. Girard had agreed to attend this committee. We also had clarification that Mr. Ossowski was declining our invitation, so we created a motion to summon the two witnesses. It's as simple as that.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Did you have that prior to the other committee members?

Mr. John Nater: Chair, as Ms. Shanahan would know, we received an email from our clerk saying that Mr. Ossowski had declined, and we had not received any notification from Mr. Girard, which is why we had the impetus to write this motion. That is why I submitted the motion that is before you. It's as simple as that.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Oh, my goodness. I think it is clear.

The Chair: Thank you.

Clerk, will you call the question on the motion?

Why don't I read it?

I'll have the clerk read it, please.

The Clerk: The motion as amended reads as follows:

That John Ossowski and Paul Girard be summoned to appear before the committee on Thursday, May 16, 2024, in relation to the study on "Report 1: Arrive-CAN" of the 2024 reports of the Auditor General of Canada, and that members be provided an estimate of the cost of this meeting.

The Chair: Very good.

The Clerk: Shall the motion of Mr. Nater as amended be adopted?

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

The Chair: I'm going to raise the next point. I'll look for comments, and if I don't receive any, I will of course move the meeting in camera.

As previously mentioned, Minister Hajdu has declined to appear to discuss "Report 2—Housing in First Nations Communities". I just wanted to bring that to everyone's attention.

I see that Mr. Desjarlais has his hand up, so I'll turn things over to him.

Go ahead, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank all members of our committee for their support on this motion. It was meaningful to me and to first nations across our country to see support—and unanimous support—across party lines for the minister to be invited to be accountable for what is a very serious, sad and deplorable state that's facing my relatives and first nations across the country.

It's been no secret. Auditor general after auditor general has said that this is beyond unacceptable. We know there are still boil-water advisories. We know, from the Auditor General herself, that nothing is being done to address more seriously the issue of who is accountable for these immense failures. Absent the courts, our political entities, for decades and decades, have not contributed fair value towards these failures.

Mr. Chair, I seek your advice in this regard. I understand that a minister may not appear to be held accountable by this committee. It breaks my heart, and I think it certainly will for the first nations I've spoken to, including those of Treaty 6, who were hoping to hear from the minister as to why she wasn't going to be present and how she was going to implement an action plan to see the very issues presented in the Auditor General's report taken seriously.

I believe we cannot summon a minister; we can only invite a minister. I'm troubled by this, because we've now issued an invitation.

Is there any other mechanism, Mr. Chair, that you are aware of by which we can summon a minister—even a deputy minister, I suppose, or someone who represents the government or Indigenous Services Canada—to come to speak to us and our representatives whom we've invited, like the grand chief from Treaty 6, to be held accountable for the conditions in his communities?

• (1650)

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, I have a few thoughts on this, which I've raised with the clerk, but I'd like to hear a few more comments from the floor, if you don't mind.

I see that Mr. Schmale would like to address this issue. There's Mr. Schmale, and I'm looking for others.

Mr. Schmale, you have the floor, sir.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak on this. I am quite happy that the NDP is now seeing that there needs to be respect for taxpayer dollars. Our previous conversation enlightened me to the fact that they do care about that.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I thought we were talking about first nations housing and Conservative support for my motion.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That was my first comment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desjarlais.

I often allow all members a little drive-by, and all members take them.

Mr. Schmale, you have the floor. Go ahead, please.

He's getting to his main point. I can tell, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you.

Just a half-second later I was going to say that I support Mr. Desjarlais' concern and his absolute shock that the Minister of Indigenous Services has refused to come to this committee to speak about the horrible conditions indigenous communities face for housing. I should also point out, as vice-chair for the indigenous and northern affairs committee, that Minister Hajdu has declined our invitations to attend. In fact, there were multiple invitations to that minister. She was even invited to come to the committee to talk about supplementary estimates (B). She has yet to come to that committee to talk about supplementary estimates (B), and you know how long ago that was. I believe we now have her coming in on the Thursday after the break week to talk about the estimates, but even that is cutting it close.

That department continues to get extraordinarily large in terms of the people who are going into that department, yet we are seeing the results go down and the outcomes go down. That has been proven by the Auditor General, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and many others. We are seeing that ongoing issues with Jordan's principle, non-insured health benefits, housing, drinking water, etc., are not getting better. The fact that this minister refuses to show up to either committee, one of which is looking after indigenous and northern affairs, is absolutely shameful.

It has been pointed out to me—this potentially is an issue for this committee to deal with, and perhaps we'll get to it at the INAN committee as well—that we can actually ask the House to compel the minister to come to this committee and answer these very important questions.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor, sir.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate Mr. Schmale's comments. I find him to be a very honourable member as well. We've worked together on these issues many times.

I'm wondering whether the last portion of what he mentioned was a proposal for a tool that we would be able to have. Maybe I can get clarification. Can we actually summon the minister? If so, I would love to summon her. Let's summon her right now.

The Chair: Mr. Nater, you're the in-house expert here. Since this is a political matter, I will refer to you before we come back to the clerk and the House administration.

You have the floor, please.

Mr. John Nater: Sure. Our clerk can certainly correct my terminology if I get anything wrong.

I believe we as a committee could table a report in the House that would ask the House to compel the attendance, but “compel” might be the wrong word. It would require the attendance of the minister at this committee. That would be one possibility.

I don't want to speak for my colleagues, but I think that's something we'd obviously support. I mean, for a minister to decline to be held accountable to committees is I think unfortunate.

• (1655)

The Chair: That's something to consider.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, do you have any comments?

[*English*]

Mr. Desjarlais, I'll come back to you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I am going to talk about my experience on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Mr. Chair, we must not forget that the committees are masters of their own proceedings, meaning that, as long as a majority of committee members agree, they can choose to summon witnesses to explain what they did and to be held accountable. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has often asked ministers to appear.

It is important for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to get information on a specific situation, which is the one we are talking about, especially since it is in the Auditor General's report. The committee wants to pass a motion for the minister to appear. I think it is a very legitimate request and it should be done.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I do appreciate Ms. Gaudreau's and Mr. Nater's and Mr. Schmale's comments today in support of options to look at this.

Listen, I'm fully co-operative in our approach to find an option on how we get the minister to be accountable to this audit. Maybe it's as easy as her own members—I'd actually invite the member of the Liberal Party in this regard—speaking to her about the importance of this. I understand that there could be a loss of communication. Maybe she doesn't understand the urgency quite yet of the fact that the Auditor General has now had many reports. We need to explore all tools if we are truly masters of our committee.

I think Ms. Gaudreau is right, Chair, that we should be able to at least compel her in some way, shape or form, unless there's advice from you that we can't.

To your point, Mr. Nater, I want to explore that. I think with your support and with Mr. Schmale's support we could look at options in the House of Commons to do something like that. Of course, we would stand in full support of that kind of recommendation to the House that could compel our committee to summon her.

The Chair: I'll read out the section that will help focus attention, and then I'll turn to Mr. Schmale, who I believe wanted to address this.

This is from page 892:

If a Member of the House [of Commons] refuses an invitation to appear before a standing committee and the committee decides that such an appearance is necessary, it may so report to the House, and it will be up to the House to decide what measures should be taken.

That is the path the committee has to not compel the witness but to begin the process to have the House of Commons decide what steps will be taken.

Mr. Schmale, go ahead, please.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I just want to build on this conversation as well, more for our counterparts around the table who may be new to this developing situation.

I bring to the attention of Mr. Desjarlais that if he remembers back during the discussions on Bill C-53, the Métis self-governing act we were discussing just before Christmas and into January, the agreement at that time was that for the supplementary estimates (B), which is months ago now, if we got Bill C-53 through committee, at that point the ministers would gladly appear to answer questions of the committee.

We have had no ministers to date. We were told just a few weeks ago that we're still waiting on a date that works in their schedules.

I'm just painting the picture for everybody in this room that if we take it to the next step of voting on a particular motion, this is an ongoing problem—not just here, but at INAN—in a department that is swelling with bureaucracy, but yet the results are going down the drain. There are indigenous lives at stake here. Housing has horrible conditions. Again, there are ongoing challenges with drinking water. People don't have drinking water that's safe. There's Jordan's principle and the endless concerns about that.

I could go on and on, but as my friend from the Bloc said, if there's a path forward to have a motion, let's get to a vote. I just wanted to inform the committee or those who might not be aware of what's going on at the INAN committee that there are serious issues with getting Minister Hajdu to appear.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Bradford, you have the floor, please.

I just noticed you, Mr. Desjarlais, but I saw Ms. Bradford first. Please go ahead.

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Chair, can you share with us the reason the minister gave to you that she couldn't come to our committee?

The Chair: Yes. It was the clerk who sent it to me. The clerk is occupied, so I'll try to find it.

The Clerk: I will read it.

The Chair: Okay. The clerk will read it.

The Clerk: It reads, "The ISC minister will be appearing at INAN on June 3 on the subject of the OAG report on indigenous housing. As such, Minister Hajdu's office has indicated that she's declining this invitation to appear at PACP on the same topic".

Ms. Valerie Bradford: As I understand it, then, she is appearing at INAN at the same time we were wanting her to appear here.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That was for the estimates.

The Chair: Mr. Schmale, I'll hear from you afterward.

Go ahead, Ms. Bradford.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: She's appearing at INAN at the exact time, so she can't be here. There's a valid reason, clearly. She can't be two places at once.

The Chair: We didn't give her a date. We asked for a date.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Okay.

It would seem that, as often happens with committees, there's a duplication. We ask the same witnesses to appear at multiple committees on the same topic. If we're talking about using and misusing resources effectively, then here would seem to be another example if she's being asked to appear on the same topic at more than one committee.

In this case, yes, it does seem to be a conflict of time as well.

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, it seems that you and I are now being put together for misusing resources.

You have the floor, and then we'll have Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I do see the potential irony in that, but I'm not calling for an extra meeting, you might see. I'm calling for the regular resources for the minister to attend.

Ms. Bradford, to your point, yes, they're going to INAN, as they should go to INAN. It's the committee for indigenous and northern affairs. But this is the Auditor General's committee. She tabled a report on here. You are responsible, Ms. Bradford, for investigating, and properly investigating, the outcome of the Auditor General's reports. That's the mandate of this committee.

Unless I mistakenly heard you, I don't think you intended to imply that we should ignore the Auditor General's report and ignore our mandate in this committee to pursue the core objective and mandate of this committee. It can be seen or perceived by your comments that you wish to ignore this very real and legitimate concern on behalf of first nations or the mandate of this committee. Which is it?

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Am I allowed to respond?

The Chair: I can put you on the list, but I had Mr. Schmale first.

Mr. Desjarlais, I will ask you to put your hand down. You're welcome to put it back up. Thank you.

I will go to Mr. Schmale and then to my little list, which Ms. Bradford is back on.

Go ahead, Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Chair.

I don't have my notes in front of me. I'm just looking through my binder. I believe that when the minister is appearing on the 22nd, it is for the estimates. I'm just looking for a confirmation on that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Jake Stewart: Perhaps I could add something to the seriousness of the issue, to Mr. Desjarlais' comment.

I remember that as a former minister of aboriginal affairs in New Brunswick, I had, as you can imagine, 16 first nations all together, but I also had four in my current constituency.

I remember that the chief of one community called me and asked me if I could drive down and see something in his community.

When I got there, I got into the truck with the chief, who was about my own age. He had this picture in his truck. It was a picture of him at the age of about 10 or 11 with four other friends all the same age. They were all deceased except for him, at this point in time, many to suicide. We had a pretty heartfelt conversation about the community and some of the struggles.

Obviously, Jordan's principle is always topical, but in terms of the housing issues in that particular community, this is why the minister of any of these departments related to indigenous affairs should always agree to whatever invitation they're getting. That day I went to a house, and there was mould everywhere. There was mould all over the house. I have chronic asthma, so as soon as I walked into that, I started breathing terribly. You could visibly see that it was black mould. It was everywhere. What was more interesting was that in that household, it would have been suitable for a family of maybe four people, five max, and there were probably 16 or 17 people living in that house that I was aware of, as per the chief.

There were federal programs they were trying to access to fix the mould problem, but the band council couldn't afford it. Their money was stretched to other programs and projects. There was this huge pot of money in the federal government. I forget the exact name of the program, but they couldn't achieve it. The people in the house didn't have the know-how to get rid of all this mould and they had nowhere else to go. The community was already down probably 400 units. This was a big community in the Mi'kmaq territory of New Brunswick.

I just wanted to say that at those times, what I observed really changes everything for me. I think the minister should simply just agree to whatever we're inviting them to, because it's so important.

I just wanted to share that. Thank you.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stewart. Your insights on that are always welcome.

Ms. Bradford, you had asked for a turn.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to clarify the thread, I'm responding to Mr. Desjarlais.

The reason I raised the question with the chair was that I was wanting him to share with the members of this committee what reason, if any, the minister gave that she was unavailable. That's why I raised the question.

Typically, I believe, the normal process of this committee would be to review the report and bring in the AG with department officials, as this committee has historically done. As well, we usually deal with deputy ministers, not ministers. Even our chair has mentioned that it is irregular for us to ask ministers to appear. Normally it is the deputy minister who appears before the public accounts committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor again.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Ms. Bradford, I appreciate that. I hope you can appreciate the severity of the Auditor General's call to do more. She demanded that we have a level of accountability that is beyond the regular statutes of this committee.

Although I appreciate the comment on the regular processes that we would take under an audit, such as having the deputy minister of transport talk to us about some rail ties that were incomplete in the last fiscal year, I want to press upon you the urgency. If I haven't already, and if the auditors general over the last 20 years haven't already, I hope you can understand the severity.

Mr. Stewart just submitted a very legitimate and very sad reality of the state of first nations housing. This is an emergency. It's life or death. That's what we're talking about. He has asthma. Imagine an indigenous child with asthma right now in that house with all that mould. I don't know about you, but I have many people in my life who I would not want to see living in a deplorable state like that. This is the worst aspect of our country.

I've spoken many times about how I'm firmly a believer that the lack of action in this work amounts to a genocide. If we do not do

something, Ms. Bradford.... I am begging you to see, with clarity and with humanity, how important this work is. It's unfortunate that the minister hasn't appeared. The deputy minister herself has spoken about the fact that she as well has her hands tied. We need a level of accountability. It's been decades and decades of sitting on hands. The last three auditors general have said that this is beyond unacceptable.

Can we please have unanimous support to see a motion that would ensure that this work could get done? I would move that the standing committee—

• (1710)

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, I'm going to pause you. You sent me a note asking for information. I have asked the clerk to send all members the information.

What you have is the draft of a previous one. You will need to work on it with better language. That is just a template for you to work with, as you can see. Ms. Bradford would like the floor, so I can give you a few minutes. If you're still working on it and there are no speakers, I will suspend, because I see your intent.

Ms. Bradford, you have the floor, please.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Mr. Desjarlais, I don't want you making this personal, as though I'm uncaring. I would just like to confirm that I was merely raising a question: Why did the minister say that she was unavailable? I think that was a fair thing to do.

Of course I care. I don't think there's a person on this committee who is not alarmed and not aware of the severity of the situation indicated in the AG's report. That's not what's in question here. I just want to clarify that I feel it's unfair that you would construe that I or I think anyone else on this committee does not take this situation very seriously. Of course it is serious.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm not seeing any more speakers, but I get the drift that we're....

Mr. Desjarlais, I was going to suspend for just a few minutes, because you're right in the middle of this debate, and I think you need a few minutes to craft your language.

I'll suspend for three to five minutes—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I'm sorry, Chair. Can I make a last comment in response to Ms. Bradford?

The Chair: Yes. When we come back from suspension, you will also get the first turn.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I just want to make certain, Ms. Bradford, that you understand that this is not intended to be personal, and I apologize if you feel personal offence. I hope you can understand the balance of temperament I must have, since it's a severe issue for me personally, and it's very difficult to imagine a scenario in which this level of accountability could be sidetracked.

With respect to offending you, I apologize, but for the purposes of summoning the minister, I believe we can get support.

The Chair: Very good. That's very good of you, Mr. Desjarlais.

I will suspend for three to five minutes, so don't go far from this room.

This meeting is suspended.

• (1710) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1725)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I've spoken many times to the immense urgency that indigenous housing presents to communities across our country. It's clear through audits going back as far as 30 years ago on the commitments that were made by governments, in addition to the fact that the Auditor General has confirmed that many of the results haven't hit their targets and that indigenous people continue to suffer deplorable living conditions, that it amounts to an emergency.

Because of those reasons, Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion:

That the Standing Committee on Public Accounts report to the House that the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North has refused to testify before the committee on matters relating to Report 2, Housing in First Nations Communities, of the 2024 Reports 2 to 4 of the Auditor General of Canada, and that the committee recommends that the House order the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North to appear before the committee on a date and time to be determined by this committee.

The Chair: That is so moved. I have a speaking list, Mr. Desjarlais, so I will turn to that.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

It is difficult for the interpreters when they do not have the motion. I congratulate them—

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: —but I am not sure I understood well.

The Chair: All right, then.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Can we give the interpreters a hard copy, please?

The Chair: Yes, just a minute.

Also, I would like Madam Clerk to read the motion, when she is ready.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: After that, I have a speaking list as well.

Mr. Desjarlais, perhaps you would put your hand down. You can put it back up right away, if you like. Thank you. That's helpful. It just resets my brain.

The clerk will read the motion in French as well.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Here is the motion:

That the Standing Committee on Public Accounts report to the House that the Member for Thunder Bay—Superior North has refused to testify before the committee on matters relating to Report 2, Housing in First Nations Communities, of the 2024 Reports 2 to 4 of the Auditor General of Canada and that the committee recommends that the House order the Member for Thunder Bay—Superior North to appear before the committee on a date and time to be determined by this committee.

[English]

The Chair: I'll turn now to my speaking list.

I have Ms. Yip to begin with.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

On the letter that was sent, I just feel that there is a process and a progression that I feel we should take before we go to what the motion has suggested.

I would like to propose that before going straight to the House, we send another letter to ask the minister to come at another time and to make very clear what the intent is and to perhaps look at the schedule a little bit more closely. I think going from A to Z is perhaps a little bit.... It could be done in a such a way that we perhaps give the minister another chance to consider our request.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Shanahan, you expressed an interest in speaking. You have the floor, please.

• (1730)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, Chair.

I think you'll recall that when this request came up a few meetings ago, I spoke to the fact that this committee, the public accounts committee, is doing the work of reviewing the Auditor General's reports, which typically has... More than typically, it was actually a former NDP member, David Christopherson, who fought for the imperative that this committee see deputy ministers, because he saw at the time—and was quite emphatic when many of us new members in 2015 joined the public accounts committee—that it's about the accountability in the delivery mechanism.

I share the concerns of Mr. Desjarlais in the sense that this topic, in various ways and forms, has been treated by the Auditor General's office, and it feels like the results are not being felt on the ground, and that is, I think, after successive changes in policy and direction and certainly a massive influx of investment into Indigenous Affairs never before seen in the history of our government. As this committee has been able to determine, through questions and testimony from department officials, it very often has to do with gaps in data collection, inability to work collaboratively with indigenous communities and a kind of colonial historical blindness and deafness to what, on the ground, is going on.

In other cases, when there were good intentions and a desire to move quickly to fix problems such as boil water advisories, I think of some of the policies of previous governments to simply go in and build a water treatment plant, to invest money but then not ensure there was capacity in the community to maintain and keep that water treatment plant going. There could have been more consultation, more serious consultation, more attention and more informed delivery by the people in our public service to whom we have entrusted these policies and programs to execute, which indeed didn't happen, until, I think, there was a sea change in the approach.

We actually see in the matter of boil water advisories a significant improvement. I think that is a testament to our public servants, who—

Mr. Jake Stewart: On a point of order—

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: —deeply care about this issue—

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Mr. Jake Stewart: Can Ms. Shanahan confirm that she's filibustering?

• (1735)

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

Ms. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mr. Jake Stewart: Either we're inviting the minister to come or we're not.

The Chair: Order.

Mrs. Shanahan has the floor.

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

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I have a point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mrs. Shanahan. I'm hearing another point of order. I think that was from Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: It's a point of order on relevance, Mr. Chair.

If I can, I'll comment quickly. If the Liberals are going to filibuster, I don't have any more energy for this—

The Chair: No. I see your hand, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: [*Inaudible—Editor*] we'll just adjourn.

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, I see your hand. I appreciate your thoughts. Mrs. Shanahan has the floor and she's well within her rights on these topics.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, do you have a point of order?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Yes, Mr. Chair.

How long is this meeting supposed to last? Have people been allowed to—

The Chair: We do not have much time, but we have some left.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: How much time do we have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: It is a bit like a soccer game. It continues until I say there is no more time left. For now, we still have some time left.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: All right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

Indeed, what I'm speaking to is the functioning of this committee and how this committee addresses the review, analysis and work of parliamentarians. We're trying to improve the work of the government in all of the different areas it is called upon to apply policies that come from the government of the day—from the executive—but have to be operationalized, measured, resourced, budgeted for and then undertaken by public servants.

That is why Mr. Christopherson was so adamant. In fact, he said he didn't want to see ministers here. If I had more time, I would look up the quotes. He said he didn't want to see ministers here, because they can appear at other committees where they're going to talk about policies and so on. He said there are other avenues, but the people he wanted to see at public accounts—

The Chair: Excuse me—

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: —were the officials who are ultimately responsible.

The Chair: I am going to press for relevance a bit.

I appreciate what a previous member, who is no longer in the Parliament and no longer chair of this committee, said.

I will remind the member that this is a witness this committee agreed should be on the witness list. I believe it was passed unanimously by this committee.

I'm going to turn things back over to you, Mrs. Shanahan, but I'm going to point out relevance if you go back to a member who is no longer on this committee, when this committee decided unanimously to call in the minister.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Indeed.

Chair, I'm just recalling what I said at the time, and why having the minister appear—who we have had appear here before—is....

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*] a joke.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes. I guess some members feel it is a joke. I'm sorry to see that.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Order.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Please, everyone, maintain your respect. If you need to stretch your legs, I'll ask that you go outside.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going into this kind of depth on this issue because, as my colleague pointed out, we're going from a letter of invitation to DEFCON 10. That's where we're going on this.

As we have done it with other witnesses here, there's room for the committee to reiterate the request and write another letter.

Chair, you have said yourself there's a reason why we normally cannot compel ministers to come here. It's because they have, of course, very busy schedules. We try as much as possible to work with the ministers' schedules, which I believe the clerk can confirm. Maybe it is simply a matter of that.

The letter from the minister indicated that she was appearing before INAN, where she should rightly appear, on this very same topic on June 3. I can't speak for the minister, but I can see how she could feel that she was answering the call.

I could go further, Chair, but in the interest of coming to ground on something here, I would propose an amendment.

Do we have the wording of the motion? Can the clerk read that out for us?

• (1740)

The Chair: Let me check with the clerk. I believe it was sent.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay. I just want to see where the—

The Chair: Is that right, Clerk? Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: No, I have not received the motion.

The Chair: Excuse me. We are sending it right away.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: All right.

We receive all sorts of emails during the meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, we're just waiting for your motion to be distributed, and then Mrs. Shanahan has an amendment to your motion.

Mrs. Shanahan, could you read your amendment?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes. I move as follows: “That the committee request that the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada appear before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts regarding the Auditor General's report on indigenous housing, and that if the minister does not confirm a date on which she intends to appear by May 23, 2024, that the committee...”

The rest is Mr. Desjarlais' motion.

The Chair: All right.

Would you just repeat it? I heard it, but I'm going to ask you to repeat it. I thought that's what you might do. You're looking to add a couple of lines at the top.

Would you repeat that? I'll ask Mr. Desjarlais to pay careful attention.

Once you've repeated that, I have a generalized question.

Mr. Sorbara, do you have you hand up to speak after this? I know Mr. Desjarlais does. You might as well. You can get back in on that.

I'm going to turn to Mr. Desjarlais next, but, Mrs. Shanahan, could you just read that again and then send it to the clerk?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes. It reads as follows: “That the committee request that the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada appear before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts regarding the Auditor General's report on indigenous housing, and that if the minister does not confirm a date on which she intends to appear by May 23, 2024, that the committee...”

We'd then insert the motion.

• (1745)

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, that is an amendment to your motion. How do you feel about it? In essence, it's giving the minister two weeks to give us a date.

I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Although I appreciate the motion, I believe that the effect of what the member just read as an amendment is the same as the effect of my motion from some weeks ago.

Maybe, Chair, the clerk could read out the date of the original request and the follow-up request. I think the member will see that there's a pattern. It's clear to me. That is why I will reject the amendment. I hope the member can see that we have provided enough time.

The Chair: Thank you.

As I'm prone to doing, I'm not going to bring the clerk into our discussions. She is in the process of checking when this motion was passed.

Our committee clerk sent the minister the invitation with follow-ups, as the clerk does so well. I asked as well. I'm not going to bring the clerk into this, but she did her job. I also asked about it frequently, and was always told, “I followed up, and I will do so again.”

Do you have the date, by chance?

The Clerk: Yes. This was adopted by the committee on April 11—

The Chair: It was April 11.

The Clerk: —when we had the initial meeting on “Report 2: Housing in First Nations Communities”. That was sent the very next morning, at 9:28 a.m., and several follow-ups were done until we got our final response on Monday, at 6:06 p.m.

The Chair: Thank you. That's where things stand.

Thank you, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Sorbara, I see your colleague Mrs. Shanahan has her hand up. I might have seen your hand before. I wanted to double-check.

The floor is yours, if you would like it.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: No. I'll put my hand down for the time being and I'll intervene when it's appropriate.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: We're now speaking on the amendment. Is that correct, Chair?

The Chair: We are speaking on the amendment. That is correct.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, I'm very sorry that it had to come to this point, but I think we're just trying to put forward in, I think, fairly strong language that we are expecting the minister to provide the committee with an answer. We have provided a date to appear before this committee. I think it's almost unprecedented. I believe it happened in a previous government under, I would say, somewhat more egregious circumstances.

Given that members here feel very strongly about the minister's appearing, and frankly in keeping, I think, with what I like to see as the non-partisan and more professional and objective proceedings of this committee, with this amendment I think we're stating in very strong terms that we expect to see the minister make that...

I have no idea what her schedule is. I have no idea what's on her plate. We're coming to the end of a very busy sitting. She will be appearing at INAN, as has been confirmed by our colleague Mr. Schmale here, who is a member of INAN, and also through the letter the clerk received, which I think is certainly the normal course of things.

As I say, I regret that it has had to come to this, but I think we're showing on our side, in the spirit of working with Mr. Desjarlais and other members who seem to feel that it is not sufficient that the minister appear at INAN, that we will—

• (1750)

The Chair: I do not like to break up the debate, but I am at risk of losing resources. Should that happen, we would lose the motion's sponsor. We are discussing the amendment, so I'm going to wind things up.

There is one last note before I look for your agreement—well, I don't actually need it, because I'm out of resources. We have a deadline coming up for the CCPAC conference at the end of the summer. I'm going to come back to this soon, so please start thinking of whether you'd like to go to the public accounts conference at the end of the summer in Quebec City. We need to put a budget together.

On that note, we're out of resources.

This meeting is adjourned.

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