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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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• (1800)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): We are back in public.

Thank you, everyone, for your patience.

We have an additional budget for the GAC audit of consulting services. It's \$1,500, but of course we won't spend anywhere near that.

Can I get approval for that, everyone? It has been distributed already.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you very much.

Number two is the one that never goes away. It keeps coming back. It's into its third Parliament. It's the shipbuilding study.

This is not for getting approval to do it. This is to approve the budget to send to the Liaison Committee to try again. It has been approved in the past by the House. The last time we sent it in, it was not approved, so we are trying again. It's travel if necessary, but not necessarily travel.

The idea is one trip east and one trip west. The west one is Vancouver and Victoria to Seaspans and the Victoria shipyard. The east one, of course, will be to Quebec City, to Davie, and to Halifax for Irving.

We have distributed the budgets. Can we just get approval to send it to LIAI?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you very much.

There are a couple of things for next week.

On May 27, we're doing the red tape, which is the one that we rescheduled. If you recall, we had one set up. We had to bump them. That will be on Monday.

On May 29, we have agreement that we're doing the main estimates. We'll have Minister Duclos here and Minister Anand. It's from 4:30 to 6:30. I'm not sure who's going to do 4:30 to 5:30 and who's going to do 5:30 to 6:30.

Then, from 6:30 to 8:30, we're continuing the Canada Post study with the president of Canada Post, just to keep Mr. Bachrach happy.

I apologize, everyone. It is going to be a long meeting. That is next Wednesday.

• (1805)

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Next Wednesday, the first two hours are going to be the main estimates and then...?

The Chair: From 6:30 to 8:30, it will be the president of Canada Post.

Unfortunately, we have to do it like this because it's the only day the ministers and the president of Canada Post stated that they would agree to attend. If they had agreed to do different dates, then we would not be sitting for four hours. This is literally the only day they would agree to. In order to do so, we're going to make it a long day.

I had Mr. Bains first, but let me just go through it quickly.

On June 3, if you recall, we agreed we would have officials from PSPC and TBS for the main estimates. On that date, instead of them being here for two hours, with one hour for Minister Anand, for example, and one hour with the officials, they're going to appear separately. That will be June 3 for the main estimates.

Finishing out the month, we have the supplementary estimates (A) coming out soon, and then we'll have our usual Canada Post, red tape and other stuff. We'll fill that in once we get the supplementary estimates.

I have Mr. Bains on the schedule. Is it on what I'm talking about?

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Yes. I'm not sure I heard a timeline or estimated date on the shipbuilding piece.

The Chair: What the committee agreed to a long time ago would be summer travel.

Again, that's if it gets past LIAI, if it gets approved by the House and then approved by the parties. They're big ifs, but this is the first step.

Mr. Parm Bains: I will say there are some completion dates in August that are taking place at the Seaspans shipyard in Vancouver with a couple of the ships.

The Chair: I've been speaking to several of the shipyards. They're very anxious to have us not out.

No, they've seemed quite anxious to have us out. It is the largest purchase in Government of Canada history, but in the end it's not up to us around the table.

Mr. Bachrach, is this on the schedule?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): I didn't hear clarity on the point. When the two ministers show up to talk about the estimates, are they concurrent or sequential?

The Chair: They are sequential.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Do they have one hour each?

The Chair: I'm not sure if it's Minister Anand and then Minister Duclos. Oh, it will be Minister Duclos first and then Minister Anand. They'll have their usual officials with them. For the second hour, we normally have solely the officials. We will do that on June 3.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I heard June 3. Is June 5 programmed?

The Chair: At this time, it is not.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm waiting to see what comes out with the supplementary estimates (A). We'll go from there, so that is our schedule coming up.

I have Ms. Block and then I have Mr. Kusmierczyk. We have about 22 minutes.

Ms. Block, go ahead.

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

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): I'm up first, though, Mr. Chair, if I'm not mistaken.

The Chair: Ms. Block caught my eye first, so it's Ms. Block and then you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

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

I would like to move the following motion:

That, in relation to its study of the ArriveCAN application, Minh Doan be ordered to appear before the committee for three hours, at a date and time to be fixed by the chair, but no later than June 7, 2024, provided that (a) Mr. Doan be offered all the accommodations that were offered to Kristian Firth and (b) if Mr. Doan does not appear as ordered, the chair be directed to report the material facts of the matter to the House forthwith.

Really briefly, Mr. Chair, as you will all recall, Mr. Doan appeared before the committee. Shortly after he appeared, Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano provided testimony that caused us, as a committee, to agree unanimously that he should be called back. Finally, there was an article that came out in January around getting rid of data files, moving them around and deleting them, that further caused us to want to hear from Mr. Doan.

I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair and throw it open for any other comments.

• (1810)

The Chair: I have Ms. Kusie.

Ms. Vignola, did you have a hand up?

It's Ms. Kusie and then Ms. Vignola.

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

I think it goes without saying that I support the motion as put forward by my colleague. As of January 24, 2024, Mr. Doan has been on medical leave. This was the time we first received the document, the letter from his lawyer, indicating that he was on this medical leave. Public servants can take a maximum of 27 unpaid sick weeks, but this time is coming to a close.

I think this committee has shown Mr. Doan a significant amount of compassion and has been respectful of his needs and of this time he has needed to heal, to reflect upon the case at hand, but the reality is that he is significantly implicated within the arrive scam scandal, first of all, of course, from the point of incompetence, given that he was simply unable to explain to this group why he was so unaware as to the lack of project management and the lack of documentation, and second, of course, on the question that has plagued this committee: Who chose GC Strategies?

This is just an incredible amount of incompetence, but more importantly, Mr. Chair, from the position that his actions really would reflect those of not having been ethical.

First of all, in potentially lying to this committee relative to the selection of GC Strategies, he indicated that his team had chosen GC Strategies, whereas his subordinates, both Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano, were adamant that it was he himself who made the selection of GC Strategies.

Second, relative to his promotion, he indicated that he had gone through a significant competition relative to receiving his position at Treasury Board. Anyone who has been through a public service substantive process can tell you that it is not something that is taken lightly, and there are many steps and much preparation in an effort to receive a substantive role within the public service, and certainly one of that significance, but again his colleagues countered what he said. In fact, he, in his testimony to our former NDP colleague here and me gave differing information that he had in fact not received the position as a result of a substantive process but was chosen for it.

Of course, as well, we have the issue of him uttering threats, threats to Mr. MacDonald, after Mr. Doan supposedly received a call from the then minister of public safety, Mr. Mendicino, who, I will add, has not yet appeared at this committee and should have appeared at this committee by now relative to arrive scam. Mr. Doan apparently, according to Mr. MacDonald, called Mr. MacDonald at that time and threatened Mr. MacDonald's career. He has to come forward and account for that. This is just not to be taken lightly, uttering threats such as this.

Also, of course, my colleague Mrs. Block pointed out the deletion of thousands of emails. We've all certainly deleted an email now and then in error, something that... Even deleting a single email brings about much stress, much concern, but deleting thousands of emails explains many administrative gaps, in fact... He denies this as well.

It's just evident that Mr. Doan is a significant part of the arrive scam scandal. He is a piece of the puzzle and, most importantly, he must be held accountable for both his incompetence and his unethical behaviour.

There comes a time, Mr. Chair, when everyone has to pay the piper, and Mr. Doan's time has arrived. Therefore, I support Mrs. Block's motion and hope my colleagues will agree that it is long past the time for Mr. Doan to come before this committee and explain his actions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

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

I don't disagree with the facts. The testimony the committee heard from Mr. Doan, Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano was contradictory. We've heard a number of contradictory statements that may very well warrant clarification. Some claim that they're being scapegoated, and others who appear before the committee will probably say the same thing. They can pass the buck until the cows come home. That's a possibility. If memory serves me correctly, Mr. Doan said he had a health issue having to do with an anxiety attack, a panic attack or something like that. I may be wrong. I could be completely mistaken about that. I may be out in left field. Who knows?

I want to stress the importance of seeing the big picture, getting explanations and asking whether we'll be able to get to the bottom of the situation. Bear in mind that we are neither judge nor jury. Our goal is to ensure that, if there was some sort of wrongdoing, it doesn't happen again. Our goal is to make sure that the processes are strengthened, so that public servants can do their jobs solely with the public interest in mind, not their own. I'm not referring to all 340,000 public servants, only if the shoe fits.

My fear is and remains crossing a line that we mustn't cross. We must set the example for everyone. We mustn't cross a line that verges on bullying or harassment. Never. We must lead by example. The public is looking at us. If we cross that line, people will think it's okay for them to do the same. It will lead to a situation we all find appalling, a situation none of us wants. That is my fear.

Mr. Doan may stay on sick leave. He has 27 sick days banked, and after, he could take unpaid leave or claim sickness benefits through employment insurance. That's a possibility. If that happens, will we compel a sick person to appear before the committee? Will we again use our exceptional power to order a witness to appear at the bar of the House? If we routinely use that power, what makes it exceptional? There is nothing exceptional about imposing the same consequence 15,000 times. This would be three times in two years. That's not exactly exceptional.

Those are my thoughts, the things I'm wondering about, the questions that must be considered.

Of course, I want answers and clarifications, but I don't want to be labelled a bully. I want to make that clear.

• (1815)

[*English*]

The Chair: It's Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to move an amendment, which is that we strike, delete, or remove all of (b) from the original motion. That is part (b), which reads, "if Mr. Doan does not appear as ordered, the chair be directed to report the material facts of the matter to the House forthwith."

If I can speak to that, I would appreciate the opportunity.

The Chair: Is it just eliminating (b)?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Yes.

The Chair: Is there a speaking list on the amendment?

Are you going to speak on that? Go ahead, sir. I thought you had stopped.

• (1820)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: No, I just wanted to say that obviously, as a committee, we have important questions to ask Mr. Doan. The next logical step in this progression in the investigation and the work of this committee is to hear directly from Mr. Doan. Obviously, we're trying to be sensitive to the fact that there are some serious medical issues that have come to light as well. However, we do believe that is the next logical step, to hear directly from Mr. Doan.

Therefore, we support the motion to bring Mr. Doan here to committee.

I don't believe that part (b) is necessary at this stage. Let's take this step by step, which is, let's hear from Mr. Doan himself. Let's obviously communicate at the meeting what the repercussions are. If there is additional co-operation, that can be clarified during the meeting, but I do believe that at this stage we should take this step by step.

The next logical step is to call him to this committee, but there is no requirement at this point to include section (b) in this motion, so I'd like that section to be struck.

At the same time, we know that there is important work that Parliament is doing at this point, especially in relation to debating the budget and debating important legislation, and we don't want to tie up the work of the House, which is laser-focused on those issues.

Again, we are supportive of calling Mr. Doan to testify in front of this committee. We think that is the logical next step, but I would ask that part (b) be stricken from the motion.

The Chair: I see Mr. Genuis on the amendment.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

In terms of the proposed amendment, I think it's important to be clear about the process. We're proposing that the committee order Mr. Doan to appear, and it seems that there's agreement on that in principle, which is great. The question is, what if he doesn't appear?

I think if we have a clear consequence in there, which is that we would report on the matter to the House, that increases the chances that Mr. Doan will appear. If we don't have part (b), the chances that the committee could get simply blown off are much higher. With part (b) in there, I think almost certainly he will appear, because we've already established that there is a path for a consequence.

I don't think it's very likely that consequence will be triggered, because with (b) in there, it's a clear message that he needs to appear. If (b) is out of there, then it's ambiguous as to whether there would be any kind of follow-up next step.

Let's also be clear in terms of the nature of that process that would follow.

It's always up to the majority, right? The reason Mr. Firth appeared before the bar was because the majority—in fact, as the case was, it was unanimous in the House—agreed to a motion to bring him before the bar. The outcomes are always going to be controlled by the majority. It's not up to us as one party to determine what the next step is. However, I think (b) is valuable because it establishes what happens if Mr. Doan doesn't appear, and establishing that means he's much more likely to appear.

If we pass this motion without part (b), I think the chances are higher that he simply doesn't appear, and then we're back here all over again, so, on that basis, we would suggest leaving (b) in and that the amendment not be supported.

Thanks.

The Chair: I see no one else, so we'll go to a vote, Clerk, on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

The Chair: The amendment passes, and we have an amended motion, which is just the first part. Does anyone wish to speak to it, or can we go to a vote on that?

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

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to go to Mr. Kusmierczyk, but keep in mind that we have about five minutes, so please speak quickly.

● (1825)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I'd like to put a motion forward. The motion is the following, and it's going to be distributed to the clerk to distribute to the committee. The motion is this:

That, given the recent media reports that Conservative Party of Canada members used taxpayer funds to benefit themselves, their spouses and their staff by expensing hundreds of thousands of dollars to attend partisan events, the committee condemn the hypocrisy of Conservative members' flagrant disregard for taxpayer money and demand a commitment to cease such practices.

I'm happy to speak to that motion.

The Chair: I bet you are. Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk. You have about four minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, I have a point of order I'd like to raise.

I'd like for you to rule on whether this motion is in order. If you'll bear with me, I have a couple of quick arguments I want to make with respect to whether it's in order.

First of all, the mandate of the government operations committee is to deal with operational matters involving the Government of Canada. It sounds like Mr. Kusmierczyk would like to have a discussion about House of Commons operations. We have a procedure and House affairs committee, which is responsible for dealing with matters involving the procedures of the House of Commons.

From what I know, the government is trying to bring this up at multiple committees, which is a tactic I've never heard of being used before by any other members of the House.

A voice: Except by you.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Please continue. We're taping this.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This isn't being recorded, is it?

Chair, I appreciate the levity from other members, but in all seriousness, there are mandates that the Standing Orders prescribe for specific committees. The government operations committee is responsible for government operations. We don't have an opposition operations committee, but we do have a procedure and House affairs committee, which is responsible for dealing with matters related to procedure and House affairs.

We also have a Board of Internal Economy, which governs the rules of the House of Commons, and it includes representation from all parties. The Board of Internal Economy is a place where the rules of the House are established and where, if there is an allegation that the rules of the House were broken...

I don't think there is an allegation here that the rules of the House were broken. There's maybe an allegation that the rules shouldn't be what they are. If members want to change rules or study rules as they relate to House of Commons activities, then the Board of Internal Economy would also be a place where this matter could be studied.

This committee does have a clear, specific mandate. It's looking at operations of government. We look at the activities of Crown corporations. That's one area, Chair, in which I would appreciate your reflecting on and ruling on whether this motion is in order.

Secondly, there are rules around the use of parliamentary language in the House, in committees and in motions that have been put forward. I would also suggest that although we do criticize each other from time to time, in the context of parliamentary committees there are certain words we cannot use. Members aren't able to accuse each other of lying. They're not able to cast other kinds of aspersions, use profanity and those sorts of things.

I think that Mr. Kusmierczyk's motion.... I'm not suggesting that he wrote these words himself; it was probably some poorly paid government staffer. The language in there is not in keeping with parliamentary rules and orders.

On the basis of the mandate of the committee, Chair, as well as on the basis of unparliamentary language, I wonder if you could just reflect on whether this motion is in order. If it's in order, I welcome hearing Mr. Kusmierczyk's comments.

• (1830)

The Chair: Maybe I can get to it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry. Go ahead. Those are my comments.

The Chair: Thank you.

This motion, while enjoyable amusement for partisan reasons, is clearly out of order. This is something for the Board of Internal Economy. We really shouldn't have been debating it, but I appreciate it being brought forward.

It's 6.30, so we are adjourning.

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