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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley



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• (1715)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 131 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. We're on our final day here.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Boo.

I'm sorry. We're on our final day. That's what I was booing about.

Excuse me. That was unparliamentary.

The Chair: I was going to turn it over to the witness for his opening statement.

Please go ahead, Ms. Vignola.

[Translation]

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

I have a procedural question for you before the witness takes the floor.

I apologize in advance to the witness, who is an expert in his field. I want to thank him for his patience, as he has already been waiting for a good hour and a bit.

However, I absolutely must ask a question about the discussions we had on Monday about the motion from April 10.

There seems to have been some confusion, given that the April 10 motion we voted on clearly stated that we would first study the documents and then create a subcommittee. This is what both Mr. Genuis and I understand from the blues. This was approved with the agreement of the official opposition whip and the sponsor of the original motion.

However, this aspect of the motion is not reflected in the minutes. In fact, last Monday's discussion did not reflect the full content of the motion.

I would therefore like to ask that we take a few minutes to clarify this. We reached a unanimous agreement on April 10, and I would like us to be able to discuss this matter again quickly.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. I missed the final sentence there. Would you repeat your final sentence?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Basically, we need to clarify what exactly was adopted on April 10. The chief whip of the official opposition party and all of the parliamentarians around the table agreed to the amendment I had proposed to Mr. Genuis' motion. In the end, it was completely changed. In other words, the blues don't reflect what's in the minutes regarding the subcommittee to study the issue of indigenous procurement.

I therefore request clarification on the motion as amended.

[English]

The Chair: The motion that I have, and that I've been working from, is the one that I think we distributed a couple of days ago.

It starts with, "That, pursuant to Standing Orders 108(1), (2) and (3)(c), a Subcommittee on Government Operations". It then goes through (a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and finally (f), which ends with, "as long as this decision is made before Thursday, June 20, 2024".

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: The motion recorded in the minutes of the June 17 meeting does not reflect the testimony given at the April 10 meeting. Here's what I said on April 10:

My amendment will allow us to do an analysis before we undertake a much more in-depth study, which would probably require a lot more documents than the ones I'm going to suggest.

Nevertheless, it will allow us to do an analysis, which will then help determine whether there is a widespread problem. If so, we'll have to carry out a much more in-depth, much more comprehensive analysis, including a number of meetings.

Without further ado, here is the amendment I'm proposing.

All that would be left of Mr. Genuis' motion are the substantive ideas. The wording would be different. It would read as follows: "That, in accordance with Standing Orders 108(1), 108(2) and 108(3)(c) of the House of Commons, the committee order the production of the Government of Canada's list of qualified aboriginal businesses in both official languages; the list include (a) any summary of the key details about each company in the government's PSAB database, (b) the number and value of contracts received by each enterprise and (c) the list of subcontractors used for each contract; the information be provided to the committee by May 20, 2024".

...

"committee members will conduct an analysis of the list and, further to that analysis, decide whether it is necessary to conduct a longitudinal study of the matter in committee or subcommittee, as they so choose, provided that this decision is made before June 20, 2024".

This was the response from Mr. Genuis:

Thank you, Chair.

We're hopefully coming towards a consensus.

I think this is an important area to study. If it gives members greater confidence in the process, requesting documents as an initial step is very reasonable, and then the committee can evaluate next steps after that. I'm supportive of the amendment as well.

There was a consensus, both in terms of understanding what I was bringing and on the substance and content. The June 17 minutes do not reflect the consensus on the motion as amended on April 10.

• (1720)

[*English*]

The Chair: There are a couple of ways forward here that I see, but everyone can please weigh in.

On your amendment, it was kind of a shemozzle. I don't know how that will translate. Your amendment is actually an out-of-order amendment because it doesn't amend; it completely replaces Mr. Genuis's. At the time, we should have ruled it out of order, but the committee kind of pushed together a way forward, as we often do, less formally.

It's not perfect, so we have a couple of ways forward. One is that the subcommittee is not happening because we did not receive names. We're obviously down to our last day. We can choose to revise this when we come back in September, which will give plenty of time to look at the documents I think you're asking for, and then, present a new motion come September, ignoring this and ignoring your out-of-order amendment that we used to push together one complete motion.

We can move forward that way, if the committee chooses. The other way forward is that the committee can now decide on a whole new motion, but we have the minister in a few minutes.

I'm going to interrupt here.

Mr. Anderson, I apologize. Because of late votes, and because we have our next witness coming here at 5:30, we're not going to

have any time. I'll let you know that we can excuse you, and the intent is that we will bring you back at a future date. I hope you are local. We will bring you back at a future date.

The original intent was to write the report over the summer, but I think we will have you back, and then we'll write the report then.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Before you do that, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: —may I just request, through you to the witness, that he submit his statement in writing and that it be distributed to be on the record, should something happen materially over the summer and should we not get back to this in time?

The Chair: Yes, if he'd submits it, we'll have it translated.

Mr. Matthew Green: It has recommendations, I imagine.

Mr. John Anderson (As an Individual): Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Perfect.

The Chair: I think you mentioned you have your opening statement.

Mr. John Anderson: Yes.

The Chair: Provide it to us. We'll have it translated and sent out, and then the intent is we'll have you back in September or October, and then you can actually read it to us. We'll give an opportunity for Q and A, and then we'll finish off the Canada Post study after that. We have you for only about five more minutes, anyway. I don't think you want to listen to us chat about someone else's motion.

We'll send it to the clerk, and we'll have it translated and sent out. It will go to the analysts as well, and then we'll see you in September or October, Mr. Anderson, with my apologies. Between the late vote and this, we won't have time to hear from you today. Thanks.

Go ahead, Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Chair, you know that I appreciate the work you do, but in my humble opinion, if the amendment was inadmissible, that should have been said at the outset, not two and a half months later. On April 10, the amendment was adopted as it stood by all committee members.

I don't know how many of you have managed to read and analyze the 6,900 or so documents. Personally, I'm a fairly fast reader but I haven't finished my analysis, so I'd venture to guess that most of us haven't.

I feel it would be quite premature to decide to create a subcommittee. In my experience, we'd run the risk of going round in circles instead of ensuring that Indigenous businesses really benefit and don't become front companies for other businesses.

• (1725)

[English]

The Chair: Are you comfortable with the suggestion, then, that we perhaps reintroduce a whole new motion when we're back in September on this? The April 10 one is what our clerk cobbled together, as he often does, from our conversations, and that's how we got this one. We won't be doing the subcommittee because we're not able to re-establish it. We can put this aside and we will have, with everyone's general agreement—I sense that's where we're at—a whole new motion to do this after the summer. Is that satisfactory?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: As long as I can be assured that no one will take advantage of the summer to start a subcommittee study that we haven't agreed to, that's fine with me.

[English]

The Chair: We won't be able to...not a subcommittee.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I'm writing notes now to create a subcommittee for the summer with one member: Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): I do recall what Madam Vignola suggested. I recall that conversation, and we're happy to support her.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, but the conversation in April, is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Again, we're ready to support Madame Vignola in terms of her instruction here.

The Chair: I think, as I suggested, there would be no subcommittee. I'm hearing that you need some time to go over all these documents, and then either you or someone else will submit a new motion come September. Is that fair?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We're in agreement.

There's one other small thing. I just mentioned Mr. Anderson. I just want to get everyone's official approval. As we said, we agreed we would have the analysts write the Canada Post report and we would table it immediately in September. That's not going to happen now. I got a text from Mr. Bachrach. He's fine. We'll wait until we're back. We'll hear a couple of other witnesses: one we weren't able to get into contact with for today, and Mr. Anderson. If everyone's fine, we will do that instead of writing the report over the summer, and we'll write it in September or October. Are we fine with that, everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We're going to suspend to bring in Minister Anand.

• (1725)

(Pause)

• (1730)

The Chair: Welcome back to OGGO.

Minister Anand, welcome back.

Mr. Matthews, welcome back to OGGO. I think this is the 18th department from which you've been with us at OGGO.

Minister Anand, the floor is yours for five minutes. Go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Before I begin I'd like to acknowledge that the lands on which we are gathered are part of the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples.

[Translation]

I'm joined today by officials from my department to give you an overview of the Supplementary Estimates (A) 2024–2025.

[English]

Supplementary estimates (A) present a total of \$12.7 billion in incremental budgetary spending, which reflects \$11.2 billion to be voted on and a \$1.5-billion increase in forecast statutory expenditures.

[Translation]

I'd like to highlight three requests in particular. First, no relationship is more important to Canada than that with indigenous peoples. Part of that relationship is righting the wrongs of the past. The Department of Indigenous Services is asking for \$2.2 billion. We also understand the need to protect newcomers and provide them with much-needed support services. To that end, Citizenship and Immigration is requesting \$951.5 million.

[English]

Last of all, in support of the government's effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Department of Transport is seeking \$604.9 million to provide purchase incentives for zero-emissions vehicles. This top-up funding was announced in budget 2024 to help Canadians make the shift to cleaner, zero-emissions vehicles.

In total, approximately \$1.6 billion of the funding in these supplementary estimates (A) is for initiatives included in this year's budget.

• (1735)

[Translation]

The other funds announced in the 2024 budget will be presented in future budget documents.

Before concluding, I also wanted to talk about a few other recent initiatives and updates. First, the government has reached an agreement in principle with the Public Service Alliance of Canada for the border services group. Once ratified, this agreement will apply to some 11,000 members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. This demonstrates that the best deals are made at the bargaining table.

Then, on May 22, I launched the Government of Canada's first-ever Enterprise Cyber Security Strategy. This outlines a proactive, whole-of-government approach that aims to protect government systems, safeguard Canadians' information and strengthen the resilience of digital government.

Also on May 29, the Treasury Board Secretariat announced measures to strengthen managerial accountability by adding mandatory procedures when procuring professional services.

Finally, on June 13, I announced that the government will introduce important legislation this fall to extend early retirement eligibility to front line public servants who help keep Canadians safe. The Government of Canada is committed to supporting these public servants. The proposed retirement benefits would apply to several occupational groups, such as firefighters, paramedics, correctional service officers, parliamentary protection officers and search and rescue technicians.

Thank you for your time. The officials accompanying me and I will now be happy to answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll start with Mrs. Kusie for six minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for your appearance here today.

Minister, would you agree that your government has found itself in a debt crisis?

Hon. Anita Anand: I do not agree with that statement.

The Chair: I'm sorry; wait one moment. We're having a translation issue.

Go ahead.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Minister, would you agree that your government has found itself in a debt crisis?

Hon. Anita Anand: I do not agree with that statement, no. We have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7 and a AAA credit rating by an independent rating organization. The Bank of Canada is lowering interest rates because of our sound fiscal position.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Would you agree that it's a problem that the government paid more on servicing debt than what was paid in health care?

Hon. Anita Anand: I believe that the very heart of our democracy is about helping the most vulnerable in our country. We have pharmacare, dental care, the Canada child benefit, \$10-a-day child care and supports for seniors. Those are examples of the ways you help the most vulnerable in our country, and that is exactly what our government is doing.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Well, it appears to me that all new spending by your government could have been covered by the amount that your government has, in fact, serviced the debt with, but your government seems to have decided that the only way to solve your debt crisis is to increase the capital gains inclusion rate.

Do you not think it would be more effective if you simply created a plan to enforce decreases in spending?

● (1740)

Hon. Anita Anand: I would like to say that there is a philosophical difference between the party of my honourable colleague and our party in the government's role. We believe in helping the most vulnerable in our country and doing that in a fiscally responsible way. At the same time, at the Treasury Board of Canada, I have led a spending review that is on track to find \$15 billion over five years and \$4.8 billion every year thereafter.

We do believe in fiscal prudence. We also believe in helping the most vulnerable in our country.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Yet your new spending amount this year is three and a half times the amount that you are attempting to find in this single fiscal year alone.

Minister, I'm afraid I disagree with you relative to your position about your government having a debt crisis. I think your government absolutely has a debt crisis, and I think it's evident by the fact that your Prime Minister has spent more than any other Prime Minister in history.

In fact, your government has spent so much that you had to bring in this job-killing tax. This is a tax that affects Canadians far beyond what your Prime Minister has claimed, what your Deputy Prime Minister has claimed and, I believe, what you're claiming here today. It hurts farmers, health care workers and small businesses. I know that the Deputy Prime Minister has said that this will only affect 0.13%.

Given that confident statement by the Deputy Prime Minister, will you, as the President of the Treasury Board, the individual who's responsible for all of the spending, since I do believe this is a spending problem that has brought your government to bring in this job-killing tax, commit today, on behalf of your government, to bring an amendment to the capital gains tax ensuring that the 99.87% of Canadians that your government says are not affected by this tax will not be impacted.

Will you make that commitment to bring in that amendment today?

Hon. Anita Anand: I will not be making an amendment suggestion relating to our government's attempt to ensure tax fairness for our country and to ensure that we are helping the most vulnerable. In fact, I would encourage my honourable colleague, if you truly care about the most vulnerable in our country, to vote in favour of items like dental care for all, child care benefits and pharmacare. Those are initiatives that will help Canadian families and, in fact, have enabled 85% of women between the ages of 25 and 45 to join the workforce postpandemic. Making the tax system fairer for all generations is a priority for our government, and we will continue to execute on that priority.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you for that, Minister.

Minister, if you will not listen to me, will you possibly consider the words of your predecessor, the Honourable Scott Brison, who, of course, sat in your seat? He is very esteemed and recently referred to the higher taxation and bigger government that you and your government have created as a "socialist baffle-gab" and that it reflects the sort of advice offered to ministers who don't know any better.

Would you promise to the committee today that you will consider the words of your predecessor, please?

Hon. Anita Anand: What I will continue to do in this position and any other is ensure that I am representing my constituents, as well as serving the people of Canada in my role as the Treasury Board president. That means executing on our government's responsibilities and prudently managing the public purse. We will continue to do this with initiatives like the refocusing government spending initiative that I mentioned earlier.

Again, there is a philosophical difference between the party opposite and our government, and our government will continue to stand up for Canadians, Canadian families and Canadian workers, as well as senior citizens.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I agree. There is a philosophical difference, Minister.

You will not commit on behalf of your government. You will not listen to your predecessors. However, will you commit today that you will include in your platform, in your leadership bid as you attempt to be the leader of your party, that you will include an exemption for these individuals I've mentioned with regard to the capital gains tax? Will you commit to that today?

Hon. Anita Anand: I would like to refute the premise of the question, Mr. Chair.

There is no such initiative under way—what my honourable colleague is mentioning. In fact, it is quite preposterous that you are mentioning that in this committee when I am here to testify about the work of the Treasury Board of Canada.

Thank you.

• (1745)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Sousa, please go ahead.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Can we just touch upon some of what was just discussed: about your refocusing government spending initiative and how it's complementary to these supplementary estimates?

Basically, is this initiative cutting programs and services to Canadians, or can it ensure growth in services and fiscal prudence as we go forward?

Hon. Anita Anand: I do want to highlight further the work that we are doing on refocusing government spending.

Phase one of that initiative was outlined in budget 2023, and as soon as I became the President of the Treasury Board, I undertook that initiative, which is to refocus government spending towards our government's priorities.

In the supplementary estimates (B) tabled last fall, we began to report on the first block of those savings, with reductions of \$500 million, as well as further reductions in the main estimates. That \$500 million was broken down into reductions in outsourcing or third party contracting of \$350 million and of \$150 million on executive travel. Then again, in the main estimates, I provided further information relating to the way in which we were refocusing spending towards our government's priorities.

Those two phases are going to deliver on the government's commitment to refocus \$15.8 billion over five years and \$4.8 billion every year thereafter.

Phase two of the refocusing government spending initiative was outlined in this year's budget. You will see us taking further initiatives to ensure the prudent management of taxpayer dollars.

Thank you.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you.

In describing the process and the creation of these supplementary estimates, you and your department have generated these changes to government spending.

One of the things we talk about in this committee that's very critical to us is value for money, right? It's value for money for taxpayers and program delivery.

Can you describe that position?

Hon. Anita Anand: Value for money is obviously extremely important to everything we do at the Treasury Board, from overseeing \$450 billion of expenditures every year to ensuring that we are cutting red tape. That will include ensuring that Bill S-6 goes through committee and hopefully, again, gets passed by the House on third reading.

The financial information in the estimates is presented to support an appropriation bill that seeks parliamentary approval for expenditures that will be incurred throughout the year. Through this supply bill, the government requests Parliament's approval of the planned spending proposals that are detailed in the estimates.

As I briefly outlined in my remarks, the supplementary estimates (A) 2024-25 present \$12.7 billion in incremental spending, and that includes \$11.2 billion in new voted spending and \$1.5 billion in forecasted statutory budgetary expenditures.

I want to highlight that the majority of that funding is through voted expenditures. We will have the opportunity to vote on this funding in the House of Commons.

Mr. Charles Sousa: In recent months, you've also made announcements with regard to improving Canada's information regime.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You and the department have made a series of announcements in recent months.

Could you touch upon how you've worked to improve Canada's information regime through these recent announcements?

Hon. Anita Anand: Most definitely.

The information regime that you're referring to is referred to as our trust and transparency strategy. With that initiative, we are aiming to make more transparent some of the documents of the federal government. You will see in the Access to Information Act the ability for individuals to have reference to historical records. What I did in that announcement is to place time periods around certain discretionary exemptions within the statute so that public servants can have reference to those time periods before they provide those documents to the general public or on request for a freedom of information—

Mr. Charles Sousa: In your opening remarks, you touched upon the indigenous community and how some of the prime objectives are about including settlements for indigenous peoples and services.

Can you share any details on these objectives and how these new fundings will help in their execution?

• (1750)

Hon. Anita Anand: Most definitely.

As you know, our government is very focused on ensuring that we walk the path of reconciliation as laid out in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. The new voted spending is for settlements addressing past grievances and historic harms committed against indigenous peoples. There is \$1.5 billion for federal Indian Day Schools and Indian Residential Schools Day Scholars settlements, \$769 million for water and wastewater treatment, and \$633 million for First Nations Child and Family Services.

I could go on, but there are a number of initiatives voted on in the supplementary (A)s.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Ms. Vignola, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Madam Anand, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being with us today.

My first question is about the plan to implement the modernized version of the Official Languages Act and the \$2.4 million earmarked for it under 1A.

If my math is right, \$2.4 million for approximately nine million francophones across Canada represents barely 27¢ per francophone. What's more, almost a quarter of that \$2.4 million will go to Quebec's 600,000 or 700,000 anglophones. That's still only 27¢ per person.

Is that enough to really get this program right?

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you for your question.

I'd like to start by saying that this is not the only amount we're going to allocate to the two official languages.

We need to continue supporting both official languages. All institutions also need to have an obligation to comply with the rules. That's why this week I announced the part VII Official Languages Accountability and Reporting Framework contained in Bill C-13. Under this framework, we have an obligation to support official languages in public services.

The accountability and reporting framework makes it very clear that our government takes the obligation to support both official languages very seriously. One of the key elements of the act requires us to ensure that Canadians can communicate with federal institutions and take advantage of their services in the language of their choice.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: As an aside, I know a few francophones in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean who have to extend their working hours so they can answer questions asked in English by people from other provinces. I wonder how many people from other provinces are hired to answer francophones from Quebec outside normal working hours, but that's not the point.

We're seeing cuts in government departments. The public service has grown by over 40%, but services are not keeping pace. Federal employees, according to the information we receive, are less and less motivated. Sometimes, some even feel that their work is pointless, while customers, the public, feel that federal services related to passports or customs, for example, are not good.

How is it possible to reconcile the skyrocketing number of employees, the decline in the perceived quality of services and, at the same time, the promise to cut spending ever so slightly?

Where are those cuts going to happen, in the end?

• (1755)

Hon. Anita Anand: Thank you for the question.

First of all, if you have been made aware of such situations in institutions, please give me some examples, as I would like to discuss these with the officials from my department who are here with me. As I said, we take this obligation very seriously.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Ms. Anand.

I tell you quite openly and sincerely, if I were to discuss this directly with you, it would have to be behind closed doors. The reason for that is because of the excessively negative atmosphere and culture where any civil servant who speaks openly about what's happening, particularly among the francophones, loses their job or is literally harassed by their superiors.

Hon. Anita Anand: That's why we need to have these conversations. If you wanted to discuss this situation with me, I will listen. We need to understand the context in terms of the framework and part VII of the Official Languages Act. It's my duty to hear these stories and to discuss them with the officials from my department who are with me this afternoon.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Just quickly—

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 25 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: —in recent weeks, we've seen WestJet brushing off customers who request services in French, threatening to take legal action against them. Canada Post hires unilingual anglophones in largely francophone municipalities.

When will bilingualism be an obligation elsewhere in Canada, and not just among francophones? When will the government actually stop encouraging the anglicization of Quebec?

[*English*]

The Chair: Give a brief answer, if you can. If not, let me know and we'll save it for the next intervention.

Thanks.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Anita Anand: As I said, all institutions have an obligation to follow the rules and offer services in both official languages.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Green, again, welcome back.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I reminisced about being back at this committee. Of course, I also served on the public accounts committee.

I'm going to have a question for you that's fairly straightforward. I'm hoping to get a straightforward answer and perhaps even a commitment out of you here today.

Minister, the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation is dedicated to advancing public sector performance audit, oversight and accountability in Canada and abroad. The foundation's work is internationally renowned and supports elected officials to build capacity, share knowledge and collaborate on issues of mutual interest of government oversight. The impact of their work increases government transparency and accountability and improves government operations, which is an important way to increase public confidence in government. In fact, as a member of the public accounts committee, I had the pleasure of taking their training, and I found it invaluable.

The CAAF has been engaged with your government for more than two years to seek funding that will allow it to continue its work, but has yet to receive a response. Unfortunately, it's my understanding that if the funding commitment isn't received by the end of the month, the CAAF will have to cease domestic programming. Now, you'll know that they also go to our provincial counterparts to provide support there. The modest funding request from the CAAF would go a long way to improving government oversight for years to come. There's wide support on the ongoing work of CAAF and their request for federal funding. This is from the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees, which represents legislative staff from federal, provincial and territorial public accounts committees across Canada. They passed a resolution asking for federal funding.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts passed a motion recommending that the Government of Canada, specifically the President of the Treasury Board, review the work of the Canada Audit and Accountability Foundation and take steps to provide adequate and stable funding for the capacity-building program as part of the legislative oversight bodies.

This might be one of the most non-partisan questions I've had all session because there is, in fact, wide support from Liberal, Conservative and New Democrat chairs of the public accounts committees, and of course, Bloc members who would be involved in some of the earlier reports as well.

Minister, can you commit today to providing federal funding for the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation to ensure that they can continue their important work by supporting legislators and improving government oversight across the country?

• (1800)

Hon. Anita Anand: I recall, from previous committee appearances, discussing the CAAF and their important work. I'd like to thank them for this work. I do believe in the usefulness of this work, and I've tasked my officials to investigate the funding request that is before us. I would ask Mr. Matthews if he could elaborate on the work that he is doing with the department to further support the CAAF.

Mr. Bill Matthews (Secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): Certainly, Minister.

In terms of a quick update, we are aware of the financial situation facing the organization. We've had some preliminary discussions. The organization does already receive funding from Global Affairs Canada, and there are possibilities of funding from other departments and programs. That's to be investigated. I will be having a conversation with senior leadership with the organization in the days to come and hope to work with them to find a solution on this.

At present, a key point for me here is that Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat does not fund this organization, so we are working with other departments and other programs where there may be a better fit to potentially get funding.

Mr. Matthew Green: You're aware that by the end of the month they might cease to exist in their ability to provide programming?

Mr. Bill Matthews: I'm aware there's a board meeting coming up that's very important, and that is one of the dates that is driving this.

Mr. Matthew Green: Will you have an answer to them before the board meeting?

Mr. Bill Matthews: We will be having discussions with their leadership team before the meeting. I can't give you a definitive answer on how those will go at this stage.

Mr. Matthew Green: Minister, you would acknowledge the function of public accounts as one of the few non-partisan spaces to be able to provide oversight, the need for parliamentary training on that function, and why it's important to remain quasi non-partisan.

What comment do you have to the board members who will be meeting in advance of the dire situation they're in?

Hon. Anita Anand: The very fact that I've tasked my officials, as ministers, to look into this issue, to examine across government what we can do and to speak with the leadership before that board meeting, should underline to you how seriously I take the work of the CAAF, and there will be more to follow from my officials.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll leave that with you in good faith and hope that you can recognize the importance of that work, not only federally but at the other levels of government.

With that being said, Mr. Chair, I'm going to move a motion with the remainder of my time. Then I will speak to the motion as procedurally correct.

That, as per the usual practice of House of Commons standing committees, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates shall not meet during Parliament's summer recess unless the requirements of s.106(4) of the Standing Orders are met.

This has been already provided as a notice of motion.

The Chair: We're not in committee business, so you cannot move the motion.

Mr. Matthew Green: It's already been put as a notice of motion—

The Chair: It was not in time. We adjourned the debate.

Mr. Matthew Green: However, I already moved it, so it's alive. It's completely in order.

I've moved it. You guys filibustered it. It's already on the table.

The Chair: You can't just reintroduce it.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm going to challenge your decision then, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You can have the clerk weigh in as well if you wish, if you don't believe me.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll just challenge your decision right now. We can skip the clerk.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): We're going to have the clerk weigh in.

Mr. Matthew Green: I don't need the clerk. We can just challenge the decision.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Well, the rest of us do—

Mr. Matthew Green: I still have the floor, thank you.

I'm challenging your decision.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Green should know that when debate on a motion is adjourned, there is a procedurally appropriate way of resuming the debate on that matter, but you cannot just demand the immediate resumption of consideration of that matter.

You can't just make up the rules. There are rules that guide how committees are supposed to work.

Mr. Matthew Green: That's precisely what I'm getting at.

I'll challenge the decision.

The Chair: No, I agree.

Mr. Green, there are procedural ways to do it. This is not the way. You cannot just, outside committee business, drop a motion—

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, you're at the will of this committee, not the other way around. You've made a decision on that, and I challenge that decision.

Call the vote.

The Chair: Please do not give directions to the clerk, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: I wasn't.

The Chair: I appreciate this is—

Mr. Matthew Green: It was through to you.

The Chair: You can keep your comments to yourself until you have the floor. You do not have the floor. And please do not be giving directions to our clerk. Thank you.

• (1805)

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard): The question is whether to maintain the chair's ruling.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 7; yeas 3 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

Mr. Matthew Green: Now I'll speak to the motion. Thank you.

Mr. Chair—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Chair.

You had just articulated the rules. Mr. Green challenged the chair on an obviously correct ruling. I guess I'm struggling to understand what the new reality is now that we've stepped outside the green book and the Standing Orders.

Mr. Matthew Green: We're resuming debate.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: What are we resuming debate on? Are we into debate, or are we...?

I don't know where we are, given that we haven't followed the rules.

The Chair: Yes, I'm going to confer with the clerk. I find this very odd that we actually have Standing Orders that we seem to decide we can overrule when we don't wish to—

Mr. Matthew Green: We're resuming debate—

The Chair: —follow proper procedures.

Just give me a couple of seconds, Mr. Genuis.

• (1805) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1805)

The Chair: Apparently we're into a point where—

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

The Chair: When you're done....

Mr. Matthew Green: No, I'm good.

The Chair: I'm referring to Mr. Kusmierczyk.

The committee overruled. You can introduce your new motion.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm resuming debate on it, and—

The Chair: We're not resuming debate, Mr. Green. You brought in a new motion.

Mr. Matthew Green: Well, it's the motion I brought in last time, which you all filibustered.

What we've discovered here—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry, Chair. Where are we?

Mr. Matthew Green: I have the floor.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: He's the chair.

The Chair: No, Mr. Green. I have the floor. I am the chair.

You tried to introduce a motion outside of committee business. I ruled that you cannot introduce a motion outside of committee business under the rules. The committee overruled me. That's fine.

You're allowed to introduce a motion now. You can't just start making things up—that you're reintroducing something. You're welcome to introduce a brand new motion, but we are not resuming a debate on that.

Mr. Matthew Green: You would like me to restate the motion.

It says:

That, as per the usual practice of House of Commons standing committees, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates shall not meet during Parliament's summer recess unless the requirements of s.106(4) of the Standing Orders are met.

Now I'm going to speak to this, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Chair.

This motion is not substantially different from another motion that was previously introduced in this committee. Therefore, it's out of order.

If you're going to introduce a new motion, it has to be substantially different from an existing motion. You can move a motion to resume consideration of another motion, but you can't just move a new motion.

If you resume consideration of a previous motion, the person who previously had the floor has the floor, which would be me.

The Chair: I was going to say that the motion is out of order because it has to be substantially different from the one we adjourned. You're not reintroducing it. You tabled a whole new motion, and it's out of order because it's not substantially different.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll challenge you on that, as well.

• (1810)

The Chair: You're setting difficult precedents, but go ahead.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 7; yeas 3)

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll try another time.

Thanks.

The Chair: You could just follow the proper procedure and have a dilatory motion to resume. Then we could—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Socialists don't believe in rules.

The Chair: If you want to pursue this path, go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: Taking into consideration the House of Commons administration will block times during the summer for technical blackouts when committees will be unable to meet, and that summer is a time when members spend time in their constituencies meeting with their constituents and—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order.

Is this the new or old motion being distributed in both official languages?

Mr. Matthew Green: —attending committee events, the members of this committee and subcommittees agree not to meet during the summer recess, except for meetings under Standing Order 106.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order.

My point of order is, could the new, old or whatever we're debating in this bizarro, ruleless framework be distributed so we can at least look at it?

The Chair: Do you have it in English and French to distribute? Would you send it to the clerk to be distributed?

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes, I can.

The Chair: I have Mr. Genuis, then Ms. Vignola.

Do you wish to start, or do you wish to wait for a few minutes?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'd like it distributed, but I am ready to start.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Matthew Green: If I put in the motion, I still have the floor. I haven't given the floor up.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On that point, Chair, because it's the same motion, I believe—

Mr. Matthew Green: It's not the same motion.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —I should have the floor, since I had the floor when we were debating this motion last. If you're resuming consideration—

Mr. Matthew Green: You are calling a point of order. You can't gain the floor through a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're right that I can't gain the floor through a point of order. However, when you resume consideration on a previous matter, the member who had the floor—

The Chair: Mr. Green, I believe it is considered a whole new motion because I was overruled. However, it appeared you had given up the floor when I asked the question.

Mr. Matthew Green: No, I did not.

The Chair: Okay, well—

Mr. Matthew Green: I just wanted to put into light what has transpired here, which is that the spirit of committees is that the committees direct their own course of action. Despite what I would consider to be the authoritarian instincts of the Conservative leader, what we have is a situation where committees are going beyond the usual practices of having planning meetings and subcommittees where all parties and all opposition parties can determine the course and direction of a committee.

To have Conservative-chaired committees decide unilaterally when, how and what we meet on is an authoritarian instinct that I think goes against the spirit of the Standing Orders.

What you witnessed in overturning your decision, sir, is a reminder that the committees are at the democratic will of the members of the committee.

When people go on and on—and I've seen the Conservative bot farms and rage farms online go on and on—about shutting stuff down, it couldn't be further from the truth.

New Democrats will stand up to Conservatives and all the other cockamamie things that are happening here. We're going to take a position that we work. We work in our constituencies as well. When we come to Ottawa, this is part of the job. We come here as legislators. We do that. We've done that for a very long time. Our work, at least for me, is in Hamilton Centre.

When you have people go on a filibuster and talk about how they're going on vacation this summer, in the winter, on March break and they're always on vacation, that's crazy. For me, when I go back to my constituency, it's harder work.

Now, maybe it's the case that the leader of the Conservative Party doesn't care to hear from Canadians in constituencies, but I'll tell you this: As a New Democrat, my job is to represent my riding to the capital, not the capital to my riding and not the leader's office to

my riding. I'm very keen to get back and hear how Hamiltonians are facing the struggles that are before them. I'm keen to get very candid feedback about the direction they want to see from this country in the next little while.

If there had been courtesy provided in other situations that would have included other parties in the decision-making and the direction, we wouldn't be here today. We're in a minority government, despite whatever fantasy world Pierre Poilievre or Andrew Scheer, whoever, wants to live in. I'll tell you this, Mr. Chair. Still, at 40%, 60% of the country doesn't approve of the direction that the Conservative Party wants to take the country in.

This is a minority government. Every committee is in a minority situation. It requires support from the other two opposition parties when you want to go in a direction. It's not the call of the chair. That's why we put these frameworks in place.

The 106(4), to me, is the democratic way to recall a committee. It is the way you can find a willing partner in any of the other parties to decide the direction.

If the Conservative caucus can't find another party to co-operate with on the direction of a committee, then it doesn't have a mandate to go in that direction. It's pure and simple. Just as it was experienced here, whether it was irregular or not. I'm under no illusions that any of the common courtesies are going to be adhered to in any potential future fantasyland of a Conservative iteration of government. I'm not naive. I know what to expect, but that doesn't mean I'm just going to accept it.

From that position, I just want to say that we're ready to work, as we do in the House of Commons here in Ottawa, with our jobs back in our communities over the summer. Should a situation occur that merits investigation, I think it would be preposterous for anybody in the Conservative caucus to think that there is some kind of Bloc Québécois-NDP cabal. We've been accused of a lot of things. I don't know that we've ever been accused of that.

If you can't find a willing partner in either of the other opposition parties, then you're on your own, pure and simple.

The stuff that I see online and I hear about in my own committee in ethics—the vitriol and abuse.... Fortunately for me, I'm from Hamilton, so we have thick skin.

For the people who are watching, if you have any illusions that committees somehow ought to operate as though the Conservatives have a majority, that's not the case right now. I can't tell the future, but I can tell you right now that's not the case. I'm here to put the Conservative caucus on notice that if they want to.... Consider it a notice of motion or a dilatory motion, Mr. Chair.

• (1815)

Have the chuckle, but I promise you this. If you all want to use your powers arbitrarily to call a meeting without consulting with any of the other parties, it's going to be adjourned. It's going to be adjourned because we can count; we can count the votes in the room. This is still a minority situation.

That's why I came in here fired up today.

Kelly, I have a lot of respect for you, my friend, and I know that you take your orders from the leadership just as the rest of your caucus does. I get it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, Chair, the member is now disparaging the chair and his role.

Mr. Matthew Green: I am not at all. I just said I have respect for him. Let the Hansard show I have respect for him.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, let the Hansard show that you said, "I have respect for you, and you don't fulfill the functions of the chair properly. You take orders from somewhere else."

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: You don't even respect the rules.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That is not respect.

Mr. Matthew Green: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It is a point of order. The Standing Orders have established rules around decorum, and that's a violation of that decorum.

Mr. Matthew Green: Kelly, I apologize.

The Chair: That's fine. Can you continue?

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes.

The Chair: I know that after me it's going to be your guys, so I'm going to get everything.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Vignola, we're listening.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: If there were seven or eight francophones around the table talking at the same time and there were one or two anglophones around the table as well, and the interpreters couldn't do their job because no one was listening and everyone kept interrupting each other, that would be unacceptable. However, that's exactly what I've been experiencing for the last 15 minutes.

Have the respect to listen to your colleagues, to raise your hand when it's time to speak, to raise a point of order, if necessary, as I just did. That will make things much more courteous, much more pleasant, both for you and for us, and for the people listening to us in the room or elsewhere.

Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: I apologize. Mr. Chair, while I have the floor, I do have a question about our resources.

How long do we have resources for?

The Chair: We have them until 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay. I'm going to say, at this moment, that I'm going to move to suspend this meeting. Thank you.

• (1820)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Why?

Mr. Matthew Green: It's not a motion.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

Chair, I do want to start by making a comment with respect to the rules of committee and how committees abide by the rules. Mr. Green and I actually first met at a debate hosted by the Catholic archdiocese of Toronto. I think he'll appreciate, if he did sufficient preparation for that debate, my reading of this section from the great play, *A Man for All Seasons* about Sir Thomas More, in which William Roper, Thomas More's rather eccentric son-in-law, says to the future saint:

So, now you give the Devil the benefit of law!

to which Thomas More replies,

Yes! What would you do? Cut a great road through the law to get after the Devil?

to which Roper replies,

Yes, I'd cut down every law in England to do that.

to which More famously replies,

Oh? And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned 'round on you, where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? This country is planted thick with laws, from coast to coast, Man's laws, not God's! And if you cut them down, and you're just the man to do it, do you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake!

This is an important reflection, I hope, for members as they consider whether or not it is wise and judicious to show shameless disregard for the long-established rules of parliamentary committees simply in order to achieve the objectives that they want. Members who think that overruling those rules, through constant challenges to the chair, is going to be in their long-term interests are fooling themselves. They should understand that adherence to the rules, be they certainly "Man's laws, not God's," to quote the play, nonetheless is what preserves us in our roles as members of Parliament and our ability to fulfill our functions.

Minister and Chair, where are we right now? We have Minister Anand, who I don't always agree with, but I certainly appreciate being able to ask questions to; a very busy minister, as all ministers are, who has come before this committee to answer questions for merely one hour, whereas I would have hoped we would have the opportunity to ask questions about the work she is doing as President of the Treasury Board. Instead of allowing those questions to proceed, we have a member of the NDP who is on a crusade to get parliamentary committees to work as little as possible, in case anyone wants to know what the animating causes that Mr. Green is excited about are.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, let me interrupt for a second, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry. I'll sit back.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Could I just ask him to lower his voice and volume and step away from the microphone? We want to look after our interpreters and translators.

The Chair: I appreciate it, Mr. Kusmierczyk, but as we've said before, if there is an issue, whether it's too close or too loud, or the microphone or earpiece is too close, the translators will let the clerk know. Then we will interrupt.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: We just don't want a repeat of what happened in the House. We're very sensitive to that.

The Chair: That was a completely different situation, but I appreciate that, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

If there are any problems with the sound, I'm happy to start from the top.

Ms. Julie Vignola: No, thanks.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

I have assurance from my francophone colleague here that it's not necessary for me to start from the top, so I'll continue.

Perhaps the people of Hamilton would like to know this: What are the animating causes for Mr. Green? What are the things he gets up in the morning thinking about when he decides which issues to prioritize? I know that when some members come to Parliament, they want to focus on economic issues. Some members come to Parliament and they want to focus on social programs. Some members come to Parliament wanting to focus on foreign policy issues.

When Mr. Green comes to Parliament, he thinks about how he can create a situation in which members of Parliament have to work less. He is going from committee to committee. This isn't even his regular committee. He's not a regular member of OGGO. He is going from committee to committee moving motions designed to reduce the workload of members of Parliament. This is his mission.

Mr. Matthew Green: It's what you do.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This is what has brought him here. He has come to Parliament in order to reduce the workload of members of Parliament. He is putting forward motions at committee saying that whatever happens, whatever the circumstances, chairs cannot continue—

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt for a second. I'm hearing lots of chatter back and forth.

Mr. Genuis has the floor. Can we just leave that with him, please?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

His motions are proposing that whatever happens this summer, whatever the circumstances, committees cannot be brought back to do their jobs over the summer. I can tell you that I think Canadians would expect something very different. Canadians would like to see members of Parliament working hard through the summer.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*] constituencies.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, going to constituency events, but also being prepared—

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you for giving me the floor.

I find it extremely offensive to hear one MP say that another MP wants to work less, when the latter specifically says that part of our work is done in our constituencies and that that's what summer is for. I don't work less in my riding—

[*English*]

The Chair: I appreciate that, Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I find it insulting to be told that, when I'm in my constituency, I'm not working. My constituents are important, as are yours, and it's not less work. It's just as much work, if not more. You all know that. There's no way I'm going to let anyone claim that I don't work in the summer.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I appreciate your point. It's not a point of order, but we do appreciate the point.

Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: He's just insulting everyone.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With great respect, I would just say that there's more virtue in telling the truth than in being offended.

This member, Mr. Green, has gone from committee to committee—it is a matter of public record—proposing the same motion. It is a motion to say that parliamentary committees cannot convene over the summer.

Mr. Matthew Green: Just do a 106, bro.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: We do not support this. We believe the work of Parliament should continue.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm going to interrupt.

Mr. Green, please; when you have the floor, you can speak, but—

Mr. Matthew Green: He heckled me my entire time, Kelly.

The Chair: Mr. Green....

You know, I'm tired of the talking over. There's too much disorder here. I'm adjourning.

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