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## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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**Thursday, March 29, 2007**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Shawn Murphy**

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Thursday, March 29, 2007

• (1600)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** Order.

The first item I'm going to deal with is Mr. Wrzesnewskyj's motion. Then I'm going to deal with Mr. Christopherson's motion, if he gets unanimous consent.

**Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC):** I just want to be clear as to the specific intent of Mr. Wrzesnewskyj's motion.

**The Chair:** I'm going to read it, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

**Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick:** Okay. After you read it, I have a question for clarification. I want to be really clear on it and have everybody on the committee on the same page on this thing.

**Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC):** Does Mr. Christopherson's motion that will follow afterwards have any bearing on Mr. Wrzesnewskyj's motion? If it does, what exactly is it?

**The Chair:** No.

**Mr. John Williams:** Okay, fine.

**The Chair:** I want to follow up on Mr. Fitzpatrick's point, which I agree with, which is that we have clarity. I'll read the motion:

It is most evident from today's proceedings that there is still significant testimony which must be presented to the Public Accounts Committee in order for the committee to have a full and complete account of the serious issues of potential perjury, fraud, and interference in criminal investigations surrounding the findings of the Auditor General in Chapter 9 of the Auditor General's Report of November 2006—Pension and Insurance Administration—Royal Canadian Mounted Police and previous testimony provided to this committee by senior RCMP officials. Consequently, I move that the following persons be asked to appear as witnesses before the Public Accounts Committee on April 16, 2007:

Paul Gauvin, Deputy Commissioner, Corporate Management and Comptroller-ship—RCMP

Rosalie Burton, former Director General HR—RCMP (Presently Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada)

Former Deputy Commissioner Barbara George—RCMP

Former Commissioner Giuliano Zaccardelli—RCMP

Dominic Crupi

James Ewanovich

And there was a friendly amendment I agreed to:

Mr. Reg Alcock

Mrs. Anne McLellan.

**A voice:** That was from this morning.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Do you still want that in?

**A voice:** Sorry, could we have those names again, please?

**The Chair:** Reg Alcock and Anne McLellan.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Yes, we definitely want Reg Alcock and Anne McLellan, as they were the ministers responsible during the time this apparent scandal was under way. They were informed of what was going on and did absolutely nothing.

**A voice:** And this is you guys; you did nothing.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** So we're delighted to have them on as witnesses to have them explain for themselves.

**A voice:** Let's not get into the partisan stuff.

**Mr. John Williams:** Let's talk about the witness list and not the rationale behind all these people, so that we try to keep the temperature down a little bit.

**The Chair:** The motion is moved. Now we're open for discussion.

Monsieur Laforest.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ):** I'd like to make a few comments.

Firstly, the word “yesterday”, that is March 28, 2007, should be substituted for the word “today”, to make it clear that the reference is to yesterday's meeting.

Secondly, I believe both sides agreed this morning that this should be a temporary list for the moment and that additional names could be added later. I thought we agreed on that, but I don't know if this can be reflected in the resolution. In any case, that's not what's most important.

Mr. John Williams asked why we needed to meet with all of these people. It's important to clarify that these were the names mentioned yesterday. Moreover, that's the purpose of Mr. Wrzesnewskyj's motion. Yesterday, March 28, we noted that the statements of the witnesses truly contradicted the statements made by some of the individuals whose names appear on this list. In some respects, their testimony was contradictory. If I understood correctly, the purpose of the motion is to help us understand clearly what transpired.

That's all the more important in that during our discussions this morning, we were wondering if an inquiry had been launched. We note that this inquiry is not public, whereas the hearings of the Public Accounts Committee in fact are.

Since we're dealing with a crisis of sorts in terms of public trust in the RCMP, it is important that the testimony given by the different people involved in this matter be public. To restore the public's trust, some of the testimony must be available to the public.

Thank you.

•(1605)

[English]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm greatly disappointed by the minister's announcement. Members will know that in yesterday's open session I resisted the pressure to call in these witnesses immediately. I very much felt that we deserved to give the minister the opportunity to address this issue, and if he did that, then in my opinion it made this moot; it wasn't necessary if he did that.

I know some of my colleagues on the opposition benches were a little concerned with that, but I really was very much concerned about the priority and integrity of our committee and our work if we're going to be dealing with the integrity of others.

I have to say I was hoping this wouldn't become partisan and that we wouldn't get bogged down, but it looks as though that's exactly what's happening. I have serious concerns. I'll speak to the details later, if I get the chance to place my motion today, or I'll wait until we come back if I have to wait the whole 48 hours.

I have to tell you straight up: my concern here is that eight to 12 weeks is a great opportunity for this to be fodder in an election campaign if something should come tumbling out at that time. We don't know who's going to do this report; we don't know how much of a proper inquiry they're going to do—again, I'll address that under the other motion—but this looks to me like a political charade, and I'm deeply disappointed that the Minister of Public Safety would take this road. Again, I'll speak to the details later on this one.

For those reasons, I am going to support this motion. My further motion later calls for us to formally request the minister to bump this up to a full commission of inquiry. My concerns before were that we would have two parallel tracks, two legitimate parallels, and that maybe it wasn't in the best interests of the public to have two, but I don't see the one issue going down the track and collecting all the things that need to be done here.

Two things, in my mind, need to happen. One is we need to tell the minister this is not good enough. The public deserves more. The history and the respect of the RCMP deserve more. It's not just what's gone on in the past; we're talking about the standards of conduct moving forward, so this cannot lie. If the minister won't do his job the way he should, then we need to step in and do ours. In my mind, that means two things: one, we call on the minister to bump this up to a full commission of inquiry so that we do get to the bottom of it; two, unless and until the minister does that, we start the process here. If he won't do it, we will.

I would much rather see it go the other way. I want to make that clear. I don't want us to go through another...I won't say "circus", but at a certain point there was some question as to how useful the public accounts committee was in conducting positive work, when indeed from then on the Gomery inquiry was what really got things done.

The second thing is that until the minister does that, we start our process. I want to make it clear now that if the minister rises to the

occasion and does the right thing, I'll be the first to say we should end our process and turn it over to the commission of inquiry. Then the public's business is being done in an appropriate, credible way.

All of that, Mr. Chair, is to say I will support this motion. It links with the one I hope to place before us a little later.

Thank you.

•(1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Christopherson.

We have seven more speakers on the list. I'm going to limit the interventions to two and a half minutes.

Mr. Fitzpatrick, you're on.

**Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick:** I think it will be a fairly short question. I want to be clear, because when we embark on this thing, we've got to have our terms of reference and our objectives in mind too, and stick to what we decide is the intent of the inquiry we're going to embark upon.

Mr. Laforest has emphasized contradictory evidence. That's what we want to zero in on. That's what the inquiry will be focused on. If I interpret that correctly, it means this committee isn't going to try to become some judicial inquiry to go on for months trying to investigate everything under the sun. I think a lot of us know the limitations of this committee in trying to do that sort of thing.

I'm really asking the person who presented this motion what his intent is. Is it the first or is it the latter? If it's the latter, I'm just wondering how that fits in with the protocol this committee just recently adopted, which fairly well defined the mandate and role of this committee.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Chair, could I answer that question?

I believe in the text of the motion you will find a very clear and concise explanation of what the motion actually entails. It references chapter 9 of the Auditor General's report of November 2006, "Pension and Insurance Administration—Royal Canadian Mounted Police", and it references previous testimony provided to this committee by senior RCMP officials.

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

Mr. Poilievre, for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** I want to say that I strongly support this motion. It's precisely what we need. We need to bring forward particularly the ministers who were responsible. According to a whistle-blower yesterday before this committee, Mr. Lewis, who's the principal whistle-blower in this matter, the minister at the time, Ms. McLellan, was given all of this information in February 2004, years ago, and yet did nothing. In fact she stood in the House of Commons and said there was no reason for an investigation. Mr. Alcock, the Treasury Board president, was given the same information back in 2004. He, too, did nothing.

All of the appointees involved in this apparent scandal are Liberal appointees, and it's going to be very important that the Liberal government officials come forward and explain their conduct in this matter.

With regard to the method we're going about it, I think the Liberal Party would certainly like a much longer process that starts later on and doesn't get going until after another election, because they do not want these revelations to come out before Canadians pass judgment on them again. That's what a commission of inquiry will require. It will take many, many months to get started, at which time the Liberals will have had the opportunity to go to the polls with impunity and, having forced an early election, get off the hook without voters knowing what they really did on this file.

I think it's incumbent on all of us to support this motion and to hear what the Liberal ministers' explanation is for their tardiness—in fact, their absence—in dealing with these files that were put in front of them by whistle-blowers, and I look forward to hearing whatever explanations they might come up with.

I point out that the investigator who the minister intends to name in the next several days will have the power to interview witnesses, carry out forensic audits, and amass a team of people who are able to help him or her in their work. Finally, if those powers aren't enough, the minister has committed to augmenting those powers, so that we can get some answers on this as quickly as possible, instead of trying to delay findings off into the distant future.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Sgro.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Chairman, this is just ridiculous. I have to tell you, I don't know how long the public accounts committee is going to stay here. We are all pledged, including you, to be non-partisan and to get to the point of what we're trying to do. Okay? As long as Mr. Poilievre, in particular, who seems to try to go for the jugular of whatever party he's after.... We can do the same thing, because, you know what, you'll be in office for a while, but the day will come around, too. That's not the way this committee needs to function, and it's not helpful.

I have a letter here that went to Minister Stockwell Day December 7 from some RCMP in British Columbia. Has he reacted? No.

You guys...I'm sorry, all members of this committee, before I came here, had a copy of the same kind of correspondence that was being sent to the members of this committee. No one bothered to take any action until our colleague did, and he's the one who did the digging and did the work. Now we're talking about the minister having an independent investigator.

Well, you know what? It sounds to me like an independent investigator.... He's going to call in some people, interview them in his office, and he's going to decide, "Well, there's no real issue", and he will do exactly what apparently was done by other members of the RCMP who refused to bring this issue forward. I think it's not the way we need to go.

As far as the member goes, I really wish he would leave his partisan hat at the door so that we could be constructive and get some work done. We're the ones who have a motion tabled that these members appear before April 16. That's our next meeting. We don't want any delays. We were the ones who were pushing this thing for months to try to get this on the table, and it was only a miracle that

we managed to get a motion passed to begin with because you guys didn't support it.

We've got it on the table now. We've heard this testimony, with no help from the government, so let's get on with this. Let's pass this motion. Let's get on with dealing with this motion. This is an important issue that's come before us and we need to deal with it in a non-partisan, proper manner, as taxpayers expect us to.

•(1615)

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

Mr. Williams, you have up to two and a half minutes.

**Mr. John Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yes, I think it is a good idea that we hear from these people. As I said earlier today—or no, I can't quote what I said in a previous committee. These people have put testimony before the public accounts committee that has been contradicted by subsequent people before the public accounts committee; therefore, we need to have clarification of these differences in statements. Whether it's perjury or not, we don't know at this point in time. Is it contempt of Parliament? We don't know at this point in time. Therefore, it is important that we proceed and hear from these witnesses.

There have been other names put forward too, Mr. Chairman. I would start with the list put forward by Mr. Wrzesnewskij and the other names we have agreed to, but I think it's more important that we not close it off; we may want to add other names. Therefore, in the interest of unity of this committee, I would suggest.... You may check with the clerk, because I'm not sure an open-ended list can be treated as a motion. I think if we all agree as a committee that we have these names, plus the others, and an open-ended list that we can add to, and adopt the motion, then we're all agreed.

It can't be a specific motion saying these people and anybody else; I don't think that's appropriate. But as a committee, we can say, let's start with these, then bring in the others, and leave it open-ended, and we go from there.

**The Chair:** Mr. Wrzesnewskij.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij:** Chair, I will treat that as a friendly amendment.

**Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC):** I'm due to speak, I think, after two more people.

**The Chair:** Mr. Wrzesnewskij, you're up next, I believe.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij:** Thank you, Chair.

A number of the points have been made, but what has to be clear here is that the announced independent investigator has nowhere near the powers that we have invested in us, here in this public accounts committee. He doesn't have the ability—and everyone here is aware of this—to call the same people we have an ability to call. The people who would come before him don't have the parliamentary privilege that people who come to testify before us have. It allows people to be a lot more forthcoming in their evidence.

Let's remember who the victims are. We know that ultimately the victims are the Canadian public and trust in the institution, but let's not forget the people directly impacted by this who have suffered tremendously for their fortitude and backbone, the rank and file—some of them senior officers—of the RCMP.

We really need to have an opportunity also in this committee to address a number of issues: to show that the will of Parliament will not be undermined, that people treat it with utmost seriousness when they come to testify under oath in front of this committee.

We represent Parliament and the will of the people, and there are allegations of perjury and contempt of Parliament. That's one issue that needs to be addressed.

The other issue is that we're also the committee of financial accountability. We have to make sure that once that report is written we have all the evidence and can make absolutely sure that every penny that was misappropriated from the RCMP pension and insurance funds is returned.

We also have to make absolutely sure that we have all the evidence, so that we can, in a full report, provide recommendations to make sure that the administrative problems that have been identified are rectified. It was stated in some of the testimony that no matter what checks you put in place, if there is a will to circumvent, then people will circumvent.

What we've clearly seen, and we need to get to the bottom of this, is that there are fundamental issues in how the RCMP Act is structured. We need to address these administrative accountability issues as well.

Thank you.

• (1620)

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

Messieurs Rodriguez, Lake, and Sweet are next, and then we're going to put the question.

I would ask members to be brief. I don't think we have to go on and on.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I fully agree with Mr. Wrzesnewskyj. The Committee mustn't shirk its responsibilities. We gave the government a chance. This morning, it asked us to wait to see how the announcement would be worded. In actual fact, it turned out to be very disappointing. It represents only a partial solution. No parameters have been set, and terms of reference have not been announced. It was a total disappointment. We had asked the government to step up to the plate, but it refused to do so. Now, I'm asking the committee to do its job.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Lake, then Mr. Sweet.

Mr. Lake.

**Mr. Mike Lake:** As Ms. Sgro pointed out...I agree with keeping this list open-ended, but based on the names that are on that list and

where we are going there, I believe there are three more names that should be added to the list right now. One is Beverley Busson. I think she needs to be at the meeting when Deputy Commissioner George is there. Another one is Paul Roy, from the OPP, because there was some testimony in the last meeting that involved him. For the same reason, Garry Loepky needs to be there as well. I would suggest that those three names be added to the list.

There are some concerns about this becoming a partisan issue. Obviously, anyone who saw question period today knows that it's a partisan issue for Borys for sure, and based on what we saw in the media today as well. It is rather funny to be pointing the finger on one side of the table. It is a heated issue. We do need to be very careful.

It is very relevant, obviously, to have Anne McLellan come to the meeting. She was the head. She was the number one person in the pecking order during the time this was happening, and I think that's appropriate. It's not partisan or political. It's appropriate that it be the case that she would be here to testify.

I don't want to take up any more time.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lake.

Before we go to Mr. Sweet, there is a point of clarification that I need as chair.

You talked about a previous amendment and such other witnesses that committees may from time to time decide upon, which is fine, but right now, colleagues, we have eight, and Mr. Lake is talking about three more. We cannot have 11 witnesses here.

**Mr. John Williams:** Mr. Chairman, we discussed that there was agreement with the other parties that it wouldn't necessarily be one meeting, so that's a moot point.

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Williams. I agree with you. Maybe I misunderstood that.

Mr. Sweet, you have the floor.

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yesterday a staff sergeant mentioned that the RCMP were iconic, and certainly going right back to the North West Mounted Police, there's no question that is the case. It's the symbol of everything that is right, good, fair, and just about Canada.

I agree with my colleagues that allowing this to spin into a partisan revelry does not help the innocent officers, of whom there are thousands, who are waiting to see justice in the higher ranks.

My Liberal colleagues may be upset with colleagues who repeat Anne McLellan's name and Reg Alcock's name, and it doesn't really inspire us to go out and see CBC and have, after an in camera meeting, all the time burned up by those colleagues. I've had a very productive and, I would say, a very amicable relationship with my colleague from Hamilton. We've worked very hard on Hamilton issues. And to imply that a minister who wants to get a quick answer in order to be able to bring some relief to people who have been suffering for years, to imply that's because of electioneering—

•(1625)

**Mr. David Christopherson:** He already admitted it.

**Mr. David Sweet:** —these are the kinds of things that will heat the committee up. I would ask everybody to be very aware and self-conscious of it, so that we can keep the heat down and really do the good work that we need to do to bring about all the truth that's required in this case.

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

I don't want to get involved in the debate, but I do want to associate myself with Mr. Sweet's comments.

**Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick:** On a point of order, Chair, we have to get some of these things sorted. We're scheduled to be over by quarter after four, but the clock says—

**The Chair:** I'm going to put the question.

**Mr. John Williams:** My point was that we were all agreed that we would have the names put forward by Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, plus some others, plus an additional three, and have an open-ended agreement, a list that we could add to at a later date. Mr. Wrzesnewskyj accepted that, but I asked you to check with the clerk because I'm not sure that an open-ended list is actually a motion we can accept.

I think we're all agreed on that. If we're all agreed, then we just adopt it as such; that is the way we're going to proceed, that we have some names, some more names, three additional names, and whatever else we, as a committee, feel is appropriate, and we'll move forward on that basis.

**The Chair:** The committee decides.

I'm going to put the question—

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** On a point of order.

Mine will be very simple.

Ms. Sgro cited a letter from the RCMP in B.C. I'm asking that when you cite a document it be tabled with the chair.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** I had every intention to.

**The Chair:** And we'll have it translated and circulated.

Thank you very much.

I'm going to put the question.

All in favour of the motion as read by myself previously, and as amended, raise your hand please.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The last item of the day, colleagues, is the motion by Mr. Christopherson, and I'm going to read it:

I move that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts write to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness requesting that the investigation of the RCMP pension fund issue be made a full commission of inquiry under the Inquiries Act.

That has been moved by Mr. Christopherson. However, before the motion can go any further, Mr. Christopherson, as he knows well, needs the unanimous consent of this committee.

I'm going to ask the question. Does Mr. Christopherson have the unanimous consent of this committee?

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Chair:** Mr. Christopherson does not have the unanimous consent of this committee.

The motion of Mr. Christopherson will be received on notice and will be dealt with at the next meeting of the committee.

At this point in time, I'm going to adjourn and wish everyone a very happy Easter.





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