



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 027 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, June 9, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. Derek Lee

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Tuesday, June 9, 2009

•(1210)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.)): Order. We're in public session now.

Ms. Hall Findlay, for your motion.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): I'd like to move the motion that everybody has seen in writing, if I could do so without reading it, because we're about to get bells.

The Chair: Introduce the motion, so it will stick as committee business.

Have you introduced it?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I've introduced it. Do I need to read the whole thing?

The Chair: No, you don't have to read it.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: With the consent of everybody having seen it, can we simply vote on it?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: There seems to be a desire to debate. Will a delay prejudice...? It's not timely?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: The motion calls for information for June 11.

The Chair: Could you adjust the date? That would seem to be reasonable.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: How do we proceed with this, if we're finishing committee? When do I get to present the motion?

The Chair: At the very next meeting.

You have the floor now.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I don't have the floor any more. We have bells. The committee business ends.

The Chair: But we're not adjourned. If you're asking when the motion would be debated and put at our next meeting, it is Thursday.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Which is June 11.

The Chair: Yes. And you would amend your motion to provide a subsequent date for the delivery of the materials.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Then in the interest of time, if we have the motion as written but amended to provide the information by June 16 instead of June 11, is that acceptable? So it is now put before the committee.

The Chair: We're seized of it and we're about to adjourn, so when we come back here on Thursday, the first item of business is your motion.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Terrific, thank you.

The Chair: It's better than nothing.

We have to adjourn now because of the bells.

By the way, colleagues, in the event the vote is over by 12:30, do you want to come back and continue? We could do that. We could suspend for the vote.

I'm going to suspend the meeting and we will be back in session between 12:30 and 12:40. We'll have another 20 minutes plus, and we'll see how members respond. I'm suspending for the vote in accordance with the rules.

We'll see you all immediately after the vote.

•(1210)

(Pause)

•(1255)

The Chair: I'm bringing the meeting back to order. We were suspended for a vote in the House of Commons.

Pursuant to Standing Order 115, we're back in session. I see a quorum.

Ms. Hall Findlay, you have a motion for consideration by the committee.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Yes, I do, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Hurry up, Martha; we are all in agreement.

[English]

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: If I may, I'll quickly read out the motion:

That the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) provide to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates by June 11, 2009:

- (i) the most recent Central Financial Management Reporting System data for 2008-09 fiscal year expenditures and lapses by department; and
- (ii) the Expenditure Monitor produced by TBS relating to the final quarter of fiscal 2008-09 as well the final copies of all of the subsequent quarterly Expenditure Monitor reports as they are completed.

If I may add, my understanding is that this information is indeed public information. It has been requested, but we have not been provided it yet. Therefore we are resorting to a motion before the committee.

The Chair: When you say “we have requested it”, you mean members of Parliament individually.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Members have requested it, yes.

The Chair: Yes. Okay, thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I call the question. Quickly, we have a minute left. We have to pass this.

[English]

The Chair: No, no, I have to recognize Mr. Warkentin on debate.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is the first that I've heard of the request for this information, so I would ask for specifics on what exactly we as a committee might learn from these documents or what is hoped to be learned from these documents.

In my office I receive and have received *The Fiscal Monitor*, which highlights the spending for the last number of months. I understand from the website that on July 20, the results of April and May 2009 will be released to members of Parliament and the information will be public. Now, I know that *The Fiscal Monitor* is a compilation of the information the member is specifically asking for, but I'm just a little bit uncertain as to what exactly we might learn from the information that is being requested that would be different from what's provided in *The Fiscal Monitor*. That's my first question.

My second point is that *The Fiscal Monitor* and all of these documents that the member talks about are really, in my understanding, the purview of the public accounts committee. It is responsible to undertake the review of the expenditures. It has done this in the past and continues to look at those documents. I really don't feel that it's the purview of this committee, unless I understand a little bit more fully as to what exactly we as a committee are hoping to learn from these documents and how it relates to our purview as a committee.

• (1300)

The Chair: Are you raising as a question of order the—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Well, I think maybe first I would get the member's clarification. If in fact I'm looking for an order as to whether or not this falls into our purview, then I may ask you, the clerk, and the analyst to rule on it.

The Chair: Martha.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Well, I thank my honourable colleague for his questions and concerns. I will address them, I hope, in order.

One, this is information that is not in *The Fiscal Monitor* in its entirety. The central financial management reporting system data, fiscal year expenditures, and lapses by department are not there.

Secondly, to have the final report by July, given the repeated concerns we have raised about the spending of this government and the timing of the spending—particularly given that it's well after the House will have risen—is simply not timely enough.

Thirdly, in terms of the committee, we have had before our committee the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Commu-

nities. We have had before our committee the President of the Treasury Board. The fact that the public accounts committee may have an interest in this as well does not preclude this committee's having a significant interest in this information. This is government operations and estimates, after all, and our job as parliamentarians, one of our most significant jobs, is in fact oversight of spending.

We are looking for this information. As I said in my introduction, it should be public information, so I'm not sure why we're not able to get this. It begs the question if there is something being hidden.

The Chair: On the issue of mandate of the committee, I'm of the view, subject to any arguments that members want to put forward, that this falls squarely within our mandate, which is government expenditures or lapses dealing with the current and the immediately past fiscal year. It has to do with how much money is in the till.

I'm quite sure that's within our mandate. It's being requested by a department.

On the question about what CFMRS is all about, our researcher points out a document here used by Parliament. It's from the government, and it says that the CFMRS

...provides a central repository of government-wide financial information which can be used by Parliament, central agencies and others without requiring departments and agencies to respond to numerous individual requests for information.

On the face of it, it appears that the CFMRS is available to the general public. A committee order from us requesting information from it would seem to be pretty much standard. If there are little problems associated with this request or this order, then we can perhaps work those out, but I don't see a problem with the thing going forward. If this expenditure is monitored or if there is a document that's produced regularly, and if it exists, why wouldn't we just be able to have a copy here today so that we wouldn't have to ask for it?

I see that we have two parts, but we might have the second part.

Continuing debate on this, we have Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: What are we doing in terms of the timeframe?

The Chair: We're over our time now.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Are we going to leave this for the next meeting?

Let's just ask the chair what the procedure is now in terms of being over our time.

The Chair: Technically we're past our meeting time.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I have additional meetings that I do need to get to.

The Chair: The chair does too. I'm just not sure if it would be in order to put a vote after our...

I've checked with the clerk, and we're not obliged to adjourn at any particular time. We could move for a....

• (1305)

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): I'm going to speak here.

There are timing issues all over this thing. You have a deadline here of June 11, which is on Thursday. That's a lot of documents for Thursday. That's a bit of a joke.

Second, in terms of the quorum for this thing, we have members walking in after the actual deadline of the committee at 1 p.m.

Why don't we have this dealt with as the first bit of business at the next meeting? This is ridiculous.

An hon. member: No, it's not ridiculous, and we're going to move it now.

The Chair: All right. I always prefer that these things go through smoothly and in a rational way.

Ms. Hall Findlay, is it realistic to expect that the data required for June 11 can be brought forward within the day or two that remains? Do you believe that's realistic?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: My understanding is that this information has already been compiled, so it's not a question of somebody preparing data. These data are already available, but have simply not been released. The short answer is yes, June 11 is appropriate.

The Chair: I'm going to ask this as a point of information: do you have any information, Mr. Warkentin?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I don't want to speak on behalf of the government, but the information I have received is that this information is not ready to be released. It's not in any form.

The information being requested as it pertains to the central financial management reporting system is really a number of reports that have a number of numbers that are compiled for *The Fiscal Monitor*, so the information is all there in the compiled form. In terms of the information by department and across every department, my understanding—and this is just my understanding—is that it would take a lot longer to pull that out of every single department and that it would take forever. It certainly wouldn't happen in a day. That's my understanding. I have no information as to the inner workings of that.

The Chair: I don't want to be part of the debate, but just in terms of a point of information here, if it were the case that the department could not deliver on time, it would be in a position to explain to us that it could not deliver on time. So it's not the end of the world. It's not even notice of the end of the world. It's just a fact of life.

In the event the information was not forthcoming and couldn't be provided, for whatever logistical reasons that may exist, that can be explained to the committee, and the committee would make other arrangements. The committee is not going to be unreasonable about this. So I don't see anything grossly unreasonable in the motion. I accept that from the point of view of some members we may be moving a little bit too quickly on this, but the vote that intervened in our meeting did significantly impair our ability to deal with this.

If members want to move that we conclude debate and go to the vote on it, we can. I'll just leave it to the members.

Okay, Madame Bourgeois is moving we vote on this.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Just preceding the vote, I'd like to offer for the public record that prior to coming back and bringing the meeting back to order, many of my colleagues were under the understanding that if the votes took us past the 12:40 mark, they weren't to return, that there would not be an expectation that the meeting would proceed. So I'll just put that on the public record.

The Chair: And for the public record, the chair might have mumbled a few words that we could probably squeak in another good 20 minutes if we came back after the vote. So I forgive members if in fact they were in any way misled.

Under the Standing Orders, I am required to suspend, which I did, and I indicated to members in the chamber and whoever I could make contact with that we were coming back. So all those things considered, this is a no-fault ambulatory walk to a vote, and if there are any loose ends, we'll deal with them at the next meeting.

We'll end the debate. I'll take a vote on this now.

Yes, Mr. Jean.

• (1310)

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Chair, point of order.

Obviously, I've been substituted in on this committee and I haven't had an opportunity to hear what the particular motion is. Given that I have been signed in now, I think it's fair to have the opportunity to hear the motion read back by the clerk and to be part of discussion before voting on that particular motion.

The Chair: Well, at this point, the chair has already agreed to terminate debate. You are certainly entitled to have the motion read again one more time. Ms. Hall Findlay did read it.

The clerk will read it. That's most appropriate.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michel Marcotte): That the Treasury Board Secretariat provide to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates by June 11, 2009—

Mr. Brian Jean: I'm sorry, I'm just having difficulty hearing. Sorry, I apologize.

The Clerk: That the Treasury Board Secretariat provide to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates by June 11, 2009:

i) the most recent Central Financial Management Reporting System data for 2008-2009 fiscal year expenditures and lapses by department; and

ii) the Expenditure Monitor produced by TBS relating to the final quarter of fiscal 2008-2009 as well as the final copies of all the subsequent quarterly Expenditure Monitor reports as they are completed.

The Chair: Okay, that's the motion.

If it's related to the vote on the motion, yes, on a point of order.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Chair, you know when we had left here, there was the suggestion that depending on how long the voting went, we would not be coming back. As you know, when we left, I did make mention of the fact that some of the members had already left and had made the assumption that we had adjourned. I was under the impression that because the voting went a little longer than we had anticipated, we would not be coming back. I did have some questions I had wanted to ask and speak on, on the motion. I've missed all of that. I feel that in a very real way my rights as a member of this committee have been somewhat prejudiced by the fact that there was a great deal of misunderstanding with respect to this committee. I have mentioned that Mr. Martin was actually.... I appreciate he's made it back.

Mr. Chair, this goes on and on in this committee. We are constantly, it strikes me, arguing with respect to procedure and how things work. We talk about motions. It's a quarter after one, for crying out loud, and we're debating a motion that I assume is a serious motion; otherwise it wouldn't have been brought forward by the member opposite. It was something that happened after the bells rang. We had an agreement that when the bells rang at this place, the gavel would come down. You've not paid any attention to that. I was halfway out the door when you then suggested that we would come back and you would suspend, as opposed to paying attention to what we had already agreed upon, Mr. Chair.

At this point, there is so much more information that I would like. I'm a new member, granted. I might not know the procedures around here and how things work. I might not have the benefit of some of the members who have been around here a lot longer. But this strikes me as being a motion that is something that is of importance. It's something I would like to learn a little bit more about. I want to know some of the rationales for bringing the motion forward at this time. I think we owe it to the other members of the committee to make sure that it's being debated and discussed with the entire committee here.

The Chair: Thank you for your point of order.

• (1315)

Mr. Paul Calandra: I'm not quite done yet, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You seem to be continuing on with some anecdotal background to this. I don't agree with all of it. But in any event, I've accepted the motion. We've moved for a vote. We're going to proceed to a vote, and I've put enough preamble into this that there's little harm to come from the vote or its outcome. The department will respond accordingly. I don't see any prejudice here at all. There are no interests that are going to be harmed. The motion simply pursues the public interest.

The motion is properly put. I'm going to call the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 3)

The Chair: We can stop there.

If there's no further business, I will adjourn.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Chair, point of order.

I want to put down for the record, Mr. Chair, I think that at some point in time, you, as chair, might want to be a bit more respectful of the members who serve on this committee. I appreciate that not all the members on my side might feel the same way that I do. In the few months that I've served on this committee, I have been struck by how little attention is paid to members on this committee. I am struck by the fact that lists are brought forward, that names are brought forward. We're debating an issue right now that was not supposed to be brought on the table.

You've allowed it to come forward and.... I just want to express my absolute and utter disgust with the process over the last few months and how this particular motion has been brought forward. This is a very serious and important motion. We owed it to the other members of the committee to make sure that we were here. Again, it's a quarter after one, and we're still debating something when the gavel should have come down prior. We do a great disservice to people when we try to ram stuff through.

The Chair: Thank you for your contributions on that point of order.

We can adjourn now.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.