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## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, May 12, 2009**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Shawn Murphy**

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## Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Tuesday, May 12, 2009

• (1700)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** I would like to resume this part of the meeting.

There are three items I'd like to deal with, colleagues. One is a notice of something that we may have to deal with Thursday. The schedule is being circulated. The first Tuesday we come back has been scheduled for quite some time now; we have national security, intelligence and information sharing.

The clerk is having difficulties contacting certain individuals, specifically the Deputy Minister of Public Safety and the RCMP commissioner, although in the commissioner's case, he's not a main player. We would not accept the accounting officer, but maybe the assistant commissioner. I'm recommending to the committee that we leave it in the clerk's hands for another two days, but if it's not resolved by Thursday, then I recommend that the committee consider issuing a summons to these individuals, because if you can't get hold of them, the whole issue of the supremacy of Parliament is at play here.

If someone is prepared to move the motion, that would be good.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** So moved.

**The Chair:** That's just notice; that's not for deliberation or debate or a vote. It's an issue that we're going to leave in the clerk's hands to work on for a further 48 hours. If it cannot be resolved, we'll have to deliberate on the possibility of issuing a summons to these individuals.

The next item to come before the committee is the motion from Madame Faillie. I believe everyone has it.

That by Wednesday, May 13, 2009, the Department of Public Works and Government Services be required to deposit the audiocassettes requested at the meeting on March 24, 2009, in relation to the Committee's study of Chapter 3, Contracting for Professional Services - Public Works and Government Services Canada of the December 2008 Report of the Auditor General of Canada.

This has been with us for a while. We moved it. We want those. We were supposed to have Public Works and Government Services Canada, but two months after getting this they tell us they're not going to release it based on privacy concerns. It was my view at the last meeting that it's not an issue in this case. To be cautious, and with all due respect to the officials from Public Works, we've asked the parliamentary counsel to come here and give the committee his opinion on the merits of that excuse. Then we can deal with the motion.

Mr. Tardi, please.

**Mr. Gregory Tardi (Parliamentary Counsel (Legal), House of Commons):** Mr. Chairman, I was literally brought into this file only a few days ago. The document that was handed to me was a copy of a letter addressed by departmental officials on behalf of the Deputy Minister of Public Works and Government Services to your clerk. The operative paragraph in that letter is as follows:

I am pleased to provide the attached Government Enterprise Network Services (GENS) Business Rationale as well as the Report on Industry Consultations. Madame Faillie had also requested a copy of the audio cassettes of the GENS consultations. In accordance with the *Access to Information Act* and the *Privacy Act*, we will seek the consent of the participants before releasing the audio cassettes. As soon as we have received the participants' consent we will forward them to the Committee. Should some participants not provide their consent, their personal information will be removed.

I was asked to analyze the legal validity of that argument. I looked at the statutes that were invoked and then arranged a telephone consultation between the clerk and me on one side and what turned out to be a plethora of PWGSC officials on the other side. I don't want to say we argued, but we discussed back and forth the merits of their reasoning, and we came up with the following results.

First of all, I asked for the details of how the GENS consultation had occurred. I was told it was one series of consultations over several days in which a number of corporate entities appeared altogether in front of each other and before the officials of PWGSC. In effect, it was public. It was not public in the sense of being open to the world at large, but public amongst the companies vis-à-vis each other.

On that basis I expressed the view to PWGSC officials that their reasoning for invoking the Access to Information Act really fell by the wayside. I invoked for them section 68 of the Access to Information Act, which effectively says that if something is in the public domain, then the act doesn't apply. Their very quick response to that was, "Well, yes, you're right, the Access to Information Act should not be taken as applicable to this process."

We then went on to discuss the Privacy Act, and I expressed to them my point of view, based solely on the text of the act, that the privacy legislation is designed to ensure the privacy of individuals only and not of corporate entities. And they agreed with that. I said that the information was in the public domain, as it was discussed in the manner I explained to you, with a large number of companies facing each other and in the presence of PWGSC officials. Therefore, it could not be qualified as being private in nature. Again, there was some grudging consent.

Finally, I said to them that in those circumstances it was very difficult to qualify any particular information as being private, because everybody knew who everybody else was and the companies were not there on an anonymous basis. The company directors, in particular, or the managers who participated in the consultation, were not there on a confidential basis.

That caused a bit of hesitation on their part, but ultimately it didn't induce any change of heart. They offered that the clerk and I ask Madame Faille whether she would accept the report on industry consultation, the business rationale, as sufficient evidence of what had transpired. The clerk's answer was no, that she had already verified with the member and that was not sufficient.

• (1705)

Finally, they said they had already started the process of consulting these companies. This will presumably last until July. I said that was of absolutely no help to the committee because that puts us squarely in the middle of the summer recess. Their answer was that those are the facts.

So, in effect, we came to a draw, and that's as much as I was able to accomplish with them.

**The Chair:** To summarize, we've asked for certain specific information. They say they won't because of privacy concerns, and you're saying there's no legal validity to that argument. Is that your statement?

**Mr. Gregory Tardi:** In my view, Chairman, there is no validity to that line of argument.

**The Chair:** Okay. We've heard Mr. Tardi.

Ms. Faille, just for the record, your notice of motion was received. Are you prepared to move that motion?

**Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** *Oui.*

**The Chair:** I'm going to suggest a slight friendly amendment—to make it Friday, May 15.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Yes.

**The Chair:** So amended.

We've heard Mr. Tardi. We have the motion. Is there any discussion on the motion?

Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** I'm in favour of the information being accessible to Madame Faille. I just don't want the committee caught. I subbed yesterday at the ethics committee where we heard extensive testimony from the Privacy Commissioner. As long as this committee can be assured, from the chair, that we do not have a situation where we are going to cross the Privacy Act, I have no difficulties whatsoever. None.

Let's just bring this forward. I think it's a reasonable request. But if we do contravene the Privacy Act, which I don't know—we have our learned guest's legal opinion on this, and that's fine. Perhaps the chair could contact Madam Stoddart, the Privacy Commissioner, and see if we can get an immediate ruling from her on that. If that corroborates the information that was brought forward here by Mr. Tardi, I would have no objection whatsoever in seeing this brought to an immediate head.

I want to be careful that we don't open the door and breach the Privacy Act ourselves, and I don't know.

**The Chair:** If I may respond, Mr. Kramp, with respect, I believe that would not be the correct course of action. We're a committee of Parliament. We represent Parliament. Parliament has engaged legal counsel. We've got the advice of the legal counsel. The Privacy Commissioner is an officer of Parliament. We wouldn't normally go to her for adjudication as to the actions of the committee, and I don't see it proper in this case. But, again, I'm entirely at the control of the committee.

Mr. Christopherson.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thank you.

My thoughts are very similar to Mr. Kramp's. We need to get information when we need it. If there are reasons, however, protections, then we can't run roughshod over those. I think we've followed a good process here.

My question would be to Mr. Tardi, just framed another way. What vulnerability or level of risk, in your opinion, is the committee vulnerable to if we go ahead with this motion?

• (1710)

**Mr. Gregory Tardi:** Mr. Chairman, my understanding is that a member wants the information contained on the audio cassettes. I have no idea what the member intends to do with that information once she has it, whether it should be for public distribution or whether it should be for her own ability to perform her functions as a parliamentarian. In a sense, it's the end use that really determines the answer to the honourable member's question.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Okay, that's fair.

But up to the point where Madame Faille would receive this, if this motion passed, presumably, up to the point of this committee's actions right now, what is the worst allegation that can be made against us, and how would you assess that?

I'm looking for the same thing you just did in more layperson's language. What allegations or charges could someone or an entity make that we've ignored this, and what would our response be? How much risk are we running here? In your opinion, is this fairly straightforward, is what I'm trying get at. Is there a vulnerability we need to be aware of in terms of our acting inappropriately, given that we don't want to?

**Mr. Gregory Tardi:** Honestly, Mr. Chairman, I find that a little bit difficult to answer. Well, let me try to broach the question this way.

A participant in that GENS consultation might prefer that it not be known to the world at large that he or she participated. In that case, such an individual could raise an objection under the Privacy Act that his or her name, that his or her personal information as a participant, was made public. Frankly, given the level of publicity of the actual process itself, that's rather unlikely.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Okay, you've answered my question. Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** I have one other thought on that, Chair.

As the witness, Mr. Tardi, has said, if this were going to committee—this tape—and we heard the testimony and it was within the purview of the committee, it's our responsibility to uphold our actions as committee members. But if it were to go to an individual outside of the committee, then the committee has no control over that. At some particular point, if it's the direction of the committee to put it to an individual and that individual wishes to use it in whatever particular manner—distribute it to others—I think we run into a potential problem.

I want to see the evidence here at committee, available to Madame Faillie, but we had best be awfully careful on this one because we could be walking into a situation.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** You've had pretty good assurance.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** That's fine.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kramp, I want to clarify something you said. The motion for the production of papers or persons was made by Ms. Faillie. The information will come to the committee and all members will receive a copy. It won't go to her, individually; it will go to all members.

Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Following up on what you said—and maybe Madame Faillie can tell us what the end use is—we would have no control over what the end use would be. To my mind it would have to be assumed that it could be used by someone in any venue, because now it would be brought out.

Secondly, Mr. Tardi, you said you debated and discussed with Public Works and then you kind of came to a draw in terms of them having their opinion and you having your opinion. Then you said, “in my opinion”, it wasn't an issue and it could be released. There are a number of unknowns there that need to be addressed before we actually move forward on it.

One is that we don't know what the end use will be, and you said it was important to know that, that it would depend on what the end use was going to be. Then, in the discussion you were having with Public Works, they had their opinion and you had yours, so in the end you said, “Well, in my opinion...”. So we have more than one opinion, I suspect, on whether it is a product that should be freed.

I'm cautious about being drawn into something about which we may have to sit around this table again trying to clear ourselves on.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** A clarification. The motion was made by Madame Faillie as part of the contracting for professional services at Public Works and Government Services Canada. We heard the evidence. That was a question put to a witness and that was the undertaking.... That would be used as part of the deliberation process when we get to that report, which we will in the future.

Mr. Young.

**Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I am highly disinclined to support the motion. I don't think I can support the motion with respect to Madame Faillie. I'm very, very concerned with regard to the possibility of undermining or subordinating the Privacy Act and the privacy of the people who were recorded on the audio cassettes. It sounds to me like there are an awful lot of people involved.

It's important in a workplace, when people give candid information to their employer, that they have some comfort that it's not going to end up on the front page of the *Globe and Mail*, especially when information can end up leaving what is otherwise a secure place.

**The Chair:** Before I put the question, I want to ask Madame Faillie to address this issue.

Also, I believe you have a document you showed me. I'll let you speak.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faillie:** Actually, I did some more detailed research in order to obtain information for our colleagues. I did not think that this matter would take all our time.

When the people came to testify here, there were discrepancies between what was said at the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates and what was said at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The intention was not to follow the Auditor General's guidelines. We had the opportunity to obtain information about a public consultation on information technology management contracts.

I thought that the audio cassettes would be useful in understanding the presentation and in following the explanations about the presentation that the officials provided.

When Public Works and Government Services Canada first informed us that there had been no simultaneous interpretation at the public session, I saw no problem with us making an exception and receiving a version just in French or English. They came back to us with the excuse that a transcription had not been made because of the cost. Up until that time, providing us with the information was no problem. Now, suddenly, the audio cassettes have become documents that are no longer appropriate for the committee to have. Last Thursday, they held a huge press conference trumpeting the merits of consultation.

I just wanted to get the documents so that we could check whether the efforts to consult the industry correspond with what we have been told here, given all the contradictions we have observed.

For my little research project, I consulted someone from the industry, from an information technology firm, who had attended. I asked him about the documents that he had been given during the consultation. At the meeting with the executive directors' committee, there was a framework proposal for consultation. They were told that, based on the principles that guided the consultation, the desire was for a transparent process where everyone's contributions would be used for the benefit of everyone in the industry: “input will be shared”.

Public Works' next response was—and this is why I found your contribution to the committee just now to be interesting—that industry presentations to the committee of director generals would be open to all industry participants. So they agreed that all briefs presented during the consultation and all industry presentations would be shared with all industry participants. They wanted it to be a public meeting so that the views expressed to the government by members of the industry could be made known to all.

So there is nothing that tells me that this information should be hard to get. To my mind, it was just information. No one who participated can say that he expected his comments to be kept confidential.

So, in the light of what we have heard today, I do not feel that getting the audio cassettes should be a problem.

• (1720)

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll hear from Ms. Ratansi and then Mr. Tardi. Then I'll put the question.

Go ahead, Ms. Ratansi.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** My question is very simple. Was there a hansard reporting of it or not? There was no hansard or blues.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** In the statement, we were told that the comments made by industry people would be provided to us. We made one correction, because I did not say a video cassette, I said an audio cassette. That was the only correction that was made.

[English]

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

[Translation]

**Mr. Gregory Tardi:** Mr. Chair, I think there is a way to resolve this issue.

Ms. Faille could legitimately get the information she wants if it was the content only, with no participants' names.

Mr. Chair, I feel that, if we asked the Department of Public Works and Government Services exactly that, to provide the information without the participants' names, that is, it could make their job easier and make life easier for Ms. Faille.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** But then there would be the question of costs. They would have to work on the audio cassettes in order to remove the names. You cannot remove anyone's name from an audio tape. You can recognize the voice. I do not know how that can be done technically.

[English]

**The Chair:** I think we've had a fulsome argument here—

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** If I may, Mr. Chairman, I have no difficulty with this coming forward at all, but I still have that concern with the Privacy Commissioner. If the chair and this committee are willing to indemnify us from the privacy concerns, with fall-back, fine, but I am concerned that if we have individuals, and somehow they are brought forward, and there is some repercussion.... I don't even know what this issue is about—haven't got a clue; don't know the issue at

all. I'm not aware of the implications, or whatever. But if we put ourselves in a position where we cross the line, and I don't know...

I respect our expert witness here today. I would still like to see a comment—run this by the Privacy Commissioner, and if they feel there's no difficulty with it, then by all means let's do it. And that shouldn't take any more than a day or two.

**The Chair:** All in favour of the motion as presented?

A recorded vote. I'll ask the clerk to....

A point of order, Mr. Young?

**Mr. Terence Young:** Was it on a point of order that I was speaking before? Do you remember that you interrupted me and went to Madame Faille?

**The Chair:** No. I apologize for that. I thought you were through

**Mr. Terence Young:** No.

**The Chair:** Then I'll let you continue.

**Mr. Terence Young:** I actually wasn't, but I do want to finish. I was almost through.

I just wanted to say that if you want employees to provide candid information and be frank and help their employer, they have to have some comfort that the information they provide—and their name, I think, might be key to it as well—does not become public. I wanted to state on the record that I'm very uncomfortable with it. I agree with Mr. Kramp. If you're prepared to take responsibility yourself as chair, or if we can be indemnified against undermining the Privacy Act, go ahead. But I can't support it for that reason.

**The Chair:** Okay.

A recorded vote has been asked for.

(On the motion as amended: yeas, 5; nays, 5)

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Okay. It's a tie.

I'm going to support the motion. I'll just elaborate a bit.

It's my view—and we've dealt with it when it has come before the committee on occasions before—that the powers of Parliament, colleagues, are broad to ask for the production of persons and documents, and the privacy concerns are very limited.

In fact, I'll just read some text. Although the Privacy Act is sometimes used as a justification not to provide documents, paragraph 8.(2)(c) of the act states that the personal information under the control of a government institution may be disclosed “for the purpose of complying with” an “order made by a...body with jurisdiction to compel the production of information”. And the House of Commons is such a body.

There are occasions, when you're dealing with a criminal case or issues of national security...but from my experience as chair of this committee and as a parliamentarian, I don't see the legitimacy of the argument. This is a private matter. These individuals went to a meeting, the meeting was transcribed, and the committee can accept it.

So I will support the motion.

If someone wants to, he or she can come back with a further motion at some point in time as to what the committee wants to do with it. But it will be used, obviously, for the preparation of this report.

That concludes the motion. We'll ask the clerk to notify the public works department.

(Motion agreed to: yeas, 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** The last item of business is Ms. Ratansi's motion. The notice was received on Tuesday. I'll just read the last three paragraphs—there are some preambles:

that the Comptroller General of Canada present to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts every seven days, commencing May 19, 2009, and every seven days thereafter, a report on expenditures approved from the \$3-billion appropriation;

that each of these weekly reports set out as of this date the number of times that vote 35 has been used, the aggregate amount that has been drawn down under that vote, and the number of jobs projected to be created by the funds expended;

that these weekly reports continue until the entire \$3-billion amount is expended, or until such time that the amount is included in the estimates process in the ordinary and normal course of parliamentary appropriations.

Ms. Ratansi, do you want to speak to the motion? If you could, keep your remarks to two minutes.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** Yes, thank you, Chair. I will keep it very brief.

We are in the midst of an unprecedented national economic crisis. The government asked in March 2009 for this unprecedented amount of \$3 billion. This is unprecedented because the government generally, when it asks for money, provides the listing of what the projects are, to provide accountability and transparency. Taking the government's own talking points on the stimulus package, that they believe in taxpayers' money always being spent in an accountable, ethical, and transparent manner, I brought this motion forward.

Given our mandate as the public accounts committee, which is to make the government accountable, we're asking, therefore, what the projects are that have been drawn down under vote 35 and the aggregate amount of money that has been drawn down, and what jobs it has created. When the stimulus package claimed that they would create jobs—and this is a very short timeframe, from March to June—and the money will be utilized.... If it's not utilized, it will go back to the consolidated revenue fund.

We've been studying chapters on accountability, etc., and have clearly stated that the government should not make assertions without delivering.

All of us in our ridings are facing people who are losing their jobs. In fact, two days ago I received an e-mail that was very distressing. People are jumping off balconies because they cannot find jobs. I think it is important for us to be mindful that in this economic crisis

we, as a public accounts committee, be retrospective. It's a short timeframe, and we ask that the Comptroller General, whose job it is—we brought in the Comptroller General as an internal auditor—provide us with the necessary tools.

I am done, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Christopherson.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thanks, Chair.

Given the extraordinary nature of the expenditure and the process and everything else, I was actually surprised and disappointed that the House approved it in the way they did. But I'm fully supportive of this accountability.

My only question, Chair—you know this is coming, because I wanted to make sure you were ready to do it—is, does it fit our mandate? I was just a little unclear. I'm used to our dealing with things that are a little bit dustier—not ancient, but also not ongoing outlays of today. I'd like to know whether it's in order, but in ruling on that, whichever way you go, would you just expand a little to help me clarify...? For instance, are we eligible to review anything from the moment money is spent? From that moment forward, can we ask for accountability? Does there have to be a certain period of time or certain internal reports, so that we're not asking for something that the government maybe doesn't have itself? At what point do things like that become the mandate of the finance committee rather than of the public accounts committee? I'm seeking your guidance as well as your ruling.

• (1730)

**The Chair:** I'm not going to make a ruling, Mr. Christopherson. I'll just say—

**Mr. David Christopherson:** You're not going to make a ruling? I'll make it a point of order if you want.

It's a point of order, then.

**The Chair:** I'll speak to that. But just to comment, without a ruling—because other people may want to speak to your comment—it has always been my view that the mandate of the committee is to deal with the expenditure of public funds. We don't deal in issues of policy. Whether things are good or bad or indifferent, that's not the role of this committee. That's always been my understanding.

I know this is not a clear-cut case. Of course, we don't deal with the estimates either. The only estimates we deal with are the estimates of the Office of the Auditor General.

That's just a comment, not a ruling, though.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** But I would like a ruling. It's a point of order

**The Chair:** Mr. Christopherson has made, I guess, a statement that he believes the motion may be out of order, and he's given his reasons. Does anyone else want to speak to that?

I guess we have everyone speaking to it.

Mr. Shipley.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** From what I understand, the mandate of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts includes a “review of and report on the Public Accounts of Canada and all reports of the Auditor General of Canada”. From that, it would clearly be the case that this is not within the mandate of this committee.

But it is within the mandate of the government operations committee. In fact, my understanding is that they're actually studying the stimulus package, the whole package, and will be making a report on it, as the Auditor General is going to be issuing a report on the stimulus funding. And that's where we fit in. We will fit in as a committee based on her report on it.

I'm amazed, quite honestly, that this has come from the opposition, since all through, our discussions on our reports are not about what is happening in the future, but about reports of what has happened in the past—in fact, even reports that have gone back two and a half years.

So I obviously can't support this motion, first because it's not within our mandate, as clearly laid out in the committee responsibilities, but also because we have other committees that have that mandate, under government operations, and that are looking at it.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I'm going to tell the committee now that I'm not going to make a ruling today on this issue. I want to take it under advisement and study it a little further.

But there are a number of people on the list. Perhaps what I'll do is go over the list, but I'm going to ask you to keep your comments to less than 60 seconds.

Ms. Crombie.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.):** Is it on Mr. Christopherson's...?

**The Chair:** It's on whether the motion is in order.

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** Okay, I'll address that first, and then I want to address the other motion.

**The Chair:** No. When we rule whether it's in order, then we can come back and discuss the merits of the—

**Mrs. Bonnie Crombie:** I understand. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I believe the motion is in order. It is within our mandate to review and report, as Mr. Shipley has rightly said. If you recall, we questioned the Auditor General on the expenditure of the \$3 billion, and she indicated to us that she would be doing audits on the \$3 billion expenditure, beginning in June. I think that's what makes it incumbent on us to continue to audit the funds.

This motion would allow her to expedite her audits and keep them on an ongoing basis.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** For some of the reasons, I'll be really quick.

It's clearly, in my mind, out of order, from having served on public accounts for a number of years.

The Auditor General has stated that basically she is auditing this as it unfolds. If the Auditor General reports back to this committee and her report deems the process to be unacceptable or acceptable, then we make recommendations based on that. To now move in and preempt the Auditor General on this and basically take over her analysis is not in our purview in this committee.

I think we're really overstepping the bounds, and sadly, this is crass politics. It's unfortunate that the committee heads in this direction.

**The Chair:** Mr. Young.

**Mr. Terence Young:** I agree that the motion is out of order. It's not within the purview of the committee to direct reports like this.

**The Chair:** Mr. Saxton.

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC):** First of all, I'm also surprised that the opposition is coming up with this, because it's clearly a duplicitous position. They're saying that on the one hand we should not be looking at new information; we should only be looking at reports that have already been done. Now they're introducing a new motion in which they want to look at new reports.

It's a duplicitous position. I don't think it's this committee's mandate to be looking at these reports. We should be looking at the AG's reports once they're completed.

**The Chair:** Ms. Ratansi is next. Then, as I said, I'm going to study this matter a little further and come back.

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi:** I firmly believe that it is within the purview of this committee, for the basic reason that the finance committee is going to be looking after the \$250 billion. No committee is touching the \$3 billion.

The problem is that the government, when it was asked to present this, said it is under cabinet confidentiality. The money belongs to the taxpayers of Canada, not to the Conservative government.

I think it is important that we be circumspect, because the situation is unprecedented. The \$3 billion that was demanded was there during the economic crisis to create jobs. All we are asking is whether in three months, if the money is not utilized, it will go into the consolidated revenue fund; give us an analysis of the drawdown. We're asking very simple questions, and I think it behooves the members of public accounts to be accountable. It behooves the government to be transparent. The Conservative government cannot say in one sentence “We are conservatives, and we believe that taxpayers' money must always be spent in an accountable, ethical, and transparent manner”, when we do not even know whether the jobs have been created or not, or whether the aggregate money has been drawn down.

Mr. Chair, as the public accounts committee, we have a mandate to ensure transparency and accountability of utilization, especially in this unprecedented economic environment.

**The Chair:** Make a brief comment only, Mr. Weston. Then we're going to....

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

**The Chair:** Well, there's going to be no decision, no vote, so you can....

Mr. Weston, be very brief, and then I'm going to adjourn.

We'll see you on Thursday, colleagues. We're having the Auditor General here with all six reports that she tabled today.

**Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC):** That's fine. I'll pass.

**The Chair:** Okay. As I said, I'm not going to make any ruling on this today. I'll consider it, and then we'll come back to the committee.

The meeting is adjourned.

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