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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Mervin Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)):
Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to the 30th meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, with the orders of the day, pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, October 5, 2009, being Bill C-37, An Act to amend the National Capital Act and other Acts.

Joining us to introduce the bill, speak on it, and take some questions from the committee members is the Honourable John Baird, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Welcome.

Joining him today from the Department of Transport are André Morency, assistant deputy minister, and Simon Dubé, director, portfolio management, crown corporation governance.

Thank you for your attendance again today, Minister. If you would like to open with some comments, we'll move forward.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I am very pleased to be here on an issue that I care passionately about: the future of the National Capital Commission. I'll be very brief in my comments. I look forward to hearing your feedback, any questions, and anything else that I can take back to my colleagues.

I think the National Capital Commission is a real national treasure and is something that everybody from every corner of the country can take great pride in. Obviously, it's especially important for me as a lifetime resident of the national capital region.

If I could, I'll explain two things at the outset.

One is the responsibility for the National Capital Commission. We have a minister of state, Lawrence Cannon, who deals with this crown corporation. That designation was made by the Prime Minister. As well, obviously, it falls under my broader portfolio. Lawrence has the lead and I'm very much a supporting actor in this, but we have worked closely together on many of these files, both now and when he was the Minister of Transport and I was a member of Parliament from the other side of the river. That's the first thing.

Second is that today the National Capital Commission is having an important meeting that they didn't want to cancel, so the leadership from the NCC will be here at a later date to hear your questions, your concerns, and your suggestions.

I think the National Capital Commission should be non-partisan. It is something that all members, from any part of the country, can contribute to. In that spirit, we look forward to hearing about any issues that arise out of this committee.

Certainly the perspective that we in the government are taking on this bill is that it's not an ideological issue. I think there is a significant amount of agreement on the point that we all share in wanting to reform and improve the National Capital Commission.

I'm quite proud of some of the changes we've made. I have not been a vocal critic of the NCC over the past 20 years, as some have. I think Marcel Beaudry served Canadians very well in his post. It was not without making mistakes, and I didn't agree with every single thing he did, but I think he served Canadians very, very well.

I am, though, very, very excited and very, very pleased by the two leaders who have been appointed to the board. Marie Lemay is a really outstanding public servant who is providing great leadership to the NCC. I have been thrilled to work with her, both as an MP in the affected area and now as lead minister in the portfolio. Russell Mills, as chair of the board, brings a huge amount of integrity to his job and is a well-respected individual.

I think the first change we made to the NCC, a decision made in the Federal Accountability Act to split the CEO and chair, was really just good governance. I think it's an important change. In some respects it's symbolic, but in other senses it is very, very real. I think it has been tremendously well received and it is something that we support. Just the new spirit of openness and transparency has been welcomed by everyone in the region, I think, whether they are municipal leaders, the business community, environmentalists, or others who interact with the board, and it's important.

I should say at the outset that one of the issues that's tremendously important to me is the greenbelt on the Ottawa side. It is very much part of our character, of the national character, and it's part of the local quality of life that we enjoy in this area. It's tremendously important. It's very different from Gatineau Park, but there are parts of significant ecological integrity within the greenbelt that have to be protected and are very important.

Like many, I have been concerned over the last 10 or 20 years that we don't have any sort of plan. To see the greenbelt disappear piece by piece.... I think the NCC, in an issue with respect to Ottawa's city council, recently said that the city shouldn't presume that the national capital greenbelt is available by slivers and slices for this or that project, however noble the project is. That's something that I believe is tremendously important.

Like many people in the capital, I was concerned that the lack of a capital budget at the NCC caused pressures for them to eat what they kill, to sell off lands. When I first sought election to the House of Commons, I referred to it as selling off the family silverware to pay for groceries. In the 2007 budget, we got a \$10 million capital budget for the NCC, which allows them to meet capital needs without having to look to asset sales. That's something that I think is tremendously important.

That also allows them to do some planning with respect to the future of the capital and allows them to maintain, to a certain degree, the infrastructure that supports it. Many of the infrastructures they maintain are tremendously important. They can maintain transportation routes, others, and planning work, so this gives them some stability but doesn't eliminate the need for government to be actively involved.

• (1540)

As you know, there are five key amendments in the bill, one of which is meetings in public. I think that has been welcomed by the public. It shows an openness and a transparency that I think we have all welcomed.

The 50-year master plan is something that I think people have called for, that it be submitted to government and tabled in Parliament. I think that has been a welcomed step.

The national interest land mass is something that is tremendously important. Not every square inch that the NCC manages is of equal importance. I mean, the property along the ceremonial route is very different from Gatineau Park or the ecologically sensitive areas in the greenbelt. Not all greenbelt land is valued the same. The Stony Swamp is something of great ecological integrity versus some scraps of land here or there that may not have the same ecological or national interest.

So the national interest land mass is something that I think is very important. Take the condominium that was built at Sussex and Wellington; that piece of land, in my judgment, was of national interest. I don't think we were well served by the NCC's decision a number of years ago to build a condo and restaurant on that parcel of land. I just use that as an example.

Environmental stewardship is something that's important. It's different in different parts of the greenbelt. Obviously those parts that are around the ceremonial route have a different importance than do others, which I've spoken about.

As well, there are enhancements for the governments in power to be able to bring in regulatory powers in a variety of areas, whether it be on issues of permits or controlling the commission resources and facilities, or whether it be restricting or prohibiting access to and activities on commission properties or ensuring that we protect the

natural resources and the process on commission properties and the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park.

Those are just some very informal opening remarks. I am excited that the committee is moving forward on examining the bill. On behalf of Minister Cannon and on behalf of the government, we welcome any suggestions, any comments, on what we can do to work together to strengthen the bill.

I'll say at the outset that this bill is not going to respond to every single concern. It is not going to go as far as every single person would like it. But I think overall it is a significant step in the right direction. As you'll know, the government had a three-person panel that looked at the future of the NCC, and much of the work that we have before us represents the fruits of that labour.

I know that my colleagues, particularly those in the national capital area, have closely followed this, particularly Mr. Dewar and Mr. Nadeau, as well as our colleague Mr. Bélanger and my colleagues Mr. Cannon and Mr. Proulx from the other side of the river.

So we're very excited to be here, and I look forward to answering questions.

As well, on behalf of Marie Lemay and Russell Mills, they look forward to the opportunity to appear before the committee to respond to your concerns and to hear your suggestions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Proulx.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, Mr. Baird, welcome. It is a real pleasure to hear you talk about the National Capital Commission with such love and interest. I share that affection and I believe in the importance of the National Capital Commission for the Ottawa-Gatineau metropolitan region.

Mr. Baird, I have a few questions for you as we in the Liberal Party are concerned about certain things. Subclause 3(1) states that the number of commissioners will be reduced to 14. This is due to the fact that the chief executive officer position was changed. The position of the head, Ms. Lemay, is no longer a commissioner's position. So there would be 14 commissioners.

What will happen if there are equal votes pro and con on an issue, according to you? Would it not be preferable that the chair have the deciding vote?

• (1545)

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird: I have to tell you that this was an issue of some concern with respect to Ms. Lemay being a member of the board, the CEO being a member of the board.

We're looking at a good number of crown corporations. We've made a determination that in most cases it's better not to have the CEO, to separate management from governance. I guess with the amount of times when they would have every single member present, when you'd actually have a position where you'd have a tie-breaking vote, it's not something that we think is of significant concern.

So I guess we've just taken the one-off—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I have no problem with it, Minister. The question wasn't about that. The question is that with 14 on the board now, shouldn't the chairperson have a casting vote so that you don't end up with a tie on votes?

Hon. John Baird: I don't want anyone having two votes, so if the chair reserved and only voted in the event of a tie, that would be one option.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Okay.

The other thing the project doesn't cover is the distribution of the different members of the board throughout the country, in the sense that normally there have been three from Quebec, four from Ontario, two from the east, and three from the west, if my memory serves me right. This is not covered in your proposal. Should we not include in the proposal where they come from and how they are established?

Hon. John Baird: I'll ask Mr. Morency to respond specifically to that. I don't think you'll see a significant change.

Mr. André Morency (Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Management and Crown Corporation Governance, Corporate Services, Department of Transport): Yes, Mr. Chair. You won't see a change in this legislation in terms of how the distribution of the members would be selected. In terms of this—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I'm sorry, it will or will not be changed?

Mr. André Morency: You will not necessarily see a change.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: You are covering the issue that the NCC's mandate be added to the issue of transportation in the region. Our suggestion is that we be much more specific in order to clearly establish the NCC's presence in the planning of interprovincial transportation, roadways, and public transportation.

Furthermore, we feel that the management of existing and future bridges should be transferred to the NCC. That would bring about the transfer of certain bridges, while others are already under the NCC's purview. Would you agree that all of the bridges across the Ottawa River in the national capital region be transferred to the NCC and, of course, with that, the necessary budget to run and maintain them and so on and so forth?

Hon. John Baird: I think there's always a concern when you transfer the asset: do you also transfer the obligation to pay for it? That's the concern I would have. I wouldn't want the NCC to have to look at dealing with issues with respect to Gatineau Park, the ceremonial route, and the bridge, and then have to weigh off priorities on those issues.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: No, but that's why I'm suggesting the appropriate budget be transferred with it.

Hon. John Baird: You can never get the appropriate budget you'd like for any file, so I guess that would be my only concern there.

On the issue of transportation, Minister Cannon in particular is someone who's been very involved in transportation, both as minister and before that with the municipal transportation system on the Quebec side. We'd like to see a much greater role for the NCC. I guess the issue we have is that neither transit system really separates its interprovincial work from its municipal work. We want to be very cognizant of not encroaching on provincial jurisdiction in this regard.

As we go forward, I'd like to see the NCC's mandate grow and do some coordination there, but at the same time, we have to be cognizant of respecting provincial jurisdiction. It's not for the federal Parliament—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Yes. Excuse me, but these other bridges are already under the federal government purview in the sense that those not under the NCC are under Public Works, so it's six of one and half a dozen of the other.

Before we run out of time on this first run, on the master plan that you're talking about in proposed section 10.1, I don't understand why you would not want it to be approved by Parliament. The way this is presented, a master plan would be established, and Parliament would be informed. I think it should be the other way around. I think Parliament should approve a master plan.

On that master plan, I would like to hear your views on the fact that the plan should cover the employment polls, let's call them, in the national capital region. You can see me coming here with a 75%-25%, in the sense that if we are ever going to arrive at a proper sharing of jobs on the Quebec and Ontario sides of the river, somebody will have to act as the planner and the police on this. I would suggest for your master plan that this be covered by the master plan for the NCC.

Not only should we be talking about square footage, square metres, or spaces, but I think, as we have said for a long time, that we should be talking about jobs, and not only jobs relating to or answering to Treasury Board, but all Canadian government direct and indirect jobs—that is to say, all jobs in all federal organizations in the national capital region. As it is, there are too many organizations that are totally federal but are not included in the calculation of this sharing. For example, there are the museums and Canada Post, and I can go on and on, to the point where, should we include all of these, the Quebec side of the river is approximately 10,000 jobs short of reaching that 75%-25% sharing.

So to go back to my first question, should the master plan not be approved by Parliament?

• (1550)

Hon. John Baird: That's not something that has traditionally been done with crown corporations, but it's something I'll certainly reflect on.

On the concern with the 75%-25%—and the government strongly supports it—to be charitable, there are many definitions of what constitutes that in real estate, and some are more liberal than others. Some view it as jobs, others as square feet.

When Mr. Trudeau first came forward with the initiative, it had a certain definition, and others have tried to redefine it over the years. I know, as President of the Treasury Board, that at one point we identified five different definitions, but the one Mr. Trudeau brought in certainly became a living definition, because it ended up growing and growing in what it constituted.

I think that would be a good idea. Obviously there's always clarity in what definition is being used. We'll take your thoughts back to my colleagues.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: What about the greenbelt?

The Chair: You're out of time. I'm sorry.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I'll come back.

Hon. John Baird: I'd be happy to talk to you again.

The Chair: Monsieur Nadeau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, Mr. Dubé and Mr. Morency, good afternoon.

Any question involving the National Capital Commission is important to members whose riding contains NCC lands. Moreover this is also of interest to all Canadians and Quebecers as we are talking about an investment. It is very important to ensure that this be done in cooperation with the other partners, that is to say the federal government, the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, as well as the two cities concerned, Gatineau and Ottawa.

One of the factors that is of great interest to me is the matter of the integrity of Quebec's territory. We know that under the Constitution, any changes to provincial borders require the consent of that province. This is to be found in article 43 of the Constitutional Act, 1982.

Moreover we know that changes cannot be made to a national park without the approval of the province wherein the national park is located. Gatineau Park is not a national park. We would be very interested in a legislative guarantee that would establish that in order to make changes to the park, not only would people have to consult the Quebec government, but also obtain its agreement. We are talking about the park boundaries. That is not in the bill.

What is your position on this? How could we work together to ensure that this be done?

• (1555)

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird: I'll invite André to speak to this afterward if he has anything else to add.

I think it's tremendously important that there be good collaboration with the NCC and both municipalities. It's much easier now than it was at one point, with fewer municipalities—and single tier—and the two provinces in question. I can report to you that certainly during my time in Parliament, at the federal level, they've enjoyed pretty good collaboration with the provincial governments on both sides of the river and, depending on the issue, with the municipal government in question.

The National Capital Commission is a federal commission. Gatineau Park is a federal park, not a national park. And as a national institution—both the park and the commission—I don't think it should be given to a municipality or province to control its fate. But the success of the leadership of the NCC at both the executive and board levels will be based on how well they work with the provincial and municipal leaders. Thus far, I think it has been very positive provincially. I haven't heard any negative concerns from the Province of Quebec or the Province of Ontario. I don't think I'd want to legislate that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: If I understand correctly, the government is not ready to consider, for instance, that the Ontario and Quebec governments be consulted if there were to be a change to the NCC lands.

Hon. John Baird: Consultation is one thing, but do we have to obtain the express consent...

Mr. Richard Nadeau: ... the legislative support...

Hon. John Baird: ... the legislative support of the Government of Quebec?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: It could also be that of Ontario.

Hon. John Baird: That is not in the bill. Of course, as I said to our colleague Mr. Proulx, we respect provincial jurisdictions. I am sure that the members of the National Assembly and the Government of Quebec will respect federal jurisdictions because we respect provincial jurisdictions.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Minister, expropriation is also an important issue. According to the National Parks Act of Canada, it is impossible to expropriate private property within or adjacent to a park. I am still thinking of Gatineau Park as an example. However, the NCC has the right to expropriate.

I went to the Gaspé this summer and was able to see that the Forillon Park affair was still very much alive in people's minds. As for Kouchibouguac National Park, we remember the case of Mr. Vautour. In fact, the argument was based on the fact that he was on the territory of the park, but the fact remains that in the Forillon Park case, people were expropriated so that the park could be created.

From the social and political perspective, I would like us to avoid in this case a situation where the NCC has expropriatory powers that are greater than those in the National Parks Act.

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird: I'm a big believer in property rights, and I have real concerns with expropriation powers. To give a crown corporation the power to expropriate would cause me great concern.

Going back to the fifties, there are still some raw feelings from people and descendants of families who had their land, farm, or home expropriated when the greenbelt was created. I'm very, very cautious on expropriation powers for a crown corporation. If in extraordinary times a contractual agreement can't be reached, I suppose that's always something to be considered, but to give it to a crown would cause me concern.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The fact remains that the NCC still has that power, if I understand correctly.

Mr. André Morency: It has it regarding lands that it already owns, but it has not exercised it in the past.

Mr. Simon Dubé (Director, Portfolio Management, Crown Corporation Governance, Department of Transport): The commission has had that power for a number of years, but it has not exercised it for over 20 years. Indeed, it no longer wishes to operate that way. It prefers to negotiate.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: You are telling me that this is not the way things are done anymore; in that case, why not simply remove that from the bill, so that that situation never occurs? What is in the bill can always be used.

Hon. John Baird: The commission has not used this power in the past 20 years, but be that as it may, you are right. I will discuss this matter with my colleagues. The rights of owners are always a concern. As is the national interest.

• (1600)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Transportation is also an important question. There is currently a debate on a new bridge that might be built between Gatineau and Ottawa. The NCC has returned to the drawing board on this. For the moment, three plans are being discussed. Would providing the NCC with legislative support as regards transportation be an encroachment on provincial jurisdiction, since transportation within their own boundaries is a matter of provincial jurisdiction?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird: I'll say it in English to be precise.

To show you how non-partisan I am with infrastructure spending, I said we didn't have to build the bridge they wanted to build on the west end, that we could build one on the east end, in a Liberal riding and a Bloc riding, because I didn't want to take all the infrastructure money for the west end.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Make us cry.

Hon. John Baird: As you know, the enthusiasm for a bridge isn't quite as strong on the west end as it is on the east end.

I think we have a responsibility when it comes to interprovincial transportation. The reality is that we're going to want to work with both provincial governments and, frankly, the municipalities, in both cases, on a new bridge in the east end. I think that only makes good sense. I think we want to share costs. That will be important. I don't know whether you could proceed without the support of the provinces on either side. They are going to the next phase of looking at an east-end bridge. It's something that I think is important and that we'd like to see happen.

It would do a lot for economic development in Gatineau. I think it would be important in the city of Ottawa to get the interprovincial trucks away from our downtown core. It's something we support. The next phase, the environmental work and the public consultation, that is required is significant, and working with communities is particularly difficult. I think we'd all like to see it get under way more quickly than the process takes, but we also want to ensure it's in the right place.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

This bill is an interesting mélange of initiatives that many of us have been pushing. You referenced reforming the NCC in your opening comments, which I certainly want to see. I applaud the government when it does the right thing, including the initiatives of Bill C-2, as you mentioned in your opening comments. I think it was important to separate the function at the top, so I concurred with the government's direction on that and supported it when Bill C-2 was going through the House.

I note also in this bill that a large focus—and again, it is something that I and others have certainly been pursuing—is on protection of Gatineau Park. I'm just curious—and this is sheer curiosity—as to why you decided to put all these things in one bill.

Hon. John Baird: It is under the broader category of NCC reform. Obviously, in recent months when this Parliament didn't look as if it would last a significant amount of time, I was concerned—as you were, and as many of us were—that NCC reform would fall by the wayside and wouldn't be accomplished. It took a significant amount of work to get it this far with the review panel, which finished a number of years ago. We took the various NCC matters and put them into one bill.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I would like to turn to the Gatineau Park provisions within the bill. Actually, this relates to your previous portfolio as Minister of the Environment.

In the Canada National Parks Act, 2000, there is the whole principle of ecological integrity that kind of guides the Canada National Parks Act. My own bill, which I put forward, didn't determine to have a park laid upon Gatineau Park. But the idea that I think is important, which relates to this bill, is that instead of having the ecological integrity that is in the National Parks Act, there is due regard in the bill to maintaining ecological integrity. I'm just wondering whether there is any rationale behind that. What I'm looking for is whether there would be an opening here to actually put that language into this bill so that it mirrors what you have in your National Parks Act.

Hon. John Baird: Obviously there is no question that we're not proposing that the park be designated a national park, nor are we proposing that it not be designated a national park but have all the obligations of a national park imposed on it. So we've tried to strike a balance. Obviously we want to protect the park, but we don't want to have to get rid of all private land ownership within it. We don't want to reach a variety of protections. I think we've struck a reasonably good balance.

There may be, from time to time, local transportation needs on the outskirts for which decisions have to be made. I hope this would be nothing more than a nip and a cut.

If there are opportunities to expand, if properties become available within the park or neighbouring the park that would benefit the ecological integrity of the park, the NCC would have the capacity to move there. We just didn't go that far.

●(1605)

Mr. Paul Dewar: The reason I'm asking—I don't think there's a huge chasm here—is that the latest master plan of the NCC has the language I just referenced to the National Parks Act, which is to have ecological integrity. Maybe we could just take a look at that. It's in one of those amendments. We can straighten things out, because it will actually then conform to the NCC's master plan right now, in terms of the National Parks Act, and put it into this bill. I don't think it will conflict with any concerns you might have about properties. It's just tweaking the language.

Hon. John Baird: In an effort to show openness to working with all members of the committee, maybe at some point after the committee has had its deliberations, if one member from each party would be interested in sitting down informally and discussing what you've heard, we could have a discussion with the NCC folks. We'd certainly welcome that. This is not an ideological issue; we want to be very practical. Obviously we want to seek environmental protections and—

Mr. Paul Dewar: On that note, I have a number of amendments to strengthen.

The issue you mentioned, acquisitions, is something on which there can be amendments made that would be helpful, including expanding the park, if that is available, noting that the whole notion of expropriation is not something people want to get into. But certainly I've applauded going down the path the way the NCC is going right now, and that is that when there is an opportunity to grow the park that way, seize it, and not seize it in the manner that one might suggest happened in the past, but to actually grow the park that way. I would welcome that approach. I would like to see the protections for the park that many of us have wanted to see for quite a while actually happen so that we get the legislation done right the first time.

One of the concerns people have, notwithstanding that the NCC is a crown corporation, is that we ensure that there is also an ability for Parliament to be involved so it can represent those interests. So again, I would like to see some tweaking of that so that how it's reported to Parliament is done correctly. Particularly if there are any massive changes contemplated, it becomes an issue that is connected to accountability through Parliament.

Hon. John Baird: Again, if you have suggestions on that, I'd welcome hearing them.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Yes, and I'll share them with all of my colleagues around the table.

I have a question, because it did capture my interest, around the reforms to the NCC as a structure.

One of the things I had proposed—and it wasn't in this bill, and that's fine—is how we get some local reflection in the NCC. I know the NCC's mandate and I fully ascribe to it, but one of the proposals was that there would be a peer selection of someone from each of the respective councils to be on the NCC. I'm not going to fight that battle, but I'd encourage all of us to have both the Quebec and the

Ontario sides of the equation, both the Ottawa and Gatineau sides, be more involved.

I'll just give you that in the past there has been a lack of consultation and involvement on transportation, so I'm glad to see that. There has been in this city, I don't have to tell you, concerns about transportation plans, not just on this side of river, in Ottawa, but also how it connects with Quebec and Gatineau, and I have to tell you that until recently there was no connection at all. In fact, the NCC was off on the side. Thankfully, they are now taking a leadership role. I happen to know they've been invited by Gatineau council. I think there will be meetings with Ottawa council. But I think if there's anything we can do, whether it's in this legislation or otherwise, to really push that....

Minister, we know that the potential of the NCC is to do good planning, to facilitate things. I don't really want to see bridges being thrown over to the NCC, quite frankly, but I want to see them facilitating so we get out of the morass of what we see in transportation. Have you any ideas on how we can improve that, either in this legislation and ideas behind that or otherwise?

●(1610)

Hon. John Baird: I think Minister Cannon has spoken very strongly on the need for better transportation planning. I guess we do have to be cognizant that such a sliver of both the Ontario and Quebec sides is actually interprovincial, and we have to respect jurisdiction on either side. I think there has to be a greater coordinating role or facilitating role by the commission. We obviously hadn't proposed to go further than that. If you have specific suggestions, I'm sure we'd all welcome hearing them.

It is a delicate balance, because at the end of the day, with the Canada Labour Code, we deal with the issue, and as you know, that's not something we all necessarily embraced with great enthusiasm. I don't want the commission to be the second tier of government in Ottawa. That is properly with the municipalities.

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, a facilitating tier is what I'm talking about.

The Chair: This will have to be your last question.

Hon. John Baird: Perhaps I could make just one response.

The Chair: Yes, very quickly.

Hon. John Baird: Nothing will replace leadership if you have good people who make that a hallmark. And I think we've seen that, particularly with this current chair and CEO, who, to my judgment, got kudos from all around.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I believe I'm sharing my time with Ms. Hoepfner.

My question is quite simple, Mr. Baird. I am not from Ottawa, but I believe that all Canadians have a vested interest in the national capital region and all of us want to see it protected. I know that the independent review was done on the national capital mandate. Can you tell the committee who was consulted on this process? Can you identify those, please?

Hon. John Baird: We had a three-person panel that did, I think, a respectable job with respect to their recommendations. Before they issued their report, they worked with municipalities on both sides. They worked with a significant number of environmental initiatives. I think they also tried to look at who were the major stakeholders that they deal with, not just in the whole expanse of the region but in particular around the ceremonial route, whether it's with museums, the art galleries, or the culture community. Environmentalists obviously are especially concerned with both the greenbelt and with Gatineau Park. I think there's an annex in their report that lists a significant number of folks they listen to. I'm pleased to see a number of locals. I know Mr. Proulx, Mr. Bélanger, and Mr. Dewar were amongst those they spoke to. They spoke to tourism representatives, representatives of the business community, other federal stakeholders. I mean, there's obviously Public Works, obviously Parliament itself, and the various crowns on the ceremonial route.

So I think they did a pretty good job, generally speaking. As I said, I don't think anyone said they got everything they wanted, but I think it was a pretty positive expression of what people wanted to see from reform.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

Ms. Hoepfner.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you.

Thanks very much for being here, Minister.

Since I've become a member of Parliament, two things have become very clear to me even though I don't represent an area in Ontario or in Ottawa. One is that this is certainly our home away from home as members of Parliament, so it's a place that we do treasure. The second thing that has become very clear to me is the beauty and I think really the awesomeness of this area and region. It's something that I've told many of my constituents about. I've told them that they need to get to the Ottawa region and see it, because it really is beautiful.

So I'm pleased to see that we're making these necessary changes. I'm also pleased to see that we're putting this effort into maintaining our national capital region.

My question has to do with funding, the change in mandate that has happened over the years, how that has affected the operating budget for the NCC, and why we've had to make increases to that budget. Could you expand on that a little?

Hon. John Baird: I think the biggest budgetary challenge has been the capital one. When we were in deficit times, I think the NCC became more efficient, which is good. We applaud that. We welcome that.

I think one area is that in the late 1980s, the last time we had a significant deficit—it was certainly much greater than it is now as a

percentage of the economy—they got rid of their capital budget and then had to go cap in hand for everything they needed. As I mentioned in my opening comments, we changed that in 2007, giving them a predictable \$10 million a year. I think that's important.

It doesn't get away from the fact that from time to time they're going to have to ask for special appropriations if there's something particularly significant that goes into the tens of millions or even hundreds of millions of dollars. That won't go away, but this does give them a planning horizon to be able to seek renewal of the various stocks of real estate and buildings and, as well, the natural treasures. If you go to the Stony Swamp, they have things that assist visitor experiences. If you go to Gatineau Park, they have things that assist the visitor experience. I think those are important.

There was a real and genuine fear and concern that, for budgetary reasons, every opportunity they had to sell a scrap of land here or a parcel of land there, they wanted to do. In my honest opinion, probably not everything they did was with that motive, but certainly with the lack of a capital budget I think it was not an unreasonable concern. I think that undoubtedly it was done from time to time, so hopefully a more stable budget is something that will be welcomed.

• (1615)

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: This is actually the first increase in the operating budget in how long?

Hon. John Baird: It's certainly the first big increase in their budget since the late 1980s. I think it shows the commitment.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Absolutely.

Hon. John Baird: I think the fact is that Ottawa-Gatineau is a vibrant political area, the only area up to Montreal, the only area in the country, that has all four political parties represented. There has certainly been a confluence of interest in the NCC in the last Parliament and this Parliament, which, frankly, we hadn't seen in many generations. The fact is that in the previous Parliament we had the political minister for Quebec representing the Gatineau side and the political minister for Ontario representing the Ottawa side, and also we had Conservatives, Liberals, the NDP, and the Bloc all pushing the issue.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: That would help, and I guess that would go to my next question as well.

Private members' bills have come forward from the different opposition parties. Can you tell us a little about how those bills have helped shape this legislation? I think this works together.

Hon. John Baird: As for the idea of a private member's bill, obviously if you can get it passed that's generally considered the home run. Regrettably, I think, many private members' bills have become largely symbolic, at least the ones that are passed. I think the other motivation for members of Parliament—

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Not all of them.

Hon. John Baird: Yes, hopefully not all of them, and I'll be voting for your private member's bill.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Thank you.

Hon. John Baird: Others are obviously hoping to advance the debate and push the government to bring forward the legislation. Mr. Dewar brought forward two bills, Bill C-207 and Bill C-367, regarding governance and protection of Gatineau Park. They certainly informed our work in preparing the bill. I know that Mr. Proulx has been very vocal on this file, as have Mr. Nadeau, Mr. Bélanger, Mr. Poilievre, Mr. O'Connor, and others.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: That is good news, and it's good news again for this committee, because I think we're doing work that is non-partisan, and this bill shows that and advances that kind of work.

Hon. John Baird: I think that on this issue it's not ideological. I think we generally want to go in the same direction. Some would like to see us go farther than others, but generally speaking, I think we're all going in the same direction. I just hope we have an opportunity to get this. If we can get a significant amount of reform, let's run and grab it while there's momentum. I think there clearly is momentum in the fact that this committee is considering it this quickly.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Absolutely.

Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Volpe is going to give his first question to Monsieur Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Minister, the Federal Accountability Act of your government, in section 228, had planned the creation of an executive committee for the National Capital Commission. Why do clauses 3, 1, and 8 of the bill confirm the abolition of the executive committee?

Hon. John Baird: We decided not to go forward with it.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Why?

Hon. John Baird: We've lived for a while with a separation between the CEO and the chair.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: You thought it was enough of a change.

Hon. John Baird: Yes, and the role of the committees in practice has been strengthened, the audit committee and others. The NCC used to have four big meetings a year. They've begun to have meetings more regularly, and the committee structure has been more active. Having the governance split from the executive function has worked out demonstrably better than anyone could have hoped. I don't say this in criticism of Mr. Beaudry, who I think has done a pretty good job.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Secondly, we're talking about the ecological integrity of the commission's property, the real or removable properties in the Gatineau Park. Should this not also apply to all other NCC properties, such as the greenbelt and any other lands of national interest?

• (1620)

Hon. John Baird: We've had long discussions about this. I don't think you can say that any one acre of property in Gatineau Park or the greenbelt is equal to another. I'll talk very frankly about the property that the NCC has in the greenbelt in west Nepean. You have areas like the Stony Swamp that are the lungs of the nation. You have important woodlots. You have other areas that have become

slivers, where regional roads have been built. You have commercial cornfields that take up a lot of former properties.

So I don't see how anyone can equate them.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Minister, when I brought this up in question period, you agreed with me on the importance of maintaining and protecting the greenbelt.

Hon. John Baird: I do agree, strongly.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Maybe at another place and time we could find a way of protecting the greenbelt. Otherwise, nothing would stop the government from selling it off, in part or as a whole. Then it would be too late.

Hon. John Baird: Preserving the greenbelt, protecting it, is something that I hold dear. If you have suggestions on how we might better do that, I would be more than happy to hear you out.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you.

Hon. John Baird: There's no substitute, though, for a good government and a strong opposition.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for coming here.

You mentioned the balanced equality with which you deal with infrastructure projects around the country, irrespective of partisanship. So I'm going to ask you, because you're always fair to us here, why the good citizens of Eglinton—Lawrence, some 100,000 of them, were asked to contribute \$1,000 each—that's \$1,000 for every man, woman, and child—to invest in infrastructure in the riding of the Minister of Defence. What makes him so special that you around the cabinet table would tax every resident of my riding \$1,000, just so he could say he brought home the bacon?

Hon. John Baird: I think my constituents might ask why this government is spending so much money in Toronto—\$666 million for the Spadina subway expansion, \$333 million on the Spadina LRT. By the way, as for the Spadina subway extension, the TTC didn't even request the funding for it.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: You initially told them to take a hike. But Minister, you had already assigned some of that money.

Hon. John Baird: Do you want to talk about the Nova Scotia situation? I was pleased to be in Halifax with Megan Leslie, the member for Halifax, where we announced \$20 million for a new central library. It will be a \$60 million library. The province is submitting \$20 million. Your colleague Rodger Cuzner and I worked very well together on \$5.6 million in sewer upgrades in Cape Breton.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: No, I'm talking about this \$100 million, Minister, the \$1,000 for every man, woman, and child in my riding. Please don't try to cloud things by making comparisons about how much money you spent in the greater Toronto area. Toronto itself has 2.5 million people. The greater Toronto area is 5.5 million. Please don't insult us by telling us you've made a contribution of \$200 million. I'm talking about \$100 million in infrastructure in a riding that pertained to one of your colleagues in cabinet. Did you get that much for your riding?

Mr. Jeffrey Watson (Essex, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Order, please.

Hon. John Baird: I didn't get that much for my riding. I can tell you that Ken Dryden and Judy Sgro got \$666 million for theirs.

The Chair: Mr. Minister, excuse me.

Mr. Watson is next on a point of order.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: That's an untruth, and you know that.

Hon. John Baird: But it's true. The Spadina subway extension... is that true?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: It's not true.

Hon. John Baird: It's not true?

The Chair: Excuse me.

Can I have order here, please? Thank you.

Hon. John Baird: We didn't give \$666 million for two Liberal ridings?

The Chair: I have to ask everyone to recognize Mr. Watson, who has been waiting patiently.

Mr. Jeffrey Watson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would expect such an intervention from Mr. Kennedy, who has undoubtedly left the room, as we should all know—big surprise.

This has no relevance to the bill in front of us here, and I think we should at least keep to the legislation. The line of questioning by Mr. Volpe may be self-serving, but it certainly doesn't serve the interests of the bill.

The Chair: I'm suggesting that is a point of order, and we will go back on topic with Monsieur Nadeau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let's us talk about ecological integrity, which is referred to in the bill, as it concerns the National Capital Commission. We know that the ultimate priority is to ensure proper environmental management of national parks. Why don't we have that same priority for Gatineau Park?

•(1625)

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird: With national parks we try to preserve examples of every one of Canada's ecosystems. Gros Morne National Park and Nahanni National Park are treasures. We want to preserve the ecological integrity of Gatineau Park. We're not proposing that it go as far as all of the protections for a national

park—we fully admit that. I think there are significant protections for the ecology of the park. It is also a controversial issue in the province of Quebec when the federal government designates national parks.

Mr. Dewar raised issues with respect to the ecological integrity rather than due regard for ecological integrity, so we certainly welcome the committee's views on these issues.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: That is very important. Some areas of Gatineau Park are unique and contain microclimates. There are others in Quebec and Canada elsewhere, but there are also some to be found in that park. We all know the history of the Champlain Sea and the geological formations it gave rise to in Gatineau Park. Those microclimates must be preserved.

Minister, it would be a very good thing to have additional protection for Gatineau Park. It would be a win-win situation for everyone.

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird: I agree that ecological protection, ecological integrity, is important. We do things in different ways. We have national parks, marine conservation areas, whale sanctuaries, and protected areas. We have a variety within the federal family alone.

After looking at the bill and hearing from witnesses, if you think there could be more precision put to that, as Mr. Dewar and now you have proposed, the government is certainly prepared to hear that out. I want to be very clear that if the committee can help make this bill better, we're very pleased to work with you. Then all of us can go back to our constituencies, whether they're here or around the country, and celebrate the fact that we did a good thing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Please be assured, Minister, that we are going to work on that, that is the purpose of the exercise. I agree with you on that.

Decisions were made by Treasury Board. On September 15, 1988 and September 29, 2008, because of budget cuts, instructions were given to the NCC to divest itself of excess lands. You have been a member of Treasury Board and know that the dominant concerns are financial rather than environmental, especially when it comes to the NCC and the preservation of ecological and environmental heritage.

Could Treasury Board once again impose this type of direction on the NCC, against which the bill would be of no use?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird: I think there can be areas of land that lose, for various reasons, their national significance or lose their connection to the greenbelt. From time to time on transportation routes, scraps of land end up cut off from the main greenbelt.

My view, I guess, is twofold: one, that if they're surplus lands, they should genuinely be surplus; two, that they not be a source of revenue for the commission; and three, if you do have some extra funds with respect to a slice of land that had to be given up for another purpose, you take those moneys and buy other lands that could help improve the greenbelt so that, at the end of the day, the greenbelt is kept whole or in fact improved.

As I said, some of the greenbelt lands, whether they be woodlots or whether they be wetlands, are extraordinary, and others are just now commercial cornfields.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: I understand what you are saying about balance.

[English]

Hon. John Baird: And I'm not proposing that we sell the commercial cornfields, let me be very clear.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: There was a moratorium on that decision concerning whether to expand or improve NCC lands. This is a double-edged sword: lands can be sold, but none can be acquired. That means that all of the NCC territory is being considered as being a part of the national interest land mass. This means that the definition is not clear if the way in which things are done can be changed that way.

I have other questions that come to mind, regarding private property within Gatineau Park, for instance. If private owners cause environmental damage, how can we protect the park and ensure that those owners understand well that causing damage to Gatineau Park is absolutely unacceptable? How can this bill protect Gatineau Park if such an unfortunate situation were to arise?

[English]

Hon. John Baird: That's an excellent question. I'll take it back to officials, because it's a very precise one.

Obviously they should have the capacity to monitor to ensure that the private property within Gatineau Park isn't able to deteriorate the quality of the ecosystems in the park and to ensure that standard environmental practices and what not are enforced.

You asked briefly, at the outset of your comments, how we improve the lands. You know, I'd love to see us, for example, along the roads, if you look at west Nepean or around Blackburn Hamlet in the east with respect to the greenbelt.... You have all this surplus land now that came from the closing of the various research facilities at Agriculture Canada. What should we be doing in terms of planting trees beside them? What can we do that would enhance the capital in that respect? Surely we can do better than simply being a landlord for old tenants or simply renting it out. Could we be planting trees? There are significant lands by the Rideau River and along Gatineau Park. Should we try to return those to ecological integrity? There has been some work done by the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority.

So I think rather than just sitting on this land and even just renting it out, we should look at what we can do that would provide for returning the land to its original state. How do we make it available

for people? The NCC does a tremendous job with bike paths and with supports for families, as with Vincent Massey Park. I think there can always be opportunities for returning it to its ecological integrity, planting more trees, making it more available for the public—as in bike paths, or as in Gatineau Park with the cross-country skiing that's enjoyed by folks.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: *Merci.*

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jean, you have two minutes. This will be the last set of questions.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for making the time to come and introduce this bill.

I have, like Mr. Volpe, an interesting constituency. I think we have the largest infrastructure deficit in the country in Fort McMurray, or we did have before this government took power, for certain. We contribute somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$6 billion to \$8 billion a year in taxes.

The Chair: Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, in French we would say what's good for *pitou* is good for *minou*. If it was a point of order that he was out of order a minute ago, the same thing applies to Mr. Jean here.

The Chair: And it's my position to say that—on your advice. Thank you.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you, Mr. Proulx.

I would like to invite you to Fort McMurray, actually, Minister, if you ever get a chance, because it's a great constituency.

I would invite Mr. Proulx too, if he'd like to come up.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I would love to.

Hon. John Baird: It looks like you have a guest.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you very much. I'd prefer the Minister of Transport and Infrastructure.

The first time I was in the House of Commons was after I was elected, so I never had the opportunity to see what we had in this area, but I've seen since that we do, as Ms. Hoepfner said, have an amazing capital, with, I would suggest, the most beautiful capital buildings in the world, and it's part of our identity. I'm wondering how many visitors we have a year to this area, international and domestic. I invite my constituents in every householder I possibly can to come and see this beautiful place. I can tell you that all of them are very happy with what's going on in this area and very proud of Ottawa and its beauty.

I'm wondering if you have that information and, if you don't have that information, if it could be provided to us, because we are the face of—

•(1635)

Hon. John Baird: On behalf of Mr. Dewar, Mr. Proulx, and Mr. Nadeau, the answer is: not enough tourists. But we'll have a lot more after our investments in the Congress Centre. It's a \$160 million investment in Ottawa—Vanier, represented by a Liberal member of Parliament. That's in addition to the \$40 million building at Ottawa University, and \$7 million at La Cité collégiale, and the \$32 million on sewer repair work, all in Ottawa—Vanier.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The light-rail train was cancelled, but—

Hon. John Baird: It was going to go to Nepean and now it's going to Ottawa—Vanier. So Peter MacKay would blush if he saw all the money going into Ottawa—Vanier.

The Chair: If I may, I would like to thank the minister for attending today. I appreciate your comments and the people you brought with you. As we move forward, I'm sure you'll get some final advice from the committee.

Hon. John Baird: We do appreciate any formal advice. As I say, I do make the offer, as I made to Mr. Dewar, that we would like one person from every party to sit down with us, and the NCC folks and the folks at my department, at the end of this to talk about what we might do to work together to improve the bill. We certainly make that offer.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to take a two-minute break, and we'll bring forward the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

•(1640)

The Chair: Order, please. If I may, I would like to move on to the second part.

Joining us today from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the Ottawa Valley Chapter, are Mr. John McDonnell, executive director, and Ms. Muriel How, chair of the Gatineau Park committee.

We welcome you. You know the process, so we'll ask you to make your presentation and then we'll move to questions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John McDonnell (Executive Director, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (Ottawa Valley Chapter)): Mr. Chairman, ladies, gentlemen, it is my pleasure to submit to you our comments on Bill C-37.

Before I begin, I would like to give you a little more information about our organization. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the CPAWS, is the best known organization in the country when it comes to the protection of natural sites. We have been in existence for 45 years. This national organization, through its powerful network of regional branches and thousands of advocates for nature, has played a leadership role in the protection of numerous important natural areas covering more than 4 million hectares of exceptional wild environments. We are talking about a territory that is bigger than Nova Scotia and represents two-thirds of Canada's protected natural heritage.

More particularly, we have played a very important role in the expansion of the Canada Nahanni National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories and also in the establishment of an important area along the Dumoine River which is very close to the national capital.

The Outaouais Valley Section was created in 1970 by a group of local citizens who were alarmed by major development projects in Gatineau Park. Very quickly, the section grappled with several problems affecting west Quebec and eastern Ontario. We are working on establishing new protected areas and ensuring the sound management of existing parks which explains our great interest in Gatineau Park.

CPAWS was ranked as one of Canada's top 10 charities by the Tides Canada Foundation and is considered among the 10 best-managed charities in the country; we have more than 45,000 donors and supporters.

I invite my colleague, Ms. Muriel How, to share with you our comments on Bill C-37.

•(1645)

[*English*]

Ms. Muriel How (Chair, Gatineau Park Committee, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (Ottawa Valley Chapter)): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, as a resident of the constituency that includes Gatineau Park, I'm honoured to have this opportunity to comment on the bill. And I thank my member of Parliament, the Honourable Lawrence Cannon, for establishing the review of the NCC and for following up that review with the introduction of Bill C-37.

We at the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society have studied the bill in great detail, and we have, in fact, concluded that there are several grave deficiencies, and I wish to bring some of them to your attention. I'd like to point out that really, with our recommendations, we believe the park can be managed by the NCC in a way similar to management of a Canadian national park. I think that's the most important part of our recommendations.

Gatineau Park is a park in name only, and this bill does not correct that omission. We therefore ask the committee to formally create and define Gatineau Park as a park, and this can be accomplished by the addition of a clause stating:

There is hereby established a park named Gatineau Park, the boundaries of which are set out in schedule 2.

Now, upon his death, Prime Minister Mackenzie King bequeathed his property at Kingsmere to Canada, in his words, "for a public park for the citizens of Canada...to have the character of a natural forest reserve". That really became the core element of the park. Thus, because it is a park for all Canadians, we recommend the addition of a clause stating:

Gatineau Park is hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment, and it shall be managed, maintained and made use of so as to leave it unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

In fact, those very words can be found in the Canada National Parks Act. Consequently, in clause 2, page 2, line 18, we recommend replacing the word "area" with the word "park", hence emphasizing its status.

We believe it's vital for legislation governing any protected area to clearly state that the overriding purpose is conserving nature and protecting its ecological integrity. But unfortunately, the bill does not address this sufficiently, nor does it provide a buffer zone around the park.

It also does not provide legal means to control development of private property within the park. Private development in a park belonging to the people of Canada and managed by a national institution—that is, the NCC—must be controlled in a manner that we think should respect this interest.

Now, for many years, the most serious challenge in the park has been the fragmentation by roads, utility corridors, and other infrastructure. This hasn't been addressed. Nor is there a statement that Gatineau Park should be managed to the same standards of ecological integrity and receive the same legal protections as those enjoyed by all Canadian national parks.

We therefore call upon this committee to amend the bill. And we have a suggestion. First, in proposed subsection 10.4(2), which is on page 6, lines 11 and 12, we recommend the replacement of the words, “give due regard to the maintenance of” with “ensure the maintenance and restoration of”, and that makes it stronger.

Now, secondly, we're not advocating legislation calling for expropriation of a residence, because it brings needless hurt and upheaval to families and it causes lifelong bitterness. However, we do recommend there be a clause to enable the commission to manage the park more on the lines of a national park of Canada, a clause granting the National Capital Commission the right of first refusal in the sale or disposition of any private property located within the boundaries of the park.

John.

• (1650)

Mr. John McDonnell: While Bill C-37 describes the park's boundaries, it allows these boundaries to be modified arbitrarily by Governor in Council, without the requirement for parliamentary approval. Canadians have every right to expect that the boundaries of Gatineau Park be enshrined in law in the same way as the boundaries of our national parks are legislated. It is imperative that changes to the boundaries of Gatineau Park be permitted only by statute, as is the stipulation for the national parks of Canada.

It's also unclear in Bill C-37 to what extent the bill and act apply to private property within the park. We would ask the minister whether private property is considered to be inside the park. If you look at proposed subsection 10.4(2), it's unclear whether this applies to private property. We would, therefore, call upon the committee to amend.... It's not only looking to the private property issue; also we would call upon the committee to amend clause 19 of Bill C-37 by replacing the words “Schedules 1 and 2” with the words “Schedule 1” so the boundaries cannot be modified by Governor in Council.

In conclusion, Gatineau Park is a national treasure. It's a beautiful wilderness of extraordinary biodiversity. Sadly, the park's ecological integrity is seriously threatened by various forms of development both inside and outside the park. Examples include new highways, houses, various commercial developments, and the list goes on and on.

We also take issue with Minister Baird's earlier statement that Gatineau Park could not have the same level of ecological integrity or the same level of protection as national parks due to the fact that parts of the park may be needed for roads and other development in the future, the idea of nip and tuck. We would argue that no portion of Gatineau Park should be used for roads, utility corridors, or any other development. The park is already too fragmented to perform its ecological functions, and every effort must be taken to restore the park. Therefore, we feel that Bill C-37 in its current form does not provide Gatineau Park with the protection it deserves. The amendments we are proposing are crucial to ensuring a basic measure of protection for Gatineau Park for the people of Canada and for future generations.

[Translation]

Consequently, we ask you to please accept our suggestions and comments with regard to wordings concerning Gatineau Park. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Welcome, Mr. McDonnell.

[English]

Welcome, Mrs. How.

Mrs. How, I just want to understand the nuance when you refer to proposed subsection 10.4(2) with regard to the ecological integrity. You want to change...? I'm working from the French version. What is it exactly? I can look at it in the blues eventually, but....

Ms. Muriel How: We were adding the wording “and restoration”. It just said “the maintenance”, but there are parts of the park that need to be restored. Therefore, we were adding that part so it makes the ecological integrity stronger.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Is it your intention to bring it up to a higher level in the sense that you don't want to strictly restore or maintain the level at which it is now but rather increase the degree of protection? Is that what I'm understanding from you?

Ms. Muriel How: I don't know that we need to increase it more than the present standard, because I think the NCC is doing a pretty good job.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Right.

Ms. Muriel How: But certainly there are aspects where I think.... There are parts that have been spoiled, and the NCC is working to improve them. They're looking at different parts of the park, seeing a part that needs to be restored and then closing it for a bit. That is why we're adding only that one word, “restoration”. I'm sorry, but I don't have the French in front of me.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That's okay. We'll find it. But it's strictly a question of levelling. Okay.

I want to make sure I understand your intent with the amendments you're bringing. Would you still accept that buses, cars, bikes, hikers, cross-country skiers...? Would you still accept them in the park, or would you rather—

• (1655)

Ms. Muriel How: Absolutely. Oh yes, it wouldn't change that. They already are changing the places that are being used too much, such as the area where they were climbing. That's where they are in fact doing the restoration.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Okay.

I want to understand how you understand first refusal.

Ms. Muriel How: The way I understand it is that if Mr. X wants to move out of the park and sell his house, he'd offer it to the NCC first. The NCC could either buy it or not, depending on the price.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That's my point. At what price? How would you tackle the price subject?

Ms. Muriel How: I don't think we can.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That's the problem. With respect to first refusal, if you have a property and you want to sell it, it would be very easy for you—and I don't think you would want to be in collusion or do anything illegal—to get me to sign an offer that is four times the value of your property.

Let's assume that your property is worth \$300,000. It would be very easy for you to convince me to sign an offer of \$1 million. Then you would go to the NCC with my offer of \$1 million and say put up or shut up.

Ms. Muriel How: The NCC wouldn't accept that.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: There you go. So how are you going to make it work then?

Ms. Muriel How: Well, it's only giving them the right of first refusal; it's not saying they have to buy it at any price.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Madam, the mechanics of a first refusal are exactly that, in the sense that if you want to accept my offer, legally you're bound to go to the NCC and say, "Listen, Proulx wants to buy my property. He's either going to give me \$1 million or you, NCC, give me \$1 million."

Ms. Muriel How: Mr. Proulx, I think the NCC would get an independent appraiser and I doubt that they would go above fair market price. They would go for the fair market price.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Okay, so you're looking then at fair market price within your first refusal clause?

Ms. Muriel How: That's right, yes.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That's what I wanted to hear from you. Thank you.

How much more time do I have?

The Chair: Two minutes.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Okay.

To Mrs. How or Mr. McDonnell, regardless of the definitions, how would it change the Gatineau Park as we know it now, or

restored or whatever, if the NCC were to continue selling parts of it for residential purposes? I don't think commercial development should be done in the park, but let's say that they were to sell off sections for residential purposes. How do you find it would change the park?

Ms. Muriel How: We don't think that should be allowed.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: So as far as you're concerned, as of now or when the bill is accepted, that's it.

Ms. Muriel How: We think that should be the case. No more.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: No more.

Ms. Muriel How: Except there is a lot of land not built on that is private property.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That's right. So would you let the owners—

Ms. Muriel How: I think the NCC is meeting with these people. Several have in fact sold to the NCC already, but it is a long, slow process.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: And if they don't sell and they want to build, it's their right to build. That's the way you look at it?

Ms. Muriel How: Yes. The municipality wants the houses to be built.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you.

The Chair: Monsieur Nadeau.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, Ms. How. Good afternoon, Mr. McDonnell.

Earlier, I put a question to the minister concerning the ultimate Gatineau Park management priority. We know that where national parks are concerned, the top management priority issue is the ecological, environmental matter. However, currently, that is not the case for Gatineau Park.

How could you help us see to it that, through an amendment, that top management priority also applies to Gatineau Park, just as it does in the case of a national park?

• (1700)

Mr. John McDonnell: We do not see why that would not be possible. It is quite simple, all we have to do is take the National Parks Act and copy a relevant part of it into Bill C-37. Gatineau Park has a biodiversity that is just as important, if not more so, as the biodiversity we find in certain national parks. We believe that priority should be given to the protection of ecological integrity above everything.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: We are in agreement but we have to manage to convince our friends on the government side in order to obtain the necessary amendments.

There is also the project to get rid of excess lands. This was in a directive from Treasury Board in 1988 and in 2008. What may be deemed excessive, when we know that all of Gatineau Park is a part of all of the national interest land mass? There is no exception to that. That is the case for all of the park and even everything that falls under the National Capital Commission.

How do you feel about that approach that led to this guideline from Treasury Board? It is a guideline, and perhaps this will not be done, but as long as the guideline exists, it could happen and we know what would then subsequently happen. The park may be changed. If this does not affect the land, it could apply to heritage buildings. We are a young region, especially on the Quebec Outaouais side. There are not many, and so these changes would be proportionally greater in number.

How do you feel about that?

Mr. John McDonnell: Our opinion is that the NCC should not be allowed to divest lands that are a part of the national interest land mass, quite simply.

We feel that Gatineau Park is already too small for the riches contained in that environment to be well protected. We have approached the NCC on a few occasions to talk about lands that were available outside the park for the purpose of establishing a buffer zone or annexing those lands to the park itself.

However, we were told that that was not a part of the current mandate. Consequently, we believe that the NCC should not be allowed to do that.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: It would be ill-advised for Treasury Board to do that. I think you agree.

The matter of integrating the territory is also very important. I'm talking about the Quebec side of the river because I am the member for Gatineau, but we can do the same thing on the Ontario side along the Ottawa River where there are NCC lands.

Would you agree to making approval by the Quebec or Ontario government mandatory before anyone can change the boundaries of Gatineau Park or the Ontario Greenbelt or any other NCC lands?

Mr. John McDonnell: We think that that is a good idea. We are currently working on the matter of protected areas in Quebec. Quebec is working hard to create new protected areas. We also believe that there should be links among these protected areas in order to allow species to move about. We think it is very important for both levels of government to cooperate, especially on Gatineau Park, because as I said earlier, we think that the park is already too small.

The same thing applies to Ontario. We are also working there to protect the greenbelt. There are some fairly interesting lands outside the greenbelt. These links can be made. I'm talking about Marlborough Forest or Larose Forest. We think that the NCC should not only work with the provinces, but also with the municipalities.

In Gatineau Park the municipality of Chelsea plays an important role in municipal zoning, especially in the Meech Lake area where new homes have been built recently. We shared our fears with the NCC concerning certain development projects. We were told that nothing could be done because the municipality gave out the permits for residential development. We think that we should really all concert our efforts and all work together for the good of Gatineau Park.

• (1705)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our guests, not only for your presentation today but for the work you've done to advance the cause of protecting Gatineau Park and a lot of our habitat around this area and, indeed, throughout the country. And thank you to the others who have worked on this file. It has been an enormous help to those of us who are in Parliament.

For those who don't know the key issues, the document you have brought today is a great primer. Thank you. I see it usually costs two bucks and you didn't charge us anything, so maybe people can donate to CPAWS later.

Ms. Muriel How: Thank you.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I think your amendments are really practical, and I have similar amendments to bring forward myself.

The question I have is that when you first looked at the bill and you tried to parse out...because as I mentioned to the minister, there is a lot in this bill. There are governance issues and there is Gatineau Park, and your primary focus, as in your presentation today, is Gatineau Park. What I got from your presentation is that the bill is going in the right direction but really needs these qualifiers, and I concur. I think what we heard from the minister is that certainly there is an opening to amend the bill to strengthen the intent. The piece I certainly asked him about was to match what we have in the parks legislation with Gatineau Park.

Is that basically where you're coming from?

Ms. Muriel How: Yes, it's basically where we're coming from. In actual fact, we started at the very beginning, 10 years ago, saying that it should become a national park. And in fact, we have had a letter from the chief executive officer saying that it doesn't have to be a national park, but we can manage it similar to a national park. Therefore, all we're trying to do is make it equivalent to a national park, even though it's not a national park.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Okay, I wanted to be clear about that, because I think some people have an impression that the intent of some is to only be satisfied if it's a national park. And what I'm hearing you say is that we want to be practical about this and the outcome for everyone is to preserve the habitat, the use, and the legacy.

I'm really glad you mentioned the legacy, because it's in this book. Others have written about it. But there is a lot of history, of course, in the park. There is a lot of habitat that needs to be preserved, but those who have gone to the park, as I have and I'm sure everyone around this table has, note that we have a real legacy to protect in terms of the historical aspects.

Have you any concerns around that, in terms of the protection that is in the bill, to ensure that those historical facets are protected? Are there any concerns you have around that, or are you fine with what's in the bill?

Ms. Muriel How: I'm fine with what's in the bill, yes. Nobody will ever do anything to the Mackenzie King Estate, now that they've built that horrible road through it.

Mr. Paul Dewar: He might sic his dog on them.

You have it in your document here, but can you speak to some of the habitat threats that exist right now for some of the species that people might not know of, and the threats that exist presently and will continue to be threats if we don't do something? Mention some of the species that are at risk, for instance.

Ms. Muriel How: John will do that.

• (1710)

Mr. John McDonnell: The real threat with Gatineau Park is that the park will become isolated from natural areas around it. The city of Gatineau is growing rapidly, the Hull sector and the Aylmer sector, as well as the municipality of Chelsea. Eventually what will happen is that the park could potentially be surrounded by development and those natural connections or those linkages to other natural areas will be lost. What will happen is that Gatineau Park will become an island of extinction, basically, because without those connections the species we find in the park will die out.

If you look at the Eardley Escarpment, there are countless rare species of plants and trees. In terms of biodiversity, Gatineau Park is probably one of the richest parks in the province of Quebec, so the real threat is that the park would become isolated. As well, the other threat is fragmentation. If you look at the southern part of the park, with the construction of Boulevard des Allumettières, that connection has been lost. An animal would have a lot of difficulty crossing that roadway. And north of there is Boulevard Saint-Raymond, and there is discussion that in the future Highway 50 may cross the park as well.

The park's proximity to the urban area is a good thing in one way, because it's a major tourist attraction and it's a jewel in the national capital region, but the fact that it's so close to the city is also a major threat. Its fragmentation and the loss of connections are major concerns.

Mr. Paul Dewar: So we need to make sure we get this right, but also to get on with it.

Mr. John McDonnell: Yes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair. I could ask more questions, but I think I've used up my time.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you for coming today.

I'm interested in taking up where Mr. Dewar left off. I'm wondering if you're not asking to have it both ways—that it not be isolated, but also to have it close to a large centre. There are several million people living in the park now, is that correct? The park has several cities in it.

Sorry, I was talking about the NCC as a whole.

Mr. John McDonnell: Yes, the national capital region.

Mr. Brian Jean: How do you achieve this? I'm interested because for a period of time I've been studying the parks in the Rockies—Jasper and Banff in particular—the isolation and the ability to stop

what ultimately will take place if it is isolated. How do you go about doing that without setting aside more tracts of land where the species won't become isolated?

Mr. John McDonnell: We've been advocating for the establishment of a buffer zone around Gatineau Park, especially toward the north so that connections can be maintained between Gatineau Park and areas north of the park. There are a number of fairly interesting areas north of Gatineau Park, including some new protected areas under the Quebec protected area strategy. We want to make sure those connections are maintained.

Even to the south, there is potential in working with landowners. We encourage the National Capital Commission to work with landowners to maintain natural features on their property; for instance, between the Eardley Escarpment and the Ottawa River. There is potential there to work with landowners. I think a lot of it is outreach and education, because the park is surrounded by private property. That's a major issue.

Mr. Brian Jean: There are approximately 1.7 million visitors to the park per year. Is that correct?

I'm interested in this brochure. You have 20,000 members across Canada in CPAWS, I understand. You also mentioned in the pamphlet that you've done some surveys, that you consulted them. I think the exact words were “some cross-section of park users”. Can you tell me how many park users you talked to for this final data, or was the data accumulated by your board of directors? How was the data and the empirical evidence that you calculated and put into this book actually received?

• (1715)

Mr. John McDonnell: It was really a random sample of park users we met inside the park. The idea was to gather a cross-section of opinions.

Mr. Brian Jean: As somebody who used to teach statistics and is interested in a proper sample survey—you have 1.7 million people using the park—I'm asking how many people your organization talked to who use the park.

Mr. John McDonnell: For this booklet, I don't really know. We could get that information. I don't have it with me here.

Mr. Brian Jean: Is it possible that it's in the thousands of people?

Mr. John McDonnell: No, I don't think so. But there have been polls.

Mr. Brian Jean: Could it be in the hundreds?

Mr. John McDonnell: Probably.

Mr. Brian Jean: If you could provide that data to us, I'd really appreciate it.

If you don't mind, if you could also get us—through the chair—some of the other information that you've referred to, specifically in relation to the buffer zone and some of the recommendations you've made, I'd appreciate it.

I think Mr. Watson has one question.

The Chair: I apologize, but we do have some motions to entertain.

With that, I will thank our guests. Thank you for your information. The committee is going to take a brief recess while our guests move away from the table, and then we'll come back to do motions.

- _____ (Pause) _____
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The Chair: If we could get everybody back to their seats, we'll get going.

Monsieur Proulx, on a point of order.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Chair, I see that on the 21st we'll be visited by municipalities; and then on the 26th, probably by representatives of provinces. To make it much easier for everybody concerned, could we maybe ask the National Capital Commission to supply us with maps so we could refer to them when these witnesses appear in front of the committee, so we know exactly what they are talking about.

Surely the NCC could supply us with maps. There are representatives from the National Capital Commission in the room.

The Chair: I will ask Bonnie to make that request on our behalf.

Moving to committee business, according to the orders of the day, we have a notice of motion from Mr. Bevington, the member of Parliament for Western Arctic:

That the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities engage in a study of Transport Canada's enforcement of air safety regulations and implementation of safety management systems for the aviation industry, and report the results of the study to the House of Commons.

Mr. Bevington.

- (1720)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Since I was appointed transport critic, I've been struck by how important aviation safety is and how important it is that we take our responsibility for that very seriously.

On April 21, I hosted in Ottawa a round table on aviation safety, and I heard how reports from inspectors and craft investigators are not receiving the proper attention. I learned that Transport Canada is actually ending inspections of many aircraft. A federal program to audit airline safety procedures has been cancelled and Transport Canada intends to stop regulating the frequency of inspections. The effect is to leave airline operators in a position of balancing business pressures and safety concerns, with minimal or no direct oversight.

I learned as well how people who deal with these issues are being treated in the industry and how they have suffered consequences from bringing forward their concerns. I can name a number of people who gave testimony in front of our round table. These results are available on a video recording at www.SafeSkies.ca. I have hosted press conferences on this to make public what I've learned. I have asked questions in the House as well.

Following a report on the CBC's *the fifth estate*, we see there has been a softening in the government's position. I think they are willing to take a good look at this to reassure Canadians that we are acting in their best interests when it comes to aviation safety.

The core of this problem is the implementation of an approach called safety management systems. It is a move away from prescriptive regulation, or criteria to which the industry must adhere, to performance-based regulation, which describes objectives and allows each regulated entity to develop its own system of achieving the objectives. In other words, the industry must develop its own policies and systems to reduce risk, which should include implementing systems for reporting and correcting shortcomings.

It's not that this system is not good. The International Civil Aviation Organization advocates SMS, but only as an additional layer to regular audits by governmental authorities—in this case, Transport Canada.

Justice Moshansky, who conducted the inquiry into an aircraft crash at Dryden, Ontario, said:

It is extremely naive to think that under SMS a financially strapped operator is, on its own initiative, going to place necessary safety expenditures ahead of economic survival. The historical record hardly inspires faith in the voluntary implementation of safety measures by some such carriers, especially in the absence of strong regulatory oversight.

My office continues to hear calls for action. I want to emphasize that the most important action we take is to protect our citizens, and so I am putting forward this motion so we can get that reassurance.

The Chair: Comments?

Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): I'm going to vote for Mr. Bevington's motion. We have already discussed the matter of safety management systems. You will remember that at the time, Minister Cannon stated that he did not intend to reduce the number of inspectors because all of the inspection work still had to be done. We have to make sure that the work continues and we should call Transport Canada and the inspector pilots' union to appear. That way, we will know what is going on.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chairman, you'll recall that the committee was engaged and taken up with the study of an SMS system when we were dealing with what was then, I believe, Bill C-7. Was it Bill C-11? I think it has changed now. At any rate, it was part of a legislative study. While I think we all in principle would agree with the motion Mr. Bevington has presented, I'm more in tune with what Monsieur Laframboise said: that while we can all agree in principle that the essential issues are whether the prescriptive legislation has been displaced by an ad hoc adherence to a voluntary safety management system, my understanding is that essentially the department implemented an SMS system notwithstanding the collapse of the legislation, which the NDP prevented from being implemented with a hoist motion. That's not a partisan comment; it's just what happened. The department went ahead, at any rate, and put in place the mechanisms to engage an SMS system.

So I think Monsieur Laframboise has a very legitimate point. If in fact that did take place, what this committee ought to do is at least convene before it members of the department and the airline pilots associations to see whether in fact the system is working and what its shortfalls are.

I hasten to add that we have two decisions to make. One is to accept the principle of this, which I would agree with. The other one is to fit this into a chronology, a timetable, that we have already started and are well on our way. I imagine if we accept that, then this will be an item for discussion at the steering committee when it next meets.

●(1725)

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really wish Mr. Kennedy were still here so he could have an opportunity to see how vigorously we debate issues that may not be on his particular timetable but are certainly are on the committee's timetable.

I would agree with this in principle as well, but I agree with Mr. Volpe and Mr. Laframboise. It's pretty consistent. I would agree with that motion. But I think in essence it needs to be narrowed to focus on exactly what your accusations are from the people you're talking to. Certainly we have studied this for a long period of time and the general principles of the motion itself, but if you could narrow it down, I would be interested in spending one day trying to get to the bottom of any accusations that have been put forward to you, because certainly they are not what I understand the government is currently doing or directing. So it would be very, very important to get to the bottom of it. And certainly one day, I think, would not be outrageous, if everyone else agreed. But let's focus on what we want to study, because we could study your general motion for the next 50 years and still come to no real conclusion.

That would be my recommendation.

The Chair: Final comment, Mr. Bevington?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Well, having heard that, I'm interested in first, as you say, actually engaging with what the problem is, where the difficulties lie, where on the one hand you have regulations that set Transport Canada in one direction and on the other hand you have a system set up that perhaps doesn't meet up with those regulations. So that would be, I guess, the first step in this kind of work. I would like to see that go ahead, and if that's what the committee wants to start with and to have an opportunity to take a look at, I would think that if we can fit that into the next number of months or before Christmas, it would be very useful. I think that would be a good step.

Aviation traffic has increased by about 50% over the last two decades, and the number of inspectors has dropped by about 15%. So we're seeing that this process is taking place in the absence of legislation. We have a responsibility to ensure that this moves ahead in a good fashion.

Anyway, if people support this, I would be quite willing to work with you on the steering committee to ensure that it doesn't tie up this committee for too long.

The Chair: I suggest that rather than voting on the motion today, we refer it to the subcommittee that I hope to have on the fourth. I think everybody is in agreement with what you're saying. We can perhaps work out the details and then present it to the committee.

Are you comfortable with that, Mr. Bevington? If you're not, we'll call the vote.

●(1730)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I'm fine with that. I think we can move forward in that fashion.

The Chair: I will put it on the agenda for the fourth.

The second motion we have is from Mr. Volpe, and there has been some discussion. It states:

That the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities engage in a study of expenses billed to the Transport Canada Mackenzie Valley pipeline fund in order to ensure that all expenses were within the scope of the fund, and report the results of the study to the House of Commons.

Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: If you will recall, this issue erupted in the national media some five to six weeks ago. It involved members of the department continuing to bill or expense invoices on the Mackenzie Valley pipeline fund, which has essentially not done any work—I don't want to prejudge anything—and no longer exists. The minister then responded by saying he would conduct an internal investigation and get back to everybody.

I could be off by a couple of days or so, but we're about five weeks down the pike on this. Before the break we agreed that this was serious enough—as it involved more than \$10 million—and deserved the attention of this committee and the House of Commons. We made only one caveat at the time. There seemed to be consensus that we could wait for the report on the investigation and then study it. I agreed to that semi-reluctantly because I think it's fair to get all the facts on the table. But it has been five weeks and we haven't heard anything back.

Maybe the parliamentary secretary can give us the status of that investigation so we can make a decision. If he can't give us an indication of the status, maybe we should direct the committee's attention to the study on its own.

The Chair: Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I would just say the same thing: that five weeks of bureaucrat time is not necessarily what most people would say five weeks should be.

But just to be fair, in this case there is an investigation under way. Getting involved as a committee in this investigation could actually compromise the outcome of it. I see no prejudice whatsoever in waiting, because it's a matter of government money being allocated to one account instead of other accounts. It's not as if it has been stolen. As far as we're aware, it's just a costing method; it has been allocated to one costing account instead of another costing account.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I don't want to prejudge the outcome of the investigation.

Mr. Brian Jean: I understand that, but there have been no allegations that the money was spent on non-legitimate government-funded or bureaucratic-funded expenses. So certainly there's no prejudice here. This committee has a lot of other work to do. It is just an accounting issue at this stage, so waiting on it is not going to prejudice anything.

I'm fine with investigating this. I would be prepared to vote for this motion, subsequent to the government's own investigation. That would make sense, because one investigation is enough to get the facts on it. What this committee will hear may actually compromise the final outcome. So I'm prepared to vote for it as long as we're prepared to wait until the investigation is complete. I see no prejudice to anybody by waiting. I don't know what the hurry could possibly be.

The Chair: Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: My approach to my motion is the same as my approach to Mr. Bevington's motion. There's a basic principle we want to accept, and then the steering committee can handle the logistics. When I hear the parliamentary secretary tell this committee he agrees that this is worthy of our attention and the only thing he has difficulty with is the logistics, then maybe the steering committee can argue out the logistics.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'd rather deal with it now. I see no benefit in going forward with an investigation when another investigation will be much more valuable to its outcome. We should wait for that to happen so we don't compromise it. It would be crazy to compromise it.

• (1735)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: The parliamentary secretary is probably right about cause and effect, but he's avoiding the question I asked earlier. Even if he's talking about government time as he defines it, as opposed to real time, it's still a long time. Is he prepared to give us an indication of how many more weeks of real time or government time the committee would have to wait before engaging its resources in doing something different?

The Chair: Should the committee write a letter to the minister asking for the timelines?

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean: That's what I was going to suggest. I was not prepared to find out the timelines, because I didn't know if Mr. Volpe was prepared to wait until the investigation was completed. It will take a period of time. We don't want to rush the truth. We want to get to the truth. We should give them the opportunity to do the proper investigation and not have to rush it. I would certainly be prepared to come back to the committee to report on what the timeline is expected to be.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: The truth can always withstand rushing or delay. But it's important for us to understand that the committee does have legitimate concerns. We've always been accommodating, and we're prepared to ask the minister in writing, but I don't want the minister to wait another five weeks to respond to the letter.

If the parliamentary secretary is undertaking to get this committee a response within 48 hours of the issuance of the letter, that would be fine.

Mr. Brian Jean: A letter might be the most appropriate method. The minister has attended this committee so many times, is always on time, and always gets back on all the requests, so I can't imagine why you would suggest that he might take five weeks to get back on this letter.

The Chair: Rather than heading to a debate, Mr. Volpe, do you have a final comment? Are we prepared to wait for the parliamentary secretary to respond?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I think we can vote now.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We'll move it to the subcommittee for discussion.

Seeing no further comments, the meeting is adjourned.

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