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Thursday, December 2, 2010

Chair

The Honourable Joseph Volpe

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• (1105)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC)): Colleagues, I call this meeting to order.

Today we will be dealing with, first of all, the notice of motion from Madame Faille. Then pursuant to that, we will go in camera to discuss draft reports.

At this particular point we will go directly to the motion from Madame Faille.

Madame Faille, I invite you to go ahead and to move your motion now, and speak to it if you wish.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): I will read the motion, for the benefit of the committee members:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), with regard to Chapter 5 of the Auditor General's report, "Relocating Members of the Canadian Forces, RCMP, and Federal Public Service," the Committee calls on Public Works and Government Services Canada to produce:

1. the internal audit of 27 October 2004 prepared by Consulting and Audit Canada;
2. the recommendations related to the internal audit;
3. the action plan developed by PWGSC.

And that these documents and files be provided in both official languages in the two sitting days following the adoption of this motion.

Actually, I moved this motion as a result of something that happened during the normal course of trying to obtain documents from the Department of Public Works and Government Services. Usually, the department is very cooperative when it comes to giving us information about the various programs. What disturbed me, however, was the fact that the Library of Parliament had requested the report, as it does when members ask for documents, and was told by department officials that they could not find the document but would try to locate it. I knew perfectly well where the document was.

On Friday, the report was found. The library should have been notified that the department had found the report and was sending it over, as per the normal procedure. What caught my attention was the fact that the report was not sent over immediately. I moved this motion so I could raise the issue with the committee.

At the beginning of the sitting, I mentioned that I was in the process of reviewing the various documents and statements provided to the committee. And I noticed that when we study issues quickly, important documents that should factor into the decision-making process are often not submitted in time or are missing when members make decisions. This document is one example of that.

Those of you who are not very familiar with the file should know that, in 2003, an investigation was launched further to a new call for tenders issued by PWGSC and that the internal audit in question should have been made public. The problem is that it was the only internal audit not posted online. So it became very difficult for anyone at this table studying the file to get a hold of the report. I asked for it nearly a year ago through an access to information request. I did not get it. I raised the issue on the order paper, but that did not work either. I went through the library, and this is what happened. Now that the library has the report, I would really like the committee members to receive and read it.

The report was supposed to be a forensic review right before the Auditor General's report and after a conflict of interest inquiry. I would like the members of the committee to read the report to gain a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding this file. This document was missing when the committee members were studying the file.

I asked to see the recommendations resulting from the internal audit, because normally when an internal audit is done, the department always responds in terms of what it plans to do. I do not have these documents. I have number 1, but not number 2 or number 3.

When I spoke to Mr. Smith a week ago, I asked him if the analyst who was there before him had the documents and if he could tell us about the action plans put forward by PWGSC. Mr. Smith did not have the previous analyst's files, however. And that is why I moved this motion.

I think the members of this committee should look at the report and, at the very least, pay close attention to the action plan put forward by Public Works and Government Services Canada and the recommendations resulting from the internal audit.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Thank you.

Just for clarity, Madame Faille, you are still requesting the three components: first, the internal audit; second, the recommendations; and third, the action plan. Is that correct?

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: I also want to add that I checked with the Auditor General as to when she began her audit immediately afterwards, and the document was never provided to her.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Okay, I would invite the other members of the committee to offer their comments.

First we have Mr. Szabo, please.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to ask the member whether she in fact received a response to her access to information request, and if so, what did it say?

Secondly, I would like to ask the same question with regard to the question on the order paper. Was there a response, and what did it say, if there were a response?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): We'll allow that. It does not pertain directly to this request, to the point of the motion now, but I think it's a fair question.

Ms. Meili Faille: Yes, it's a fair question.

[Translation]

When I made the access to information request, I was told that the report could not be found. When I put the question on the order paper, department officials were yet again resistant, saying they had done an internal audit. I filed an access to information request with respect to my question on the order paper, to obtain a copy of the document, but they could not find it. So I went through other channels, and it was after calling the department, that I learned where the report was.

I find that troubling, but I do not want to focus on that aspect of the situation. I think that the internal audit addresses some important elements. It does not matter whether you are a Conservative, a Liberal or whatever. The Conservatives were part of the opposition back when we were studying the report, and the information had not been disclosed to the members of the committee, plain and simple.

For those who have been following the file, this audit fills a void that existed. I just wanted the members of the committee to have a copy.

Mr. Szabo's question speaks to just how difficult it was to obtain the document. On Friday, the department had it in its possession, but the liaison officer said that he was going to send it by mail. So I definitely would not have received it until a week and a half later, when he could have just put it in an envelope that I could have had picked up since it was just next door.

• (1110)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Okay, the chair has two thoughts on this.

One thought, of course, is regarding your request now for the production of the documents, which is obviously in order for discussion on the floor.

The second issue is the reasons for the delay. If the committee wishes to go into that as a field of study, I think that's fair, but I think it would have to be a committee decision.

Do you have a point of order?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Chair, if I may, let's call it a point of order. This matter would not have arisen had the document been provided to the member.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): That's correct, but we're—

Mr. Paul Szabo: This is consequential. And I think, based on the answer of the member, it's also relevant for the committee to consider bringing those persons who made those representations before us to explain to the committee.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Then if the committee decides to do that on a point of issue or point of study, it has the right to do so.

Right now we're going to discuss—

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: I am not trying to—

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Right now we will continue discussing the request on the notice of motion.

Our next speaker is Mr. Saxton, please.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I do not object to Madame Faille's request to have this information. I do, however, wish to ask about the two days of sitting time to get those reports. That sounds extremely fast, obviously, and I'd ask Madame Faille to reconsider it and perhaps allow more time for the documentation to be provided.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: I am willing to do that. I am giving you a bit of the background behind my motion.

On Friday, when I tried to obtain the information, I had already been looking for the report since the spring. And the department had had it for a week and a half. The library, which had asked for the document originally, received a response that I find disturbing and problematic. And that is why I set the two-day deadline. But I do agree with you. We could get the report when we get back from Christmas break. I have no problem with that.

I quite like Mr. Szabo, but I do not want to get into a debate on the delay and the circumstances surrounding the issue right now. This may have just been an exception. I am waiting for the department to provide a more detailed explanation on what really happened with this request. It could very well be due to the fact that the document was subject to an audit. So I can appreciate that they were concerned.

I am telling the committee members about this because, on Friday, when all of this happened, I did not have very much time to respond. I think the committee members know what I am talking about here. We do not always have much time to deal with issues that involve the Auditor General's reports, and we often do not receive responses to our access to information requests or information in a timely enough manner to make informed decisions. In this case, you have the Genest report and the Auditor General's report. But, for some reason or another, we never got that one.

• (1115)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Madame Faille, the chair has heard no objection to your motion at this particular point. The only discussion or point of consideration would be perhaps a small modification of the two days to five days, or whatever.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: When we get back?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Something that would seem to be reasonable by the department, but certainly not enough to delay this, so that we have this information ASAP for your perusal and the rest of the committee's perusal.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: In January?

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Would you be comfortable with any time period?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Madame Faille mentioned after we get back, so why don't we say the first meeting when we get back?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Is that suitable to the rest of the committee?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: The first of February. We have our first meeting—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Madame Faille, the mover of the motion, what are your thoughts on this? Are you comfortable with that?

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: I would agree with the first meeting when we get back.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): Are we comfortable with that, committee?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): We have approval.

Mr. Shipley, do you wish to debate this issue further?

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): No, actually I was agreeing with Madame Faille.

There may be complications, and I don't know what they may be. The fact remains that we have the right to have that material. I just appreciate the fact that if anybody is defending anybody here, there needs to be a reason.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: As Ms. d'Auray mentioned, usually internal audits are available online. All reports, all internal audits are posted online. I read them religiously. When I got a response that said October, I looked at the website, but it was not there, unfortunately.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Daryl Kramp): The motion will now stand to read “by Tuesday, February 1, 2011”, and of course we accept Madame Faille's motion. That will be the timeframe on that. And the reason, of course—the chair just adds a little bit of personal knowledge on this—is that I understand Madame Faille's concern, after having sat through, both in the government operations committee and the public accounts committee, the issue she is concerned with, and quite frankly a number of members have as well. So that's in and over and done.

At this particular point, I will adjourn for a few minutes while we go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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