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Chair: Mr. John Williamson



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• (1715)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)): I call the meeting back to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting to discuss committee business.

My objective here today is to ratify some of the decisions that were made in the subcommittee. We'll see how long it takes.

The subcommittee met on Wednesday, April 17, and Tuesday, April 30. I'd like to report back on behalf of the subcommittee.

Language was confirmed for a letter to Mr. David Yeo and Nicole Foster. The letter was then shared with the full committee and distributed to recipients.

It was agreed that a follow-up letter would be sent to David Yeo following his written responses. That letter was distributed to Mr. Yeo on April 23.

Language was proposed by a member, drafted by the analyst and confirmed in subcommittee for a letter to Microsoft. The draft has been sent to all members of the committee, and it is my desire to send that letter to Microsoft shortly.

I will read the letter first and look for your consent to send this off. It reads:

Pertaining to your testimony before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts of 9 April 2024, the committee requests copies of all communications between Microsoft Canada Inc. and the Canada Border Services Agency with regard to the ArriveCan Application in general as well as those pertaining to the bridge between ArriveCAN and the BSO (Border Services Officer) application based on what you told the committee.

Please send this information to Hilary Smyth, Clerk of the Committee, no later than May 21, 2024.

Do I have consent to send this?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: That's to Microsoft.

The Chair: Yes, it's to the official.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Yes, I like it.

The Chair: Very good.

First of all, this is outstanding, but for the sake of full disclosure, we have a motion that was passed by the committee for an ArriveCAN committee meeting with KPMG. You'll recall that this motion was passed soon after the two original witnesses were in. In terms of maximizing the committee's time, I've added two others for the

sake of efficiency that had been set before that, two other contractors, Donna Cona and TEKsystems.

In addition to this, as the subcommittee went through—and I think I reported this back already—we agreed to a suite of meetings. We've agreed to study “Report 6: Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act—2030 Emissions Reduction Plan”.

This first one requires no additional witnesses, because its a committee review of an audit from the Office of the Auditor General. That's on what I'll call autopilot.

We're going to look at “Report 4: National Trade Corridors Fund—Transport Canada”. Again, we hear from the principals and the Auditor General. It's on autopilot—no additional witnesses are needed.

Here we agreed to an additional meeting on “Report 2: Housing in First Nations Communities”. The witness list, as assembled by the subcommittee, was sent out to all members this morning.

Do I have your agreement to proceed with that meeting based on those witnesses? I'm seeing yeses.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Very good.

Last, there was agreement for an ArriveCAN meeting. That list was distributed to members, again, with the makeup as required by the motion in terms of representation.

Does that witness list look good, and may I proceed with that as well?

Go ahead, Mrs. Shanahan.

• (1720)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): I have questions as to the number of meetings. I see that you have Donna Cona on the list here, for example. That's already included.

The Chair: There are two ArriveCAN meetings that are outstanding. The first one you're referring to is....

I might have to look at the list you're looking at.

The first one with the contractors, KPMG in particular, was passed by a motion of this committee. Do you recall that?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, we saw KPMG.

The Chair: No, following that meeting, there was a motion to bring back one individual from KPMG.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Is that on this list?

The Chair: That's set by the committee already. The discussion of the subcommittee focused on the additional ArriveCAN meeting with the witnesses.

Let me go through the list. I'll let the clerk correct me.

We have the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, an official from the CBSA and then three individuals. That list was made up of suggestions from government members and opposition members.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: In the spirit of the motion we passed regarding the proportionality of witnesses, I seem to remember a previous meeting where.... I don't know who it was, because the members have changed. It might have been Mr. Nater who said that we now have to put a priority on our witnesses. We have to choose them.

The Chair: This list is that priority.

Wait one second.

Mrs. Shanahan, for the meeting, Liberal members would have four witnesses.

I'll hold it for a second.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Jean has just shown me a shorter list. That prioritization has taken place, then.

The Chair: Yes, it was distributed.

• (1725)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes. Okay.

The Chair: Is that good?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, we're good with that. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. We're moving right along here.

Go ahead, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I'm looking at the witness list for that. I believe I supplied the CBSA president.

The Chair: Hold on. I have competing lists here. Can someone confirm this?

Yes, that individual will be included as well, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, I have a second question, then.

Are we doing one meeting with two panels? Is that it?

The Chair: That's what I will do, yes.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay, that's very good.

The Chair: The mandate is for a meeting. I'm going to work with the clerk on this. I think I will split it up a bit to ensure we have a balanced meeting.

Those are all passed and approved.

I will remind you all that on Tuesday, we have a long-outstanding meeting for the public accounts for 2023. I am expecting the

Bank of Canada and the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board to be here on Tuesday. The Department of Finance will also be here.

I'm going to recognize Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Chair, we had a discussion about the witnesses we wanted to invite. I know that all the members were there. Following that discussion, there is a witness that I consider important to the ArriveCAN study, and that is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

I want to be very clear that what we're trying to understand is the investigative process. Obviously, and I'll state it one last time, we are all aware that we will not receive specific details about the on-going investigation. Rather, we want to understand the investigation process in general to determine how far the RCMP can go in this type of situation.

The RCMP is at the top of the list of witnesses that I want to invite. As the chair rightly mentioned at our last meeting, the RCMP's testimony must not be heard concurrently with that of businesses or other federal institutions, such as the Canada Border Services Agency. The RCMP will therefore have to appear as a stand-alone witness during a meeting.

I would like to read out a motion, which should be sent to you shortly. It reads as follows:

That the committee invite the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to appear for no less than two hours on the committee's review of Report 1, ArriveCAN, from the Auditor General, within three weeks of this motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: That motion has been sent to you.

In the meantime, I'm going to say a few words.

The subcommittee discussed this. I thought this needed to come back to the committee for a discussion. I did not like the idea of having the RCMP appear with other witnesses. I think that would be difficult for everyone at the table. Madame Sinclair-Desgagné is doing just that right now.

If you want to have a look at the motion, we can discuss it and perhaps resolve this in the next hour or so.

I will begin with Mrs. Shanahan. Then, Mr. Desjarlais, I understand you have your hand up as well. Thank you.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I was just going to ask if we are suspending.

• (1730)

The Chair: Let me just hear a few comments. I hear where you're coming from, but I want to hear a few comments first.

Go ahead, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I agree with the motion. My only potential concern was the one you shared during the subcommittee in relation to the potential that the RCMP may not be able to answer all questions during a pending investigation.

In that case, we would not want to prejudice the investigation, so can we find an option to confirm with the RCMP that there may be questions that are out of scope for them to answer in advance of this meeting so that we don't have redundancy?

The Chair: What are you proposing? Are you suggesting that we accept answers that...? Are you suggesting that we go in camera at some point in the meeting? What's your question for the...?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I want to be able to protect the integrity of the investigation while also being able to ask the RCMP important and credible questions about ArriveCAN without compromising any potential investigation.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Genuis, do you have any comments you want to make? Then I have Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I'll just briefly say that we support the motion. In listening to it, I don't know that it mentioned the amount of time. I think it would be important. Is two hours in the motion?

Okay, that's fantastic. We're good to go.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Chair, as you alluded to, I think the chair can ask the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at any given time if they have information that they would prefer to share with committee members in camera.

I don't think it needs to be explicitly written into the motion. If the RCMP feels the need to provide information to the committee in camera, I would have no problem with that. You have my word.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mrs. Shanahan.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I like the way Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné explained the motion; it aims to give us a better understanding of the RCMP process. I see the RCMP's testimony as being the same as a meeting with the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation, a training session or an explanatory meeting with the Clerk of the House.

Part of the meeting with the RCMP should be held in camera to give members a chance to ask questions. However, I think a public hearing of one hour would be enough to provide information to Canadians.

The Chair: Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: If I understand correctly, Mrs. Shanahan, you are proposing a one-hour public hearing. The only disadvantage I see is that it greatly reduces my speaking time.

I have a lot of questions for the RCMP to understand the process. So that's why I suggested two hours, i.e., a full meeting.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: We could compromise. Since this would be an information gathering session, each member could have approximately the same amount of time to ask questions. We could also do it informally, as we have done with the Auditor General from time to time.

[English]

The Chair: Are there any comments on this?

I'm sorry, Ms. Shanahan. I was jumping ahead. Are you proposing an hour in total or in public?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I'm proposing an hour in public, because the RCMP cannot respond to any questions.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: With all due respect, if we have members who are going to insist on asking them directly who they're charging and who they have warrants for, etc., that risks being prejudicial to the investigation, and I don't think anybody wants that.

If we're going to make it for educational purposes, which I think is valuable, then that would be one hour in public, or it could be one hour—

The Chair: I'm actually just asking questions. I don't have a position on this. I'll wait for the committee.

Is it an additional hour in camera, then, if necessary?

• (1735)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Well, I don't see it, especially if we're able to divide up time more or less equally among us.

We're not questioning the witness as part of our mandate. It's an educational thing. Everyone benefits from the questions that are asked and the answers that are given. Really, it's one or the other: one hour in public, or if people prefer, one hour in camera. I really see that one hour is more than enough.

The Chair: Very good.

I saw Mr. Desjarlais first. Then I'll come to you, Mr. Genuis.

Go ahead, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I think that's maybe a bit too far, to be frank. What I'm trying to suggest is that we should be wary of the potential concern that we could prejudice an investigation, but I also know that our committee's mandate is to gather information. It's the RCMP's job to find guilt. Our committee's job is information and evidence, and that's something that I think we do really well, but we have to be certain of that line.

There is a place, I think, Mr. Chair, between the calling of a vote to go in camera, where we can, at the time of the meeting and the hearing, discuss that potential, under the advice of the RCMP. I think that if the RCMP suggest to us that there could be prejudice based on their testimony, at that time I would suggest that the committee entertain a motion to go in camera for the purpose of receiving that information, but until such time, I do think that a public meeting for two hours, for the purpose of transparency to the public, is important to this process.

The Chair: That's what I was thinking, Mr. Desjarlais: not to prejudice the comments. It gives us flexibility and it gives the chair flexibility to hear an appropriate amount in public and then shift gears if necessary.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I hope we're moving towards a consensus.

I have a couple quick points. I agree with what Mr. Desjarlais is saying in terms of the time distribution. Let's have them here in public, and let's see how things unfold. The proportions may be different in terms of what's proposed. Maybe it does make sense to have a portion in public and a portion in camera. However, let's start in public, let's ask the questions we can and let's see where we are.

In terms of questions and what they can or cannot answer, I think it should be very clear that the RCMP will know exactly what questions they can and can't answer. Both things are true: Committees have a right to demand information when they choose to, but committees can and should be reasonable in their exercise of that power. If RCMP officials are earnestly telling us that they're not able to answer certain questions, I think the committee will be reasonable in response to that.

I don't think we need to be the ones deciding what they can and cannot answer. I think they will be able to tell us. We can ask the questions, whatever questions, and they will respond to them in a way that's appropriate to their professionalism and their mandate.

I think the motion works as is and that things will unfold in a proper way.

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan is next.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to understand better what we're looking for from the RCMP.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, are you really seeking to obtain information on the processes and procedure? Is it a kind of basic course on how to lead an investigation, amongst other things? In other words, no names would be mentioned. No names and no situations. Some members of the committee are experienced lawyers. I'm sure we don't want to interfere with the investigation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Chair, I would say to my colleague that the objective is indeed more of an information gathering one.

However, there are two things I would like to point out.

I agree with what Mr. Genuis and Mr. Desjarlais said. Everyone here knows that if we take the opportunity to ask a question that is too specific, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police would be justified in saying that they cannot answer the question. It would be a waste of time. Everyone here is aware of that, and no one wants to waste their time. We are therefore going to ask questions related to the processes, so that we can fully understand them.

During our study on ArriveCAN, we were often told that we could not talk about several aspects because an RCMP investigation was under way.

I would like to understand what the RCMP looks at in cases such as this one. What is within the scope of an RCMP investigation in a case like this?

That's important to know, because unfortunately, there is a big cone of silence over what is happening with ArriveCAN, due to the RCMP's investigation. Understanding the scope of the RCMP's investigation will help us to continue our work and get an overview of what happened in the ArriveCAN case.

● (1740)

The Chair: Next up is Ms. Yip.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip: You're proposing two hours, then, and it would just be a regular session. We would just do the regular rotations.

The Chair: There would be one exception, which is the carve-out for possibly going in camera if the committee feels that this should happen. Otherwise, yes.

Ms. Jean Yip: It would be the same as with every other witness, with the rounds and so forth.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: With all due respect, the way the motion is worded may lead us to believe that we are once again asking the RCMP to appear before us on ArriveCAN, whereas we are actually seeking general information. We should instead be asking that the committee invite the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to appear for at least two hours to explain to the committee the procedures surrounding an investigation such as the one on ArriveCAN.

Am I on the right track?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: The answer is simple: Each motion must pertain to one of the committee's current studies or propose a new one, which is not the case here. It is really about getting information on everything that is being done on ArriveCAN. Even if we don't ask specific questions about the ongoing investigation—and in any case the RCMP wouldn't be able to answer them—the motion still has to be related to the ArriveCAN study, because that's what our questions are about.

As you know, we have to make sure that the motions we put forward relate to committee business. Had I not done so, you would have been the first to tell me that it was not germane to the committee's work. So the motion has to be based on a report by the Auditor General.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I agree that the hearing should take place as part of this study, but I don't want us to start questioning the RCMP about the testimony we've heard at other meetings on ArriveCAN. I wouldn't want us to ask these witnesses what they think of certain comments made by a particular witness.

I'm spitballing here, but we could ask the RCMP to appear before us to explain the procedures surrounding an investigation of this kind, or something like that.

• (1745)

The Chair: Any comments?

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor. Perhaps you could wrap things up.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I think the intentions of the members of the committee are very clear, including mine, obviously, since it is my motion. We can count on the fact that the RCMP knows what they can and cannot say.

The motion is simple and straightforward, so we can vote on the motion if everyone is in agreement.

[*English*]

The Chair: Could you call the vote, please, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: Shall the motion by Madame Sinclair-Desgagné carry?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I will work with the clerk to set that up as per the parameters passed in the motion I heard today with respect to the in camera portion, as well.

Go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to be here at the public accounts committee on this fine Thursday afternoon.

Chair, there is a very important motion that I'm going to move in just a moment to highlight how important accountability is.

We have seen something unprecedented. According to some reporting that La Presse has done, it appears the extreme challenges associated with arrive scam are not isolated. La Presse has revealed

that there are up to 30 instances of federal government employees who could very well be double-dipping. Many of those individuals are in conflicts of interest. It is quite astounding.

Chair, I'm going to move a motion. I would like to reserve, if I could, the right to speak very briefly on it.

The Chair: Yes.

I want to interrupt. Normally, I do it the other way, which means presenting the motion first and then speaking to it. Is this a new motion, or is it a motion that's already been...? You'll get to it.

Go ahead, but can you get to the motion right away, please?

Thank you.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I appreciate that. Thank you, Chair. I know every chair does it a little differently, so I appreciate that.

I will move the motion. I believe it has been sent to the clerk as well for distribution in both of Canada's official languages.

I move:

That, in relation to the committee's ongoing work on government contracting and further to the information provided by the Treasury Board Secretariat on April 12, 2024, the committee order:

(a) the production of copies of the 140 conflict of interest declarations filed in the 2022-23 fiscal year and the 162 conflict of interest declarations filed in the 2023-24 fiscal year concerning public servants employed in the core public administration who were involved in contractual relationships with the Government of Canada;

(b) the production of copies of any conflict of interest declarations filed in the 2022-23 and 2023-24 fiscal years by persons employed by the federal government, including Crown corporations, but outside of the core public administration, who were involved in contractual relationships with the Government of Canada; and

(c) the production of records which detail all payments made in respect of the contractual relationships disclosed in the declarations referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b),

provided that

(d) the names and contact information of the public servants may be redacted;

(e) for greater certainty, no redactions shall be applied to the names of contracting entities or the value of the contractual relationship disclosed, including, where multiple relationships are disclosed, the value of each contractual relationship disclosed; and

(f) these documents, with only the redactions authorized by paragraph (d), shall be deposited with the Clerk of the Committee, in both official languages,

(i) in the case of the documents referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b), within 21 days of the adoption of this order, and

(ii) in the case of documents referred to in paragraph (c), within 35 days of the adoption of this order.

Chair, if I can reserve the right to speak to it, I will allow the opportunity for it to be distributed.

• (1750)

The Chair: Yes, speak to it first, and then I'll get into the mechanisms. Be relatively brief, and I can come back to you again.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Chair, I'll be very brief.

While this motion is very technical, I think it speaks to the very simple fact that accountability is needed.

When it comes to Dalian, we have an egregious example of a public servant who was double-dipping. We are seeing this troubling trend come about since it appears, according to La Presse, that there could be around 30 federal employees who were paid by the government, while they were salaried employees, to test an artificial application designed by a private firm belonging to a senior federal executive in order to assess whether it was possible to use this technology to resolve problems with Phoenix.

We see—

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Wait one second, Mr. Kurek.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, I think we're seeing that this is the exact same motion as Mr. Nater's.

Are you going to speak to that?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Yes.

The Chair: Can you please wrap up?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Perfect.

I'm moving the motion, yes, that Mr. Nater brought forward.

We have these egregious examples of government employees who are moonlighting as contractors. It's seen that 38% could be in a conflict of interest. We want to know what those conflicts are.

Chair, I think it's a very simple request. While technical, it gets to the heart of what Canadians are simply demanding answers for.

I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you.

This motion was previously under consideration by the committee. Therefore, Mr. Kurek, I'd like a motion to resume debate on the motion from you.

I will ask the clerk if I have the words correct. This is a dilatory motion, which means we'll have a vote on it right away. We can take it up now—

Mr. Damien Kurek: I so move.

The Chair: Did I get that right, clerk? Do you need to say anything, or shall I call the vote?

The vote before us right now is to resume debate on this motion. This is not to pass the motion; it is to pick up the debate on a motion we previously studied, the motion proposed by Mr. Nater on April 25. It's not debatable.

Clerk, could you call the vote, please, to resume debate on this motion?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 9; nays 1)

The Chair: We will continue debate.

Mr. Kurek, I promised you the floor. It's over to you. Then I'll look for other speakers.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thanks, Chair.

I think I made it clear in my preamble that answers are needed. Increasingly, in my regular committee assignment at the access to information, privacy and ethics committee, we are seeing a troubling trend of there seeming to be no end to public dollars being abused.

Chair, I would suggest that the way this motion is written is very specific. We simply need to ensure that if there was what could be double-dipping.... If employees who are working in a department are moonlighting as contractors and getting contracts from that department, I would certainly hope no one around this table would suggest it's a good idea or a responsible use of public dollars, nor would Canadians. I would suggest to the Canadians watching, if that is in fact the case, that there is a serious challenge with the way public dollars are being administered in terms of employees and the rules and regulations around what they are allowed to do when it comes to contracts and procurement.

Chair, I will leave it at that. I'm hopeful we can have support. The specifics of this motion are very direct. We, of course, want to respect the privacy of those individuals. However, if a federal employee has a company engaged in a contract with the federal government, as it specifically says in this motion, it certainly needs to be public, as do, of course, the dollars associated with that.

Chair, I hope common sense will prevail. I hope we can produce these documents so that my very capable colleagues who sit as regular members of this committee are able to provide the transparency that Canadians demand and certainly deserve, the transparency that Conservatives are diligently working so hard each and every day to provide.

Thank you, Chair.

● (1755)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Kurek.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, I would like to clarify first that we're resuming debate on the motion of Mr. Nater. It is the exact same one. We had a copy of that, so we can disregard whatever came afterwards.

The Chair: It was identical. I was following as he read.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I was following along for a while trying to pick that up.

As I often argue here, when it comes to asking for the production of copies of numerous documents, we don't know exactly what that looks like. Is it a summary sheet like this? Is it a pile like that? We don't know how they're filed or how they're kept.

In this committee, it is appreciated when we can talk about motions beforehand. We've done that in the past and we can come to ground on what should be a common purpose here, which is transparency and looking to better serve the Canadian public.

These documents would have to be translated. I don't know what that looks like. I don't know if Mr. Kurek knows what that looks like. We don't have Mr. Nater here, so I don't know if he was able to make some determination on that as well. We didn't look at it on our side since we didn't think we were dealing with the number of documents that we have to deal with.

Just looking at colleagues, I'm looking for a change in the number of days. It would be to change, in paragraph (f)(i), "21 days", to "60 days". In paragraph (f)(ii), it's to change the "35 days" to "60 days".

I think that gives the public service a little bit more time. Given our experience with days being moved around, I can suggest some more formal wording.

I move the amendment that we remove (i) and (ii) and replace—

• (1800)

The Chair: Is this in (f)(i) and (f)(ii)?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: It's just the days. It would be "within 60 days of the adoption of this order". It's to strike "21" and replace it with "60".

The Chair: It's an amendment to the motion to replace "21" with "60". We're now debating that.

We'll go to Mr. McCauley. Mr. Desjarlais, I'll come to you next.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am completely opposed to this amendment.

We are looking for 140 conflict of interest declarations that are already on file. We know the names. We know where the files are. Most of them are probably already in English or French, but if they're not, there are only 140. There were 162 filed for 2023-24. That's hardly a large number. We have a very capable public service, which I'm sure can get these to us in a day, which is much less than the time period the Liberals are offering, which, funnily enough, takes us into summer, when we actually can't get to them.

There's been a great cloud of distrust placed over large segments of the public service because of this ongoing issue that started with ArriveCAN and that has spread into this double-dipping. This is why we need to get to this.

One of the gentleman, the chap from Dalian, came to the operations committee. He had made the front page of The Globe and Mail, and yet not a single person in this government sat there and thought, "Holy cow—Mr. Yeo, you have the same name and you

look just like this guy in The Globe and Mail who is under investigation. We've been working side by side for 20 years. It must not be you." We've had ministers who somehow have been unaware that this has been going on, at department after department.

I'm hoping this is not a systemic issue, but I think we need to put it behind us quickly and get answers quickly so we can move on. I think 21 days and 35 days to get effectively 302 different documents is nothing, considering the size of our public service, considering the competency of our public service. I think we owe it to them to get this cleared so we can put this scandal—for lack of better words—behind us.

I appreciate what Mrs. Shanahan is doing, as she always does, which is trying to delay and pushing back. If there were 100,000 documents or 10,000 documents, I could see that, but 140 conflict of interest declarations that are already filled out and filed are not that difficult to find.

The fact that the government was able to count 140 means they know exactly where they are and that they have easy access. I'm sure we could get them by next Monday if we really wanted them.

I'm going to suggest that we stick with the original 21 days and 35 days, which is extremely reasonable.

Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McCauley, you don't have to think those thoughts about Mrs. Shanahan. I just assumed she wanted to sit in the summer.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you, Chair.

I often strive, particularly in this case, to get unanimous consent for the work we do. I think that's your goal too, Mr. Chair.

We often, in the discussion of the production of documents, come to this discussion of how many documents and when. I support this motion in its original language. I also support the proposed amendments by Mrs. Shanahan, if that means they'll be voting in favour of the motion.

I think it is reasonable, especially for the committee that's investigating something as serious as this, to attempt to find consensus with respect to what often plagues our entire country. Both governments, Conservatives and Liberals, have had massive scandals for a very long time on very similar issues. New Democrats have been consistent in our approach in wanting to fix this in an earnest way. If we have support from the government, the governing members, to investigate this conduct, and if there's earnest will by the Conservatives not to make cheap political points out of this, I think we could actually get to a position where these recommendations could be valid. They could come to a point where we might agree on recommendations to finally end this hundred years of insiders benefiting.

Those are just my thoughts, Chair, because it's not as though these scandals didn't exist before. We've seen many scandals in the previous governments under the Conservatives, and we have seen many scandals under this current government.

The concern is that this is obviously ongoing. I don't want to see this happen to our public purse anymore. I don't want to see the public service continually rammed to the ground while insiders and lobbyists continuously get access.

If there's actually earnest support to get the unanimous consent of all parties here today to actually properly investigate this issue and it comes to a point where there are recommendations to end this decades-long fiasco....

We heard about Dalian, a donor to the Conservative Party. This goes on for both sides.

If we're really serious about this work—and I really do mean that in a genuine offer—we could come to a point of being unanimous on this investigation and actually end it.

Those are my thoughts.

• (1805)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kurek, you have the floor again.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thanks very much, Chair.

I referred earlier to my regular committee assignment at the ethics committee, so I'm relatively familiar with the Ethics Commissioner, and his office does very good work.

This information is not that complicated. If we had wanted to play politics, we could have said tomorrow or by Monday or something like that. No, I think the the 21 days and 35 days are very reasonable. These are forms that are filled out, a process that all MPs are relatively familiar with in our roles and obligations under the Conflict of Interest Act.

I think the timelines laid out in the motion are very reasonable. It's my understanding, Chair, that the documents are in most cases already bilingual. Often translation ends up being a bottleneck in especially large document production orders, but it's my understanding that the vast majority of these documents are already bilingual and therefore would not have to face that hurdle, which, to Mrs. Shanahan's point, can cause delays. That is certainly not a major issue in this regard. I hope that we can find support.

I will share a concern that I have.

We see with the arrive scam scandal that when the Auditor General and others attempted to get answers on an approximately \$60-million project that started off as something that was only supposed to cost a little bit of money and then just ballooned unbelievably.... We saw contracting and procurement and history being made. It was the first time in a century that somebody was called to the bar, a contractor who had lied to a committee, and on and on and on.

Forgive me if I'm hesitant to give too much time, because we saw when time elapsed between the contracts being made and the demand for accountability that documents disappeared. That is not only unprecedented but quite possibly illegal. There is this definitive need to ensure that while being reasonable—and I think we can do that—Parliament has the right and, I would suggest, the moral obligation to get to the bottom of this stuff.

This motion is very reasonable. We have a system in the Conflict of Interest Act that is designed to help mitigate some of these things. Where there have been breaches, where information is needed so that we can look into what could very well be double-dipping, the timelines are reasonable. The request is more than reasonable. We've taken care to ensure that the names of individuals can be redacted, again a very reasonable request. That way we can get to work on accountability.

I would suggest that the motion as originally written is already more than reasonable. I would encourage the committee to acknowledge that. I do say that because of my role in the ethics committee. This is something that I think we can pass as it was originally written.

Thank you.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Desjarlais is next.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

After listening to our colleagues, I don't think there will be unanimous consent here. It doesn't look like it. I don't see the Conservatives being willing to budge on this. For those purposes, my work in trying to get a serious review of this and consideration of this, given life by the consensus offered by the Liberals, is obviously not manageable here today. For those reasons, I think we'll have to rely on the very good work of our public service to meet the very short time frames.

I understand those time frames are short. We'll have to just rely on that, because of the requirement for the production here. For those reasons, I support this motion and would call for a vote.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have to run through the speaking list first.

[Translation]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: We also support this motion. I think it is very important that we have these documents before the end of the parliamentary session, that is before the summer. However, with a 60-day turnaround time, we would receive them during the summer. For that reason, I support the motion as it stands.

[English]

The Chair: Very good.

Clerk, could you call the vote on the “60 days” amendment, please?

First, I have a point of clarification. This is very small. There are two dates here, and I believe Ms. Shanahan is looking for “60 days” for both of them. For the sake of efficiency, because otherwise I expect we'll be doing this again...

I believe that's what you meant.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes.

The Chair: Yes.

Then it's not just “21 days” but also “35 days” that would be changed to “60 days”. It's consistent. I was not clear on that before.

Please call the vote, Clerk.

We have a tie.

I vote no on the amendment to the motion.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We now return to debate on the motion as written.

Go ahead, Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, I will rely, then, on the good judgment of the clerk and you that when it comes to the timely production of documents as requested, if there's a need for some leeway, it will be accorded. However, I understand the will of the committee here. We want to get them as soon as possible.

With that, I will call for the vote.

The Chair: Seeing no other speakers, I will ask the clerk for a roll call vote, please.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, I will say this: Your timing is off. It has not been 100 years but more like 150 years, if you go back to John A. Macdonald's CPR scandal. You've underestimated by a good 50%.

• (1815)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I agree with you, Chair. It's been a long time.

The Chair: Is there any other business here?

We'll see you back here Tuesday afternoon. The meeting is adjourned.

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