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Chair: Mr. John Williamson



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• (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

The first part of our meeting will be conducted in public to consider two motions. Should we complete our discussion of those two motions, we will then go in camera to review the public accounts 2021 report.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*Translation*]

As per the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on March 10, 2022, all those attending the meeting in person must wear a mask, except for members who are at their place during proceedings.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

[*English*]

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French audio. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

All comments should be addressed through the Chair.

[*Translation*]

Members participating in person in the room must raise their hand if they wish to speak. Members participating via the Zoom application are to use the "raise hand" feature. The clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated speaking order, so your patience and understanding are appreciated.

[*English*]

As I said, we're starting the meeting today in public, beginning with committee business.

I will recognize Mr. Therrien.

Please indicate which motion you're presenting, and then speak to it briefly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members, good morning.

On Thursday, I put some motions on notice, and the time has come to debate them. I have two.

With your permission, Mr. Chair, I will read the first one. Then, we can discuss it and move on to the next. That would be the best way to proceed.

I will read the motion slowly, so the interpreters can do their job properly.

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertakes a study of the expenditure of nearly \$100,000 in public funds by the Governor General of Canada for catering services during an eight day tour of the Middle East in March 2022; and that the Committee invites the Governor General to appear before the Committee for a period of two (2) hours on or before June 23, 2022.

If I may, Mr. Chair, I will explain my reason for proposing the motion.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead. You have a few minutes.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Everyone is aware of what happened. We were informed that the Governor General incurred very significant expenditures, and obviously that caught our attention and set off alarm bells. The average person would see it as exorbitant spending.

Both the committee and Parliament are tasked with ensuring the sound management of public funds. At a time when people are telling us how much they are struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living goes up, we find out that the new Governor General, who has been on the job for less than a year, has already picked up some peculiar habits. As a result, she has racked up quite a bill, to say the least.

According to the information we received, her trip was nine days long in all. Since we last spoke, Mr. Chair, we learned new information from the media, which shed more light on the whole situation. It is all the more important that the Governor General appear before the committee. As I said, we now know more about the situation, but not enough to dispense with her appearance before the committee.

I'd like to share some of the information we learned from the media, information corroborated by the Department of National Defence.

On the trip with the Governor General were 29 of her colleagues—I wouldn't know what else to call them, but they were accompanying the Governor General—and 17 security and logistics personnel.

We now know that the bill wasn't \$92,000 or \$93,000. It was reviewed and lowered, and actually ended up being \$80,000. I'm not sure why exactly, but it doesn't really matter. The money was for two lunches, three breakfasts and snacks. It did not include alcohol or dinners. It did not include the expenses for the duration of the nine-day trip.

I wrote the figures down. The average person wants to know what they cover. As an average person, myself, I would describe the amounts as exorbitant. Let's say the snacks cost \$5,000. These aren't the kinds of snacks you buy from Mondoux. They went all out. It works out to \$319 per meal. We are talking breakfasts and lunches for everyone on board, even the crew, assuming the food was available to everyone.

Here are my questions, and I may have more. I am simply trying to show how shocking this is and how much information we are missing.

First of all, who are all those people? Why does the Governor General have 29 people travelling with her?

[English]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I don't disagree with the member's right to bring such matters to committee, and I won't say that the issue needs to be dismissed out of hand—I'm not of that view. However, before he—because I get the feeling that he's getting ready to go on.... As a courtesy, I suppose, before he does that, I would ask you to confirm with the clerk whether or not this motion is, in fact, in order, because I don't see—with all due respect to the member—how it fits within the mandate of the committee. I've looked at the mandate letter of the committee closely, and there's no.... I just don't see the fit. I would put that to you, Mr. Chair: to confer with the clerk on it.

• (1110)

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Therrien, give me a few moments, please.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Of course, Mr. Chair. That's no problem. It's normal for members to have questions.

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I agree with the member.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, like you, I did view the Standing Orders to see if this motion was in order. After reviewing the Standing Orders and consulting with the clerk, I believe it is, based on the Standing Orders that outline a number of areas we are meant to study year in and year out. In particular are the reports from the Auditor General, as well as public accounts on an annual basis.

The Standing Orders also permit members to bring forward other areas of study, should they wish to do so. I can cite—and I think I will, because I hope we won't belabour the motions themselves—

Standing Order 108(1)(a), which states that the subcommittee shall be empowered to examine and inquire in all such matters as may be proposed by committee members. Standing Orders 108(2)(c) and 108(2)(e) also state that as well; (e) in particular says that we may study “other matters, relating to the mandate, management, organization or operation of the department, as the committee deems fit.” Finally, 108(3)(g) is in that vein as well: “Public Accounts shall include, among other matters, review of and report on the Public Accounts of Canada and all reports of the Auditor General of Canada”.

Pardon me; hold on a second. That's not quite the point I wanted to make. I'm sorry; in the commentary on Standing Orders 108(2), 108(3) and 108(4), it states, “[T]he Standing Order includes a blanket reference permitting a standing committee to examine any matter relating to the department as it deems necessary and worthwhile.”

I take your point of our priority and where we ought to look, but the Standing Orders do not preclude members from bringing forward more motions like this.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Again, Chair, this isn't a slight towards you at all. I'm looking at the mandate of the committee; it's in front of me here. All of it relates to the public accounts of Canada. All of it relates to the work of the Auditor General. This committee has worked, I think, very well together in the pursuit of that. We still have some outstanding business to deal with that falls in line with the mandate of this committee.

I still don't see how this motion.... To be frank, if it was going to come up anywhere, it would come up in the defence committee, not here. Defence was involved in approving the funding. I just don't see it.

I don't know if members around the table have a point of view on that. It's hard to see, still, even based on your explanation, how something like this can be referred here.

The Chair: I'd ask if you could point to something about standing committees that preclude it; I think standing committees don't do that. They allow for additional studies and motions like this to come forward.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Based on that logic, with all due respect, Chair, we could have anything and everything referred to the public accounts committee. If it doesn't have a relevance for this committee.... I don't think this one does. I fail to see the relevance of it.

The Chair: This motion relates directly to the expenditures of this case, a voyage, and public accounts is tasked with reviewing expenditures after the fact.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: The mandate of the committee is to look at the work of the Auditor General. It is the audit committee of Parliament. There's something in here about the work of the Auditor General and things of this nature.

I'm not saying that the matter can't be pursued. I would rather get on with business that we've been working on already.

• (1115)

The Chair: To that, the estimates are reviewed by government operations, but this committee is tasked with looking at the expenditure side of things.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I suppose, Chair, one possible solution is to look at whether or not there's a precedent here. Has this committee ever looked at anything relating to the Governor General and spending under that by the Governor General, their office or anything along these lines? If there has been a time when this committee looked at that, then a precedent would be established, and looking at the motion of our colleague would be in order.

Again, the mandate letter is clear that this committee is tasked with the work of the Auditor General and engaging on the public accounts of Canada.

The public accounts of Canada are very specific. They don't refer to just the general public accounts in the abstract. We're talking about something very specific, and the reports of the Auditor General fit within that.

The Chair: Sure. There are two points.

One is that whether or not there's precedent doesn't necessarily weaken or reduce the committee's opportunity to bring forward motions it deems fit.

Two is that a mandate letter does not supersede the Standing Orders. The Standing Orders are what actually govern Parliament. The Standing Orders do not preclude this. In fact, in numerous cases, they permit this committee to examine areas within its mandate that its members wish to bring forward.

That is what we have here. My ruling is that it is in order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Again, Chair, I don't want to challenge the chair, but it may have to get to that point. You keep referring to the Standing Orders. Can you go over that again?

The Chair: Sure. I'll do it slowly.

I will hear others if they want to speak on this point of order as well, because once it is challenged, there is no debate; it goes immediately to a vote.

[*Translation*]

I'm going to read a few points, Mr. Therrien, and then you can have the floor.

[*English*]

Standing Order 108(1)(a) says that the committee shall be "empowered to examine and enquire into all such matters"—it lists several—"as may be proposed by committee members". There's a broad opening there that allows additional motions and studies to be considered.

Let me go through them and then you can—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Okay.

The Chair: This is Standing Order 108(2)(c). At the top, in 108(2), is the introduction, "In general, the committees shall be severally empowered to review and report on..." and it lists a number of them. Then 108(2)(c) is "the immediate, medium and long-

term expenditure plans and the effectiveness of implementation of same by the department".

That's talking about the immediate. In this case, they've happened. I think 108(2)(e) is stronger. It refers to "other matters, relating to the mandate, management, organization or operation of the department, as the committee deems fit." Again, that gives latitude to do so and it again follows up with should this committee deem it fit.

Finally, I cited 108(3)(g) before. It says, "Public Accounts shall include"—and the next three words are pertinent—"among other matters, review of and report on the Public Accounts of Canada and all reports of the Auditor General of Canada". While that's specific to those two reviews we do, it does not preclude this committee looking at other matters.

Finally, the commentary from the Standing Orders says, "[T]he Standing Order includes a blanket reference permitting a standing committee to examine any matter relating to the department as it deems necessary and worthwhile."

I was looking for examples that might disallow it. I didn't find any. Our rules are the Standing Orders. They are in place. They are the governing body for committees, as well as Parliament. In many cases, they indicate what can't be done, and where they are silent or where they offer an interpretation that allows debate, my view is that debate should be allowed to happen.

I'm going to go to Monsieur Therrien first, and then I'll come back to your side.

• (1120)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I was going to make one last point.

The Chair: I'll recognize him.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Therrien.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand your decision and, obviously, I support it. I should tell you that I did my homework, and I had a whole explanation ready to show—a bit like you're doing—why this motion was in order. There is a lot of overlap between what you're saying and the rationale my party put together, so we are quite satisfied with your decision.

I am not at all swayed by the arguments of the honourable Liberal member, whom I have the utmost respect for. I still believe the motion is in order.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: The point you made—I think it was your second-last point, Mr. Chair—on "other matters"...does not preclude other matters coming to the committee, I believe.

The Chair: Let me have a look.

Standing Order 108(3)(g) states, “Public Accounts shall include, among other matters, review of and report on the Public Accounts of Canada and all reports of the Auditor General of Canada”.

I wasn't sure what you said at the last point. The commentary was, “[T]he Standing Order includes a blanket reference permitting a standing committee to examine any matter relating to the department as it deems necessary and worthwhile.”

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: All of that may hold. However, the sacrosanct principle of committees, as I understand after working on them for almost seven years, is that the mandate of the committee is the absolute key. Other matters may come to committee, but they must fit within the mandate of the committee. The mandate is extremely clear. We've been over it. I've mentioned it at length. You yourself acknowledged it is all about the work of the Auditor General of Canada and the public accounts of the country.

Again, to emphasize the point for Mr. Therrien and colleagues around the table, I'm not saying this issue should not be taken up. It can be taken up, of course, but it could be taken up, for example, by the OGO committee, which covers expenditures. This committee is the audit committee of Parliament. It covers the reports and expenditures of the Auditor General. I think the member can bring it up, but not at this committee. I still make the point that I don't see how it fits within the mandate of this committee. Everything you said in terms of the Standing Orders holds, but the reflection is always that those principles are subservient to the idea that the mandate of the committee is the most key. If the committee is to look at an issue, it must fit within the mandate of the committee.

I asked about precedents before. I wouldn't want to see a precedent established where we have pursued a matter that fits outside the scope of the committee, and then we have issues coming up—let's say in the fall—that are outside the scope of the committee. We can't carry out the important work that clearly would fit in the mandate—the work of the Auditor General. That's my point. That's why I still maintain, with great respect, that it is out of order.

The Chair: Mr. Dong, you had your hand up briefly. Do you have a comment? If not, I'll go to Mrs. Shanahan.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): I'll resume my comments in debate.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll just follow that line.

[*Translation*]

I was on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in 2015, and I was quite struck by how different this committee was from the others.

We work on the basis of consensus, our reports are unanimous, and our efforts are bolstered by the fact that the Auditor General works closely with us to examine spending—something that is especially important. On that point, I agree with my fellow member. That is the purpose of this committee. We must make sure that Canadians get value for their money.

Nevertheless, the Department of National Defence or, rather, the Canadian Armed Forces are responsible for the flight-related expenditures. The Governor General has nothing to do with it. It has to do with security. She is our country's representative, so it is entirely appropriate for her to have this level of security around her. As everyone knows, these expenses were lowered. Perhaps there is something to look into, but normally, it would be a matter for a different committee, as my fellow member suggested, perhaps even the Standing Committee on National Defence.

On this committee, when we examine the public accounts, we have the benefit of the work of the Auditor General and her office. Thanks to that reporting and analysis, we are able to work in a non-partisan way to ensure that Canadians get value for their money. For that reason, I agree with my fellow member that these two motions don't appear to fall within the scope of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

This could set a very worrisome precedent for the committee.

• (1125)

The Chair: I heard you loud and clear, Ms. Shanahan and Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*English*]

The other element I relied on for this decision is that while we're often seized with the reports from the Auditor General, one of our overriding functions, of course, is to look at the public accounts, which is a summary of all expenditures across the government. Now, perhaps we should spend more time on it than we have, both this year and previously, and perhaps we should do that in the future. The fact that this committee does address government expenditures to see how they fulfilled their mandate, to me is what makes this motion in order.

I'm going to leave it at that. I'm not going to hear any more points of order on this. Members have rights—and Mr. Fragiskatos alluded to that—which they can exercise.

I think, Mrs. Shanahan, we're also getting close, with your point of order, to debate again. There are many points that can be raised about this motion that would touch on parliamentary convention with respect to the Governor General, but those aren't points of order relevant to the ruling. That is where I landed and where I maintain my position.

With that, I'm going to turn it back to Monsieur Therrien to continue his introduction. I hope he will be somewhat brief so we can have a debate on this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll try to keep it short. In any case, I had already explained why it was important to support the motion.

The valiant member for Châteauguay—Lacolle, the riding next to mine, said that the committee's purpose was to examine the management of public funds. That is precisely why I am bringing this situation to the committee's attention. I was almost done. I was saying that some questions were still unanswered. This won't take too long.

Why were there 29 people? Who were they all? All the information we got was—

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I believe there are bells right now.

The Chair: Do I have unanimous consent to continue for another 15 minutes?

Mr. Eric Duncan: Generally, we don't—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: No, you do not.

The Chair: That's fine.

We'll suspend the meeting for the vote.

• (1130) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1220)

The Chair: I resume the meeting.

Monsieur Therrien, you had the floor.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: We have duelling points of order here.

Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Chair, I wonder if you could ask the clerk to clarify a few things. If we are going to have a debate or discussion on this, I think we have to be aware of certain things, as a committee. I maintain that the motion is out of order. However, there are other things, as well, that I think colleagues need to consider before we continue with the debate we're having.

First of all, if we were to carry out this work, if a report were to be worked on and completed by the committee on the matter, would it be rejected by the Speaker if it was deemed outside of the mandate? The Speaker could come to the conclusion, and I think would come to the conclusion, to be frank, that any report focusing on this would be outside of the mandate of the committee, and all the work that the committee had done would have been for naught.

The second thing I would ask you to confer with the clerk on is whether or not the Governor General could ever be summoned to appear at this committee. I don't believe that's the case, but I think we ought to hear from the clerk on that.

Finally, could you get the clerk's advice on whether or not this committee has in fact looked at matters pertaining to the Governor General in the past?

I raised that before, but we didn't get an answer on that.

The Chair: I will address two of the three, because I raised those exact same points.

The answer lies, in part, in what this committee decides. I have just ruled that the motion is in order. The committee, during the debate, is free to set the scope on any report.

I know there has been reference informally to the 2004 review of the then governor general's expenditures on another trip that drew headlines. I would note that that motion was substantially different

from this one. That talked about reviewing the estimates. This motion talks about reviewing the expenditures, which I think is an important point of differentiation.

It is possible that the Speaker could rule it out of order, if this committee takes allowances beyond its mandate. I don't believe this motion does that.

Number two is a question that I also asked. Parliament does not have the power to order the Governor General to appear. However, the wording in this motion is “invite”, which is different.

Your third question was whether this committee had ever heard from the Governor General's office.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: No. It was whether we had ever looked at matters relating to the Governor General's work.

The Chair: Because my mind goes back only so far, I will ask the clerk if she has an answer to that. I don't know if it goes back to 1867, but we can ask.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall): I have no recollection. I think the analysts might be better placed to answer that, but it would be in a report from the Auditor General if we had studied it.

I don't see any reference in any of the reports of the Auditor General's office.

The Chair: Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dillan Theckedath (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon.

We took a look back to 2015, and since I've been with the committee, it has never conducted a study on the Office of the Governor General or the expenditures of the governor general. There are two spending items, one for daily duties—which is overseen by the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General—and one for general expenditures, which are sometimes funded by the Department of National Defence for trips abroad, or by the Department of Canadian Heritage for a few facilities and ceremonies.

As far back as 2015, there have been none. We examined a few old reports, but we didn't find anything. In 2003-04, however, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates did conduct a study on the role, mandate and estimates of the governor general. This committee has not done any, but others may have.

• (1225)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to turn now to Mr. Duncan.

Mr. Desjarlais, I saw your signal as well.

Mr. Duncan, you have the floor on a point of order, not a debate about the motion.

Mr. Eric Duncan: That's correct, Mr. Chair. Thank you for giving me the floor.

I would just say that to the question of relevance and being in order, I believe that it certainly is, and you related it to the Standing Orders.

I won't refer to or start debate on the second motion that is going to be debated today, but I'll allude to the fact that, as we're reminded often, we can't force the Auditor General, for an example, to undertake a study on something. However, we could recommend and have our voices heard.

I think the motion that's before us is in order. Precedence, as you alluded to earlier, is not a reason for ruling something in or out. We, as a committee, have the opportunity to look at and examine and set our agenda on the work we want to do.

Frankly, I'll have some constructive comments during the debate on the motion itself, but is it common practice? No. However, it does not rule out, in terms of being within our means and abilities to do so, having witnesses come to speak to this issue, to provide public testimony—I say this respectful of the independence of the Auditor General—as to perhaps why this issue needs to be studied or reviewed.

I will note respectfully, without getting into debate, that over the course of the last couple of weeks, in the public discourse, we've seen the Governor General respond. We've seen it battled over to defence. We've seen it in foreign affairs. Everybody seems to be having this...so having officials able to speak to it could provide some background or public testimony as to perhaps why the Auditor General or our committee would feel that this needs to be further talked about.

I think it's within scope and reasonable to do so. We can get to debating the merits of it, and perhaps some friendly amendments and other things that can strengthen the quality of the motion before us.

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

Mr. Desjarlais, on the point of order.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Yes. It's the same point of order on scope and relevancy.

I agree that of course there's merit to the question that this committee may do these things, but we have to consider, in many regards, the work of other committees. As we know, this same motion was tabled in another committee, OGGO. The analyst just pointed out that it's been reviewed in OGGO in the past, so there's a precedent there and no precedent here.

I also want to make very certain that there is actually a committee, which isn't this committee, that has this mandate. I quote from the national defence committee mandate, which says to examine “legislation, activities and expenditures” of “the Canadian Armed Forces”, which is, in this case, responsible for all the decisions on the Governor General's expenses.

There's a committee explicitly responsible for this work, and I'd suggest that this committee do the work to make sure that the department, the Canadian Armed Forces, is responsible for those ex-

penditures, because it's right in its mandate itself. There is precedent for that. It's actually done this before.

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, that is something that I also considered. Being aware that defence obviously has the ability to look at the defence department, and being aware that OGGO has previously done it, does not lessen this committee's rights.

My question is simply whether the motion is in order. It's up to committee members at the end of the day to decide if they want to study it or not, but the question I looked at is whether it is in order. Just because another committee can look at it, or another committee has looked at a different motion, doesn't rule out that this committee could consider it. That's the basis that I made this decision on, to allow debate to continue, and before we wrap up at some point, this committee's members will decide whether or not the motion will go ahead.

There are a couple of hurdles to get over here. The first one, obviously, is to proceed with the debate, and then there will be a vote to proceed with a study or not.

Yes, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Chair, based on everything we've heard, and with great respect, because it does not sound like you're going to change your view as to whether or not the motion is in fact in order, I move that we challenge your ruling and vote accordingly.

The Chair: It's your right to do so.

I saw Mr. Duncan's hand wave, and I probably should have stopped you.

Mr. Duncan, do you have a point you want to make?

Mr. Eric Duncan: I do, Mr. Chair.

To go into Mr. Desjarlais's point about this debate, the items he's raising about the relevance or not are not ruling that the motion is in order. Whether or not he believes or we believe that this needs to be studied, debate should be had on the merits of that.

On ruling it in or out, from a technical perspective, I believe it's allowed. I would say that the debate on this could be a part of the main debate, not a challenge over the validity of it.

• (1230)

The Chair: I hear you.

Monsieur Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: The honourable member for the NDP pointed to the Department of National Defence, but the governor general is involved with—

[English]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry—

The Chair: I know what Mr. Fragiskatos is going to say.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you jumped the queue there. I had other people in line. Having said that, you have challenged the chair, so it goes to a vote right away. There is no debate on this, so I'm going to call for a recorded vote.

We're going to have a recorded vote. The clerk is going to call your name, so you will vote to uphold the chair or...

Please explain it.

The Clerk: The question is, shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?

I will call the opposition in alphabetical order, and then the government members in alphabetical order.

If you vote yes, it means that you're upholding—

The Chair: Right. If you vote yes, the debate continues. If you vote no, the debate ends.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Very good, so this is the end of the motion and the debate.

I will suspend the meeting so we can go in camera now to discuss the public accounts 2021—

Mr. Eric Duncan: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, we have two motions before us.

The Chair: Yes. Pardon me. We were discussing motion number one, so now I'm going to turn to motion number two.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Therrien, could you read your second motion, the one pertaining to the Auditor General?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Very well.

I can't propose an amendment or change to the first motion, but another party could propose a friendly amendment to alter the substance of the motion so that the committee could resume debate on whether it was in order or—

The Chair: I'm afraid the committee decided not to proceed with the first motion.

Mr. Alain Therrien: All right.

The Chair: That's settled.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Very well.

With your permission, Mr. Chair, I will read the second motion. Here it is slowly:

That the Committee mandates the Chair to send a letter to the Auditor General of Canada strongly recommending to investigate the expenses and costs incurred by the Governor General of Canada, from public funds, in her capacity as Canada's representative at home and abroad since her appointment on July 6, 2021.

The Chair: Does anyone wish to comment?

Mr. Alain Therrien: I had started commenting.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I don't know whether I should repeat my comments because it's been a while since I spoke. My clothes are out of style now.

This is about the Governor General, the 29 guests on the trip, and the 17 crew members and security personnel. Just over \$80,000 was spent on two lunches, three breakfasts and snacks.

That's only a portion of the expenses. It's surprising because the figure was originally \$91,000 or \$92,000 for a nine-day trip. People thought that was a lot for a nine-day trip. They assumed it included breakfasts, lunches and dinners, but didn't know whether it was in flight or not. That doesn't matter. People also thought it included alcohol.

Surprisingly, the Department of National Defence paid the bill. The NDP member said earlier—

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Therrien, but we have a point of order.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Fine. What's happening exactly?

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Sorry.

● (1235)

[*English*]

On a point of order, I would just like to say that the OAG carries only three main types of legislative audits: financial audits and performance audits, as well as special examinations. The OAG examines programs and not incidents, and this is an incident.

Also, as we have already discussed, we cannot compel the AG to study a particular report. I feel that this study does not belong in this committee but in other committees, as we have previously discussed.

The Chair: On the first point, I think those are items of debate. You're welcome to move an amendment to the motion, if you'd like. On the second point, again, I'm going to rule that this motion is in order and debate should proceed on it.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I'm not going to hear any points of order on it, but you are welcome to challenge the chair.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: That's what I'm going to do. I was going to say that you know I hold you in high regard and I work well with you, but based on the fact that we said what we said on the previous motion, I fail to see how this one would be in order, and I challenge the chair on that.

The Chair: There's no debate on that, so we'll have to turn to a vote right away.

The Clerk: The question is, shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Very good. The debate ends on this motion as well.

Before I jump—as I did before—to suspend the meeting, I don't think there are any other points to discuss in public. We've dealt with the two motions.

Go ahead, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: If I may, I'll ask a question of the clerk or the chair. I support, of course, the investigation of this issue, but in a different committee. Can this committee ask another committee to do this work?

The Chair: I don't believe so. No.

Mr. Eric Duncan: That should have been done during debate, Mr. Chair, not now.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Eric Duncan: We had the opportunity. We voted it down and had a conversation about it, so it's over.

The Chair: Mr. Duncan, that's the point.

I would take a motion, if you wanted to come back with it, but it needs 48 hours—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: That's okay.

The Chair: There's nothing I can take on the spot.

Seeing no other issues, I will suspend the meeting for a few seconds so that we can return in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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