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# **Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, February 5, 2008**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Diane Marleau**

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## Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Tuesday, February 5, 2008

• (0905)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.)):** We have a quorum and we have representatives from all of our parties here. I'm going to start by asking whether the committee minds if we move directly to witnesses for about an hour. They're already here and they're ready to make their presentations. I'd like to do that, if you don't mind.

I would like the witnesses, if at all possible, because you've been before the committee before, to perhaps bring us up to date on what's happened since the last meeting or what's been going on since we first found out about the serious challenges that there are with pay and benefits in the public service. It would give the members more time for questions. I'll ask you if that's okay with you.

You can go ahead and make your statement. We're at your disposal. But we'd like to get to the crux of the matter more quickly if we can, because we might only have an hour or a little more. We have a number of other motions we have to deal with.

Who's first?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan (Chair, Interdepartmental Compensation Consultants Committee):** I'm Jill Ronan, compensation and team leader with DND and also a member of the Association of Compensation Advisors.

I'd like to start by saying good morning, Madam Chair and honourable members. We'd like to thank you for allowing us the opportunity to address you again today on the issues facing the compensation community in the federal public service.

We want to applaud this committee for the progress that has taken place to date as a direct result of this committee's attention to our issues. It was very apparent in the standing committee held on December 12, 2007, with the Canadian Public Service Agency that our employer has taken a proactive approach to moving forward with resolutions in some areas. While we applaud this progress, we have some areas of concern that require the attention and action on the part of our employer.

In order to keep our presentation as streamlined as possible and to ensure we do not inundate you with information overload, we have broken the issues into three key areas that were addressed by CPSA on December 12. They are capacity-building, technology and service delivery model, and the classification of the compensation adviser positions.

I would like to now introduce Michael Brandimore. He will present on the first issue, capacity-building.

**Mr. Michael Brandimore (Interdepartmental Compensation Consultants Committee):** Good morning. I'm Michael Brandimore. Madam Chair, honourable members, I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to address you yet again on these issues.

What we derive from the presentation and discussion is that the mandate of the capacity-building group within CPSA is to recruit future compensation advisers and develop a national training program. The recruitment mandate certainly does not appear to be an issue, considering that 5,800 applicants were received. This resulted in 109 positions being filled as of this date. Out of these 109 new recruits, 60 were recruited and employed in the Department of Public Works, which would indicate that 49 went to other core departments.

It was further stated that statistics show that another 100 will be retiring from the public service in the next five years.

Our concern with these statistics is that they do not appear to include departures for other reasons, such as moving to other positions within the public service or promotions. This would definitely increase the numbers to be taken into account for human resource planning.

While this is encouraging, it does not in any way address the issue of retention. It has historically been shown that even in the best of circumstances the trainee programs result in up to 50% of trainees either failing the training program or departing for other positions. The real issue of concern is one of retention, and unless the issue of classification is resolved, shortages will continue to impede the success of any capacity-building initiative developed.

Again, although we applaud this capacity-building initiative, as Mr. Kramp so astutely pointed out on December 12, given that it takes up to two years to train these newly recruited compensation trainees, how could this dramatic improvement be attributed to them? Madame Bourgeois responded by stating, "We have a very dedicated community who have agreed to do overtime to resolve the issues." And there are retirees who have agreed to come back to assist.

While we agree with Madame Bourgeois' statement, this has to be recognized as a very short-term initiative and not a two-year resolution while the trainees attain the required skills to fulfill the full functions. We're already seeing an increase in burnout situations at work, which is counterproductive, as it means we will lose skilled compensation advisers for yet another reason.

We also have some concerns with the statistics on the backlog within the core departments. As compensation advisers, we deal interdepartmentally on a constant basis, and many of the compensation advisers have stated that they were never asked to provide statistics and still have a fair-sized backlog they are dealing with.

We agree that these types of statistics are crucial to establishing that there are backlogs. However, unless these stats are as factual as possible, they can be more harmful than helpful.

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Diane Melançon will now be presenting on the second key issue, technology and service delivery.

**Ms. Diane Melançon (Co-Chair, Interdepartmental Compensation Consultants Committee):** We applaud our employer for the efforts being made to develop, first, systems that will streamline the transactional portion of our functions and, second, self-serve systems for managers and employees. What concerns us is the timing and the impact it will have on our positions.

Madame Jolicoeur clearly states that the current pay system is very limited in automation, and that, while Public Works Canada is continuing to work on the pay modernization project, the project approval has yet to be given. This community has been waiting for this new system for over a decade, and it would appear that it could take another decade to come to fruition.

Even if managers and employees have the capacity to enter transactions, they will require the verification of the compensation advisers to ensure accuracy prior to being processed through the pay system for payments. Pension modernization forms approximately 18% of the current functions of a compensation adviser. To state that all pension functions are being reallocated to a centralized pension team is somewhat misleading. The compensation adviser will still be responsible for commencing pension contribution, making changes, paying severance pay, and providing research documentation through the pension division to ensure that accurate benefits are received.

While it could be argued that these are pay-related functions, the relativity between pay and pension benefits is the reason that years ago these functions were developed from superannuation. Compensation advisers should still be trained in pension-related functions to understand the impact that pay administration has on the pension administration.

Technology provides tools that can streamline our work, but in no way can it address 70,000 rules and regulations coming from legislation, Treasury Board, unions, etc. It would appear that a decrease in the transactional portion of some of our functions would be offset by the increase in the advisory portion of our functions. There is no easy button in compensation benefits.

• (0910)

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** I'd like to present on the third key issue, classification.

As you can imagine, this is an issue that is near and dear to our community. The history of attempting to have these positions classified at an appropriate group and level was provided to your committee at the standing committee meeting in June 2007, and we do not want to take up your valuable time going over all of that.

What we want to do is address the issues that were brought forth by CPSA at the December 12 meeting.

The key point that was made during that meeting is that Treasury Board has an agreement with the union, PSAC, to look at the PA group, program administration group, as a whole in respect to classification and not subgroups, and further, that technology and service delivery model may have an impact on our functions. PSAC has made it clear to our employer with the submission of the AS round table report that they do not agree that our group can wait until the PA group is resolved as a whole. In fact, they recommend immediate reclassification to the AS-4 level for our group. All evidence provided during the December 12, 2007, meeting indicated there are no clear timeframes on when technology and service delivery models will change the functions of the compensation advisers significantly.

Technology service delivery will address workload, and not the complexities of these positions. Workload is not a factor rated in our current classification system. These are the same arguments that were put forth by our employer four years ago, and they are still being used today. Classification of positions is based on the duties of your current position, not on what they will be four, five, ten years down the road.

The issue of separate employers, in which CSIS was used as an example, clearly shows the wage disparity within the public service for compensation advisers performing the same functions. This is a classic example of pay inequity. The human rights principle is that work of equal value should have pay of equal value. Our employer's response to this is that the separate employer has a different classification system and rating system, and therefore that is apt. This is completely illogical to us. It is almost saying that these separate employers' new classification systems cannot possibly be as accurate as Treasury Board's 40-plus-year antiquated classification system. The bottom line is, they have developed a classification system that recognizes the complexity of the compensation advisers today.

The salary difference is approximately \$14,000, which would actually closely align our wage to that of the AS-4 group level within Treasury Board, which is what our union has recommended Treasury Board do immediately.

So if our union is willing to adjust the agreement they have made with our employer in regard to our group, and if separate employers have been able to capture the complexities of our functions, why is our employer not willing to act upon the recommendations that have been put forth?

In a statement referring to the classification history of the compensation adviser positions on page 15 of the minutes on the 12th of December, Madame Boudrias stated the following: "They"—referring to Treasury Board compensation advisers—"were all reclassified at the same time, because if we did not do that, you can imagine the issue we would have in terms of people moving from a department to another one to have a better job or a promotion or better salary level."

That is in fact what is happening. Our most skilled compensation advisers are moving to places like CSIS and CSE, where the salaries are far better.

In a nutshell, our employer has stated two main impediments to dealing with the classification issues of our positions: the agreement they have with our union, and the impact technology service delivery will have on our job descriptions.

The union has removed the first impediment by recommending that the employer reclassify these positions to the AS-4 level immediately. And in regard to the changes that may occur in our job descriptions as a result of technology service delivery, they have not come to fruition over the last four years, and based on the evidence provided there's no clear timeframe on when they will. The complexity, responsibility, intellectual effort, and demands required of our functions are neither properly recognized nor compensated. This is a major component as to why there are staff shortages, backlog, and retention problems. The development, recruitment, and, most importantly, the retention issues will not be successful unless the classification issue is resolved.

• (0915)

We are respectfully requesting that this committee continue to exert their influence, to have the President of Treasury Board work with the Canada Public Service Agency and the Public Service Alliance of Canada to resolve the classification issue of the compensation advisers' positions within the federal public service.

In closing, we would like once again to thank the chair and the honourable members for their continued efforts on our behalf.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Do you have somebody else who wants to make a short statement?

**Ms. Patty Ducharme (National Executive Vice-President, Public Service Alliance of Canada):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm Patty Ducharme. I'm the national executive vice-president of the PSAC. The Public Service Alliance of Canada is a union that represents the pay compensation advisers who work for the Government of Canada, making sure that your staff, the public servants of Canada, are all paid in a timely fashion.

I want to thank the chair and the members of the committee for inviting us to appear before you today on issues facing the compensation system in the federal government. As the national executive vice-president of the PSAC, I'm particularly pleased and proud to appear here alongside our members who directly deliver compensation services for the federal government.

I want to reinforce comments that were made by the employer when they appeared before you on December 12, 2007. The compensation system relies on an extremely dedicated and committed group of federal workers. Day in and day out the 1,400 PSAC members who perform these duties show their determination to do a difficult job under extremely difficult circumstances.

A further indication of their dedication and determination is the willingness of these members to take the time to come before you today and present their detailed understanding of the problems the

government is having paying people on time. I want to draw the committee members' attention as well to the gallery. The gallery is filled with PSAC members who are compensation advisers in government departments, and they're here supporting representatives of their community and their union. This is a very significant issue for this community.

As the union representing these dedicated public service workers, I want to emphasize that we share their frustration at the failure of the employer to adequately address the problems facing the compensation community. Yes, it is positive that government has a number of initiatives under way, under areas such as training, recruitment, and technological improvements, but their own consultation process with managers and front-line workers recognizes that there are classification problems underlying the problems facing this community. We have found that the employer is completely unwilling to work with the union in addressing the classification issues for this group.

We had a consultation session last June with the Canada Public Service Agency to talk about the issues affecting this community, where agency officials clearly laid out a number of positive capacity-building initiatives, but the representatives had virtually no mandate to discuss the issue of classification.

Last summer we followed up with a letter to Rick Burton, the vice-president of the CPSA, asking to meet on the specific issue of classification, and he was unwilling to do so.

Earlier this month we wrote to Nicole Jauvin, the president of CPSA, once again asking for a willingness from the employer to sit down and come up with an interim solution to address the retention problems that come from classification of the compensation advisers at the AS-2 level. We still don't have an answer from Madame Jauvin, but I expect we will get the same one Madame Boudrias gave this committee in December. In response to a question from MP Mark Holland about the employer's willingness to undertake short-term measures to address the classification issues, she replied: "So we have an agreement with PSAC that we will be looking at the entire PA group."

She asserted, as has Rick Burton before her, that the broader PA reform project is the solution to the AS classification problem. We need to be clear. The agreement about undertaking a classification review exercise for the PA group was something first announced by the employer on May 8, 2002. This was not negotiated with the PSAC. The employer believes it has a unilateral right to classify and has never agreed with any bargaining agent to jointly develop a classification standard in the federal public service.

• (0920)

In April 2006 the PSAC, Treasury Board, and PSHRMAC did agree to issue a joint statement indicating their willingness to commit to the project of classification reform for the PA group. Specifically, that agreement involved commitment to a first phase of six to eight months, during which our respective representatives would meet to map out a process and timeline for a new PA standard.

The first phase never occurred. More than 20 months have passed since the PSAC and the employer signed that joint statement. Madame Boudrias more or less admitted this when she said to you last month that the work hadn't yet been started.

In our view, it is quite unacceptable for the employer to hold out the PA classification reform as a solution to the classification issue that underlies the problem facing the AS compensation advisers. There is no evidence the employer has invested the kinds of resources and energy needed to achieve PA reform in the short term, and the problem facing the AS compensation advisers is an immediate and urgent one.

Interestingly, while telling you last month that the PA classification reform is a solution to the AS problem, later in her testimony Madame Boudrias said, and I quote, "We won't wait for the big review of the PA group to do something", suggesting that perhaps they are prepared to take an interim step. This is positive, but as yet there is no evidence from any of the contact between CPSA and PSAC that they are willing to work together on a solution, what they might be considering, and what kind of timeline they're actually considering.

In the meantime, the problems the government is having paying people on time continues. There was an article in *La Presse* about a situation at the Shawinigan tax centre where 200 federal public sector workers, your employees, were facing problems in getting paid in a timely fashion.

The fact that many separate employers have found ways of reclassifying compensation advisers and paying them at significantly higher rates is an indication of the need for a short-term solution. It is also an indication of a further retention problem that the Treasury Board and the CPSA will face. Unless they act now to close the gap, Treasury Board will lose even more valuable compensation advisers to these separate employers.

In closing, I would like to once again thank the members of the committee for giving attention to the issues facing the compensation community. We'd be happy to answer any questions you have, which may help you in your future deliberations.

• (0925)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your presentations.

Now we'll move to Mr. Holland.

**Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.):** Thank you, Mrs. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. Thank you as well to the compensation advisers who are gathered here today, not only for your presence but also collectively for all the work you do on behalf of Canadians and the public service.

Obviously I'm very concerned, both by this issue and also the ramifications of it for people being paid on time. What I'm hearing today is a lot of frustration. There's a sense you're simply not being heard, and things that should logically be dealt with are not. Certainly I think it'd be fair to characterize this as at an impasse; you really don't feel your issues are being heard.

In my opinion, we almost heard two parallel conversations. On the one hand, we heard from Treasury Board, which felt these issues were being moved forward or there was common ground. We're hearing today, I think, this isn't the case. I'm summarizing and I'm seeing nodding heads, so that would be correct.

Let me start by what this committee can do. What would you like to see this committee do in the way of recommendations, actions on this to help bridge this impasse? Ideally, as you come before us today, what are the actions you would hope the committee would undertake?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** In a nutshell, we're attempting to have this committee influence Treasury Board to step up to the plate. Even if it's a short-term solution while the long-term resolution is being put in place, it should be done now, without waiting any longer. The backlogs may have been improved slightly, but they're certainly not dealt with. They're still there, and they're going to continue.

It will take a considerable amount of time to develop the technology to reduce workload. Let me stress that this is about reducing workload. It won't reduce the complexities of the job. It will also take time to train new compensation advisers. Madame Boudrias admitted that they were behind the eight ball, that they were five years late in starting. I give her credit for acknowledging that. The bottom line is that it happened and we're in that position now.

We are not naive enough to believe that if we were classified tomorrow all the problems would disappear. We're trying to say that unless the classification issue is dealt with today, the shortages will increase. We could slow down the train if this issue would just be dealt with.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** That's fair. I think the committee will be looking at this in its deliberations.

If we were able to see a resolution to the classification issue, how long would it take? You said all the problems wouldn't disappear overnight, and that's a fair statement. I think we understand that. But how long do you think it would take to get things into a manageable position if we were to act?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** I would be hard-pressed—I think any of us would—to answer that.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Ballpark—I'm not looking for an exact time, just a range.

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** I'll just give you a small example of how it could work. This month, we in DND are losing three fully qualified compensation advisers to other positions, because of the classification issue.

I think we would see an improvement far sooner than the technology will take to develop, and far sooner than waiting five years for them to increase the number of trained compensation advisers. I think you would see an improvement fairly quickly.

• (0930)

**Mr. Mark Holland:** On the issue of turnover rates, in some departments they've chosen to reclassify, increase payments for HR professionals and compensation advisers. Has that aided in helping to reduce the turnover rates? Have you seen an improvement?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Do you want to speak to that a bit, so we can see how?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** I can give you an example. When CSIS created their new classification reform and the compensation advisers' positions were reclassified, within six months—and I'll use DND as an example, because that's my department—we lost four skilled compensation advisers in a four-month period because they went to positions at CSIS.

Of course if somebody can get a position that pays them \$14,000 more a year for doing the exact same thing, it's only logical that they're going to move to those positions.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Some departments have moved to a computerized compensation system already. We know that there were a number of problems with this. Can you speak to that? Have those been resolved, or are they still being experienced?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** I can give you an example. I am an Industry Canada employee. I have been working at Statistics Canada since October 2006, and I still am. There are four of us helping them out. It is just chaos over there. Of course they're not talking about that in the newspapers, but they're so backlogged it is unbelievable. We are still answering e-mails that employees have sent to the compensation unit going back to 2006. We are doing pension estimates. We are doing elective service for people who want to buy back service. They are short-staffed.

Of course they're losing fully trained compensation advisers who are going to agencies that pay more for the same type of work. They've been replaced. For example, if I give you eight compensation advisers, fully trained, they will receive eight trainees from this new trainee job bank. Well, they have no experience at all. For the ones who are still there, they're stuck doing their own work and having to train at the same time. It's not helping them at all. I wish some of them could have been here today, but they are so backlogged that not one person was able to attend. That's just an example. I know for Public Works, even though they say they're fully up to date, they are not. We've been speaking to many compensation advisers.

Each department still has the same problem of transfers within different departments. Of course transfers in the compensation unit are not what we call an emergency. An emergency is putting somebody on payroll, or if somebody is retiring we have to cut them off pay. These are what we call emergencies. For them, transfers are not an emergency, but the impact is so much that it impacts their taxes and their deductions. There is a big impact.

Some of them are transferring to other departments with a promotion, but we can't do the promotion. We can't do anything until those transfers are done. We're all waiting for answers from all these different departments, the compensation unit, to be able to do the transfer, but they're so backlogged this is not their priority.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Bourgeois, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, ladies and gentleman. I'm pleased to see you.

In December, we heard from people who told us that they had an action plan to solve the compensation problems and that that action plan had two components. The first component concerned the professional community, and the second focused on the infrastructure of all computer systems and so on. I'd like to have some fairly brief answers.

First, I'd like to know whether each of the components has been affected since the government seemed to want to attempt to solve the problem. In other words, have we resolved part of the question of the consolidation of the community of human resources professionals? And are we solving the infrastructure problem?

● (0935)

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** They've begun to develop things so that employees in every department have access to their pay stubs, which they can print themselves. They'll be able to get into the system, which is already possible now, and do an estimate of what their pension would be if they retired. Employees currently do not have access to this system in all the departments. That's coming soon.

On December 12, they talked a lot about systems and change, but they indicated that they were still studying this and that it would be ready in three, five or 10 years. They're examining things, but we can't wait five or 10 years. The problem is here now. Every day I see people who work in compensation. Some are absent as a result of illness. They are completely discouraged because, when there are problems and people don't have their cheques—whether it's an overtime cheque or following a promotion—and they complain, it goes through us.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** I asked you the question because those people told this committee that everything was going well and that they had a plan. I'm very glad there is a plan, and I was the first person to congratulate them. However, I realize today that we were literally misled; the word isn't too strong. I like it when people tell us the truth.

Are the employees who are having trouble with their compensation mainly full-time or part-time employees?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** There are full-time employees, there are part-time employees; there are all the scenarios. As I said, the full-time employees often have problems because they have worked overtime and have not been compensated. They may have been waiting for a cheque for up to six months. There's no reason to wait six months for an overtime cheque. It may be because they were promoted and are waiting for a cheque, and so on. There are a number of scenarios. Transfers are a big problem because there's tax incidence. When people work in Quebec and go to work in Ontario, taxes and deductions are definitely not the same. We don't have the power to begin discussions to prevent certain deductions from being made or to suspend deductions that these people would like suspended. If there is an impact, it's terrible. Some of these people are on the payroll, but not necessarily all; there are some who aren't. Some are casual workers. The problem most frequently cited is lost documents.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** That happens often?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** It happens fairly often.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** A lot of people contact my office, and, as if by chance, their documents are lost. But behind the computer systems, there are human beings.

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** It goes beyond reality.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Ms. Ducharme, I'm going to ask you the next question. You told us that the agreement on the classification review was not negotiated. Is that correct? That was announced unilaterally by the employer, and you haven't been given an answer since that day, despite your efforts to be included in the process. Is that correct?

[English]

**Ms. Patty Ducharme:** Yes, Madame, that's correct.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** If I understood correctly, there's no timetable for solving the problem, and no measures are being contemplated. You've been given no solutions.

[English]

**Ms. Patty Ducharme:** Yes. I believe it was Madame Boudrias who gave evidence on December 12 that the work related to PA reform had not even started when she came in December. Our bargaining teams are meeting and have been trying to get the employer to make presentations with respect to where we are on the whole PA reform issue. It's my understanding that to date no such presentation has been made to the bargaining teams.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** My last question is for Mr. Brandimore. With regard to the recruitment of compensation employees, you said that 60 full-time employees had been recruited, as well as 49 others, part-time employees, I imagine, for a total of more than 100, when 100 employees retire. Is that correct?

[English]

**Mr. Michael Brandimore:** Yes, that is correct.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Do you see any clear will on the employer's part to solve the problem? That's not it? Did I misunderstand?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** Pardon me, there were 109: 60 were recruited by Public Works and Government Services Canada, and 49 were distributed among the other departments. They are full-time employees.

● (0940)

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** All right. If I understand correctly, a lot more are needed when 100 retire in a year?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** Yes.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** How long have you been reporting that problem?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** It started in 2000.

[English]

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** February 14, 2000.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** And you've observed no clear will to solve this problem?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** Since February 14, 2000, we've attended committee meetings with the union, and so on. The members of the compensation committee ultimately retained their own lawyer. We've all had to provide money to pay him. The complaint has just been accepted by the Canadian Human Rights Commission. It was filed in 2004. It has just been accepted, but it has to go through various stages at the Commission. Absolutely nothing has been resolved to date.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** That's fine. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Here in the committee, we've been talking about this for about a year and a half. It's taken a little time to get to us.

[English]

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** It's a good thing we don't pay people that slowly, I guess, eh?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Albrecht.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to each of the witnesses for being here. I don't question for one minute your dedication to your job and to the people you represent. So thank you for that.

My understanding is that, clearly, the classification issue is the primary concern you're coming with today. I also understand that you've been working on this since at least 2000, if not earlier, and we still don't seem to have come up with a remedy.

For me, as a new member in this Parliament, it would have been helpful to have some of your submissions written today, because, as you indicated, it's very complex, and it's even more complex for someone like me who doesn't—

**The Chair:** Mr. Albrecht, we do have a written submission. We didn't put it around because it is not translated. You will be getting it later this afternoon.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Thank you. I still say the written submission would have been helpful in understanding the verbal submission. The technicalities and the details of the complexities are obvious.

I want to follow up on a couple of questions. First of all, let's look at the number of applications: 5,800 applications, 109 positions filled. How does that compare with the number of positions you need to fill? You said there were 100 retirements, but what are the numbers necessary to fill your requirements?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** That was Treasury Board's or CPSA's number, 100 retiring. Those were the statistics they provided, and that's within the next five years. We have to say we find that number difficult to believe. In my department alone, within five years twenty of us will be leaving. And that's just one little area. So we are not sure if they meant in the NCR or nationally. Certainly it cannot be nationally.



**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** My question goes, I hope, deeper than that. If a certain number of people are retiring, obviously you need to replace them. But it would seem that there might also be a need to increase the numbers based on how many people were hired, the workload, and all of those things. What is the ideal number that you would need to fill the capacity deficit?

**Mr. Michael Brandimore:** We'd have to look at it department by department. I'm not sure that anyone here could do it today. We can speak to our own department: I think we're short seven or eight people.

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Yes, that's a good point. At DND, based on standards that should be used, we're short seven people.

I guess we look at it globally because in every department every one of us is working overtime. If you're working overtime, it means you don't have enough resources to do the job.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** So we don't have an ideal figure that would correct this deficit?

**Ms. Patty Ducharme:** Remember that we have a group of members who work full-time for the government, who are leading a collective action for the compensation advisers community. They are not the employer. They don't have the information the employer has access to. They don't know how many transfers have taken place outside the compensation community. They don't know how many people have left for promotions or other jobs, jobs outside the federal government or at other agencies. That's information that only Treasury Board, the employer, is able to provide.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Moving on to the technology, I understand that some of the administrative system with Public Works is antiquated at best. How do you think this problem grew to be so far backlogged? Is it a lack of financial resources, or a failure in budgeting? Is it a lack of vision or planning? I'm having trouble understanding how a system like that could be allowed to deteriorate for 30 years and be that far behind. If anything, we should be leading the way.

• (0945)

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** It's a good question. Madame Jolicoeur, in her response on December 12, basically said they have been attempting to get a modernized pay system since 1997.

Although we are not the employer, the compensation has emerged in these things as they evolve. I would say it's the complexity. I think Madame Jolicoeur said this clearly as well. It's the complexity of the required functions and payments that make it difficult to take an off-the-shelf program and say "Okay, here, make this work". It was probably also financial restraint. That's our employer's role to address, but we certainly have been waiting decades to get a new pay system.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** It seems to me that because of the complexity we're dealing with, there should be a system in place to address this.

I don't know how much time I have.

**The Chair:** Two minutes.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** We talked about the different aspects of the government's action plan relating to consolidation, computerization, improvements, and centralization. Do you have any comments on

the centralization aspect? Has that been a negative, a positive? How do you see it?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Actually, we didn't get that they were looking at centralization of compensation services. In fact, when the question was asked about Matane, the development of a team in Matane, it was clearly stated that it was not decentralization but just locating a hybrid team elsewhere.

In the compensation community we've been very involved in service delivery models, because it has a huge impact on how we provide service. Some departments attempted to go to things like single discipline, where they broke up the team and went to full-blown call centres. It's interesting to note that they were the ones that ended up with the biggest backlogs.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Finally—

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** These are the departments that were affected the most, and still are today.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Other than the issue of the classification, it seems to me that on the progress that's being made in terms of improving the infrastructure and recruitment there is some action being taken. I would urge us to be a little patient on those fronts and try to zero in on the classification issue.

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** We would agree with you wholeheartedly, because it's been made very clear in their evidence that it will not be in the short term that we will see technology available that can address a lot of these.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Angus, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank everyone who has come for your presence here and for taking an interest in this.

I think my wife thinks political life is dubious at the best of times, and I don't know if my colleagues would want to give you the same level of support, but I personally hold you responsible for me being able to keep selling political life to my wife, because the cheque does come in on a regular basis. You do yeoman's service on that front.

I am concerned, however, by what I've heard this morning, particularly what I'm hearing on the example in Industry Canada, where we have a two-year backlog of people getting back to issues on pensions—

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** It is Statistics Canada where we are working overtime. That is just one of the departments that is having these problems.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** We're bordering on deadbeat at that point. If it's two years, that is really shocking, and I don't think that standard can be accepted.

I'm looking at the issues that have been laid out here: the workload, the complexity of issues, the turnover you're getting because people can go elsewhere and get better pay for doing the same amount of work. On the issue of retirement, you said there are twenty people in your department. It seems to me that will be a virtual tsunami when it happens. Then, of course, there is the classification of staff. Out of that list, is there any one issue? We keep getting back to classification. Is that the premier issue to be addressed, and the other ones we work away from?

• (0950)

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** In our opinion, yes. We will give CPSA credit where credit is due. They are working on the systems that will allow the transactional portion of our job to be more streamlined. The bottom line is it is not going to be developed within the next five years. We've been waiting over a decade now. We don't have great faith that it will.

What do we have that can happen today to retain the compensation advisers in compensation, and maybe encourage people not to retire so quickly? It boils down really to you can recruit all you want, but if you can't retain them it just won't work. So, yes, classification is a huge part of the problem, in our opinion.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** I will put this question to Madame Ducharme. Again, you are the employee, not the employer, so I don't know if you have the answer.

In other aspects of the federal civil service, are there issues of classification? I have dealt with medical adjudicators and their fight to get reclassified. Are we looking at Treasury Board basically drawing the line on principle because if they give it to one group they're going to open the door to others? Is that part of what's happening here?

**Ms. Patty Ducharme:** The classification system is an antiquated system. I believe it was Madame Boudrias who spoke in December when she appeared in front of the committee and said that most of the job descriptions and the classification system itself are older than many of our members. They are 40-plus years old. Work is being done that was never anticipated by the employer or probably by the average worker, and trying to address that issue using job descriptions is one method we have used.

It is obviously a huge problem. The medical adjudicators' case is a perfect example. Frontier border services officers is another perfect example. We have many members who work under this antiquated classification system who need to see immediate relief.

In 1999, when the pay equity complaint came down, the employer was told to come up with a gender-neutral classification system. It's 2008. That hasn't happened. We continue to wait. We continue to pressure the employer. And quite frankly, it is time for the government to push Treasury Board to deal with this issue.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Given the impending turnover in terms of retirement, is there a sufficient plan in place to train people? What's the training time to get somebody up to speed, to know the complexity of paying across regional and provincial borders, pension, etc.?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** It takes up to two years to train an adviser in the compensation and benefits area. We tend to say it takes up to five years to become a fully competent compensation adviser.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** So has there been an effort to start to prepare for the wave of retirements?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Yes. Madame Boudria stated that they have a five-year plan now. They were five years late starting, but they do have a five-year plan now. We have a slight concern with the fact that they are looking at only 100 positions in the next five years, but that's their job too.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** My last question is on the issue of technology. As politicians we are extreme generalists, and our friends at Treasury Board will say, "We've heard this and don't worry, we have a great new computer system. Once it's installed we'll press all the buttons and say it's excellent and it works for us."

I always think of a story that a friend of mine who worked at a South African gold mine told me. They did all their accounting by hand, year after year, and they were never late until they brought in a computer program that was going to speed up work. He said for the next ten years they never managed to get an accounting fact sheet in on time because there was always a problem with the computer.

It might be anecdotal, but with the complex issues you're dealing with in the various provincial jurisdictions, do you actually think there is a program that can do this in a quick way? Or will we have to go back to tried and true trust in the expertise of the people we're hiring?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** We believe it has to be a balance of both. There can be a pay system that makes the transactional portion of our functions more streamlined and will allow managers and employees to self-serve in certain areas. But there is no pay system that will be able to accommodate the complexities of the function.

CPSA themselves stated in their evidence of December 12 that even if these work tools are brought in to streamline the transactional portion, the advisory portion of the compensation adviser's job will still be there and will possibly be increased because of managers and employees using a self-serve type of system.

• (0955)

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** I will go to Madame Folco.

[Translation]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, this is the first meeting for me as well, so I may limit myself to more general questions. What I understand is that you've been promised major changes for 40 years now. Changes have been made, but not enough, obviously, from what you've explained to us.

With regard to the pension administration system, there's also an intent to transform the operational processes and services. In your opinion, how do you view your role if that transformation is ever made? How do you see your role changing following that? In other words, you've described the present situation to us, but what I'm asking you, in a way, is to submit a wish list to give us an idea of the direction you'd like to take in future.

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** I can tell you that, even if, for example, the government transferred all service buy-backs for pensions to Moncton—that's already been done, a few years ago—if it transferred all those duties to Moncton, that would reduce our workload a little, but it would be a very small reduction because the Moncton people would nevertheless have to communicate with us. We're the ones who have the files of all the employees in each department. We would have to confirm whether they had leave without pay, their salaries, and so on. It's always the same thing. That's what happened a number of years ago, and, ultimately, there were so many problems in Moncton that everything was transferred again to each of the departments. That's why we in the departments have the files.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** The question I'm ultimately asking you, Ms. Melançon, is if the operations were transferred to Moncton, perhaps in the not so near future, could you foresee the files going to Moncton as well and everything being done from A to Z in Moncton itself? That's the question I'm asking you.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** That's a very good question. In fact we felt that on December 12 the employer was kind of misleading when they said the pension functions would be devolved to the centralized pension team in Shediac. In fact we'll still retain a portion of the approximately 18% of our functions that are pension-related. We'll still have to commence pension contributions for new employees; we'll have to continue making any changes or data corrections to them.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Excuse me for interrupting, Madam Ronan. You say we'll still have to do this, so how do you see it in idealistic terms; how do you see that relationship in the future? Do you see what I mean? I'm asking you to transfer it to the future and say this is where it's at, these are the mistakes, and these are the weaknesses. Where do we go from there?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** We mentioned early in our evidence that years ago superannuation did the pension function. There were a lot of issues with things not being done correctly because they didn't have the resource documents and weren't meeting with the clients, so for many reasons it was devolved over to the compensation advisers. Decades later we're doing the full circle thing and going back to putting the pension functions with superannuation. I guess we're saying that 18% of our functions really isn't going to have a huge impact, so we would leave it with us.

Our wish is for Treasury Board to hire enough resources to accommodate the standards they have set for what a compensation adviser should have as a client base, which is approximately 175 clients.

Our other wish is that they classify us at an accurate group and level that will encourage new compensation advisers to come on

board and make it a career. Historically, compensation advisers, once they got into compensation, stayed in it for their whole careers.

• (1000)

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** A fascinating life.

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Yes. We have to create a career path. No initiative for capacity-building will be successful without it.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll go to Madame Faille.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is my second meeting, but it's the first time I have spoken. I worked at the Canadian Human Rights Commission. I was there in 1989-1990, when the complaint was filed, and I looked into this matter, since I was working in the Secretary General's office. I knew the public service until 1993: the reorganizations, the position equivalencies, the general positions. So I understand your dissatisfaction.

I remember that I understood nothing about my T4 slips, when tax time came, or about the amended T4s that I received later. So I pity the Revenue Canada officer who had to examine those documents, because it must have been hell for him. I also felt a great deal of frustration. I was very active in union business in the public service. I remember some situations where the government representatives arrived at the bargaining tables without a mandate. That's frustrating because the research and the work were done, but the members were penalized. So I'm happy to be sitting on this committee and to be addressing this question in full knowledge of the facts.

I'd like to ask a question related to the news. You said that you had been in negotiations with the government since 2000. In my experience, you could go back even further, since history seems to repeat itself.

Since 2000, have you always been negotiating with the same officials? If not, with whom did you start those negotiations?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** At first, it was with our union, of course, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, of which Nicole Turmel was president at the time. That led to nothing. I should give her some merit, however, because, just before she changed unions, she ultimately admitted that these old problems existed and that something should be done.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** I know who you started with on the PSAC side, but with whom did you negotiate on the government side?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** I'm going to let Jill speak.

[English]

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** As was explained earlier in the December meeting, in 2000 we were reclassified from AS-1 to AS-2. At that time we put forth a letter to Madame Boudrias, who happened to be the assistant deputy minister at DND at the time, because grievances had to be interdepartmental. We put our concerns forth at that time. Madame Boudrias advised us to submit a grievance, which was the correct procedure.

We went through the grievance process. Because of the national impact any grievance process would have, because of our group, we requested that Treasury Board chair the grievance process. To cut a long story short, that grievance process did not work. We were working with PSAC in the meantime. We eventually submitted a human rights case because we could not get any action taken in any of the venues available to us within the federal public service.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Again with the same officials?

[English]

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** No, they changed. Treasury Board has a turnover as great as any other department, and probably greater in some ways.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Do you think that the problems are amplified today, that the problem is amplified? Since the last series of meetings that you had with the Treasury Board representatives, have the problems become even bigger because you don't see any developments in the file?

[English]

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Are you referring to negotiating on bargaining?

• (1005)

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Among the people you do business with, you still refer to Ms. Jauvin and Ms. Boudrias. Have you always worked with the same people?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** Yes, they've been there since 2000.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** What's troubling in the statement I see here is that, when there are layoffs following tax time, the employer has to provide records of employment within 10 days. Was there any whistle-blowing by the people responsible for employment insurance? Do the people from that department complain that that time frame isn't complied with?

**An hon. member:** The time frame is five days.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** All right.

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Employees who are leaving have to be given a record of employment within a period of five days.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** Is that done?

**An hon. member:** Yes.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** So what's reported here in the news and concerns workers is not really a problem?

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** That won't be a problem for our department, but I can't confirm that for Revenue Canada.

[English]

She wants to know whether Revenue Canada is doing it within five days.

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** I can't answer that for you. But I would like to address that, because it's an interesting area.

Public Works has a program in the federal public service called iAccess. It gives us the ability to complete a record of employment. It does all the wonderful accounting for us once we plunk in the figures, and it goes directly to HRDC.

The problem is that not every department has it. Some departments that have it can't get it to work because of firewalls. So it's a wonderful tool, and if it were widespread and given to everybody to use, it would certainly make sure those went out on time.

[Translation]

**Ms. Meili Faille:** So the problem now is that not all the departments are as advanced.

**Ms. Diane Melançon:** That's correct. Not all the departments have the system that was developed. A number have to do the calculation manually before they can issue a record of employment to the employee.

**Ms. Meili Faille:** I imagine there are still problems with rotational and non-rotational services and with Foreign Affairs. I worked at the Department of Immigration at the time, and we had problems because we had to turn over interfaces with other departments—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Faille. We'll close with Mr. Kramp.

[English]

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and welcome back to our guests, regretfully.

From your previous appearances here, together with representation from the Public Works Commission, Madam Barrados, etc., I am deeply concerned with the statements that we're hearing today, not because I don't agree with them but because we have such an obvious difference in testimony given on behalf of the Public Works Commission, on behalf of Madam Barrados, and on behalf of the union.

This really is a serious problem. We hear in the evidence just given to Mr. Angus that we have people going two years without responses, whether to queries or whatever. This is not only unacceptable, it's intolerable.

We, as a government, cannot operate under such a standard. I'm deeply concerned, and I'm concerned that somebody is misleading this committee. I'll just put it gently: we have been told we don't have a problem; we have been told we do have a problem. So I think you can see the position this committee finds itself in.

I am not content, as a member of this committee, to see this go on in perpetuity, to see a long-standing problem carry on. This has to come to a head. I think this committee has a responsibility to bring this to a head ASAP. There are a lot of questions. I have just a ton of questions, some that would be supportive of various positions both pro and con, and I think others have many questions as well.

I was once an employer of well over a thousand people, and I recognize that it costs much more to train an individual than it does to retain one. It's much more cost-effective for everyone involved and much more productive. That should be almost a truism, but apparently it is not. This is just not acceptable.

On the other side, we don't seem to have enough information to make the comparisons we need. Are other provinces going through this with their public services? Are other countries with similar procedures, similar democracies, going through the same situation?

I don't think we have adequate bases for comparison. Is this problem isolated? Is this just a Canadian federal government problem, or does it exist beyond us? What are some of the solutions? Whether or not it exists beyond these doors, we have a responsibility to ensure that we do not carry on this way.

I brought up this question before in committee. We have institutions and private companies with hundreds of thousands of employees, like banks. Do they have the same situation? Why or why not? They might not have the complexity or the turnover. There is no direct comparison. I understand these realities, but there could be lessons both ways that we could learn.

I think this study and your appearance before this committee is absolutely valuable. It's treasured, and I think the committee should make it not only a part of its record but also a part of its direction. Madam Chair, to your credit, this has been your hobby-horse for quite a while, but we have talked at length about this issue without coming to a resolution.

I would like to see this committee recognize this as a serious priority. We should devote some time to it and come up with some recommendations. When we have an absolute contradiction, we have to hear back from some of our witnesses. We cannot have misleading statements, ignorant statements, or uninformed statements. The yin and yang aren't where they should be here.

• (1010)

That's not acceptable. I realize that I have not asked you a ton of questions, but I was here when you made representation to committee before, and it is disturbing to hear that the same problems persist without improvement.

I'll let my colleague finish out my time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Warkentin wants to ask a short question before we go to other business.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Ms. Ronan, regarding the comment you made about access to HRSDC, you said that your department has computer access to HRSDC that allows for providing separation slips. What other mechanism would be used? What other benefits are you able to access as a result of this connection?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** With HRSDC or with the iAccess program?

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I guess the iAccess that you were talking about.

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Actually, it's a very nice tool. It allows us to look at payroll registers electronically, against the hard copy. It allows us to provide employees with a copy of their stub if they lose

it. We've never been able to do this before. So it has some very user friendly aspects.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** That's the iAccess program?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Yes, iAccess.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Could anybody tell us approximately what percentage of the compensation advisers have access to this?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** I couldn't.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Would you say half? I'm asking because this is something we would have to bring forward as a recommendation. It's helpful for us to find out if this is massively beneficial to compensation advisers.

• (1015)

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Absolutely it is.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** We understand that the classification issue needs to be addressed and that we have to find out what the contradictions are and where they lie. But we are looking for other recommendations as well. Obviously, this iAccess is one of them. Is there anything else that you want to address before we let you go and move on to our other business? Are there other things that would be of help to other compensation advisers?

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** At this point, resources is our biggest issue.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** In the next couple of meetings we're going to be discussing resources in terms of manpower within the civil service. There's massive turnover across departments in every job, and we're going to try to get a handle on that.

**Mrs. Jill Ronan:** Our concern is that we cannot sustain the overtime we're doing. The retirees coming back are not going to want to stay. If that happens, your offices are going to be bombarded with more complaints.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Could anybody comment on the massive turnover within the civil service and how it has affected the compensation advisers' work?

**Ms. Patty Ducharme:** It increases the workload dramatically. Quite frankly, it's not just exodus. It's also people coming on as terms, people brought in as students, people who have different pay rules for administration.

If you're genuinely concerned about this, I think it would be helpful for the employer to do an exit interview when pay compensation advisers are leaving their jobs. This would provide you with concrete, accurate data, which we cannot now supply. We don't have access to those members when they're leaving. The employer should be doing exit interviews with those workers and asking them why they're leaving. This way, you'll get the answer.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** A statistic I've seen is 60% turnover in the civil service within a year. That affects the workload that would be put on compensation advisers. This is an issue that you have to address, but it's also an issue the federal government has to look at. We need to look at the broader picture and ask why the whole civil service is moving like it is. We see the problem when we consider the compensation advisers.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Warkentin.

As you can see, we're still very much committed to your issue. We will continue to debate it as we continue to debate the issue of employee turnover. We're going to keep your issue top of mind.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bourgeois, your speech will have to be very brief because we have something else on the agenda.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Yes, Madam Chair.

I would simply like to propose to you, and to my colleagues, that we see Ms. Boudrias and Ms. Jauvin again in this committee so that we can make judicious recommendations. I'm making that an official motion.

**The Chair:** All right.

[*English*]

All those in favour of bringing back Madame Jauvin and Madame Boudrias ?

It is unanimous.

We'll ask the clerk to have them come back. I'm going to take a brief two-minute break while our people exit so we can go on to the next order of business.

Thank you for your work.

●(1015) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

●(1020)

**The Chair:** I'm calling the meeting to order. We're going to deal with the first motion, which is the motion by Mr. Holland.

Go ahead, Mr. Holland.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Thank you, Chair.

I bring forward a motion, and I'll be brief. I'm looking for a single meeting to explore this issue, as there are a number of different concerns.

We're talking first about the light rail project. At the time there were ten separate projects that also had memorandums of understanding. Only this project was singled out, and it was done so during a municipal election. What is key here is that there was a confidentiality agreement between the government and Siemens with respect to this project. The now Minister of the Environment, the then President of the Treasury Board, leaked the contacts after obtaining a copy of the LRT contract between the City of Ottawa and Siemens PCL/Dufferin. He leaked the package to the media and misrepresented its contents. Clearly this had a major impact on the municipal election.

The concern is that the minister not only used his position to influence the outcome of a municipal election but misrepresented a contract and may have in fact violated the terms of a confidentiality agreement. So I think it's important that we examine those issues and that we find out exactly what happened and what role was played to influence the outcome of that election. That's the reason for having the motion before the committee today.

Madame Folco has a small amendment, just to focus the witness list a little bit, because it was a little general in the motion.

**The Chair:** I'll go to Mr. Moore first. Or do you want to hear the amendment first?

Madame Folco, let's have your amendment, please.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

The amendment I'm moving makes no change to the spirit of my colleague Mr. Holland's motion, but it suggests that a limited number of persons be called to testify, so that we can go quite quickly to the heart of the matter. I'm making no change to the first paragraph so I'll move immediately to the second, which reads as follows:

That this Committee hold one meeting, with a possibility of more should the committee deem it necessary, to hear witnesses including [...]

I would delete the six lines following the word "including" that form the rest of the paragraph. All the names appearing in that paragraph would be deleted and we would replace them with the following names: Mr. Wayne Wouters, Secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada; Ms. Christa Wessel, counsel at Siemens Canada; Mr. Kent Kirkpatrick, City Manager of the City of Ottawa; Mr. Rick O'Connor, counsel the City of Ottawa; and Mr. Réjean Chartrand, former Director of Economic Development and Strategic Projects with the City of Ottawa.

●(1025)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

On the amendment....

[*Translation*]

**Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC):** Pardon me, but who are the other individuals apart from Wayne Wouters, Kent Kirkpatrick and Réjean Chartrand?

[*English*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Christa Wessel, general legal counsel, Kent Kirkpatrick, Rick O'Connor, Réjean Chartrand. There are five.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. James Moore:** They take the place of Minister Baird, Mr. Poilievre and so on.

[*English*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Everybody. It takes over after the word

[*Translation*]

"including".

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Debate on the amendment.

Mr. Moore.

**Mr. James Moore:** First, I think this motion is clearly a fishing expedition, obviously. We know why this motion is coming up, obviously, and I don't think it is terribly helpful. First of all, it goes beyond the mandate of this actual committee when it was created a couple of years ago. That's very important. Parliamentary committees have their functions, their mandates, and their responsibilities, and this clearly goes beyond that.

I know, Mark, you've pushed this motion at the public accounts committee, right?

**Mr. Mark Holland:** I was told it should be here. The clerk told me this is the committee it belonged with, so I moved it to this committee before moving it there. I was just making sure it was at the right committee, James, and now I'm told we're at the right place.

**Mr. James Moore:** The Ethics Commissioner took a look at the whole issue of this light rail project and declined to investigate it because he said there is in fact no problem here whatsoever.

As long as there is the sentence in here, "with a possibility of more witnesses, should the committee deem it necessary".... I mean, it's very easy to bring people before a committee, essentially bureaucrats from the City of Ottawa and the federal government. I suspect the Liberals will push to have this committee meeting held in one of the Centre Block committee rooms with the cameras, because that's what this motion is about, getting in front of cameras.

**The Chair:** No one has approached me on that, at this point.

**Mr. James Moore:** Wait for it, wait for it.

This motion could very well preoccupy this committee. We're not going to sit here as a government and allow something when the Ethics Commissioner has said there's nothing wrong. It doesn't even warrant investigation. Nothing wrong happened here. To have a bunch of bureaucrats come before the committee so that people can grandstand and take shots at something, where there's clearly nothing wrong, and to let that hijack this committee....

With the possibility of more witnesses, should the committee deem it necessary, we will deem it necessary to bring anybody before the committee if required to undo the damage being done here. We've seen in this particular Parliament—it's my third term—that it's been getting out of hand, frankly, the going after people and their individual character based on little or no evidence. We have seen that.

• (1030)

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Coming from you, that's something else.

**Mr. James Moore:** Yes, coming from me, Raymonde, it actually is. I was a victim of it just before we went into the Christmas break. With no evidence, I almost had my character assassinated for absolutely nothing. So yes, I think I can speak on this a little bit, Raymonde.

This is unnecessary. We saw last week the attack on Dimitri Soudas. Stéphane Dion had to withdraw his criticisms because they were libellous outside the House of Commons. We saw Ruby Dhalla accusing the justice minister of a crime outside the House of Commons, and she had to apologize and retract. Last week we saw Dimitri Soudas getting attacked with no evidence whatsoever. It was on the front page of *The Globe and Mail*. It was dismissed by the media the very next day because it was a non-story. Now we're going to invite a bunch of people before the committee on an issue for which the Ethics Commissioner has already rendered judgment that there is nothing wrong.

I think this committee has functioned very well, Madam Chair. We've had a number of people before this committee who have opened our eyes to a number of different topics. We have a very full calendar here already. We've passed a number of motions already to

study a number of very important issues that are important to the public service, to the management of government, which is what this committee is about.

This committee isn't about what a former treasury secretary did or didn't do that the Ethics Commissioner said a year and a half ago there's no problem with. This committee is about overseeing the management and the operation of government. That's what this committee's mandate is. We already have a very full schedule.

If this is going to be the start of the downward spiral of parliamentary committees, as we go into an election campaign, where silly season comes now, then this is the beginning of it. And this is entirely unnecessary.

Madame Folco, I welcome you to your first meeting.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. James Moore:** I'm sorry that your contribution is this partisan, because it's not terribly helpful.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Well, I had a contribution just before.

**Mr. James Moore:** Yes.

I think this motion is partisan, unnecessary, fishing, and out of step with the spirit that this committee has developed and the good work that this committee has to do. Charlie Angus has a motion coming up in a minute that I think is an important one to look at.

I think this motion will clearly sidetrack the future business of the committee, because we're not going to put up any more with these fishing expeditions and character assassinations without evidence and where the Ethics Commissioner has already cleared everybody involved.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there debate by anybody else on the amendment?

Mr. Angus.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Thank you.

I've thought a lot about this motion, because I did feel it was a fishing expedition, and I'm uncomfortable about a fishing expedition. I've asked Mr. Holland if there is a smoking gun that warrants our committee's interest. He said we could look at it in one day.

I'm worried about it still being open-ended, so I would prefer that we put it in the motion that we meet for one day. If we decide afterwards that there's evidence, well, then, we meet afterwards if there's evidence.

I would be very uncomfortable about doing this in front of television cameras. I think it would be inappropriate. If we're going to do this, we have to have very clear definition. Either there's something there or there's not. If there is something there, then we will look at it, but I certainly am not comfortable bringing people in and putting television cameras on them. I think that would be inappropriate at this point, because we don't know what we're looking for.

Personally, I would support, if there is evidence, one day. Let's see, and if, at the end of that, we feel there is something, then I would consider moving on.

I'm asking for your direction on this, Madam Chair, for some very clear guidelines so that we're not opening up a hand grenade on something in the middle of this committee.

**The Chair:** Do you wish to amend the amendment?

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Yes, at the end of the day I'd like to amend the amendment and ask for one day of committee hearings. I certainly don't want it to be a subamendment. My support in advance is contingent on this not being in the main television chamber.

**The Chair:** We don't want to make a circus out of this.

So what would your subamendment say?

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** It would say that this committee hold one meeting to hear witnesses. Then I'd defer to them on the witness list, because at this point, since we're not bringing politicians before us, at least we can hear if people have credible cases. We'll give it one day, and if there's further...we'll take it from there.

**The Chair:** Is there debate on the subamendment?

Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** I don't want to be totally repetitive of the comments to my colleague, but I am concerned for two real reasons. I and a number of members of this committee have championed this to be an oversight committee, as was originally intended. As such, for the most part this committee remains relatively non-partisan—as best we can within the constraints of Parliament. I am really concerned that with this motion we're heading down a slippery slope, and once you start down that slippery slope, away you go.

My prediction right now before this committee is that if we start down this slope it will be a circus. It will be inescapable and will do great injustice to the purpose of this committee. It will do even more injustice to the number of issues that have come before us that we have yet to deal with.

A classic example is the deputation we had here today. They have appeared before this committee a number of times. We have not come up yet with a concrete proposal, evaluation, report, or sense of direction. We have a number of other similar issues that should not, in my humble opinion, be held hostage to political partisan games. Quite frankly, with all due respect to Mr. Holland—he has his role to play within the opposition—I really believe this is going over the bounds of trying to be constructive and an asset to this committee, and getting the results that are needed for the people we represent.

We have a responsibility, not just to ourselves and this committee but to all of the representatives who have come and given witness here. They've poured out their problems and situations to us and asked for our help, guidance, support, and whatever. What message does this send to them? Is it that we'd rather go off and play some political games instead of dealing with some of the problems that really matter to them?

•(1035)

**The Chair:** We're also debating the subamendment proposed by Mr. Angus that we meet for one day with no cameras. It would be an open session, but it would only be one meeting with five people. It's a subamendment on the amendment, so it adds that part.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** I'll go back to that point, and I mentioned the slippery slope. Once you take the genie out of the bottle and pull the

cap off this thing, the experience I have in Parliament, for the short time I've been here, three and a half to maybe four years, but maybe 30 years around this thing.... All of a sudden our main purpose and direction will be usurped for the wrong reasons. It will be a terrible reflection. It will open up a Pandora's box that will embarrass not only this committee but some members involved in the committee, particularly once we get into this.

There has already been a police investigation. It is done and closed as far as the particular elements of the people we are talking about inviting to this committee. That is a non-starter. Anything else where charges have been laid, these are matters that are before the court. We certainly cannot interview witnesses and ask for testimony that would be relative to comments they might have to make before a court of law.

So I really think we will put ourselves into a position of conflict. We're not going to be able to get solid resolved answers, because people either aren't going to be able to respond or won't want to play the game.

Madam Chair, I want to be on the record as saying, all politics aside, let's do our job with the responsible activities that have been put before this committee. Otherwise we might all just start bringing in spurious motions like this—and away we go. They will be on the next topic, and the next topic. Let's deal with serious issues before us that deserve answers.

**The Chair:** Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Could I get clarification as to where we are right now in terms of the motion as it will read if we include the amendment and subamendment as well. Could I hear what that is?

**The Chair:** Could you read the motion?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michel Marcotte):** If it is agreeable to Mr. Angus, instead of adding something on the subamendment we would take off what is already in the first motion. In English it would read:

That this committee look into whether the unprecedented decision taken by the former Treasury Board President during the 2006 municipal election to withhold \$200 million in federal funding for a light rail transit project in Ottawa constituted political interference in a municipal matter; That this committee hold one meeting to hear witnesses: Wayne Wouters, Secretary of the Treasury Board; Christa C. Wessel, General Legal Counsel, Siemens Canada Limited; Kent Kirkpatrick, City Manager, City of Ottawa; Rick O'Connor, City Solicitor, City of Ottawa; and Réjean Chartrand, former Director of Economic Development and Strategic Projects, City of Ottawa.

•(1040)

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Perhaps this might speed things along, Ms. Chair. I would be willing to consider as the mover of the motion that the subamendment is a friendly amendment without the need to vote on it. I accept that it's the intent of what the motion was. I have no problem with that change whatsoever.

**The Chair:** How about making sure whether we have to include in the motion that we not hold the meeting in a room with a television camera.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** You are the chair, and I'm not seeking that, Ms. Chair. It's your prerogative what room to choose. I'm not seeking it to be anything different from what you would normally do.

**The Chair:** It would be in one of these rooms that we usually have.



**Mr. Mark Holland:** I'm not seeking it to be anything different.

**The Chair:** You're saying this is a friendly amendment and you're willing to include that in your amendment.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Right, and now we're only dealing with Madame Folco's.

**The Chair:** You're in accordance with that. So we're fine. We can just deal with Madame Folco's amendment, which includes Mr. Angus' amendment.

Mr. Warkentin.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Just so that I get perfect clarification, the second paragraph basically reads that the committee hold one meeting to hear witnesses. Following that are the names of the witnesses that will be brought forward and basically the rest is the City of Ottawa or whoever.

**The Chair:** Mr. Moore.

I had Mr. Holland on the list.

**Mr. James Moore:** If Mark wants to go first, go ahead.

**The Chair:** Mark, did you want to say something?

**Mr. Mark Holland:** No, that's pretty much it. I don't want to get into all the details. I have legitimate concerns and I said I want to express that in a meeting. I think I've outlined some of those. I think going into greater detail will just protract the debate for a long time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Moore.

**Mr. James Moore:** Before this committee passes or votes on this motion and asks all these individuals to come before this committee, I want to ask Madame Folco why she wants Wayne Wouters to come before the committee.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** I'll ask my colleague, Mr. Holland, to answer for me.

**Mr. James Moore:** It's your motion.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Yes, but I'm new to the committee and I think he can explain why better than I and in infinite detail—I can do it in only a general way. So I'm asking my colleague to explain.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** The witnesses are there because there are two principal questions that have to be answered. One is, there was a confidentiality agreement that was entered into between the government and Siemens-PCL/Dufferin. Were the specific details of that contract violated? That's an important question.

Secondly, we know that the minister obtained a copy of the contract on the understanding that it was to remain confidential and then leaked those contents and may well have misrepresented those contents, and that misrepresentation was to the benefit of a particular mayoralty candidate and had a major influence in the municipal election. That's a very serious thing, obviously, if true.

What we're trying to ascertain with this witness list is whether that indeed is what happened. If it did, then that constitutes, obviously, a very serious breach. That's why the individuals are listed here, including the Secretary of the Treasury Board. We want to ask and understand what the Treasury Board understood were the provisions of the confidentiality agreement they entered into. What were they obliged to uphold, having entered into that agreement with Siemens?

**Mr. James Moore:** What would the committee gain by having Christa Wessel come before the committee?

**Mr. Mark Holland:** We would understand from the perspective of Siemens what their understanding was when they entered into this confidentiality agreement, their expectations of the government when it was agreed that this was not to be publicly disclosed, and how they felt when this contract was in their opinion misrepresented. Did they feel that the government acted in good faith? Did they feel that they were the casualty of the minister trying to get involved in a municipal campaign? Did that end up in a legitimate contract that should have moved forward—as the other nine did without interruption—being impacted?

I think it would be extremely important to hear from Siemens.

**Mr. James Moore:** Why do we want to have Kent Kirkpatrick come before the committee?

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Again, I think I've answered all of these. I think we have to—

**Mr. James Moore:** If we ask each of these people to come before the committee, it's going to be contentious.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Madam Chair, we can talk about this all day long.

This is the last one I will do. Certainly we'd also want to know the understanding of the City of Ottawa about the contract they entered into, whether or not they felt the minister misrepresented the terms of those contracts. That's why we would ask him and the other representatives from the city to be there.

• (1045)

**Mr. James Moore:** I have a question, though. Kent Kirkpatrick... I'm not up to the latest in city politics.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** He's the city manager.

**Mr. James Moore:** I know. Was Kent Kirkpatrick also the city manager prior to Larry O'Brien's term?

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Yes, he was.

**Mr. James Moore:** Okay.

Well, I continue to have concerns about this and the direction this is going. As I said, the Ethics Commissioner has clearly said this is an issue that didn't even warrant an investigation, that we don't need to look into this. I can tell you that if this turns into a gong show and we see the usual behaviour we've seen and people start getting attacked, this committee will get hijacked very quickly.

Madam Chair, I would remind you that we have already passed numerous motions to have Passport Canada come before this committee. That's an important one. We're heading into summer travel season and people are applying for their passports. Last summer all members of Parliament got a lot of correspondence from constituents who were frustrated.

We've asked Revenue Canada to come before the committee. We've also asked to look at the federal government's real estate plan again. We have the executive director of Heritage Canada coming before the committee. I think it was Madame Bourgeois, or maybe it was Madame Faille, who made the correct point that we need to understand the importance of heritage buildings in any kind of government procurement. We've already had that come before this committee. Also, we want Public Sector Integrity Canada to come before the committee, to discuss issues that are important there.

We also have a number of days blocked off to deal with the whole issue of the Public Appointments Commission and the entire issue of Linda Keen and Gary Lunn. We've seen that raised in the House of Commons in question period, and in the media. We've had that raised a number of times.

I think it's important that this committee's good work not get sidetracked by this. Madam Chair, I hope you would impress upon committee members and the clerk the importance....

We've already had votes in this committee on a number of motions. I have the list of motions here. I won't go through it. We also have BMO and RBC and those groups to come before the committee, who haven't quite confirmed yet. We want to have them.

We have to respect the democracy of this committee. We've taken a number of votes on a number of important issues. We have a lot of work to come before this committee. This is obviously a fishing expedition. We know why this is coming before the committee. There's no honest intent here, other than the immediate politics of it. This is purely a game.

We have a lot of good work to come before this committee. I would caution members that in voting for this motion a lot of good work that this committee has already committed to could very well be sidetracked. I don't think that's at all helpful.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Moore.

Mr. Warkentin, followed by Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Madam Chair, thank you very much.

From looking around the table and the indications from other committee members, I suspect this motion will go forward. If there are questions that need to be answered, let's have them answered.

Madam Chair, I'm wondering if you can provide us with some details. I think there are concerns, on both sides of the table, that nobody's good name gets dragged into the mud through these processes.

The Ethics Commissioner has already ruled on this. The OPP have made their determination on this. Anybody who has looked into this from the outside has made the determination that this is a closed case. But obviously we're going to have the opportunity to see some more people. I'm wondering if you or the clerk could provide us with details as to whether there's anything we should be aware of to ensure that people's good names aren't raked through the mud and whether there are provisions you're willing to undertake to ensure that doesn't happen, so as my colleagues have talked about, this committee doesn't turn into a three-ring circus.

**The Chair:** As the chair, I can do my best to try to keep people on topic, but there are times when people will say things I can't control.

I don't know if the clerk wants to wade in on this.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Essentially, if there are questions in terms of a contract having been.... Again, I'm not an expert on Ottawa politics, but my understanding is there may be some dispute between the City of Ottawa and Siemens Canada, the contractor, in terms of the contract and moving forward. Are there any legal provisions that need to be respected or considered as we move forward on this?

• (1050)

**The Chair:** I would think the City of Ottawa may tell us they can't respond to certain questions if it is under legal review, but I can't tell you that because I don't know. I am not that familiar with what's going on in Ottawa.

**Mr. James Moore:** And we do have the prerogative in the middle of the meeting to have that in camera?

**The Chair:** If that's the case, yes.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Is there something you are able to...?

**The Clerk:** There has been some discussion lately about the sub-judice aspect of things, and there is no fixed decision on that.

The usual provision would be to be careful, but some scholars would propose that the rule does not restrict members from getting into those matters with some caution. But there is no fixed answer as to how far one can go on that matter.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** If this committee does go forward with the decisions—and obviously it wouldn't be for some time—and if we do decide to go into this process, I wonder if the clerk could provide a briefing for those who aren't familiar with the details surrounding Ottawa and its decision to build or not build whatever they're building and also maybe a briefing regarding the legal disputes that might be ongoing.

**The Chair:** We'd have to ask our researcher to look into that. It would be more his responsibility to do the preliminary work to find out more of what's been going on with this particular issue and to brief us.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** And in collaboration with the House legal team, would we be able to get a clarification on the legal matters that Ottawa and Siemens may be involved in?

**The Chair:** We can always ask the House legal team to come forward if there are any issues, as we've done in the past.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** I don't even know. I just recall that at one point there was a threat of a lawsuit. I don't even know if anybody can—

**The Chair:** I have no idea myself whether there is a lawsuit now.

Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Daryl Kramp:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have two quick little points. Obviously, the public accounts-committee has already taken a look at this situation, and in their collective wisdom and to the credit of the purpose of their committee they do not wish to be an accessory to the degradation of their committee responsibilities and their committee purpose.

But what I'm really deeply concerned about is just what exactly happened in this committee a short while ago. Under the rule of parliamentary protection, Mr. Holland made a slanderous statement and has already made allegations of impropriety against a minister right here in this committee. This is a harbinger of where this committee is going to go with this issue if we allow unfettered political partisan games to rule this committee rather than looking after the serious governmental responsibilities we have.

Here we are just discussing the issue, and already the slander starts. I say to myself, if this is where this committee wishes to go with this issue, then I'm going to find it embarrassing, and I certainly expect it will be for many other committee members before we end up at the destination this little path is going to take us.

**The Chair:** Mr. Brown, you are the final speaker.

**Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC):** Thank you.

Mr. Holland mentioned at the beginning that when he brought this forward at the public accounts committee, it was suggested that wasn't the appropriate committee and that this was. I assume that was received in writing. If it was in the minutes of the public accounts committee I think it would be helpful if Mr. Holland could pass that on to us before we vote on this, because it does seem beyond the scope of this committee. If we're making that statement on behalf of the clerk of another committee, I'd like to see the clerk's statement to that effect.

**The Chair:** I'm told it was just a conversation with the clerk of the public accounts committee.

**Mr. Patrick Brown:** The challenge is that we're saying what the other clerk said. We're dictating what his conversation is, and there's no evidence of that.

**The Chair:** To be honest, the government operations committee has the jurisdiction to investigate any form of government operation. This committee has a very broad mandate. It really does.

**An hon. member:** It requires some discretion.

**The Chair:** Well, there can be some discretion.

I'm going to call the vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

•(1055)

**Mr. James Moore:** I thought we had to have debate on the main motion.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** As a point of order, Madam Chair, we already had debate. You allowed debate to be on much more than just the amendment. You allowed debate to be on the entire motion. I didn't make a point of order at the time because it was my understanding that the debate was occurring on the motion in general. As chair, you have the prerogative to say that we had a very expansive debate on this and it's time to call the question.

On that basis—

**The Chair:** To be honest, on a motion of this kind, as long as there are speakers who wish to speak, I have to recognize them. That's also in the rules.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** I know, but the question is whether or not that debate is taking place for the purposes of obstructing the

business of the committee, or whether that debate is legitimate. I didn't make a point of order because we'd just finished debating the entire motion, not just the amendment. I allowed that to go on without making a point of order, because I explicitly and implicitly understood that we were having the whole debate on the whole motion at one time.

Now we're having the same debate all over again, and I would put it to you that the only purpose of that debate is to protract the process, and that is not legitimate. Therefore, I would request that you utilize your prerogative to say that it's time to call the question.

**The Chair:** Mr. Moore wants to speak. We'll hear what he has to say because he has put his hand up and maybe he has some great new additions for us.

**Mr. James Moore:** Thank you.

That was nothing short of an attack, Mark.

I'm not going to belabour the point or prattle on, but I did want to again reassert the importance of this committee being a new committee in parliamentary history that does have a broad, but still relatively focused, mandate. It's broad in that it can touch activities of government but it's focused in the sense that we're supposed to be overseeing the processes by which decisions are made. What we're doing here for obvious political manoeuvrings is taking one particular individual case of a municipal contract—not a federal contract—and bringing that into the federal arena for the purposes of debate and exposure and attack and criticism and so on. That's what we're doing here.

I think this committee has worked very well. Madam Chair, you've done a very good job and this committee has seen a lot of issues come before it. We started off very rockily in this Parliament with the whole Gwyn Morgan issue. We've recovered a bit. We've regrouped. Our professionalism has re-established itself. We're talking about a lot of issues. I think we need to continue to keep that spirit going forward.

**The Chair:** I'm going to go to Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Kramp, do you have anything new to bring to the discussion?

You also know that I've been a very fair chair and I will continue to do that and try to control, so that there are no reputations that are sullied unduly. I really believe we have to be responsible and respectful, and I'm going to try to continue to do that as long as I'm chair of this committee.

Mr. Warkentin and Mr. Kramp.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Thank you very much.

Looking at the motion as it now reads, in the first paragraph we're talking directly about the former Treasury Board president. We're looking at an unprecedented decision. We're asking other people to comment on a decision that the minister made or didn't make. He isn't going to have the opportunity to discuss the matter. I'm wondering if we should just change it to “the decision by Treasury Board” or some other discussion. Really we're asking other people to comment on what he may or may not have been thinking. I'm not certain that really was the intent of the original motion.

Having said that, that's something the committee should maybe look at.

As you just talked about, Madam Chair, with regard to being fair, and obviously we all want this to be fair, before this particular meeting is held I wonder if there'd be an opportunity for us as a committee to speak with the in-house legal experts just to discuss—

**The Chair:** I'm certainly quite willing to ask the House legal experts to give us an opinion on this. I have no problem.

• (1100)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** It's an opportunity for us to ask what we should refrain from asking. Specifically, I'm thinking about a lawsuit that may currently be in process.

**The Chair:** We can make arrangements to have legal counsel from the House of Commons come before the committee at the next meeting to explain to us just exactly what the parameters might be on the legal side.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** It wouldn't even have to be the next committee meeting, but maybe just the committee meeting prior to when this happens.

**The Chair:** Point of order, Mr. Holland?

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Point of order.

We've had a very fulsome debate on this. We either have a vote now or we.... I heard a lot of concern about wasting the time of committee. I would ask that as the chair of the committee—particularly with all the expression of concern about wasting the time of the committee—that we have the vote. It's either now or never. I think we've had a very fulsome debate.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Well, if it's now or never, then never.

**Mr. Mark Holland:** Well, not now or never, but I mean for today.

**The Chair:** We'll go with one short statement. No? Then we'll go to the question.

(Motion as amended agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will ask legal counsel to come and give us an opinion whenever we can arrange that. Perhaps he or she could give us a written opinion as well. We'll look into that.

I thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned. See you on Thursday.

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