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## **Standing Committee on Public Accounts**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, March 8, 2016**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable Kevin Sorenson**



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•(0850)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC)):** All right.

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

I will reiterate my motion then. I would like to propose that the parliamentary secretary be permitted to remain in this meeting when we go in camera.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Shanahan.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Chair, on a point of order, I oppose both the principle and the specifics of the motion. In principle, again, and I've said this before, the government ran on a platform of strengthening committees and making them more independent. It spoke directly to at least not making parliamentary secretaries voting members, and it talked about strengthening that independence.

They're still there and so that ability to squeeze the throat from the PMO still exists through the parliamentary secretaries on the committees, so I'm opposed to that.

In the specific instance here, this is an oversight committee. The whole *raison d'être* of what we're going to hear from our briefers when we go in camera is about the absolute importance of being, as much as possible, non-partisan. Now, that's going against our grain. It's not easy, but that is the goal. We work best when we are being non-partisan.

We are an oversight committee. Why on earth do we need an umbilical cord between an oversight committee and the PMO? We're an oversight committee. There's no need for any direction from the PMO.

I make the case that it's the antithesis of what we want for a strong public accounts committee, which is that non-partisanship. It also goes against the promises the current government made to have more accountability to strengthen the independence of the committees. If you can't do it with public accounts, which is built-in non-partisan, how the hell are you ever going to reach that with the other committees that have that partisanship built into them?

I'm opposed to this in principle, because the government's not living up to the promises it made that in part gave it its majority government and its right to exercise power. I'm also specifically opposed since I have spent my entire federal public life on this committee and have tried—and often, I'll admit, failed—to be as

non-partisan as possible. So to structurally build in an exception that allows parliamentary secretaries to be somewhere they weren't allowed to be even under the Harper rules, to me is just unbelievable. For all those reasons, I'm opposed.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I don't know how much debate we really want to have on this. I have a number of people asking. It requires unanimous consent. I still have some on the speakers list. If you want to continue with this, we can certainly do it and we'll take time from our guests or from our questions later.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** I certainly do not want to take away from the valuable time that we will have with our witnesses, so I will keep it short. Just to reiterate, this is an educational meeting. It's important that we have someone with the resources of the parliamentary secretary here to listen and to partake in this briefing, and that is why I'm proposing that the parliamentary secretary stay.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** I have no problem with the presence of the parliamentary secretary for a briefing meeting providing information on how the committee works. I don't think we should waste any more time on this subject. We have witnesses here who've sacrificed their time to be with us and we should just get on with the meeting.

•(0855)

**Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.):** To reiterate Mr. Poilievre's and Madam Shanahan's point, this is an educational meeting. We had it precisely to help us proceed. I think it's pushing it really far to pretend that having the parliamentary secretary attend the meeting is a partisan gesture.

There has in no way been any demonstration that the parliamentary secretary is pulling strings as Mr. Christopherson has accused her of doing. Actually, I find it very partisan to be taking that point instead of admitting that this is an instruction for us to learn how to do our job properly. There's absolutely no reason why the parliamentary secretary shouldn't be here.

**The Chair:** This is an in camera meeting and that's why we have the motion.

**Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.):** I second the motion.

**The Chair:** We don't need a seconder. Thank you.

All right, are we ready for the motion?

(Motion negated)

**The Chair:** We'll ask Ms. Murray to leave.

We will go back in camera.

(Motion agreed to)

**Mr. David Christopherson:** It's nothing personal, Joyce.

**The Chair:** We have a motion to go back in camera from Mr. Christopherson.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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