



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 127**

**PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT**

Wednesday, September 18, 2024

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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry





## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Wednesday, September 18, 2024

• (1755)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order. The meeting is now in public. Please remember that.

I see Mr. Noormohamed's hand, and then Mr. Kurek's. Then, Mr. Jivani, was your hand up, or were you just pointing to somebody?

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Kurek, go ahead.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I believe, if I'm recalling—and of course we all just came back from the summer recess—that one still has the floor when moving from a meeting with a dilatory motion. It's my recollection of the rules, but I certainly look to the clerk to clarify that.

**The Chair:** I don't think so, but go ahead.

The bottom line is that you had the floor. Your motion was passed, so you're no longer discussing your motion, and so I think the floor is open.

Go ahead, Mr. Noormohamed.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I move the following motion.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I have a point of order.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** It's a motion for which I had given notice on May 7, 2024, and it reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of no less than—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Excuse me. I have a point of order.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** It is just to challenge the decision to cede the floor.

**The Chair:** All right. The chair is being challenged. I shall call a vote on those who agree with the challenge or those who agree with the chair.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Just to clarify, Madam Chair, if I vote no, it is to challenge. Just give us.... Let's make sure we're voting the correct way.

**The Chair:** If you vote with Mr. Kurek, who is challenging the chair, then you are agreeing with him. If you vote against Mr. Kurek, you are supporting the chair's decision.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Is voting no a vote to agree with the chair?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer):** The question is, shall the decision of the chair be sustained?

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I'm sorry, but you said, "Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?" Then that's a yes in support of the chair.

**The Chair:** It's a yes.

**The Clerk:** You vote yes if you agree to sustain the chair's decision. You vote no if you wish to overturn it.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Okay, so yes, I wish to sustain the decision of the chair—just so we're clear.

**The Clerk:** We are all on the same page.

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

**The Chair:** The chair's decision to not allow Mr. Kurek the floor and open up the meeting is not sustained, so we go ahead.

Mr. Kurek, you have the floor.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Mr. Kurek sought to challenge the chair, and that has happened. Under which Standing Order was that challenge made, and under which Standing Order specifically did Mr. Kurek seek to reference that in fact your ruling was inaccurate?

**The Chair:** The bottom line is that the chair ruled, and he disagreed and challenged the chair. It's straightforward.

Mr. Coteau, go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Can we get an update on exactly where we were during the last meeting, when he had the floor? What was the discussion then? It's many months ago.

**The Chair:** No. He had the floor when he decided the motion he put forward was to go in public. He won that motion. We're now in public, and he suggested that he still had the floor. I suggested that unless he had a new motion, his old motion had been voted on and carried, so it was open to anyone else putting their hand up. That was my decision.

Now, obviously, most of the committee disagreed with me and agreed with Mr. Kurek, so Mr. Kurek now has the floor.

• (1800)

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Does moving a motion and having it voted on allow you to keep your spot after the motion is dealt with?

**The Chair:** No, it does not allow you to keep your spot.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** But that's what he's suggesting.

**The Chair:** Well, I don't know. We had a vote, Mr. Coteau, and I have to bow to the will of the committee. That's what I'm here to do.

If the committee—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Just to be clear, Chair, it suggests that, because he called for a motion to go public, he had the floor at that point even though that motion was voted on.

**The Chair:** That's what Mr. Kurek is suggesting. I am disagreeing with him on this issue, yet the committee agreed with him and not with the chair's ruling. There we go. The decision has been made. The vote has been taken.

Mr. Kurek, you have the floor.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will endeavour to be very quick.

With the revelation that the CBC awarded \$18.4 million in bonuses last year but still cut hundreds of jobs across that organization, to learn in the last number of months that \$3.3 million went to just 45 executives is astounding. To put that in perspective, that would be \$73,000 in bonuses alone for each executive.

Therefore, Madam Chair, I would hope that I find support and that we can dispose of this quickly—this egregious abuse of tax dollars—to get answers, specifically when it comes to the CEO of CBC, Ms. Catherine Tait. In her previous testimony before this committee, she had made overtures and commitments that certainly she had no intention of following through on.

Madam Chair, as I mentioned, I hope this can be disposed of quickly and that there would be support from all parties to get to the bottom of this.

I would move:

Given that,

The CBC paid out \$18.4 million in bonuses this year, including \$3.3 million to top executives, after eliminating hundreds of jobs,

The committee immediately call the President and CEO of the CBC, Ms. Catherine Tait, to testify for no less than three hours, within 14 calendar days of the adoption of this motion, and

the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Pascale St-Onge, to testify for no less than three hours, within 14 calendar days of the adoption of this motion, and that these two witnesses appear separately.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have the motion. You heard it.

We have Mr. Waugh and then Mr. Beaulieu.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** I'll be very quick.

I certainly agree with this motion. We've had Ms. Tait several times now to the heritage committee trying to explain bonuses or performance bonuses or whatever she calls it.

I think when this news broke in late June or early July, Canadians were taken aback. They were surprised at the \$18.4 million in bonuses last year to this year. We still don't know her bonus situation, Chair. She didn't receive the bonus, we understand, from 2022, I believe. She did not say in committee, when she did come, that she received her bonus.

Now we know that Ms. Tait is leaving the CBC. Her intention is to retire this coming January, so I think it's very important that the committee hear from Ms. Tait on the direction that the CBC is going and the \$18.4 million in bonuses that were handed out.

The Canadian Taxpayers Association, or whoever it was, exposed this in late June. While she was here, I do give her credit for saying it was the board, but it was the Privy Council or the minister who approved this. I too would like to hear from Ms. Tait at the heritage committee.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Beaulieu is next.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** I'd like to make an amendment to the motion to delete the part about the minister. We think it's appropriate to invite Ms. Tait to come and explain herself for three hours. However, considering that the minister is in the process of giving her a new mandate to change things, we feel it's less relevant for her to come and testify.

• (1805)

[English]

**The Chair:** Please read your amendment. You want to remove the last piece—the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** We propose removing the following paragraph: “and the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Pascale Saint-Onge, to testify for no less than 3 hours each, within 14 calendar days of the adoption of this motion, and that these two witnesses appear separately.”

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now have an amendment on the floor. We're going to deal with the amendment.

Regarding the amendment, Mr. Noormohamed, go ahead.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

The substance of the motion in respect of calling Ms. Tait is important. I think it's important for us to have this thoughtful discussion and debate. I think it's important for us to be able to ask questions of her, given that this has been a topic of a lot of conversation in this committee.

I would agree with Mr. Beaulieu's point of view on this, given the importance of separating the role of the minister in all of this. I think the importance really is to have Madam Tait here to have that conversation and to not muddy the waters with anything else.

We would be very much in support of Mr. Beaulieu's amendment. If that amendment does pass, we would be supportive of the motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there any further discussion on the amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Waugh.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Yes, I will support the amendment. At the same time, I want people around the table to realize that it was the Privy Council and the Minister of Canadian Heritage who signed off on the bonuses. That's the only statement I'm going to make right now.

**The Chair:** Are you supporting the amendment?

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I'll support the amendment, but I also want everyone around the table to realize who signed off on it.

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

Ms. Ashton is next.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** We will support the amendment, although I will say that clearly there are questions for the Minister of Heritage that I hope we might get to at another time.

Having said that, I think the broader motion is critical. We know that Ms. Tait and the CBC board cannot continue in the way they have. Canadians, I think, are not just disappointed but angered by the fact that \$18.4 million in bonuses was given out to CBC executives, with \$3.3 million going to top executives while job cuts were being threatened and local journalism was being lost, including in regions like mine, which has no CBC presence.

This is wrong, but for some reason Ms. Tait thinks that everything's okay. She doesn't seem to understand that her actions threaten the legitimacy of the CBC, an institution that we should all be proud of.

While CBC employees struggle with job insecurity, with lower wages than they deserve, with a culture of fear and reprisal when they speak out, a small group of CBC executives has been allowed

to get rich off the backs of Canadians. We believe that this is not okay.

I also want to indicate that Liberal mismanagement is at play here. We know that the threat to cut funding to the CBC was also an instigator, or put into motion, a number of things that were deeply problematic. We also know that deep cuts made during the time of Stephen Harper set the CBC back in irreparable ways in some cases.

However, I would say that the Liberals may pat themselves on the back for being...not conservative, but imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. I wish we could hear from all government representatives who have a hand in how the CBC is funded and had a hand in approving these bonuses.

Having said that, I think it is critical to move forward with hearing from Ms. Tait, who did not answer this question as it should have been answered when she was here. It's very clear to me that Canadians deserve answers from the CBC, from the head of the CBC, right away. I believe that we, as the heritage committee, need to make sure that this happens as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Coteau is next.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would agree with the amendment. I think it's important to have the CBC CEO and president join us.

In the conversation we had with Ms. Tait a few months ago, there were some very specific questions about the willingness to change the bonus structure at the CBC, and it seemed like there was a willingness to explore that. I would like to know, personally, if that has been a discussion item within their executive and within their board.

Also, I remember saying when she was here that the way in which Canadians perceive this is not aligned with where Canadians are, so I think it would be a great idea to request that she join this committee to answer some further questions.

I do believe that the amendment is a good amendment in that we can focus on the CBC specifically, on the president and the CEO's position on these issues.

● (1810)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Noormohamed is next.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to touch on something that Ms. Ashton said. In all of these discussions, one thing that Canadians said loud and clear is that they support a strong public broadcaster and that they believe fundamentally in the idea of a public broadcaster that is supported and does a good job of telling the stories of Canada, of Canadians. For rural communities, indigenous communities and so many who have no other access, the CBC is a critical and essential part of this country, an institution of this country.

A lot of research and polling gets done. Angus Reid did a study, and they said something that's very interesting. They said that defunding the CBC is considered to be "bad" by the vast majority of Canadians. If we want to have a thoughtful discussion in this committee about the CBC, about building a strong CBC and about ensuring that there is a strong public broadcaster—and I think we should—then we do need to ask difficult questions of the executive. We need to ask difficult questions so that CBC/Radio-Canada is not just present in this country but it is a strong, vibrant force for telling the story of Canada.

In a world where corporate interests get to decide what we hear and what we don't, having a non-profit public broadcaster in this country is a critical part of who we are in this country, whether it is telling the stories of rural Quebec, making sure that we have strong francophone content at Radio-Canada for the francophone communities in my riding of Vancouver Granville or telling stories about the north.

[Translation]

It's important that everyone have access to content in French.

[English]

That is the role the CBC needs to be playing.

I think our opportunity here in this committee is to have these conversations with the executive and to get beyond the idea of "Let's do everything we can to tear the institution down." We hear a lot about defunding the CBC and how it is—as the Leader of the Opposition called it—a "billion-dollar propaganda arm", but really, let's get into the substance of what I think many of us really care about, which is having a strong institution that Canadians can look to and can rely upon and that is, quite frankly, a reflection of who we are as a country.

These discussions with Ms. Tait can be tough. We should be having tough conversations, but I think we should be looking at how we improve institutions and build institutions in this country. I think we're all, hopefully—well, many of us—committed to that work. I challenge all of us, regardless of our political stripe, to make sure that the conversations we have on this topic get us to a good place in the interest of all Canadians, regardless of where in this country they live.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Seeing no other hands up to speak to the amendment, we're going to vote on the amendment.

Mr. Kurek, is it on the amendment? No.

We're voting on Mr. Beaulieu's amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Chair:** Now we move to voting on the motion as amended, and I will read the motion as amended.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I'm sorry, but I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Now that the amendment has passed, should we not see if there's debate on the main motion as amended? I think Madame Lattanzio—

• (1815)

**The Chair:** We could if you wish to. I think everybody seemed to be in agreement, but there you go. Go ahead and debate the actual motion if you would like to.

I will read it. The motion on the floor, as amended, is,

Given that,

The CBC paid out \$18.4 million in bonuses this year, including \$3.3 million to top executives, after eliminating hundreds of jobs,

The committee immediately call the President and CEO of the CBC, Ms. Catherine Tait, to testify for no less than three hours, within 14 calendar days of the adoption of this motion.

This is what is on the floor now.

Now, is somebody's hand up?

Yes. Go ahead, Ms. Lattanzio.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

We're suggesting to testify for no less than three hours each. I was just wondering if my colleague is suggesting that we do this in two sessions, one session or one extended session. How are we going to do this in three hours?

**The Chair:** This may depend on whether we have resources to go for three hours or not, but it's a question that perhaps Mr. Kurek can answer.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** It's a question for clarification.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

To the member, when this has been the case in other committees I've been at, I know that for the clerk and the folks who make these meetings happen, three-hour meetings are not uncommon. I'm on the Canada-China committee. We meet for three hours on a regular basis, and I have no doubt that the administration folks here, who do the good work that they do, can get that sorted out.

**The Chair:** Are you wishing for three straight hours?

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** That's right.

**The Chair:** All right.

Of course, the clerk will inquire about whether we have resources to do that, because we need to have resources, interpreters, a room, etc. The clerk is instructed to find that out.

Does that answer your question, Ms. Lattanzio?

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** It does.

Where it says “to testify for no less than three hours”, could it be a total of three hours so that we can ensure that it gets done in a time slot of three hours, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I think it's functionally the same thing, but yes, I think that would be certainly the spirit of the motion, for sure.

**The Chair:** Yes.

Is that it? Are there any other hands up? Is there no more discussion?

Go ahead, Kevin.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Madam Chair, Ms. Tait knows the procedures of the House of Commons, and I do believe that she would agree to come for the three hours. It's not two hours and 51 minutes. She knows that when we say “up to”, it is three hours.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Noormohamed, go ahead.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I'm sorry. Ms. Gainey was first.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Anna. Was your hand up? I didn't see it.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anna Gainey (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.):** Would it be possible to have the new motion in writing in both official languages so that we can read it?

[English]

**The Chair:** Well, you have the old motion, the original motion.

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** I have the old one.

**The Chair:** The original motion just removes the third paragraph and the “and” at the end of the second paragraph.

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** It's the whole sentence after “and”.

**The Chair:** Yes. I read it earlier. I can read it again.

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** I know. I didn't capture what had been....

**The Chair:** It's “The CBC paid out....” Do you want me to read it again?

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** Where does it end now?

**The Chair:** It ends at “of the adoption of this motion”. There's a period there.

**Ms. Anna Gainey:** It's a period, and the rest is gone.

**The Chair:** Yes. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Coteau.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I'd like to move an amendment that instead of three hours, we make it two hours so that it fits into one meeting.

**The Chair:** We have an amendment on the floor.

Is there discussion or debate on the amendment?

Go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** In acknowledging the clock, Madam Chair, as you know, we have 12 minutes. I think what is becoming increasingly clear is that according to what the Liberals have suggested, they're in support of the motion but seem to be doing everything they can to delay actually getting to a vote.

Three hours is reasonable. Ms. Tait has been to committee before. She has refused to answer questions before. I think three hours is very reasonable. I won't support lessening it to two.

However, what is becoming abundantly clear is that the Liberals simply don't seem to want to vote. I know that there are other motions that are important and that we would sure like to deal with in committee business. Unfortunately, intentions are becoming clear.

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

I would like to point out that I think it's always a dangerous road we go down when we presume to know what people are thinking.

Go ahead, Mr. Noormohamed.

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was just going to point out to Mr. Kurek.... The hope was that now that we have new members, we'd get to a place where we actually trust each other and assume the best intentions in each other.

To my mind, I'm not trying to delay a vote on this. I think it would be very important for us. I wanted to speak to the notion of the two hours and then getting to a vote and having a resolution before we all end today. That's my commitment to this group. I mean, I can only speak for our side.

That's the intention, but I will say this: Historically, when we've had witnesses, we've had them for two hours. We've run them through the mill for two hours. They have done what they need to do in two hours.

There's not a question, I don't think. We should be able to get to everything that we need to get to—

● (1820)

**The Chair:** Are you speaking in favour of the amendment?

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** Yes, I'm speaking in favour of the amendment.

I mean, we reserve the right as a committee to call her back, as we have done before. My suggestion would be that given the resources for two hours, given we know that we have questions to ask her.... You will all recall that the last time we were here, all of us asked her some pretty tough and difficult questions, as you know. It was a fairly non-partisan effort or all-party effort at trying to get answers.

I would support that amendment, and if there are no other comments on it, let's get it to a vote.

**The Chair:** Is there any more discussion on the amendment of two hours? There's no discussion, so I will ask the clerk to go to the vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** We are going to two hours. That's the amendment. It's now amended to "no less than two hours each".

Now we're going to go to the motion as amended. Is there any discussion on the motion as amended? I see no hands up, so I'm going to call the vote. We have five minutes left on the clock. Let's do that, because I'm told we do not have resources to carry on further.

Go ahead, Clerk. Please get the motion moving.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** I would like to congratulate this committee. On the very first meeting, we agreed on a motion. Thank you very much, guys.

Did you have your hand up, Mr. Noormohamed?

**Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed:** I did, but if you're going to adjourn, then I won't bother you.

**The Chair:** Seeing that we only have four more minutes on the clock, I will move that we adjourn this meeting.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Madame Chair...?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Niki.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Seeing that we have some extra time, before we adjourn—

**The Chair:** Did you have your hand up?

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Yes, I just put my hand up.

**The Chair:** I had called the meeting adjourned, so unless you want me to have a vote on the adjournment of the meeting with no debate, I can't entertain your motion, because the meeting was—

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I thought it was when you hit the gavel.

**A voice:** Call a vote.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry about that, Niki. Stick your hand up in the air and I'll see it. Then I can mention you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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