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• (1130)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 90 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, also known as the mighty OGGO. If you are watching at home on CPAC, I hope you will like and subscribe and give us a raving five-star review.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), the committee is meeting to resume consideration of a request for contracts between the federal government and electric vehicle battery manufacturing companies.

I will remind everyone to please not put your earpieces next to the microphone as doing so causes feedback and potential injury.

The meeting was adjourned yesterday. We were debating an amendment moved by Mr. Sousa. We are resuming debate on the amendment by Mr. Sousa.

I am starting a speaking list. I see Mr. Masse, Mr. Jowhari, Mr. Sousa, Mr. Kusmierczyk and Mr. Genuis. We will go from there.

We have two hours.

Right now, Mr. Masse, the floor is yours.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for a couple of minutes of grace there. The House had some activity on Bill C-27, so I was just getting a quick briefing on that. Thank you for a couple of extra minutes to get here. I appreciate it.

I want to respond to something Mr. Jowhari said. He is actually a friend, so when he made that joke about not listening, other members should not be offended. He did that yesterday. It was related to a filibuster that I was doing at the time. The Liberals were trying to reduce my time at the industry committee, so I spoke for over two and a half hours, I think it was, on the bridge in Windsor.

Mr. Jowhari did actually listen when I'm not sure sometimes whether others did or not. It was a kind pun that he was making yesterday, not a negative thing in any respect. He's always reminded me that I've briefed him well on the border between Windsor and Detroit.

I do appreciate that, but he also asked about this issue affecting my riding, and this is one of the reasons for the motion as it is. It is important for me to clarify that, in many ways, it restricts my capa-

bility to do my job in terms of the interest that I have in the sector and also these investments, and I will say that there are investments. There are a lot of questions out there about the number of jobs that are going to be created. There are also a lot of questions about how they will play out in the community. The lack of planning that's been done is scary, quite frankly.

A lot of people at this table will understand the shortage of housing across Canada that we now have to deal with, and there has been very little federal or provincial support provided to the municipality or the citizens as to where some of these workers will come from and whether they are going to be permanent or temporary or maybe cycled in and out. There has been engagement with the private sector to some degree, and there have been city resources spent for that, but it's one thing that's going to create angst and anxiety and it is something we need to get out there in public to continue to make sure the numbers are correct for proper social planning.

Maybe with these opportunities, if we are going to have to live with any possible contracts in whatever way they are going to be written, there will also be a way of making sure that, when these housing elements are done and the workers are gone, the housing can maybe be turned into social housing. There is work that can be done in that vein, which is important to maybe cover some of the concerns that are being expressed about the amount of capital investment that's taking place and the fact that we are going to have to have some workers come in regardless, because the contracts are signed.

These are some of the reasons why I think shedding light on this issue is tremendously important. I also want to have confidence that proper training is going to be provided. We've had all this time between then and now to work on getting more training done, and we haven't seen that take place. However, perhaps with more light on this there can be training opportunities for the future, whether they are for the plant in Windsor, which is coming online first, or perhaps for some of the other communities, which might send some of their members to our area temporarily or have some of the Windsor members go to different places to actually contribute and lessen the burden on foreign workers and their necessity in the future.

We don't have any of those things in place right now, and we don't know the answers to those important questions. That's one of the reasons I can't agree with the amendment.

I come from an auto family and I know that it is critically important that the jobs be worth it, but we still don't have a national auto strategy. That is something I have been after for a long time. We have one-off deals that leave us vulnerable to these situations, because we end up doing Hail Mary passes. For those who aren't familiar with the football jargon, this refers to the last play of the half or the quarter, in which you throw the ball as far as you can and hope that somebody catches it and you can win or tie the game. That's kind of our approach to some of these—

• (1135)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brian Masse: That's kind of our approach to some of these—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Masse. We have a point of order. I think I know what it's going to be.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I feel obliged to point out that the origin of the phrase “Hail Mary” is not just sports.

Thanks.

The Chair: As a fourth degree Knight of Columbus, I appreciate your intervention, Mr. Genuis.

I certainly know what Mr. Masse was referring to.

Go ahead, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: Fair enough. I welcome the intervention to set the record straight.

Going back to the training elements of this, I look at what we have in front of us now as an opportunity to try to improve what's going to take place in the subsequent investments.

I won't take up too much more time, but I do want to impress upon you how important it is to me and to Mr. Jowhari. I have been on the picket lines. I don't know if many people here have ever been. There are so many times that I've been on the picket lines, whether it was for the Windsor assembly plant or for the tier twos and threes, the feeder-tier plants, where they have fewer rights and less support, like at Local 195, with Emile Nabbout and others. They do auto supply support. For those workers at a tier one plant, where my brother works, they often are left a little farther behind than the assembly plant. Everything matters. Every dollar matters. Fighting for the benefits, the safety of the plants....

I just came from a discussion in the halls of Parliament here. We were discussing the environmental conditions. My community has some of the highest cancer rates in the country. We have significant environmental degradation related to the work that built the manufacturing centre for this country and for the automotive sector. That's a legacy cost that we have. That's in our water. It's in our land. I was on council when we did the first brownfield project. A contaminated former Chrysler truck assembly plant is now a shopping mall, but it took massive public incentives to do that, to recover it.

This touches us in every way. As the auto sector has diminished—and this is important for these jobs in Windsor—so has our support for the United Way, because people don't have the same

amount of fiscal capacity they had before. Millions of dollars annually have been lost from the not-for-profit sector and other charitable organizations as we've witnessed plant modernization, more use of machinery, less use of human capital and labour, and fewer jobs—and those were hard-fought collective agreements won by the unions.

By the way, it's important to note that, for the government's response in terms of the feds and the provinces, this comes on the backs of the negotiated agreements of Unifor to get investment into this country, the same as with the other ones that have been done in the past. This, to me, is very important with regard to not only the personal aspect but also a professional one. I also want to mention the community aspect. Every opportunity where we can increase the employment capacity of Canadians to work on these elements, in these places, through these deals—the more we can shift that—is worth it. If it's one job.... That was made fun of when I first raised it and that's okay. I can live with that. If it's hundreds or thousands of jobs later on and training, even better, but my job is to come here to fight for jobs. As things currently stand, I have a lot of concerns.

I'll conclude by saying that I'm glad my colleague raised this. Again, I'm happy to give him some more briefing on the Ambassador Bridge and how they now want to bring toxic materials and hazardous waste, which is actually going to affect the auto industry as well.... We're fighting that. I'm giving a briefing to the minister today on that. I can do that outside the halls here so that we don't have to drag everybody else into the conversation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Masse.

As you are aware, I have a son at University of Windsor. I appreciate your comments about the housing there.

I have Mr. Jowhari, I think, and then I have Mr. Sousa.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you.

I'd like to, once again, thank my colleague MP Masse for his kind words. Indeed, I learned a lot. INDU was one of the very first committees I joined. I definitely learned from someone who has been there a long time. I really appreciate it.

Where did we end up yesterday? We were talking about the fact that we are a willing partner and that we remain a willing partner, because we think it's a success story. We were talking about the fact that we are being extremely transparent, but we are balancing that transparency with making sure we mitigate the risk of unintended consequences as a result of full disclosure. The option on the table—and I strongly recommend we look at it, consider it and approve it—is for us to go through a staged process.

Stage one is having unredacted contracts in front of all of us for a whole week. I'm willing to sit here for longer than a week. I'm talking on my behalf. I'm willing to forgo...and be here right after the House rises for Christmas in order to look at these, because I think it's a success story and we are accountable to stakeholders. However, to mitigate the risk of unintended consequences that would result from full disclosure, we are saying that we'll ask the company to redact a copy and that this redaction could be made public.

We also talked about making sure we go through the integrity of the process. We talked about the various stakeholders we are accountable to. We talked about the fact—I'll reiterate it—that the hiring plan submitted to the Government of Canada during the process of incentive negotiation clearly states who we're hiring, for how long we're hiring them, how we're housing them, etc. I wanted to raise a point last night... I've been reflecting on this since last night: What's the real reason we are trying to do this and we are not accepting that very balanced approach, which allows us to mitigate the risk.

Before I come to that, I want to go back to MP Masse.

MP Masse said that he believes there was a lack of planning. I'd like to submit that I am led to believe, at least based on what I'm reading, and I'm hoping that, once we have an opportunity to look at these—unredacted, in committee, in camera, with the clerk present—we'll see that a lot of planning has gone on. At the very least I can quote this fact about the planning, which I have been quoting since then. I will read it from a briefing that was prepared, at least, for me. It says, LG Energy Solution has confirmed to Seoul investor officers that they still intend to hire 2,500 Canadians, have hired 130 since March and continue to hire as per their hiring plan submitted to the Government of Canada during the process of the incentive negotiation. This tells me that, at least on the labour side, there's definitely a plan.

Last night, my colleague spent a lot of time talking about IP. He talked about the training report. Once again, it is clearly stated that these are temporary, special skill.... They're coming to Canada. They're crossing the border back and forth, between Canada and the U.S., to implement as well as train. Once again, my colleague MP Masse brought up proper training. I don't think that's something that will get redacted, whether it's unredacted or the company redacts it. It's a success story. Nobody wants to hide the fact that we are bringing, under the free trade agreement we have with Korea...as well as the genesis of the contract.

Also, look at the unions. Unions have already been a part of this. They've looked at it. I'm sure the heads of the unions have been in touch with you. Around proper training, at least, it's quite clear why these resources are coming. Regardless of whether we look at it in

public or in camera, training is already part of it and it's being discussed.

• (1145)

You also talked about housing. That's great. As you know, since August, we have been going around and making announcements in various cities. We have been working with all provinces and municipalities. I am proud to say that in Richmond Hill on Monday—I was with Mr. Fraser—we made an announcement of \$31.2 million of housing accelerator funding. That funding is also available to the City of Windsor.

Just as MP McCauley said, my daughter is also a graduate of Windsor's dual JD, and yes, housing was a big issue. I'm glad this might be an opportunity for us to be able to make recommendations. The recommendation that you're bringing is a great recommendation. I don't think that's going to be something that's going to get redacted, which we are so worried about. If you're openly and publicly talking about it, that's great.

When we talk about a lack of planning, I think there is a plan, at least on the labour side. I believe there is a plan on the implementation of these technologies. We are onboarding 130 people to be able to do this. We are already issuing visas under the free trade agreement for these experts to come to Canada. As far as proper training goes, it naturally fits into the fact that these special resources and skills are coming here. Housing is a great cost to them, but it's open for us to discuss it.

Now, MP Masse also talked about a national auto strategy. I think that's a great idea.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order. The bells are ringing.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On the point of order, I thought Mr. Badawey was going to point out how irrelevant and repetitive his colleague's comments were.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: With all due respect, I don't think it's irrelevant. My colleague, MP Brian Masse, brought up all of those points—

The Chair: Let me address the point of order, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: I'm addressing all of these points, regardless of whether—

The Chair: Mr. Jowhari, there was a point of order.

We have 28 minutes. Can we seek unanimous consent to go for 20 minutes, and then we'll break 10 minutes before the vote?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): No.

The Chair: That's sad.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Before we go, Chair. I'm sorry. I'm deaf on this side. That's why I wear this. I just wanted to let you know that I wasn't being disrespectful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Folks, we are suspended until after the vote.

• (1145) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1230)

The Chair: We have a hard stop at 1:30. We have two votes coming up, which will eat up all the time, so I am going to adjourn.

Colleagues, thanks for your patience today.

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