



STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSE SERVICES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSE SERVICES

Hon. Randy Weekes, Chair
Biggar-Sask Valley

Ms. Nicole Sarauer, Deputy Chair
Regina Douglas Park

Hon. Lori Carr
Estevan

Ms. Lisa Lambert
Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood

Mr. Matt Love
Saskatoon Eastview

Hon. Paul Merriman
Saskatoon Silverspring-Sutherland

Ms. Vicki Mowat
Saskatoon Fairview

Mr. Greg Ottenbreit
Yorkton

[The committee met at 10:59.]

The Chair: — I'd like to welcome the Standing Committee on House Services. I would like to introduce and announce all the members in attendance today and any substitutions. My name is Randy Weekes. I'm the Chair. With us today is Ms. Nicole Sarauer, Deputy Chair. Chitting in for Lori Carr is the Hon. Jim Reiter. Chitting in for the Hon. Jeremy Harrison is the Hon. Paul Merriman, and chitting in for Matt Love is Ms. Meara Conway. In attendance also is Ms. Vicki Mowat. And chitting in for Greg Ottenbreit is Mr. Daryl Harrison; and in attendance, Ms. Lisa Lambert.

We now consider changes to membership on standing committees pursuant to rule 139(4)(a). I recognize Mr. Merriman.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move the following motion:

That the name of the Hon. Paul Merriman be substituted for the name of Hon. Jeremy Harrison on the Standing Committee on House Services.

I so move.

The Chair: — The motion by Mr. Merriman is:

That the name of the Hon. Paul Merriman be substituted for the name of the Hon. Jeremy Harrison on the Standing Committee on House Services.

He so moves. All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Any opposed? None. Carried. I recognize Mr. Merriman.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move the following motion:

That the name of Hon. Paul Merriman be substituted for the name of Hon. Jeremy Harrison on the Standing Committee on Private Bills.

I so move.

The Chair: — The member has moved:

That the name of Hon. Paul Merriman be substituted for the name of the Hon. Jeremy Harrison on the Standing Committee on Private Bills.

All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Any opposed? Carried. I recognize Mr. Merriman.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move the

following motion:

That the name of Hon. Paul Merriman be substituted for the name of Hon. Jeremy Harrison on the Standing Committee on Privileges.

The Chair: — The motion reads:

That the name of the Hon. Paul Merriman be substituted for the name of the Hon. Jeremy Harrison on the Standing Committee on Privileges.

All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Any opposed? Carried.

We will now consider changes to the steering committee of the Standing Committee on House Services. I recognize Mr. Merriman.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move the following motion:

That a steering committee be appointed to establish an agenda and priority of business of subsequent meetings and that the membership be comprised of Mr. Speaker, Hon. Paul Merriman, and Nicole Sarauer; and further,

That the steering committee shall meet from time to time to direct the committee at the call of the Chair, or the presence of the majority of the members of the steering committee is necessary to constitute a meeting, and that substitution forms for the membership of the Standing Committee on House Services be permitted on the steering committee.

I so move.

The Chair: — The motion reads:

That a steering committee be appointed to establish an agenda and priority of business for subsequent meetings and that the membership be comprised of Mr. Speaker and Hon. Paul Merriman and Ms. Nicole Sarauer; and further,

That the steering committee shall meet from time to time as directed by the committee or at the call of the Chair, that the presence of the majority of the members of the steering committee is necessary to constitute a meeting, and that substitutions from the membership of the Standing Committee on House Services be permitted on the steering committee.

All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Consideration of committee report. Committee members, before you there is a draft copy of the 16th report. I would like to ask a member to move the following motion:

That the 16th report of the Standing Committee on House Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

Mr. Merriman.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move the following motion:

That the 16th report of the Standing Committee on House Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

I so move.

The Chair: — The motion reads:

That the 16th report of the Standing Committee on House Services be adopted and presented to the Assembly.

All in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. We will move on to the consideration of correspondence dated June 11th, 2024 from committee member Ms. Vicki Mowat. I will now recuse myself from the Chair and ask the Deputy Chair to take over.

The Deputy Chair: — All right. Thank you. As has been mentioned, we will now consider the correspondence dated June 11th, 2024 from committee member Ms. Vicki Mowat. I recognize Ms. Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Madam Chair. We're here today to deal with a very important matter that Saskatchewan people want answers to.

On the final day of the sitting the Speaker made a number of very serious allegations. The Speaker said he was repeatedly harassed by the member from Meadow Lake and the member from Estevan. The Speaker said that the Premier's senior advisor lunged at him in the hallway. The Speaker said that the member from Meadow Lake sought permission to carry a handgun in the legislature, and the Speaker said that the member from Meadow Lake brought a long gun into the Legislative Building.

We were told by the Premier that this was all unequivocally false, but one week later the member from Meadow Lake admitted the truth. Days after that, the incident report from the office of the Sergeant-at-Arms showed that even that story was inconsistent with the facts.

The stories keep changing. There are still more questions than answers, and that's why we're here today. Committee members all have the correspondence that led to this meeting today, so they're aware of the motions I'm going to be proposing.

But I'll say this in closing: serious concerns have been raised by the Speaker. Saskatchewan people have many unanswered questions, and they deserve answers to these questions. We've all been elected as members of the legislature to lead the entire province. What example are we setting for every other workplace in Saskatchewan if government MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly] choose not to investigate these serious

concerns about harassment and workplace safety in our own backyard?

I'm sure the Premier would love to see this all go away, but it's not the job of this committee to do what's in the best interests of the Premier. It's our job to do what's in the best interests of the people of Saskatchewan. I encourage all members to support two motions that I'll be putting forward today.

And with that, I'll move my first motion:

That the committee orders pursuant to rule 132(1) that the following witnesses appear at a future meeting of the committee to answer questions related to the allegations made by the Speaker on May 16, 2024:

Scott Moe, Premier of Saskatchewan;
Jeremy Harrison, Minister of Trade and Export Development;
Lori Carr, Government House Leader; and
Reg Downs, senior advisor to the Premier.

I so move.

The Deputy Chair: — Thank you. Ms. Mowat has moved the following motion:

That the committee orders pursuant to rule 132(1) that the following witnesses appear at a future meeting of the committee to answer questions related to the allegations made by the Speaker on May 16, 2024:

(a) Scott Moe, Premier of Saskatchewan;
(b) Jeremy Harrison, Minister of Trade and Export Development;
(c) Lori Carr, Government House Leader; and
(d) Reg Downs, senior advisor to the Premier.

Are there any other speakers? Mr. Reiter.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — Thanks, Madam Chair. Our position of the government's been very clear on this from the start. As far as the allegations about harassment and bullying, there's proper processes to follow here. There's a process for harassment regarding MLAs, which the Speaker is one and so are the people named — the House Leader and Deputy House Leader — in the letter, as well as the Premier.

If the concerns about harassment involve staff, there's also a proper stream of process to deal with that as well. We don't believe that this committee is the proper process to deal with that.

If the concerns are in regard to the weapons allegations that the Speaker had made in the day that the member opposite mentioned, I think that very clearly is the purview of security in this building. We don't believe that it should be the position of politicians to direct law enforcement. Law enforcement still has the opportunity — they did at the time; they deemed it not necessary to take action — they could still review it at this point in time. So the position of the government's been clear from the start. It's still the same position today. Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Conway.

Ms. Conway: — Thank you, Madam Chair. The argument made by Mr. Reiter was addressed in our June 11th letter; namely that, you know, we fully support the Speaker's right to avail himself of the harassment policy. The problem with that is, it's not a full answer to what we've proposed need to be looked into with these motions or with this motion.

The harassment process is certainly ill-suited to getting answers on the long gun incident, on the changing stories that came about after these allegations were made, as well as the alleged harassment of the Speaker by the Premier's senior advisor, Reg Downs.

Now in terms of this being the right venue for this, we believe that the House Services Committee is the right venue to examine any matter of this nature. According to the website, the House Services Committee is authorized to examine:

... any matter it deems advisable with respect to the rules, procedures, practices and powers of the Legislative Assembly, its operation and organization, and the facilities and services provided to the Assembly, its committees and Members.

Investigating workplace harassment and workplace safety, Madam Chair, is obviously part of the operations of any workplace, including our workplace, and this motion is well within the scope of this committee. We in this building need to set an example for every workplace in the province that when serious concerns are raised, an investigation will follow. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Reiter.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — To Ms. Conway's point about setting a proper example, I would certainly agree with that part of her comments. That's why, I believe it was 2016 or '17, both sides of the House, the opposition and the government agreed on the harassment policy. I believe it was unanimous at that point in time. We think the policy is there for a reason and it should be followed.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Conway.

Ms. Conway: — Madam Chair, as I stated, the harassment policy, we support the Speaker to avail himself of that. And yes, that may be part of this but it's not a full answer to what was raised in the final day of the sitting by the Speaker.

What's more, there have been a number of stories, changing stories by the Premier, by Mr. Harrison, by others. And as part of the committee, we could call witnesses because when they've been speaking about these allegations to media, they simply can't keep their stories straight. So this is yet another reason to avail ourselves of this process through the House Services Committee.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Merriman.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move an amendment at this time.

Okay, thank you, Madam Chair. The motion is:

That all words following "committee" be deleted and the following be added:

notes in 2017, government and opposition members worked together to develop and pass the Legislative Assembly anti-harassment policy.

This policy spells out a clear process for reporting and resolving allegations of harassment. It includes an investigation process and provision to engage an independent outside investigator if necessary.

That this process is designed to be fair and impartial, respecting the rights of both the complainant and the respondent. This is the process that should be followed by any member of the Legislative Assembly wish to make a harassment complaint.

I so move this amendment.

The Deputy Chair: — So Mr. Merriman has moved an amendment to the motion that reads:

That all words following "committee" be deleted and the following be added:

notes in 2017, government and opposition members worked together to develop and pass the Legislative Assembly anti-harassment policy.

That the policy spells out a clear process for reporting and resolving allegations of harassment. It includes an investigation process and a provision to engage an independent outside investigator if necessary.

That this process is designed to be fair and impartial, respecting the rights of both the complainant and the respondent. This is the process that should be followed should any member of the Legislative Assembly wish to make a harassment complaint.

Is there any debate on the amendment? Ms. Conway.

Ms. Conway: — Madam Chair, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, the harassment process can address some of the allegations made by the Speaker but not all of the allegations made by the Speaker. It is ill-suited to getting answers about the long gun incident. It is ill-suited to getting answers about the changing stories. And it is ill-suited at getting at allegations of harassment by Reg Downs, Madam Speaker.

I would also add that that process is confidential. This has now become an issue of public record. The public is aware of this. The public wants answers. And it's disappointing to see this amendment moved, which appears to be an attempt to block a larger investigation into all of the matters, all of the very serious matters that have now been exposed as part of the Speaker's allegations on the last day of the sitting.

[11:15]

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Merriman.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that's exactly why we have moved this motion, is for them to make that determining process. There is a process in place. This is a process that was agreed to, brought forward by a former member, Mr. Forbes, for this exact reason. The harassment policy should be followed. We should make sure that they have the determining process to see if an outside investigator . . . It has its process. I don't want to set the precedent for ourselves as legislators or for any other business, as the opposition has pointed out, that you should bypass a process that is set in place for harassment.

This is exactly why we have this policy in place, agreed to by all parties, and we want to make sure that the process is followed if it is deemed necessary. I don't want to set a precedent that we should go outside a harassment process because allegations were brought forward in a public manner. There is a process in place. We all agreed to that. It is up to them to determine whether it is in their purview or not.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Conway.

Ms. Conway: — Madam Chair, the other issue here, which is possibly setting a concerning precedent, is when a complainant wants to make a harassment complaint, they should be driving that process. It is not for us to drive that process.

And again, that harassment process is confidential. And for all we know — and we wouldn't know — the Speaker has availed himself of that process. We wouldn't know one way or the other. Again, it's a confidential process. These matters have now become a matter of public record. They are of great interest to the public, and it's very disappointing to see this government try to push this into the shadows which, you know, moving this motion and with this motion passing, this is what would essentially happen.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Reiter.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I would respectfully disagree. The government's not trying to push this into the shadows. There's proper processes to follow. We've already — I have and so has Minister Merriman — addressed the issue for harassment. As far as the issue for the guns, it's our position very clearly that's a matter for law enforcement. That's not a matter for politicians to try to direct law enforcement.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Conway.

Ms. Conway: — It would be interesting to hear from Mr. Reiter, one thing he's not kind of addressed in his comments, as well as Mr. Merriman, is the changing stories. I think the public has an interest in understanding how these stories keep changing. The inconsistencies, the changing stories — none of the processes proposed by Mr. Merriman or Mr. Reiter address those changing stories. I wonder if they want to respond to that.

The Deputy Chair: — Mr. Reiter.

Hon. Mr. Reiter: — I would just simply close with this. I would disagree with the way the member has portrayed that. But even if that's her view of it, it's not the purview of a committee of the legislature, including this one, to determine what a politician said in a scrum, whether or not that's accurate. That's never been, nor

should it be.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Conway.

Ms. Conway: — Madam Chair, also in closing, the purview of this committee though could be to determine what happened. Saskatchewan people deserve to know what happened. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Chair: — Seeing no other speakers, we will vote on the amendment to the motion that's been moved by Mr. Merriman. All those in favour of the amendment?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Opposed? The amendment is carried. We'll now vote . . . Are there any other speakers on the main motion as amended? Seeing none, we'll vote on the main motion as amended.

Does anyone need me to read out the main motion as amended? Seeing nobody, all those in favour?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Opposed? Carried. Ms. Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll bring forward my second motion at this time. My earlier comments still stand, that we need get to the bottom of what happened here and that the people of the province deserve to have that clarity. With that in mind, I move:

That the committee appoint an independent investigator to carry out an investigation into all the allegations made by the Speaker on May 16th, 2024.

I so move.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Mowat has moved the following motion:

That the committee appoint an independent investigator to carry out an investigation into all the allegations made by the Speaker on May 16th, 2024.

Anyone like to speak to the motion? Seeing none, we'll call the question. All those in favour of the motion? Opposed? Defeated.

Is there any other business? Ms. Mowat.

Ms. Mowat: — Madam Chair, with the issue of the independent investigator, it's unclear why the government did not support that motion, as none of them spoke to it. If the rationale behind that is related to the context of all the allegations, I will offer a motion that specifically looks at the allegations into guns being in the legislature. This is a matter of public safety. It's a matter of workplace safety for everyone who works in this building. And so I would move, for consideration of the committee:

That the committee appoint an independent investigator to carry out an investigation into the allegation made by the Speaker on May 16th, 2024 that the member from Meadow

Lake brought a long gun into the Legislative Building.

I so move.

The Deputy Chair: — Ms. Mowat has moved the following motion:

That the committee appoint an independent investigator to carry out an investigation into the allegation made by the Speaker on May 16th, 2024 that the member from Meadow Lake brought a long gun into the Legislative Building.

Anyone like to speak to the motion? Ms. Conway.

Ms. Conway: — Madam Chair, I'll just add that with the changes to how security is done in this building, taking it out of the hands of a neutral third party, a non-partisan, non-governmental body, and making, you know, the security of this building answerable to Mr. Merriman, the minister responsible, it is particularly important for this motion to pass given that workplace safety is a matter of all our concern.

And the members, particularly on our side, are very concerned at not only the allegations of the Speaker, but what we now know to have been true, that Mr. Merriman brought, at least on one occasion, a gun into the building, that he . . .

A Member: — Harrison.

Ms. Conway: — Sorry, did I say Merriman? Correction. I'll correct the record: it wasn't Mr. Merriman that brought a long gun; it was Mr. Harrison. Sorry about that, Mr. Merriman.

That Mr. Harrison brought a long gun into the building. That he represented having brought the gun in with the permission of security at the time, the Sergeant-at-Arms, but we now know from the incident report that that was not the case.

All of these incidents, the unknowns around this incident, the unknowns around whether it happened more than once — these are of very grave concern to all individuals that work in this building. So I would hope that the government side of this committee supports this more narrow independent investigation into the incidents around the gun incident.

The Deputy Chair: — Any other speakers to the motion? Seeing none, I'll call the question. All those in favour? Opposed? That motion is defeated.

Any other business? Seeing none, that concludes our business for today. I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Ms. Lambert has moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Deputy Chair: — Carried. The Standing Committee on House Services is adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 11:24.]