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Sent: October 22, 2020 7:53 PM
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Subject: Interview transcript - Minister Anand - Power & Politics with Vassy Kapelos / Oct. 22, 2020

Good evening,

Here's tonight's interview with Minister Anand with CBC.

Thanks,

Marc

Program:	Power & Politics with Vassy Kapelos (Hour 1)	DATE:	2020-Oct-22 5:00PM	Time:	5:00PM - 6:00PM
Station:	CBC News Network	Network:	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation	City:	Toronto

HEADLINE: Interview with Minister Anita Anand

DAVID COCHRANE (Host): Well we begin on this side of the border. In the wake of a Conservative motion that threatened to defeat the minority government, the opposition has tabled a new one and the Liberals have their gloves on again. The Conservatives want the Health Committee to investigate the government's pandemic response but the Liberals say the demand for documents would hold up public servants working around the clock to support Canadians during the pandemic. We've reached the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Anita Anand, in Oakville, Ontario. Minister, welcome back to the show.

ANITA ANAND (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): Hi David. Thanks for having me.

COCHRANE: Minister, the Conservatives say this motion would look at the COVID response and learn from possible missteps in the first wave. Is there not some merit to that argument?

ANAND: Listen, I am fully on board with the need for all members of our House of Commons to work together and in that vein we made public a number of documents and contracts in the summer relating to our PPE procurements. And so yes, we really do need to work together. The issue that I have with the motion relates to the production of documents that are highly sensitive. For example, our advance purchase agreements for vaccines. Those were hard fought contracts and they contain very sensitive information and I do not want to risk these contracts and the procurements that they will lead to because I believe that the health and

safety of Canadians would be at stake.

COCHRANE: But could not the law clerk and the people who work for the House of Commons vet those and redact the critical information out of those to protect the national interests in those cases?

ANAND: In some cases David we are still in negotiations. Whether we're talking about vaccine procurements, PPE procurements and rapid test procurements, these negotiations are still occurring and if we release all of the documents that the Conservatives are requesting, we will undermine our negotiations. We will undermine our contracts and I do not believe that is in the best interests of the health and safety of Canadians. That is my underlying concern with this motion. David, I practiced corporate law and I taught corporate and securities law for 22 years. I know agreements of this sort and I am very concerned with releasing information that would jeopardize our procurements at this moment in time.

COCHRANE: One of the other complaints about this motion that members of your government have made is that the 15 days that it gives officials to turn over the volume of documents they're looking for. It's just not enough time to realistically do it but when Patty Hajdu, the health minister, was asked today multiple times, "What is a realistic timeframe?" should wouldn't say. So what is a realistic timeframe for your government to turn these documents over if the Commons adopts this motion?

ANAND: Well thanks, I appreciate the question. For me it's not a question of the timeframe. Where in the middle of a second wave David. Our procurements are still occurring. We need to ensure that those contracts will continue to provide for us, that the corporations and the suppliers with whom we are speaking will continue to do business with us. If we go ahead and release information that will undermine our supplier relationships. And it's not just me as minister who is saying this. The president of the Auto Parts Manufacturers Association today said, "Firms across the country dropped everything to help save lives by making critical goods for every government in Canada. Every political strike we all worked together." In other words this is a cross-Canada effort and we all need to contribute to it and I am very concerned with releasing documents, vaccine contracts, PPE contracts, emails and the like because we will undermine those relationships and it is very, very--

COCHRANE: But the motion says that you can redact these documents for these security concerns, these national security concerns and surely the procurement of vaccines and the procurement of necessary medical equipment falls under national security because that's the exemption you've applied before on the release of documents. So is not this concern you are raising covered by the very words of the motion?

ANAND: Actually as I read the motion David the national security exemption as worded only applies to the documents relating to the Vaccine Task Force. And so I'm not confident that indeed it would allow the redaction of certain information across the board. But I just am continuing to look through this motion and as I said, I do want to work with all sides of this House. As a government we want to work with all sides of the House. That's why when the OGGO committee requested documentation, we provided it and we're continually updating information about our contracts on our website. And we will continue to make information public as soon as it is not overly sensitive to do so. It's our commitment to transparency and accountability and it's my commitment as minister to the people of Canada.

COCHRANE: I appreciate that the negotiations on these sorts of matters are done through the House

Leaders office most often but Mr. Rodrigues was not available to speak to us today. So I'm just wondering if you are aware of any negotiations or counterproposal from the Liberals to the Conservatives on changing this motion to address your concerns or are you just going to try to fight it and stop it when it goes to a vote on Monday?

ANAND: I believe within the last hour the House Leader has been proposing additional language for the motion which is indicative of our willingness and concern that we do need to work together for the health and safety of Canadians. And I think everyone in the House of Commons shares this concern. We're in the middle of a pandemic still and we need to get out to the other side together.

COCHRANE: So does that mean you'd be willing to support this motion if you can get some changes as being put forward by your House Leader?

ANAND: Well I will take a deeper look at the motion but I will say that it is very broad and I'm not a hundred percent sure what the House Leader is proposing at the current time. So I'm going to take it back and offer my comments but I will say that as a procurement minister our documentation, our contracts, our negotiations are front and centre to me and I will be raising those concerns when I speak with all sides of the house.

COCHRANE: If this legislation truly is such a threat though to vaccine procurement and other necessary medical contracts that you're talking about, why would this not qualify as a vote of confidence? Your government has said today you won't make it a confidence vote but if it is truly a threat to the pandemic response and your ability to get the medicines and treatments that the country needs, why wouldn't it be a confidence vote?

ANAND: Well David, I think we all have faith and hope that this government will be one in which other parties will come to the table with and reach an agreement in some way, shape or form so that we don't have to go down that road as the prime minister has said and I agree. This isn't the time for an election. We need to try to work together and that's exactly what we're going to do each and every day.

COCHRANE: But do you have any indications from your conversations with the health minister's office if there is a willingness to change the language to accommodate some of these concerns?

ANAND: Look, my focus today and every day is to make sure our procurements are coming into Canada. We have over now 2 billion items of PPE procured, we have 282 doses of vaccines procured for Canadians and we have rapid tests coming into Canada every day and week now. So that's my focus and that's going to continue to be my focus because we need this stuff for Canadians.

COCHRANE: OK. Minister Anand, thank you so much for your time.

ANAND: Thank you so much David. Take care.

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REPORTER: David Cochrane
MEDIA LOG ID: 20201022T-0066

Length: 8:40
Words: 1400

Province: Ontario
Reach: National

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