

2024

Hfx No. 531463

SUPREME COURT OF NOVA SCOTIA

IN THE MATTER OF THE *COMPANIES' CREDITORS ARRANGEMENT ACT*, R.S.C., c. C-36, AS AMENDED

AND IN THE MATTER OF A PLAN OR ARRANGEMENT OF SALTWIRE NETWORK INC., THE HALIFAX HERALD LIMITED, HEADLINE PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS LIMITED, TITAN SECURITY & INVESTIGATION INC., BRACE CAPITAL LIMITED AND BRACE HOLDINGS LIMITED

BETWEEN:

Fiera Private Debt Fund III LP and Fiera Private Debt Fund V LP,  
each by their general partner, Fiera Private Debt GP Inc.

Applicants

-and-

Saltwire Network Inc., The Halifax Herald Limited, Headline Promotional Products Limited,  
Titan Security & Investigation Inc., Brace Capital Limited and Brace Holdings Limited

Respondents

**BOOK OF AUTHORITIES OF THE MONITOR**

October 10, 2024

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**TO: The Service List**

# INDEX

## INDEX

<b>Tab</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Pinpoints</b>
1	<i>Harte Gold Corp (Re)</i> , 2022 ONSC 653	20, 38
2	<i>Just Energy Group Inc et al v Morgan Stanley Capital Group Inc et al</i> , 2022 ONSC 6354	34
3	Liquidation Consulting Agreement Approval Order, in the Matter of a Plan of Compromise or Arrangement of Payless ShoeSource Canada Inc. and Payless ShoeSource Canada GP Inc. dated February 21, 2019, Toronto, Court File No. CV-19-00614629-00CL.	
4	<i>PCAS Patient Care Automation Services Inc (Re)</i> , 2012 ONSC 3367	54
5	<i>Royal Bank of Canada v Soundair Corp</i> (1991), 4 OR (3d) 1	
6	<i>Sherman Estate v Donovan</i> , 2021 SCC 25, [2021] 2 SCR 75	38
7	<i>Sierra Club of Canada v Canada (Minister of Finance)</i> , 2002 SCC 41, [2002] 2 SCR 522	53
8	<i>Target Canada Co (Re)</i> , 2015 ONSC 7574	23
9	<i>White Birch Paper Holding Company (Arrangement relatif à)</i> , 2010 QCCS 4915	49

TAB 1

**At para(s) 20, 38**

# Harte Gold Corp. (Re), 2022 ONSC 653 (CanLII)

Date: 2022-02-04

File number: CV-21-00673304-00CL

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CITATION: *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, 2022 ONSC 653

**COURT FILE NO.:** CV-21-00673304-00CL

**DATE:** 2022-02-04

SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE – ONTARIO (COMMERCIAL LIST)

**RE:** THE COMPANIES' CREDITORS ARRANGEMENT ACT, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-36, AS AMENDED,  
Applicant

**AND:**

A PLAN OF COMPROMISE OR ARRANGEMENT OF HARTE GOLD CORP., Applicant

**BEFORE:** Penny J.

**COUNSEL:** *Guy P. Martel, Danny Duy Vu, Lee Nicholson, William Rodler Dumais* for the Applicant

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*Marc Wasserman, Kathryn Esaw, Dave Rosenblat, Justin Kanji* for 1000025833 Ontario Inc.

*Stuart Brotman and Daniel Richer* for BNP Paribas

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2729992 Ontario Corp., ANR Investments B.V. and AHG (Jersey) Limited

*David Bish* for OMF Fund II SO Ltd., Orion Resource Partners (USA) LP and their affiliates

*Orlando M. Rosa and Gordon P. Acton* for Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg First Nation (Pic  
Moberg First Nation)

*Timothy Jones* for the Attorney General of Ontario

**HEARD:** January 28, 2022

ENDORSEMENT

[1] This is a motion by Harte Gold for an approval and reverse vesting order involving the sale of Harte Gold's mining enterprise to a strategic purchaser (that is, an entity in the gold mining business) and for an order extending the stay and expanding the Monitor's powers to include new entities to be created for the purposes of implementing Harte Gold's proposed restructuring. There was no opposition to the relief sought. All those who appeared at the hearing supported approval of the transaction.

[2] Following the conclusion of oral submissions on Friday, January 28, 2022, I issued the orders sought with written reasons to follow. These are the reasons.

## Background

[3] Harte Gold is a public company incorporated under the *Business Corporations Act* (Ontario). Prior to January 17, 2022, its shares publicly traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange, Frankfurt Stock Exchange and over-the-counter. Harte Gold operates a gold mine located in northern Ontario within the Sault Ste. Marie Mining Division and approximately 30 km north of the town of White River. This mine, referred to as the Sugar Loaf Mine, produces gold bullion. Harte Gold has a total of 260 employees on payroll, as well as 19 employees retained through various agencies. Harte Gold's payroll obligations are current.

[4] Of some importance to the form of transaction proposed in this case, involving an approval and reverse vesting order (RVO), is the fact that Harte Gold has 12 material permits and licenses that are required to maintain its mining operations, 24 active work permits and licenses that allow the performance of exploration work on various parts of the Sugar Loaf property and many other forest resource licenses, fire permits and the like, all necessary in one way or another to Harte Gold's continued operations. Harte Gold also has 513 mineral tenures, consisting of three freehold properties, seven leasehold properties, 468 mineral claims and 35 additional tenures. The transfer of these permits and licenses etc. would involve a complex transfer or new application process of indeterminate risk, delay and cost.

[5] It is also important to note that Harte Gold is party to an Impact Benefits Agreement dated April 2018 between Harte Gold and Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg First Nation.

[6] Harte Gold has two primary secured creditors. They are: a numbered company (833) owned by Silver Lake Resources Limited (an Australian gold mine company). 833 is a very recent assignee of significant secured debt from BNPP; and, AHG Jersey Limited (AHG is part of the Appian group). Appian entities are also counterparties to a number of offtake agreements under which Harte Gold sells gold in exchange for prices determined by a pricing formula tied to the London bullion market. Orion is, similarly, a counterparty to additional offtake agreements. BNPP, following the assignment of its

secured debt, has retained additional obligations in respect of certain hedging arrangements provided to Harte Gold. Harte Gold also has a number of trade and other unsecured creditors who are owed an estimated \$7.5 million for pre-filing obligations and further amounts for services rendered post-filing.

[7] At the time of its initial application to the court, Harte Gold's assets were valued at \$163.8 million. Its liabilities were valued at \$166.1 million. On a balance sheet basis, therefore, Heart Gold was insolvent.

[8] Since about 2019, Harte Gold has been pursuing a number of measures to address a growing liquidity problem, a problem only exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite these efforts, in 2020 Harte Gold was obliged to seek agreement from its prime lender, BNPP, to defer debt payments and to seek a forbearance from enforcement of BNPP's security. In May 2021, Harte Gold initiated a strategic review of options to achieve the desired liquidity and to fund the acquisition of new capital. Harte Gold appointed a strategic committee of its board and, shortly thereafter, a special committee of independent directors. The special committee retained FTI as financial advisor (FTI was subsequently appointed Monitor by this Court) and developed a plan to attract new capital through a potential sale.

[9] This pre-filing strategic process involved approaching over 250 potential buyers. 31 of these entities executed confidentiality agreements; 28 of those conducted due diligence through Harte Gold's virtual data room. Harte Gold received four nonbinding expressions of interest but, by the bid deadline in September 2021, no binding offers had been received.

[10] In the aftermath of this unsuccessful process, Silver Lake through 833 acquired BNPP's debt and advanced a proposal to acquire Harte Gold's operations by way of a credit bid and to provide interim financing in connection with any proceedings under the CCAA. An initial order under the CCAA issued from this Court on December 7, 2021.

[11] In the midst of this process, Harte Gold received a competing proposal to make a credit bid from Harte Gold's second secured creditor, Appian. As a result of these developments, Harte Gold resolved to conduct a further (albeit brief, given the extensive process that had just been completed) sale and investment solicitation process, this time with a stalking horse bid. Further competing proposals took place between Silver Lake and Appian over who would be the stalking horse bidder. As a result of this process, the stalking horse bid of Silver Lake was significantly improved. Appian was then content to let Silver Lake's credit bid form the basis of the SISP. I approved this process in an order dated December 20, 2021.

[12] The Monitor provided a new solicitation notice to a total of 48 known and previously unknown potential bidders (other than Silver Lake and Appian). None of the potentially interested parties signed a confidentiality agreement or requested access to the data room.

[13] Only one competing bid was received – a further credit bid from Appian with improved conditions over those proposed by Silver Lake. Ultimately, all parties agreed that the responding commitment from Silver Lake which was at least as favourable to stakeholders as the Appian bid would be, in effect, the prevailing and winning bid.

[14] This took the form of a Second Amended and Restated Subscription Agreement (SARSA) with 833, the actual purchaser. The improved terms were: (a) the assumption by the purchaser of Harte Gold's office lease at 161 Bay Street in Toronto; (b)(i) the proviso that the \$10 million cap on payment of cure costs and pre-filing trade creditors does not apply to the assumption of post-filing trade creditor obligations; and (ii) all amounts owing by Harte Gold to any of the Appian parties are subject to a settlement agreement between 833 Ontario, Silver Lake and Appian and excluded from the pre-filing cure costs; and, (c) the undertaking to pay an additional cash deposit of US\$1,693,658.72, equivalent to approximately 5% of the Appian indebtedness.

[15] In broad brush terms, the Silver Lake/833 purchase is structured as a reverse vesting order. The transaction will involve:

- the cancellation of all Harte Gold shares and the issue of new shares to the purchaser
- payment by the purchaser of all secured debt
- payment by the purchaser of virtually all pre-filing trade amounts (estimated at \$7.5 million but with a \$10 million cap) and post-filing trade amounts
- certain excluded contracts and liabilities being assigned to newly formed companies which will, ultimately, be put into bankruptcy. The excluded contracts and liabilities include a number of agreements involving ongoing or future services in respect of which there is little if any money currently owed. They also include a number of contracts with Appian entities and Orion, both of which support approval of the transaction. The employment contracts of four terminated executives will, however, be excluded liabilities, which will nullify the value of any termination claims. Notably, excluded liabilities does not include regulatory or environmental liabilities to any government authority
- retaining on the payroll all but four employees (the four members of the executive team whose employment contracts will be terminated), and
- releases, including of Harte Gold and its directors and officers, the Monitor and its legal counsel and Silver Lake and its directors and officers.

There is no provision for any break fee. Nor is there a request for any form of sealing order.

[16] I should add that the value of what the purchaser is paying for Harte Gold's business, including the secured debt, the pre and post-filing trade amounts, interim financing and the like, totals well over \$160 million.



# Issues

[17] There are three principal issues:

- (1) Whether the proposed transaction should be approved, including the reverse vesting order transaction structure and the form of the proposed release;
- (2) Whether the stay should be extended; and,
- (3) Whether the Monitor's mandate should be extended to include additional companies (newcos) being incorporated for the purposes of executing the proposed transaction.

# Analysis

[18] Section 11 of the CCAA confers jurisdiction on the Court in the broadest of terms: "the court, on the application of any person interested in the matter, may, subject to the restrictions set out in this Act, on notice to any other person or without notice as it may see fit, make any order that it considers appropriate in the circumstances".

[19] Section 36(1) of the CCAA provides:

A debtor company in respect of which an order has been made under this Act may not sell or otherwise dispose of assets outside the ordinary course of business unless authorized to do so by a court. Despite any requirement for shareholder approval, including one under federal or provincial law, the court may authorize the sale or disposition even if shareholder approval was not obtained.

[20] Section 36(3) of the CCAA provides a non-exhaustive list of factors to be considered on a motion to approve a sale. These include:

- (a) whether the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition was reasonable in the circumstances;
- (b) whether the monitor approved the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition;
- (c) whether the monitor filed with the court a report stating that in their opinion the sale or disposition would be more beneficial to the creditors than a sale or disposition under a bankruptcy;
- (d) the extent to which the creditors were consulted;
- (e) the effects of the proposed sale or disposition on the creditors and other interested parties; and
- (f) whether the consideration to be received for the assets is reasonable and fair, taking into account their market value.

[21] The s. 36(3) criteria largely correspond to the principles articulated in *Royal Bank v. Soundair Corp*, 1991 CanLII 2727 (ONCA) for the approval of the sale of assets in an insolvency scenario:

(a) whether sufficient effort has been made to obtain the best price and that the debtor has not acted improvidently;

(b) the interests of all parties;

(c) the efficacy and integrity of the process by which offers have been obtained; and

(d) whether there has been unfairness in the working out of the process:

see *Target Canada Co. (Re)*, 2015 ONSC 1487, at paras. 14-17.

[22] The purchase transaction for which approval is being sought in this case does not provide for a sale of assets but, rather, provides for a “reverse vesting order” under which the purchaser will become the sole shareholder of Harte Gold and certain excluded assets, excluded contracts and excluded liabilities will be vested out to new companies incorporated for that purpose.

[23] In determining whether the transaction should be approved and the RVO granted, it is appropriate to consider:

(a) the statutory basis for a reverse vesting order and whether a reverse vesting order is appropriate in the circumstances; and,

(b) the factors outlined in s. 36(3) of the CCAA, making provision or adjustment, as appropriate, for the unique aspects of a reverse vesting transaction.

### The Statutory Basis (Jurisdiction) for a Reverse Vesting Order

[24] The first reverse vesting sale transaction appears to have been approved by this Court in *Plasco Energy (Re)*, (July 17, 2015), CV-15-10869-00CL in the handwritten endorsement of Justice Wilton-Siegel. The use of the reverse vesting order structure was not in dispute (indeed, in most of the cases, reported and otherwise, there has been no dispute). Wilton-Siegel J. found “the Court has authority under section 11 of the CCAA to authorize such transactions notwithstanding that the applicants are not proceeding under s. 6(2) of the CCAA insofar as it is not contemplated that the applicants will propose a plan of arrangement or compromise.”

[25] A few dozen of these orders have been made since that time, mostly in a context where there was no opposition and no obvious or identified unfairness arising from the use of the RVO structure. The frequency of applications based on court approval of an RVO structure has increased significantly in the past few years.

[26] More recently, two reverse vesting orders have been approved in contested cases and been considered by appellate courts in Canada. I cite these two cases in particular because, being opposed and appealed, there tends to be a more in-depth analysis of the issues than is usually the case in the context of unopposed orders.

[27] In *Arrangement relatif à Nemaska Lithium Inc*, 2020 QCCS 3218 at paras. 52 and 71 (leave to appeal to QCCA refused, *Arrangement relatif à Nemaska Lithium Inc*, 2020 QCCA 1488; leave to appeal to SCC refused, *Arrangement relatif à Nemaska Lithium Inc*, 2021 CarswellQue 4589), Justice Gouin of the Quebec Superior Court approved a reverse vesting transaction in the face of opposition by a creditor. Following a nine day hearing, Gouin J. reviewed the context of the transaction in detail and carefully analyzed the purpose and efficiency of the RVO in maintaining the going concern operations of the debtor companies. He also found that the approval of the RVO should be considered under s. 36 CCAA, subject to determining, for example:

- Whether sufficient efforts to get the best price have been made and whether the parties acted providently
- The efficacy and integrity of the process followed
- The interests of the parties, and
- Whether any unfairness resulted from the process.

Gouin J. considered that these criteria had been met and found the issuance of the RVO to be a valid exercise of his discretion, concluding that it would serve to maximize creditor recoveries while maintaining the debtor companies as a going concern and allowing an efficient transfer of the necessary permits, licences and authorizations to the purchaser.

[28] In denying leave to appeal, the Quebec Court of Appeal noted that the CCAA judge found that “the terms ‘sell or otherwise dispose of assets outside the ordinary course of business’ under subsection 36(1) of the CCAA should be broadly interpreted to allow a CCAA judge to grant innovative solutions such as RVOs on a case by case basis, in accordance with the wide discretionary powers afforded the supervising judge pursuant to section 11 CCAA, as recognized by the Supreme Court in *Callidus*”: *Nemaska* QCCA at para 19.

[29] Similarly, in *Quest University Canada (Re)*, 2020 BCSC 1883, Justice Fitzpatrick of the British Columbia Supreme Court extensively reviewed the caselaw related to a CCAA court’s authority to grant a reverse vesting order. Fitzpatrick J. found that the CCAA provided sufficient authority to grant the reverse vesting order being sought, which was consistent “with the remedial purposes of the CCAA” and consistent with the Supreme Court of Canada’s ruling on CCAA jurisdiction in *9354-9186 Québec Inc. v.*

*Callidus Capital Corp.*, 2020 SCC 10. She found, therefore, that the issue in each case is not whether the court has sufficient jurisdiction but whether the relief is “appropriate” in the circumstances and stakeholders are treated as fairly and reasonably as the circumstances permit.

[30] In *Quest*, the debtor was in the process of putting forward a plan of compromise under the CCAA. It encountered resistance from an unsecured creditor whose vote could potentially have prevented the necessary creditor approval of the plan. The debtor revised its approach, deleting all conditions precedent requiring creditor and court approval and proceeded with a motion for the approval of an RVO to achieve what it was really after; that is, a sale of certain assets to a new owner with Quest continuing as a going concern academic institution.

[31] Fitzpatrick J. relied on *Callidus* to the effect that:

- Courts have long recognized that s. 11 of the CCAA signals legislative endorsement of the “broad reading of CCAA authority developed by the jurisprudence”. On the plain wording of the provision, the jurisdiction granted by s. 11 is constrained only by restrictions set out in the CCAA itself, and the requirement that the order made be “appropriate in the circumstances”
- the CCAA generally prioritizes “avoiding the social and economic losses resulting from liquidation of an insolvent company”
- Where a party seeks an order relating to a matter that falls within the supervising judge’s purview, and for which there is no CCAA provision conferring more specific jurisdiction, s. 11 necessarily is the provision of first resort in anchoring jurisdiction. As Blair J.A. put it in *Stelco*, s. 11 “for the most part supplants the need to resort to inherent jurisdiction” in the CCAA context
- The exercise of the discretion under s. 11 must further the remedial objectives of the CCAA and be guided by the baseline considerations of appropriateness, good faith, and due diligence
- Whether this discretion ought to be exercised in a particular case is a circumstance-specific inquiry that must balance the various objectives of the CCAA. The supervising judge is best positioned to undertake this inquiry.

[32] The SCC in *Callidus* made an important point in the context of the limits of broad discretion; all discretion has limits and its exercise under s. 11 must accord with the objectives of the CCAA and other insolvency legislation in Canada. These objectives include: providing for timely, efficient and impartial resolution of a debtor’s insolvency; preserving and maximizing the value of a debtor’s assets; ensuring fair and equitable treatment of the claims against a debtor; protecting the public interest; and, in the context of a commercial insolvency, balancing the costs and benefits of restructuring or liquidating the company. Further, the discretion under s. 11 must also be exercised in furtherance of three baseline considerations: (a) that the order sought is appropriate in the circumstances, and (b) that the applicant has been acting in good faith and (c) with due diligence.

[33] Ultimately, Fitzpatrick J. held that, in the complex and unique circumstances of that case, it was appropriate to exercise her discretion to allow the RVO structure. Quest sought this relief in good faith and while acting with due diligence to promote the best outcome for all stakeholders. She considered the balance between the competing interests at play and concluded that the proposed transaction was unquestionably the fairest and most reasonable means by which the greatest benefit can be achieved for the overall stakeholder group.

[34] The British Columbia Court of Appeal refused leave to appeal, concluding that the appeal was not “meritorious”, also noting that reverse vesting orders had been granted in other contested proceedings, namely *Nemaska*. The BCCA also stated that the reverse vesting order granted by Fitzpatrick J. “reflect[ed] precisely the type of intricate, fact-specific, real-time decision making that inheres in judges supervising CCAA proceedings”: *Southern Star Developments Ltd. v. Quest University Canada*, 2020 BCCA 364.

[35] It is worthy of note that, in both *Nemaska* and *Quest*, the *bona fides* of the objectors were front and centre in the judicial analysis and, in both cases, the motivations and objectives of the objectors were found suspect and inadequate.

[36] The jurisdiction of the court to issue an RVO is frequently said to arise from s. 11 and s. 36(1) of the CCAA. However, the structure of the transaction employing an RVO typically does not involve the debtor ‘selling or otherwise disposing of assets outside the ordinary course of business’, as provided in s. 36(1). This is because the RVO structure is really a purchase of shares of the debtor and “vesting out” from the debtor to a new company, of unwanted assets, obligations and liabilities.

[37] I am, therefore, not sure I agree with the analysis which finds jurisdiction to issue an RVO in s. 36(1). But that can be left for another day because I am wholeheartedly in agreement that s. 11, as broadly interpreted in the jurisprudence including, most recently, *Callidus*, clearly provides the court with jurisdiction to issue such an order, provided the discretion available under s. 11 is exercised in accordance with the objects and purposes of the CCAA. And it is for this reason that I also wholeheartedly agree that the analytical framework of s. 36(3) for considering an asset sale transaction, even though s. 36 may not support a standalone basis for jurisdiction in an RVO situation, should be applied, with necessary modifications, to an RVO transaction.

[38] Given this context, however, I think it would be wrong to regard employment of the RVO structure in an insolvency situation as the “norm” or something that is routine or ordinary course. Neither the BIA nor the CCAA deal specifically with the use or application of an RVO structure. The judicial authorities approving this approach, while there are now quite a few, do not generally provide much guidance on the positive and negative implications of this restructuring technique or what to look out for. Broader-based commentary and discussion is only now just now starting to emerge. This suggests to me that the RVO should continue to be regarded as an unusual or extraordinary measure; not an approach appropriate in any case merely because it may be more convenient or beneficial for the purchaser. Approval of the use of an RVO structure should, therefore, involve close scrutiny. The Monitor and the court must be diligent in ensuring that the

restructuring is fair and reasonable to all parties having regard to the objectives and statutory constraints of the CCAA. This is particularly the case where there is no party with a significant stake in the outcome opposing the use of an RVO structure. The debtor, the purchaser and especially the Monitor, as the court appointed officer overseeing the process and answerable to the court (and in addition to all the usual enquiries and reporting obligations), must be prepared to answer questions such as:

- (a) Why is the RVO necessary in this case?
- (b) Does the RVO structure produce an economic result at least as favourable as any other viable alternative?
- (c) Is any stakeholder worse off under the RVO structure than they would have been under any other viable alternative? and
- (d) Does the consideration being paid for the debtor's business reflect the importance and value of the licences and permits (or other intangible assets) being preserved under the RVO structure?

[39] With this in mind, I will turn to the enumerated s. 36(3) factors. To the extent there are RVO specific issues of concern apart from those enumerated in s. 36(3), I will also address those in the following section of my analysis.

## The Section 36 Factors in the RVO Context

### Reasonableness of the Process Leading to the Proposed Sale

[40] Between the pre-filing strategic review process and the court approved SISF, the business and assets of Harte Gold have been extensively marketed on a global basis. While the SISF was subject to variation from the format contemplated in my earlier order, the ability of the applicant, in conjunction with the Monitor, to vary the process was already established in that order. I find, in any event, that the adjustments made were appropriate in the circumstances, given there were no new bidders and the only offers came from the two competing secured creditors who had already been extensively involved in the process and whose status, interests and objectives were well known to the applicant and the Monitor.

[41] Prior to its appointment as Monitor, FTI was intimately involved at all stages of the strategic review process, including the implementation of the pre-filing marketing process and the negotiation of the original proposed subscription agreement that was executed prior to the commencement of the CCAA proceedings and subsequently replaced by the stalking horse bid and the SARSA.

[42] Following the commencement of the CCAA proceedings, the Monitor was involved in the negotiations that resulted in the execution of the stalking horse bid and the SARSA. In addition, the Monitor has overseen the implementation of the SISF and is satisfied that it was carried out in accordance with the SISF procedures, including the Monitor's consent to the amendment of the SISF procedures to cancel the auction as unnecessary and accept the SARSA as the best option available.

[43] The Monitor's opinion is that the process was reasonable, leading to the best outcome reasonably available in the circumstances.

[44] I am satisfied that the sales process was reasonable. The transaction now before the Court was the culmination of approximately seven months of extensive solicitation efforts on the part of both Harte Gold and FTI as part of the pre-filing strategic process and the SISP.

[45] Harte Gold and FTI broadly canvassed the market by contacting 241 parties regarding their potential interest in acquiring Harte Gold's business and assets. This process ultimately culminated in initial competing bids from Silver Lake and Appian and, subsequently, additional competing bids from both entities as part of the SISP. The competitive tension in this process resulted in material improvements for stakeholders on both occasions.

## Comparison with Sale in Bankruptcy

[46] The Monitor has considered whether the completion of the transaction contemplated by the SARSA would be more beneficial to creditors of the applicant and stakeholders generally than a sale or disposition of the business and assets of Harte Gold under a bankruptcy. The Monitor is unambiguously of the view that the SARSA transaction is the vastly more beneficial option.

[47] The SISP has shown that the SARSA represents the highest and best offer available for Harte Gold's business and assets. The Monitor is satisfied that the approval and completion of the transactions contemplated by the SARSA are in the best interests of the creditors of Harte Gold and its stakeholders generally.

[48] In addition to anything else, a bankruptcy would jeopardize ongoing operations and the permits and licences necessary to maintain such operations. A sale in bankruptcy would delay and, again, jeopardize the approval and closing of the proposed transaction as it would be necessary to first assign Harte Gold into bankruptcy or obtain a bankruptcy order, convene a meeting of creditors, appoint inspectors and obtain the approval of the inspectors for the transaction prior to seeking a more traditional AVO or an RVO. Additional costs would also be incurred in undertaking those steps. Silver Lake would have to continue to advance additional funds to finance ongoing operations during this extended period. There is no indication it would be willing to do so. In any event, requiring such a process would fundamentally change the value proposition the purchaser has relied upon and is willing to accept.

[49] Taking all this into account, a sale or disposition of the business and assets of the applicant in a bankruptcy would almost certainly result in a lower recovery for stakeholders and would not be more beneficial than closing the RVO transaction in the CCAA proceedings.

## Consultation with Creditors

[50] Harte Gold's major creditors are Silver Lake, the Appian parties and BNPP. BNPP still has potential claims of approximately \$28 million in respect of its hedge agreements. Silver Lake has claims of approximately \$95 million in respect of the DIP facility and the first lien credit facilities it acquired from BNPP. The Appian parties have claims of approximately US\$34 million in respect of amounts owing under the Appian facility and additional potential claims in respect of obligations under royalty and offtake agreements.

[51] BNPP was consulted throughout the strategic review process and has executed a support agreement with the purchaser. In addition, as previously described, the purchaser and the Appian Parties have been extensively involved in the SISF.

[52] While there is no evidence of consultations with unsecured creditors, I do not regard that as a material deficiency given that virtually all creditors, secured and unsecured alike, are going to be paid in full under the terms of the SARSA.

[53] The Monitor is of the view that the degree of creditor consultation has been appropriate in the circumstances. The Monitor does not consider that any material change in the outcome of efforts to sell the business and assets of the Applicant would have resulted from additional creditor consultation.

[54] I find, on the evidence, that the Monitor's assessment of this factor is well supported and correct.

## The Effect of the Proposed Sale on Creditors and Other Interested Parties

[55] The proposed transaction affords the following benefits to the creditors and to stakeholders generally:

- (a) the retention and payment in full of the claims of almost all creditors of Harte Gold;
- (b) continued employment for all except four of the Harte Gold's employees;
- (c) ongoing business opportunities for suppliers of goods and services to the Sugar Loaf Mine; and
- (d) the continuation of the benefits of the existing Impact Benefits Agreement with Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg First Nation.

[56] The Monitor's opinion is that the effect of the proposed transaction is overwhelming positive for the vast majority of Harte Gold's creditors and other stakeholders apart (as discussed below) from the shareholders who have no reasonable economic interest at this point.

[57] Unlike *Quest*, this is not a case in which the RVO is being used to thwart creditor opposition. Indeed, the evidence is that almost all creditors, secured and unsecured, will be paid in full. To the extent there might be concerns that an RVO structure could be used to thwart creditor democracy and



voting rights, those concerns are not present here. This is not a traditional “compromise” situation. It is hard to see how anything would change under a creditor class vote scenario because almost all of the creditors are being paid in full.

[58] The evidence is that there is no creditor being placed in a worse position, because of the use of an RVO transaction structure, than they would have been in under a more traditional asset sale and AVO structure (or, for that matter, under any plausible plan of compromise).

[59] Because the transaction contemplates the cancellation of all existing shares and related rights in Harte Gold and the issue of new shares to the purchaser, the existing shareholders of Harte Gold will receive no recovery on their investment. Being a public company, Harte Gold has issued material change notices as the events described above were unfolding. By the time of the commencement of the CCAA proceedings, the shareholders had been advised in no uncertain terms that there was no prospect of shareholders realizing any value for their equity investment.

[60] The evidence of Harte’s financial problems and balance sheet insolvency, the unsuccessful pre-filing strategic review process, and the hard reality that the only parties willing to bid anything for Harte Gold were the holders of secured debt (and only for, effectively, the value of the secured debt plus carrying and process costs) only serves to emphasize that equity holders will not see, and on any other realistic scenario would not see, any recovery of their equity investment in Harte Gold.

[61] Under s. 186(1) of the OBCA, “reorganization” includes a court order made under the *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act* or an order made under the *Companies Creditors Arrangement Act* approving a proposal. While the term “proposal” is unfortunate (because there are no formal “proposals” under the CCAA), I view the use of this term in the non-technical sense of the word; that is, as encompassing any proposal such as the proposed transaction brought forward for the approval of the Court under the provisions of the CCAA in this case.

[62] Section 186(2) of the OBCA provides that if a corporation is subject to a reorganization, its articles may be amended by the court order to effect any change that might lawfully be made by an amendment under s. 168. Section 168(1)(g) provides that a corporation may from time to time amend its articles to add, change or remove any provision that is set out in its articles, including to change the designation of all or any of its shares, and add, change or remove any rights, privileges, restrictions and conditions, including rights to accrued dividends, in respect of all or any of its shares. This provides the jurisdiction of the court to approve the cancellation of all outstanding shares and the issuance of new shares to the purchaser.

[63] Section 36(1) of the CCAA contemplates that despite any requirement for shareholder approval, the court may authorize a sale or disposition out of the ordinary course even if shareholder approval is not obtained. While, again, s. 36(1) is concerned with asset sales, the underlying logic of this provision applies to an assessment of cancellation of shares as well. In this case, there is no prospect of shareholder recovery on any realistic scenario.

[64] Equity claims are subject to special treatment under the CCAA. Section 6(8) prohibits court approval of a plan of compromise if any equity is to be paid before payment in full of all claims that are not equity claims. Section 22(1) provides that equity claimants are prohibited from voting on a plan unless the court orders otherwise. In short, shareholders have no economic interest in an insolvent enterprise: *Sino-Forest Corporation (Re)*, 2012 ONSC 4377, paras. 23-29. In circumstances like Harte Gold's, where the shareholders have no economic interest, present or future, it would be unnecessary and, indeed, inappropriate to require a vote of the shareholders: *Stelco Inc. (Re)*, 2006 CanLII 4500 at para. 11. The order requested for the cancellation of existing shares is, for these reasons, justified in the circumstances.

[65] Taking all this into account, I find that the effect of the transaction on creditors and stakeholders is overwhelmingly positive and the best outcome reasonably available in the circumstances.

## Fairness of Consideration

[66] Harte Gold's business and assets have been extensively marketed both prior to and during the CCAA proceedings. At the conclusion of the SISP, two bids were available, which were equivalent in all material respects and represented the highest and best offers received. As described earlier, all parties concurred that the Silver Lake-sponsored SARSA should be determined to be the successful bid. As also described above, the closing of the SARSA transaction will provide a vastly superior recovery for creditors than would a liquidation of Harte Gold's assets in bankruptcy. Based on the market, therefore, the consideration must be considered fair and reasonable.[1]<sup>1</sup>

[67] A further concern with an RVO transaction structure such as this one could be whether, in effect, a purchaser making a credit bid might be getting something (i.e., the licences and permits) for nothing (i.e., the licences and permits were not subject to the creditor's security). It is possible that in a bankruptcy, for example, the licences and permits might have no value. The evidence here is that the purchaser is paying more than Harte Gold would be worth in a bankruptcy. The evidence is also that the purchaser is paying considerably more than just the value of the secured debt. This includes cure costs for third party trade creditors and DIP financing to keep the Mine operational – both payments being made to bring about the acquisition of the Mine as a going concern.

[68] It is true that no attempt has been made to put an independent value on the transfer of the licences and permits. However, any strategic buyer (Silver Lake is a strategic buyer and acquired the BNPP debt for this purpose) would need the licences and permits. The results of the pre-filing strategic process and the SISP constitutes evidence that no one else among the universe of potential purchasers of an operating gold mine in Northern Ontario was willing to pay more than Silver Lake was willing to pay. In the circumstances, I do not think it could be seriously suggested that Silver Lake is getting "something" for "nothing".

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1. The total value of the consideration is, perhaps coincidentally, also roughly equivalent to the value of Harte Gold's assets as shown in its audited financial statements in the last full year prior to the commencement of these proceedings.

[69] The Monitor is satisfied that the consideration is fair in the circumstances. I agree with the Monitor's assessment for the reasons outlined above.

## Other Considerations Re Appropriateness of RVO vs. AVO

[70] As noted, Harte Gold has twelve material permits and licenses that are required to maintain its mining operations, as well as twenty-four active work permits and licenses that allow the performance of exploration work and many other forest resource licences and fire permits.

[71] The principal objective and benefit of employing the RVO approach in this case is the preservation of Harte Gold's many permits and licences necessary to conduct operations at the Sugar Loaf Mine. Under a traditional asset sale and AVO structure, the purchaser would have to apply to the various agencies and regulatory authorities for transfers of existing licences and permits or, if transfers are not possible, for new licences and permits. This is a process that would necessarily involve risk, delay, and cost. The RVO sought in this case achieves the timely and efficient preservation of the necessary licences and permits necessary for the operations of the Mine.

[72] It is no secret that time is not on the side of a debtor company faced with Harte Gold's financial challenges. It is also relevant that the purchaser has agreed to provide DIP financing up to \$10.8 million and substantial cure costs of pre and post filing trade obligations. This is all financing required to be able to continue operations as a going concern at the Mine post closing and to fund the CCAA process.

[73] The position of the purchaser is, not unreasonably, that it will not both continue to fund ongoing operations and the CCAA process and undertake a process of application to relevant government agencies for transfers of the Harte Gold licenses and permits (or, if necessary, for new ones) with all of the risks and uncertainties of possible adverse outcomes and indeterminant delays and costs associated with such a process. The RVO structure will enable the transaction to be completed efficiently and expeditiously, without exposure to these material risks, delays and costs.

[74] The Monitor supports the use of the RVO transaction structure. The Monitor has also pointed out that the applicant holds some 513 mineral tenures, consisting of three freehold properties, seven leasehold properties, 468 mineral claims and 35 additional tenures. The reverse vesting structure avoids the need to amend the various registrations to reflect a new owner, which would add more cost and delay if the proposed purchase transaction was to proceed through a traditional asset purchase and vesting order.

[75] In addition, Harte Gold has a significant number of contracts that will be retained under the SARSA. Again, the RVO transaction structure will avoid potentially significant delays and costs associated with having to seek consent to assignment from contract counter-parties or, if consents could not be obtained, orders assigning such contracts under s. 11.3 of the CCAA. The Monitor has also pointed out that under the SARSA and the RVO, the purchaser will be required to pay applicable cure costs in respect of the retained contracts which has been structured in substantially the same manner as contemplated by s. 11.3(4) of the CCAA if a contract was assigned by court order.

[76] For all these reasons, I accept that the proposed RVO transaction structure is necessary to achieve the clear benefits of the Silver Lake purchase and that it is appropriate to approve this transaction in the circumstances.

## Conclusion on RVO/Section 36 Issues

[77] In all the circumstances, I find that the RVO sought in the circumstances of this case is in the interests of the creditors and stakeholders in general. I consider the RVO to be appropriate in the circumstances. The RVO will: provide for timely, efficient and impartial resolution of Harte Gold's insolvency; preserve and maximize the value of Harte Gold's assets; ensure a fair and equitable treatment of the claims against Harte Gold; protect the public interest (in the sense of preserving employment for well over 250 employees as well as numerous third party suppliers and service providers and maintaining Harte Gold's commitments to the First Nations peoples of the area); and, balances the costs and benefits of Harte Gold's restructuring or liquidation.

## Release

[78] Harte Gold seeks a Release which includes the present and former directors and officers of Harte Gold and the newcos, the Monitor and its legal counsel, and the purchaser and its directors, and officers. The proposed Release covers all present and future claims against the released parties based upon any fact, matter of occurrence in respect of the SARSA transactions or Harte Gold and its assets, business or affairs, except any claim for fraud or willful misconduct or any claim that is not permitted to be released under s. 5.1(2) of the CCAA.

[79] CCAA courts have frequently approved releases, both in the context of a plan and in the absence of a CCAA plan, both on consent and in contested matters. These releases have been in favour of the parties, directors, officers, monitors, counsel, employees, shareholders and advisors.

[80] I find that the requested Release is reasonable and appropriate in the circumstances. I base my decision on an assessment of following factors taken from *Lydian International Limited (Re)*, 2020 ONSC 4006 at para. 54. As is often the case in the exercise of discretionary powers, it is not necessary for each of the factors to apply for the release to be approved.

[81] Whether the claims to be released are rationally connected to the purpose of the restructuring: The claims released are rationally connected to Harte Gold's restructuring. The Release will have the effect of diminishing claims against the released parties, which in turn will diminish indemnification claims by the released parties against the Administration Charge and the Directors' Charge. The result is a larger pool of cash available to satisfy creditor claims. Given that a purpose of a CCAA proceeding is to maximize creditor recovery, a release that helps achieve this goal is rationally connected to the purpose of the Company's restructuring.

[82] Whether the releasees contributed to the restructuring: The released parties made significant contributions to Harte Gold's restructuring, both prior to and throughout these CCAA Proceedings. Among other things, the extensive efforts of the directors and management of Harte Gold were instrumental in the conduct of the pre-filing strategic process, the SISF and the continued operations of Harte Gold during the CCAA proceedings. With a proposed sale that will maintain Harte Gold as a going concern and permit most creditors to receive recovery in full, these CCAA proceedings have had what must be considered a "successful" outcome for the benefit of Harte Gold's stakeholders. The released parties have clearly contributed time, energy and resources to achieve this outcome and accordingly, are deserving of a release.

[83] Whether the Release is fair, reasonable and not overly broad: The Release is fair and reasonable. Harte Gold is unaware of any outstanding director claims or liabilities against its directors and officers. Similarly, Harte Gold is unaware of any claims against the advisors related to their provision of services to Harte Gold or to the purchaser relating to Harte Gold or these CCAA proceedings. As such, the Release is not expected to materially prejudice any stakeholders. Further, the Release is sufficiently narrow. Regulatory or environmental liabilities owed to any government authority have not been disclaimed and the language of the Release was specifically negotiated with the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines to preserve those identified obligations. Further, the Release carves out and preserves claims that are not permitted to be released pursuant to s. 5.1(2) of the CCAA and claims arising from fraud or wilful misconduct. The scope of the Release is sufficiently balanced and will allow Harte Gold and the released parties to move forward with the transaction and to conclude these CCAA proceedings.

[84] Whether the restructuring could succeed without the Release: The Release is being sought, with the support of Silver Lake and the Appian parties (the most significant stakeholders in these CCAA proceedings) as it will enhance the certainty and finality of the transaction. Additionally, Harte Gold and the purchaser both take the position that the Release is an essential component to the transaction.

[85] Whether the Release benefits Harte Gold as well as the creditors generally: The Release benefits Harte Gold and its creditors and other stakeholders by reducing the potential for the released parties to seek indemnification, thus minimizing further claims against the Administration Charge and the Directors' Charge.

[86] Creditors' knowledge of the nature and effect of the Release: All creditors on the service list were served with materials relating to this motion. Harte Gold also made additional efforts to serve all parties with excluded claims under the transaction. Additionally, the form of the Release was included in the draft approval and reverse vesting order that was included in the original Application Record in these CCAA proceedings. All of this provided stakeholders with ample notice and time to raise concerns with Harte Gold or the Monitor. No creditor (or any other stakeholder) has objected to the Release. A specific claims process for claims against the released parties in these circumstances would only result in additional costs and delay without any apparent corresponding benefit.

## Extension of the Stay

[87] The current stay period expires on January 31, 2022. Under s. 11.02 of the CCAA, the court may grant an extension of a stay of proceedings where: (a) circumstances exist that make the order appropriate; and (b) the debtor company satisfies the court that it has acted, and is acting, in good faith and with due diligence.

[88] Harte Gold is seeking to extend the stay period to and including March 29, 2022 to allow it to proceed with the closing of the Silver Lake transaction, while at the same time preserving the status quo and preventing creditors and others from taking any steps to try and better their positions in comparison to other creditors.

[89] No creditors are expected to suffer material prejudice as a result of the extension of the stay of proceedings. Harte Gold is acting in good faith and will continue to pay its post-filing obligations in the ordinary course. As detailed in Harte Gold's cash flow forecast, it is expected to have sufficient liquidity to continue its operations during the contemplated extension of the stay.

[90] For these reasons the stay is extended to March 29, 2022.

## Expansion of Monitor's Powers

[91] The CCAA provides the Court with broad discretion in respect of the Monitor's functions. Section 23(1)(k) of the CCAA provides that the Monitor can "carry out any other functions in relation to the [debtor] company that the court may direct". In addition, of course, s. 11 of the CCAA authorizes this Court to make any order that is necessary and appropriate in the circumstances.

[92] The order for the Monitor's expanded powers is intended to provide the Monitor with the power, effective upon the issuance of the approval and reverse vesting order, to administer the affairs of the newcos (which is necessary to complete the transaction), along with powers necessary to wind down these CCAA proceedings and to put the newcos into bankruptcy following the close of the transaction. No creditor is prejudiced by the expansion of the Monitor's powers to facilitate the transaction and the wind-down of the CCAA proceedings. On the contrary, the granting of such powers is necessary to achieve the benefits of the transaction to stakeholders which have been described above.

[93] I approve the grant of the requested powers to the Monitor.

## Conclusion

[94] For all these reasons, the motion for an order approving the Silver Lake transaction, including the RVO structure, is granted. The additional requests for orders extending the stay and expanding the Monitor's powers are also granted.

**Penny J.**

**Date:** 2022-02-04

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TAB 2



At para(s) 34

# Just Energy Group Inc. et. al. v. Morgan Stanley Capital Group Inc. et. al., 2022 ONSC 6354 (CanLII)

Date: 2022-11-14

File number: CV-21-00658423-00CL

**Citation:** **Just Energy Group Inc. et. al. v. Morgan Stanley Capital Group Inc. et. al., 2022 ONSC 6354 (CanLII), <<https://canlii.ca/t/jt3xw>>, retrieved on 2024-10-10**

CITATION: Just Energy Group Inc. et. al. v. Morgan Stanley Capital Group Inc. et. al., 2022 ONSC 6354

**COURT FILE NO.:** CV-21-00658423-00CL

**DATE:** 20221114

ONTARIO

SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE

**BETWEEN:** )  
 )

IN THE MATTER  
OF THE  
COMPANIES'  
CREDITORS  
ARRANGEMENT  
ACT, R.S.C. 1985,  
c. C-36, AS  
AMENDED

– and –

IN THE MATTER  
OF A PLAN OF  
COMPROMISE  
OR  
ARRANGEMENT  
OF JUST ENERGY  
GROUP INC.,  
JUST ENERGY  
CORP., ONTARIO  
ENERGY  
COMMODITIES  
INC.,  
UNIVERSALE  
ENERGY  
CORPORATION,  
JUST ENERGY  
FINANCE CANADA  
ULC, HUDSON  
ENERGY CANADA  
CORP., JUST  
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TEXAS I CORP.,  
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LLC, JUST  
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PENNSYLVANIA  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY  
MICHIGAN  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY  
SOLUTIONS INC.,  
HUDSON  
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HOLDINGS CORP.  
and JUST  
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(FINANCE)  
HUNGARY ZRT.

Applicants

**- and -**

MORGAN  
STANLEY CAPITAL  
GROUP INC.

Respondents

in his capacity  
as  
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*Ganesh Yadav,* self-represented

*Mohammad Jaafari,* self-represented

)

**HEARD:**

November 2, 2022

ENDORSEMENT

McEwen J.

[1] The Applicants (collectively the “Just Energy Entities”) bring a motion seeking approval of a going-concern sale transaction (the “Transaction”) for their business. They seek to implement the Transaction through a proposed draft reverse vesting order (the “RVO”) and other related relief.

[2] The Just Energy Entities provided the court with two draft orders in furtherance of their position. The first is the RVO for the Transaction. The second is an order (the “Monitor’s Order”) giving FTI Consulting Canada Inc. (the “Monitor”) enhanced powers to implement the RVO and other related relief, including a stay extension, approval of the Monitor’s reports and fees and a sealing order.

[3] I granted the two orders with reasons to follow. I am now providing those reasons.

## **BACKGROUND**

[4] Just Energy Group Inc. (“Just Energy”) and its subsidiaries collectively form the Just Energy Entities. Just Energy is primarily a holding company that operates subsidiaries in Canada and the U.S.

[5] Just Energy is incorporated under the *Canada Business Corporations Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-44 (“CBCA”). It maintains dual headquarters in Ontario and Texas. Just Energy’s shares are listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange and the New York Stock Exchange.

[6] The Just Energy Entities are a retail energy provider. Their principal line of business consists of purchasing retail energy and natural gas commodities from large energy suppliers and reselling them to residential and commercial customers. The Just Energy Entities service over 950,000 residential and commercial customers across Canada and the U.S. and employ over 1,000 employees.

[7] The Just Energy Entities’ business is highly regulated. This is because of its nature. The business depends on many licenses, authorizations and permits across multiple jurisdictions in both Canada and the U.S. Without these approvals the Just Energy Entities cannot market or sell energy to its customers.

[8] On March 9, 2022, the Just Energy Entities obtained protection under the *Companies’ Creditors Arrangement Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c.C-36 (the “CCAA”) pursuant to an Initial Order under the CCAA.

[9] The Just Energy Entities were forced to file for protection under the CCAA after an extreme winter storm in Texas. The February 2021 storm, together with Texas regulators’ response to the storm, posed a significant liquidity challenge that precipitated the filing. In or about the time of the filing, the Just Energy Entities held an aggregate book value of approximately CDN \$1.069 billion, with an aggregate book value of liabilities around CDN \$1.28 billion.

[10] There is a complicated array of secured creditors. Insofar as the Transaction is concerned, the Pacific Investment Management Company LLC (“PIMCO”) manages a number of funds which comprise a portion of the secured creditors and/or the DIP Lenders. These entities constitute the purchaser in the Transaction (the “Purchaser”).

[11] There are also several other secured creditors, including the Credit Facility Lenders and secured suppliers. They have reached an agreement with the Just Energy Entities and the Purchaser with respect to the Transaction.

[12] In September 2021, this court granted a Claims Process Order to establish a process to determine the nature, quantum and validity of the claims against the Just Energy Entities.

[13] In May 2022, the Just Energy Entities brought a motion (the “Meetings Order Motion”) seeking, amongst other things, authorization to hold a creditors’ meeting to vote on their proposed Plan of Compromise and Arrangement.

[14] Some unsecured litigation claimants opposed the Meetings Order Motion: primarily, two uncertified U.S. class actions (together the “U.S. Class Actions”), a certified Ontario class action (the “Omarali Class Action”) and plaintiffs in four actions brought in Texas by approximately 250 claimants (the “Mass Tort Claims”).

[15] Following my June 10, 2022 Endorsement, the Plan Sponsor—that consisted of the DIP Lenders, one of their affiliates and other stakeholders—withdrawed their support for the proposed Plan of Compromise and Arrangement.

[16] Thereafter, the Just Energy Entities, the Plan Sponsor and other supporting stakeholders pivoted to implementing a sales and investment solicitation process (the “SISP”) in accordance with the new Support Agreement dated August 4, 2022 (the “SISP Support Agreement”). The SISP included a stalking-horse bid by the Purchaser.

[17] On August 18, 2022, I granted an order (the “SISP Approval Order”) that, amongst other things, approved the SISP and SISP Support Agreement with modest modifications.

[18] The SISP was conducted over a 10-week period. It was conducted in accordance with the SISP Approval Order and was well-publicized. The Just Energy Entities negotiated non-disclosure agreements with potential bidders, facilitated access to the data room for those parties, responded to numerous due diligence requests and offered management presentation meetings. Four written notices of intention to bid (“NOIs”) were received. Ultimately, however, no bids were received; therefore, the Transaction was declared the successful bid, subject to court approval.

[19] It bears noting that, in addition to the SISP, the business of the Just Energy Entities was broadly and extensively marketed over the past approximately three years. No meaningful proposals were ever received.

[20] Also, at the time of the SISP Approval Order, the Just Energy Entities had been negotiating with their key stakeholders for roughly 1.5 years.

[21] Further, U.S. Class Actions were involved in the SISP but ultimately did not file a NOI or engage in further discussions with the Just Energy Entities in the SISP.

[22] The value that the Purchaser is paying for the Just Energy Entities is approximately U.S. \$444 million plus the assumption of several liabilities, all of which provides recovery for the approximately CDN \$1 billion in secured claims.

[23] Last, all equity interests of Just Energy and Just Energy (U.S.) Corp. (“JEUS”) that exist prior to the proposed implementation of the RVO will be deemed to be terminated, cancelled or redeemed following the closing. The Purchaser will own all the issued and outstanding shares of JEUS. In turn, JEUS will own all of the issued and outstanding shares of Just Energy and the other acquired entities. The Just Energy Entities will continue to control their own assets, other than the excluded assets, and will remain liable for their respective assumed liabilities.

## THE ISSUES

[24] There are two issues on this motion:

- whether the Transaction should be approved, including the RVO and related relief; and
- whether the Monitor should receive the enhanced powers requested in the Monitor’s Order with respect to the implementation of the RVO and the related relief, including the stay extension, approval of the Monitor’s reports and fees and a sealing order.

[25] The secured creditors consent to the relief sought. Neither the U.S. Class Actions, the Omarali Class Action nor the Mass Tort Claims opposed the relief sought. The only opposition comes from Mr. Ganesh Yadav, a shareholder, and Mr. Mohammad Jaafari, a former employee of Just Energy who is pursuing a claim in the Tokyo District Court of Japan alleging wrongful termination.

[26] I will first deal with the issues surrounding the RVO and the Monitor’s Order. Thereafter I will outline the two specific claims of Mr. Yadav and Mr. Jaafari and explain why I do not believe their claims affect the relief sought by the Just Energy Entities.

## REVERSE VESTING ORDERS

[27] A reverse vesting order generally involves a series of steps, whereby:

- (a) the purchaser becomes the sole shareholder of the debtor company;
- (b) the debtor company retains its assets, including key contracts and permits; and
- (c) the liabilities not assumed by the purchaser are vested out and transferred, together with any excluded assets, into a newly incorporated entity or entities.<sup>[1]<sup>2</sup></sup>

The assets and liabilities are vested out in the separate entity or entities (which are referred to in the RVO as “Residual Cos.”) which may then be addressed through a bankruptcy or similar process. The reverse vesting order is therefore contrasted with a traditional vesting order in which the assets of a debtor company that the purchaser acquires are vested in the purchaser free and clear of any encumbrances or claims, other than those assumed by the purchaser, as contemplated by s. 36(4) of the CCAA. The purchase price stands in place of the assets and is available to satisfy creditor claims, in whole or in part, in accordance with their pre-existing priority.

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2. *Arrangement relatif à Black Rock Metals Inc.*, 2022 QCCS 2828, at para. 85, leave to appeal to QCCA refused, 2022 QCCA 1073.



## The Law relating to Reverse Vesting Orders

[28] I begin my analysis with a general review of the law.

[29] The jurisdiction to approve a transaction through a reverse vesting order is found in s. 11 of the CCAA. Section 11 gives this court broad powers to make orders that it sees fit, subject to the restrictions set out in the statute. There is no provision in the CCAA that prohibits a reverse vesting order structure: see *Quest University (Re)*, 2020 BCSC 1883, at para. 157.

[30] Some courts have also held that s. 36 of the CCAA confers jurisdiction. Section 36 contemplates court approval for the sale of a debtor company's assets out of the ordinary course of business: see *Black Rock Metals Inc.*; *Quest University (Re)*, at para. 40.

[31] In any event, it is settled law that courts have jurisdiction to approve a transaction involving a reverse vesting order. Moreover, courts agree that the factors set out in s. 36(3) of the CCAA should also be considered on a motion to approve a sale, including one involving a reverse vesting order. Section 36(3) stipulates that the court is to consider, among other things,

- (a) whether the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition was reasonable in the circumstances;
- (b) whether the monitor approved the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition;
- (c) whether the monitor filed with the court a report stating that in their opinion the sale or disposition would be more beneficial to the creditors than a sale or disposition under a bankruptcy;
- (d) the extent to which the creditors were consulted;
- (e) the effects of the proposed sale or disposition on the creditors and other interested parties; and
- (f) whether the consideration to be received for the assets is reasonable and fair, taking into account their market value.

[32] In *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, 2022 ONSC 653, Penny J. held that the s. 36(3) criteria largely correspond to the principles articulated in *Royal Bank of Canada v. Soundair Corp* (1991), 1991 CanLII 2727 (ON CA), 4 O.R. (3d) 1 (C.A) for the approval of the sale of assets in an insolvency. They are as follows:

- whether sufficient effort has been made to obtain the best price and that the debtor has not acted improvidently;
- the interests of all parties;

- the efficacy and integrity of the process by which offers have been obtained; and
- whether there has been unfairness in the working out of the process.

[33] Reverse vesting orders are relatively new structures. I agree that reverse vesting orders should not be the “norm” and that a court should carefully consider whether a reverse vesting order is warranted in the circumstances: see *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, at para. 38; *Black Rock Metals Inc.*, at para. 99. That said, reverse vesting orders have been deemed appropriate in a number of cases: see *Quest University (Re)*, at para. 168, *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, at para. 77 and *Black Rock Metals Inc.*, at para. 114.

[34] The aforementioned cases approved reverse vesting orders in circumstances where:

- The debtor operated in a highly-regulated environment in which its existing permits, licenses or other rights were difficult or impossible to reassign to a purchaser.
- The debtor is a party to certain key agreements that would be similarly difficult or impossible to assign to a purchaser.
- Where maintaining the existing legal entities would preserve certain tax attributes that would otherwise be lost in a traditional vesting order transaction.

[35] Given the supporting jurisprudence, I will now discuss why the RVO should be granted and why the Transaction should be approved.

### **The RVO should be granted**

[36] The Just Energy Entities’ business, as noted, is highly regulated and depends almost entirely on a substantial number of licenses, authorizations and permits in multiple jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S.

[37] As set out in the affidavit of Mr. Michael Carter, the Chief Financial Officer to the Just Energy Entities (at para. 57), the value of the Just Energy Entities’ business arises predominantly from the gross margin in their customer contracts. The business is wholly dependent on the Just Energy Entities holding several non-transferable licenses and authorizations that permit their operation in Canada and the U.S. and in their agreements with over 100 public utilities, which allow the Just Energy Entities to provide natural gas and electricity in certain markets to their customers.

[38] Currently the Just Energy Entities hold at least:

- Seventeen separate licenses and authorizations in five provinces in Canada which allows them to market natural gas and electricity in the applicable provincial markets, eight of which are non-transferrable and non-assignable, with the remaining nine only assignable with leave of the regulator.
- Five separate import and export orders issued by the Canadian Energy Regulator (“CER”), all of which are non-transferrable and non-assignable.
- Three separate registrations with the Alberta Electricity System Operator (the “AESO”) in Alberta and with the Independent Electricity System Operator (“IESO”) in Ontario, all of which are either non-transferrable or only assignable with leave.
- Six licenses in Nevada and New Jersey to allow them to market natural gas and/or electricity in the applicable states, all of which are non-transferrable.
- Twenty-five licenses in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia to allow them to market natural gas and/or electricity in the applicable states, all of which may only be transferred with the prior authorization of the applicable regulator in each jurisdiction.
- Eighteen electricity and/or natural gas provider licenses or authorizations in California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, and New York, where no process for transferring the licenses or authorizations is prescribed in the applicable statutes.
- Five retail electricity provider certifications in Texas which may only be transferred with the authorization of the Public Utility Commission of Texas (“PUCT”).
- Three separate export authorizations issued by the Department of Energy (“DOE”) in the U.S., all of which may only be transferred with the prior authorization of the DOE’s assistant secretary.
- Seven separate market-based authorizations issued by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (“FERC”) in the U.S. which may only be transferred with the prior authorization of FERC.

[39] As further deposed by Mr. Carter, all the provincial, state, market participation, export and import orders, licenses and authorizations held by the Just Energy Entities are either non-transferrable, capable of transfer only with the approval of the applicable regulator, or provide for no clear regulatory process for the transfer of such authorizations.

[40] On Mr. Carter’s analysis, the RVO would not hamper the existing licenses, authorizations, orders and agreements. As such, he deposes that the RVO structure is the only feasible structure for the Transaction (at para. 59). Any other structure would risk exposing most of the 89 licenses upon which the Just Energy Entities’ business is founded. Mr. Carter also deposes (at para. 75) that if a traditional

vesting order was granted, the Purchaser would be required to participate in a separate regulatory process in five Canadian provinces, 15 U.S. states and with federal agencies in both Canada and the U.S. to try and obtain transfers of the 89 licenses, authorizations and certifications or the issuance of new licenses, authorizations and certifications. This risk and uncertainty would affect the value of a sale to any other purchaser. For this reason, the benefit of the RVO is clear: it preserves the necessary approvals to conduct business.

[41] Additionally, Mr. Carter (at para. 60) deposes that the Just Energy Entities are party to a myriad of hedging transactions. This includes hedge transactions with commodity suppliers to minimize commodity and volume risk, foreign exchange hedge transactions and hedges for renewal energy credits, many of which are fundamental to the Just Energy Entities' ability to effectively operate their business and non-transferrable. Moreover, any U.S. tax attributes resident in the Just Energy Entities would generally be unable to be utilized in the go-forward business where the Transaction structure has a traditional asset sale vesting order.

[42] No stakeholder disputes Mr. Carter's evidence. More specifically, no stakeholder disputes the importance of maintaining the 89 current licenses, authorizations and certifications listed above. And, no stakeholder disputes the fact that under a traditional asset sale and approval and vesting order structure, a purchaser would have to apply to the various agencies and regulators for transfers of the aforementioned licenses, etc.

[43] I agree with the Just Energy Entities, who are supported by the Monitor. Given the above, the RVO sought is the only way to achieve the preservation of the licenses, authorizations and certifications necessary for the ongoing business operations of the Just Energy Entities. This includes transferring the excluded assets into the two Residual Cos., one in Canada and one in the U.S. as is typically the case in reverse vesting orders.

[44] The fact that the Just Energy Entities has been operating for approximately 19 months since the CCAA filing is critical. As noted by Penny J. in *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, at para. 72, time is not on the side of a debtor company facing financial challenges. I agree.

[45] For all the reasons above, I am satisfied that the RVO is appropriate.

[46] I now turn to the s. 36(3) factors.

### **The Transaction is fair and reasonable**

#### ***The process leading to the proposed sale was reasonable***

[47] The Transaction was developed by the Just Energy Entities in consultation with the Monitor and its financial advisor, Mr. Mark Caiger, the Managing Director, Mergers & Acquisitions at BMO Nesbitt Burns Inc., as well as the Purchaser and other secured lenders. As noted, the SISF was approved

by this court and thereafter conducted as per the provisions of the SISP Approval Order. As set out in Mr. Carter's affidavit, the SISP was undertaken in accordance with the SISP Approval Order in two stages.

[48] The overview of the SISP structure is well described in Mr. Caiger's October 19, 2022 affidavit. Amongst other things, in the first stage, the Just Energy Entities and Mr. Caiger prepared a list of potential bidders, established a data room and published a press release announcing the SISP. Mr. Caiger contacted 41 potential bidders, non-disclosure agreements were negotiated and four NOIs were received.

[49] The process then moved into the second stage. The Just Energy Entities prepared a form of transaction agreement that included a form of approval and RVO for completion by bidders as part of receiving submissions of a qualified bid. Three of the four second stage participants eventually indicated that they were not going to proceed. The remaining party did not submit a bid. It advised the Monitor that it saw no value beyond the stalking-horse bid.

[50] The Transaction before this court is therefore the only going-concern Transaction available to the Just Energy Entities. I am satisfied in the circumstances that the market was thoroughly canvassed and, as noted, in addition to the SISP, the business of the Just Energy Entities has been marketed broadly and extensively for approximately three years. The U.S. Class Actions previously indicated that they may advance their own restructuring plan for consideration and voting by the Just Energy Entities creditors. During this process, they were allowed full participation but ultimately did not file a NOI or further engage in the SISP process.

***The Monitor has approved the process***

[51] As noted, the Monitor approved the process that lead to the Transaction. The Monitor concluded that the RVO is the only efficient means to ensure that all the licenses, authorizations and agreements remain in place. The Monitor is also of the view that any potential prejudice to the individual creditors is far outweighed by the overall benefit of the Transaction. Importantly, the Monitor also believes that the RVO represents the only viable alternative to implement the Transaction for the benefit of the Just Energy Entities' stakeholders.

***The Transaction is more beneficial to the creditors than a sale or disposition in bankruptcy***

[52] The Monitor assisted the Just Energy Entities in preparing a liquidation analysis when the Just Energy Entities were pursuing approval of the Plan of Compromise and Arrangement. The analysis has been updated. The Monitor and the Just Energy Entities concluded, on the basis of the updated liquidation analysis, that not only would a liquidation produce no recovery for unsecured creditors, but it would result in a shortfall to secured creditors. This, of course, would be less beneficial than closing the Transaction.

***The creditors were consulted***

[53] As noted in this endorsement, extensive consultation was undertaken both with the secured creditors, the U.S. Class Actions, the Omarali Class Action and the Mass Tort Claims. There is no suggestion in the record that any creditors were ignored or overlooked.

***The effect of the Transaction on creditors and other interested parties***

[54] I am of the belief that the RVO is the only viable option for a going-concern exit from the CCAA proceedings.

[55] No other offers have been obtained, not only during the SISP but also in the past three years when the Just Energy Entities' business was being broadly and extensively marketed. No other plan or proposal has been put forward.

[56] The Transaction, in my view, provides a number of positive benefits, including:

- preserving the going-concern value of the business for the benefit of stakeholders;
- maintaining the Just Energy Entities' relationships with the majority of its commodity suppliers, vendors, trade creditors and other counter-parties;
- providing for the continued operation of the Just Energy Entities across Canada and the U.S.;
- continuing to supply uninterrupted energy to the Just Energy Entities approximately 950,000 customers;
- preserving the ongoing employment of most of the more than 1,000 employees of the Just Energy Entities;
- maintaining the aforementioned regulatory and licensing relationships across Canada and the U.S.;
- satisfying or assuming in full all secured claims and priority payables;
- preserving U.S. tax attributes and tax pools; and
- permitting the Just Energy Entities to exit these proceedings with a significantly deleveraged balance sheet and a U.S. \$250 million new credit facility bringing an end to the CCAA proceedings aside from the limited matters related to the Residual Cos.

[57] As discussed, the Transaction does not provide any recovery for unsecured creditors or shareholders. I accept the submissions of the Just Energy Entities, however, that this is not a result of the RVO structure. Rather, this reflects the fact that the Just Energy Entities' value, as tested through the market through the SISP and through previous marketing attempts over three years, is not high

enough to generate value for the unsecured creditors and shareholders. This was also the situation in *Black Rock Metals Inc.* (see paras. 109, 120). I agree with the comments in *Black Rock Metals Inc.* wherein Chief Justice Paquette stated that the unsecured creditors and shareholders are therefore not in a worse position with the reverse vesting order than they would have been under a traditional asset sale. Either way, they have no economic interest because the purchase price would not generate any value for the unsecured creditors and shareholders.

[58] There is no other viable option being presented to this court. Further, it bears noting that the shareholders' interests amount to claims in equity. As noted in *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, at para. 64, shareholders have no economic interest in an insolvent enterprise and therefore they are not entitled to a vote in any plan. The portion of the order requested relating to the cancellation of the existing shares is, therefore, justified in the circumstances.

[59] The consideration to be received for the assets is fair and reasonable. The Just Energy Entities' business was extensively marketed both prior to and during the CCAA. There have been no offers, except that put forth by the Purchaser. Therefore, I accept that the consideration is fair and reasonable.

[60] While it is unfortunate that there is no recovery for unsecured creditors or shareholders, this is a function of the market. In this regard, it is noteworthy that PIMCO holds over U.S. \$250 million in unsecured debt that it will not recover.

[61] There is also evidence above that the purchaser is paying more than the Just Energy Entities would be worth in a bankruptcy. Furthermore, the Monitor is satisfied that the consideration is fair in the circumstances.

### ***Other considerations***

[62] Based on the foregoing analysis of the s. 36(3) provisions, I am also satisfied that the criteria set out above in *Soundair* have been met: there has been a sufficient effort to obtain the best price; the debtor has not acted imprudently; the interests of the parties have been properly considered; the process has been carried out with efficacy and integrity; and there is no unfairness in the circumstances.

[63] The Transaction will provide for a fair and reasonable resolution of the Just Energy Entities' insolvency and obtain the best value for its assets. In sum, employment is preserved for most employees and energy will continued to be provided for approximately 950,000 customers.

### **Related relief**

[64] With respect to the shareholdings in the Just Energy Entities, it is reasonable to cancel the existing shares and issue new common shares to the Purchaser via JEUS. Similar approaches have been used in other reverse vesting order transactions: see *Black Rock Metals Inc.*, at para. 122; *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, at paras. 59-64. Since the existing shareholders have no economic interest in the company, there is no entitlement to recovery unless all creditors are paid in full: *Canwest Global Communications Corp. (Re)*, 2010 ONSC 4209, 70 C.B.R. (5th) 1.

[65] The *CBCA* provides that the share conditions of a *CBCA* corporation under *CCAA* protection can be changed by articles of reorganization. Section 191(1) of the *CBCA* recognizes that a “reorganization” includes a court order made under any Act of Parliament that affects the rights among the corporation, its shareholders and other creditors (see s. 191(1)(c)). This includes the *CCAA*: see *Canwest*, at para. 34; *Black Rock Metals Inc.*, at para. 122; *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, at para. 61 (dealing with the equivalent provision of Ontario’s *Business Corporations Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. B.16. (*OBCA*)).

[66] Pursuant to ss. 173, 176(1)(b) and 191(2) of the *CBCA*, courts have accepted that, under a *CCAA* proceeding, they can approve the cancellation of outstanding shares as part of a corporate reorganization that gives effect to a *CCAA* restructuring transaction and that the shareholders are not entitled to vote: see *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, at para. 62; *Black Rock Metals Inc.*, at para. 122; *Canwest*, at para. 34.

[67] There are also a number of other orders requested in the RVO that I have approved. I will briefly deal with the noteworthy ones below, as follows:

- It is appropriate that the RVO provides that all former employees of the Just Energy Entities be transferred to the Canadian Residual Cos. This will assist these former employees in relation to their entitlements under the *Wage Earner Protection Program Act*, S.C. 2005, c.47, s.1. Similar relief was granted in *Quest University (Re)*, which also involved a reverse vesting order.
- The releases sought are proportional in scope and consistent with releases granted in other similar *CCAA* proceedings. I have analyzed the factors set out by Penny J. in *Harte Gold Corp. (Re)*, at paras. 81-86. As in that case, the releases are rationally connected to the purposes of the restructuring; the releasees contributed to the restructuring; the releases are not overly broad; the releases will enhance the certainty and finality of the Transaction; the releases benefit the Just Energy Entities, its creditors and other stakeholders by reducing the potential for the released parties to seek indemnification; and all creditors on the service list were made aware of the releases sought and the nature and effect of the release.
- The specific relief in the RVO concerning the ongoing litigation with the Electric Reliability Council of Texas Inc. (“ERCOT”) is fair and reasonable. The wording was negotiated with ERCOT and preserves the Just Energy Entities’ and ERCOT’s rights in the ongoing litigation between them as set out para. 11.
- Similarly, the paragraphs of the RVO concerning the Omarali Class Action are fair and reasonable and have been negotiated with the Omarali Class Action solicitors and are not prejudicial to the insurers noted therein.
- All remaining ancillary relief is fair and reasonable. I have simply touched upon the most significant ancillary relief above.

## THE MONITOR’S ORDER



[68] As outlined, I granted the Monitor's Order.

[69] First, it is necessary that the Monitor carry on in order to implement the steps required with respect to the Residual Cos. in Canada and the U.S. and to implement the provisions of the RVO.

[70] Second, the stay extension to January 31, 2023 is also necessary given the steps that must be undertaken.

[71] I have reviewed the activities of the Monitor's reports and fees and they are fair and reasonable.

[72] Last, I agree that a sealing order should be issued with respect to confidential Exhibit "F" of Mr. Caiger's affidavit. Exhibit "F" is comprised of the four NOIs received by the Just Energy Entities. The NOIs contain confidential, commercially sensitive information regarding the identities of the four participants and their respective corporate, operational and financial information disclosed in support of the requirement of each NOI. Additionally, the NOIs contain confidential and commercially sensitive information regarding the scope and subject matter of each proposed bid. Dissemination of this information at this time, would pose a legitimate risk to the commercial interests of the SISP participants and the Just Energy Entities and their stakeholders should the Transaction fail to close. Thus, the public's interest in maintaining the confidentiality of this commercially sensitive information creates an important commercial interest. Accordingly, I am satisfied that the test set out in *Sierra Club of Canada v. Canada (Minister of Finance)*, 2002 SCC 41, [2002] 2 S.C.R. 522, at para. 53, as recast in *Sherman Estate v. Donovan*, 2021 SCC 25, 458 D.L.R. (4th) 361, at para. 38, has been met. The sealing order is being made on an interim basis pending further order of the court.

#### **CLAIMS OF BP ENERGY COMPANY**

[73] At the request of the Just Energy Entities and the BP Energy Company, I will now turn to agreed-upon terms as between the Just Energy Entities and the BP Energy Company.

[74] The Just Energy Entities and BP Energy Company and certain of its affiliates (collectively "BP") and the Just Energy Entities have reached an agreement, which is not opposed by any other stakeholders, that BP, being beneficiaries of the Priority Commodity/ISO Charge in these proceedings, are not opposing this motion on the basis that the New Intercreditor Agreement will be on terms consistent with those set forth in the term sheet included in Exhibit "I" to the Affidavit of Mr. Carter sworn August 4, 2022 (the "ICA Term Sheet").

[75] To the extent that the terms of the New Intercreditor Agreement are inconsistent with the ICA Term Sheet or contain material changes to the current Intercreditor Agreement that are not specifically set forth in the ICA Term Sheet, BP is reserving its rights to return to this Court to (a) oppose the future release of the Priority Commodity/ISO Charge contemplated by the Reverse Vesting Order and (b) take such action as it reasonably deems necessary to assure its future extensions and credit and accommodations are terminated.

[76] I have reviewed this agreement with counsel and find it to be fair and reasonable in the circumstances of the Transaction.

### **THE OPPOSING STAKEHOLDERS**

[77] As noted, two stakeholders raised objections to the orders sought by the Just Energy Entities. I will deal with each in turn.

#### **Ganesh Yadav**

[78] Mr. Yadav is a shareholder.

[79] Mr. Yadav did not file any affidavit evidence or any other evidence in a proper form. Rather, he filed what he described as a “motion record” in which he attached various documents relating to the Just Energy Entities’ financial performances and outlined his objections.

[80] Essentially, he submits that the Just Energy Entities have significant liquidity, far in excess of the stalking-horse bid and the calculations performed by the Just Energy Entities and the Monitor. He primarily submits that the Just Energy Entities have significant future equity in its hedges, that energy prices are increasing and that the hedges are placed at very attractive prices. To support this argument, he relies upon the Just Energy Entities’ 2022 annual report describing the derivative instruments. Mr. Yadav stresses that there are significant cash flows and that the future value of the Just Energy Entities is very promising.

[81] The difficulty with Mr. Yadav’s submissions, however, is the fact that there is no evidentiary basis for these submissions other than a loose connection of documents that, in and of themselves, do not support his argument.

[82] More importantly, the Just Energy Entities’ business was marketed for over three years and was widely canvassed during the SISP. During this entire time period there has not been a single offer in excess of the stalking-horse offer. Further, Mr. Yadav’s submissions concerning value run contrary to the Just Energy Entities and the Monitor’s valuation of the company and are unsupported by any other stakeholder.

[83] Based on the foregoing, there is no cogent evidence in the record to support Mr. Yadav’s submissions, nor has he adduced proper evidence to this court by way of affidavit or expert’s report.

[84] As a shareholder, he has an equity claim for which there is no recovery in the Transaction.

#### **Mohammad Jaafari**

[85] Mr. Jaafari also did not file any affidavit evidence at this motion. He, too, simply provided a number of documents.[2]<sup>3</sup>

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3. Mr. Jaafari continued to improperly send documents directly to me, after I signed the two orders, which I have not considered in preparing these reasons.

[86] Mr. Jaafari is a former Director and Representative Director of Just Energy Japan Kabushiki Kaisha (“JEJKK”), a former subsidiary of Just Energy. JEJKK operated the Just Energy Entities’ businesses in Japan.

[87] Mr. Jaafari was terminated from his position in August 2018, allegedly for cause.

[88] In November 2018, he commenced litigation in the Tokyo District Court against Just Energy and JEJKK.

[89] In April 2020, the Just Energy Entities sold their Japanese business. Mr. Jaafari submitted a Proof of Claim in the CCAA proceeding that was disallowed by the Monitor.

[90] Mr. Jaafari apparently has continued his litigation in Tokyo. As noted above, although there is no affidavit evidence, the documentation that he has filed with this court includes apparent endorsements by the Tokyo District Court which, if accurate, accept that Mr. Jaafari was an employee of Just Energy.

[91] Mr. Jaafari submits that as part of the RVO, I should order that money be paid in trust until the litigation in Tokyo is resolved. As I understand it, he is seeking a payment of approximately CDN \$2 million.

[92] The Just Energy Entities submit that Mr. Jaafari’s ongoing litigation is in violation of the Initial Order and that he was never an employee of Just Energy. Counsel also advises that they recently heard from their former Japanese counsel (although there is no evidence to support this) that Mr. Jaafari’s action against Just Energy was dismissed.

[93] In any event, the Just Energy Entities submit that, at best, Mr. Jaafari has an unsecured claim that is incapable of recovery since unsecured creditors are receiving no money as a result of the Transaction. Therefore, even if he is successful, there is no recovery.

[94] The Monitor, in support of the Just Energy Entities’ submissions, confirms that there is no recovery for Mr. Jaafari even if he is successful. The Monitor further submits that a payment into court or into some sort of trust would constitute a preference, which is inappropriate where other unsecured creditors are not receiving any money as a result of the Transaction.

[95] Based on the incomplete record in front of me, there is no meaningful way to determine the status and legitimacy of Mr. Jaafari’s claim for wrongful dismissal.

[96] In any event, I accept the submissions of the Just Energy Entities, supported by the Monitor, that Mr. Jaafari’s claim constitutes an unsecured claim for which there will be no recovery in the circumstances of this case.

[97] As the Monitor points out, Just Energy no longer has any assets or operations in Japan and no longer owns JEJKK. The stay of proceedings does not extend to JEJKK, which is now owned by another corporation. The Monitor submits that Mr. Jaafari is free to pursue such claims in Japan without the

involvement of the Just Energy Entities. To allow Mr. Jaafari's claim to continue against the Just Energy Entities in Japan would require the Just Energy Entities to incur expenses, perhaps make a payment into court or into trust and would deplete the Just Energy Entities' estate to the detriment of the other stakeholders with no foreseeable benefits to Mr. Jaafari.

[98] I therefore accept the Monitor's submission that this court order that Mr. Jaafari's claim can be addressed by the Just Energy Entities, in consultation with the Monitor, in accordance with the terms of the Claims Procedure Order. I am specifically not making an order that any money be paid into court or into a trust account.

### **CONCLUSION**

[99] For the reasons above, the RVO and the Monitor's Order should be approved. A reverse vesting order is permitted pursuant to the above provisions of the CCAA. Given the nature of the Just Energy Entities' business, the RVO structure is necessary and appropriate to preserve the going-concern value of the business. The Transaction is the only viable transaction that has emerged in the 19 months since the CCAA filing. It is currently the only option for a going-concern exit from the CCAA proceedings. The Transaction is the product of months of negotiations between the Just Energy Entities' key stakeholders as well as a robust court-approved SISP.

[100] Overall, the Transaction provides tangible benefits to the Just Energy Entities and their stakeholders. The fact that the Transaction provides no recovery for the general unsecured creditors or shareholders is a function of the market, not the RVO structure.

### **DISPOSITION**

[101] For the reasons above, I grant both the RVO and the Monitor's Order.

McEwen, J.

**Released: November 14, 2022**

CITATION: Just Energy v. Morgan Stanley et. al., 2022 ONSC 6354

**COURT FILE NO.:** CV-21-00658423-00CL

**DATE:** 20221114

ONTARIO

SUPERIOR  
COURT OF  
JUSTICE

**BETWEEN:**

IN THE MATTER  
OF THE  
*COMPANIES'*  
*CREDITORS*  
*ARRANGEMENT*  
ACT, R.S.C. 1985,  
c. C-36, AS  
AMENDED

– and –  
IN THE MATTER  
OF A PLAN OF  
COMPROMISE  
OR  
ARRANGEMENT  
OF JUST ENERGY  
GROUP INC.,  
JUST ENERGY  
CORP., ONTARIO  
ENERGY  
COMMODITIES  
INC.,  
UNIVERSALE  
ENERGY  
CORPORATION,  
JUST ENERGY  
FINANCE CANADA  
ULC, HUDSON  
ENERGY CANADA  
CORP., JUST  
MANAGEMENT  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY  
FINANCE  
HOLDING INC.,  
11929747  
CANADA INC.,  
12175592  
CANADA INC., JE

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SERVICES  
HOLDCO I INC.,  
JE SERVICES  
HOLDCO II INC.,  
8704104  
CANADA INC.,  
JUST ENERGY  
ADVANCED  
SOLUTIONS  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY (U.S.)  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY ILLINOIS  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY  
INDIANA CORP.,  
JUST ENERGY  
MASSACHUSETTS  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY NEW  
YORK CORP.,  
JUST ENERGY  
TEXAS I CORP.,  
JUST ENERGY,  
LLC, JUST  
ENERGY  
PENNSYLVANIA  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY  
MICHIGAN  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY  
SOLUTIONS INC.,  
HUDSON  
ENERGY  
SERVICES LLC,  
HUDSON  
ENERGY CORP.,  
INTERACTIVE

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ENERGY GROUP  
LLC , HUDSON  
PARENT  
HOLDINGS LLC,  
DRAG  
MARKETING LLC  
JUST ENERGY  
ADVANCED  
SOLUTIONS LLC,  
FULCRUM RETAIL  
ENERGY LLC,  
FULCRUM RETAIL  
HOLDINGS LLC,  
TARA ENERGY,  
LLC, JUST  
ENERGY  
MARKETING  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY  
CONNECTICUT  
CORP., JUST  
ENERGY LIMITED,  
JUST SOLAR  
HOLDINGS CORP.  
and JUST  
ENERGY  
(FINANCE)  
HUNGARY ZRT.

Applicants

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ENDORSEMENT

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**Released:**  
**November 14,**  
**2022**

McEwen

J.





TAB 3

ONTARIO  
SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE  
(COMMERCIAL LIST)

THE HONOURABLE ) THURSDAY, THE 21ST  
REGIONAL SENIOR JUSTICE MORAWETZ ) DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2019



IN THE MATTER OF THE *COMPANIES' CREDITORS ARRANGEMENT ACT*,  
R.S.C. 1985, c. C-36, AS AMENDED

AND IN THE MATTER OF A PLAN OF COMPROMISE OR ARRANGEMENT OF PAYLESS  
SHOESOURCE CANADA INC. AND PAYLESS SHOESOURCE CANADA GP INC.

(the "Applicants")

**LIQUIDATION CONSULTING AGREEMENT APPROVAL ORDER**

**THIS MOTION**, made by the Applicants, pursuant to the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-36, as amended (the "**CCAA**") for an order, among other things, approving the consulting agreement entered into between, on the one hand, Payless Holdings, LLC and Payless ShoeSource Canada LP, and on the other hand, Great American Group, LLC and Tiger Capital Group, LLC (collectively with their respective Canadian affiliate assignees, the "**Consultant**") dated as of February 12, 2019 (the "**Consulting Agreement**") and other related relief was heard this day at 330 University Avenue, Toronto, Ontario.

**ON READING** the affidavit of Stephen Marotta sworn February 18, 2019 and the Exhibits thereto, and the pre-filing report of FTI Consulting Canada Inc. in its capacity as proposed monitor dated February 19, 2019 (the "**Pre-Filing Report**") and the First Report of FTI Consulting Canada Inc. in its capacity as monitor dated February 20, 2019 and on hearing the submissions of counsel for the Applicants and Payless ShoeSource Canada LP (each a "**Payless Canada Entity**" and

*(counsel for the Consultant, counsel to the ad hoc group of lenders under the Term Loan Credit Facility (as defined in the Marotta Affidavit))*

collectively, the "Payless Canada Entities"), FTI Consulting Canada Inc. in its capacity as court-appointed monitor (the "Monitor"), Wells Fargo Bank, National Association (the "ABL Agent"), Cortland Products Corp. (the "Term Loan Agent"), the Consultant, counsel for The Cadillac Fairview Corporation Limited, ~~counsel for Bentall Kennedy (Canada) LP, Quadreal Property Group~~, counsel for Ivanhoe Cambridge, counsel for Cushman Wakefield Asset Services, Morguard Investments Limited, Smart REIT (SmartCentres), RioCan REIT, Cominar REIT, Triovest Realty Advisors Inc. and Blackwood Partners Management Corporation, counsel for the Oxford Properties Group and Crombie REIT, and no one appearing for any other person on the service list, although properly served as appears from the affidavit of Monique Sassi sworn on February 19, 2019.

**Service**

1. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that the time for service of the Notice of Motion and the Motion Record is hereby abridged and validated so that this Motion is properly returnable today and hereby dispenses with further service thereof.
2. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that any capitalized term used and not defined herein, shall have the meaning ascribed thereto in the Initial Order, the Consulting Agreement, or the Sale Guidelines (defined below), as applicable.

**Approval of the Consulting Agreement**

3. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that the Consulting Agreement, including the Sale Guidelines attached hereto as Schedule "A" (the "Sale Guidelines"), and the transactions contemplated under the Consulting Agreement including the Sale Guidelines, are hereby approved with such minor amendments to the Consulting Agreement (but not the Sale Guidelines) as the Payless Canada Entities, with the consent of the Monitor, and the Consultant may deem necessary and agree to in writing. Subject to the provisions of this Order, the Payless Canada Entities are hereby

authorized and directed to take such additional steps and execute such additional documents as may be necessary or desirable to implement the Consulting Agreement and the Sale Guidelines and the transactions contemplated therein.

### **The Sale**

4. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that each of the Payless Canada Entities, with the assistance of the Consultant, is authorized and directed to conduct the Sale in accordance with this Order, the Consulting Agreement and the Sale Guidelines and to advertise and promote the Sale within the Stores, all in accordance with the Sale Guidelines. If there is a conflict between this Order, the Consulting Agreement and the Sale Guidelines, the order of priority of documents to resolve each conflict is as follows: (1) this Order; (2) the Sale Guidelines; and (3) the Consulting Agreement.

5. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that each of the Payless Canada Entities, with the assistance of the Consultant, is authorized to market and sell the Merchandise, Additional Merchant Goods and, subject to the Initial Order and paragraph 11 of the Sale Guidelines, the Offered FF&E, free and clear of all liens, claims, encumbrances, security interests, hypothecs, prior claims, mortgages, charges, trusts, deemed trusts, executions, levies, financial, monetary or other claims, whether or not such claims have attached or been perfected, registered or filed and whether secured, unsecured, quantified or unquantified, contingent or otherwise, whensoever and howsoever arising, and whether such claims arose or came into existence prior to the date of this Order or arise or come into existence following the date of this Order (in each case, whether contractual, statutory, arising by operation of law, in equity or otherwise) (all of the foregoing, collectively "**Claims**"), including, without limiting the generality of the foregoing: (a) any encumbrances or charges created by the Initial Order and any other charges hereinafter granted by this Court in these proceedings; and (b) all charges, security interests or claims evidenced by registrations pursuant to the *Personal Property Security Act* (Ontario) or any other personal property registry system (all of which are collectively referred to as the "**Encumbrances**"), which

Claims will attach instead to the proceeds received from the Merchandise, Additional Merchant Goods, and the Offered FF&E, other than amounts due and payable to the Consultant by any of the Payless Canada Entities under the Consulting Agreement, in the same order and priority as the Claims existed as at the date hereof.

6. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that, subject to the terms of this Order and the Sale Guidelines, the Consultant shall have the right to use the Stores and all related store services, furniture, trade fixtures and equipment, including the FF&E, located at the Stores, and other assets of any of the Payless Canada Entities as designated under the Consulting Agreement for the purpose of conducting the Sale, and for such purposes, the Consultant shall be entitled to the benefit of the Payless Canada Entities' stay of proceedings provided pursuant to the Initial Order, as applicable and as such stay may be extended from time to time.

7. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that until the Sale Termination Date which, for greater certainty, shall be the earlier of April 30, 2019 and the effective date of a disclaimer in accordance with the CCAA, the Consultant shall have access to the Stores in accordance with the applicable leases and the Sale Guidelines on the basis that the Consultant is assisting the Payless Canada Entities and each of the Payless Canada Entities has granted the right of access to the applicable Store to the Consultant. To the extent that the terms of the applicable leases are in conflict with any term of this Order or the Sale Guidelines, the terms of this Order and the Sale Guidelines shall govern.

8. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that nothing in this Order shall amend or vary, or be deemed to amend or vary, the terms of the leases for the Stores. Nothing contained in this Order or the Sale Guidelines shall be construed to create or impose upon any of the Payless Canada Entities or the Consultant any additional restrictions not contained in the applicable lease.

9. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that nothing herein is, or shall be deemed to be a consent by any Landlord to the sale, assignment or transfer of any Lease, or to grant to the Landlord any greater rights than already exist under the terms of any applicable Lease.

10. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that until the Sale Termination Date, the Consultant shall have the right to use, without interference by any intellectual property licensor, the Payless Canada Entities' trademarks, trade names and logos, customer/marketing lists, website and social media accounts as well as all licenses and rights granted to any of the Payless Canada Entities to use the trade names, and logos of third parties, relating to and used in connection with the operation of the Stores solely for the purpose of advertising and conducting the Sale in accordance with the terms of the Consulting Agreement, the Sale Guidelines and this Order.

#### **Consultant Liability**

11. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that the Consultant shall act solely as an independent consultant to each of the Payless Canada Entities and that it shall not be liable for any claims against any of the Payless Canada Entities other than as expressly provided in the Consulting Agreement or the Sale Guidelines. More specifically:

- (a) The Consultant shall not be deemed to be an owner or in possession, care, control or management of the Stores or the assets located therein or associated therewith or of the Payless Canada Entities' employees located at the Stores or any other property of any of the Payless Canada Entities;
- (b) The Consultant shall not be deemed to be an employer, or a joint or successor employer or a related or common employer or payor within the meaning of any legislation governing employment or labour standards or pension benefits or health and safety or other statute, regulation or rule of law or equity for any

purpose whatsoever, and shall not incur any successorship liabilities whatsoever; and

- (c) The Payless Canada Entities shall bear all responsibility for any liability whatsoever (including without limitation losses, costs, damages, fines, or awards) relating to claims of customers, employees and any other persons arising from events and closings occurring at the Stores during and after the term of the Consulting Agreement, except to the extent that such claims are the result of events or circumstances caused or contributed to by the gross negligence or wilful misconduct of the Consultant, its employees, agents or other representatives, or otherwise in accordance with the Consulting Agreement.

12. **THIS COURT ORDERS** to the extent any of the Payless Canada Entities' landlords may have a claim against any of the Payless Canada Entities arising solely out of the conduct of the Consultant in conducting the Sale for which any of the Payless Canada Entities have claims against the Consultant under the Consulting Agreement, the Payless Canada Entity(ies) shall be deemed to have assigned free and clear such claims to the applicable landlord (the "**Assigned Landlord Rights**"); provided that each such landlord shall only be permitted to advance each such claims against the Consultant if written notice, including the reasonable details of such claims, is provided by such Landlord to the Consultant, the Payless Canada Entities and the Monitor during the period from the Sale Commencement Date to the date that is thirty (30) days following the Sale Termination Date.

**Consultant as Unaffected Creditor**

13. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that, in accordance with the CCAA and the Initial Order, and subject only to paragraph 6 of this Order, the Consultant shall not be affected by the stay of proceedings in respect of the Payless Canada Entities and shall be entitled to exercise its



remedies under the Consulting Agreement in respect of claims of the Consultant pursuant to the Consulting Agreement (collectively, the "**Consultant's Claims**"), the Consultant shall be treated as an unaffected creditor in the context of the present proceedings.

14. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that notwithstanding the terms of any order issued by this Court in the context of the present proceedings or the terms of the CCAA, none of the Payless Canada Entities shall be entitled to repudiate, disclaim or resiliate the Consulting Agreement or any of the agreements, contracts or arrangements in relation thereto entered into with the Consultant nor shall any claim in favour of the Consultant Agreement or related agreements, contracts or arrangements be compromised pursuant to any plan of compromise or arrangement.

15. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that each of the Payless Canada Entities is hereby authorized and directed to remit, in accordance with the Consulting Agreement, or any other agreement contract or arrangement in relation thereto, all amounts that become due to the Consultant thereunder.

16. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that no Claims shall attach to any amounts payable by any of the Payless Canada Entities to the Consultant pursuant to the Consulting Agreement, including any amounts that must be reimbursed by any of the Payless Canada Entities to the Consultant, and the Payless Canada Entity(ies) shall pay any such amounts to the Consultant free and clear of all Claims, notwithstanding any enforcement or other process, all in accordance with the Consulting Agreement.

17. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that notwithstanding (a) the pendency of these proceedings; (b) any application for a bankruptcy order now or hereafter issued pursuant to the *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act* ("**BIA**") in respect of any of the Payless Canada Entities or any bankruptcy order made pursuant to any such applications; (c) any assignment in bankruptcy made in respect of any of the Payless Canada Entities; (d) the provisions of any federal or provincial statute; or (e) any

negative covenants, prohibitions or other similar provisions with respect to borrowings, incurring debt or the creation of encumbrances, contained in any existing loan documents, lease, mortgage, security agreement, debenture, sublease, offer to lease or other document or agreement (collectively, the "**Agreement**") which binds any of the Payless Canada Entities:

(a) the Consulting Agreement and the transactions and actions provided for and contemplated therein (including the Sale Guidelines), including, without limitation, the payment of amounts due to the Consultant; and

(b) the Assigned Landlord Rights,

shall be binding on any trustee in bankruptcy that may be appointed in respect of any of the Payless Canada Entities and shall not be void or voidable by any Person (as defined in the BIA), including any creditor of any of the Payless Canada Entities, nor shall they, or any of them, constitute or be deemed to be a preference, fraudulent conveyance, transfer at undervalue or other challengeable reviewable transaction, under the BIA or any applicable law, nor shall they constitute oppressive or unfairly prejudicial conduct under any applicable law.

18. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that notwithstanding (a) the pendency of these proceedings; (b) any application for a bankruptcy order now or hereafter issued pursuant to the BIA in respect of any of the Payless Canada Entities or any bankruptcy order made pursuant to any such applications; (c) any assignment in bankruptcy made in respect of any of the Payless Canada Entities; (d) the provisions of any federal or provincial statute; or (e) any Agreement which binds any of the Payless Canada Entities, any obligation to clean up or repair any of the leased premises contained in this Order or the Sale Guidelines, shall be binding on any trustee in bankruptcy that may be appointed in respect to the Payless Canada Entities and shall not be void or voidable by any Person (as defined in the BIA), including any creditor of any of the Payless Canada Entities, nor shall they, or any of them, constitute or be deemed to be a preference,

fraudulent conveyance, transfer at undervalue or other challengeable reviewable transaction, under the BIA or any applicable law, nor shall they constitute oppressive or unfairly prejudicial conduct under any applicable law.

**Gift Cards, Returns and Coupons**

19. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that for a period of thirty days (30) following the granting of the Initial Order, the Payless Canada Entities will honour gift cards that were issued by the Payless Canada Entities prior to the Sale Commencement Date in accordance with the Payless Canada Entities' customer gift card policies and procedures as they existed as of the date of the Initial Order.

20. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that the Payless Canada Entities shall continue to honour returns and exchanges of Merchandise sold prior to the Sale Commencement Date for a period of thirty days (30) following the granting of the Initial Order in compliance with the Payless Canada Entities' return policies in effect as of the date such item was purchased and any Merchandise sold after the Sale Commencement Date will not be subject to return or exchange.

21. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that upon entry of this Order, the Payless Canada Entities shall cease to honour coupons issued under any promotional programs.

**General**

22. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that this Order shall have full force and effect in all provinces and territories in Canada.

23. **THIS COURT HEREBY REQUESTS** the aid and recognition of any Court, tribunal, regulatory or administrative bodies, having jurisdiction in Canada, the United States of America or elsewhere, to give effect to this Order and to assist the Payless Canada Entities, the Monitor and their respective agents in carrying out the terms of this Order. All courts, tribunals, regulatory and

administrative bodies are hereby respectfully requested to make such orders and to provide such assistance to the Payless Canada Entities and to the Monitor, as an officer of this Court, as may be necessary or desirable to give effect to this Order, to grant representative status to the Monitor in any foreign proceeding, or to assist the Payless Canada Entities and the Monitor and their respective agents in carrying out the terms of this Order.

24. **THIS COURT ORDERS** that any interested party (including any of the Payless Canada Entities and the Monitor) may apply to this Court to vary or amend this Order on not less than seven (7) days' notice to any other party or parties likely to be affected by the order sought or upon such other notice, if any, as this Court may order.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "A. J. ...", is written over a horizontal line.

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ON / BOOK NO:  
LE / DANS LE REGISTRE NO:

FEB 21 2019

PER / PAR: *UM*

## Schedule "A"

### SALE GUIDELINES

The following procedures shall apply to the Sale to be conducted at the Stores of Payless ShoeSource Canada Inc., Payless ShoeSource Canada GP Inc. and Payless ShoeSource Canada LP (collectively, the "**Merchant**"). All terms not herein defined shall have the meaning set forth in the Consulting Agreement by and between a joint venture comprised of Great American Group, LLC and Tiger Capital Group, LLC (collectively with their respective Canadian affiliate assignees, the "**Consultant**"), Payless Holdings, LLC and the Merchant dated as of February 12, 2019 (the "**Consulting Agreement**").

1. Except as otherwise expressly set out herein, and subject to: (i) the Initial Order in these proceedings dated February 19, 2019, (the "**Initial Order**") or any further Order of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice (Commercial List) (the "**Court**"); or (ii) any subsequent written agreement between the Merchant and the applicable landlord(s) (individually, a "**Landlord**" and, collectively, the "**Landlords**") and approved by the Consultant in writing, or (iii) as otherwise set forth herein, the Sale shall be conducted in accordance with the terms of the applicable leases/or other occupancy agreements to which the affected Landlords are privy for each of the affected Stores (individually, a "**Lease**" and, collectively, the "**Leases**"). However, nothing contained herein shall be construed to create or impose upon the Merchant or the Consultant any additional restrictions not contained in the applicable Lease or other occupancy agreement.
2. The Sale shall be conducted so that each of the Stores remains open during its normal hours of operation provided for in its respective Lease until the respective Sale Termination Date for such Store. The Sale at the Stores shall end by no later than the Sale Termination Date. Rent payable under the respective Leases shall be paid in accordance with the terms of the Initial Order.
3. The Sale shall be conducted in accordance with applicable federal, provincial and municipal laws and regulations, unless otherwise set out herein or otherwise ordered by the Court.
4. All display and hanging signs used by the Consultant in connection with the Sale shall be professionally produced and all hanging signs shall be hung in a professional manner. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in the Leases, the Consultant may advertise the Sale at the Stores as an "everything on sale", an "everything must go", a "store closing" or similar theme sale at the Stores (provided however that no signs shall advertise the Sale as a "bankruptcy", a "going out of business" or a "liquidation" sale it being understood that the French equivalent of "clearance" is "liquidation" and is permitted to be used). Forthwith upon request from a Landlord, the Landlord's counsel, the Merchant or the Monitor, the Consultant shall provide the proposed signage packages along with the proposed dimensions and number of signs (as approved by the Merchant pursuant to the Consulting Agreement) by e-mail or facsimile to the applicable Landlords or to their counsel of record. Where the provisions of the Lease conflict with these Sale Guidelines, these Sale Guidelines shall govern. The Consultant shall not use neon or day-glow or handwritten signage (unless otherwise contained in the sign package, including "you pay" or "topper" signs). In addition, the Consultant shall be permitted to utilize exterior banners/signs at stand alone or strip mall Stores or enclosed mall Stores with a separate entrance from the exterior of the enclosed mall, provided, however, that where such

banners are not explicitly permitted by the applicable Lease and the Landlord requests in writing that the banners are not to be used, no banners shall be used absent further Order of the Court, which may be sought on an expedited basis on notice to the service list in the CCAA proceeding (the "Service List"). Any banners used shall be located or hung so as to make clear that the Sale is being conducted only at the affected Store and shall not be wider than the premises occupied by the affected Store. All exterior banners shall be professionally hung and to the extent that there is any damage to the façade of the premises of a Store as a result of the hanging or removal of the exterior banner, such damage shall be professionally repaired at the expense of the Consultant. If a Landlord is concerned with "store closing" signs being placed in the front window of a Store or with the number or size of the signs in the front window, the Consultant and the Landlord will discuss the Landlord's concerns and work to resolve the dispute.

5. The Consultant shall be permitted to utilize sign walkers and street signage; provided, however, such sign walkers and street signage shall not be located on the shopping centre or mall premises.
6. The Consultant shall not make any alterations to interior or exterior Store lighting, except as authorized pursuant to the applicable Lease. The hanging of exterior banners or other signage, where permitted in accordance with the terms of these guidelines, shall not constitute an alteration to a Store.
7. Conspicuous signs shall be posted in the cash register areas of each Store to the effect that all sales are "final".
8. The Consultant shall not distribute handbills, leaflets or other written materials to customers outside of any of the Stores on any Landlord's property, unless permitted by the applicable Lease or, if distribution is customary in the shopping centre in which the Store is located. Otherwise, the Consultant may solicit customers in the Stores themselves. The Consultant shall not use any giant balloons, flashing lights or amplified sound to advertise the Sale or solicit customers, except as permitted under the applicable Lease, or agreed to by the Landlord, and no advertising trucks shall be used on a Landlord property or mall ring roads, except as explicitly permitted under the applicable Lease or agreed to by the Landlord.
9. At the conclusion of the Sale in each Store, the Consultant shall arrange that the premises for each Store are in "broom-swept" and clean condition, and shall arrange that the Stores are in the same condition as on the commencement of the Sale, ordinary wear and tear excepted. No property of any Landlord of a Store shall be removed or sold during the Sale. No permanent fixtures (other than FF&E which for clarity is owned by the Merchant) may be removed without the applicable Landlord's written consent unless otherwise provided by the applicable Lease. Any fixtures or personal property left in a Store after the Sale Termination Date in respect of which the applicable Lease has been disclaimed by the Merchant shall be deemed abandoned, with the applicable Landlord having the right to dispose of the same as the Landlord chooses, without any liability whatsoever on the part of the Landlord.
10. Subject to the terms of paragraph 9 above, the Consultant may sell Offered FF&E which is located in the Stores during the Sale. The Merchant and the Consultant may advertise the sale of Offered FF&E consistent with these guidelines on the understanding that any applicable Landlord may require that such signs be placed in discreet locations

acceptable to the applicable Landlord, acting reasonably. Additionally, the purchasers of any Offered FF&E sold during the Sale shall only be permitted to remove the Offered FF&E either through the back shipping areas designated by the applicable Landlord, or through other areas after regular store business hours, or through the front door of the Store during store business hours if the Offered FF&E can fit in a shopping bag, with applicable Landlord's supervision as required by the applicable Landlord. The Consultant shall repair any damage to the Stores resulting from the removal of any Offered FF&E by Consultant or by third party purchasers of Offered FF&E from Consultant.

11. The Merchant hereby provides notice to the Landlords of the Merchant and the Consultant's intention to sell and remove Offered FF&E from the Stores. The Consultant will arrange a walk through with each Landlord that requests a walk through with the Consultant to identify the Offered FF&E subject to the sale. The relevant Landlord shall be entitled to have a representative present in the Store to observe such removal. If the Landlord disputes the Consultant's entitlement to sell or remove any FF&E under the provisions of the Lease, such FF&E shall remain on the premises and shall be dealt with as agreed between the Merchant, the Consultant and such Landlord, or by further Order of the Court upon application by the Merchant on at least two (2) days' notice to such Landlord. If the Merchant has disclaimed or resiliated the Lease governing such Store in accordance with the CCAA and the Initial Order, it shall not be required to pay rent under such Lease pending resolution of any such dispute (other than rent payable for the notice period provided for in the CCAA and the Initial Order, and the disclaimer or resiliation of the Lease) shall be without prejudice to the Merchant's or Consultant's claim to the FF&E in dispute.
12. If a notice of disclaimer or resiliation is delivered pursuant to the CCAA and the Initial Order to a Landlord while the Sale is ongoing and the Store in question has not yet been vacated, then: (a) during the notice period prior to the effective time of the disclaimer or resiliation, the applicable Landlord may show the affected leased premises to prospective tenants during normal business hours, on giving the Merchant and the Consultant 24 hours' prior written notice; and (b) at the effective time of the disclaimer or resiliation, the relevant Landlord shall be entitled to take possession of any such Store without waiver of or prejudice to any claims or rights such Landlord may have against the Merchant in respect of such Lease or Store, provided that nothing herein shall relieve such Landlord of its obligation to mitigate any damages claimed in connection therewith.
13. The Consultant and its agents and representatives shall have the same access rights to the Stores as the Merchant under the terms of the applicable Lease, and the applicable Landlords shall have the rights of access to the Stores during the Sale provided for in the applicable Lease (subject, for greater certainty, to any applicable stay of proceedings).
14. The Merchant and the Consultant shall not conduct any auctions of Merchandise, Additional Merchant Goods, or Offered FF&E at any of the Stores.
15. The Consultant shall be entitled, as agent for the Merchant to include in the Sale the Additional Merchant Goods to the extent such are on-order goods from the Merchant's existing vendors provided that: (i) the Additional Merchant Goods sold as part of the Sale will not exceed \$ 5 million at cost in the aggregate; and (ii) the Additional Merchandise Goods will be distributed among Stores such that no Store will receive more than 2% of the Additional Merchant Goods.

16. The Consultant shall designate a party to be contacted by the Landlords should a dispute arise concerning the conduct of the Sale. The initial contact person for the Consultant shall be Ashley Taylor who may be reached by phone at 416-869-5236 or email at ataylor@stikeman.com. If the parties are unable to resolve the dispute between themselves, the Landlord or Merchant shall have the right to schedule a "status hearing" before the Court on no less than two (2) days written notice to the other party or parties, during which time the Consultant shall cease all activity in dispute other than activity expressly permitted herein, pending the determination of the matter by the Court; provided, for greater certainty, that if a banner has been hung in accordance with these Sale Guidelines and is thereafter the subject of a dispute, the Consultant shall not be required to take any such banner down pending determination of the dispute.
17. Nothing herein is, or shall be deemed to be a consent by any Landlord to the sale, assignment or transfer of any Lease, or to grant to the Landlord any greater rights than already exist under the terms of any applicable Lease.
18. These Sale Guidelines may be amended by written agreement between the Merchant, the Consultant and any applicable Landlord (provided that such amended Sale Guidelines shall not affect or bind any other Landlord not privy thereto without further Order of the Court approving the amended Sale Guidelines).



IN THE MATTER OF THE *COMPANIES' CREDITORS ARRANGEMENT ACT*, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-36, AS AMENDED

AND IN THE MATTER OF A PLAN OF COMPROMISE OR ARRANGEMENT OF PAYLESS SHOESOURCE CANADA INC. AND PAYLESS SHOESOURCE CANADA GP INC.

**ONTARIO  
SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE  
(COMMERCIAL LIST)**

PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED AT TORONTO

**LIQUIDATION CONSULTING AGREEMENT APPROVAL  
ORDER**

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*Lawyers for Payless ShoeSource Canada Inc., Payless  
ShoeSource Canada GP Inc. and Payless ShoeSource  
Canada LP*

TAB 4

At para(s) 54

# PCAS Patient Care Automation Services Inc. (Re), 2012 ONSC 3367 (CanLII)

Date: 2012-06-09

File number: CV-12-9656-00CL

**Citation:** **PCAS Patient Care Automation Services Inc. (Re), 2012 ONSC 3367 (CanLII), <<https://canlii.ca/t/frnm7>>, retrieved on 2024-10-10**

**CITATION:** PCAS Patient Care Automation Services Inc. (Re), 2012 ONSC 3367

**COURT FILE NO.:** CV-12-9656-00CL

**DATE:** 20120609

SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE – ONTARIO

COMMERCIAL LIST

**RE:** IN THE MATTER OF the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-36, as amended;

AND IN THE MATTER OF a plan of compromise or arrangement of PCAS Patient Care Automation Services Inc. and 2163279 Ontario Inc., Applicants

**BEFORE:** D. M. Brown J.

**COUNSEL:** S. Babe and I. Aversa, for the Applicants

M. Wasserman and J. MacDonald, for the Monitor, PricewaterhouseCoopers Inc.

J. Porter and A. Shepherd, for 2320714 Ontario Inc., the DIP Lender

B. O'Neill, for Castcan Investments (secured creditor)

R. M. Slattery, for Royal Bank of Canada (secured creditor)

M. Laugesen and G. Finlayson, for the Successful Bidder, DashRx, LLC

C. Besant, for Walgreen Co.

A. Scotchmer, for Lanworks Inc.

P. Saunders, a shareholder, for himself and other shareholders

B. Jaffe, for Merge, a potential bidder

S-A. Wilson, for Dan Brintnell, a shareholder

**HEARD:** June 5 and 6, 2012

REASONS FOR DECISION

# I. Request for sale approval, vesting and distribution orders under the CCAA

[1] PCAS Patient Care Automation Services Inc. and 2163279 Ontario Inc. move under the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* for orders approving the agreement of purchase and sale between the Applicants and DashRx, LLC ("DashRx") dated May 29, 2012 (the "Purchase Agreement"), vesting the Purchased Assets in DashRx and distributing the sale proceeds, together with certain other related orders, including the termination of this CCAA proceeding.

[2] At the continuation of the hearing on June 6, 2012, I granted the requested orders. These are my reasons for so doing.

## II. The proposed sale

### A. The sales and investor solicitation process

[3] The Applicants are healthcare technology companies which were developing an automated pharmacy dispensing platform. They were in the pre-commercialization phase of operations and encountered financing difficulties. The Initial Order under the CCAA was made by Morawetz J. on March 23, 2012; it appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers Inc. as Monitor.

[4] The subsequent history of this matter is set out my previous Reasons.[1]<sup>4</sup>

[5] On May 14, 2012, I approved a sale and investor solicitation process ("SISP"). The Applicants developed the SISP with the assistance of the Monitor, the Monitor's agent, PricewaterhouseCoopers Corporate Finance Inc. ("PwCCF") and the DIP Lender. The SISP sought to maximize stakeholder value either through (i) a going concern sale of the Applicants' business and assets or (ii) new investment and a plan of compromise or arrangement. The SISP set out the procedural and substantive requirements for a qualified purchase or investment bid (a "Qualified Bid").

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4. April 20, 2012 (2012 ONSC 2423); May 5, 2012 (2012 ONSC 2714); May 8 (2012 ONSC 2778); May 14, 2012 (2012 ONSC 2840); May 28, 2012 (2012 ONSC 3147).

[6] A feature of the approved SISP was the DIP Lender's "stalking horse" bid under which the DIP Lender would pay the Stalking Horse Price by a release of the DIP Indebtedness and the assumption of the outstanding senior secured claims. The terms of the Stalking Horse Bid were not required to be emulated in other Qualified Bids; the Stalking Horse Bid served to set a floor price in the SISP. The Stalking Horse Agreement was posted in the Applicants' data-room.

[7] The SISP was conducted by the Applicants with the support and assistance of the Monitor. Under the terms of the SISP, bids were due by 12:00 p.m. on May 24, 2012. Two bids, including the DashRx bid, were received before the Bid Deadline, and one further bid was received on May 24, 2012, but after the Bid Deadline. These three bids were reviewed in a series of meetings held by the Applicants, the DIP Lender, the Monitor and their counsel on May 24 and May 25, 2012.

[8] In a Confidential Appendix to its Seventh Report the Monitor described the financial terms of each bid and disclosed the materials filed by each bidder, as well as the written communications with each bidder.

## B. The Unsuccessful Bids

[9] As described in detail in the evidence, the bid submitted by Unsuccessful Bidder 1 was received the evening of May 24, but provided no cash consideration to the Applicants. On the evening of May 25, 2012, Applicants' counsel sent a letter to Unsuccessful Bidder 1 advising that its bid was not a Qualified Bid and that certain additional details would need to be provided before it could be considered a Qualified Bid. Unsuccessful Bidder 1 did not respond to the request for clarification and its bid was not treated as a Qualified Bid.

[10] By letter dated May 23 Unsuccessful Bidder 2 offered to buy PCAS for cash. On May 23 the Applicants wrote to Unsuccessful Bidder 2 about how it would need to alter its bid to satisfy the requirements for a Qualified Bid in the SISP. Notwithstanding follow-up communications, Unsuccessful Bidder 2 did not respond to the Applicants' inquiries until Sunday, May 27, 2012 and it did not provide any material new information. The bid by Unsuccessful Bidder 2 therefore was not treated as a Qualified Bid under the SISP.

## C. The Successful Bid

The purchaser

[11] DashRx is a Delaware limited liability corporation formed by a large, California-based investment fund to purchase the assets of the Applicants. The fund's Investment Manager has approximately US\$500 million in assets under management, almost exclusively in the health care and pharmaceutical sectors.

[12] On May 24, 2012, prior to the bid deadline, DashRx submitted a version of the Purchase Agreement. It was the only bid received in the form of a formal asset purchase agreement. DashRx also remitted a cash deposit to the Monitor.

[13] The Investment Manager had been performing due diligence and engaging in talks with the Applicants for several months prior to the commencement of the CCAA proceedings with an aim to investing in or purchasing PCAS. A major U.S. retail pharmacy chain, Walgreen Co. is participating in the Successful Bid as a substantial investor in DashRx. Walgreen was the potential large U.S. customer identified in previous evidence in this proceeding.

[14] The Monitor requested that it be allowed to reveal the name of the Investment Manager; the latter expressed a strong preference that its identity not be disclosed. Against that background the Monitor reported that it had requested independent evidence of the financial position of the Investment Manager:

[T]he Monitor has received additional information regarding the Investment Manager and is satisfied that the Purchaser should have the financial wherewithal to close the transaction. The Purchaser and Walgreens have shown their commitment by jointly paying the deposit and agreeing to fund the operating needs of the Company to June 6, 2012 (with a cap of \$250,000). The Monitor also notes that Walgreens' participation provides another source of financial support to the Purchaser.

[15] By May 27, 2012, following further negotiations and an enhancement of the DashRx bid to permit some recovery for unsecured creditors, the material terms of the DashRx Purchase Agreement were settled to a point that the Applicants, in consultation with the DIP Lender and the Monitor, were prepared to recognize the Purchase Agreement as a Qualified Bid, as a bid superior to the Stalking Horse Bid, and to identify it as the Successful Bid under the SISP, subject to final negotiation of the APA.

[16] The Purchase Agreement was finalized, executed and delivered by the parties on June 1, 2012. DashRx committed to provide \$250,000 to fund the Applicants' operations from May 31, 2012 until closing on June 6. That funding was received on May 31, 2012.

### Purchased and Excluded Assets

[17] Under the Purchase Agreement the purchaser will acquire Purchased Assets on an "as is, where is" basis. Certain tax credit entitlements are treated as Excluded Assets.

### The purchase price and consideration

[18] The consideration payable under the Purchase Agreement is a combination of the assumption of secured liabilities, cash, and the issuance of secured and unsecured convertible promissory notes to the Applicants' creditors, including unsecured creditors. The Applicants do not expect that there will be any surplus proceeds from the transaction for PCAS shareholders.

[19] The cash portion of the purchase price is designated for:

- (i) distribution in payment of all statutory priority claims, comprised of approximately \$235,000 in accrued and unpaid vacation pay;
- (ii) distribution to the DIP Lender to be used by the DIP Lender:
  - a. first, to obtain the consent of the Senior Secured Creditors, RBC and Castcan, to the discharge of their security interests and charges over the Purchased Assets and to obtain their consent for the issuance of an approval and vesting order in respect of the Sale Agreement; and,
  - b. as to the balance, in partial satisfaction of the DIP Indebtedness;
- (iii) payment of the amounts payable under the court-approved key employee retention plan; and
- (iv) payment of \$100,000 to the Applicants, in trust for a trustee in bankruptcy to be appointed in respect of the Applicants, and the other direct and indirect subsidiaries of PCAS, to pay for the costs of administering their anticipated bankruptcies

[20] The non-cash portion of the purchase price in the transaction will be comprised of:

- (i) the assumption of the secured obligations to IBM;
- (ii) interest-bearing promissory notes issued in favour of the DIP Lender, secured against the assets of DashRx and ranking junior only to the secured assumed obligations to IBM ("Secured Note"); and,
- (iii) interest-bearing unsecured promissory notes issued to the Applicants, in trust, for the pool of unsecured creditors of the Applicants ("Unsecured Note").

[21] At the commencement of the hearing on June 5 one unsecured creditor, Lanworks, raised concerns about the lack of transparency regarding the terms of the Unsecured Notes. The details of the terms of the Notes had been placed in the Monitor's Confidential Appendix. Prior to the resumption of the hearing on June 6 Lanworks was provided with information about the terms of the Unsecured Note, as a result of which Lanworks indicated that it neither consented to nor opposed the orders sought. The terms of the Secured and Unsecured Notes were finalized by the time of the continuation of the hearing on June 6.

### Proposed releases

[22] In its Seventh Report the Monitor noted that under the terms of the Purchase Agreement certain claims against former employees of the Applicants were included in the Purchased Assets and the Agreement required the Applicants to deliver a broad release in favour of the Purchaser and related parties. The Monitor observed that the releases were negotiated as part of the comprehensive arrangements in respect of the transactions contemplated by the Agreement.

## Proposed occupancy agreements

[23] A condition of the Sale Agreement was that PCAS provided DashRx with post-Closing occupancy and access to the Applicants' leased premises at 2440 Winston Park Drive. DashRx will pay all rent and other occupancy costs and will indemnify the Applicants. The Applicants are seeking approval of, and authorization to enter into, an occupancy agreement with DashRx.

## III. The proposed distribution of sale proceeds

[24] The Applicants seek an order under which the sale proceeds would be distributed to the following persons or groups:

- (i) To use \$235,315 to satisfy statutory priority claims relating to employee accrued and unpaid vacation pay claims;
- (ii) To pay the cash component of the purchase price to the DIP Lender to be used by the DIP Lender (i) to obtain the consent of the secured creditors, RBC and Castcan Investments Inc., to discharge their security interests and charges over the Purchased Assets and (ii) as to the balance, to make partial repayment of the DIP Lending Facility;
- (iii) To distribute \$261,000 to the beneficiaries of the KERP Charge; and,
- (iv) To pay \$100,000 to PwC, the proposed Trustee in Bankruptcy, for fees in connection with the anticipated bankruptcies of the Applicants.

## Payment to the DIP Lender

[25] The only parties claiming interests in priority to the DIP Lender are IBM, RBC and Castcan. The Purchaser will assume the liability for IBM. As to RBC and Castcan, at the time the DIP Lending Facility was put in place the DIP Lender negotiated a Pari Passu Agreement with RBC and Castcan. An issue arose concerning the validity of the security taken by Castcan in respect of certain assets, specifically Harmonized Sales Tax Refunds (the "HST Refunds"). I will discuss that issue in more detail below. For present purposes, suffice it to say that the Applicants propose that upon paying out the claims of the Senior Secured Creditors from the cash proceeds received on Closing, the DIP Lender will be subrogated to and/or take an assignment of the Senior Secured Creditor's claims. The Applicants are expected to receive sizable tax credit entitlements within a matter of weeks. Those entitlements are Excluded Assets under the Purchase Agreement. As a result, any claims on them will not be vested out by operation of the proposed Approval and Vesting Order.



[26] Against this background the Applicants seek an order authorizing and directing them, and any Trustee, to distribute to the DIP Lender amounts equal to any specified tax credit entitlements received. Such distributions would enable the DIP Lender to recoup part of the purchase price it will flow through to one of the Senior Secured Creditors – Castcan - on Closing.

[27] If the aggregate amount of all tax credit entitlements received by the Applicants/Trustee post-Closing and distributed to the DIP Lender end up being less than the aggregate amount that the DIP Lender paid to RBC and Castcan out of the cash proceeds of the Transaction on Closing, then the DIP Lender will be issued an Additional Secured Note to cover the difference. The amount of the Additional Secured Note will come out of the pool of funds otherwise set aside for the unsecured creditors of the Applicants. The Unsecured Note therefore will be less than the total pool of possible proceeds for unsecured creditors, and an additional Unsecured Note will be issued to the Trustee for the benefit of the unsecured creditors once the face amount of the Additional Secured Note is known.

[28] Although the DIP Indebtedness is not being paid out in full on Closing, the DIP Lender has consented to the payments of cash on account of the KERP and the future costs of bankruptcy estate administration.

[29] Under the Initial Order the Directors' Charge ranked ahead of the KERP Charge. The Applicants asked the Court to terminate the Directors' Charge. Those benefiting from the Directors' Charge did not oppose that request.

#### KERP employees

[30] The KERP originally benefitted twenty employees and allowed for a total maximum allocation of \$500,000. The KERP was to be paid in the following installments: (i) 20% upon the raising of \$8,000,000 for funding the DIP Facility, and PCAS receiving the authorization of this Court to borrow up to or in excess of that amount; (ii) 20% at the midway mark of the SISF; and, (iii) the balance of 60% upon the earliest of (i) the closing of a sale of all or substantially all of the assets, property and undertaking of the Applicants, or (ii) Court approval and sanction of a plan of arrangement or compromise in the CCAA Proceedings.

[31] The commitment under the DIP Facility never reached \$8 million, so the initial payment was not made. The second scheduled 20% payment was made on May 25, 2012. Payment of the 60% balance will be made from the cash proceeds on closing. Due to attrition, only sixteen employees remain in the KERP. The final 60% installment payable from the transaction proceeds will total \$242,100, resulting in total KERP payments of \$322,800.

## IV. Positions of the Parties

[32] The Senior Secured Creditors supported the orders sought by the Applicants. The Monitor recommended that the Court grant the orders. As noted, one unsecured creditor, Lanworks, sought to obtain further information and, on so doing, advised that it neither consented to nor opposed the orders sought. No other creditors appeared on the return of the motion.

[33] The hearing of the motion started at 4:45 p.m. on June 5, 2012. At that time Mr. Peter Saunders, a shareholder, stated that he appeared on behalf of himself and other shareholders. He read a statement which expressed concern about the bidding process, and Mr. Saunders indicated that he and other shareholders would be meeting with counsel at 8:00 a.m. on June 6. Over the opposition of the Applicants and the Purchaser, I adjourned the hearing to June 6 at 10:00 a.m.

[34] On June 6 Mr. Saunders returned, but without counsel. Ms. Wilson appeared for the first time on behalf of another shareholder, Mr. Dan Brintnell, and asked to make submissions. Also, Mr. Jaffe appeared on behalf of a potential bidder, Merge, which had not participated in the SISP and asked for leave to submit an offer. What then transpired was described in the following portions of my handwritten endorsement of June 6:

This is the continuation of the approval/vesting/distribution motion commenced yesterday @ 4:45 p.m. At yesterday's hearing I asked questions of counsel for the applicants, Monitor and DIP lender on certain points and was provided answers.

...

Yesterday Mr. Peter Saunders, a shareholder, on behalf of himself and some other SHs, read a statement dated June 5/12 expressing concern about the bidding process. Mr. Saunders indicated they would be meeting counsel today @ 8 a.m. I adj'd the matter to 10 a.m. today to facilitate that meeting. This morning Mr. Saunders advised that counsel was unable to meet them; they plan to meet this afternoon. Mr. Saunders indicated that their counsel would like a 5-day adjm't of this motion.

I will not grant the requested adjm't. By reasons dated May 14/12 I approved the SISP. By reasons dated May 28 I granted an extension of the stay until June 6. Both Reasons made clear the urgent nature of the SISP in the particular circumstances of these companies. No appeal was taken from, nor stay sought in respect of, either order. The public portion of the present motion materials provide detailed information about the conduct of the SISP and the bids. The portions sought to be sealed meet the test in *Sierra Club*. From previous motions I am aware that the applicants have communicated frequently with shareholders; the Monitor has posted all materials on its website.

I am satisfied in the circumstances reasonable notice of this motion and the SISP has been given to all affected parties. The shareholders have not previously participated; that was their choice. It is unreasonable for them to seek to adjourn matters at this stage. The applicants run out of money tomorrow; the shareholders offer no concrete alternative.

After writing these Reasons, on my return to Court, I was advised by counsel for Merge that they only learned of the sale process on May 30 and now wish to tender an Offer. I did not accept the Offer. The SISP was an open and transparent process. The OCA in *Soundair* spoke about the need to maintain the integrity of a court-approved sale process.[2]<sup>5</sup> I am not prepared to accept an offer at this late stage. I note [that] Merge did not have counsel at yesterday's hearing.

Ms. Wilson appeared for a SH, Dan Brintnell. After obtaining instructions, Ms. Wilson advised she had no further submissions.

## V. Analysis of the proposed sale transaction

### A. Guiding legal principles

[35] In most circumstances resort is made to the CCAA to “permit the debtor to continue to carry on business and, where possible, avoid the social and economic costs of liquidating its assets” and to create “conditions for preserving the *status quo* while attempts are made to find common ground amongst stakeholders for a reorganization that is fair to all”. The reality, however, is that “reorganizations of differing complexity require different legal mechanisms.” This has led courts to recognize that the CCAA may be used to sell substantially all of the assets of a debtor company to preserve it as a going concern under new ownership, or to wind-up or liquidate it.[3]<sup>6</sup>

[36] The portions of section 36 of the CCAA relevant to this proposed sale to a non-related person are as follows:

36. (1) A debtor company in respect of which an order has been made under this Act may not sell or otherwise dispose of assets outside the ordinary course of business unless authorized to do so by a court. Despite any requirement for shareholder approval, including one under federal or provincial law, the court may authorize the sale or disposition even if shareholder approval was not obtained.

(2) A company that applies to the court for an authorization is to give notice of the application to the secured creditors who are likely to be affected by the proposed sale or disposition.

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5. *Royal Bank v. Soundair* (1991), 1991 CanLII 2727 (ON CA), 4 O.R. (3d) 1 (C.A.). See in particular the Reasons of Galligan J.A. at pp. 7d to 10c.

6. See the cases summarized in *First Leaside Wealth Management Inc. (Re)*, 2012 ONSC 1299, para. 32.

(3) In deciding whether to grant the authorization, the court is to consider, among other things,

(a) whether the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition was reasonable in the circumstances;

(b) whether the monitor approved the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition;

(c) whether the monitor filed with the court a report stating that in their opinion the sale or disposition would be more beneficial to the creditors than a sale or disposition under a bankruptcy;

(d) the extent to which the creditors were consulted;

(e) the effects of the proposed sale or disposition on the creditors and other interested parties; and

(f) whether the consideration to be received for the assets is reasonable and fair, taking into account their market value.

(6) The court may authorize a sale or disposition free and clear of any security, charge or other restriction and, if it does, it shall also order that other assets of the company or the proceeds of the sale or disposition be subject to a security, charge or other restriction in favour of the creditor whose security, charge or other restriction is to be affected by the order.

(7) The court may grant the authorization only if the court is satisfied that the company can and will make the payments that would have been required under paragraphs 6(4)(a) and (5)(a) if the court had sanctioned the compromise or arrangement.

## B. Consideration of the factors

Was notice of the application given to the secured creditors who are likely to be affected by the proposed sale or disposition?

[37] The applicants have satisfied this requirement. The Purchaser will assume the liability owing to IBM Canada. The other two secured creditors, RBC and Castcan, support the proposed transaction.

The reasonableness of the process leading to the proposed sale

[38] The SISP was approved by this Court by order made May 14, 2012. In my Reasons of that date I stated:

Given the extensive efforts to date by management of the applicants to solicit interest in the business and given the liquidity crunch facing the applicants, I was satisfied that the proposed SISP would result, in the specific circumstances of this case, in a fair, transparent and commercially efficacious process which should allow a sufficient opportunity for interested

parties to come forward with a superior offer and thereby optimize the chances of securing the best possible price for the assets up for sale or the best possible investment in the continuing operations of the applicants. For those reasons I approved the SISP.[4]<sup>7</sup>

[39] Although the applicants took the lead in running the SISP, the evidence disclosed that the Monitor was involved in all stages of the process.

[40] Before the commencement of these CCAA proceedings, members of the PCAS Board of Directors had engaged in separate dialogues with a significant number of parties who were interested in either investing in the DIP Lender to provide financing to the Applicants, purchasing the assets of the Applicants, or buying PCAS. During the SISP PCAS, with the assistance of PwCCF and the Monitor, (i) ran an electronic due diligence data-room, (ii) identified 184 potential bidders from around the globe and contacted 164 of them, (iii) developed a "teaser" which was circulated to 121 of the identified parties, as well as a confidential information memorandum which was posted to the data room and sent to the all of the 18 interested parties who had executed a non-disclosure agreement, (iv) conducted site tours at its Premises, with the Monitor in attendance, for seven potential bidders, (v) developed a non-reliance letter for Qualified Bidders to sign in order to be able to review third-party review of the PCAS technology prepared for the Board and facilitated meetings with the authors of the Technology Review at the request of two potential bidders.

[41] In its Sixth Report dated May 28, 2012 the Monitor described in detail the steps taken up until that point of time in conducting the SISP. The Monitor provided updated information in its Seventh Report dated June 1, 2012. In its Confidential Appendix to the Seventh Report the Monitor presented detailed, un-redacted information about the bids which were tendered, the resulting communications with the bidders, and its comparative evaluation of the bids.

[42] I am satisfied that the SISP run by the Applicants, with the extensive involvement of the Monitor, complied with the terms of the SISP approved in my May 14 Order.

[43] As mentioned, on the continuation of the approval hearing on June 6 counsel appeared for a potential bidder, Merge, seeking to submit an offer on behalf of his client. In *Royal Bank of Canada v. Soundair*, in the context of an approval motion for a sale by a court-appointed receiver, Galligan J. considered the approach which a court should take where a second offer was made after a receiver had entered into an agreement of purchase and sale. He cited two judgments by Saunders J. which had held that the court should consider the second offer, if constituting a "substantially higher bid",<sup>[5]</sup><sup>8</sup> and Galligan J.A. continued:

What those cases show is that the prices in other offers have relevance only if they show that the price contained in the offer accepted by the receiver was so unreasonably low as to demonstrate that the receiver was improvident in accepting it. I am of the opinion, therefore, that if they do not tend to show that the receiver was improvident, they should not be considered upon a

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7. 2012 ONSC 2840, para. 19.

8. *Re Selkirk* (1986), 58 C.B.R. (N.S.) 245 (Ont. Bkcy.); *Re Beauty Counsellors of Canada Ltd.* (1986), 58 C.B.R. (N.S.) 237 (Ont. Bkcy.)

motion to confirm a sale recommended by a court-appointed receiver. If they were, the process would be changed from a sale by a receiver, subject to court approval, into an auction conducted by the court at the time approval is sought. In my opinion, the latter course is unfair to the person who has entered bona fide into an agreement with the receiver, can only lead to chaos, and must be discouraged.

If, however, the subsequent offer is so substantially higher than the sale recommended by the receiver, then it may be that the receiver has not conducted the sale properly. In such circumstances, the court would be justified itself in entering into the sale process by considering competitive bids. However, I think that that process should be entered into only if the court is satisfied that the receiver has not properly conducted the sale which it has recommended to the court.[6]<sup>9</sup>

[44] In the present case I departed from the process described in the *Soundair* case and declined to accept Merge's offer for consideration. The facts in *Soundair* are quite distinguishable. In the *Soundair* case the second bidder had secured a court order permitting it to make an offer. By contrast, in the present case the court had approved a SISP which set a May 24, 2012 bid deadline. All other bids complied, or came very close to complying, with that court-approved deadline. Merge contended that it did not learn of the bidding process until May 30, a week after the bid deadline. The prompt posting of all court orders on the Monitor's website, when combined with Merge's delays in pursuing an offer after learning of this proceeding make it completely unreasonable for Merge to expect that a court would grant it leave to submit an offer for consideration. The court-approved SISP would be stood on its head were that allowed.

[45] Moreover, as was apparent from the Monitor's detailed narration of the consideration given to the bids which were filed on or just after the court-approved bid deadline, time was spent during the SISP process for discussions amongst the Applicants, the Monitor and the bidders to ascertain whether their bids constituted Qualified Bids. The stay of proceedings in this case was set to expire on June 6, the date Merge came forth in court with its offer. The only cash available for Applicants' operations through to June 6 was the advance of \$250,000 by the Purchaser to the Applicants on May 31. The Applicants stated that they would be out of funds by day's end on June 6 or early on June 7. Consequently, there was no realistic prospect that any offer tendered on June 6 could receive a measured consideration while the companies continued to operate.

[46] Finally, Merge did not tender its offer at the commencement of the approval motion on June 5. Its counsel made no submissions that day nor signed the counsel sheet. The only reason I adjourned the hearing to June 6 was to afford some shareholders a brief opportunity to consult with counsel. I made it clear on the record on June 5 that hearing from those shareholders was the only order of business for June 6. Merge did not come forth until the resumption of the hearing on June 6. In those circumstances it was difficult to treat Merge's proffer of a bid as a serious one.

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9. *Soundair, supra.*, pp. 9h-10c.

[47] In sum, the compliance of the Applicants with the court-approved SISP and the unreasonableness of the timing of Merge's offer led me to conclude that the process leading to the proposed sale was reasonable.

Did the Monitor approve the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition?

[48] In its Fifth Report dated May 11, 2012 the Monitor recommended approving the SISP.

Did the Monitor file with the court a report stating that in its opinion the sale or disposition would be more beneficial to the creditors than a sale or disposition under a bankruptcy?

[49] In its Seventh Report the Monitor set out at some length its views about the proposed sale transaction:

The Monitor is of the view that the transaction contemplated by the APA meets the factors set out in section 36(3) of the CCAA. As previously described in the Fifth Report and the Sixth Report, the Monitor is of the view that an expedited SISP was likely the only viable process to maximize the value of the Company for the benefit of its stakeholders given the Company's dire liquidity situation.

The APA provides for a going concern sale of the Company's business that maintains some Canadian operations and should allow for some continued employment.

The Company and the DIP Lender developed the SISP in consultation with Monitor and, in the Monitor's view, the Company implemented a fair, transparent and efficient SISP in the circumstances in accordance with the Orders of this Court and the Court's reasons for decision dated May 14, 2012. Given the Company's liquidity situation, the necessity of implementing an expedited SISP and the bids received, it is the Monitor's view that the price obtained for the Company's assets is fair and reasonable in the circumstances. In addition, as reported in the Second Report, the Monitor is of the view that it is unlikely that a Trustee would have been able to appropriately take possession, market and sell the technology, intellectual property and other assets of the Company as a result of the Company having effectively no cash, limited accounts receivable and few unencumbered assets available to be monetized quickly in liquidation.

The Monitor recommended approving the Successful Bid.

To what extent were the creditors consulted?

[50] The record disclosed that discussions had taken place with the secured creditors. Appropriate notice was given by the Applicants of all steps taken to seek approval of the DIP Lending Facility, the various extensions of the stay and approval of the SISP. As noted, only one unsecured creditor appeared at the approval hearing and its information questions were answered.

What are the effects of the proposed sale or disposition on the creditors and other interested parties?

[51] As summarized by the Monitor in its Seventh Report:

The APA does not provide for any recovery for the Company's shareholders. The APA provides as follows:

- a) statutory priority claims are paid in full in cash.
- b) The beneficiaries of the KERP are to be paid in full and in cash.
- c) The claim of the DIP Lender will be partially satisfied through a combination of cash and interest bearing secured notes convertible at maturity into cash or common shares of the Purchaser.
- d) The Company's unsecured creditors will receive their pro rata share of a pool of interest bearing unsecured notes convertible at maturity into cash or common shares of the Purchaser.
- e) The Company will assume the Assumed Liability [IBM].

In addition, the APA also provides funding for a bankruptcy of the Company or a continuation of the CCAA Proceedings in respect of the Company. As described in further detail below, it is anticipated that the Company will be assigned into bankruptcy and that the entitlement of the unsecured creditors to the unsecured convertible notes will be determined through the statutory claims process provided under the *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act* ... It is anticipated that one unsecured note will be provided to a trustee in bankruptcy to be appointed in respect of the Company.

Is the consideration to be received for the assets reasonable and fair, taking into account their market value?

[52] In its Seventh Report the Monitor expressed its view that "the price obtained for the Company's assets is fair and reasonable in the circumstances". In the *Soundair* case Galligan J.A. stated:

At the outset, I think that the fact that the OEL offer was the only acceptable one available to the receiver on March 8, 1991, after ten months of trying to sell the airline, is strong evidence that the price in it was reasonable.[7]<sup>10</sup>

So, too, in this case. Although no valuation was filed in respect of the companies' assets, the evidence filed on previous motions disclosed that the applicants had made efforts for many months prior to initiating CCAA proceedings to secure further investment in or the sale of the companies. The state of the companies, and the potential business opportunity they offered, were extensively known. Notwithstanding the short SISF, the Monitor reported that contact was made with a large number of

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10. *Soundair, supra.*, p. 8g.



potentially interested parties. Only three bids resulted. Of those three, two were not treated as Qualified Bids. The record, especially the Monitor's Confidential Appendix, supported the selection of the DashRx offer as the Successful Bid. Against the backdrop of those efforts, I concluded that the proposed purchase price was fair and reasonable.

Does the proposed transaction satisfy the requirements of section 36(7) of the CCAA?

[53] The applicants did not sponsor a pension plan for its employees. With the payment of the statutory priority claims from the proceeds of sale, obligations under section 6(5)(a) of the CCAA will be satisfied.

## C. Conclusion

[54] In sum, the proposed Purchase Agreement met the specific factors enumerated in section 36(3) of the CCAA and, when looked at as a whole in the particular circumstances of this case, represented a fair and reasonable transaction.[8]<sup>11</sup> For those reasons I authorized the proposed Purchase Agreement and granted the vesting order which was sought.

# VI. Analysis of the proposed distribution

[55] The distribution of the sale proceeds proposed by the Applicants, and supported by the Monitor, was straight-forward, save for one issue – the validity of Castcan's security in respect of HST Refunds.

## A. The Castcan security issue described

[56] In its Seventh Report the Monitor described the Pari Passu Agreement which the DIP Lender had negotiated with two secured creditors, RBC and Castcan, at the time of putting in place the DIP Lending Facility:

The Monitor has been advised that the DIP Lender entered into an agreement with Castcan and others, whereby the DIP Lender agreed that its claims against the Company would be subordinate to the claims of Castcan (the "Pari Passu Agreement"). Pursuant to the Pari Passu Agreement, Castcan has the right to be repaid in full before the DIP Lender receives any consideration for the amounts it advanced under the DIP Facility... The Monitor has been advised that the DIP Lender has agreed that its position will also be subordinate to RBC, as provided for in the Initial Order.

Although the Purchaser was willing to assume the liabilities owed to RBC and Castcan, they both advised that they were not willing to become creditors of the Purchaser and wanted to be paid in cash in full on closing. In order to accommodate the secured creditors' requests, the

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11. *White Birch Paper Holding Company*, 2010 QCCS 4915, paras. 48 and 49.

DIP Lender has agreed to pay RBC and Castcan in full in cash from the amount payable to the DIP Lender pursuant to the terms of the APA. As a result of that payment, the DIP Lender will be subrogated to or take an assignment of the positions of RBC and Castcan in respect of their validly perfected and secured positions, subject to the lack of clarity in the law in respect of the Castcan Loan and Security discussed below.

[57] The lack of clarity in the law in respect of the Castcan Loan stemmed from the assignment of Crown debts, on a full recourse basis, made in the March 6, 2012 Factor Agreement between Castcan and the Applicants. The Crown debts assigned to Castcan included certain Scientific Research and Experimental Development ("SR&ED") refundable tax credit entitlements, Ontario Innovation Tax Credit ("OITC") refunds and harmonized sales tax ("HST") refunds. The Applicants executed a GSA in favour of Castcan to secure the obligations owing to Castcan, including those under the Factor Agreement.

[58] Counsel to the Monitor provided an opinion that the assignment of the SR&ED Tax Credits and the OITC Tax Credits under the Factor Agreement was valid and the security granted in each GSA in respect of such assignments was valid and enforceable.

[59] Section 67 of the *Financial Administration Act (Canada)*, R.S.C. 1985, c. F-11 (the "FAA") provides as follows:

Except as provided in this Act or any other Act of Parliament,

(a) a Crown debt is not assignable; and

(b) no transaction purporting to be an assignment of a Crown debt is effective so as to confer on any person any rights or remedies in respect of that debt.

In light of that section, counsel to the Monitor advised that the HST Refunds might not be assignable and that the security granted in respect of the HST Refunds might not be valid and enforceable because no provision in the *Excise Tax Act (Canada)* or the *FAA* exempted the HST Refunds from section 67 of the *FAA*.

[60] Castcan took the position that certain provisions in the Factor Agreement entitled it, in any event, to receive the HST Refunds. The Monitor commented on part of the argument advanced by Castcan:

Section 12 of the Factor Agreement provides that if any right or entitlement that, as a matter of law is not assignable, the Company will: (a) co-operate with Castcan to provide the benefits of these Non-Assignable Rights to Castcan, including, holding them in trust; (b) enforce any rights of Castcan arising from these Non-Assignable Rights; (c) take all actions to ensure that the value of these Non-Assignable Rights are preserved; and (d) pay over to Castcan all monies collected in respect of these Non-Assignable Rights. One interpretation is that the obligations set out in Section 12 of the Factor Agreement with respect to the HST Refunds are enforceable

and are secured by the GSAs. Another interpretation is that Section 12 simply gives rise to a claim in equity against the Company and that such an equitable claim may not be secured by the GSAs.

The Monitor is of the view that there is strong argument that Castcan has a claim against the Company for unjust enrichment and, to the extent of such unjust enrichment, a Court may order that a constructive trust applies to the monies advanced by Castcan in respect of the HST Refunds.

Given the provisions of the FAA and existing case law, counsel to the Monitor has advised that it cannot conclude with certainty that the obligations in the Factor Agreement in favour of Castcan with respect to the HST Refunds are secured by the GSAs. Accordingly, the Monitor is of the view that it is unclear whether any payment by the Company to Castcan in respect of the HST Refunds should be made in priority to other creditors.

The Monitor is of the view that the equities clearly favour paying Castcan the full amount owed to it under the Factor Agreement, including the amounts in respect of the HST Refunds.

The Monitor notes that Castcan paid \$1,000,000 to the Company in good faith on a full recourse basis at a time when the Company was in dire need of liquidity. The vast majority of the amounts paid by Castcan were used to fund the Company's payroll. In the Monitor's view, it would be inequitable for the Company or any of its creditors to get a windfall at the expense of a creditor that provided value to the Company as a result of lack of clarity in the existing law and the wording of the Factor Agreement.

[61] The Applicants proposed that upon paying out the claims of the Senior Secured Creditors from the cash proceeds received on closing, the DIP Lender would be subrogated to and/or take an assignment of the Senior Secured Creditor's claims. The Applicants also sought an order which provided, in part, that they, or the proposed Trustee, pay to the DIP Lender any tax credit entitlements received in respect of the HST Refund, notwithstanding section 67 of the *FAA*. The Monitor explained the rationale for this request:

The DIP Lender is of the view that since there is likely no secondary market for the secured convertible notes, the net present value of the secured convertible notes is less than the face value of such notes. As a result, the DIP Lender is taking the position that the consideration it is receiving is insufficient to satisfy the full amount of the DIP Lender's claim against the Company. The DIP Lender is also of the view that the DIP Lender's Charge should continue to secure the obligations owing to the DIP Lender as a result of its shortfall after distribution of the proceeds to it on closing of the transaction contemplated by the APA. The Monitor supports the DIP Lender's views.

The DIP Lender is also of the view that the value of the notes should be discounted by an amount that is at least as great as the amount of the HST Refunds in order to permit the proceeds of the HST Refunds once received by the estate to be paid to the DIP Lender on

account of its DIP Charge. The Monitor supports the DIP Lender's views with respect to the DIP Lender's Charge. Accordingly, the Monitor is of the view that the DIP Lender's Charge should remain effective over all of the Excluded Assets until such time as such refunds are received and become proceeds of the estate and the DIP Lender is repaid in full.

The parties with an economic interest in the proceeds of the transaction and the Tax Credit Entitlements have agreed to the arrangement with the DIP Lender described above with respect to the HST Refunds. Such an arrangement will permit the DIP Lender to satisfy its obligations under the Pari Passu Agreement while still receiving the consideration that was agreed to be paid to it pursuant to the APA.

## B. Legal analysis

[62] Section 67 of the *FAA* provides that “no transaction purporting to be an assignment of a Crown debt is effective” except as provided in that Act or any other federal Act. In *Mazetti v. Marzetti* the Supreme Court of Canada held that under section 67 “a purported assignment of a Crown debt is rendered absolutely ineffective, as between debtor and creditor, and as between assignor and assignee.”[9]<sup>12</sup> The Court of Appeal, in *Profitt v. A.D. Productions Ltd. (Trustee of)*, held that purported assignments of federal sales tax refunds were invalid.[10]<sup>13</sup>

[63] In their factum the Applicants pointed to several cases which they contended might limit the application of the decisions in *Mazetti* and *Profitt*.<sup>14</sup> Castcan had submitted to the Monitor that several provisions of the Factor Agreement operated to give it priority to the HST Refund notwithstanding the *Mazetti* and *Profitt* decisions. I did not need to address those points to decide the motion. Assuming, for purposes of argument, the ineffectiveness of Castcan’s security as it related to the HST Refund, that refund would constitute property of the Applicants. Pursuant to the Initial Order the DIP Lender was granted a charge on the “Property” of the Applicants which was defined as the Applicants’ “current and future assets, undertakings and properties of every nature and kind whatsoever, and wherever situate including all proceeds thereof”. The “Property” of the applicants included their entitlement to the HST Refund. Accordingly, in the event of a failure of Castcan’s security, the DIP Lender would be entitled to the HST Refund.

[64] Section 67 of the *FAA* does not prevent such a result since it only renders ineffective any “*transaction* purporting to be an assignment of a Crown debt”. The DIP Lender’s Charge created by the Initial Order was not such a “*transaction*”. As the Supreme Court of Canada pointed out in *Bank of*

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12. 1994 CanLII 50 (SCC), [1994] 2 S.C.R. 765, para. 99.

13. (2002), 2002 CanLII 44914 (ON CA), 32 C.B.R. (4) 94 (O.C.A.), para. 28.

14. *Cargill Ltd. v. Ronald (Trustee of)* (2007), 2007 MBQB 102 (CanLII), 32 C.B.R. (5) 169 (Man. C.A.); *McKay & Maxwell, Ltd., Re* (1927), 8 C.B.R. 534 (N.S.S.C.); *Christensen, Re* (1961), 2 C.B.R. (N.S.) 324 (Ont. S.C.); *Front Iron & Metal Co., Re* (1980), 38 C.B.R. (N.S.) 317 (Ont. S.C.).

*Montreal v. i Trade Finance Inc.*, rights which result from a court order are not rights stemming from a “transaction”.<sup>[12]</sup><sup>15</sup> Section 67 of the *FAA* does not apply to rights created by a court order, including a DIP lending charge granted over all of a company’s property pursuant to section 11.2(1) of the *CCAA*.

[65] Since the DIP Lender would be entitled to the HST Refund in the event of a defect in Castcan’s security, it was open to the DIP Lender to agree, with Castcan, as a matter of contract, that Castcan should receive full payout as contemplated by the *Pari Passu* Agreement.

[66] As to the Applicants’ request for an order that they, or the proposed Trustee, pay to the DIP Lender any tax credit entitlements received in respect of the HST Refund, I was satisfied that it was appropriate to exercise my discretion under section 11 of the *CCAA* to make such an order. I accepted the Monitor’s view that the DIP Lender was entitled to be repaid in full upon the conclusion of the *CCAA* proceedings and that its charge should continue to secure the obligations to it as a result of the shortfall after distribution of the transaction proceeds. The use of the Secured Note to repay the DIP Lender entails a risk that the DIP Lender might not receive full repayment of its DIP Lending Facility. Consequently, I accepted the Monitor’s view that it would be appropriate to discount the value of the note by an amount equal to the HST Refund. Such a result promotes, in part, the remedial purposes of the *CCAA* by ensuring that DIP lenders, whose role often is critical to the successful completion of a re-organization, can advance interim financing with the reasonable assurance of receiving repayment of their DIP loans.

[67] As to the distribution of \$100,000 of the sales proceeds to fund bankruptcy proceedings involving the Applicants, I accepted the Monitor’s view that since no further funds existed to continue the *CCAA* proceedings, a bankruptcy would serve as the most cost effective and efficient way in which to complete the winding-up of the companies’ affairs, including establishing a mechanism to determine the quantum for unsecured claims.

[68] For those reasons I approved the distribution of the sale proceeds proposed by the Applicants, as well as the related orders terminating the *CCAA* proceedings upon the Monitor filing its discharge certificate and approving the Monitor’s Seventh Report and the activities described therein.

## VII. Sealing order

[69] The information contained in the Confidential Appendix to the Monitor’s Seventh Report clearly met the criteria for a sealing order set out in *Sierra Club of Canada v. Canada (Minister of Finance)*.<sup>[13]</sup><sup>16</sup> In order to protect the integrity of the SISF and the proposed sales transaction, I granted an order that the appendix be sealed until the completion of the Purchase Agreement transaction.

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(original signed by)

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15. 2011 SCC 26 (CanLII), [2011] 2 S.C.R. 360, para. 30. See also, *Torstar Corp. v. ITI Information Technology Institute Inc.* (2002), 2002 NSSC 200 (CanLII), 36 C.B.R. (4) 114 (N.S.S.C.), paras. 29 and 32.

16. 2002 SCC 41 (CanLII), [2002] 2 S.C.R. 522.

D. M. Brown J.

**Date:** June 9, 2012

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TAB 5

# Royal Bank of Canada v. Soundair Corp., 1991 CanLII 2727 (ON CA)

Date: 1991-07-03

Other citations: 4 OR (3d) 1 — 83 DLR (4th) 76 — 46 OAC 321 — 7 CBR (3d) 1 — [1991] CarswellOnt 205 — [1991] OJ No 1137 (QL)

**Citation:** **Royal Bank of Canada v. Soundair Corp., 1991 CanLII 2727 (ON CA)**, <<https://canlii.ca/t/1p78p>>, retrieved on 2024-10-10

Royal Bank of Canada v. Soundair Corp., Canadian Pension Capital Ltd. and Canadian Insurers Capital Corp.  
Indexed as: Royal Bank of Canada v. Soundair Corp. (C.A.)

4 O.R. (3d) 1

[1991] O.J. No. 1137

Action No. 318/91

ONTARIO

Court of Appeal for Ontario

Goodman, McKinlay and Galligan J.J.A.

July 3, 1991

Debtor and creditor -- Receivers -- Court-appointed receiver accepting offer to purchase assets against wishes of secured creditors -- Receiver acting properly and prudently -- Wishes of creditors not determinative -- Court approval of sale confirmed on appeal.

Air Toronto was a division of Soundair. In April 1990, one of Soundair's creditors, the Royal Bank, appointed a receiver to operate Air Toronto and sell it as a going concern. The receiver was authorized to sell Air Toronto to Air Canada, or, if that sale could not be completed, to negotiate and sell Air Toronto to another person. Air Canada made an offer which the receiver rejected. The receiver then entered into negotiations with Canadian Airlines International (Canadian); two subsidiaries of Canadian, Ontario Express Ltd. and Frontier Airlines Ltd., made an offer to purchase on March 6, 1991 (the OEL offer). Air Canada and a creditor of Soundair, CCFL, presented an offer to purchase to the receiver on March 7, 1991 through 922, a company formed for that purpose (the 922 offer). The receiver declined the 922 offer because it contained an unacceptable condition and accepted the OEL offer. 922 made a



second offer, which was virtually identical to the first one except that the unacceptable condition had been removed. In proceedings before Rosenberg J., an order was made approving the sale of Air Toronto to OEL and dismissing the 922 offer. CCFL appealed.

Held, the appeal should be dismissed.

Per Galligan J.A.: When deciding whether a receiver has acted providently, the court should examine the conduct of the receiver in light of the information the receiver had when it agreed to accept an offer, and should be very cautious before deciding that the receiver's conduct was improvident based upon information which has come to light after it made its decision. The decision to sell to OEL was a sound one in the circumstances faced by the receiver on March 8, 1991. Prices in other offers received after the receiver has agreed to a sale have relevance only if they show that the price contained in the accepted offer was so unreasonably low as to demonstrate that the receiver was improvident in accepting it. If they do not do so, they should not be considered upon a motion to confirm a sale recommended by a court-appointed receiver. If the 922 offer was better than the OEL offer, it was only marginally better and did not lead to an inference that the disposition strategy of the receiver was improvident.

While the primary concern of a receiver is the protecting of the interests of creditors, a secondary but important consideration is the integrity of the process by which the sale is effected. The court must exercise extreme caution before it interferes with the process adopted by a receiver to sell an unusual asset. It is important that prospective purchasers know that, if they are acting in good faith, bargain seriously with a receiver and enter into an agreement with it, a court will not lightly interfere with the commercial judgment of the receiver to sell the asset to them.

The failure of the receiver to give an offering memorandum to those who expressed an interest in the purchase of Air Toronto did not result in the process being unfair, as there was no proof that if an offering memorandum had been widely distributed among persons qualified to have purchased Air Toronto, a viable offer would have come forth from a party other than 922 or OEL.

The fact that the 922 offer was supported by Soundair's secured creditors did not mean that the court should have given effect to their wishes. Creditors who asked the court to appoint a receiver to dispose of assets (and therefore insulated themselves from the risks of acting privately) should not be allowed to take over control of the process by the simple expedient of supporting another purchaser if they do not agree with the sale by the receiver. If the court decides that a court-appointed receiver has acted providently and properly (as the receiver did in this case), the views of creditors should not be determinative.

Per McKinlay J.A. (concurring in the result): While the procedure carried out by the receiver in this case was appropriate, given the unfolding of events and the unique nature of the assets involved, it was not a procedure which was likely to be appropriate in many receivership sales.

Per Goodman J.A. (dissenting): The fact that a creditor has requested an order of the court appointing a receiver does not in any way diminish or derogate from his right to obtain the maximum benefit to be derived from any disposition of the debtor's assets. The creditors in this case were convinced that

acceptance of the 922 offer was in their best interest and the evidence supported that belief. Although the receiver acted in good faith, the process which it used was unfair insofar as 922 was concerned and improvident insofar as the secured creditors were concerned.

APPEAL from the judgment of the General Division, Rosenberg J., May 1, 1991, approving the sale of an airline by a receiver.

Cases referred to Beauty Counsellors of Canada Ltd. (Re) (1986), 58 C.B.R. (N.S.) 237 (Ont. Bkcy.); British Columbia Development Corp. v. Spun Cast Industries Inc. (1977), 1977 CanLII 251 (BC SC), 5 B.C.L.R. 94, 26 C.B.R. (N.S.) 28 (S.C.); Cameron v. Bank of Nova Scotia (1981), 1981 CanLII 4762 (NS CA), 38 C.B.R. (N.S.) 1, 45 N.S.R. (2d) 303, 86 A.P.R. 303 (C.A.); Crown Trust Co. v. Rosenberg (1986), 1986 CanLII 2760 (ON SC), 60 O.R. (2d) 87, 22 C.P.C. (2d) 131, 67 C.B.R. (N.S.) 320 (note), 39 D.L.R. (4th) 526 (H.C.J.); Salima Investments Ltd. v. Bank of Montreal (1985), 1985 ABCA 191 (CanLII), 41 Alta. L.R. (2d) 58, 65 A.R. 372, 59 C.B.R. (N.S.) 242, 21 D.L.R. (4th) 473 (C.A.); Selkirk (Re) (1986), 58 C.B.R. (N.S.) 245 (Ont. Bkcy.); Selkirk (Re) (1987), 64 C.B.R. (N.S.) 140 (Ont. Bkcy.) Statutes referred to Employment Standards Act, R.S.O. 1980, c. 137 Environmental Protection Act, R.S.O. 1980, c. 141

J.B. Berkow and Steven H. Goldman, for appellants.

John T. Morin, Q.C., for Air Canada.

L.A.J. Barnes and Lawrence E. Ritchie, for Royal Bank of Canada.

Sean F. Dunphy and G.K. Ketcheson for Ernst & Young Inc., receiver of Soundair Corp., respondent.

W.G. Horton, for Ontario Express Ltd.

Nancy J. Spies, for Frontier Air Ltd.

GALLIGAN J.A.:-- This is an appeal from the order of Rosenberg J. made on May 1, 1991 (Gen. Div.). By that order, he approved the sale of Air Toronto to Ontario Express Limited and Frontier Air Limited and he dismissed a motion to approve an offer to purchase Air Toronto by 922246 Ontario Limited.

It is necessary at the outset to give some background to the dispute. Soundair Corporation (Soundair) is a corporation engaged in the air transport business. It has three divisions. One of them is Air Toronto. Air Toronto operates a scheduled airline from Toronto to a number of mid-sized cities in the United States of America. Its routes serve as feeders to several of Air Canada's routes. Pursuant to a connector agreement, Air Canada provides some services to Air Toronto and benefits from the feeder traffic provided by it. The operational relationship between Air Canada and Air Toronto is a close one.

In the latter part of 1989 and the early part of 1990, Soundair was in financial difficulty. Soundair has two secured creditors who have an interest in the assets of Air Toronto. The Royal Bank of Canada (the Royal Bank) is owed at least \$65,000,000. The appellants Canadian Pension Capital Limited and Canadian Insurers Capital Corporation (collectively called CCFL) are owed approximately \$9,500,000. Those creditors will have a deficiency expected to be in excess of \$50,000,000 on the winding-up of Soundair.

On April 26, 1990, upon the motion of the Royal Bank, O'Brien J. appointed Ernst & Young Inc. (the receiver) as receiver of all of the assets, property and undertakings of Soundair. The order required the receiver to operate Air Toronto and sell it as a going concern. Because of the close relationship between Air Toronto and Air Canada, it was contemplated that the receiver would obtain the assistance of Air Canada to operate Air Toronto. The order authorized the receiver:

(b) to enter into contractual arrangements with Air Canada to retain a manager or operator, including Air Canada, to manage and operate Air Toronto under the supervision of Ernst & Young Inc. until the completion of the sale of Air Toronto to Air Canada or other person ...

Also because of the close relationship, it was expected that Air Canada would purchase Air Toronto. To that end, the order of O'Brien J. authorized the receiver:

(c) to negotiate and do all things necessary or desirable to complete a sale of Air Toronto to Air Canada and, if a sale to Air Canada cannot be completed, to negotiate and sell Air Toronto to another person, subject to terms and conditions approved by this Court.

Over a period of several weeks following that order, negotiations directed towards the sale of Air Toronto took place between the receiver and Air Canada. Air Canada had an agreement with the receiver that it would have exclusive negotiating rights during that period. I do not think it is necessary to review those negotiations, but I note that Air Canada had complete access to all of the operations of Air Toronto and conducted due diligence examinations. It became thoroughly acquainted with every aspect of Air Toronto's operations.

Those negotiations came to an end when an offer made by Air Canada on June 19, 1990, was considered unsatisfactory by the receiver. The offer was not accepted and lapsed. Having regard to the tenor of Air Canada's negotiating stance and a letter sent by its solicitors on July 20, 1990, I think that the receiver was eminently reasonable when it decided that there was no realistic possibility of selling Air Toronto to Air Canada.

The receiver then looked elsewhere. Air Toronto's feeder business is very attractive, but it only has value to a national airline. The receiver concluded reasonably, therefore, that it was commercially necessary for one of Canada's two national airlines to be involved in any sale of Air Toronto. Realistically, there were only two possible purchasers whether direct or indirect. They were Air Canada and Canadian Airlines International.

It was well known in the air transport industry that Air Toronto was for sale. During the months following the collapse of the negotiations with Air Canada, the receiver tried unsuccessfully to find viable purchasers. In late 1990, the receiver turned to Canadian Airlines International, the only realistic alternative. Negotiations began between them. Those negotiations led to a letter of intent dated February 11, 1991. On March 6, 1991, the receiver received an offer from Ontario Express Limited and Frontier Airlines Limited, who are subsidiaries of Canadian Airlines International. This offer is called the OEL offer.

In the meantime, Air Canada and CCFL were having discussions about making an offer for the purchase of Air Toronto. They formed 92246 Ontario Limited (922) for the purpose of purchasing Air Toronto. On March 1, 1991, CCFL wrote to the receiver saying that it proposed to make an offer. On March 7, 1991, Air Canada and CCFL presented an offer to the receiver in the name of 922. For convenience, its offers are called the 922 offers.

The first 922 offer contained a condition which was unacceptable to the receiver. I will refer to that condition in more detail later. The receiver declined the 922 offer and on March 8, 1991, accepted the OEL offer. Subsequently, 922 obtained an order allowing it to make a second offer. It then submitted an offer which was virtually identical to that of March 7, 1991, except that the unacceptable condition had been removed.

The proceedings before Rosenberg J. then followed. He approved the sale to OEL and dismissed a motion for the acceptance of the 922 offer. Before Rosenberg J., and in this court, both CCFL and the Royal Bank supported the acceptance of the second 922 offer.

There are only two issues which must be resolved in this appeal. They are:

- (1) Did the receiver act properly when it entered into an agreement to sell Air Toronto to OEL?
- (2) What effect does the support of the 922 offer by the secured creditors have on the result?

I will deal with the two issues separately.

#### I. DID THE RECEIVER ACT PROPERLY IN AGREEING TO SELL TO OEL?

Before dealing with that issue there are three general observations which I think I should make. The first is that the sale of an airline as a going concern is a very complex process. The best method of selling an airline at the best price is something far removed from the expertise of a court. When a court appoints a receiver to use its commercial expertise to sell an airline, it is inescapable that it intends to rely upon the receiver's expertise and not upon its own. Therefore, the court must place a great deal of confidence in the actions taken and in the opinions formed by the receiver. It should also assume that the receiver is acting properly unless the contrary is clearly shown. The second observation is that the court should be reluctant to second-guess, with the benefit of hindsight, the considered business decisions made by its receiver. The third observation which I wish to make is that the conduct of the receiver should be reviewed in the light of the specific mandate given to him by the court.

The order of O'Brien J. provided that if the receiver could not complete the sale to Air Canada that it was "to negotiate and sell Air Toronto to another person". The court did not say how the receiver was to negotiate the sale. It did not say it was to call for bids or conduct an auction. It told the receiver to negotiate and sell. It obviously intended, because of the unusual nature of the asset being sold, to leave the method of sale substantially in the discretion of the receiver. I think, therefore, that the court should not review minutely the process of the sale when, broadly speaking, it appears to the court to be a just process.

As did Rosenberg J., I adopt as correct the statement made by Anderson J. in *Crown Trust Co. v. Rosenberg* (1986), 1986 CanLII 2760 (ON SC), 60 O.R. (2d) 87, 39 D.L.R. (4th) 526 (H.C.J.), at pp. 92-94 O.R., pp. 531-33 D.L.R., of the duties which a court must perform when deciding whether a receiver who has sold a property acted properly. When he set out the court's duties, he did not put them in any order of priority, nor do I. I summarize those duties as follows:

1. It should consider whether the receiver has made a sufficient effort to get the best price and has not acted improvidently.
2. It should consider the interests of all parties.
3. It should consider the efficacy and integrity of the process by which offers are obtained.
4. It should consider whether there has been unfairness in the working out of the process.

I intend to discuss the performance of those duties separately.

1. Did the receiver make a sufficient effort to get the best price and did it act providently?

Having regard to the fact that it was highly unlikely that a commercially viable sale could be made to anyone but the two national airlines, or to someone supported by either of them, it is my view that the receiver acted wisely and reasonably when it negotiated only with Air Canada and Canadian Airlines International. Furthermore, when Air Canada said that it would submit no further offers and gave the impression that it would not participate further in the receiver's efforts to sell, the only course reasonably open to the receiver was to negotiate with Canadian Airlines International. Realistically, there was nowhere else to go but to Canadian Airlines International. In doing so, it is my opinion that the receiver made sufficient efforts to sell the airline.

When the receiver got the OEL offer on March 6, 1991, it was over ten months since it had been charged with the responsibility of selling Air Toronto. Until then, the receiver had not received one offer which it thought was acceptable. After substantial efforts to sell the airline over that period, I find it difficult to think that the receiver acted improvidently in accepting the only acceptable offer which it had.

On March 8, 1991, the date when the receiver accepted the OEL offer, it had only two offers, the OEL offer which was acceptable, and the 922 offer which contained an unacceptable condition. I cannot see how the receiver, assuming for the moment that the price was reasonable, could have done anything but accept the OEL offer.

When deciding whether a receiver had acted providently, the court should examine the conduct of the receiver in light of the information the receiver had when it agreed to accept an offer. In this case, the court should look at the receiver's conduct in the light of the information it had when it made its decision on March 8, 1991. The court should be very cautious before deciding that the receiver's conduct was improvident based upon information which has come to light after it made its decision. To do so, in my view, would derogate from the mandate to sell given to the receiver by the order of O'Brien J. I agree with and adopt what was said by Anderson J. in *Crown Trust v. Rosenberg*, supra, at p. 112 O.R., p. 551 D.L.R.:

Its decision was made as a matter of business judgment on the elements then available to it. It is of the very essence of a receiver's function to make such judgments and in the making of them to act seriously and responsibly so as to be prepared to stand behind them.

If the court were to reject the recommendation of the Receiver in any but the most exceptional circumstances, it would materially diminish and weaken the role and function of the Receiver both in the perception of receivers and in the perception of any others who might have occasion to deal with them. It would lead to the conclusion that the decision of the Receiver was of little weight and that the real decision was always made upon the motion for approval. That would be a consequence susceptible of immensely damaging results to the disposition of assets by court-appointed receivers.

(Emphasis added)

I also agree with and adopt what was said by Macdonald J.A. in *Cameron v. Bank of Nova Scotia* (1981), 1981 CanLII 4762 (NS CA), 38 C.B.R. (N.S.) 1, 45 N.S.R. (2d) 303 (C.A.), at p. 11 C.B.R., p. 314 N.S.R.:

In my opinion if the decision of the receiver to enter into an agreement of sale, subject to court approval, with respect to certain assets is reasonable and sound under the circumstances at the time existing it should not be set aside simply because a later and higher bid is made. To do so would literally create chaos in the commercial world and receivers and purchasers would never be sure they had a binding agreement.

(Emphasis added)

On March 8, 1991, the receiver had two offers. One was the OEL offer which it considered satisfactory but which could be withdrawn by OEL at any time before it was accepted. The receiver also had the 922 offer which contained a condition that was totally unacceptable. It had no other offers. It was faced with the dilemma of whether it should decline to accept the OEL offer and run the risk of it being withdrawn, in the hope that an acceptable offer would be forthcoming from 922. An affidavit filed by the president of the receiver describes the dilemma which the receiver faced, and the judgment made in the light of that dilemma:

24. An asset purchase agreement was received by Ernst & Young on March 7, 1991 which was dated March 6, 1991. This agreement was received from CCFL in respect of their offer to purchase the assets and undertaking of Air Toronto. Apart from financial considerations, which will be

considered in a subsequent affidavit, the Receiver determined that it would not be prudent to delay acceptance of the OEL agreement to negotiate a highly uncertain arrangement with Air Canada and CCFL. Air Canada had the benefit of an "exclusive" in negotiations for Air Toronto and had clearly indicated its intention to take itself out of the running while ensuring that no other party could seek to purchase Air Toronto and maintain the Air Canada connector arrangement vital to its survival. The CCFL offer represented a radical reversal of this position by Air Canada at the eleventh hour. However, it contained a significant number of conditions to closing which were entirely beyond the control of the Receiver. As well, the CCFL offer came less than 24 hours before signing of the agreement with OEL which had been negotiated over a period of months, at great time and expense.

(Emphasis added) I am convinced that the decision made was a sound one in the circumstances faced by the receiver on March 8, 1991.

I now turn to consider whether the price contained in the OEL offer was one which it was provident to accept. At the outset, I think that the fact that the OEL offer was the only acceptable one available to the receiver on March 8, 1991, after ten months of trying to sell the airline, is strong evidence that the price in it was reasonable. In a deteriorating economy, I doubt that it would have been wise to wait any longer.

I mentioned earlier that, pursuant to an order, 922 was permitted to present a second offer. During the hearing of the appeal, counsel compared at great length the price contained in the second 922 offer with the price contained in the OEL offer. Counsel put forth various hypotheses supporting their contentions that one offer was better than the other.

It is my opinion that the price contained in the 922 offer is relevant only if it shows that the price obtained by the Receiver in the OEL offer was not a reasonable one. In *Crown Trust v. Rosenberg*, supra, Anderson J., at p. 113 O.R., p. 551 D.L.R., discussed the comparison of offers in the following way:

No doubt, as the cases have indicated, situations might arise where the disparity was so great as to call in question the adequacy of the mechanism which had produced the offers. It is not so here, and in my view that is substantially an end of the matter.

In two judgments, Saunders J. considered the circumstances in which an offer submitted after the receiver had agreed to a sale should be considered by the court. The first is *Re Selkirk* (1986), 58 C.B.R. (N.S.) 245 (Ont. Bkcy.), at p. 247:

If, for example, in this case there had been a second offer of a substantially higher amount, then the court would have to take that offer into consideration in assessing whether the receiver had properly carried out his function of endeavouring to obtain the best price for the property.

The second is *Re Beauty Counsellors of Canada Ltd.* (1986), 58 C.B.R. (N.S.) 237 (Ont. Bkcy.), at p. 243:

If a substantially higher bid turns up at the approval stage, the court should consider it. Such a bid may indicate, for example, that the trustee has not properly carried out its duty to endeavour to obtain the best price for the estate.

In *Re Selkirk* (1987), 64 C.B.R. (N.S.) 140 (Ont. Bkcy.), at p. 142, McRae J. expressed a similar view:

The court will not lightly withhold approval of a sale by the receiver, particularly in a case such as this where the receiver is given rather wide discretionary authority as per the order of Mr. Justice Trainor and, of course, where the receiver is an officer of this court. Only in a case where there seems to be some unfairness in the process of the sale or where there are substantially higher offers which would tend to show that the sale was improvident will the court withhold approval. It is important that the court recognize the commercial exigencies that would flow if prospective purchasers are allowed to wait until the sale is in court for approval before submitting their final offer. This is something that must be discouraged.

(Emphasis added)

What those cases show is that the prices in other offers have relevance only if they show that the price contained in the offer accepted by the receiver was so unreasonably low as to demonstrate that the receiver was improvident in accepting it. I am of the opinion, therefore, that if they do not tend to show that the receiver was improvident, they should not be considered upon a motion to confirm a sale recommended by a court-appointed receiver. If they were, the process would be changed from a sale by a receiver, subject to court approval, into an auction conducted by the court at the time approval is sought. In my opinion, the latter course is unfair to the person who has entered bona fide into an agreement with the receiver, can only lead to chaos, and must be discouraged.

If, however, the subsequent offer is so substantially higher than the sale recommended by the receiver, then it may be that the receiver has not conducted the sale properly. In such circumstances, the court would be justified itself in entering into the sale process by considering competitive bids. However, I think that that process should be entered into only if the court is satisfied that the receiver has not properly conducted the sale which it has recommended to the court.

It is necessary to consider the two offers. Rosenberg J. held that the 922 offer was slightly better or marginally better than the OEL offer. He concluded that the difference in the two offers did not show that the sale process adopted by the receiver was inadequate or improvident.

Counsel for the appellants complained about the manner in which Rosenberg J. conducted the hearing of the motion to confirm the OEL sale. The complaint was, that when they began to discuss a comparison of the two offers, Rosenberg J. said that he considered the 922 offer to be better than the OEL offer. Counsel said that when that comment was made, they did not think it necessary to argue further the question of the difference in value between the two offers. They complain that the finding that the 922 offer was only marginally better or slightly better than the OEL offer was made without them having had the opportunity to argue that the 922 offer was substantially better or significantly



better than the OEL offer. I cannot understand how counsel could have thought that by expressing the opinion that the 922 offer was better, Rosenberg J. was saying that it was a significantly or substantially better one. Nor can I comprehend how counsel took the comment to mean that they were foreclosed from arguing that the offer was significantly or substantially better. If there was some misunderstanding on the part of counsel, it should have been raised before Rosenberg J. at the time. I am sure that if it had been, the misunderstanding would have been cleared up quickly. Nevertheless, this court permitted extensive argument dealing with the comparison of the two offers.

The 922 offer provided for \$6,000,000 cash to be paid on closing with a royalty based upon a percentage of Air Toronto profits over a period of five years up to a maximum of \$3,000,000. The OEL offer provided for a payment of \$2,000,000 on closing with a royalty paid on gross revenues over a five-year period. In the short term, the 922 offer is obviously better because there is substantially more cash up front. The chances of future returns are substantially greater in the OEL offer because royalties are paid on gross revenues while the royalties under the 922 offer are paid only on profits. There is an element of risk involved in each offer.

The receiver studied the two offers. It compared them and took into account the risks, the advantages and the disadvantages of each. It considered the appropriate contingencies. It is not necessary to outline the factors which were taken into account by the receiver because the manager of its insolvency practice filed an affidavit outlining the considerations which were weighed in its evaluation of the two offers. They seem to me to be reasonable ones. That affidavit concluded with the following paragraph:

24. On the basis of these considerations the Receiver has approved the OEL offer and has concluded that it represents the achievement of the highest possible value at this time for the Air Toronto division of SoundAir.

The court appointed the receiver to conduct the sale of Air Toronto and entrusted it with the responsibility of deciding what is the best offer. I put great weight upon the opinion of the receiver. It swore to the court which appointed it that the OEL offer represents the achievement of the highest possible value at this time for Air Toronto. I have not been convinced that the receiver was wrong when he made that assessment. I am, therefore, of the opinion that the 922 offer does not demonstrate any failure upon the part of the receiver to act properly and providently.

It follows that if Rosenberg J. was correct when he found that the 922 offer was in fact better, I agree with him that it could only have been slightly or marginally better. The 922 offer does not lead to an inference that the disposition strategy of the receiver was inadequate, unsuccessful or improvident, nor that the price was unreasonable.

I am, therefore, of the opinion that the receiver made a sufficient effort to get the best price and has not acted improvidently.

2. Consideration of the interests of all parties

It is well established that the primary interest is that of the creditors of the debtor: see *Crown Trust Co. v. Rosenberg*, supra, and *Re Selkirk* (1986, Saunders J.), supra. However, as Saunders J. pointed out in *Re Beauty Counsellors*, supra, at p. 244 C.B.R., "it is not the only or overriding consideration".

In my opinion, there are other persons whose interests require consideration. In an appropriate case, the interests of the debtor must be taken into account. I think also, in a case such as this, where a purchaser has bargained at some length and doubtless at considerable expense with the receiver, the interests of the purchaser ought to be taken into account. While it is not explicitly stated in such cases as *Crown Trust Co. v. Rosenberg*, supra, *Re Selkirk* (1986, Saunders J.), supra, *Re Beauty Counsellors*, supra, *Re Selkirk* (1987, McRae J.), supra, and *Cameron*, supra, I think they clearly imply that the interests of a person who has negotiated an agreement with a court-appointed receiver are very important.

In this case, the interests of all parties who would have an interest in the process were considered by the receiver and by Rosenberg J.

### 3. Consideration of the efficacy and integrity of the process by which the offer was obtained

While it is accepted that the primary concern of a receiver is the protecting of the interests of the creditors, there is a secondary but very important consideration and that is the integrity of the process by which the sale is effected. This is particularly so in the case of a sale of such a unique asset as an airline as a going concern.

The importance of a court protecting the integrity of the process has been stated in a number of cases. First, I refer to *Re Selkirk* (1986), supra, where Saunders J. said at p. 246 C.B.R.:

In dealing with the request for approval, the court has to be concerned primarily with protecting the interest of the creditors of the former bankrupt. A secondary but important consideration is that the process under which the sale agreement is arrived at should be consistent with commercial efficacy and integrity.

In that connection I adopt the principles stated by Macdonald J.A. of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court (Appeal Division) in *Cameron v. Bank of N.S.* (1981), 1981 CanLII 4762 (NS CA), 38 C.B.R. (N.S.) 1, 45 N.S.R. (2d) 303, 86 A.P.R. 303 (C.A.), where he said at p. 11:

In my opinion if the decision of the receiver to enter into an agreement of sale, subject to court approval, with respect to certain assets is reasonable and sound under the circumstances at the time existing it should not be set aside simply because a later and higher bid is made. To do so would literally create chaos in the commercial world and receivers and purchasers would never be sure they had a finding agreement. On the contrary, they would know that other bids could be received and considered up until the application for court approval is heard -- this would be an intolerable situation.

While those remarks may have been made in the context of a bidding situation rather than a private sale, I consider them to be equally applicable to a negotiation process leading to a private sale.

Where the court is concerned with the disposition of property, the purpose of appointing a receiver is to have the receiver do the work that the court would otherwise have to do.

In *Salima Investments Ltd. v. Bank of Montreal* (1985), 1985 ABCA 191 (CanLII), 41 Alta. L.R. (2d) 58, 21 D.L.R. (4th) 473 (C.A.), at p. 61 Alta. L.R., p. 476 D.L.R., the Alberta Court of Appeal said that sale by tender is not necessarily the best way to sell a business as an ongoing concern. It went on to say that when some other method is used which is provident, the court should not undermine the process by refusing to confirm the sale.

Finally, I refer to the reasoning of Anderson J. in *Crown Trust Co. v. Rosenberg*, supra, at p. 124 O.R., pp. 562-63 D.L.R.:

While every proper effort must always be made to assure maximum recovery consistent with the limitations inherent in the process, no method has yet been devised to entirely eliminate those limitations or to avoid their consequences. Certainly it is not to be found in loosening the entire foundation of the system. Thus to compare the results of the process in this case with what might have been recovered in some other set of circumstances is neither logical nor practical.

(Emphasis added)

It is my opinion that the court must exercise extreme caution before it interferes with the process adopted by a receiver to sell an unusual asset. It is important that prospective purchasers know that, if they are acting in good faith, bargain seriously with a receiver and enter into an agreement with it, a court will not lightly interfere with the commercial judgment of the receiver to sell the asset to them.

Before this court, counsel for those opposing the confirmation of the sale to OEL suggested many different ways in which the receiver could have conducted the process other than the way which he did. However, the evidence does not convince me that the receiver used an improper method of attempting to sell the airline. The answer to those submissions is found in the comment of Anderson J. in *Crown Trust Co. v. Rosenberg*, supra, at p. 109 O.R., p. 548 D.L.R.:

The court ought not to sit as on appeal from the decision of the Receiver, reviewing in minute detail every element of the process by which the decision is reached. To do so would be a futile and duplicitous exercise.

It would be a futile and duplicitous exercise for this court to examine in minute detail all of the circumstances leading up to the acceptance of the OEL offer. Having considered the process adopted by the receiver, it is my opinion that the process adopted was a reasonable and prudent one.

4. Was there unfairness in the process?

As a general rule, I do not think it appropriate for the court to go into the minutia of the process or of the selling strategy adopted by the receiver. However, the court has a responsibility to decide whether the process was fair. The only part of this process which I could find that might give even a superficial impression of unfairness is the failure of the receiver to give an offering memorandum to those who expressed an interest in the purchase of Air Toronto.

I will outline the circumstances which relate to the allegation that the receiver was unfair in failing to provide an offering memorandum. In the latter part of 1990, as part of its selling strategy, the receiver was in the process of preparing an offering memorandum to give to persons who expressed an interest in the purchase of Air Toronto. The offering memorandum got as far as draft form, but was never released to anyone, although a copy of the draft eventually got into the hands of CCFL before it submitted the first 922 offer on March 7, 1991. A copy of the offering memorandum forms part of the record and it seems to me to be little more than puffery, without any hard information which a sophisticated purchaser would require in order to make a serious bid.

The offering memorandum had not been completed by February 11, 1991. On that date, the receiver entered into the letter of intent to negotiate with OEL. The letter of intent contained a provision that during its currency the receiver would not negotiate with any other party. The letter of intent was renewed from time to time until the OEL offer was received on March 6, 1991.

The receiver did not proceed with the offering memorandum because to do so would violate the spirit, if not the letter, of its letter of intent with OEL.

I do not think that the conduct of the receiver shows any unfairness towards 922. When I speak of 922, I do so in the context that Air Canada and CCFL are identified with it. I start by saying that the receiver acted reasonably when it entered into exclusive negotiations with OEL. I find it strange that a company, with which Air Canada is closely and intimately involved, would say that it was unfair for the receiver to enter into a time-limited agreement to negotiate exclusively with OEL. That is precisely the arrangement which Air Canada insisted upon when it negotiated with the receiver in the spring and summer of 1990. If it was not unfair for Air Canada to have such an agreement, I do not understand why it was unfair for OEL to have a similar one. In fact, both Air Canada and OEL in its turn were acting reasonably when they required exclusive negotiating rights to prevent their negotiations from being used as a bargaining lever with other potential purchasers. The fact that Air Canada insisted upon an exclusive negotiating right while it was negotiating with the receiver demonstrates the commercial efficacy of OEL being given the same right during its negotiations with the receiver. I see no unfairness on the part of the receiver when it honoured its letter of intent with OEL by not releasing the offering memorandum during the negotiations with OEL.

Moreover, I am not prepared to find that 922 was in any way prejudiced by the fact that it did not have an offering memorandum. It made an offer on March 7, 1991, which it contends to this day was a better offer than that of OEL. 922 has not convinced me that if it had an offering memorandum its offer would have been any different or any better than it actually was. The fatal problem with the first 922 offer was that it contained a condition which was completely unacceptable to the receiver. The receiver properly,

in my opinion, rejected the offer out of hand because of that condition. That condition did not relate to any information which could have conceivably been in an offering memorandum prepared by the receiver. It was about the resolution of a dispute between CCFL and the Royal Bank, something the receiver knew nothing about.

Further evidence of the lack of prejudice which the absence of an offering memorandum has caused 922 is found in CCFL's stance before this court. During argument, its counsel suggested, as a possible resolution of this appeal, that this court should call for new bids, evaluate them and then order a sale to the party who put in the better bid. In such a case, counsel for CCFL said that 922 would be prepared to bid within seven days of the court's decision. I would have thought that, if there were anything to CCFL's suggestion that the failure to provide an offering memorandum was unfair to 922, it would have told the court that it needed more information before it would be able to make a bid.

I am satisfied that Air Canada and CCFL have, and at all times had, all of the information which they would have needed to make what to them would be a commercially viable offer to the receiver. I think that an offering memorandum was of no commercial consequence to them, but the absence of one has since become a valuable tactical weapon.

It is my opinion that there is no convincing proof that if an offering memorandum had been widely distributed among persons qualified to have purchased Air Toronto, a viable offer would have come forth from a party other than 922 or OEL. Therefore, the failure to provide an offering memorandum was neither unfair nor did it prejudice the obtaining of a better price on March 8, 1991, than that contained in the OEL offer. I would not give effect to the contention that the process adopted by the receiver was an unfair one.

There are two statements by Anderson J. contained in *Crown Trust Co. v. Rosenberg*, supra, which I adopt as my own. The first is at p. 109 O.R., p. 548 D.L.R.:

The court should not proceed against the recommendations of its Receiver except in special circumstances and where the necessity and propriety of doing so are plain. Any other rule or approach would emasculate the role of the Receiver and make it almost inevitable that the final negotiation of every sale would take place on the motion for approval.

The second is at p. 111 O.R., p. 550 D.L.R.:

It is equally clear, in my view, though perhaps not so clearly enunciated, that it is only in an exceptional case that the court will intervene and proceed contrary to the Receiver's recommendations if satisfied, as I am, that the Receiver has acted reasonably, prudently and fairly and not arbitrarily.

In this case the receiver acted reasonably, prudently, fairly and not arbitrarily. I am of the opinion, therefore, that the process adopted by the receiver in reaching an agreement was a just one.

In his reasons for judgment, after discussing the circumstances leading to the 922 offer, Rosenberg J. said this [at p. 31 of the reasons]:

They created a situation as of March 8, where the receiver was faced with two offers, one of which was in acceptable form and one of which could not possibly be accepted in its present form. The receiver acted appropriately in accepting the OEL offer.

I agree.

The receiver made proper and sufficient efforts to get the best price that it could for the assets of Air Toronto. It adopted a reasonable and effective process to sell the airline which was fair to all persons who might be interested in purchasing it. It is my opinion, therefore, that the receiver properly carried out the mandate which was given to it by the order of O'Brien J. It follows that Rosenberg J. was correct when he confirmed the sale to OEL.

## II. THE EFFECT OF THE SUPPORT OF THE 922 OFFER BY THE TWO SECURED CREDITORS

As I noted earlier, the 922 offer was supported before Rosenberg J., and in this court, by CCFL and by the Royal Bank, the two secured creditors. It was argued that, because the interests of the creditors are primary, the court ought to give effect to their wish that the 922 offer be accepted. I would not accede to that suggestion for two reasons.

The first reason is related to the fact that the creditors chose to have a receiver appointed by the court. It was open to them to appoint a private receiver pursuant to the authority of their security documents. Had they done so, then they would have had control of the process and could have sold Air Toronto to whom they wished. However, acting privately and controlling the process involves some risks. The appointment of a receiver by the court insulates the creditors from those risks. But insulation from those risks carries with it the loss of control over the process of disposition of the assets. As I have attempted to explain in these reasons, when a receiver's sale is before the court for confirmation the only issues are the propriety of the conduct of the receiver and whether it acted providently. The function of the court at that stage is not to step in and do the receiver's work or change the sale strategy adopted by the receiver. Creditors who asked the court to appoint a receiver to dispose of assets should not be allowed to take over control of the process by the simple expedient of supporting another purchaser if they do not agree with the sale made by the receiver. That would take away all respect for the process of sale by a court-appointed receiver.

There can be no doubt that the interests of the creditor are an important consideration in determining whether the receiver has properly conducted a sale. The opinion of the creditors as to which offer ought to be accepted is something to be taken into account. But, if the court decides that the receiver has acted properly and providently, those views are not necessarily determinative. Because, in this case, the receiver acted properly and providently, I do not think that the views of the creditors should override the considered judgment of the receiver.

The second reason is that, in the particular circumstances of this case, I do not think the support of CCFL and the Royal Bank of the 922 offer is entitled to any weight. The support given by CCFL can be dealt with summarily. It is a co-owner of 922. It is hardly surprising and not very impressive to hear that it supports the offer which it is making for the debtors' assets.

The support by the Royal Bank requires more consideration and involves some reference to the circumstances. On March 6, 1991, when the first 922 offer was made, there was in existence an interlender agreement between the Royal Bank and CCFL. That agreement dealt with the share of the proceeds of the sale of Air Toronto which each creditor would receive. At the time, a dispute between the Royal Bank and CCFL about the interpretation of that agreement was pending in the courts. The unacceptable condition in the first 922 offer related to the settlement of the interlender dispute. The condition required that the dispute be resolved in a way which would substantially favour CCFL. It required that CCFL receive \$3,375,000 of the \$6,000,000 cash payment and the balance, including the royalties, if any, be paid to the Royal Bank. The Royal Bank did not agree with that split of the sale proceeds.

On April 5, 1991, the Royal Bank and CCFL agreed to settle the interlender dispute. The settlement was that if the 922 offer was accepted by the court, CCFL would receive only \$1,000,000 and the Royal Bank would receive \$5,000,000 plus any royalties which might be paid. It was only in consideration of that settlement that the Royal Bank agreed to support the 922 offer.

The Royal Bank's support of the 922 offer is so affected by the very substantial benefit which it wanted to obtain from the settlement of the interlender dispute that, in my opinion, its support is devoid of any objectivity. I think it has no weight.

While there may be circumstances where the unanimous support by the creditors of a particular offer could conceivably override the proper and provident conduct of a sale by a receiver, I do not think that this is such a case. This is a case where the receiver has acted properly and in a provident way. It would make a mockery out of the judicial process, under which a mandate was given to this receiver to sell this airline, if the support by these creditors of the 922 offer were permitted to carry the day. I give no weight to the support which they give to the 922 offer.

In its factum, the receiver pointed out that, because of greater liabilities imposed upon private receivers by various statutes such as the Employment Standards Act, R.S.O. 1980, c. 137, and the Environmental Protection Act, R.S.O. 1980, c. 141, it is likely that more and more the courts will be asked to appoint receivers in insolvencies. In those circumstances, I think that creditors who ask for court-appointed receivers and business people who choose to deal with those receivers should know that if those receivers act properly and providently their decisions and judgments will be given great weight by the courts who appoint them. I have decided this appeal in the way I have in order to assure business people who deal with court-appointed receivers that they can have confidence that an agreement which they make with a court-appointed receiver will be far more than a platform upon which others may bargain

at the court approval stage. I think that persons who enter into agreements with court-appointed receivers, following a disposition procedure that is appropriate given the nature of the assets involved, should expect that their bargain will be confirmed by the court.

The process is very important. It should be carefully protected so that the ability of court-appointed receivers to negotiate the best price possible is strengthened and supported. Because this receiver acted properly and providently in entering into the OEL agreement, I am of the opinion that Rosenberg J. was right when he approved the sale to OEL and dismissed the motion to approve the 922 offer.

I would, accordingly, dismiss the appeal. I would award the receiver, OEL and Frontier Airlines Limited their costs out of the Soundair estate, those of the receiver on a solicitor-and-client scale. I would make no order as to the costs of any of the other parties or interveners.

MCKINLAY J.A. (concurring in the result):-- I agree with Galligan J.A. in result, but wish to emphasize that I do so on the basis that the undertaking being sold in this case was of a very special and unusual nature. It is most important that the integrity of procedures followed by court-appointed receivers be protected in the interests of both commercial morality and the future confidence of business persons in their dealings with receivers. Consequently, in all cases, the court should carefully scrutinize the procedure followed by the receiver to determine whether it satisfies the tests set out by Anderson J. in *Crown Trust Co. v. Rosenberg* (1986), 1986 CanLII 2760 (ON SC), 60 O.R. (2d) 87, 39 D.L.R. (4th) 526 (H.C.J.). While the procedure carried out by the receiver in this case, as described by Galligan J.A., was appropriate, given the unfolding of events and the unique nature of the assets involved, it is not a procedure that is likely to be appropriate in many receivership sales.

I should like to add that where there is a small number of creditors who are the only parties with a real interest in the proceeds of the sale (i.e., where it is clear that the highest price attainable would result in recovery so low that no other creditors, shareholders, guarantors, etc., could possibly benefit therefrom), the wishes of the interested creditors should be very seriously considered by the receiver. It is true, as Galligan J.A. points out, that in seeking the court appointment of a receiver, the moving parties also seek the protection of the court in carrying out the receiver's functions. However, it is also true that in utilizing the court process the moving parties have opened the whole process to detailed scrutiny by all involved, and have probably added significantly to their costs and consequent shortfall as a result of so doing. The adoption of the court process should in no way diminish the rights of any party, and most certainly not the rights of the only parties with a real interest. Where a receiver asks for court approval of a sale which is opposed by the only parties in interest, the court should scrutinize with great care the procedure followed by the receiver. I agree with Galligan J.A. that in this case that was done. I am satisfied that the rights of all parties were properly considered by the receiver, by the learned motions court judge, and by Galligan J.A.

GOODMAN J.A. (dissenting):-- I have had the opportunity of reading the reasons for judgment herein of Galligan and McKinlay J.A. Respectfully, I am unable to agree with their conclusion.



The case at bar is an exceptional one in the sense that upon the application made for approval of the sale of the assets of Air Toronto two competing offers were placed before Rosenberg J. Those two offers were that of Frontier Airlines Ltd. and Ontario Express Limited (OEL) and that of 922246 Ontario Limited (922), a company incorporated for the purpose of acquiring Air Toronto. Its shares were owned equally by Canadian Pension Capital Limited and Canadian Insurers Capital Corporation (collectively CCFL) and Air Canada. It was conceded by all parties to these proceedings that the only persons who had any interest in the proceeds of the sale were two secured creditors, viz., CCFL and the Royal Bank of Canada (the Bank). Those two creditors were unanimous in their position that they desired the court to approve the sale to 922. We were not referred to nor am I aware of any case where a court has refused to abide by the unanimous wishes of the only interested creditors for the approval of a specific offer made in receivership proceedings.

In *British Columbia Development Corp. v. Spun Cast Industries Inc.* (1977), 1977 CanLII 251 (BC SC), 5 B.C.L.R. 94, 26 C.B.R. (N.S.) 28 (S.C.), Berger J. said at p. 95 B.C.L.R., p. 30 C.B.R.:

Here all of those with a financial stake in the plant have joined in seeking the court's approval of the sale to Fincas. This court does not have a roving commission to decide what is best for investors and businessmen when they have agreed among themselves what course of action they should follow. It is their money.

I agree with that statement. It is particularly apt to this case. The two secured creditors will suffer a shortfall of approximately \$50,000,000. They have a tremendous interest in the sale of assets which form part of their security. I agree with the finding of Rosenberg J., Gen. Div., May 1, 1991, that the offer of 922 is superior to that of OEL. He concluded that the 922 offer is marginally superior. If by that he meant that mathematically it was likely to provide slightly more in the way of proceeds it is difficult to take issue with that finding. If on the other hand he meant that having regard to all considerations it was only marginally superior, I cannot agree. He said in his reasons [pp. 17-18]:

I have come to the conclusion that knowledgeable creditors such as the Royal Bank would prefer the 922 offer even if the other factors influencing their decision were not present. No matter what adjustments had to be made, the 922 offer results in more cash immediately. Creditors facing the type of loss the Royal Bank is taking in this case would not be anxious to rely on contingencies especially in the present circumstances surrounding the airline industry.

I agree with that statement completely. It is apparent that the difference between the two offers insofar as cash on closing is concerned amounts to approximately \$3,000,000 to \$4,000,000. The Bank submitted that it did not wish to gamble any further with respect to its investment and that the acceptance and court approval of the OEL offer, in effect, supplanted its position as a secured creditor with respect to the amount owing over and above the down payment and placed it in the position of a joint entrepreneur but one with no control. This results from the fact that the OEL offer did not provide for any security for any funds which might be forthcoming over and above the initial downpayment on closing.

In *Cameron v. Bank of Nova Scotia* (1981), 1981 CanLII 4762 (NS CA), 38 C.B.R. (N.S.) 1, 45 N.S.R. (2d) 303 (C.A.), Hart J.A., speaking for the majority of the court, said at p. 10 C.B.R., p. 312 N.S.R.:

Here we are dealing with a receiver appointed at the instance of one major creditor, who chose to insert in the contract of sale a provision making it subject to the approval of the court. This, in my opinion, shows an intention on behalf of the parties to invoke the normal equitable doctrines which place the court in the position of looking to the interests of all persons concerned before giving its blessing to a particular transaction submitted for approval. In these circumstances the court would not consider itself bound by the contract entered into in good faith by the receiver but would have to look to the broader picture to see that the contract was for the benefit of the creditors as a whole. When there was evidence that a higher price was readily available for the property the chambers judge was, in my opinion, justified in exercising his discretion as he did. Otherwise he could have deprived the creditors of a substantial sum of money.

This statement is apposite to the circumstances of the case at bar. I hasten to add that in my opinion it is not only price which is to be considered in the exercise of the judge's discretion. It may very well be, as I believe to be so in this case, that the amount of cash is the most important element in determining which of the two offers is for the benefit and in the best interest of the creditors.

It is my view, and the statement of Hart J.A. is consistent therewith, that the fact that a creditor has requested an order of the court appointing a receiver does not in any way diminish or derogate from his right to obtain the maximum benefit to be derived from any disposition of the debtor's assets. I agree completely with the views expressed by McKinlay J.A. in that regard in her reasons.

It is my further view that any negotiations which took place between the only two interested creditors in deciding to support the approval of the 922 offer were not relevant to the determination by the presiding judge of the issues involved in the motion for approval of either one of the two offers nor are they relevant in determining the outcome of this appeal. It is sufficient that the two creditors have decided unanimously what is in their best interest and the appeal must be considered in the light of that decision. It so happens, however, that there is ample evidence to support their conclusion that the approval of the 922 offer is in their best interests.

I am satisfied that the interests of the creditors are the prime consideration for both the receiver and the court. In *Re Beauty Counsellors of Canada Ltd.* (1986), 58 C.B.R. (N.S.) 237 (Ont. Bkcy.) Saunders J. said at p. 243:

This does not mean that a court should ignore a new and higher bid made after acceptance where there has been no unfairness in the process. The interests of the creditors, while not the only consideration, are the prime consideration.

I agree with that statement of the law. In *Re Selkirk* (1986), 58 C.B.R. (N.S.) 245 (Ont. Bkcy.) Saunders J. heard an application for court approval for the sale by the sheriff of real property in bankruptcy proceedings. The sheriff had been previously ordered to list the property for sale subject to approval of the court. Saunders J. said at p. 246 C.B.R.:

In dealing with the request for approval, the court has to be concerned primarily with protecting the interests of the creditors of the former bankrupt. A secondary but important consideration is that the process under which the sale agreement is arrived at should be consistent with the commercial efficacy and integrity.

I am in agreement with that statement as a matter of general principle. Saunders J. further stated that he adopted the principles stated by Macdonald J.A. in *Cameron*, supra, at pp. 92-94 O.R., pp. 531-33 D.L.R., quoted by Galligan J.A. in his reasons. In *Cameron*, the remarks of Macdonald J.A. related to situations involving the calling of bids and fixing a time limit for the making of such bids. In those circumstances the process is so clear as a matter of commercial practice that an interference by the court in such process might have a deleterious effect on the efficacy of receivership proceedings in other cases. But Macdonald J.A. recognized that even in bid or tender cases where the offeror for whose bid approval is sought has complied with all requirements a court might not approve the agreement of purchase and sale entered into by the receiver. He said at pp. 11-12 C.B.R., p. 314 N.S.R.:

There are, of course, many reasons why a court might not approve an agreement of purchase and sale, viz., where the offer accepted is so low in relation to the appraised value as to be unrealistic; or, where the circumstances indicate that insufficient time was allowed for the making of bids or that inadequate notice of sale by bid was given (where the receiver sells property by the bid method); or, where it can be said that the proposed sale is not in the best interest of either the creditors or the owner. Court approval must involve the delicate balancing of competing interests and not simply a consideration of the interests of the creditors.

The deficiency in the present case is so large that there has been no suggestion of a competing interest between the owner and the creditors.

I agree that the same reasoning may apply to a negotiation process leading to a private sale but the procedure and process applicable to private sales of a wide variety of businesses and undertakings with the multiplicity of individual considerations applicable and perhaps peculiar to the particular business is not so clearly established that a departure by the court from the process adopted by the receiver in a particular case will result in commercial chaos to the detriment of future receivership proceedings. Each case must be decided on its own merits and it is necessary to consider the process used by the receiver in the present proceedings and to determine whether it was unfair, improvident or inadequate.

It is important to note at the outset that Rosenberg J. made the following statement in his reasons [p. 15]:

On March 8, 1991 the trustee accepted the OEL offer subject to court approval. The receiver at that time had no other offer before it that was in final form or could possibly be accepted. The receiver had at the time the knowledge that Air Canada with CCFL had not bargained in good faith and had not fulfilled the promise of its letter of March 1. The receiver was justified in assuming that Air Canada and CCFL's offer was a long way from being in an acceptable form and that Air Canada and CCFL's objective was to interrupt the finalizing of the OEL agreement and to retain as long as possible the Air Toronto connector traffic flowing into Terminal 2 for the benefit of Air Canada.

In my opinion there was no evidence before him or before this court to indicate that Air Canada with CCFL had not bargained in good faith and that the receiver had knowledge of such lack of good faith. Indeed, on this appeal, counsel for the receiver stated that he was not alleging Air Canada and CCFL had not bargained in good faith. Air Canada had frankly stated at the time that it had made its offer to purchase which was eventually refused by the receiver that it would not become involved in an "auction" to purchase the undertaking of Air Canada and that, although it would fulfil its contractual obligations to provide connecting services to Air Toronto, it would do no more than it was legally required to do insofar as facilitating the purchase of Air Toronto by any other person. In so doing Air Canada may have been playing "hard ball" as its behaviour was characterized by some of the counsel for opposing parties. It was nevertheless merely openly asserting its legal position as it was entitled to do.

Furthermore there was no evidence before Rosenberg J. or this court that the receiver had assumed that Air Canada and CCFL's objective in making an offer was to interrupt the finalizing of the OEL agreement and to retain as long as possible the Air Toronto connector traffic flowing into Terminal 2 for the benefit of Air Canada. Indeed, there was no evidence to support such an assumption in any event although it is clear that 922 and through it CCFL and Air Canada were endeavouring to present an offer to purchase which would be accepted and/or approved by the court in preference to the offer made by OEL.

To the extent that approval of the OEL agreement by Rosenberg J. was based on the alleged lack of good faith in bargaining and improper motivation with respect to connector traffic on the part of Air Canada and CCFL, it cannot be supported.

I would also point out that, rather than saying there was no other offer before it that was final in form, it would have been more accurate to have said that there was no unconditional offer before it.

In considering the material and evidence placed before the court I am satisfied that the receiver was at all times acting in good faith. I have reached the conclusion, however, that the process which he used was unfair insofar as 922 is concerned and improvident insofar as the two secured creditors are concerned.

Air Canada had been negotiating with Soundair Corporation for the purchase from it of Air Toronto for a considerable period of time prior to the appointment of a receiver by the court. It had given a letter of intent indicating a prospective sale price of \$18,000,000. After the appointment of the receiver, by agreement dated April 30, 1990, Air Canada continued its negotiations for the purchase of Air Toronto

with the receiver. Although this agreement contained a clause which provided that the receiver "shall not negotiate for the sale ... of Air Toronto with any person except Air Canada", it further provided that the receiver would not be in breach of that provision merely by receiving unsolicited offers for all or any of the assets of Air Toronto. In addition, the agreement, which had a term commencing on April 30, 1990, could be terminated on the fifth business day following the delivery of a written notice of termination by one party to the other. I point out this provision merely to indicate that the exclusivity privilege extended by the Receiver to Air Canada was of short duration at the receiver's option.

As a result of due diligence investigations carried out by Air Canada during the month of April, May and June of 1990, Air Canada reduced its offer to 8.1 million dollars conditional upon there being \$4,000,000 in tangible assets. The offer was made on June 14, 1990 and was open for acceptance until June 29, 1990.

By amending agreement dated June 19, 1990 the receiver was released from its covenant to refrain from negotiating for the sale of the Air Toronto business and assets to any person other than Air Canada. By virtue of this amending agreement the receiver had put itself in the position of having a firm offer in hand with the right to negotiate and accept offers from other persons. Air Canada in these circumstances was in the subservient position. The receiver, in the exercise of its judgment and discretion, allowed the Air Canada offer to lapse. On July 20, 1990 Air Canada served a notice of termination of the April 30, 1990 agreement.

Apparently as a result of advice received from the receiver to the effect that the receiver intended to conduct an auction for the sale of the assets and business of the Air Toronto Division of Soundair Corporation, the solicitors for Air Canada advised the receiver by letter dated July 20, 1990 in part as follows:

Air Canada has instructed us to advise you that it does not intend to submit a further offer in the auction process.

This statement together with other statements set forth in the letter was sufficient to indicate that Air Canada was not interested in purchasing Air Toronto in the process apparently contemplated by the receiver at that time. It did not form a proper foundation for the receiver to conclude that there was no realistic possibility of selling Air Toronto to Air Canada, either alone or in conjunction with some other person, in different circumstances. In June 1990 the receiver was of the opinion that the fair value of Air Toronto was between \$10,000,000 and \$12,000,000.

In August 1990 the receiver contacted a number of interested parties. A number of offers were received which were not deemed to be satisfactory. One such offer, received on August 20, 1990, came as a joint offer from OEL and Air Ontario (an Air Canada connector). It was for the sum of \$3,000,000 for the good will relating to certain Air Toronto routes but did not include the purchase of any tangible assets or leasehold interests.

In December 1990 the receiver was approached by the management of Canadian Partner (operated by OEL) for the purpose of evaluating the benefits of an amalgamated Air Toronto/Air Partner operation. The negotiations continued from December of 1990 to February of 1991 culminating in the OEL agreement dated March 8, 1991.

On or before December, 1990, CCFL advised the receiver that it intended to make a bid for the Air Toronto assets. The receiver, in August of 1990, for the purpose of facilitating the sale of Air Toronto assets, commenced the preparation of an operating memorandum. He prepared no less than six draft operating memoranda with dates from October 1990 through March 1, 1991. None of these were distributed to any prospective bidder despite requests having been received therefor, with the exception of an early draft provided to CCFL without the receiver's knowledge.

During the period December 1990 to the end of January 1991, the receiver advised CCFL that the offering memorandum was in the process of being prepared and would be ready soon for distribution. He further advised CCFL that it should await the receipt of the memorandum before submitting a formal offer to purchase the Air Toronto assets.

By late January CCFL had become aware that the receiver was negotiating with OEL for the sale of Air Toronto. In fact, on February 11, 1991, the receiver signed a letter of intent with OEL wherein it had specifically agreed not to negotiate with any other potential bidders or solicit any offers from others.

By letter dated February 25, 1991, the solicitors for CCFL made a written request to the Receiver for the offering memorandum. The receiver did not reply to the letter because he felt he was precluded from so doing by the provisions of the letter of intent dated February 11, 1991. Other prospective purchasers were also unsuccessful in obtaining the promised memorandum to assist them in preparing their bids. It should be noted that exclusivity provision of the letter of intent expired on February 20, 1991. This provision was extended on three occasions, viz., February 19, 22 and March 5, 1991. It is clear that from a legal standpoint the receiver, by refusing to extend the time, could have dealt with other prospective purchasers and specifically with 922.

It was not until March 1, 1991 that CCFL had obtained sufficient information to enable it to make a bid through 922. It succeeded in so doing through its own efforts through sources other than the receiver. By that time the receiver had already entered into the letter of intent with OEL. Notwithstanding the fact that the receiver knew since December of 1990 that CCFL wished to make a bid for the assets of Air Toronto (and there is no evidence to suggest that at any time such a bid would be in conjunction with Air Canada or that Air Canada was in any way connected with CCFL) it took no steps to provide CCFL with information necessary to enable it to make an intelligent bid and, indeed, suggested delaying the making of the bid until an offering memorandum had been prepared and provided. In the meantime by entering into the letter of intent with OEL it put itself in a position where it could not negotiate with CCFL or provide the information requested.

On February 28, 1991, the solicitors for CCFL telephoned the receiver and were advised for the first time that the receiver had made a business decision to negotiate solely with OEL and would not negotiate with anyone else in the interim.

By letter dated March 1, 1991 CCFL advised the receiver that it intended to submit a bid. It set forth the essential terms of the bid and stated that it would be subject to customary commercial provisions. On March 7, 1991 CCFL and Air Canada, jointly through 922, submitted an offer to purchase Air Toronto upon the terms set forth in the letter dated March 1, 1991. It included a provision that the offer was conditional upon the interpretation of an interlender agreement which set out the relative distribution of proceeds as between CCFL and the Royal Bank. It is common ground that it was a condition over which the receiver had no control and accordingly would not have been acceptable on that ground alone. The receiver did not, however, contact CCFL in order to negotiate or request the removal of the condition although it appears that its agreement with OEL not to negotiate with any person other than OEL expired on March 6, 1991.

The fact of the matter is that by March 7, 1991, the receiver had received the offer from OEL which was subsequently approved by Rosenberg J. That offer was accepted by the receiver on March 8, 1991. Notwithstanding the fact that OEL had been negotiating the purchase for a period of approximately three months the offer contained a provision for the sole benefit of the purchaser that it was subject to the purchaser obtaining:

... a financing commitment within 45 days of the date hereof in an amount not less than the Purchase Price from the Royal Bank of Canada or other financial institution upon terms and conditions acceptable to them. In the event that such a financing commitment is not obtained within such 45 day period, the purchaser or OEL shall have the right to terminate this agreement upon giving written notice of termination to the vendor on the first Business Day following the expiry of the said period.

The purchaser was also given the right to waive the condition.

In effect the agreement was tantamount to a 45-day option to purchase excluding the right of any other person to purchase Air Toronto during that period of time and thereafter if the condition was fulfilled or waived. The agreement was, of course, stated to be subject to court approval.

In my opinion the process and procedure adopted by the receiver was unfair to CCFL. Although it was aware from December 1990 that CCFL was interested in making an offer, it effectively delayed the making of such offer by continually referring to the preparation of the offering memorandum. It did not endeavour during the period December 1990 to March 7, 1991 to negotiate with CCFL in any way the possible terms of purchase and sale agreement. In the result no offer was sought from CCFL by the receiver prior to February 11, 1991 and thereafter it put itself in the position of being unable to negotiate with anyone other than OEL. The receiver, then, on March 8, 1991 chose to accept an offer which was conditional in nature without prior consultation with CCFL (922) to see whether it was prepared to remove the condition in its offer.

I do not doubt that the receiver felt that it was more likely that the condition in the OEL offer would be fulfilled than the condition in the 922 offer. It may be that the receiver, having negotiated for a period of three months with OEL, was fearful that it might lose the offer if OEL discovered that it was negotiating with another person. Nevertheless it seems to me that it was imprudent and unfair on the part of the receiver to ignore an offer from an interested party which offered approximately triple the cash down payment without giving a chance to the offeror to remove the conditions or other terms which made the offer unacceptable to it. The potential loss was that of an agreement which amounted to little more than an option in favour of the offeror.

In my opinion the procedure adopted by the receiver was unfair to CCFL in that, in effect, it gave OEL the opportunity of engaging in exclusive negotiations for a period of three months notwithstanding the fact that it knew CCFL was interested in making an offer. The receiver did not indicate a deadline by which offers were to be submitted and it did not at any time indicate the structure or nature of an offer which might be acceptable to it.

In his reasons Rosenberg J. stated that as of March 1, CCFL and Air Canada had all the information that they needed and any allegations of unfairness in the negotiating process by the receiver had disappeared. He said [p. 31]:

They created a situation as of March 8, where the receiver was faced with two offers, one of which was in acceptable form and one of which could not possibly be accepted in its present form. The receiver acted appropriately in accepting the OEL offer.

If he meant by "acceptable in form" that it was acceptable to the receiver, then obviously OEL had the unfair advantage of its lengthy negotiations with the receiver to ascertain what kind of an offer would be acceptable to the receiver. If, on the other hand, he meant that the 922 offer was unacceptable in its form because it was conditional, it can hardly be said that the OEL offer was more acceptable in this regard as it contained a condition with respect to financing terms and conditions "acceptable to them".

It should be noted that on March 13, 1991 the representatives of 922 first met with the receiver to review its offer of March 7, 1991 and at the request of the receiver withdrew the inter-lender condition from its offer. On March 14, 1991 OEL removed the financing condition from its offer. By order of Rosenberg J. dated March 26, 1991, CCFL was given until April 5, 1991 to submit a bid and on April 5, 1991, 922 submitted its offer with the interlender condition removed.

In my opinion the offer accepted by the receiver is improvident and unfair insofar as the two creditors are concerned. It is not improvident in the sense that the price offered by 922 greatly exceeded that offered by OEL. In the final analysis it may not be greater at all. The salient fact is that the cash down payment in the 922 offer constitutes approximately two-thirds of the contemplated sale price whereas the cash down payment in the OEL transaction constitutes approximately 20 to 25 per cent of the contemplated sale price. In terms of absolute dollars, the down payment in the 922 offer would likely exceed that provided for in the OEL agreement by approximately \$3,000,000 to \$4,000,000.



In *Re Beauty Counsellors of Canada Ltd.*, supra, Saunders J. said at p. 243 C.B.R.:

If a substantially higher bid turns up at the approval stage, the court should consider it. Such a bid may indicate, for example, that the trustee has not properly carried out its duty to endeavour to obtain the best price for the estate. In such a case the proper course might be to refuse approval and to ask the trustee to recommence the process.

I accept that statement as being an accurate statement of the law. I would add, however, as previously indicated, that in determining what is the best price for the estate the receiver or court should not limit its consideration to which offer provides for the greater sale price. The amount of down payment and the provision or lack thereof to secure payment of the balance of the purchase price over and above the down payment may be the most important factor to be considered and I am of the view that is so in the present case. It is clear that that was the view of the only creditors who can benefit from the sale of Air Toronto.

I note that in the case at bar the 922 offer in conditional form was presented to the receiver before it accepted the OEL offer. The receiver in good faith, although I believe mistakenly, decided that the OEL offer was the better offer. At that time the receiver did not have the benefit of the views of the two secured creditors in that regard. At the time of the application for approval before Rosenberg J. the stated preference of the two interested creditors was made quite clear. He found as a fact that knowledgeable creditors would not be anxious to rely on contingencies in the present circumstances surrounding the airline industry. It is reasonable to expect that a receiver would be no less knowledgeable in that regard and it is his primary duty to protect the interests of the creditors. In my view it was an improvident act on the part of the receiver to have accepted the conditional offer made by OEL and Rosenberg J. erred in failing to dismiss the application of the receiver for approval of the OEL offer. It would be most inequitable to foist upon the two creditors who have already been seriously hurt more unnecessary contingencies.

Although in other circumstances it might be appropriate to ask the receiver to recommence the process, in my opinion, it would not be appropriate to do so in this case. The only two interested creditors support the acceptance of the 922 offer and the court should so order.

Although I would be prepared to dispose of the case on the grounds stated above, some comment should be addressed to the question of interference by the court with the process and procedure adopted by the receiver.

I am in agreement with the view expressed by McKinlay J.A. in her reasons that the undertaking being sold in this case was of a very special and unusual nature. As a result the procedure adopted by the receiver was somewhat unusual. At the outset, in accordance with the terms of the receiving order, it dealt solely with Air Canada. It then appears that the receiver contemplated a sale of the assets by way of auction and still later contemplated the preparation and distribution of an offering memorandum inviting bids. At some point, without advice to CCFL, it abandoned that idea and reverted to exclusive negotiations with one interested party. This entire process is not one which is customary or widely

accepted as a general practice in the commercial world. It was somewhat unique having regard to the circumstances of this case. In my opinion the refusal of the court to approve the offer accepted by the receiver would not reflect on the integrity of procedures followed by court-appointed receivers and is not the type of refusal which will have a tendency to undermine the future confidence of business persons in dealing with receivers.

Rosenberg J. stated that the Royal Bank was aware of the process used and tacitly approved it. He said it knew the terms of the letter of intent in February 1991 and made no comment. The Royal Bank did, however, indicate to the receiver that it was not satisfied with the contemplated price nor the amount of the down payment. It did not, however, tell the receiver to adopt a different process in endeavouring to sell the Air Toronto assets. It is not clear from the material filed that at the time it became aware of the letter of intent, it knew that CCFL was interested in purchasing Air Toronto.

I am further of the opinion that a prospective purchaser who has been given an opportunity to engage in exclusive negotiations with a receiver for relatively short periods of time which are extended from time to time by the receiver and who then makes a conditional offer, the condition of which is for his sole benefit and must be fulfilled to his satisfaction unless waived by him, and which he knows is to be subject to court approval, cannot legitimately claim to have been unfairly dealt with if the court refuses to approve the offer and approves a substantially better one.

In conclusion I feel that I must comment on the statement made by Galligan J.A. in his reasons to the effect that the suggestion made by counsel for 922 constitutes evidence of lack of prejudice resulting from the absence of an offering memorandum. It should be pointed out that the court invited counsel to indicate the manner in which the problem should be resolved in the event that the court concluded that the order approving the OEL offer should be set aside. There was no evidence before the court with respect to what additional information may have been acquired by CCFL since March 8, 1991 and no inquiry was made in that regard. Accordingly, I am of the view that no adverse inference should be drawn from the proposal made as a result of the court's invitation.

For the above reasons I would allow the appeal with one set of costs to CCFL-922, set aside the order of Rosenberg J., dismiss the receiver's motion with one set of costs to CCFL-922 and order that the assets of Air Toronto be sold to numbered corporation 922246 on the terms set forth in its offer with appropriate adjustments to provide for the delay in its execution. Costs awarded shall be payable out of the estate of Soundair Corporation. The costs incurred by the receiver in making the application and responding to the appeal shall be paid to him out of the assets of the estate of Soundair Corporation on a solicitor-and-client basis. I would make no order as to costs of any of the other parties or interveners.

Appeal dismissed.

TAB 6

At para(s) 38

# Sherman Estate v. Donovan, 2021 SCC 25 (CanLII), [2021] 2 SCR 75

Date: 2021-06-11

File number: 38695

Other citations: 458 DLR (4th) 361 — AZ-51772339 — 72 CR (7th) 223 — 66 CPC (8th) 1 —  
[2021] SCJ No 25 (QL) — [2021] ACS no 25

**Citation:** **Sherman Estate v. Donovan, 2021 SCC 25 (CanLII), [2021] 2 SCR 75, <<https://canlii.ca/t/jgc4w>>, retrieved on 2024-10-10**

Most recent unfavourable mention: R. v. Riley, 2023 NSSC 377 (CanLII)

## SUPREME COURT OF CANADA

**CITATION:** Sherman Estate v. Donovan,  
2021 SCC 25, [2021] 2 S.C.R. 75

**APPEAL HEARD:** October 6,  
2020

**JUDGMENT RENDERED:** June  
11, 2021

**DOCKET:** 38695

**BETWEEN:**

**Estate of Bernard Sherman and Trustees of the Estate and  
Estate of Honey Sherman and Trustees of the Estate**

Appellants

and

**Kevin Donovan and  
Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd.**

Respondents

- and -

**Attorney General of Ontario, Attorney General of British Columbia,  
Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Income Security Advocacy Centre,  
Ad IDEM/Canadian Media Lawyers Association, Postmedia Network Inc.,  
CTV, a Division of Bell Media Inc., Global News, a division of Corus  
Television Limited Partnership, The Globe and Mail Inc.,  
Citytv, a division of Rogers Media Inc.,  
British Columbia Civil Liberties Association,  
HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario, HIV Legal Network  
and Mental Health Legal Committee**

Interveners

**CORAM:** Wagner C.J. and Moldaver, Karakatsanis, Brown, Rowe, Martin and Kasirer JJ.

**REASONS FOR JUDGMENT:** Kasirer J. (Wagner C.J. and Moldaver, Karakatsanis, Brown, Rowe and Martin JJ. concurring)

(paras. 1 to 108)

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Estate of Bernard Sherman and Trustees of the Estate and

Estate of Honey Sherman and Trustees of the Estate

Appellants

v.

Kevin Donovan and

Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd.

Respondents

and

Attorney General of Ontario,

Attorney General of British Columbia,

Canadian Civil Liberties Association,

Income Security Advocacy Centre,

Ad IDEM/Canadian Media Lawyers Association,

Postmedia Network Inc., CTV, a Division of Bell Media Inc.,

Global News, a division of Corus Television Limited Partnership,

The Globe and Mail Inc., Citytv, a division of Rogers Media Inc.,

British Columbia Civil Liberties Association,

HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario,

HIV Legal Network and Mental Health Legal Committee

Interveners

**Indexed as: Sherman Estate v. Donovan**

2021 SCC 25

File No.: 38695.

2020: October 6; 2021: June 11.

Present: Wagner C.J. and Moldaver, Karakatsanis, Brown, Rowe, Martin and Kasirer JJ.

on appeal from the court of appeal for ontario

*Courts — Open court principle — Sealing orders — Discretionary limits on court openness — Important public interest — Privacy — Dignity — Physical safety — Unexplained deaths of prominent couple generating intense public scrutiny and prompting trustees of estates to apply for sealing of probate files — Whether privacy and physical safety concerns advanced by estate trustees amount to important public interests at such serious risk to justify issuance of sealing orders.*

A prominent couple was found dead in their home. Their deaths had no apparent explanation and generated intense public interest. To this day, the identity and motive of those responsible remain unknown, and the deaths are being investigated as homicides. The estate trustees sought to stem the intense press scrutiny prompted by the events by seeking sealing orders of the probate files. Initially granted, the sealing orders were challenged by a journalist who had reported on the couple's deaths, and by the newspaper for which he wrote. The application judge sealed the probate files, concluding that the harmful effects of the sealing orders were substantially outweighed by the salutary effects on privacy and physical safety interests. The Court of Appeal unanimously allowed the appeal and lifted the sealing orders. It concluded that the privacy interest advanced lacked a public interest quality, and that there was no evidence of a real risk to anyone's physical safety.

*Held:* The appeal should be dismissed.

The estate trustees have failed to establish a serious risk to an important public interest under the test for discretionary limits on court openness. As such, the sealing orders should not have been issued. Open courts can be a source of inconvenience and embarrassment, but this discomfort is not, as a general matter, enough to overturn the strong presumption of openness. That said, personal information disseminated in open court can be more than a source of discomfort and may result in an affront to a person's dignity. Insofar as privacy serves to protect individuals from this affront, it is an important public interest and a court can make an exception to the open court principle if it is at serious risk. In this case, the risks to privacy and physical safety cannot be said to be sufficiently serious.

Court proceedings are presumptively open to the public. Court openness is protected by the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression and is essential to the proper functioning of Canadian democracy. Reporting on court proceedings by a free press is often said to be inseparable from the principle of open justice. The open court principle is engaged by all judicial proceedings, whatever their nature. Matters in a probate file are not quintessentially private or fundamentally administrative. Obtaining a certificate of appointment of estate trustee in Ontario is a court proceeding engaging the fundamental rationale for openness — discouraging mischief and ensuring confidence in the administration of justice through transparency — such that the strong presumption of openness applies.

The test for discretionary limits on court openness is directed at maintaining the presumption while offering sufficient flexibility for courts to protect other public interests where they arise. In order to succeed, the person asking a court to exercise discretion in a way that limits the open court presumption must establish that (1) court openness poses a serious risk to an important public interest; (2) the order sought is necessary to prevent this serious risk to the identified interest because reasonably alternative measures will not prevent this risk; and (3) as a matter of proportionality, the benefits of the order outweigh its negative effects.

The recognized scope of what interests might justify a discretionary exception to open courts has broadened over time and now extends generally to important public interests. The breadth of this category transcends the interests of the parties to the dispute and provides significant flexibility to address harm to fundamental values in our society that unqualified openness could cause. While there is no closed list of important public interests, courts must be cautious and alive to the fundamental importance of the open court rule when they are identifying them. Determining what is an important public interest can be done in the abstract at the level of general principles that extend beyond the parties to the particular dispute. By contrast, whether that interest is at serious risk is a fact-based



finding that is necessarily made in context. The identification of an important interest and the seriousness of the risk to that interest are thus theoretically separate and qualitatively distinct operations.

Privacy has been championed as a fundamental consideration in a free society, and its public importance has been recognized in various settings. Though an individual's privacy will be pre-eminently important to that individual, the protection of privacy is also in the interest of society as a whole. Privacy therefore cannot be rejected as a mere personal concern: some personal concerns relating to privacy overlap with public interests.

However, cast too broadly, the recognition of a public interest in privacy could threaten the strong presumption of openness. The privacy of individuals will be at risk in many court proceedings. Furthermore, privacy is a complex and contextual concept, making it difficult for courts to measure. Recognizing an important interest in privacy generally would accordingly be unworkable.

Instead, the public character of the privacy interest involves protecting individuals from the threat to their dignity. Dignity in this sense involves the right to present core aspects of oneself to others in a considered and controlled manner; it is an expression of an individual's unique personality or personhood. This interest is consistent with the Court's emphasis on the importance of privacy, but is tailored to preserve the strong presumption of openness.

Privacy as predicated on dignity will be at serious risk in limited circumstances. Neither the sensibilities of individuals nor the fact that openness is disadvantageous, embarrassing or distressing to certain individuals will generally on their own warrant interference with court openness. Dignity will be at serious risk only where the information that would be disseminated as a result of court openness is sufficiently sensitive or private such that openness can be shown to meaningfully strike at the individual's biographical core in a manner that threatens their integrity. The question is whether the information reveals something intimate and personal about the individual, their lifestyle or their experiences.

In cases where the information is sufficiently sensitive to strike at an individual's biographical core, a court must then ask whether a serious risk to the interest is made out in the full factual context of the case. The seriousness of the risk may be affected by the extent to which information is disseminated and already in the public domain, and the probability of the dissemination

actually occurring. The burden is on the applicant to show that privacy, understood in reference to dignity, is at serious risk; this erects a fact-specific threshold consistent with the presumption of openness.

There is also an important public interest in protecting individuals from physical harm, but a discretionary order limiting court openness can only be made where there is a serious risk to this important public interest. Direct evidence is not necessarily required to establish a serious risk to an important public interest, as objectively discernable harm may be identified on the basis of logical inferences. But this process of inferential reasoning is not a licence to engage in impermissible speculation. It is not just the probability of the feared harm, but also the gravity of the harm itself that is relevant to the assessment of serious risk. Where the feared harm is particularly serious, the probability that this harm materialize need not be shown to be likely, but must still be more than negligible, fanciful or speculative. Mere assertions of grave physical harm are therefore insufficient.

In addition to a serious risk to an important interest, it must be shown that the particular order sought is necessary to address the risk and that the benefits of the order outweigh its negative effects as a matter of proportionality. This contextual balancing, informed by the importance of the open court principle, presents a final barrier to those seeking a discretionary limit on court openness for the purposes of privacy protection.

In the present case, the risk to the important public interest in privacy, defined in reference to dignity, is not serious. The information contained in the probate files does not reveal anything particularly private or highly sensitive. It has not been shown that it would strike at the biographical core of the affected individuals in a way that would undermine their control over the expression of their identities. Furthermore, the record does not show a serious risk of physical harm. The estate trustees asked the application judge to infer not only the fact that harm would befall the affected individuals, but also that a person or persons exist who wish to harm them. To infer all this on the basis of the deaths and the association of the affected individuals with the deceased is not a reasonable inference but is speculation.

Even if the estate trustees had succeeded in showing a serious risk to privacy, a publication ban — less constraining on openness than the sealing orders — would have likely been sufficient as a reasonable alternative to prevent this risk. As a final barrier, the estate trustees would have had to show that the benefits of any order necessary to protect from a serious risk to the important public interest outweighed the harmful effects of the order.

## Cases Cited

**Applied:** *Sierra Club of Canada v. Canada (Minister of Finance)*, 2002 SCC 41, [2002] 2 S.C.R. 522; **referred to:** *Canadian Broadcasting Corp. v. New Brunswick (Attorney General)*, 1996 CanLII 184 (SCC), [1996] 3 S.C.R. 480; *Vancouver Sun (Re)*, 2004 SCC 43, [2004] 2 S.C.R. 332; *Khuja v. Times Newspapers Ltd.*, [2017] UKSC 49, [2019] A.C. 161; *Edmonton Journal v. Alberta (Attorney General)*, 1989 CanLII 20 (SCC), [1989] 2 S.C.R. 1326; *Dagenais v. Canadian Broadcasting Corp.*, 1994 CanLII 39 (SCC), [1994] 3 S.C.R. 835; *R. v. Mentuck*, 2001 SCC 76, [2001] 3 S.C.R. 442; *Lavigne v. Canada (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages)*, 2002 SCC 53, [2002] 2 S.C.R. 773; *Dagg v. Canada (Minister of Finance)*, 1997 CanLII 358 (SCC), [1997] 2 S.C.R. 403; *R. v. Henry*, 2009 BCCA 86, 270 B.C.A.C. 5; *Attorney General of Nova Scotia v. MacIntyre*, 1982 CanLII 14 (SCC), [1982] 1 S.C.R. 175; *A.B. v. Bragg Communications Inc.*, 2012 SCC 46, [2012] 2 S.C.R. 567; *Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. v. Ontario*, 2005 SCC 41, [2005] 2 S.C.R. 188; *Re Southam Inc. and The Queen (No. 1)* (1983), 41 O.R. (2d) 11; *R. v. Oakes*, 1986 CanLII 46 (SCC), [1986] 1 S.C.R. 103; *Otis v. Otis* (2004), 7 E.T.R. (3d) 221; *H. (M.E.) v. Williams*, 2012 ONCA 35, 108 O.R. (3d) 321; *F.N. (Re)*, 2000 SCC 35, [2000] 1 S.C.R. 880; *R. v. Dymont*, 1988 CanLII 10 (SCC), [1988] 2 S.C.R. 417; *Alberta (Information and Privacy Commissioner) v. United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 401*, 2013 SCC 62, [2013] 3 S.C.R. 733; *Toronto Star Newspaper Ltd. v. R.*, 2012 ONCJ 27, 289 C.C.C. (3d) 549; *Douez v. Facebook, Inc.*, 2017 SCC 33, [2017] 1 S.C.R. 751; *R. v. Paterson* (1998), 1998 CanLII 14969 (BC CA), 102 B.C.A.C. 200; *S. v. Lamontagne*, 2020 QCCA 663; *Himel v. Greenberg*, 2010 ONSC 2325, 93 R.F.L. (6th) 357; *A.B. v. Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*, 2017 FC 629; *R. v. Pickton*, 2010 BCSC 1198; *Lac d'Amiante du Québec Ltée v. 2858-0702 Québec Inc.*, 2001 SCC 51, [2001] 2 S.C.R. 743; *3834310 Canada inc. v. Chamberland*, 2004 CanLII 4122; *R. v. Spencer*, 2014 SCC 43, [2014] 2 S.C.R. 212; *Coltsfoot Publishing Ltd. v. Foster-Jacques*, 2012 NSCA 83, 320 N.S.R. (2d) 166; *Goulet v. Transamerica Life Insurance Co. of Canada*, 2002 SCC 21, [2002] 1 S.C.R. 719; *Godbout v. Longueuil (Ville de)*, 1995 CanLII 4750 (QC CA), [1995] R.J.Q. 2561, aff'd 1997 CanLII 335 (SCC), [1997] 3 S.C.R. 844; *A. v. B.*, 1990 CanLII 3132; *R. v. Plant*, 1993 CanLII 70 (SCC), [1993] 3 S.C.R. 281; *R. v. Tessling*, 2004 SCC 67, [2004] 3 S.C.R. 432; *R. v. Cole*, 2012 SCC 53, [2012] 3 S.C.R. 34; *Work Safe Twerk Safe v. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Ontario*, 2021 ONSC 1100; *Fedeli v. Brown*, 2020 ONSC 994; *R. v. Marakah*, 2017 SCC 59, [2017] 2 S.C.R. 608; *R. v. Quesnelle*, 2014 SCC 46, [2014] 2 S.C.R. 390; *R. v. Mabior*, 2012 SCC 47, [2012] 2 S.C.R. 584; *R. v. Chanmany*, 2016 ONCA 576, 352 O.A.C. 121; *X. v. Y.*, 2011 BCSC 943, 21 B.C.L.R. (5th) 410; *R. v. Esseghaier*, 2017 ONCA 970, 356 C.C.C. (3d) 455.

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APPEAL from a judgment of the Ontario Court of Appeal (Doherty, Rouleau and Hourigan J.J.A.), 2019 ONCA 376, 47 E.T.R. (4th) 1, [2019] O.J. No. 2373 (QL), 2019 CarswellOnt 6867 (WL Can.), setting aside a decision of Dunphy J., 2018 ONSC 4706, 417 C.R.R. (2d) 321, 41 E.T.R. (4th) 126, 28 C.P.C. (8th) 102, [2018] O.J. No. 4121 (QL), 2018 CarswellOnt 13017 (WL Can.). Appeal dismissed.

Chantelle Cseh and Timothy Youdan, for the appellants.

Iris Fischer and Skye A. Sepp, for the respondents.

Peter Scrutton, for the intervener the Attorney General of Ontario.

Jaqueline Hughes, for the intervener the Attorney General of British Columbia.

Ryder Gilliland, for the intervener the Canadian Civil Liberties Association.

Ewa Krajewska, for the intervener the Income Security Advocacy Centre.

Robert S. Anderson, Q.C., for the interveners Ad IDEM/Canadian Media Lawyers Association, Postmedia Network Inc., CTV, a Division of Bell Media Inc., Global News, a division of Corus Television Limited Partnership, The Globe and Mail Inc. and Citytv, a division of Rogers Media Inc.

Adam Goldenberg, for the intervener the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association.

Khalid Janmohamed, for the interveners the HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario, the HIV Legal Network and the Mental Health Legal Committee.

The judgment of the Court was delivered by

Kasirer J. —

I. Overview

[1] This Court has been resolute in recognizing that the open court principle is protected by the constitutionally-entrenched right of freedom of expression and, as such, it represents a central feature of a liberal democracy. As a general rule, the public can attend hearings and consult court files and the press — the eyes and ears of the public — is left free to inquire and comment on the workings of the courts, all of which helps make the justice system fair and accountable.

[2] Accordingly, there is a strong presumption in favour of open courts. It is understood that this allows for public scrutiny which can be the source of inconvenience and even embarrassment to those who feel that their engagement in the justice system brings intrusion into their private lives. But this discomfort is not, as a general matter, enough to overturn the strong presumption that the public can attend hearings and that court files can be consulted and reported upon by the free press.

[3] Notwithstanding this presumption, exceptional circumstances do arise where competing interests justify a restriction on the open court principle. Where a discretionary court order limiting constitutionally-protected openness is sought — for example, a sealing order, a publication ban, an order excluding the public from a hearing, or a redaction order — the applicant must demonstrate, as a threshold requirement, that openness presents a serious risk to a competing interest of public importance. That this requirement is considered a high bar serves to maintain the strong presumption

of open courts. Moreover, the protection of open courts does not stop there. The applicant must still show that the order is necessary to prevent the risk and that, as a matter of proportionality, the benefits of that order restricting openness outweigh its negative effects.

[4] This appeal turns on whether concerns advanced by persons seeking an exception to the ordinarily open court file in probate proceedings — the concerns for privacy of the affected individuals and their physical safety — amount to important public interests that are at such serious risk that the files should be sealed. The parties to this appeal agree that physical safety is an important public interest that could justify a sealing order but disagree as to whether that interest would be at serious risk, in the circumstances of this case, should the files be unsealed. They further disagree whether privacy is in itself an important interest that could justify a sealing order. The appellants say that privacy is a public interest of sufficient import that can justify limits on openness, especially in light of the threats individuals face as technology facilitates widespread dissemination of personally sensitive information. They argue that the Court of Appeal was mistaken to say that personal concerns for privacy, without more, lack the public interest component that is properly the subject-matter of a sealing order.

[5] This Court has, in different settings, consistently championed privacy as a fundamental consideration in a free society. Pointing to cases decided in other contexts, the appellants contend that privacy should be recognized here as a public interest that, on the facts of this case, substantiates their plea for orders sealing the probate files. The respondents resist, recalling that privacy has generally been seen as a poor justification for an exception to openness. After all, they say, virtually every court proceeding entails some disquiet for the lives of those concerned and these intrusions on privacy must be tolerated because open courts are essential to a healthy democracy.

[6] This appeal offers, then, an occasion to decide whether privacy can amount to a public interest in the open court jurisprudence and, if so, whether openness puts privacy at serious risk here so as to justify the kind of orders sought by the appellants.

[7] For the reasons that follow, I propose to recognize an aspect of privacy as an important public interest for the purposes of the relevant test from *Sierra Club of Canada v. Canada (Minister of Finance)*, 2002 SCC 41, [2002] 2 S.C.R. 522. Proceedings in open court can lead to the dissemination of highly sensitive personal information that would result not just in discomfort or embarrassment, but in

an affront to the affected person's dignity. Where this narrower dimension of privacy, rooted in what I see as the public interest in protecting human dignity, is shown to be at serious risk, an exception to the open court principle may be justified.

[8] In this case, and with this interest in mind, it cannot be said that the risk to privacy is sufficiently serious to overcome the strong presumption of openness. The same is true of the risk to physical safety here. The Court of Appeal was right in the circumstances to set aside the sealing orders and I would therefore dismiss the appeal.

## II. Background

[9] Prominent in business and philanthropic circles, Bernard Sherman and Honey Sherman were found dead in their Toronto home in December of 2017. Their deaths had no apparent explanation and generated intense public interest and press scrutiny. In January of the following year, the Toronto Police Service announced that the deaths were being investigated as homicides. As the present matter came before the courts, the identity and motive of those responsible remained unknown.

[10] The couple's estates and estate trustees (collectively the "Trustees")<sup>[1]</sup><sup>17</sup> sought to stem the intense press scrutiny prompted by the events. The Trustees hoped to see to the orderly transfer of the couple's property, at arm's length from what they saw as the public's morbid interest in the unexplained deaths and the curiosity around apparently great sums of money involved.

[11] When the time came to obtain certificates of appointment of estate trustee from the Superior Court of Justice, the Trustees sought a sealing order so that the estate trustees and beneficiaries ("affected individuals") might be spared any further intrusions into their privacy and be protected from what was alleged to be a risk to their safety. The Trustees argued that if the information in the court files was revealed to the public, the safety of the affected individuals would be at risk and their privacy compromised as long as the deaths were unexplained and those responsible for the tragedy remained at large. In support of their request, they argued that there was a real and substantial risk that the affected individuals would suffer serious harm from the public exposure of the materials in the circumstances.

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17. As noted in the title of proceedings, the appellants in this matter have been referred to consistently as the "Estate of Bernard Sherman and Trustees of the Estate and Estate of Honey Sherman and Trustees of the Estate." In these reasons the appellants are referred to throughout as the "Trustees" for convenience.



[12] Initially granted, the sealing orders were challenged by Kevin Donovan, a journalist who had written a series of articles on the couple's deaths, and Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd., for which he wrote (collectively the "Toronto Star").<sup>18</sup> The Toronto Star said the orders violated its constitutional rights of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, as well as the attending principle that the workings of the courts should be open to the public as a means of guaranteeing the fair and transparent administration of justice.

III. Proceedings Below

A. Ontario Superior Court of Justice, 2018 ONSC 4706, 41 E.T.R. (4th) 126 (Dunphy J.)

[13] In addressing whether the circumstances warranted interference with the open court principle, the application judge relied on this Court's judgment in *Sierra Club*. He noted that a confidentiality order should only be granted when: "(1) such an order is necessary . . . to prevent a serious risk to an important interest because reasonable alternative measures will not prevent the risk; and (2) the salutary effects of the confidentiality order outweigh its deleterious effects, including the effects on the right to free expression and the public interest in open and accessible court proceedings" (para. 13(d)).

[14] The application judge considered whether the Trustees' interests would be served by granting the sealing orders. In his view, the Trustees had correctly identified two legitimate interests in support of making an exception to the open court principle: "protecting the privacy and dignity of victims of crime and their loved ones" and "a reasonable apprehension of risk on behalf of those known to have an interest in receiving or administering the assets of the deceased" (paras. 22-25). With respect to the first interest, the application judge found that "[t]he degree of intrusion on that privacy and dignity has already been extreme and . . . excruciating" (para. 23). For the second interest, although he noted that "it would have been preferable to include objective evidence of the gravity of that risk from, for example, the police responsible for the investigation", he concluded that "the lack of such evidence is not fatal" (para. 24). Rather, the necessary inferences could be drawn from the circumstances notably the "willingness of the perpetrator(s) of the crimes to resort to extreme violence to pursue whatever motive existed" (*ibid.*). He concluded that the "current uncertainty" was the source of a reasonable apprehension of the risk of harm and, further, that the foreseeable harm was "grave" (*ibid.*).

[15] The application judge ultimately accepted the Trustees' submission that these interests "very strongly outweigh" what he called the proportionately narrow public interest in the "essentially administrative files" at issue (paras. 31 and 33). He therefore concluded that the harmful effects of the sealing orders were substantially outweighed by the salutary effects on the rights and interests of the affected individuals.

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18. The use of "Toronto Star" as a collective term referring to both respondents should not be taken to suggest that only Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. is participating in this appeal. Mr. Donovan is the only respondent to have been a party throughout. Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. was a party in first instance, but was removed as a party on consent at the Court of Appeal. By order of Karakatsanis J. dated March 25, 2020, Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. was added as a respondent in this Court.

[16] Finally, the application judge considered what order would protect the affected individuals while infringing upon the open court principle to the minimum extent possible. He decided no meaningful part of either file could be disclosed if one were to make the redactions necessary to protect the interests he had identified. Open-ended sealing orders did not, however, sit well with him. The application judge therefore sealed the files for an initial period of two years, with the possibility of renewal.

B. Court of Appeal for Ontario, 2019 ONCA 376, 47 E.T.R. (4th) 1 (Doherty, Rouleau and Hourigan JJ.A.)

[17] The Toronto Star’s appeal was allowed, unanimously, and the sealing orders were lifted.

[18] The Court of Appeal considered the two interests advanced before the application judge in support of the orders to seal the probate files. As to the need to protect the privacy and dignity of the victims of violent crime and their loved ones, it recalled that the kind of interest that is properly protected by a sealing order must have a public interest component. Citing *Sierra Club*, the Court of Appeal wrote that “[p]ersonal concerns cannot, without more, justify an order sealing material that would normally be available to the public under the open court principle” (para. 10). It concluded that the privacy interest for which the Trustees sought protection lacked this quality of public interest.

[19] While it recognized the personal safety of individuals as an important public interest generally, the Court of Appeal wrote that there was no evidence in this case that could warrant a finding that disclosure of the contents of the estate files posed a real risk to anyone’s physical safety. The application judge had erred on this point: “the suggestion that the beneficiaries and trustees are somehow at risk because the Shermans were murdered is not an inference, but is speculation. It provides no basis for a sealing order” (para. 16).

[20] The Court of Appeal concluded that the Trustees had failed the first stage of the test for obtaining orders sealing the probate files. It therefore allowed the appeal and set aside the orders.

C. Subsequent Proceedings

[21] The Court of Appeal’s order setting aside the sealing orders has been stayed pending the disposition of this appeal. The Toronto Star brought a motion to adduce new evidence on this appeal, comprised of land titles documents, transcripts of the cross-examination of a detective on the murder investigation, and various news articles. This evidence, it says, supports the conclusion that the sealing orders should be lifted. The motion was referred to this panel.

IV. Submissions

[22] The Trustees have appealed to this Court seeking to restore the sealing orders made by the application judge. In addition to contesting the motion for new evidence, they maintain that the orders are necessary to prevent a serious risk to the privacy and physical safety of the affected individuals and that the salutary effects of sealing the court probate files outweigh the harmful effects of limiting court openness. The Trustees argue that two legal errors led the Court of Appeal to conclude otherwise.

[23] First, they submit the Court of Appeal erred in holding that privacy is a personal concern that cannot, without more, constitute an important interest under *Sierra Club*. The Trustees say the application judge was right to characterize privacy and dignity as an important public interest which, as it was subject to a serious risk, justified the orders. They ask this Court to recognize that privacy in itself is an important public interest for the purposes of the analysis.

[24] Second, the Trustees submit that the Court of Appeal erred in overturning the application judge's conclusion that there was a serious risk of physical harm. They argue that the Court of Appeal failed to recognize that courts have the ability to draw reasonable inferences by applying reason and logic even in the absence of specific evidence of the alleged risk.

[25] The Trustees say that these errors led the Court of Appeal to mistakenly set aside the sealing orders. In answer to questions at the hearing, the Trustees acknowledged that an order redacting certain documents in the file or a publication ban could assist in addressing some of their concerns, but maintained neither is a reasonable alternative to the sealing orders in the circumstances.

[26] The Trustees submit further that the protection of these interests outweighs the deleterious effects of the orders. They argue that the importance of the open court principle is attenuated by the nature of these probate proceedings. Given that it is non-contentious and not strictly speaking necessary for the transfer of property at death, probate is a court proceeding of an "administrative" character, which diminishes the imperative of applying the open court principle here (paras. 113-14).

[27] The Toronto Star takes the position that the Court of Appeal made no mistake in setting aside the sealing orders and that the appeal should be dismissed. In the Toronto Star's view, while privacy can be an important interest where it evinces a public component, the Trustees have only identified a subjective desire for the affected individuals in this case to avoid further publicity, which is not inherently harmful. According to the Toronto Star and some of the interveners, the Trustees' position would allow that measure of inconvenience and embarrassment that arises in every court proceeding to take precedence over the interest in court openness protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in which all of society has a stake. The Toronto Star argues further that the information in the court files is not highly sensitive. On the issue of whether the sealing orders were necessary to protect the affected individuals from physical harm, the Toronto Star submits that the Court of Appeal was right to conclude that the Trustees had failed to establish a serious risk to this interest.

[28] In the alternative, even if there were a serious risk to one or another important interest, the Toronto Star says the sealing orders are not necessary because the risk could be addressed by an alternative, less onerous order. Furthermore, it says the orders are not proportionate. In seeking to minimize the importance of openness in probate proceedings, the Trustees invite an inflexible approach to balancing the effects of the order that is incompatible with the principle that openness applies to all court proceedings. In any event, there is a public interest in openness specifically here, given that the certificates sought can affect the rights of third parties and that openness ensures the fairness of the proceedings, whether they are contested or not.

#### V. Analysis

[29] The outcome of the appeal turns on whether the application judge should have made the sealing orders pursuant to the test for discretionary limits on court openness from this Court's decision in *Sierra Club*.

[30] Court openness is protected by the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression and is essential to the proper functioning of our democracy (*Canadian Broadcasting Corp. v. New Brunswick (Attorney General)*, 1996 CanLII 184 (SCC), [1996] 3 S.C.R. 480, at para. 23; *Vancouver Sun (Re)*, 2004 SCC 43, [2004] 2 S.C.R. 332, at paras. 23-26). Reporting on court proceedings by a free press is often said to be inseparable from the principle of open justice. "In reporting what has been said and done at a public trial, the media serve as the eyes and ears of a wider public which would be absolutely entitled to attend but for purely practical reasons cannot do so" (*Khuja v. Times Newspapers Ltd.*, [2017] UKSC 49, [2019] A.C. 161, at para. 16, citing *Edmonton Journal v. Alberta (Attorney General)*, 1989 CanLII 20 (SCC), [1989] 2 S.C.R. 1326, at pp. 1339-40, per Cory J.). Limits on openness in service of other public interests have been recognized, but sparingly and always with an eye to preserving a strong presumption that justice should proceed in public view (*Dagenais v. Canadian Broadcasting Corp.*, 1994 CanLII 39 (SCC), [1994] 3 S.C.R. 835, at p. 878; *R. v. Mentuck*, 2001 SCC 76, [2001] 3 S.C.R. 442, at paras. 32-39; *Sierra Club*, at para. 56). The test for discretionary limits on court openness is directed at maintaining this presumption while offering sufficient flexibility for courts to protect these other public interests where they arise (*Mentuck*, at para. 33). The parties agree that this is the appropriate framework of analysis for resolving this appeal.

[31] The parties and the courts below disagree, however, about how this test applies to the facts of this case and this calls for clarification of certain points of the *Sierra Club* analysis. Most centrally, there is disagreement about how an important interest in the protection of privacy could be recognized such that it would justify limits on openness, and in particular when privacy can be a matter of public concern. The parties bring two settled principles of this Court's jurisprudence to bear in support of their respective positions. First, this Court has often observed that privacy is a fundamental value necessary to the preservation of a free and democratic society (*Lavigne v. Canada (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages)*, 2002 SCC 53, [2002] 2 S.C.R. 773, at para. 25; *Dagg v. Canada (Minister of Finance)*, 1997 CanLII 358 (SCC), [1997] 2 S.C.R. 403, at paras. 65-66, per La Forest J. (dissenting but not on this point); *New Brunswick*, at para. 40). Courts have invoked privacy, in some

instances, as the basis for an exception to openness under the *Sierra Club* test (see, e.g., *R. v. Henry*, 2009 BCCA 86, 270 B.C.A.C. 5, at paras. 11 and 17). At the same time, the jurisprudence acknowledges that some degree of privacy loss — resulting in inconvenience, even in upset or embarrassment — is inherent in any court proceeding open to the public (*New Brunswick*, at para. 40). Accordingly, upholding the presumption of openness has meant recognizing that neither individual sensibilities nor mere personal discomfort associated with participating in judicial proceedings are likely to justify the exclusion of the public from court (*Attorney General of Nova Scotia v. MacIntyre*, 1982 CanLII 14 (SCC), [1982] 1 S.C.R. 175, at p. 185; *New Brunswick*, at para. 41). Determining the role of privacy in the *Sierra Club* analysis requires reconciling these two ideas, which is the nub of the disagreement between the parties. The right of privacy is not absolute; the open court principle is not without exceptions.

[32] For the reasons that follow, I disagree with the Trustees that the ostensibly unbounded privacy interest they invoke qualifies as an important public interest within the meaning of *Sierra Club*. Their broad claim fails to focus on the elements of privacy that are deserving of public protection in the open court context. That is not to say, however, that privacy can never ground an exceptional measure such as the sealing orders sought in this case. While the mere embarrassment caused by the dissemination of personal information through the open court process does not rise to the level justifying a limit on court openness, circumstances do exist where an aspect of a person’s private life has a plain public interest dimension.

[33] Personal information disseminated in open court can be more than a source of discomfort and may result in an affront to a person’s dignity. Insofar as privacy serves to protect individuals from this affront, it is an important public interest relevant under *Sierra Club*. Dignity in this sense is a related but narrower concern than privacy generally; it transcends the interests of the individual and, like other important public interests, is a matter that concerns the society at large. A court can make an exception to the open court principle, notwithstanding the strong presumption in its favour, if the interest in protecting core aspects of individuals’ personal lives that bear on their dignity is at serious risk by reason of the dissemination of sufficiently sensitive information. The question is not whether the information is “personal” to the individual concerned, but whether, because of its highly sensitive character, its dissemination would occasion an affront to their dignity that society as a whole has a stake in protecting.

[34] This public interest in privacy appropriately focuses the analysis on the impact of the dissemination of sensitive personal information, rather than the mere fact of this dissemination, which is frequently risked in court proceedings and is necessary in a system that privileges court openness. It is a high bar — higher and more precise than the sweeping privacy interest relied upon here by the Trustees. This public interest will only be seriously at risk where the information in question strikes at what is sometimes said to be the core identity of the individual concerned: information so sensitive that its dissemination could be an affront to dignity that the public would not tolerate, even in service of open proceedings.

[35] I hasten to say that applicants for an order making exception to the open court principle cannot content themselves with an unsubstantiated claim that this public interest in dignity is compromised any more than they could by an unsubstantiated claim that their physical integrity is endangered. Under *Sierra Club*, the applicant must show on the facts of the case that, as an important interest, this dignity dimension of their privacy is at “serious risk”. For the purposes of the test for discretionary limits on court openness, this requires the applicant to show that the information in the court file is sufficiently sensitive such that it can be said to strike at the biographical core of the individual and, in the broader circumstances, that there is a serious risk that, without an exceptional order, the affected individual will suffer an affront to their dignity.

[36] In the present case, the information in the court files was not of this highly sensitive character that it could be said to strike at the core identity of the affected persons; the Trustees have failed to show how the lifting of the sealing orders engages the dignity of the affected individuals. I am therefore not convinced that the intrusion on their privacy raises a serious risk to an important public interest as required by *Sierra Club*. Moreover, as I shall endeavour to explain, there was no serious risk of physical harm to the affected individuals by lifting the sealing orders. Accordingly, this is not an appropriate case in which to make sealing orders, or any order limiting access to these court files. In the circumstances, the admissibility of the Toronto Star’s new evidence is moot. I propose to dismiss the appeal.

#### A. The Test for Discretionary Limits on Court Openness

[37] Court proceedings are presumptively open to the public (*MacIntyre*, at p. 189; *A.B. v. Bragg Communications Inc.*, 2012 SCC 46, [2012] 2 S.C.R. 567, at para. 11).

[38] The test for discretionary limits on presumptive court openness has been expressed as a two-step inquiry involving the necessity and proportionality of the proposed order (*Sierra Club*, at para. 53). Upon examination, however, this test rests upon three core prerequisites that a person seeking such a limit must show. Recasting the test around these three prerequisites, without altering its essence, helps to clarify the burden on an applicant seeking an exception to the open court principle. In order to succeed, the person asking a court to exercise discretion in a way that limits the open court presumption must establish that:

- (1) court openness poses a serious risk to an important public interest;
- (2) the order sought is necessary to prevent this serious risk to the identified interest because reasonably alternative measures will not prevent this risk; and,
- (3) as a matter of proportionality, the benefits of the order outweigh its negative effects.

Only where all three of these prerequisites have been met can a discretionary limit on openness — for example, a sealing order, a publication ban, an order excluding the public from a hearing, or a redaction order — properly be ordered. This test applies to all discretionary limits on court openness, subject only to valid legislative enactments (*Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. v. Ontario*, 2005 SCC 41, [2005] 2 S.C.R. 188, at paras. 7 and 22).

[39] The discretion is structured and controlled in this way to protect the open court principle, which is understood to be constitutionalized under the right to freedom of expression at s. 2(b) of the Charter (*New Brunswick*, at para. 23). Sustained by freedom of expression, the open court principle is one of the foundations of a free press given that access to courts is fundamental to newsgathering. This Court has often highlighted the importance of open judicial proceedings to maintaining the independence and impartiality of the courts, public confidence and understanding of their work and ultimately the legitimacy of the process (see, e.g., *Vancouver Sun*, at paras. 23-26). In *New Brunswick*, La Forest J. explained the presumption in favour of court openness had become “one of the hallmarks of a democratic society” (citing *Re Southam Inc. and The Queen (No.1)* (1983), 1983 CanLII 1707 (ON CA), 41 O.R. (2d) 113 (C.A.), at p. 119), that “acts as a guarantee that justice is administered in a non-arbitrary manner, according to the rule of law . . . thereby fostering public confidence in the integrity of the court system and understanding of the administration of justice” (para. 22). The centrality of this principle to the court system underlies the strong presumption — albeit one that is rebuttable — in favour of court openness (para. 40; *Mentuck*, at para. 39).

[40] The test ensures that discretionary orders are subject to no lower standard than a legislative enactment limiting court openness would be (*Mentuck*, at para. 27; *Sierra Club*, at para. 45). To that end, this Court developed a scheme of analysis by analogy to the *Oakes* test, which courts use to understand whether a legislative limit on a right guaranteed under the Charter is reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society (*Sierra Club*, at para. 40, citing *R. v. Oakes*, 1986 CanLII 46 (SCC), [1986] 1 S.C.R. 103; see also *Dagenais*, at p. 878; *Vancouver Sun*, at para. 30).

[41] The recognized scope of what interests might justify a discretionary exception to open courts has broadened over time. In *Dagenais*, Lamer C.J. spoke of a requisite risk to the “fairness of the trial” (p. 878). In *Mentuck*, Iacobucci J. extended this to a risk affecting the “proper administration of justice” (para. 32). Finally, in *Sierra Club*, Iacobucci J., again writing for a unanimous Court, restated the test to capture any serious risk to an “important interest, including a commercial interest, in the context of litigation” (para. 53). He simultaneously clarified that the important interest must be expressed as a public interest. For example, on the facts of that case, a harm to a particular business interest would not have been sufficient, but the “general commercial interest of preserving confidential information” was an important interest because of its public character (para. 55). This is consistent with the fact that this test was developed in reference to the *Oakes* jurisprudence that focuses on the “pressing and substantial” objective of legislation of general application (*Oakes*, at pp. 138-39; see also *Mentuck*, at para. 31). The term “important interest” therefore captures a broad array of public objectives.

[42] While there is no closed list of important public interests for the purposes of this test, I share Iacobucci J.'s sense, explained in *Sierra Club*, that courts must be "cautious" and "alive to the fundamental importance of the open court rule" even at the earliest stage when they are identifying important public interests (para. 56). Determining what is an important public interest can be done in the abstract at the level of general principles that extend beyond the parties to the particular dispute (para. 55). By contrast, whether that interest is at "serious risk" is a fact-based finding that, for the judge considering the appropriateness of an order, is necessarily made in context. In this sense, the identification of, on the one hand, an important interest and, on the other, the seriousness of the risk to that interest are, theoretically at least, separate and qualitatively distinct operations. An order may therefore be refused simply because a valid important public interest is not at serious risk on the facts of a given case or, conversely, that the identified interests, regardless of whether they are at serious risk, do not have the requisite important public character as a matter of general principle.

[43] The test laid out in *Sierra Club* continues to be an appropriate guide for judicial discretion in cases like this one. The breadth of the category of "important interest" transcends the interests of the parties to the dispute and provides significant flexibility to address harm to fundamental values in our society that unqualified openness could cause (see, e.g., P. M. Perell and J. W. Morden, *The Law of Civil Procedure in Ontario* (4th ed. 2020), at para. 3.185; J. Bailey and J. Burkell, "Revisiting the Open Court Principle in an Era of Online Publication: Questioning Presumptive Public Access to Parties' and Witnesses' Personal Information" (2016), 48 *Ottawa L. Rev.* 143, at pp. 154-55). At the same time, however, the requirement that a serious risk to an important interest be demonstrated imposes a meaningful threshold necessary to maintain the presumption of openness. Were it merely a matter of weighing the benefits of the limit on court openness against its negative effects, decision-makers confronted with concrete impacts on the individuals appearing before them may struggle to put adequate weight on the less immediate negative effects on the open court principle. Such balancing could be evasive of effective appellate review. To my mind, the structure provided by *Dagenais*, *Mentuck*, and *Sierra Club* remains appropriate and should be affirmed.

[44] Finally, I recall that the open court principle is engaged by all judicial proceedings, whatever their nature (*MacIntyre* at pp. 185-86; *Vancouver Sun*, at para. 31). To the extent the Trustees suggested, in their arguments about the negative effects of the sealing orders, that probate in Ontario does not engage the open court principle or that the openness of these proceedings has no public value, I disagree. The certificates the Trustees sought from the court are issued under the seal of that court, thereby bearing the imprimatur of the court's authority. The court's decision, even if rendered in a non-contentious setting, will have an impact on third parties, for example by establishing the testamentary paper that constitutes a valid will (see *Otis v. Otis* (2004), 7 E.T.R. (3d) 221 (Ont. S.C.), at paras. 23-24). Contrary to what the Trustees argue, the matters in a probate file are not quintessentially private or fundamentally administrative. Obtaining a certificate of appointment of estate trustee in



Ontario is a court proceeding and the fundamental rationale for openness — discouraging mischief and ensuring confidence in the administration of justice through transparency — applies to probate proceedings and thus to the transfer of property under court authority and other matters affected by that court action.

[45] It is true that other non-probate estate planning mechanisms may allow for the transfer of wealth outside the ordinary avenues of testate or intestate succession — that is the case, for instance, for certain insurance and pension benefits, and for certain property held in co-ownership. But this does not change the necessarily open court character of probate proceedings. That non-probate transfers keep certain information related to the administration of an estate out of public view does not mean that the Trustees here, by seeking certificates from the court, somehow do not engage this principle. The Trustees seek the benefits that flow from the public judicial probate process: transparency ensures that the probate court’s authority is administered fairly and efficiently (*Vancouver Sun*, at para. 25; *New Brunswick*, at para. 22). The strong presumption in favour of openness plainly applies to probate proceedings and the Trustees must satisfy the test for discretionary limits on court openness.

#### B. The Public Importance of Privacy

[46] As mentioned, I disagree with the Trustees that an unbounded interest in privacy qualifies as an important public interest under the test for discretionary limits on court openness. Yet in some of its manifestations, privacy does have social importance beyond the person most immediately concerned. On that basis, it cannot be excluded as an interest that could justify, in the right circumstances, a limit to court openness. Indeed, the public importance of privacy has been recognized by this Court in various settings, and this sheds light on why the narrower aspect of privacy related to the protection of dignity is an important public interest.

[47] I respectfully disagree with the manner in which the Court of Appeal disposed of the claim by the Trustees that there is a serious risk to the interest in protecting personal privacy in this case. For the appellate judges, the privacy concerns raised by the Trustees amounted to “[p]ersonal concerns” which cannot, “without more”, satisfy the requirement from *Sierra Club* that an important interest be framed as a public interest (para. 10). The Court of Appeal in our case relied, at para. 10, on *H. (M.E.) v. Williams*, 2012 ONCA 35, 108 O.R. (3d) 321, in which it was held that “[p]urely personal interests cannot justify non-publication or sealing orders” (para. 25). Citing as authority judgments of this Court in *MacIntyre* and *Sierra Club*, the court continued by observing that “personal concerns of a litigant, including concerns about the very real emotional distress and embarrassment that can be occasioned to litigants when justice is done in public, will not, standing alone, satisfy the necessity branch of the test” (para. 25). Respectfully stated, the emphasis that the Court of Appeal placed on personal concerns as a

means of deciding that the sealing orders failed to meet the necessity requirement in this case and in *Williams* is, I think, mistaken. Personal concerns that relate to aspects of the privacy of an individual who is before the courts can coincide with a public interest in confidentiality.

[48] Like the Court of Appeal, I do agree with the view expressed particularly in the pre-*Charter* case of *MacIntyre*, that where court openness results in an intrusion on privacy which disturbs the “sensibilities of the individuals involved” (p. 185), that concern is generally insufficient to justify a sealing or like order and does not amount to an important public interest under *Sierra Club*. But I disagree with the Court of Appeal in this case and in *Williams* that this is because the intrusion only occasions “personal concerns”. Certain personal concerns — even “without more” — can coincide with important public interests within the meaning of *Sierra Club*. To invoke the expression of Binnie J. in *F.N. (Re)*, 2000 SCC 35, [2000] 1 S.C.R. 880, at para. 10, there is a “public interest in confidentiality” that is felt, first and foremost, by the person involved and is most certainly a personal concern. Even in *Williams*, the Court of Appeal was careful to note that where, without privacy protection, an individual would face “a substantial risk of serious debilitating emotional . . . harm”, an exception to openness should be available (paras. 29-30). The means of discerning whether a privacy interest reflects a “public interest in confidentiality” is therefore not whether the interest reflects or is rooted in “personal concerns” for the privacy of the individuals involved. Some personal concerns relating to privacy overlap with public interests in confidentiality. These interests in privacy can be, in my view, important public interests within the meaning of *Sierra Club*. It is true that an individual’s privacy is pre-eminently important to that individual. But this Court has also long recognized that the protection of privacy is, in a variety of settings, in the interest of society as a whole.

[49] The proposition that privacy is important, not only to the affected individual but to our society, has deep roots in the jurisprudence of this Court outside the context of the test for discretionary limits on court openness. This background helps explain why privacy cannot be rejected as a mere personal concern. However, the key differences in these contexts are such that the public importance of privacy cannot be transposed to open courts without adaptation. Only specific aspects of privacy interests can qualify as important public interests under *Sierra Club*.

[50] In the context of s. 8 of the *Charter* and public sector privacy legislation, La Forest J. cited American privacy scholar Alan F. Westin for the proposition that privacy is a fundamental value of the modern state, first in *R. v. Dymont*, 1988 CanLII 10 (SCC), [1988] 2 S.C.R. 417, at pp. 427-28 (concurring), and then in *Dagg*, at para. 65 (dissenting but not on this point). In the latter case,

La Forest J. wrote: “The protection of privacy is a fundamental value in modern, democratic states. An expression of an individual’s unique personality or personhood, privacy is grounded on physical and moral autonomy — the freedom to engage in one’s own thoughts, actions and decisions” (para. 65 (citations omitted)). That statement was endorsed unanimously by this Court in *Lavigne*, at para. 25.

[51] Further, in *Alberta (Information and Privacy Commissioner) v. United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 401*, 2013 SCC 62, [2013] 3 S.C.R. 733 (“*UFCW*”), decided in the context of a statute regulating the use of information by organizations, the objective of providing an individual with some control over their information was recognized as “intimately connected to individual autonomy, dignity and privacy, self-evidently significant social values” (para. 24). The importance of privacy, its “quasi-constitutional status” and its role in protecting moral autonomy continues to find expression in our recent jurisprudence (see, e.g., *Lavigne*, at para. 24; *Bragg*, at para. 18, per Abella J., citing *Toronto Star Newspaper Ltd. v. R.*, 2012 ONCJ 27, 289 C.C.C. (3d) 549, at paras. 40-41 and 44; *Douez v. Facebook, Inc.*, 2017 SCC 33, [2017] 1 S.C.R. 751, at para. 59). In *Douez*, Karakatsanis, Wagner (as he then was) and Gascon JJ. underscored this same point, adding that “the growth of the Internet, virtually timeless with pervasive reach, has exacerbated the potential harm that may flow from incursions to a person’s privacy interests” (para. 59).

[52] Privacy as a public interest is underlined by specific aspects of privacy protection present in legislation at the federal and provincial levels (see, e.g., *Privacy Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. P-21; *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*, S.C. 2000, c. 5 (“*PIPEDA*”); *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. F.31; *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, CQLR, c. C-12, s. 5; *Civil Code of Québec*, arts. 35 to 41).[3]<sup>19</sup> Further, in assessing the constitutionality of a legislative exception to the open court principle, this Court has recognized that the protection of individual privacy can be a pressing and substantial objective (*Edmonton Journal*, at p. 1345, per Cory J.; see also the concurring reasons of Wilson J., at p. 1354, in which “the public interest in protecting the privacy of litigants generally in matrimonial cases against the public interest in an open court process” was explicitly noted). There is also continued support for the social and public importance of individual privacy in the academic literature (see, e.g., A. J. Cockfield, “Protecting the Social Value of Privacy in the Context of State Investigations Using New Technologies” (2007), 40 *U.B.C. L. Rev.* 41, at p. 41; K. Hughes, “A Behavioural Understanding of Privacy and its Implications for Privacy Law” (2012), 75 *Mod. L. Rev.* 806, at p. 823; P. Gewirtz, “Privacy and Speech” (2001), *Sup. Ct. Rev.* 139, at p. 139). It is therefore inappropriate, in my respectful view, to dismiss the public interest in protecting privacy as merely a personal concern. This does not mean, however, that privacy generally is an important public interest in the context of limits on court openness.

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19. At the time of writing the House of Commons is considering a bill that would replace part one of *PIPEDA*: Bill C-11, *An Act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act and the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts*, 2nd Sess., 43rd Parl., 2020.

[53] The fact that the case before the application judge concerned individuals who were advancing their own privacy interests, which were undeniably important to them as individuals, does not mean that there is no public interest at stake. In *F.N. (Re)*, this was the personal interest that young offenders had in remaining anonymous in court proceedings as a means of encouraging their personal rehabilitation (para. 11). All of society had a stake, according to Binnie J., in the young person's personal prospect for rehabilitation. This same idea from *F.N. (Re)* was cited in support of finding the interest in *Sierra Club* to be a public interest. That interest, rooted first in an agreement of personal concern to the contracting parties involved, was a private matter that evinced, alongside its personal interest to the parties, a "public interest in confidentiality" (*Sierra Club*, at para. 55). Similarly, while the Trustees have a personal interest in preserving their privacy, this does not mean that the public has no stake in this same interest because — as this Court has made clear — it is related to moral autonomy and dignity which are pressing and substantial concerns.

[54] In this appeal, the Toronto Star suggests that legitimate privacy concerns would be effectively protected by a discretionary order where there is "something more" to elevate them beyond personal concerns and sensibilities (R.F., at para. 73). The Income Security Advocacy Centre, by way of example, submits that privacy serves the public interests of preventing harm and of ensuring individuals are not dissuaded from accessing the courts. I agree that these concepts are related, but in my view care must be taken not to conflate the public importance of privacy with that of other interests; aspects of privacy, such as dignity, may constitute important public interests in and of themselves. A risk to personal privacy may be tied to a risk to psychological harm, as it was in *Bragg* (para. 14; see also J. Rossiter, *Law of Publication Bans, Private Hearings, and Sealing Orders* (loose-leaf), s. 2.4.1). But concerns for privacy may not always coincide with a desire to avoid psychological harm, and may focus instead, for example, on protecting one's professional standing (see, e.g., *R. v. Paterson* (1998), 1998 CanLII 14969 (BC CA), 102 B.C.A.C. 200, at paras. 76, 78 and 87-88). Similarly, there may be circumstances where the prospect of surrendering the personal information necessary to pursue a legal claim may deter an individual from bringing that claim (see *S. v. Lamontagne*, 2020 QCCA 663, at paras. 34-35 (CanLII)). In the same way, the prospect of surrendering sensitive commercial information would have impaired the conduct of the party's defence in *Sierra Club* (at para. 71), or could pressure an individual into settling a dispute prematurely (K. Eltis, *Courts, Litigants and the Digital Age* (2nd ed. 2016), at p. 86). But this does not necessarily mean that a public interest in privacy is wholly subsumed by such concerns. I note, for example, that access to justice concerns do not apply where the privacy interest to be protected is that of a third party to the litigation, such as a witness, whose access to the courts is not at stake and who has no choice available to terminate the litigation and avoid any privacy impacts (see, e.g., *Himel v. Greenberg*, 2010 ONSC 2325, 93 R.F.L. (6th) 357, at para. 58; see also Rossiter, s. 2.4.2(2)). In any event, the recognition of these related and valid important public

interests does not answer the question as to whether aspects of privacy in and of themselves are important public interests and does not diminish the distinctive public character of privacy, considered above.

[55] Indeed, the specific harms to privacy occasioned by open courts have not gone unnoticed nor been discounted as merely personal concerns. Courts have exercised their discretion to limit court openness in order to protect personal information from publicity, including to prevent the disclosure of sexual orientation (see, e.g., *Paterson*, at paras. 76, 78 and 87-88), HIV status (see, e.g., *A.B. v. Canada (Citizenship and Immigration)*, 2017 FC 629, at para. 9 (CanLII)), and a history of substance abuse and criminality (see, e.g., *R. v. Pickton*, 2010 BCSC 1198, at paras. 11 and 20 (CanLII)). This need to reconcile the public interest in privacy with the open court principle has been highlighted by this Court (see, e.g., *Edmonton Journal*, at p. 1353, per Wilson J.). Writing extra-judicially, McLachlin C.J. explained that “[i]f we are serious about peoples’ private lives, we must preserve a modicum of privacy. Equally, if we are serious about our justice system, we must have open courts. The question is how to reconcile these dual imperatives in a fair and principled way” (“Courts, Transparency and Public Confidence – To the Better Administration of Justice” (2003), 8 *Deakin L. Rev.* 1, at p. 4). In seeking that reconciliation, the question becomes whether the relevant dimension of privacy amounts to an important public interest that, when seriously at risk, would justify rebutting the strong presumption favouring open courts.

### C. The Important Public Interest in Privacy Bears on the Protection of Individual Dignity

[56] While the public importance of privacy has clearly been recognized by this Court in various settings, caution is required in deploying this concept in the test for discretionary limits on court openness. It is a matter of settled law that open court proceedings by their nature can be a source of discomfort and embarrassment and these intrusions on privacy are generally seen as of insufficient importance to overcome the presumption of openness. The *Toronto Star* has raised the concern that recognizing privacy as an important public interest will lower the burden for applicants because the privacy of litigants will, in some respects, always be at risk in court proceedings. I agree that the requirement to show a serious risk to an important interest is a key threshold component of the analysis that must be preserved in order to protect the open court principle. The recognition of a public interest in privacy could threaten the strong presumption of openness if privacy is cast too broadly without a view to its public character.

[57] Privacy poses challenges in the test for discretionary limits on court openness because of the necessary dissemination of information that openness implies. It bears recalling that when Dickson J., as he then was, wrote in *MacIntyre* that “covertness is the exception and openness the rule”, he was explicitly treating a privacy argument, returning to and dismissing the view, urged many times before, “that the ‘privacy’ of litigants requires that the public be excluded from court proceedings” (p. 185 (emphasis added)). Dickson J. rejected the view that personal privacy concerns require closed courtroom doors, explaining that “[a]s a general rule the sensibilities of the individuals involved are no basis for exclusion of the public from judicial proceedings” (*ibid.*).

[58] Though writing before *Dagenais*, and therefore not commenting on the specific steps of the analysis as we now understand them, to my mind, Dickson J. was right to recognize that the open court principle brings necessary limits to the right to privacy. While individuals may have an expectation that information about them will not be revealed in judicial proceedings, the open court principle stands presumptively in opposition to that expectation. For example, in *Lac d'Amiante du Québec Ltée v. 2858-0702 Québec Inc.*, 2001 SCC 51, [2001] 2 S.C.R. 743, LeBel J. held that “a party who institutes a legal proceeding waives his or her right to privacy, at least in part” (para. 42). *MacIntyre* and cases like it recognize — in stating that openness is the rule and covertness the exception — that the right to privacy, however defined, in some measure gives way to the open court ideal. I share the view that the open court principle presumes that this limit on the right to privacy is justified.

[59] The *Toronto Star* is therefore right to say that the privacy of individuals will very often be at some risk in court proceedings. Disputes between and concerning individuals that play out in open court necessarily reveal information that may have otherwise remained out of public view. Indeed, much like the Court of Appeal in this case, courts have explicitly adverted to this concern when concluding that mere inconvenience is insufficient to cross the initial threshold of the test (see, e.g., *3834310 Canada inc. v. Chamberland*, 2004 CanLII 4122 (Que. C.A.), at para. 30). Saying that any impact on individual privacy is sufficient to establish a serious risk to an important public interest for the purposes of the test for discretionary limits on court openness could render this initial requirement moot. Many cases would turn on the balancing at the proportionality stage. Such a development would amount to a departure from *Sierra Club*, which is the appropriate framework and one which must be preserved.

[60] Further, recognizing an important interest in privacy generally could prove to be too open-ended and difficult to apply. Privacy is a complex and contextual concept (*Dagg*, at para. 67; see also B. McIsaac, K. Klein and S. Brown, *The Law of Privacy in Canada* (loose-leaf), vol. 1, at pp. 1-4; D. J. Solove, “Conceptualizing Privacy” (2002), 90 *Cal. L. Rev.* 1087, at p. 1090). Indeed, this Court has described the nature of limits of privacy as being in a state of “theoretical disarray” (*R. v. Spencer*, 2014 SCC 43, [2014] 2 S.C.R. 212, at para. 35). Much turns on the context in which privacy is invoked. I agree with the *Toronto Star* that a bald recognition of privacy as an important interest in the context of the test for discretionary limits on court openness, as the Trustees advance here, would invite considerable confusion. It would be difficult for courts to measure a serious risk to such an interest because of its multi-faceted nature.

[61] While I acknowledge these concerns have merit, I disagree that they require that privacy never be considered in determining whether there is a serious risk to an important public interest. I reach this conclusion for two reasons. First, the problem of privacy’s complexity can be attenuated by focusing on the purpose underlying the public protection of privacy as it is relevant to the judicial process, in order to fix precisely on that aspect which transcends the interests of the parties in this context. That narrower dimension of privacy is the protection of dignity, an important public interest that can be threatened by open courts. Indeed, rather than attempting to apply a single unwieldy concept of privacy in all contexts, this Court has generally fixed on more specific privacy interests

tailored to the particular situation (*Spencer*, at para. 35; *Edmonton Journal*, at p. 1362, per Wilson J.). That is what must be done here, with a view to identifying the public aspect of privacy that openness might inappropriately undermine.

[62] Second, I recall that in order to pass the first stage of the analysis one must not simply invoke an important interest, but must also overcome the presumption of openness by showing a serious risk to this interest. The burden of showing a risk to such an interest on the facts of a given case constitutes the true initial threshold on the person seeking to restrict openness. It is never sufficient to plead a recognized important public interest on its own. The demonstration of a serious risk to this interest is still required. What is important is that the interest be accurately defined to capture only those aspects of privacy that engage legitimate public objectives such that showing a serious risk to that interest remains a high bar. In this way, courts can effectively maintain the guarantee of presumptive openness.

[63] Specifically, in order to preserve the integrity of the open court principle, an important public interest concerned with the protection of dignity should be understood to be seriously at risk only in limited cases. Nothing here displaces the principle that covertness in court proceedings must be exceptional. Neither the sensibilities of individuals nor the fact that openness is disadvantageous, embarrassing or distressing to certain individuals will generally on their own warrant interference with court openness (*MacIntyre*, at p. 185; *New Brunswick*, at para. 40; *Williams*, at para. 30; *Coltsfoot Publishing Ltd. v. Foster-Jacques*, 2012 NSCA 83, 320 N.S.R. (2d) 166, at para. 97). These principles do not preclude recognizing the public character of a privacy interest as important when it is related to the protection of dignity. They merely require that a serious risk be shown to exist in respect of this interest in order to justify, exceptionally, a limit on openness, as is the case with any important public interest under *Sierra Club*. As Professors Sylvette Guillemard and Séverine Menétrey explain, [TRANSLATION] “[t]he confidentiality of the proceedings may be justified, in particular, in order to protect the parties’ privacy . . . . However, the jurisprudence indicates that embarrassment or shame is not a sufficient reason to order that proceedings be held *in camera* or to impose a publication ban” (*Comprendre la procédure civile québécoise* (2nd ed. 2017), at p. 57).

[64] How should the privacy interest at issue be understood as raising an important public interest relevant to the test for discretionary limits on court openness in this context? It is helpful to recall that the orders below were sought to limit access to documents and information in the court files. The Trustees’ argument on this point focused squarely on the risk of immediate and widespread dissemination of the personally identifying and other sensitive information contained in the sealed materials by the Toronto Star. The Trustees submit that this dissemination would constitute an unwarranted intrusion into the privacy of the affected individuals beyond the upset they have already suffered as a result of the publicity associated with the death of the Shermans.

[65] In my view, there is value in leaving individuals free to restrict when, how and to what extent highly sensitive information about them is communicated to others in the public sphere, because choosing how we present ourselves in public preserves our moral autonomy and dignity as individuals.

This Court has had occasion to underscore the connection between the privacy interest engaged by open courts and the protection of dignity specifically. For example, in *Edmonton Journal*, Wilson J. noted that the impugned provision which would limit publication about matrimonial proceedings addressed “a somewhat different aspect of privacy, one more closely related to the protection of one’s dignity . . . namely the personal anguish and loss of dignity that may result from having embarrassing details of one’s private life printed in the newspapers” (pp. 1363-64). In *Bragg*, as a further example, the protection of a young person’s ability to control sensitive information was said to foster respect for “dignity, personal integrity and autonomy” (para. 18, citing *Toronto Star Newspaper Ltd.*, at para. 44).

[66] Consistent with this jurisprudence, I note by way of example that the Quebec legislature expressly highlighted the preservation of dignity when the *Sierra Club* test was codified in the *Code of Civil Procedure*, CQLR, c. C-25.01 (“*C.C.P.*”), art. 12 (see also Ministère de la Justice, *Commentaires de la ministre de la Justice: Code de procédure civile, chapitre C-25.01* (2015), art. 12). Under art. 12 *C.C.P.*, a discretionary exception to the open court principle can be made by the court if “public order, in particular the preservation of the dignity of the persons involved or the protection of substantial and legitimate interests”, requires it.

[67] The concept of public order evidences flexibility analogous to the concept of an important public interest under *Sierra Club* yet it recalls that the interest invoked transcends, in importance and consequence, the purely subjective sensibilities of the persons affected. Like the “important public interest” that must be at serious risk to justify the sealing orders in the present appeal, public order encompasses a wide array of general principles and imperative norms identified by a legislature and the courts as fundamental to a given society (see *Goulet v. Transamerica Life Insurance Co. of Canada*, 2002 SCC 21, [2002] 1 S.C.R. 719, at paras. 42-44, citing *Godbout v. Longueuil (Ville de)*, 1995 CanLII 4750 (QC CA), [1995] R.J.Q. 2561 (C.A.), at p. 2570, aff’d 1997 CanLII 335 (SCC), [1997] 3 S.C.R. 844). As one Quebec judge wrote, referring to *Sierra Club* prior to the enactment of art. 12 *C.C.P.*, the interest must be understood as defined [TRANSLATION] “in terms of a public interest in confidentiality” (see *3834310 Canada inc.*, at para. 24, per Gendreau J.A. for the Court of appeal). From among the various considerations that make up the concept of public order and other legitimate interests to which art. 12 *C.C.P.* alludes, it is significant that dignity, and not an untailored reference to either privacy, harm or access to justice, was given pride of place. Indeed, it is that narrow aspect of privacy considered to be a fundamental right that courts had fixed upon before the enactment of art. 12 *C.C.P.* — [TRANSLATION] “what is part of one’s personal life, in short, what constitutes a minimum personal sphere” (*Godbout*, at p. 2569, per Baudouin J.A.; see also *A. v. B.*, 1990 CanLII 3132 (Que. C.A.), at para. 20, per Rothman J.A.).

[68] The “preservation of the dignity of the persons involved” is now consecrated as the archetypal public order interest in art. 12 *C.C.P.* It is the exemplar of the *Sierra Club* important public interest in confidentiality that stands as justification for an exception to openness (S. Rochette and J.-F. Côté, “Article 12”, in L. Chamberland, ed., *Le grand collectif: Code de procédure civile — Commentaires et annotations* (5th ed. 2020), vol. 1, at p. 102; D. Ferland and B. Emery, *Précis de procédure civile du Québec* (6th ed. 2020), vol. 1, at para. 1-111). Dignity gives concrete expression to



this public order interest because all of society has a stake in its preservation, notwithstanding its personal connections to the individuals concerned. This codification of *Sierra Club's* notion of important public interest highlights the superordinate importance of human dignity and the appropriateness of limiting court openness on this basis as against an overbroad understanding of privacy that might be otherwise unsuitable to the open court context.

[69] Consistent with this idea, understanding privacy as predicated on dignity has been advanced as useful in connection with challenges brought by digital communications (K. Eltis, "The Judicial System in the Digital Age: Revisiting the Relationship between Privacy and Accessibility in the Cyber Context" (2011), 56 *McGill L.J.* 289, at p. 314).

[70] It is also significant, in my view, that the application judge in this case explicitly recognized, in response to the relevant arguments from the Trustees, an interest in "protecting the privacy and dignity of victims of crime and their loved ones" (para. 23 (emphasis added)). This elucidates that the central concern for the affected individuals on this point is not merely protecting their privacy for its own sake but privacy where it coincides with the public character of the dignity interests of these individuals.

[71] Violations of privacy that cause a loss of control over fundamental personal information about oneself are damaging to dignity because they erode one's ability to present aspects of oneself to others in a selective manner (D. Matheson, "Dignity and Selective Self-Presentation", in I. Kerr, V. Steeves and C. Lucock, eds., *Lessons from the Identity Trail: Anonymity, Privacy and Identity in a Networked Society* (2009), 319, at pp. 327-28; L. M. Austin, "Re-reading Westin" (2019), 20 *Theor. Inq. L.* 53, at pp. 66-68; Eltis (2016), at p. 13). Dignity, used in this context, is a social concept that involves presenting core aspects of oneself to others in a considered and controlled manner (see generally Matheson, at pp. 327-28; Austin, at pp. 66-68). Dignity is eroded where individuals lose control over this core identity-giving information about themselves, because a highly sensitive aspect of who they are that they did not consciously decide to share is now available to others and may shape how they are seen in public. This was even alluded to by La Forest J., dissenting but not on this point, in *Dagg*, where he referred to privacy as "[a]n expression of an individual's unique personality or personhood" (para. 65).

[72] Where dignity is impaired, the impact on the individual is not theoretical but could engender real human consequences, including psychological distress (see generally *Bragg*, at para. 23). La Forest J., concurring, observed in *Dyment* that privacy is essential to the well-being of individuals (p. 427). Viewed in this way, a privacy interest, where it shields the core information associated with dignity necessary to individual well-being, begins to look much like the physical safety interest also raised in this case, the important and public nature of which is neither debated, nor, in my view, seriously debatable. The administration of justice suffers when the operation of courts threatens physical well-being because a responsible court system is attuned to the physical harm it inflicts on individuals and works to avoid such effects. Similarly, in my view, a responsible court must be attuned

and responsive to the harm it causes to other core elements of individual well-being, including individual dignity. This parallel helps to understand dignity as a more limited dimension of privacy relevant as an important public interest in the open court context.

[73] I am accordingly of the view that protecting individuals from the threat to their dignity that arises when information revealing core aspects of their private lives is disseminated through open court proceedings is an important public interest for the purposes of the test.

[74] Focusing on the underlying value of privacy in protecting individual dignity from the exposure of private information in open court overcomes the criticisms that privacy will always be at risk in open court proceedings and is theoretically complex. Openness brings intrusions on personal privacy in virtually all cases, but dignity as a public interest in protecting an individual's core sensibility is more rarely in play. Specifically, and consistent with the cautious approach to the recognition of important public interests, this privacy interest, while determined in reference to the broader factual setting, will be at serious risk only where the sensitivity of the information strikes at the subject's more intimate self.

[75] If the interest is ultimately about safeguarding a person's dignity, that interest will be undermined when the information reveals something sensitive about them as an individual, as opposed to generic information that reveals little if anything about who they are as a person. Therefore the information that will be revealed by court openness must consist of intimate or personal details about an individual — what this Court has described in its jurisprudence on s. 8 of the *Charter* as the “biographical core” — if a serious risk to an important public interest is to be recognized in this context (*R. v. Plant*, 1993 CanLII 70 (SCC), [1993] 3 S.C.R. 281, at p. 293; *R. v. Tessling*, 2004 SCC 67, [2004] 3 S.C.R. 432, at para. 60; *R. v. Cole*, 2012 SCC 53, [2012] 3 S.C.R. 34, at para. 46). Dignity transcends personal inconvenience by reason of the highly sensitive nature of the information that might be revealed. This Court in *Cole* drew a similar line between the sensitivity of personal information and the public interest in protecting that information in reference to the biographical core. It held that “reasonable and informed Canadians” would be more willing to recognize the existence of a privacy interest where the relevant information cuts to the “biographical core” or, “[p]ut another way, the more personal and confidential the information” (para. 46). The presumption of openness means that mere discomfort associated with lesser intrusions of privacy will generally be tolerated. But there is a public interest in ensuring that openness does not unduly entail the dissemination of this core information that threatens dignity — even if it is “personal” to the affected person.

[76] The test for discretionary limits on court openness imposes on the applicant the burden to show that the important public interest is at serious risk. Recognizing that privacy, understood in reference to dignity, is only at serious risk where the information in the court file is sufficiently sensitive erects a threshold consistent with the presumption of openness. This threshold is fact specific. It addresses the concern, noted above, that personal information can frequently be found in court files and yet finding this sufficient to pass the serious risk threshold in every case would undermine the structure of the test. By requiring the applicant to demonstrate the sensitivity of the information as a necessary

condition to the finding of a serious risk to this interest, the scope of the interest is limited to only those cases where the rationale for not revealing core aspects of a person's private life, namely protecting individual dignity, is most actively engaged.

[77] There is no need here to provide an exhaustive catalogue of the range of sensitive personal information that, if exposed, could give rise to a serious risk. It is enough to say that courts have demonstrated a willingness to recognize the sensitivity of information related to stigmatized medical conditions (see, e.g., *A.B.*, at para. 9), stigmatized work (see, e.g., *Work Safe Twerk Safe v. Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Ontario*, 2021 ONSC 1100, at para. 28 (CanLII)), sexual orientation (see, e.g., *Paterson*, at paras. 76, 78 and 87-88), and subsection to sexual assault or harassment (see, e.g., *Fedeli v. Brown*, 2020 ONSC 994, at para. 9 (CanLII)). I would also note the submission of the intervener the Income Security Advocacy Centre, that detailed information about family structure and work history could in some circumstances constitute sensitive information. The question in every case is whether the information reveals something intimate and personal about the individual, their lifestyle or their experiences.

[78] I pause here to note that I refer to cases on s. 8 of the *Charter* above for the limited purpose of providing insight into types of information that are more or less personal and therefore deserving of public protection. If the impact on dignity as a result of disclosure is to be accurately measured, it is critical that the analysis differentiate between information in this way. Helpfully, one factor in determining whether an applicant's subjective expectation of privacy is objectively reasonable in the s. 8 jurisprudence focuses on the degree to which information is private (see, e.g., *R. v. Marakah*, 2017 SCC 59, [2017] 2 S.C.R. 608, at para. 31; *Cole*, at paras. 44-46). But while these decisions may assist for this limited purpose, this is not to say that the remainder of the s. 8 analysis has any relevance to the application of the test for discretionary limits on court openness. For example, asking what the Trustees' reasonable expectation of privacy was here could invite a circular analysis of whether they reasonably expected their court files to be open to the public or whether they reasonably expected to be successful in having them sealed. Therefore, it is only for the limited purpose described above that the s. 8 jurisprudence is useful.

[79] In cases where the information is sufficiently sensitive to strike at an individual's biographical core, a court must then ask whether a serious risk to the interest is made out in the full factual context of the case. While this is obviously a fact-specific determination, some general observations may be made here to guide this assessment.

[80] I note that the seriousness of the risk may be affected by the extent to which information would be disseminated without an exception to the open court principle. If the applicant raises a risk that the personal information will come to be known by a large segment of the public in the absence of an order, this is a plainly more serious risk than if the result will be that a handful of people become aware of the same information, all else being equal. In the past, the requirement that one be physically present to acquire information in open court or from a court record meant that information was, to some extent, protected because it was "practically obscure" (D. S. Ardia, "Privacy and Court Records:

Online Access and the Loss of Practical Obscurity” (2017), 4 *U. Ill. L. Rev.* 1385, at p. 1396). However, today, courts should be sensitive to the information technology context, which has increased the ease with which information can be communicated and cross-referenced (see Bailey and Burkell, at pp. 169-70; Ardia, at pp. 1450-51). In this context, it may well be difficult for courts to be sure that information will not be broadly disseminated in the absence of an order.

[81] It will be appropriate, of course, to consider the extent to which information is already in the public domain. If court openness will simply make available what is already broadly and easily accessible, it will be difficult to show that revealing the information in open court will actually result in a meaningful loss of that aspect of privacy relating to the dignity interest to which I refer here. However, just because information is already accessible to some segment of the public does not mean that making it available through the court process will not exacerbate the risk to privacy. Privacy is not a binary concept, that is, information is not simply either private or public, especially because, by reason of technology in particular, absolute confidentiality is best thought of as elusive (see generally *R. v. Quesnelle*, 2014 SCC 46, [2014] 2 S.C.R. 390, at para. 37; *UFCW*, at para. 27). The fact that certain information is already available somewhere in the public sphere does not preclude further harm to the privacy interest by additional dissemination, particularly if the feared dissemination of highly sensitive information is broader or more easily accessible (see generally Solove, at p. 1152; Ardia, at p. 1393-94; E. Paton-Simpson, “Privacy and the Reasonable Paranoid: The Protection of Privacy in Public Places” (2000), 50 *U.T.L.J.* 305, at p. 346).

[82] Further, the seriousness of the risk is also affected by the probability that the dissemination the applicant suggests will occur actually occurs. I hasten to say that implicit in the notion of risk is that the applicant need not establish that the feared dissemination will certainly occur. However, the risk to the privacy interest related to the protection of dignity will be more serious the more likely it is that the information will be disseminated. While decided in a different context, this Court has held that the magnitude of risk is a product of both the gravity of the feared harm and its probability (*R. v. Mabior*, 2012 SCC 47, [2012] 2 S.C.R. 584, at para. 86).

[83] That said, the likelihood that an individual’s highly sensitive personal information will be disseminated in the absence of privacy protection will be difficult to quantify precisely. It is best to note as well that probability in this context need not be identified in mathematical or numerical terms. Rather, courts may merely discern probability in light of the totality of the circumstances and balance this one factor alongside other relevant factors.

[84] Finally, and as discussed above, individual sensitivities alone, even if they can be notionally associated with “privacy”, are generally insufficient to justify a restriction on court openness where they do not rise above those inconveniences and discomforts that are inherent to court openness (*MacIntyre*, at p. 185). An applicant will only be able to establish that the risk is sufficient to justify a limit on openness in exceptional cases, where the threatened loss of control over information about oneself is so fundamental that it strikes meaningfully at individual dignity. These circumstances engage

“social values of superordinate importance” beyond the more ordinary intrusions inherent to participating in the judicial process that Dickson J. acknowledged could justify curtailing public openness (pp. 186-87).

[85] To summarize, the important public interest in privacy, as understood in the context of the limits on court openness, is aimed at allowing individuals to preserve control over their core identity in the public sphere to the extent necessary to preserve their dignity. The public has a stake in openness, to be sure, but it also has an interest in the preservation of dignity: the administration of justice requires that where dignity is threatened in this way, measures be taken to accommodate this privacy concern. Although measured by reference to the facts of each case, the risk to this interest will be serious only where the information that would be disseminated as a result of court openness is sufficiently sensitive such that openness can be shown to meaningfully strike at the individual’s biographical core in a manner that threatens their integrity. Recognizing this interest is consistent with this Court’s emphasis on the importance of privacy and the underlying value of individual dignity, but is also tailored to preserve the strong presumption of openness.

D. The Trustees Have Failed to Establish a Serious Risk to an Important Public Interest

[86] As *Sierra Club* made plain, a discretionary order limiting court openness can only be made where there is a serious risk to an important public interest. The arguments on this appeal concerned whether privacy is an important public interest and whether the facts here disclose the existence of serious risks to privacy and safety. While the broad privacy interest invoked by the Trustees cannot be relied on to justify a limit on openness, the narrower concept of privacy understood in relation to dignity is an important public interest for the purposes of the test. I also recognize that a risk to physical safety is an important public interest, a point on which there is no dispute here. Accordingly, the relevant question at the first step is whether there is a serious risk to one or both of these interests. For reasons that follow, the Trustees have failed to establish a serious risk to either. This alone is sufficient to conclude that the sealing orders should not have been issued.

(1) The Risk to Privacy Alleged in this Case Is Not Serious

[87] As I have said, the important public interest in privacy must be understood as one tailored to the protection of individual dignity and not the broadly defined interest the Trustees have asked this Court to recognize. In order to establish a serious risk to this interest, the information in the court files about which the Trustees are concerned must be sufficiently sensitive in that it strikes at the biographical core of the affected individuals. If it is not, there is no serious risk that would justify an exception to openness. If it is, the question becomes whether a serious risk is made out in light of the facts of this case.

[88] The application judge never explicitly identified a serious risk to the privacy interest he identified but, to the extent he implicitly reached this conclusion, I respectfully do not share his view. His finding was limited to the observation that “[t]he degree of intrusion on that privacy and dignity [i.e., that of the victims and their loved ones] has already been extreme and, I am sure, excruciating”

(para. 23). But the intense scrutiny faced by the Shermans up to the time of the application is only part of the equation. As the sealing orders can only protect against the disclosure of the information in these court files relating to probate, the application judge was required to consider the sensitivity of the specific information they contained. He made no such measure. His conclusion about the seriousness of the risk then focused entirely on the risk of physical harm, with no indication that he found that the Trustees met their burden as to the serious risk to the privacy interest. Said very respectfully and with the knowledge that the application judge did not have the benefit of the above framework, the failure to assess the sensitivity of the information constituted a failure to consider a required element of the legal test. This warranted intervention on appeal.

[89] Applying the appropriate framework to the facts of this case, I conclude that the risk to the important public interest in the affected individuals' privacy, as I have defined it above in reference to dignity, is not serious. The information the Trustees seek to protect is not highly sensitive and this alone is sufficient to conclude that there is no serious risk to the important public interest in privacy so defined.

[90] There is little controversy in this case about the likelihood and extent of dissemination of the information contained in the estate files. There is near certainty that the Toronto Star will publish at least some aspects of the estate files if it is provided access. Given the breadth of the audience of its media organization, and the high-profile nature of the events surrounding the death of the Shermans, I have no difficulty in concluding that the affected individuals would lose control over this information to a significant extent should the files be open.

[91] With regard to the sensitivity of the information, however, the information contained in these files does not reveal anything particularly private about the affected individuals. What would be revealed might well cause inconvenience and perhaps embarrassment, but it has not been shown that it would strike at their biographical core in a way that would undermine their control over the expression of their identities. Their privacy would be troubled, to be sure, but the relevant privacy interest bearing on the dignity of the affected persons has not been shown to be at serious risk. At its highest, the information in these files will reveal something about the relationship between the deceased and the affected individuals, in that it may reveal to whom the deceased entrusted the administration of their estates and those who they wished or were deemed to wish to be beneficiaries of their property at death. It may also reveal some basic personal information, such as addresses. Some of the beneficiaries might well, it may fairly be presumed, bear family names other than Sherman. I am mindful that the deaths are being investigated as homicides by the Toronto Police Service. However, even in this context, none of this information provides significant insight into who they are as individuals, nor would it provoke a fundamental change in their ability to control how they are perceived by others. The fact of being linked through estate documents to victims of an unsolved murder is not in itself highly sensitive. It may be the source of discomfort but has not been shown to constitute an affront to dignity in that it does not probe deeply into the biographical core of these individuals. As a result, the Trustees have failed to establish a serious risk to an important public interest as required by *Sierra Club*.

[92] The fact that some of the affected individuals may be minors is also insufficient to cross the seriousness threshold. While the law recognizes that minors are especially vulnerable to intrusions of privacy (see *Bragg*, at para. 17), the mere fact that information concerns minors does not displace the generally applicable analysis (see, e.g., *Bragg*, at para. 11). Even taking into account the increased vulnerability of minors who may be affected individuals in the probate files, there is no evidence that they would lose control of information about themselves that reveals something close to the core of their identities. Merely associating the beneficiaries or trustees with the Shermans' unexplained deaths is not enough to constitute a serious risk to the identified important public interest in privacy, defined in reference to dignity.

[93] Further, while the intense media scrutiny on the family following the deaths suggests that the information would likely be widely disseminated, it is not in itself indicative of the sensitivity of the information contained in the probate files.

[94] Showing that the information that would be revealed by court openness is sufficiently sensitive and private such that it goes to the biographical core of the affected individual is a necessary prerequisite to showing a serious risk to the relevant public interest aspect of privacy. The Trustees did not advance any specific reason why the contents of these files are more sensitive than they may seem at first glance. When asserting a privacy risk, it is essential to show not only that information about individuals will escape the control of the person concerned — which will be true in every case — but that this particular information concerns who the individuals are as people in a manner that undermines their dignity. This the Trustees have not done.

[95] Therefore, while some of the material in the court files may well be broadly disseminated, the nature of the information has not been shown to give rise to a serious risk to the important public interest in privacy, as appropriately defined in this context in reference to dignity. For that reason alone, I conclude that the Trustees have failed to show a serious risk to this interest.

## (2) The Risk to Physical Safety Alleged in this Case is Not Serious

[96] Unlike the privacy interest raised in this case, there was no controversy that there is an important public interest in protecting individuals from physical harm. It is worth underscoring that the application judge correctly treated the protection from physical harm as a distinct important interest from that of the protection of privacy and found that this risk of harm was “foreseeable” and “grave” (paras. 22-24). The issue is whether the Trustees have established a serious risk to this interest for the purpose of the test for discretionary limits on court openness. The application judge observed that it would have been preferable to include objective evidence of the seriousness of the risk from the police service conducting the homicide investigation. He nevertheless concluded there was sufficient proof of risk to the physical safety of the affected individuals to meet the test. The Court of Appeal says that was a misreading of the evidence, and the *Toronto Star* agrees that the application judge's conclusion as to the existence of a serious risk to safety was mere speculation.

[97] At the outset, I note that direct evidence is not necessarily required to establish a serious risk to an important interest. This Court has held that it is possible to identify objectively discernable harm on the basis of logical inferences (*Bragg*, at paras. 15-16). But this process of inferential reasoning is not a licence to engage in impermissible speculation. An inference must still be grounded in objective circumstantial facts that reasonably allow the finding to be made inferentially. Where the inference cannot reasonably be drawn from the circumstances, it amounts to speculation (*R. v. Chanmany*, 2016 ONCA 576, 352 O.A.C. 121, at para. 45).

[98] As the Trustees correctly argue, it is not just the probability of the feared harm, but also the gravity of the harm itself that is relevant to the assessment of serious risk. Where the feared harm is particularly serious, the probability that this harm materialize need not be shown to be likely, but must still be more than negligible, fanciful or speculative. The question is ultimately whether this record allowed the application judge to objectively discern a serious risk of physical harm.

[99] This conclusion was not open to the application judge on this record. There is no dispute that the feared physical harm is grave. I agree with the *Toronto Star*, however, that the probability of this harm occurring was speculative. The application judge's conclusion as to the seriousness of the risk of physical harm was grounded on what he called "the degree of mystery that persists regarding both the perpetrator and the motives" associated with the deaths of the Shermans and his supposition that this motive might be "transported" to the trustees and beneficiaries (para. 5; see also paras. 19 and 23). The further step in reasoning that the unsealed estate files would lead to the perpetrator's next crime, to be visited upon someone mentioned in the files, is based on speculation, not the available affidavit evidence, and cannot be said to be a proper inference or some kind of objectively discerned harm or risk thereof. If that were the case, the estate files of every victim of an unsolved murder would pass the initial threshold of the test for a sealing order.

[100] Further, I recall that what is at issue here is not whether the affected individuals face a safety risk in general, but rather whether they face such a risk as a result of the openness of these court files. In light of the contents of these files, the Trustees had to point to some further reason why the risk posed by this information becoming publicly available was more than negligible.

[101] The speculative character of the chain of reasoning leading to the conclusion that a serious risk of physical harm exists in this case is underlined by differences between these facts and those cases relied on by the Trustees. In *X. v. Y.*, 2011 BCSC 943, 21 B.C.L.R. (5th) 410, the risk of physical harm was inferred on the basis that the plaintiff was a police officer who had investigated "cases involving gang violence and dangerous firearms" and wrote sentencing reports for such offenders which identified him by full name (para. 6). In *R. v. Esseghaier*, 2017 ONCA 970, 356 C.C.C. (3d) 455, Watt J.A. considered it "self-evident" that the disclosure of identifiers of an undercover operative working in counter-terrorism would compromise the safety of the operative (para. 41). In both cases, the danger



flowed from facts establishing that the applicants were in antagonistic relationships with alleged criminal or terrorist organizations. But in this case, the Trustees asked the application judge to infer not only the fact that harm would befall the affected individuals, but also that a person or persons exist who wish to harm them. To infer all this on the basis of the Shermans' deaths and the association of the affected individuals with the deceased is not reasonably possible on this record. It is not a reasonable inference but, as the Court of Appeal noted, a conclusion resting on speculation.

[102] Were the mere assertion of grave physical harm sufficient to show a serious risk to an important interest, there would be no meaningful threshold in the analysis. Instead, the test requires the serious risk asserted to be well grounded in the record or the circumstances of the particular case (*Sierra Club*, at para. 54; *Bragg*, at para. 15). This contributes to maintaining the strong presumption of openness.

[103] Again, in other cases, circumstantial facts may allow a court to infer the existence of a serious risk of physical harm. Applicants do not necessarily need to retain experts who will attest to the physical or psychological risk related to the disclosure. But on this record, the bare assertion that such a risk exists fails to meet the threshold necessary to establish a serious risk of physical harm. The application judge's conclusion to the contrary was an error warranting the intervention of the Court of Appeal.

E. There Would Be Additional Barriers to a Sealing Order on the Basis of the Alleged Risk to Privacy

[104] While not necessary to dispose of the appeal, it bears mention that the Trustees would have faced additional barriers in seeking the sealing orders on the basis of the privacy interest they advanced. I recall that to meet the test for discretionary limits on court openness, a person must show, in addition to a serious risk to an important interest, that the particular order sought is necessary to address the risk and that the benefits of the order outweigh its negative effects as a matter of proportionality (*Sierra Club*, at para. 53).

[105] Even if the Trustees had succeeded in showing a serious risk to the privacy interest they assert, a publication ban — less constraining on openness than the sealing orders — would have likely been sufficient as a reasonable alternative to prevent this risk. The condition that the order be necessary requires the court to consider whether there are alternatives to the order sought and to restrict the order as much as reasonably possible to prevent the serious risk (*Sierra Club*, at para. 57). An order imposing a publication ban could restrict the dissemination of personal information to only those persons consulting the court record for themselves and prohibit those individuals from spreading the information any further. As I have noted, the likelihood and extent of dissemination may be relevant factors in determining the seriousness of a risk to privacy in this context. While the *Toronto Star* would be able to consult the files subject to a publication ban, for example, which may assist it in its investigations, it would not be able to publish and thereby broadly disseminate the contents of the files. A publication ban would seem to protect against this latter harm, which has been the focus of the

Trustees' argument, while allowing some access to the file, which is not possible under the sealing orders. Therefore, even if a serious risk to the privacy interest had been made out, it would likely not have justified a sealing order, because a less onerous order would have likely been sufficient to mitigate this risk effectively. I hasten to add, however, that a publication ban is not available here since, as noted, the seriousness of the risk to the privacy interest at play has not been made out.

[106] Further, the Trustees would have had to show that the benefits of any order necessary to protect from a serious risk to the important public interest outweighed the harmful effects of the order, including the negative impact on the open court principle (*Sierra Club*, at para. 53). In balancing the privacy interests against the open court principle, it is important to consider whether the information the order seeks to protect is peripheral or central to the judicial process (paras. 78 and 86; *Bragg*, at paras. 28-29). There will doubtless be cases where the information that poses a serious risk to privacy, bearing as it does on individual dignity, will be central to the case. But the interest in important and legally relevant information being aired in open court may well overcome any concern for the privacy interests in that same information. This contextual balancing, informed by the importance of the open court principle, presents a final barrier to those seeking a discretionary limit on court openness for the purposes of privacy protection.

#### VI. Conclusion

[107] The conclusion that the Trustees have failed to establish a serious risk to an important public interest ends the analysis. In such circumstances, the Trustees are not entitled to any discretionary order limiting the open court principle, including the sealing orders they initially obtained. The Court of Appeal rightly concluded that there was no basis for asking for redactions because the Trustees had failed at this stage of the test for discretionary limits on court openness. This is dispositive of the appeal. The decision to set aside the sealing orders rendered by the application judge should be affirmed. Given that I propose to dismiss the appeal on the existing record, I would dismiss the Toronto Star's motion for new evidence as being moot.

[108] For the foregoing reasons, I would dismiss the appeal. The Toronto Star requests no costs given the important public issues in dispute. As such, there will be no order as to costs.

*Appeal dismissed.*

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Solicitors for the respondents: Blake, Cassels & Graydon, Toronto.

Solicitor for the intervener the Attorney General of Ontario: Attorney General of Ontario, Toronto.

Solicitor for the intervener the Attorney General of British Columbia: Attorney General of British Columbia, Vancouver.

Solicitors for the intervener the Canadian Civil Liberties Association: DMG Advocates, Toronto.

Solicitors for the intervener the Income Security Advocacy Centre: Borden Ladner Gervais, Toronto.

Solicitors for the interveners Ad IDEM/Canadian Media Lawyers Association, Postmedia Network Inc., CTV, a Division of Bell Media Inc., Global News, a division of Corus Television Limited Partnership, The Globe and Mail Inc. and Citytv, a division of Rogers Media Inc.: Farris, Vancouver.

Solicitors for the intervener the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association: McCarthy Tétrault, Toronto.

Solicitors for the interveners the HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario, the HIV Legal Network and the Mental Health Legal Committee: HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic Ontario, Toronto.

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TAB 7

**At para(s) 53**

# Sierra Club of Canada v. Canada (Minister of Finance), 2002 SCC 41 (CanLII), [2002] 2 SCR 522

Date: 2002-04-26

File number: 28020

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**Citation:** **Sierra Club of Canada v. Canada (Minister of Finance), 2002 SCC 41 (CanLII), [2002] 2 SCR 522, <<https://canlii.ca/t/51s4>>, retrieved on 2024-10-10**

Most recent unfavourable mention: Crocs Canada, Inc. v. Double Diamond Distribution Ltd., 2022 FC 1445 (CanLII)

Sierra Club of Canada v. Canada (Minister of Finance), [2002] 2 S.C.R. 522, 2002 SCC 41

**Atomic Energy of Canada Limited**

*Appellant*

v.

**Sierra Club of Canada**

*Respondent*

and

**The Minister of Finance of Canada, the Minister of Foreign  
Affairs of Canada, the Minister of International Trade of  
Canada and the Attorney General of Canada**

*Respondents*

**Indexed as: Sierra Club of Canada v. Canada (Minister of Finance)**

**Neutral citation: 2002 SCC 41.**

File No.: 28020.

2001: November 6; 2002: April 26.

Present: McLachlin C.J. and Gonthier, Iacobucci, Bastarache, Binnie, Arbour and LeBel JJ.

on appeal from the federal court of appeal

*Practice — Federal Court of Canada — Filing of confidential material — Environmental organization seeking judicial review of federal government’s decision to provide financial assistance to Crown corporation for construction and sale of nuclear reactors — Crown corporation requesting confidentiality order in respect of certain documents — Proper analytical approach to be applied to exercise of judicial discretion where litigant seeks confidentiality order — Whether confidentiality order should be granted — Federal Court Rules, 1998, SOR/98-106, r. 151.*

Sierra Club is an environmental organization seeking judicial review of the federal government’s decision to provide financial assistance to Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. (“AECL”), a Crown corporation, for the construction and sale to China of two CANDU reactors. The reactors are currently under construction in China, where AECL is the main contractor and project manager. Sierra Club maintains that the authorization of financial assistance by the government triggered s. 5(1)(b) of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (“CEAA”), requiring an environmental assessment as a condition of the financial assistance, and that the failure to comply compels a cancellation of the financial arrangements. AECL filed an affidavit in the proceedings which summarized confidential documents containing thousands of pages of technical information concerning the ongoing environmental assessment of the construction site by the Chinese authorities. AECL resisted Sierra Club’s application for production of the confidential documents on the ground, *inter alia*, that the documents were the property of the Chinese authorities and that it did not have the authority to disclose them. The Chinese authorities authorized disclosure of the documents on the condition that they be protected by a confidentiality order, under which they would only be made available to the parties and the court, but with no restriction on public access to the judicial proceedings. AECL’s application for a confidentiality order was rejected by the Federal Court, Trial Division. The Federal Court of Appeal upheld that decision.

*Held:* The appeal should be allowed and the confidentiality order granted on the terms requested by AECL.

In light of the established link between open courts and freedom of expression, the fundamental question for a court to consider in an application for a confidentiality order is whether the right to freedom of expression should be compromised in the circumstances. The court must ensure that the discretion to grant the order is exercised in accordance with *Charter* principles because a confidentiality order will have a negative effect on the s. 2(b) right to freedom of expression. A confidentiality order should only be granted when (1) such an order is necessary to prevent a serious risk to an important interest, including a commercial interest, in the context of litigation because reasonably alternative measures will not prevent the risk; and (2) the salutary effects of the confidentiality order, including the effects on the right of civil litigants to a fair trial, outweigh its deleterious effects, including the effects on the right to free expression, which in this context includes the public interest in open and accessible court proceedings. Three important elements are subsumed under the first branch of the test. First, the risk must be real and substantial, well grounded in evidence, posing a serious threat to the commercial interest in question. Second, the important commercial interest must be one which can be expressed in terms of a public interest in confidentiality, where there is a general principle at stake. Finally, the judge is required to consider not only whether reasonable alternatives are available to such an order but also to restrict the order as much as is reasonably possible while preserving the commercial interest in question.



Applying the test to the present circumstances, the commercial interest at stake here relates to the objective of preserving contractual obligations of confidentiality, which is sufficiently important to pass the first branch of the test as long as certain criteria relating to the information are met. The information must have been treated as confidential at all relevant times; on a balance of probabilities, proprietary, commercial and scientific interests could reasonably be harmed by disclosure of the information; and the information must have been accumulated with a reasonable expectation of it being kept confidential. These requirements have been met in this case. Disclosure of the confidential documents would impose a serious risk on an important commercial interest of AECL, and there are no reasonably alternative measures to granting the order.

Under the second branch of the test, the confidentiality order would have significant salutary effects on AECL's right to a fair trial. Disclosure of the confidential documents would cause AECL to breach its contractual obligations and suffer a risk of harm to its competitive position. If a confidentiality order is denied, AECL will be forced to withhold the documents in order to protect its commercial interests, and since that information is relevant to defences available under the *CEAA*, the inability to present this information hinders AECL's capacity to make full answer and defence. Although in the context of a civil proceeding, this does not engage a *Charter* right, the right to a fair trial is a fundamental principle of justice. Further, the confidentiality order would allow all parties and the court access to the confidential documents, and permit cross-examination based on their contents, assisting in the search for truth, a core value underlying freedom of expression. Finally, given the technical nature of the information, there may be a substantial public security interest in maintaining the confidentiality of such information.

The deleterious effects of granting a confidentiality order include a negative effect on the open court principle, and therefore on the right to freedom of expression. The more detrimental the confidentiality order would be to the core values of (1) seeking the truth and the common good, (2) promoting self-fulfilment of individuals by allowing them to develop thoughts and ideas as they see fit, and (3) ensuring that participation in the political process is open to all persons, the harder it will be to justify the confidentiality order. In the hands of the parties and their experts, the confidential documents may be of great assistance in probing the truth of the Chinese environmental assessment process, which would assist the court in reaching accurate factual conclusions. Given the highly technical nature of the documents, the important value of the search for the truth which underlies both freedom of expression and open justice would be promoted to a greater extent by submitting the confidential documents under the order sought than it would by denying the order.

Under the terms of the order sought, the only restrictions relate to the public distribution of the documents, which is a fairly minimal intrusion into the open court rule. Although the confidentiality order would restrict individual access to certain information which may be of interest to that individual, the second core value of promoting individual self-fulfilment would not be significantly affected by the confidentiality order. The third core value figures prominently in this appeal as open justice is a fundamental aspect of a democratic society. By their very nature, environmental matters carry significant public import, and openness in judicial proceedings involving environmental issues will generally attract a high degree of protection, so that the public interest is engaged here more than if this were an action between private parties involving private interests. However, the narrow scope of the order coupled with the highly technical nature of the confidential documents significantly temper the deleterious effects the confidentiality order would have on the public interest in open courts. The core freedom of expression

values of seeking the truth and promoting an open political process are most closely linked to the principle of open courts, and most affected by an order restricting that openness. However, in the context of this case, the confidentiality order would only marginally impede, and in some respects would even promote, the pursuit of these values. The salutary effects of the order outweigh its deleterious effects and the order should be granted. A balancing of the various rights and obligations engaged indicates that the confidentiality order would have substantial salutary effects on AECL's right to a fair trial and freedom of expression, while the deleterious effects on the principle of open courts and freedom of expression would be minimal.

### Cases Cited

**Applied:** *Edmonton Journal v. Alberta (Attorney General)*, 1989 CanLII 20 (SCC), [1989] 2 S.C.R. 1326; *Canadian Broadcasting Corp. v. New Brunswick (Attorney General)*, 1996 CanLII 184 (SCC), [1996] 3 S.C.R. 480; *Dagenais v. Canadian Broadcasting Corp.*, 1994 CanLII 39 (SCC), [1994] 3 S.C.R. 835; *R. v. Mentuck*, [2001] 3 S.C.R. 442, 2001 SCC 76; *M. (A.) v. Ryan*, 1997 CanLII 403 (SCC), [1997] 1 S.C.R. 157; *Irwin Toy Ltd. v. Quebec (Attorney General)*, 1989 CanLII 87 (SCC), [1989] 1 S.C.R. 927; *R. v. Keegstra*, 1990 CanLII 24 (SCC), [1990] 3 S.C.R. 697; **referred to:** *AB Hassle v. Canada (Minister of National Health and Welfare)*, 2000 CanLII 17121 (FCA), [2000] 3 F.C. 360, aff'g (1998), 1998 CanLII 8942 (FC), 83 C.P.R. (3d) 428; *Ethyl Canada Inc. v. Canada (Attorney General)* (1998), 17 C.P.C. (4th) 278; *R. v. Oakes*, 1986 CanLII 46 (SCC), [1986] 1 S.C.R. 103; *R. v. O.N.E.*, [2001] 3 S.C.R. 478, 2001 SCC 77; *F.N. (Re)*, [2000] 1 S.C.R. 880, 2000 SCC 35; *Eli Lilly and Co. v. Novopharm Ltd.* (1994), 56 C.P.R. (3d) 437.

## **Statutes and Regulations Cited**

*Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, ss. 1, 2(b).

*Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, S.C. 1992, c. 37, ss. 5(1)(b), 8, 54, 54(2)(b).

*Federal Court Rules, 1998*, SOR/98-106, rr. 151, 312.

APPEAL from a judgment of the Federal Court of Appeal, 2000 CanLII 14737 (FCA), [2000] 4 F.C. 426, 187 D.L.R. (4th) 231, 256 N.R. 1, 24 Admin. L.R. (3d) 1, [2000] F.C.J. No. 732 (QL), affirming a decision of the Trial Division, 1999 CanLII 9383 (FC), [2000] 2 F.C. 400, 178 F.T.R. 283, [1999] F.C.J. No. 1633 (QL). Appeal allowed.

*J. Brett Ledger and Peter Chapin*, for the appellant.

*Timothy J. Howard and Franklin S. Gertler*, for the respondent Sierra Club of Canada.

*Graham Garton, Q.C.*, and *J. Sanderson Graham*, for the respondents the Minister of Finance of Canada, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, the Minister of International Trade of Canada and the Attorney General of Canada.

The judgment of the Court was delivered by

IACOBUCCI J. —

## I. Introduction

1           In our country, courts are the institutions generally chosen to resolve legal disputes as best they can through the application of legal principles to the facts of the case involved. One of the underlying principles of the judicial process is public openness, both in the proceedings of the dispute, and in the material that is relevant to its resolution. However, some material can be made the subject of a confidentiality order. This appeal raises the important issues of when, and under what circumstances, a confidentiality order should be granted.

2           For the following reasons, I would issue the confidentiality order sought and accordingly would allow the appeal.

## II. Facts

3           The appellant, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (“AECL”) is a Crown corporation that owns and markets CANDU nuclear technology, and is an intervener with the rights of a party in the application for judicial review by the respondent, the Sierra Club of Canada (“Sierra Club”). Sierra Club is an environmental organization seeking judicial review of the federal government’s decision to provide financial assistance in the form of a \$1.5 billion guaranteed loan relating to the construction and sale of two CANDU nuclear reactors to China by the appellant. The reactors are currently under construction in China, where the appellant is the main contractor and project manager.

4           The respondent maintains that the authorization of financial assistance by the government triggered s. 5(1)(b) of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, S.C. 1992, c. 37 (“CEAA”), which requires that an environmental assessment be undertaken before a federal authority grants financial assistance to a project. Failure to undertake such an assessment compels cancellation of the financial arrangements.

5           The appellant and the respondent Ministers argue that the CEAA does not apply to the loan transaction, and that if it does, the statutory defences available under ss. 8 and 54 apply. Section 8 describes the circumstances where Crown corporations are required to conduct environmental assessments. Section 54(2)(b) recognizes the validity of an environmental assessment carried out by a foreign authority provided that it is consistent with the provisions of the CEAA.

6                    In the course of the application by Sierra Club to set aside the funding arrangements, the appellant filed an affidavit of Dr. Simon Pang, a senior manager of the appellant. In the affidavit, Dr. Pang referred to and summarized certain documents (the “Confidential Documents”). The Confidential Documents are also referred to in an affidavit prepared by Mr. Feng, one of AECL’s experts. Prior to cross-examining Dr. Pang on his affidavit, Sierra Club made an application for the production of the Confidential Documents, arguing that it could not test Dr. Pang’s evidence without access to the underlying documents. The appellant resisted production on various grounds, including the fact that the documents were the property of the Chinese authorities and that it did not have authority to disclose them. After receiving authorization by the Chinese authorities to disclose the documents on the condition that they be protected by a confidentiality order, the appellant sought to introduce the Confidential Documents under Rule 312 of the *Federal Court Rules, 1998*, SOR/98-106, and requested a confidentiality order in respect of the documents.

7                    Under the terms of the order requested, the Confidential Documents would only be made available to the parties and the court; however, there would be no restriction on public access to the proceedings. In essence, what is being sought is an order preventing the dissemination of the Confidential Documents to the public.

8                    The Confidential Documents comprise two Environmental Impact Reports on Siting and Construction Design (the “EIRs”), a Preliminary Safety Analysis Report (the “PSAR”), and the supplementary affidavit of Dr. Pang which summarizes the contents of the EIRs and the PSAR. If admitted, the EIRs and the PSAR would be attached as exhibits to the supplementary affidavit of Dr.

Pang. The EIRs were prepared by the Chinese authorities in the Chinese language, and the PSAR was prepared by the appellant with assistance from the Chinese participants in the project. The documents contain a mass of technical information and comprise thousands of pages. They describe the ongoing environmental assessment of the construction site by the Chinese authorities under Chinese law.

9           As noted, the appellant argues that it cannot introduce the Confidential Documents into evidence without a confidentiality order, otherwise it would be in breach of its obligations to the Chinese authorities. The respondent's position is that its right to cross-examine Dr. Pang and Mr. Feng on their affidavits would be effectively rendered nugatory in the absence of the supporting documents to which the affidavits referred. Sierra Club proposes to take the position that the affidavits should therefore be afforded very little weight by the judge hearing the application for judicial review.

10           The Federal Court of Canada, Trial Division refused to grant the confidentiality order and the majority of the Federal Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal. In his dissenting opinion, Robertson J.A. would have granted the confidentiality order.

III. Relevant Statutory Provisions

11           *Federal Court Rules, 1998, SOR/98-106*

**151.** (1) On motion, the Court may order that material to be filed shall be treated as confidential.



(2) Before making an order under subsection (1), the Court must be satisfied that the material should be treated as confidential, notwithstanding the public interest in open and accessible court proceedings.

IV. Judgments Below

A. *Federal Court, Trial Division*, 1999 CanLII 9383 (FC), [2000] 2 F.C. 400

12 Pelletier J. first considered whether leave should be granted pursuant to Rule 312 to introduce the supplementary affidavit of Dr. Pang to which the Confidential Documents were filed as exhibits. In his view, the underlying question was that of relevance, and he concluded that the documents were relevant to the issue of the appropriate remedy. Thus, in the absence of prejudice to the respondent, the affidavit should be permitted to be served and filed. He noted that the respondent would be prejudiced by delay, but since both parties had brought interlocutory motions which had contributed to the delay, the desirability of having the entire record before the court outweighed the prejudice arising from the delay associated with the introduction of the documents.

13 On the issue of confidentiality, Pelletier J. concluded that he must be satisfied that the need for confidentiality was greater than the public interest in open court proceedings, and observed that the argument for open proceedings in this case was significant given the public interest in Canada's role as a vendor of nuclear technology. As well, he noted that a confidentiality order was an exception to the rule of open access to the courts, and that such an order should be granted only where absolutely necessary.

14 Pelletier J. applied the same test as that used in patent litigation for the issue of a protective order, which is essentially a confidentiality order. The granting of such an order requires the appellant to show a subjective belief that the information is confidential and that its interests would be harmed by disclosure. In addition, if the order is challenged, then the person claiming the benefit of the order must demonstrate objectively that the order is required. This objective element requires the party to show that the information has been treated as confidential, and that it is reasonable to believe that its proprietary, commercial and scientific interests could be harmed by the disclosure of the information.

15 Concluding that both the subjective part and both elements of the objective part of the test had been satisfied, he nevertheless stated: "However, I am also of the view that in public law cases, the objective test has, or should have, a third component which is whether the public interest in disclosure exceeds the risk of harm to a party arising from disclosure" (para. 23).

16 A very significant factor, in his view, was the fact that mandatory production of documents was not in issue here. The fact that the application involved a voluntary tendering of documents to advance the appellant's own cause as opposed to mandatory production weighed against granting the confidentiality order.

17 In weighing the public interest in disclosure against the risk of harm to AECL arising from disclosure, Pelletier J. noted that the documents the appellant wished to put before the court were prepared by others for other purposes, and recognized that the appellant was bound to protect the confidentiality of the information. At this stage, he again considered the issue of materiality. If the documents were shown to be very material to a critical issue, "the requirements of justice militate in favour of a confidentiality order. If the documents are marginally relevant, then the voluntary nature of the production argues against a confidentiality order" (para. 29). He then decided that the documents were material to a question of the appropriate remedy, a significant issue in the event that the appellant failed on the main issue.

18 Pelletier J. also considered the context of the case and held that since the issue of Canada's role as a vendor of nuclear technology was one of significant public interest, the burden of justifying a confidentiality order was very onerous. He found that AECL could expunge the sensitive material from the documents, or put the evidence before the court in some other form, and thus maintain its full right of defence while preserving the open access to court proceedings.

19 Pelletier J. observed that his order was being made without having perused the Confidential Documents because they had not been put before him. Although he noted the line of cases which holds that a judge ought not to deal with the issue of a confidentiality order without reviewing the documents themselves, in his view, given their voluminous nature and technical content as well as his lack of information as to what information was already in the public domain, he found that an examination of these documents would not have been useful.

20 Pelletier J. ordered that the appellant could file the documents in current form, or in an edited version if it chose to do so. He also granted leave to file material dealing with the Chinese regulatory process in general and as applied to this project, provided it did so within 60 days.

B. *Federal Court of Appeal*, 2000 CanLII 14737 (FCA), [2000] 4 F.C. 426

(1) Evans J.A. (Sharlow J.A. concurring)

21 At the Federal Court of Appeal, AECL appealed the ruling under Rule 151 of the *Federal Court Rules, 1998*, and Sierra Club cross-appealed the ruling under Rule 312.

22 With respect to Rule 312, Evans J.A. held that the documents were clearly relevant to a defence under s. 54(2)(b) which the appellant proposed to raise if s. 5(1)(b) of the *CEAA* was held to apply, and were also potentially relevant to the exercise of the court's discretion to refuse a remedy even if the Ministers were in breach of the *CEAA*. Evans J.A. agreed with Pelletier J. that the benefit to the appellant and the court of being granted leave to file the documents outweighed any prejudice to the respondent owing to delay and thus concluded that the motions judge was correct in granting leave under Rule 312.

23 On the issue of the confidentiality order, Evans J.A. considered Rule 151, and all the factors that the motions judge had weighed, including the commercial sensitivity of the documents, the fact that the appellant had received them in confidence from the Chinese authorities, and the appellant's argument that without the documents it could not mount a full answer and defence to the application.

These factors had to be weighed against the principle of open access to court documents. Evans J.A. agreed with Pelletier J. that the weight to be attached to the public interest in open proceedings varied with context and held that, where a case raises issues of public significance, the principle of openness of judicial process carries greater weight as a factor in the balancing process. Evans J.A. noted the public interest in the subject matter of the litigation, as well as the considerable media attention it had attracted.

24 In support of his conclusion that the weight assigned to the principle of openness may vary with context, Evans J.A. relied upon the decisions in *AB Hassle v. Canada (Minister of National Health and Welfare)*, 2000 CanLII 17121 (FCA), [2000] 3 F.C. 360 (C.A.), where the court took into consideration the relatively small public interest at stake, and *Ethyl Canada Inc. v. Canada (Attorney General)* (1998), 17 C.P.C. (4th) 278 (Ont. Ct. (Gen. Div.)), at p. 283, where the court ordered disclosure after determining that the case was a significant constitutional case where it was important for the public to understand the issues at stake. Evans J.A. observed that openness and public participation in the assessment process are fundamental to the *CEAA*, and concluded that the motions judge could not be said to have given the principle of openness undue weight even though confidentiality was claimed for a relatively small number of highly technical documents.

25 Evans J.A. held that the motions judge had placed undue emphasis on the fact that the introduction of the documents was voluntary; however, it did not follow that his decision on the confidentiality order must therefore be set aside. Evans J.A. was of the view that this error did not affect the ultimate conclusion for three reasons. First, like the motions judge, he attached great weight to the principle of openness. Secondly, he held that the inclusion in the affidavits of a summary of the reports could go a long way to compensate for the absence of the originals, should the appellant choose not

to put them in without a confidentiality order. Finally, if AECL submitted the documents in an expunged fashion, the claim for confidentiality would rest upon a relatively unimportant factor, i.e., the appellant's claim that it would suffer a loss of business if it breached its undertaking with the Chinese authorities.

26 Evans J.A. rejected the argument that the motions judge had erred in deciding the motion without reference to the actual documents, stating that it was not necessary for him to inspect them, given that summaries were available and that the documents were highly technical and incompletely translated. Thus the appeal and cross-appeal were both dismissed.

(2) Robertson J.A. (dissenting)

27 Robertson J.A. disagreed with the majority for three reasons. First, in his view, the level of public interest in the case, the degree of media coverage, and the identities of the parties should not be taken into consideration in assessing an application for a confidentiality order. Instead, he held that it was the nature of the evidence for which the order is sought that must be examined.

28 In addition, he found that without a confidentiality order, the appellant had to choose between two unacceptable options: either suffering irreparable financial harm if the confidential information was introduced into evidence, or being denied the right to a fair trial because it could not mount a full defence if the evidence was not introduced.

29 Finally, he stated that the analytical framework employed by the majority in reaching its decision was fundamentally flawed as it was based largely on the subjective views of the motions judge. He rejected the contextual approach to the question of whether a confidentiality order should issue, emphasizing the need for an objective framework to combat the perception that justice is a relative concept, and to promote consistency and certainty in the law.

30 To establish this more objective framework for regulating the issuance of confidentiality orders pertaining to commercial and scientific information, he turned to the legal rationale underlying the commitment to the principle of open justice, referring to *Edmonton Journal v. Alberta (Attorney General)*, 1989 CanLII 20 (SCC), [1989] 2 S.C.R. 1326. There, the Supreme Court of Canada held that open proceedings foster the search for the truth, and reflect the importance of public scrutiny of the courts.

31 Robertson J.A. stated that although the principle of open justice is a reflection of the basic democratic value of accountability in the exercise of judicial power, in his view, the principle that justice itself must be secured is paramount. He concluded that justice as an overarching principle means that exceptions occasionally must be made to rules or principles.

32 He observed that, in the area of commercial law, when the information sought to be protected concerns "trade secrets", this information will not be disclosed during a trial if to do so would destroy the owner's proprietary rights and expose him or her to irreparable harm in the form of financial loss. Although the case before him did not involve a trade secret, he nevertheless held that

the same treatment could be extended to commercial or scientific information which was acquired on a confidential basis and attached the following criteria as conditions precedent to the issuance of a confidentiality order (at para. 13):

(1) the information is of a confidential nature as opposed to facts which one would like to keep confidential; (2) the information for which confidentiality is sought is not already in the public domain; (3) on a balance of probabilities the party seeking the confidentiality order would suffer irreparable harm if the information were made public; (4) the information is relevant to the legal issues raised in the case; (5) correlatively, the information is "necessary" to the resolution of those issues; (6) the granting of a confidentiality order does not unduly prejudice the opposing party; and (7) the public interest in open court proceedings does not override the private interests of the party seeking the confidentiality order. The onus in establishing that criteria one to six are met is on the party seeking the confidentiality order. Under the seventh criterion, it is for the opposing party to show that a *prima facie* right to a protective order has been overtaken by the need to preserve the openness of the court proceedings. In addressing these criteria one must bear in mind two of the threads woven into the fabric of the principle of open justice: the search for truth and the preservation of the rule of law. As stated at the outset, I do not believe that the perceived degree of public importance of a case is a relevant consideration.

33                    In applying these criteria to the circumstances of the case, Robertson J.A. concluded that the confidentiality order should be granted. In his view, the public interest in open court proceedings did not override the interests of AECL in maintaining the confidentiality of these highly technical documents.



34 Robertson J.A. also considered the public interest in the need to ensure that site plans for nuclear installations were not, for example, posted on a Web site. He concluded that a confidentiality order would not undermine the two primary objectives underlying the principle of open justice: truth and the rule of law. As such, he would have allowed the appeal and dismissed the cross-appeal.

## V. Issues

35 A. What is the proper analytical approach to be applied to the exercise of judicial discretion where a litigant seeks a confidentiality order under Rule 151 of the *Federal Court Rules, 1998*?

B. Should the confidentiality order be granted in this case?

## VI. Analysis

A. *The Analytical Approach to the Granting of a Confidentiality Order*

(1) The General Framework: Herein the *Dagenais* Principles

36           The link between openness in judicial proceedings and freedom of expression has been firmly established by this Court. In *Canadian Broadcasting Corp. v. New Brunswick (Attorney General)*, 1996 CanLII 184 (SCC), [1996] 3 S.C.R. 480, at para. 23, La Forest J. expressed the relationship as follows:

The principle of open courts is inextricably tied to the rights guaranteed by s. 2(b). Openness permits public access to information about the courts, which in turn permits the public to discuss and put forward opinions and criticisms of court practices and proceedings. While the freedom to express ideas and opinions about the operation of the courts is clearly within the ambit of the freedom guaranteed by s. 2(b), so too is the right of members of the public to obtain information about the courts in the first place.

Under the order sought, public access and public scrutiny of the Confidential Documents would be restricted; this would clearly infringe the public's freedom of expression guarantee.

37           A discussion of the general approach to be taken in the exercise of judicial discretion to grant a confidentiality order should begin with the principles set out by this Court in *Dagenais v. Canadian Broadcasting Corp.*, 1994 CanLII 39 (SCC), [1994] 3 S.C.R. 835. Although that case dealt with the common law jurisdiction of the court to order a publication ban in the criminal law context, there are strong similarities between publication bans and confidentiality orders in the context of judicial proceedings. In both cases a restriction on freedom of expression is sought in order to preserve or promote an

interest engaged by those proceedings. As such, the fundamental question for a court to consider in an application for a publication ban or a confidentiality order is whether, in the circumstances, the right to freedom of expression should be compromised.

38 Although in each case freedom of expression will be engaged in a different context, the *Dagenais* framework utilizes overarching *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* principles in order to balance freedom of expression with other rights and interests, and thus can be adapted and applied to various circumstances. As a result, the analytical approach to the exercise of discretion under Rule 151 should echo the underlying principles laid out in *Dagenais*, although it must be tailored to the specific rights and interests engaged in this case.

39 *Dagenais* dealt with an application by four accused persons under the court's common law jurisdiction requesting an order prohibiting the broadcast of a television programme dealing with the physical and sexual abuse of young boys at religious institutions. The applicants argued that because the factual circumstances of the programme were very similar to the facts at issue in their trials, the ban was necessary to preserve the accuseds' right to a fair trial.

40 Lamer C.J. found that the common law discretion to order a publication ban must be exercised within the boundaries set by the principles of the *Charter*. Since publication bans necessarily curtail the freedom of expression of third parties, he adapted the pre-*Charter* common law rule such that

it balanced the right to freedom of expression with the right to a fair trial of the accused in a way which reflected the substance of the test from *R. v. Oakes*, 1986 CanLII 46 (SCC), [1986] 1 S.C.R. 103. At p. 878 of *Dagenais*, Lamer C.J. set out his reformulated test:

A publication ban should only be ordered when:

- (a) Such a ban is necessary in order to prevent a real and substantial risk to the fairness of the trial, because reasonably available alternative measures will not prevent the risk; and
- (b) The salutary effects of the publication ban outweigh the deleterious effects to the free expression of those affected by the ban. [Emphasis in original.]

41 In *New Brunswick, supra*, this Court modified the *Dagenais* test in the context of the related issue of how the discretionary power under s. 486(1) of the *Criminal Code*, R.S.C. 1985, c. C-46, to exclude the public from a trial should be exercised. That case dealt with an appeal from the trial judge's order excluding the public from the portion of a sentencing proceeding for sexual assault and sexual interference dealing with the specific acts committed by the accused on the basis that it would avoid "undue hardship" to both the victims and the accused.

42 La Forest J. found that s. 486(1) was a restriction on the s. 2(b) right to freedom of expression in that it provided a "discretionary bar on public and media access to the courts": *New Brunswick*, at para. 33; however he found this infringement to be justified under s. 1

provided that the discretion was exercised in accordance with the *Charter*. Thus, the approach taken by La Forest J. at para. 69 to the exercise of discretion under s. 486(1) of the *Criminal Code*, closely mirrors the *Dagenais* common law test:

- (a) the judge must consider the available options and consider whether there are any other reasonable and effective alternatives available;
  
- (b) the judge must consider whether the order is limited as much as possible; and
  
- (c) the judge must weigh the importance of the objectives of the particular order and its probable effects against the importance of openness and the particular expression that will be limited in order to ensure that the positive and negative effects of the order are proportionate.

In applying this test to the facts of the case, La Forest J. found that the evidence of the potential undue hardship consisted mainly in the Crown's submission that the evidence was of a "delicate nature" and that this was insufficient to override the infringement on freedom of expression.

43            This Court has recently revisited the granting of a publication ban under the court's common law jurisdiction in *R. v. Mentuck*, [2001] 3 S.C.R. 442, 2001 SCC 76, and its companion case *R. v. O.N.E.*, [2001] 3 S.C.R. 478, 2001 SCC 77. In *Mentuck*, the Crown moved for a publication ban to protect the identity of undercover police officers and operational methods employed by the officers in their investigation of the accused. The accused opposed the motion

as an infringement of his right to a fair and public hearing under s. 11(d) of the *Charter*. The order was also opposed by two intervening newspapers as an infringement of their right to freedom of expression.

44 The Court noted that, while *Dagenais* dealt with the balancing of freedom of expression on the one hand, and the right to a fair trial of the accused on the other, in the case before it, both the right of the accused to a fair and public hearing, and freedom of expression weighed in favour of denying the publication ban. These rights were balanced against interests relating to the proper administration of justice, in particular, protecting the safety of police officers and preserving the efficacy of undercover police operations.

45 In spite of this distinction, the Court noted that underlying the approach taken in both *Dagenais* and *New Brunswick* was the goal of ensuring that the judicial discretion to order publication bans is subject to no lower a standard of compliance with the *Charter* than legislative enactment. This goal is furthered by incorporating the essence of s. 1 of the *Charter* and the *Oakes* test into the publication ban test. Since this same goal applied in the case before it, the Court adopted a similar approach to that taken in *Dagenais*, but broadened the *Dagenais* test (which dealt specifically with the right of an accused to a fair trial) such that it could guide the exercise of judicial discretion where a publication ban is requested in order to preserve any important aspect of the proper administration of justice. At para. 32, the Court reformulated the test as follows:

A publication ban should only be ordered when:

(a) such an order is necessary in order to prevent a serious risk to the proper administration of justice because reasonably alternative measures will not prevent the risk; and

(b) the salutary effects of the publication ban outweigh the deleterious effects on the rights and interests of the parties and the public, including the effects on the right to free expression, the right of the accused to a fair and public trial, and the efficacy of the administration of justice.

46 The Court emphasized that under the first branch of the test, three important elements were subsumed under the “necessity” branch. First, the risk in question must be a serious risk well grounded in the evidence. Second, the phrase “proper administration of justice” must be carefully interpreted so as not to allow the concealment of an excessive amount of information. Third, the test requires the judge ordering the ban to consider not only whether reasonable alternatives are available, but also to restrict the ban as far as possible without sacrificing the prevention of the risk.

47 At para. 31, the Court also made the important observation that the proper administration of justice will not necessarily involve *Charter* rights, and that the ability to invoke the *Charter* is not a necessary condition for a publication ban to be granted:

The [common law publication ban] rule can accommodate orders that must occasionally be made in the interests of the administration of justice, which encompass more than fair trial rights. As the test is intended to “reflec[t] the substance of the *Oakes* test”, we cannot require that *Charter* rights be the only legitimate objective of

such orders any more than we require that government action or legislation in violation of the *Charter* be justified exclusively by the pursuit of another *Charter* right. [Emphasis added.]

The Court also anticipated that, in appropriate circumstances, the *Dagenais* framework could be expanded even further in order to address requests for publication bans where interests other than the administration of justice were involved.

48            *Mentuck* is illustrative of the flexibility of the *Dagenais* approach. Since its basic purpose is to ensure that the judicial discretion to deny public access to the courts is exercised in accordance with *Charter* principles, in my view, the *Dagenais* model can and should be adapted to the situation in the case at bar where the central issue is whether judicial discretion should be exercised so as to exclude confidential information from a public proceeding. As in *Dagenais*, *New Brunswick* and *Mentuck*, granting the confidentiality order will have a negative effect on the *Charter* right to freedom of expression, as well as the principle of open and accessible court proceedings, and, as in those cases, courts must ensure that the discretion to grant the order is exercised in accordance with *Charter* principles. However, in order to adapt the test to the context of this case, it is first necessary to determine the particular rights and interests engaged by this application.

(2) The Rights and Interests of the Parties



49                   The immediate purpose for AECL’s confidentiality request relates to its commercial interests. The information in question is the property of the Chinese authorities. If the appellant were to disclose the Confidential Documents, it would be in breach of its contractual obligations and suffer a risk of harm to its competitive position. This is clear from the findings of fact of the motions judge that AECL was bound by its commercial interests and its customer’s property rights not to disclose the information (para. 27), and that such disclosure could harm the appellant’s commercial interests (para. 23).

50                   Aside from this direct commercial interest, if the confidentiality order is denied, then in order to protect its commercial interests, the appellant will have to withhold the documents. This raises the important matter of the litigation context in which the order is sought. As both the motions judge and the Federal Court of Appeal found that the information contained in the Confidential Documents was relevant to defences available under the *CEAA*, the inability to present this information hinders the appellant’s capacity to make full answer and defence, or, expressed more generally, the appellant’s right, as a civil litigant, to present its case. In that sense, preventing the appellant from disclosing these documents on a confidential basis infringes its right to a fair trial. Although in the context of a civil proceeding this does not engage a *Charter* right, the right to a fair trial generally can be viewed as a fundamental principle of justice: *M. (A.) v. Ryan*, 1997 CanLII 403 (SCC), [1997] 1 S.C.R. 157, at para. 84, *per* L’Heureux-Dubé J. (dissenting, but not on that point). Although this fair trial right is directly relevant to the appellant, there is also a general public interest in protecting the right to a fair trial. Indeed, as a general proposition, all disputes in the courts should be decided under a fair

trial standard. The legitimacy of the judicial process alone demands as much. Similarly, courts have an interest in having all relevant evidence before them in order to ensure that justice is done.

51 Thus, the interests which would be promoted by a confidentiality order are the preservation of commercial and contractual relations, as well as the right of civil litigants to a fair trial. Related to the latter are the public and judicial interests in seeking the truth and achieving a just result in civil proceedings.

52 In opposition to the confidentiality order lies the fundamental principle of open and accessible court proceedings. This principle is inextricably tied to freedom of expression enshrined in s. 2(b) of the *Charter*: *New Brunswick, supra*, at para. 23. The importance of public and media access to the courts cannot be understated, as this access is the method by which the judicial process is scrutinized and criticized. Because it is essential to the administration of justice that justice is done and is seen to be done, such public scrutiny is fundamental. The open court principle has been described as “the very soul of justice”, guaranteeing that justice is administered in a non-arbitrary manner: *New Brunswick*, at para. 22.

(3) Adapting the *Dagenais* Test to the Rights and Interests of the Parties

53 Applying the rights and interests engaged in this case to the analytical framework of *Dagenais* and subsequent cases discussed above, the test for whether a confidentiality order ought to be granted in a case such as this one should be framed as follows:

A confidentiality order under Rule 151 should only be granted when:

(a) such an order is necessary in order to prevent a serious risk to an important interest, including a commercial interest, in the context of litigation because reasonably alternative measures will not prevent the risk; and

(b) the salutary effects of the confidentiality order, including the effects on the right of civil litigants to a fair trial, outweigh its deleterious effects, including the effects on the right to free expression, which in this context includes the public interest in open and accessible court proceedings.

54 As in *Mentuck*, I would add that three important elements are subsumed under the first branch of this test. First, the risk in question must be real and substantial, in that the risk is well grounded in the evidence, and poses a serious threat to the commercial interest in question.

55 In addition, the phrase “important commercial interest” is in need of some clarification. In order to qualify as an “important commercial interest”, the interest in question cannot merely be specific to the party requesting the order; the interest must be one which can be expressed in terms of a public interest in confidentiality. For example, a private company could not argue simply that the existence of a particular contract should not be made public because to do so would cause the company to lose business, thus harming its commercial interests. However, if, as in this case, exposure of information would cause a breach of a confidentiality agreement, then the commercial interest affected can be characterized more broadly as the general commercial interest of preserving confidential information. Simply put, if there is no general principle at stake, there can be no “important commercial interest” for the purposes of this test. Or, in the words of Binnie J. in *F.N. (Re)*, [2000] 1 S.C.R. 880, 2000 SCC 35, at para. 10, the open court rule only yields “where the public interest in confidentiality outweighs the public interest in openness” (emphasis added).

56 In addition to the above requirement, courts must be cautious in determining what constitutes an “important commercial interest”. It must be remembered that a confidentiality order involves an infringement on freedom of expression. Although the balancing of the commercial interest with freedom of expression takes place under the second branch of the test, courts must be alive to the fundamental importance of the open court rule. See generally Muldoon J. in *Eli Lilly and Co. v. Novopharm Ltd.* (1994), 56 C.P.R. (3d) 437 (F.C.T.D.), at p. 439.

57 Finally, the phrase “reasonably alternative measures” requires the judge to consider not only whether reasonable alternatives to a confidentiality order are available, but also to restrict the order as much as is reasonably possible while preserving the commercial interest in question.

B. *Application of the Test to this Appeal*

(1) Necessity

58 At this stage, it must be determined whether disclosure of the Confidential Documents would impose a serious risk on an important commercial interest of the appellant, and whether there are reasonable alternatives, either to the order itself, or to its terms.

59 The commercial interest at stake here relates to the objective of preserving contractual obligations of confidentiality. The appellant argues that it will suffer irreparable harm to its commercial interests if the Confidential Documents are disclosed. In my view, the preservation of confidential information constitutes a sufficiently important commercial interest to pass the first branch of the test as long as certain criteria relating to the information are met.

60 Pelletier J. noted that the order sought in this case was similar in nature to an application for a protective order which arises in the context of patent litigation. Such an order requires the applicant to demonstrate that the information in question has been treated at all relevant times as confidential and that on a balance of probabilities its proprietary, commercial and scientific interests could reasonably be harmed by the disclosure of the information: *AB Hassle v. Canada (Minister of National Health and Welfare)* (1998), 1998 CanLII 8942 (FC), 83 C.P.R. (3d) 428 (F.C.T.D.), at p. 434. To this I would add the requirement proposed by Robertson J.A. that the information in question must be of a “confidential nature” in that it has been “accumulated with a reasonable expectation of it being kept confidential” as opposed to “facts which a litigant would like to keep confidential by having the courtroom doors closed” (para. 14).

61 Pelletier J. found as a fact that the *AB Hassle* test had been satisfied in that the information had clearly been treated as confidential both by the appellant and by the Chinese authorities, and that, on a balance of probabilities, disclosure of the information could harm the appellant’s commercial interests (para. 23). As well, Robertson J.A. found that the information in question was clearly of a confidential nature as it was commercial information, consistently treated and regarded as confidential, that would be of interest to AECL’s competitors (para. 16). Thus, the order is sought to prevent a serious risk to an important commercial interest.

62 The first branch of the test also requires the consideration of alternative measures to the confidentiality order, as well as an examination of the scope of the order to ensure that it is not overly broad. Both courts below found that the information contained in the Confidential Documents was relevant to potential defences available to the appellant under the *CEAA* and this finding was

not appealed at this Court. Further, I agree with the Court of Appeal's assertion (at para. 99) that, given the importance of the documents to the right to make full answer and defence, the appellant is, practically speaking, compelled to produce the documents. Given that the information is necessary to the appellant's case, it remains only to determine whether there are reasonably alternative means by which the necessary information can be adduced without disclosing the confidential information.

63 Two alternatives to the confidentiality order were put forward by the courts below. The motions judge suggested that the Confidential Documents could be expunged of their commercially sensitive contents, and edited versions of the documents could be filed. As well, the majority of the Court of Appeal, in addition to accepting the possibility of expungement, was of the opinion that the summaries of the Confidential Documents included in the affidavits could go a long way to compensate for the absence of the originals. If either of these options is a reasonable alternative to submitting the Confidential Documents under a confidentiality order, then the order is not necessary, and the application does not pass the first branch of the test.

64 There are two possible options with respect to expungement, and in my view, there are problems with both of these. The first option would be for AECL to expunge the confidential information without disclosing the expunged material to the parties and the court. However, in this situation the filed material would still differ from the material used by the affiants. It must not be forgotten that this motion arose as a result of Sierra Club's position that the summaries contained in the affidavits should be accorded little or no weight without the presence of the underlying documents. Even if the relevant information and the confidential information were mutually exclusive, which would allow for the disclosure of all the information relied on in the affidavits, this relevancy determination could not be

tested on cross-examination because the expunged material would not be available. Thus, even in the best case scenario, where only irrelevant information needed to be expunged, the parties would be put in essentially the same position as that which initially generated this appeal, in the sense that, at least some of the material relied on to prepare the affidavits in question would not be available to Sierra Club.

65 Further, I agree with Robertson J.A. that this best case scenario, where the relevant and the confidential information do not overlap, is an untested assumption (para. 28). Although the documents themselves were not put before the courts on this motion, given that they comprise thousands of pages of detailed information, this assumption is at best optimistic. The expungement alternative would be further complicated by the fact that the Chinese authorities require prior approval for any request by AECL to disclose information.

66 The second option is that the expunged material be made available to the court and the parties under a more narrowly drawn confidentiality order. Although this option would allow for slightly broader public access than the current confidentiality request, in my view, this minor restriction to the current confidentiality request is not a viable alternative given the difficulties associated with expungement in these circumstances. The test asks whether there are reasonably alternative measures; it does not require the adoption of the absolutely least restrictive option. With respect, in my view, expungement of the Confidential Documents would be a virtually unworkable and ineffective solution that is not reasonable in the circumstances.



67 A second alternative to a confidentiality order was Evans J.A.'s suggestion that the summaries of the Confidential Documents included in the affidavits "may well go a long way to compensate for the absence of the originals" (para. 103). However, he appeared to take this fact into account merely as a factor to be considered when balancing the various interests at stake. I would agree that at this threshold stage to rely on the summaries alone, in light of the intention of Sierra Club to argue that they should be accorded little or no weight, does not appear to be a "reasonably alternative measure" to having the underlying documents available to the parties.

68 With the above considerations in mind, I find the confidentiality order necessary in that disclosure of the Confidential Documents would impose a serious risk on an important commercial interest of the appellant, and that there are no reasonably alternative measures to granting the order.

(2) The Proportionality Stage

69 As stated above, at this stage, the salutary effects of the confidentiality order, including the effects on the appellant's right to a fair trial, must be weighed against the deleterious effects of the confidentiality order, including the effects on the right to free expression, which in turn is connected to the principle of open and accessible court proceedings. This balancing will ultimately determine whether the confidentiality order ought to be granted.

(a) *Salutary Effects of the Confidentiality Order*

70 As discussed above, the primary interest that would be promoted by the confidentiality order is the public interest in the right of a civil litigant to present its case, or, more generally, the fair trial right. Because the fair trial right is being invoked in this case in order to protect commercial, not liberty, interests of the appellant, the right to a fair trial in this context is not a *Charter* right; however, a fair trial for all litigants has been recognized as a fundamental principle of justice: *Ryan, supra*, at para. 84. It bears repeating that there are circumstances where, in the absence of an affected *Charter* right, the proper administration of justice calls for a confidentiality order: *Mentuck, supra*, at para. 31. In this case, the salutary effects that such an order would have on the administration of justice relate to the ability of the appellant to present its case, as encompassed by the broader fair trial right.

71 The Confidential Documents have been found to be relevant to defences that will be available to the appellant in the event that the *CEAA* is found to apply to the impugned transaction and, as discussed above, the appellant cannot disclose the documents without putting its commercial interests at serious risk of harm. As such, there is a very real risk that, without the confidentiality order, the ability of the appellant to mount a successful defence will be seriously curtailed. I conclude, therefore, that the confidentiality order would have significant salutary effects on the appellant's right to a fair trial.

72 Aside from the salutary effects on the fair trial interest, the confidentiality order would also have a beneficial impact on other important rights and interests. First, as I discuss in more detail below, the confidentiality order would allow all parties and the court access to the Confidential Documents,

and permit cross-examination based on their contents. By facilitating access to relevant documents in a judicial proceeding, the order sought would assist in the search for truth, a core value underlying freedom of expression.

73 Second, I agree with the observation of Robertson J.A. that, as the Confidential Documents contain detailed technical information pertaining to the construction and design of a nuclear installation, it may be in keeping with the public interest to prevent this information from entering the public domain (para. 44). Although the exact contents of the documents remain a mystery, it is apparent that they contain technical details of a nuclear installation, and there may well be a substantial public security interest in maintaining the confidentiality of such information.

*(b) Deleterious Effects of the Confidentiality Order*

74 Granting the confidentiality order would have a negative effect on the open court principle, as the public would be denied access to the contents of the Confidential Documents. As stated above, the principle of open courts is inextricably tied to the s. 2(b) *Charter* right to freedom of expression, and public scrutiny of the courts is a fundamental aspect of the administration of justice: *New Brunswick, supra*, at paras. 22-23. Although as a general principle, the importance of open courts cannot be overstated, it is necessary to examine, in the context of this case, the particular deleterious effects on freedom of expression that the confidentiality order would have.

75 Underlying freedom of expression are the core values of (1) seeking the truth and the common good; (2) promoting self-fulfilment of individuals by allowing them to develop thoughts and ideas as they see fit; and (3) ensuring that participation in the political process is open to all persons: *Irwin Toy Ltd. v. Quebec (Attorney General)*, 1989 CanLII 87 (SCC), [1989] 1 S.C.R. 927, at p. 976; *R. v. Keegstra*, 1990 CanLII 24 (SCC), [1990] 3 S.C.R. 697, at pp. 762-64, *per* Dickson C.J. *Charter* jurisprudence has established that the closer the speech in question lies to these core values, the harder it will be to justify a s. 2(b) infringement of that speech under s. 1 of the *Charter*: *Keegstra*, at pp. 760-61. Since the main goal in this case is to exercise judicial discretion in a way which conforms to *Charter* principles, a discussion of the deleterious effects of the confidentiality order on freedom of expression should include an assessment of the effects such an order would have on the three core values. The more detrimental the order would be to these values, the more difficult it will be to justify the confidentiality order. Similarly, minor effects of the order on the core values will make the confidentiality order easier to justify.

76 Seeking the truth is not only at the core of freedom of expression, but it has also been recognized as a fundamental purpose behind the open court rule, as the open examination of witnesses promotes an effective evidentiary process: *Edmonton Journal, supra*, at pp. 1357-58, *per* Wilson J. Clearly the confidentiality order, by denying public and media access to documents relied on in the proceedings, would impede the search for truth to some extent. Although the order would not exclude the public from the courtroom, the public and the media would be denied access to documents relevant to the evidentiary process.

77            However, as mentioned above, to some extent the search for truth may actually be promoted by the confidentiality order. This motion arises as a result of Sierra Club's argument that it must have access to the Confidential Documents in order to test the accuracy of Dr. Pang's evidence. If the order is denied, then the most likely scenario is that the appellant will not submit the documents with the unfortunate result that evidence which may be relevant to the proceedings will not be available to Sierra Club or the court. As a result, Sierra Club will not be able to fully test the accuracy of Dr. Pang's evidence on cross-examination. In addition, the court will not have the benefit of this cross-examination or documentary evidence, and will be required to draw conclusions based on an incomplete evidentiary record. This would clearly impede the search for truth in this case.

78            As well, it is important to remember that the confidentiality order would restrict access to a relatively small number of highly technical documents. The nature of these documents is such that the general public would be unlikely to understand their contents, and thus they would contribute little to the public interest in the search for truth in this case. However, in the hands of the parties and their respective experts, the documents may be of great assistance in probing the truth of the Chinese environmental assessment process, which would in turn assist the court in reaching accurate factual conclusions. Given the nature of the documents, in my view, the important value of the search for truth which underlies both freedom of expression and open justice would be promoted to a greater extent by submitting the Confidential Documents under the order sought than it would by denying the order, and thereby preventing the parties and the court from relying on the documents in the course of the litigation.

79 In addition, under the terms of the order sought, the only restrictions on these documents relate to their public distribution. The Confidential Documents would be available to the court and the parties, and public access to the proceedings would not be impeded. As such, the order represents a fairly minimal intrusion into the open court rule, and thus would not have significant deleterious effects on this principle.

80 The second core value underlying freedom of speech, namely, the promotion of individual self-fulfilment by allowing open development of thoughts and ideas, focusses on individual expression, and thus does not closely relate to the open court principle which involves institutional expression. Although the confidentiality order would restrict individual access to certain information which may be of interest to that individual, I find that this value would not be significantly affected by the confidentiality order.

81 The third core value, open participation in the political process, figures prominently in this appeal, as open justice is a fundamental aspect of a democratic society. This connection was pointed out by Cory J. in *Edmonton Journal*, *supra*, at p. 1339:

It can be seen that freedom of expression is of fundamental importance to a democratic society. It is also essential to a democracy and crucial to the rule of law that the courts are seen to function openly. The press must be free to comment upon court proceedings to ensure that the courts are, in fact, seen by all to operate openly in the penetrating light of public scrutiny.

Although there is no doubt as to the importance of open judicial proceedings to a democratic society, there was disagreement in the courts below as to whether the weight to be assigned to the open court principle should vary depending on the nature of the proceeding.

82 On this issue, Robertson J.A. was of the view that the nature of the case and the level of media interest were irrelevant considerations. On the other hand, Evans J.A. held that the motions judge was correct in taking into account that this judicial review application was one of significant public and media interest. In my view, although the public nature of the case may be a factor which strengthens the importance of open justice in a particular case, the level of media interest should not be taken into account as an independent consideration.

83 Since cases involving public institutions will generally relate more closely to the core value of public participation in the political process, the public nature of a proceeding should be taken into consideration when assessing the merits of a confidentiality order. It is important to note that this core value will always be engaged where the open court principle is engaged owing to the importance of open justice to a democratic society. However, where the political process is also engaged by the substance of the proceedings, the connection between open proceedings and public participation in the political process will increase. As such, I agree with Evans J.A. in the court below where he stated, at para. 87:

While all litigation is important to the parties, and there is a public interest in ensuring the fair and appropriate adjudication of all litigation that comes before the courts, some cases raise issues that transcend the immediate interests of the parties and the general public interest in the due administration of justice, and have a much wider public interest significance.

84 This motion relates to an application for judicial review of a decision by the government to fund a nuclear energy project. Such an application is clearly of a public nature, as it relates to the distribution of public funds in relation to an issue of demonstrated public interest. Moreover, as pointed out by Evans J.A., openness and public participation are of fundamental importance under the CEAA. Indeed, by their very nature, environmental matters carry significant public import, and openness in judicial proceedings involving environmental issues will generally attract a high degree of protection. In this regard, I agree with Evans J.A. that the public interest is engaged here more than it would be if this were an action between private parties relating to purely private interests.

85 However, with respect, to the extent that Evans J.A. relied on media interest as an indicium of public interest, this was an error. In my view, it is important to distinguish public interest, from media interest, and I agree with Robertson J.A. that media exposure cannot be viewed as an impartial measure of public interest. It is the public nature of the proceedings which increases the need for openness, and this public nature is not necessarily reflected by the media desire to probe the facts of the case. I reiterate the caution given by Dickson C.J. in *Keegstra, supra*, at p. 760, where he stated that, while the speech in question must be examined in light of its relation to the core values, “we must guard carefully against judging expression according to its popularity”.

86 Although the public interest in open access to the judicial review application as a whole is substantial, in my view, it is also important to bear in mind the nature and scope of the information for which the order is sought in assigning weight to the public interest. With respect, the motions judge



erred in failing to consider the narrow scope of the order when he considered the public interest in disclosure, and consequently attached excessive weight to this factor. In this connection, I respectfully disagree with the following conclusion of Evans J.A., at para. 97:

Thus, having considered the nature of this litigation, and having assessed the extent of public interest in the openness of the proceedings in the case before him, the Motions Judge cannot be said in all the circumstances to have given this factor undue weight, even though confidentiality is claimed for only three documents among the small mountain of paper filed in this case, and their content is likely to be beyond the comprehension of all but those equipped with the necessary technical expertise.

Open justice is a fundamentally important principle, particularly when the substance of the proceedings is public in nature. However, this does not detract from the duty to attach weight to this principle in accordance with the specific limitations on openness that the confidentiality order would have. As Wilson J. observed in *Edmonton Journal*, *supra*, at pp. 1353-54:

One thing seems clear and that is that one should not balance one value at large and the conflicting value in its context. To do so could well be to pre-judge the issue by placing more weight on the value developed at large than is appropriate in the context of the case.

87 In my view, it is important that, although there is significant public interest in these proceedings, open access to the judicial review application would be only slightly impeded by the order sought. The narrow scope of the order coupled with the highly technical nature of the Confidential Documents significantly temper the deleterious effects the confidentiality order would have on the public interest in open courts.

88 In addressing the effects that the confidentiality order would have on freedom of expression, it should also be borne in mind that the appellant may not have to raise defences under the *CEAA*, in which case the Confidential Documents would be irrelevant to the proceedings, with the result that freedom of expression would be unaffected by the order. However, since the necessity of the Confidential Documents will not be determined for some time, in the absence of a confidentiality order, the appellant would be left with the choice of either submitting the documents in breach of its obligations, or withholding the documents in the hopes that either it will not have to present a defence under the *CEAA*, or that it will be able to mount a successful defence in the absence of these relevant documents. If it chooses the former option, and the defences under the *CEAA* are later found not to apply, then the appellant will have suffered the prejudice of having its confidential and sensitive information released into the public domain, with no corresponding benefit to the public. Although this scenario is far from certain, the possibility of such an occurrence also weighs in favour of granting the order sought.

89 In coming to this conclusion, I note that if the appellant is not required to invoke the relevant defences under the *CEAA*, it is also true that the appellant's fair trial right will not be impeded, even if the confidentiality order is not granted. However, I do not take this into account as a factor

which weighs in favour of denying the order because, if the order is granted and the Confidential Documents are not required, there will be no deleterious effects on either the public interest in freedom of expression or the appellant's commercial interests or fair trial right. This neutral result is in contrast with the scenario discussed above where the order is denied and the possibility arises that the appellant's commercial interests will be prejudiced with no corresponding public benefit. As a result, the fact that the Confidential Documents may not be required is a factor which weighs in favour of granting the confidentiality order.

90 In summary, the core freedom of expression values of seeking the truth and promoting an open political process are most closely linked to the principle of open courts, and most affected by an order restricting that openness. However, in the context of this case, the confidentiality order would only marginally impede, and in some respects would even promote, the pursuit of these values. As such, the order would not have significant deleterious effects on freedom of expression.

## VII. Conclusion

91 In balancing the various rights and interests engaged, I note that the confidentiality order would have substantial salutary effects on the appellant's right to a fair trial, and freedom of expression. On the other hand, the deleterious effects of the confidentiality order on the principle of open courts and freedom of expression would be minimal. In addition, if the order is not granted and in the course of the judicial review application the appellant is not required to mount a defence under the *CEAA*, there is a possibility that the appellant will have suffered the harm of having disclosed confidential information

in breach of its obligations with no corresponding benefit to the right of the public to freedom of expression. As a result, I find that the salutary effects of the order outweigh its deleterious effects, and the order should be granted.

92 Consequently, I would allow the appeal with costs throughout, set aside the judgment of the Federal Court of Appeal, and grant the confidentiality order on the terms requested by the appellant under Rule 151 of the *Federal Court Rules, 1998*.

*Appeal allowed with costs.*

*Solicitors for the appellant: Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt, Toronto.*

*Solicitors for the respondent Sierra Club of Canada: Timothy J. Howard, Vancouver; Franklin S. Gertler, Montréal.*

*Solicitor for the respondents the Minister of Finance of Canada, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, the Minister of International Trade of Canada and the Attorney General of Canada: The Deputy Attorney General of Canada, Ottawa.*

TAB 8

**At para(s) 23**

# Target Canada Co. (Re), 2015 ONSC 7574 (CanLII)

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**DATE:** 2015-12-11

SUPERIOR COURT OF JUSTICE - ONTARIO

**RE: IN THE MATTER OF A PLAN OF COMPROMISE OR ARRANGEMENT OF TARGET CANADA CO., TARGET CANADA HEALTH CO., TARGET CANADA MOBILE GP CO., TARGET CANADA PHARMACY (BC) CORP., TARGET CANADA PHARMACY (ONTARIO) CORP., TARGET CANADA PHARMACY CORP., TARGET CANADA PHARMACY (SK) CORP. AND TARGET CANADA PROPERTY LLC.**

**BEFORE:** Regional Senior Justice Morawetz

**COUNSEL:** *J. Swartz and Dina Milivojevic*, for the Target Corporation

*Jeremy Dacks*, for the Target Canada Entities

*Susan Philpott*, for the Employees

*Richard Swan and S. Richard Orzy*, for Rio Can Management Inc. and KingSett Capital Inc.

*Jay Carfagnini and Alan Mark*, for Alvarez & Marsal, Monitor

*Jeff Carhart*, for Ginsey Industries

*Lauren Epstein*, for the Trustee of the Employee Trust

*Lou Brzezinski and Alexandra Teodescu*, for Nintendo of Canada Limited, Universal Studios, Thyssenkrupp Elevator (Canada) Limited, United Cleaning Services, RPJ Consulting Inc., Blue Vista, Farmer Brothers, East End Project, Trans Source, E One Entertainment, Foxy Originals

*Linda Galessiere*, for Various Landlords

ENDORSEMENT

[1] Alvarez & Marsal Canada Inc., in its capacity as Monitor of the Applicants (the “Monitor”) seeks approval of Monitor’s Reports 3-18, together with the Monitor’s activities set out in each of those Reports.

[2] Such a request is not unusual. A practice has developed in proceedings under the Companies’ Creditors Arrangement Act (“CCAA”) whereby the Monitor will routinely bring a motion for such approval. In most cases, there is no opposition to such requests, and the relief is routinely granted.

[3] Such is not the case in this matter.

[4] The requested relief is opposed by Rio Can Management Inc. (“Rio Can”) and KingSett Capital Inc. (“KingSett”), two landlords of the Applicants (the “Target Canada Estates”). The position of these landlords was supported by Mr. Brzezinski on behalf of his client group and as agent for Mr. Solmon, who acts for ISSI Inc., as well as Ms. Galessiere, acting on behalf of another group of landlords.

[5] The essence of the opposition is that the request of the Monitor to obtain approval of its activities – particularly in these liquidation proceedings – is both premature and unnecessary and that providing such approval, in the absence of full and complete disclosure of all of the underlying facts, would be unfair to the creditors, especially if doing so might in future be asserted and relied upon by the Applicants, or any other party, seeking to limit or prejudice the rights of creditors or any steps they may wish to take.

[6] Further, the objecting parties submit that the requested relief is unnecessary, as the Monitor has the full protections provided to it in the Initial Order and subsequent orders, and under the CCAA.

[7] Alternatively, the objecting parties submit that if such approval is to be granted, it should be specifically limited by the following words:

“provided, however, that only the Monitor, in its personal capacity and only with respect to its own personal liability, shall be entitled to rely upon or utilize in any way such approval.”

[8] The CCAA mandates the appointment of a monitor to monitor the business and financial affairs of the company (section 11.7).

[9] The duties and functions of the monitor are set forth in Section 23(1). Section 23(2) provides a degree of protection to the monitor. The section reads as follows:

- (2) Monitor not liable – if the monitor acts in good faith and takes reasonable care in preparing the report referred to in any of paragraphs (1)(b) to (d.1), the monitor is not liable for loss or damage to any person resulting from that person’s reliance on the report.

[10] Paragraphs 1(b) to (d.1) primarily relate to review and reporting issues on specific business and financial affairs of the debtor.

[11] In addition, paragraph 51 of the Amended and Restated Order provides that:

... in addition to the rights, and protections afforded the Monitor under the CCAA or as an officer of the Court, the Monitor shall incur no liability or obligation as a result of its appointment or the carrying out of the provisions of this Order, including for great certainty in the Monitor's capacity as Administrator of the Employee Trust, save and except for any gross negligence or wilful misconduct on its part.

[12] The Monitor sets out a number of reasons why it believes that the requested relief is appropriate in these circumstances. Such approval

- (a) allows the monitor and stakeholders to move forward confidently with the next step in the proceeding by fostering the orderly building-block nature of CCAA proceedings;
- (b) brings the monitor's activities in issue before the court, allowing an opportunity for the concerns of the court or stakeholders to be addressed, and any problems to be rectified in a timely way;
- (c) provides certainty and finality to processes in the CCAA proceedings and activities undertaken (eg., asset sales), all parties having been given an opportunity to raise specific objections and concerns;
- (d) enables the court, tasked with supervising the CCAA process, to satisfy itself that the monitor's court-mandated activities have been conducted in a prudent and diligent manner;
- (e) provides protection for the monitor, not otherwise provided by the CCAA; and
- (f) protects creditors from the delay in distribution that would be caused by:
  - a. re-litigation of steps taken to date; and
  - b. potential indemnity claims by the monitor.

[13] Counsel to the Monitor also submits that the doctrine of issue estoppel applies (as do related doctrines of collateral attack and abuse of process) in respect of approval of the Monitor's activities as described in its reports. Counsel submits that given the functions that court approval serves, the availability of the doctrine (and related doctrines) is important to the CCAA process. Counsel submits that actions mandated and authorized by the court, and the activities taken by the Monitor to carry them out, are not interim measure that ought to remain open for second guessing or re-litigating down the road and there is a need for finality in a CCAA process for the benefit of all stakeholders.

[14] Prior to consideration of these arguments, it is helpful to review certain aspects of the doctrine of *res judicata* and its relationship to both issue estoppel and cause of action estoppel. The issue was recently considered in *Forrest v. Vriend*, 2015 Carswell BC 2979, where Ehrcke J. stated:



25. “TD and Vriend point out that the doctrine of *res judicata* is not limited to issue estoppel, but includes cause of action estoppel as well. The distinction between these two related components of *res judicata* was concisely explained by Cromwell J.A., as he then was, in *Hoque v. Montreal Trust Co. of Canada* (1997), 1997 NSCA 153 (CanLII), 162 N.S.R. (2d) 321 (C.A.) at para. 21:

21 *Res judicata* is mainly concerned with two principles. First, there is a principle that “... prevents the contradiction of that which was determined in the previous litigation, by prohibiting the relitigation of issues already actually addressed.”: see Sopinka, Lederman and Bryant, *The Law of Evidence in Canada* (1991) at p. 997. The second principle is that parties must bring forward all of the claims and defences with respect to the cause of action at issue in the first proceeding and that, if they fail to do so, they will be barred from asserting them in a subsequent action. This “... prevents fragmentation of litigation by prohibiting the litigation of matters that were never actually addressed in the previous litigation, but which properly belonged to it.”: *ibid* at 998. Cause of action estoppel is usually concerned with the application of this second principle because its operation bars all of the issues properly belonging to the earlier litigation.

...

30. It is salutary to keep in mind Mr. Justice Cromwell’s caution against an overly broad application of cause of action estoppel. In *Hoque* at paras. 25, 30 and 37, he wrote:

25. The appellants submit, relying on these and similar statements, that cause of action estoppel is broad in scope and inflexible in application. With respect, I think this overstates the true position. In my view, this very broad language which suggests an inflexible application of cause of action estoppel to all matters that “could” have been raised does not fully reflect the present law.

....

30. The submission that all claims that could have been dealt with in the main action are barred is not borne out by the Canadian cases. With respect to matter not actually raised and decided, the test appears to me to be that the party should have raised the matter and, in deciding whether the party should have done so, a number of factors are considered.

...

37. Although many of these authorities cite with approval the broad language of *Henderson v. Henderson, supra*, to the effect that any matter which the parties had the opportunity to raise will be barred, I think, however, that this language is somewhat too wide. The better principle is that those issues which the parties had the opportunity to raise and, in all the circumstances, should have raised, will be barred. In determining whether the matter should have been raised, a court will consider whether proceeding constitutes a collateral attack on the earlier findings, whether it simply asserts a new legal conception of facts previously litigated, whether it relies on “new” evidence that could have been discovered in the earlier proceeding with reasonable diligence, whether the two proceedings relate to separate and distinct causes of action and whether, in all the circumstances, the second proceeding constitutes an abuse of process.

[15] In this case, I accept the submission of counsel to the Monitor to the effect that the Monitor plays an integral part in balancing and protecting the various interests in the CCAA environment.

[16] Further, in this particular case, the court has specifically mandated the Monitor to undertake a number of activities, including in connection with the sale of the debtors assets. The Monitor has also, in its various Reports, provided helpful commentary to the court and to Stakeholders on the progress of the CCAA proceedings.

[17] Turning to the issue as to whether these Reports should be approved, it is important to consider how Monitor’s Reports are in fact relied upon and used by the court in arriving at certain determinations.

[18] For example, if the issue before the court is to approve a sales process or to approve a sale of assets, certain findings of fact must be made before making a determination that the sale process or the sale of assets should be approved. Evidence is generally provided by way of affidavit from a representative of the applicant and supported by commentary from the monitor in its report. The approval issue is put squarely before the court and the court must, among other things conclude that the sales process or the sale of assets is, among other things, fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

[19] On motions of the type, where the evidence is considered and findings of fact are made, the resulting decision affects the rights of all stakeholders. This is recognized in the jurisprudence with the acknowledgment that *res judicata* and related doctrines apply to approval of a Monitor’s report in these circumstances. (See: *Toronto Dominion Bank v. Preston Spring Gardens Inc.*, 2006 CanLII 15145 (ON SC), [2006] O.J. No. 1834 (SCJ Comm. List); *Toronto Dominion Bank v. Preston Spring Gardens Inc.*, 2007 ONCA 145 and *Bank of America Canada v. Willann Investments Limited*, [1993] O.J. No. 3039 (SCJ Gen. Div.)).

[20] The foregoing must be contrasted with the current scenario, where the Monitor seeks a general approval of its Reports. The Monitor has in its various reports provided commentary, some based on its own observations and work product and some based on information provided to it by the Applicant or other stakeholders. Certain aspects of the information provided by the Monitor has not been scrutinized or challenged in any formal sense. In addition, for the most part, no fact-finding process has been undertaken by the court.

[21] In circumstances where the Monitor is requesting approval of its reports and activities in a general sense, it seems to me that caution should be exercised so as to avoid a broad application of res judicata and related doctrines. The benefit of any such approval of the Monitor's reports and its activities should be limited to the Monitor itself. To the extent that approvals are provided, the effect of such approvals should not extend to the Applicant or other third parties.

[22] I recognized there are good policy and practical reasons for the court to approve of Monitor's activities and providing a level of protection for Monitors during the CCAA process. These reasons are set out in paragraph [12] above. However, in my view, the protection should be limited to the Monitor in the manner suggested by counsel to Rio Can and KingSett.

[23] By proceeding in this manner, Court approval serves the purposes set out by the Monitor above. Specifically, Court approval:

- (a) allows the Monitor to move forward with the next steps in the CCAA proceedings;
- (b) brings the Monitor's activities before the Court;
- (c) allows an opportunity for the concerns of the stakeholders to be addressed, and any problems to be rectified,
- (d) enables the Court to satisfy itself that the Monitor's activities have been conducted in prudent and diligent manners;
- (e) provides protection for the Monitor not otherwise provided by the CCAA; and
- (f) protects the creditors from the delay and distribution that would be caused by:
  - (i) re-litigation of steps taken to date, and
  - (ii) potential indemnity claims by the Monitor.

[24] By limiting the effect of the approval, the concerns of the objecting parties are addressed as the approval of Monitor's activities do not constitute approval of the activities of parties other than the Monitor.

[25] Further, limiting the effect of the approval does not impact on prior court orders which have approved other aspects of these CCAA proceedings, including the sales process and asset sales.

[26] The Monitor's Reports 3-18 are approved, but the approval is limited by the inclusion of the wording provided by counsel to Rio Can and KingSett, referenced at paragraph [7].

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Regional Senior Justice G.B. Morawetz

**Date:** December 11, 2015

TAB 9

**At para(s) 49**

# White Birch Paper Holding Company (Arrangement relatif à), 2010 QCCS 4915 (CanLII)

Date: 2010-09-24

File number: 500-11-038474-108

Other citation: 72 CBR (5th) 49

**Citation:** **White Birch Paper Holding Company (Arrangement relatif à), 2010 QCCS 4915 (CanLII), <<https://canlii.ca/t/2dof0>>, retrieved on 2024-10-10**

White Birch Paper Holding Company (Arrangement relatif à)

2010 QCCS 4915

JM1838

SUPERIOR COURT

(Commercial division)

*The Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act*

CANADA

PROVINCE OF QUEBEC

DISTRICT OF MONTREAL

No: 500-11-038474-108

DATE: 15 October 2010

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UNDER THE PRESIDENCY OF:                      THE HONOURABLE                      ROBERT MONGEON, J.S.C.

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IN THE MATTER OF THE PLAN OF ARRANGEMENT AND COMPROMISE OF:

WHITE BIRCH PAPER HOLDING COMPANY

**-and-**

**WHITE BIRCH PAPER COMPANY**

-and-

**STADACONA GENERAL PARTNER INC.**

**-and-**

**BLACK SPRUCE PAPER INC.**

**-and-**

**F.F. SOUCY GENERAL PARTNER INC.**

**-and-**

**3120772 NOVA SCOTIA COMPANY**

**-and-**

**ARRIMAGE DE GROS CACOUNA INC.**

**-and-**

**PAPIER MASSON LTÉE**

Petitioners

-and-

**ERNST & YOUNG INC.**

Monitor

**-and-**

**STADACONA LIMITED PARTNERSHIP**

**-and-**

**F.F. SOUCY LIMITED PARTNERSHIP**

**-and-**

**F.F. SOUCY INC. & PARTNERS, LIMITED PARTNERSHIP**

Mises-en-cause

**-and-**

**SERVICE D'IMPARTITION INDUSTRIEL INC.**

**-and-**

**KSH SOLUTIONS INC.**

**-and-**

**BD WHITE BIRCH INVESTMENT LLC**

Intervenant

**-and-**

**SIXTH AVENUE INVESTMENT CO. LLC**

**DUNE CAPITAL LLC**

**DUNE CAPITAL INTERNATIONAL LTD**

Opposing parties

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**REASONS FOR JUDGMENT GIVEN ORALLY ON**

**SEPTEMBER 24, 2010**

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BACKGROUND

[1] On 24 February 2010, I issued an Initial Order under the CCAA protecting the assets of the Debtors and Mis-en-cause (the WB Group). Ernst & Young was appointed Monitor.

[2] On the same date, Bear Island Paper Company LLC (Bear Island) filed for protection of Chapter 11 of the US Bankruptcy code before the US Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Virginia.



[3] On April 28, 2010, the US Bankruptcy Court issued an order approving a Sale and Investor Solicitation Process ("SISP") for the sale of substantially all of the WB Group's assets. I issued a similar order on April 29, 2010. No one objected to the issuance of the April 29, 2010 order. No appeal was lodged in either jurisdiction.

[4] The SISP caused several third parties to show some interest in the assets of the WG Group and led to the execution of an Asset Sale Agreement (ASA) between the WB Group and BD White Birch Investment LLC ("BDWB"). The ASA is dated August 10, 2010. Under the ASA, BDWB would acquire all of the assets of the Group and would:

- a) assume from the Sellers and become obligated to pay the Assumed Liabilities (as defined in the ASA);
- b) pay US\$90 million in cash;
- c) pay the Reserve Payment Amount (as defined);
- d) pay all fees and disbursements necessary or incidental for the closing of the transaction; and
- e) deliver the Wind Down Amount (as defined).

the whole for a consideration estimated between \$150 and \$178 million dollars.

[5] BDWB was to acquire the Assets through a Stalking Horse Bid process. Accordingly, Motions were brought before the US Bankruptcy Court and before this Court for orders approving:

- a) the ASA
- b) BDWB as the stalking horse bidder
- c) The Bidding Procedures

[6] On September 1, 2010, the US Bankruptcy Court issued an order approving the foregoing without modifications.

[7] On September 10, 2010, I issued an order approving the foregoing with some modifications (mainly reducing the Break-Up Fee and Expense Reimbursement clauses from an aggregate total sought of US\$5 million, down to an aggregate total not to exceed US\$3 million).

[8] My order also modified the various key dates of implementation of the above. The date of September 17 was set as the limit to submit a qualified bid under stalking horse bidding procedures, approved by both Courts and the date of September 21 was set as the auction date. Finally, the approval of the outcome of the process was set for September 24, 2010<sup>[1]</sup><sup>20</sup>.

[9] No appeal was lodged with respect to my decision of September 10, 2010.

[10] On September 17, 2010, Sixth Avenue Investment Co. LLC ("Sixth Avenue") submitted a qualified bid.

[11] On September 21, 2010, the WB Group and the Monitor commenced the auction for the sale of the assets of the group. The winning bid was the bid of BDWB at US\$236,052,825.00.

[12] BDWB's bid consists of:

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20. See my Order of September 10, 2010.

- i) US\$90 million in cash allocated to the current assets of the WB Group;
- ii) \$4.5 million of cash allocated to the fixed assets;
- iii) \$78 million in the form of a credit bid under the First Lien Credit Agreement allocated to the WB Group's Canadian fixed assets which are collateral to the First Lien Debt affecting the WB Group;
- iv) miscellaneous additional charges to be assumed by the purchaser.

[13] Sixth Avenue's bid was equivalent to the BDWB winning bid less US\$500,000.00, that is to say US\$235,552,825.00. The major difference between the two bids being that BDWB used credit bidding to the extent of \$78 million whilst Sixth Avenue offered an additional \$78 million in cash. For a full description of the components of each bid, see the Monitor's Report of September 23, 2010.

[14] The Sixth Avenue bidder and the BDWB bidder are both former lenders of the WB Group regrouped in new entities.

[15] On April 8, 2005, the WB Group entered into a First Lien Credit Agreement with Credit Suisse AG Cayman Islands and Credit Suisse AG Toronto acting as agents for a number of lenders.

[16] As of February 24, 2010, the WB Group was indebted towards the First Lien Lenders under the First Lien Credit Agreement in the approximate amount of \$438 million (including interest). This amount was secured by all of the Sellers' fixed assets. The contemplated sale following the auction includes the WB Group's fixed assets and unencumbered assets.

[17] BDWB is comprised of a group of lenders under the First Lien Credit Agreement and hold, in aggregate approximately 65% of the First Lien Debt. They are also "Majority Lenders" under the First Lien Credit Agreement and, as such, are entitled to make certain decisions with respect to the First Lien Debt including the right to use the security under the First Lien Credit Agreement as tool for credit bidding.

[18] Sixth Avenue is comprised of a group of First Lien Lenders holding a minority position in the First Lien Debt (approximately 10%). They are not "Majority Lenders" and accordingly, they do not benefit from the same advantages as the BDWB group of First Lien Lenders, with respect to the use of the security on the fixed assets of the WB Group, in a credit bidding process<sup>[2]</sup><sup>21</sup>.

[19] The bidding process took place in New York on September 21, 2010. Only two bidders were involved: the winning bidder (BDWB) and the losing bidder<sup>[3]</sup><sup>22</sup> (Sixth Avenue).

[20] In its Intervention, BDWB has analysed all of the rather complex mechanics allowing it to use the system of credit bidding as well as developing reasons why Sixth Avenue could not benefit from the same privilege. In addition to certain arguments developed in the reasons which follow, I also accept as my own BDWB's submissions developed in section (e), paragraphs [40] to [53] of its Intervention as well as the arguments brought forward in paragraphs [54] to [60] validating BDWB's specific right to credit bid in the present circumstances.

[21] Essentially, BDWB establishes its right to credit bid by referring not only to the September 10 Court Order but also by referring to the debt and security documents themselves, namely the First Lien Credit Agreement, the US First Lien Credit Agreement and under the Canadian Security Agreements

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21. For a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship of BDWB members and Sixth Avenue members as lenders under the original First Lien Credit Agreement of April 8, 2005, see paragraphs 15 to 19 of BDWB's Intervention.

22. Sometimes referred to as the "bitter bidder" or "disgruntled bidder" See Re: *Abitibi Bowater* [2010] QCCS 1742 (Gascon J.)

whereby the "Majority Lender" may direct the "Agents" to support such credit bid in favour of such "Majority Lenders". Conversely, this position is not available to the "Minority Lenders". This reasoning has not been seriously challenged before me.

[22] The Debtors and Mis-en-cause are now asking me to approve the sale of all and/or substantially all the assets of the WB Group to BDWB. The disgruntled bidder asks me to not only dismiss this application but also to declare it the winning bidder or, alternatively, to order a new auction.

[23] On September 24, 2010, I delivered oral reasons in support of the Debtors' Motion to approve the sale. Here is a transcript of these reasons.

**REASONS (delivered orally on September 24, 2010)**

[24] I am asked by the Petitioners to approve the sale of substantially all the WB Group's assets following a bid process in the form of a "Stalking Horse" bid process which was not only announced in the originating proceedings in this file, I believe back in early 2010, but more specifically as from May/June 2010 when I was asked to authorise the Sale and Investors Solicitation Process (SISP). The SISP order led to the canvassing of proposed bidders, qualified bidders and the eventual submission of a "Stalking Horse" bidder. In this context, a Motion to approve the "Stalking Horse" Bid process to approve the assets sale agreement and to approve a bidding procedure for the sale of substantially all of the assets of the WB Group was submitted and sanctioned by my decision of September 10, 2010.

[25] I note that throughout the implementation of this sale process, all of its various preliminary steps were put in place and approved without any contestation whatsoever by any of the interested stakeholders except for the two construction lien holders KSH[4]<sup>23</sup> and SIII[5]<sup>24</sup> who, for very specific reasons, took a strong position towards the process itself (not that much with the bidding process but with the consequences of this process upon their respective claims).

[26] The various arguments of KSH and SIII against the entire Stalking Horse bid process have now become moot, considering that both BDWB and Sixth Avenue have agreed to honour the construction liens and to assume the value of same (to be later determined).

[27] Today, the Motion of the Debtors is principally contested by a group which was identified as the "Sixth Avenue" bidders and more particularly, identified in paragraph 20 of the Motion now before me. The "Stalking Horse" bidder, of course, is the Black Diamond group identified as "BD White Birch Investment LLC". The Dune Group of companies who are also secured creditors of the WB Group are joining in, supporting the position of Sixth Avenue. Their contestation rests on the argument that the best and highest bid at the auction, which took place in New York on September 21, should not have been identified as the Black Diamond bid. To the contrary, the winning bid should have been, according to the contestants, the "Sixth Avenue" bid which was for a lesser dollar amount (\$500,000.00), for a larger cash amount (approximately \$78,000,000.00 more cash) and for a different allocation of the purchase price.

[28] Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Monitor, in its report of August 23, supports the "Black Diamond" winning bid and the Monitor recommends to the Court that the sale of the assets of the WB Group be made on that basis.

[29] The main argument of "Sixth Avenue" as averred, sometimes referred to as the "bitter bidder", comes from the fact that the winning bid relied upon the tool of credit bidding to the extent of \$78,000,000.00 in arriving at its total offer of \$236,052,825.00.

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23. KSH Solutions Inc.

24. Service d'Impartition Industriel Inc.

[30] If I take the comments of "Sixth Avenue", the use of credit bidding was not only a surprise, but a rather bad surprise, in that they did not really expect that this would be the way the "Black Diamond" bid would be ultimately constructed. However, the possibility of reverting to credit bidding was something which was always part of the process. I quote from paragraph 7 of the Motion to Approve the Sale of the Assets, which itself quotes paragraph 24 of the SISP Order, stating that:

**"24. Notwithstanding anything herein to the contrary, including without limitation, the bidding requirements herein, the agent under the White Birch DIP Facility (the "DIP Agent") and the agent to the WB Group's first lien term loan lenders (the First Lien Term Agent"), on behalf of the lenders under White Birch DIP Facility and the WB Group's first lien term loan lenders, respectively, shall be deemed Qualified Bidders and any bid submitted by such agent on behalf of the respective lenders in respect of all or a portion of the Assets shall be deemed both Phase 1 Qualified Bids and Phase 2 Qualified Bids. The DIP Agent and First Lien Term Agent, on behalf of the lenders under the White Birch DIP Facility and the WB Group's first lien term loan lenders, respectively, shall be permitted in their sole discretion, to credit bid up to the full amount of any allowed secure claims under the White Birch DIP Facility and the first lien term loan agreement, respectively, to the extent permitted under Section 363(k) of the Bankruptcy Code and other applicable law."**

[31] The words "and other applicable law" could, in my view, tolerate the inclusion of similar rules of procedure in the province of Quebec.[6]<sup>25</sup>

[32] The possibility of reverting to credit bidding was also mentioned in the bidding procedure sanctioned by my decision of September 10, 2010 as follows and I now quote from paragraph 13 of the Debtors' Motion:

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25. The concept of credit bidding is not foreign to Quebec civil law and procedure. See for example articles 689 and 730 of the Quebec code of Civil Procedure which read as follows: **689. The purchase price must be paid within five days, at the expiry of which time interest begins to run. Nevertheless, when the immovable is adjudged to the seizing creditor or any hypothecary creditor who has filed an opposition or whose claim is mentioned in the statement certified by the registrar, he may retain the purchase-money to the extent of the claim until the judgment of distribution is served upon him. 730. A purchaser who has not paid the purchase price must, within ten days after the judgment of homologation is transmitted to him, pay the sheriff the amounts necessary to satisfy the claims which have priority over his own; if he fails to do so, any interested party may demand the resale of the immovable upon him for false bidding. When the purchaser has fulfilled his obligation, the sheriff must give him a certificate that the purchase price has been paid in full.** See also Denis Ferland and Benoit Emery, 4<sup>ème</sup> édition, volume 2 (Éditions Yvon Blais (2003)): **"La loi prévoit donc que, lorsque l'immeuble est adjudgé au saisissant ou à un créancier hypothécaire qui a fait opposition, ou dont la créance est portée à l'état certifié par l'officier de la publicité des droits, l'adjudicataire peut retenir le prix, y compris le prix minimum annoncé dans l'avis de vente (art. 670, al. 1, e), 688.1 C.p.c.), jusqu'à concurrence de sa créance et tant que ne lui a pas été signifié le jugement de distribution prévu à l'article 730 C.p.c. (art. 689, al 2 C.p.c.). Il n'aura alors à payer, dans les cinq jours suivant la signification de ce jugement, que la différence entre le prix d'adjudication et le montant de sa créance pour satisfaire aux créances préférées à la sienne (art. 730, al. 1 C.p.c.). La Cour d'appel a déclaré, à ce sujet, que puisque le deuxième alinéa de l'article 689 C.p.c. est une exception à la règle du paiement lors de la vente par l'adjudicataire du prix minimal d'adjudication (art. 688.1, al. 1 C.p.c.) et à celle du paiement du solde du prix d'adjudication dans les cinq jours suivants (art. 689, al. 1 C.p.c.), il doit être interprété de façon restrictive. Le sens du mot «créance», contenu dans cet article, ne permet alors à l'adjudicataire de retenir que la partie de sa créance qui est colloquée ou susceptible de l'être, tout en tenant compte des priorités établies par la loi." See, finally, *Montreal Trust vs Jori Investment Inc.* (J.E. 80-220 (C.S.)), *Eugène Marcoux Inc. v. Côté* (1990) 1990 CanLII 3615 (QC CA), *R.J.Q. 1221 (C.A.)***

**13. "Notwithstanding anything herein to the contrary, the applicable agent under the DIP Credit Agreement and the application agent under the First Lien Credit Agreement shall each be entitled to credit bid pursuant to Section 363(k) of the Bankruptcy Code and other applicable law.**

[33] I draw from these excerpts that when the "Stalking Horse" bid process was put in place, those bidders able to benefit from a credit bidding situation could very well revert to the use of this lever or tool in order to arrive at a better bid<sup>[7]</sup><sup>26</sup>.

[34] Furthermore, many comments were made today with respect to the dollar value of a credit bid versus the dollar value of a cash bid. I think that it is appropriate to conclude that if credit bidding is to take place, it goes without saying that the amount of the credit bid should not exceed, but should be allowed to go as high as the face value amount of the credit instrument upon which the credit bidder is allowed to rely. The credit bid should not be limited to the fair market value of the corresponding encumbered assets. It would then be just impossible to function otherwise because it would require an evaluation of such encumbered assets, a difficult, complex and costly exercise.

[35] Our Courts have always accepted the dollar value appearing on the face of the instrument as the basis for credit bidding. Rightly or wrongly, this is the situation which prevails.

[36] Many arguments were brought forward, for and against the respective position of the two opposing bidders. At the end of the day, it is my considered opinion that the "Black Diamond" winning bid should prevail and the "Sixth Avenue" bid, the bitter bidder, should fail.

[37] I have dealt briefly with the process. I don't wish to go through every single step of the process but I reiterate that this process was put in place without any opposition whatsoever. It is not enough to appear before a Court and say: "Well, we've got nothing to say now. We may have something to say later" and then, use this argument to reopen the entire process once the result is known and the result turns out to be not as satisfactory as it may have been expected. In other words, silence sometimes may be equivalent to acquiescence. All stakeholders knew what to expect before walking into the auction room.

[38] Once the process is put in place, once the various stakeholders accept the rules, and once the accepted rules call for the possibility of credit bidding, I do not think that, at the end of the day, the fact that credit bidding was used as a tool, may be raised as an argument to set aside a valid bidding and auction process.

[39] Today, the process is completed and to allow "Sixth Avenue" to come before the Court and say: "My bid is essentially better than the other bid and Court ratify my bid as the highest and best bid as opposed to the winning bid" is the equivalent to a complete eradication of all proceedings and judgments rendered to this date with respect to the Sale of Assets authorized in this file since May/June 2010 and I am not prepared to accept this as a valid argument. Sixth Avenue should have expected that BDWB would want to revert to credit bidding and should have sought a modification of the bidding procedure in due time.

[40] The parties have agreed to go through the bidding process. Once the bidding process is started, then there is no coming back. Or if there is coming back, it is because the process is vitiated by an illegality or non-compliance of proper procedures and not because a bidder has decided to credit bid in accordance with the bidding procedures previously adopted by the Court.

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26. The SISP, the bidding procedure and corresponding orders recognize the principle of credit bidding at the auction and these orders were not the subject of any appeal procedure. See paragraphs 24, 25 and 26 of BDWB's Intervention. As for the right to credit bid in a sale by auction under the CCAA, see Re: *Maax Corporation* (QSC. no. 500-11-033561-081, July 10, 2008, , Buffoni J.) See also Re: *Brainhunter* (OSC Commercial List, no.09-8482-00CL, January 22, 2010)

[41] The Court cannot take position today which would have the effect of annihilating the auction which took place last week. The Court has to take the result of this auction and then apply the necessary test to approve or not to approve that result. But this is not what the contestants before me ask me to do. They are asking me to make them win a bid which they have lost.

[42] It should be remembered that "Sixth Avenue" agreed to continue to bid even after the credit bidding tool was used in the bidding process during the auction. If that process was improper, then "Sixth Avenue" should have withdrawn or should have addressed the Court for directions but nothing of the sort was done. The process was allowed to continue and it appears evident that it is only because of the end result which is not satisfactory that we now have a contestation of the results.

[43] The arguments which were put before me with a view to setting aside the winning bid (leaving aside those under Section 36 of the CCAA to which I will come to a minute) have not convinced me to set it aside. The winning bid certainly satisfies a great number of interested parties in this file, including the winning bidders, including the Monitor and several other creditors.

[44] I have adverse representations from two specific groups of creditors who are secured creditors of the White Birch Group prior to the issue of the Initial Order which have, from the beginning, taken strong exceptions to the whole process but nevertheless, they constitute a limited group of stakeholders. I cannot say that they speak for more interests than those of their own. I do not think that these creditors speak necessarily for the mass of unsecured creditors which they allege to be speaking for. I see no benefit to the mass of creditors in accepting their submissions, other than the fact that the Monitor will dispose of US\$500,000.00 less than it will if the winning bid is allowed to stand.

[45] I now wish to address the question of Section 36 CCAA.

[46] In order to approve the sale, the Court must take into account the provisions of Section 36 CCAA and in my respectful view, these conditions are respected.

[47] Section 36 CCAA reads as follows:

**36. (1) A debtor company in respect of which an order has been made under this Act may not sell or otherwise dispose of assets outside the ordinary course of business unless authorized to do so by a court. Despite any requirement for shareholder approval, including one under federal or provincial law, the court may authorize the sale or disposition even if shareholder approval was not obtained.**

**(2) A company that applies to the court for an authorization is to give notice of the application to the secured creditors who are likely to be affected by the proposed sale or disposition.**

**(3) In deciding whether to grant the authorization, the court is to consider, among other things,**

**(a) whether the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition was reasonable in the circumstances;**

**(b) whether the monitor approved the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition;**

**(c) whether the monitor filed with the court a report stating that in their opinion the sale or disposition would be more beneficial to the creditors than a sale or disposition under a bankruptcy;**

**(d) the extent to which the creditors were consulted;**

**(e) the effects of the proposed sale or disposition on the creditors and other interested parties; and**

**(f) whether the consideration to be received for the assets is reasonable and fair, taking into account their market value.**

**(4) If the proposed sale or disposition is to a person who is related to the company, the court may, after considering the factors referred to in subsection (3), grant the authorization only if it is satisfied that**

**(a) good faith efforts were made to sell or otherwise dispose of the assets to persons who are not related to the company; and**

**(b) the consideration to be received is superior to the consideration that would be received under any other offer made in accordance with the process leading to the proposed sale or disposition.**

**(5) For the purpose of subsection (4), a person who is related to the company includes**

**(a) a director or officer of the company;**

**(b) a person who has or has had, directly or indirectly, control in fact of the company; and**

**(c) a person who is related to a person described in paragraph (a) or (b).**

**(6) The court may authorize a sale or disposition free and clear of any security, charge or other restriction and, if it does, it shall also order that other assets of the company or the proceeds of the sale or disposition be subject to a security, charge or other restriction in favour of the creditor whose security, charge or other restriction is to be affected by the order.**

**(7) The court may grant the authorization only if the court is satisfied that the company can and will make the payments that would have been required under paragraphs 6(4)(a) and (5)(a) if the court had sanctioned the compromise or arrangement.**

**2005, c. 47, s. 131; 2007, c. 36, s. 78.**

**(added underlining)**

[48] The elements which can be found in Section 36 CCAA are, first of all, not limitative and secondly they need not to be all fulfilled in order to grant or not grant an order under this section.

[49] The Court has to look at the transaction as a whole and essentially decide whether or not the sale is appropriate, fair and reasonable. In other words, the Court could grant the process for reasons others than those mentioned in Section 36 CCAA or refuse to grant it for reasons which are not mentioned in Section 36 CCAA.

[50] Nevertheless, I was given two authorities as to what should guide the Court in similar circumstances, I refer firstly to the comments of Madame Justice Sarah Peppall in *Canwest* [2002], CarswellOnt 3509, and she writes at paragraph 13:

**"The proposed disposition of assets meets the Section 36 CCAA criteria and those set forth in the *Royal Bank v. Soundair Corp.* decision. Indeed, to a large degree, the criteria overlap. The process was reasonable as the Monitor was content with it (and this is the case here). Sufficient efforts were made to attract the best possible bid (this was done here through the process, I don't have to review this in detail); the SISP was widely publicized (I am given to understand that, in this present instance, the SISP was publicized enough to generate the interest of many interested bidders and then a smaller group of Qualified Bidders which ended up in the choice of one "Stalking Horse" bidder); ample time was given to prepare offers; and there was integrity and no unfairness in the process. The Monitor was intimately involved in supervising the SISP and also made the Superior Cash Offer recommendation. The Monitor had previously advised the Court that in its opinion, the Support Transaction was preferable to a bankruptcy (this was all done in the present case.) The logical extension of that conclusion is that the AHC Transaction is as well (and, of course, understand that the words "preferable to a bankruptcy" must be added to this last sentence). The effect of the proposed sale on other interested parties is very positive. (It doesn't mean by saying that, that it is positive upon all the creditors and that no creditor will not suffer from the process but given the representations made before me, I have to conclude that the proposed sale is the better solution for the creditors taken as a whole and not taken specifically one by one) Amongst other things, it provides for a going concern outcome and significant recoveries for both the secured and unsecured creditors.**

[51] Here, we may have an argument that the sale will not provide significant recoveries for unsecured creditors but the question which needs to be asked is the following: "Is it absolutely necessary to provide interest for all classes of creditors in order to approve or to set aside a "Stalking Horse bid process"?"

[52] In my respectful view, it is not necessary. It is, of course, always better to expect that it will happen but unfortunately, in any restructuring venture, some creditors do better than others and sometimes, some creditors do very badly. That is quite unfortunate but it is also true in the bankruptcy alternative. In any event, in similar circumstances, the Court must rely upon the final recommendation of the Monitor which, in the present instance, supports the position of the winning bidder.

[53] In *Nortel Networks*, Mister Justice Morawetz, in the context of a Motion for the Approval of an Assets Sale Agreement, Vesting Order of approval of an intellectual Property Licence Agreement, etc. basically took a similar position (2009, CarswellOnt 4838, at paragraph 35):

**"The duties of the Court in reviewing a proposed sale of assets are as follows:**

- 1) It should consider whether sufficient effort has been made to obtain the best price and that the debtor has not acted improvidently;**
- 2) It should consider the interests of all parties;**



**3) It should consider the efficacy and integrity of the process by which offers have been obtained;**

**4) and it should consider whether there has been unfairness in the working out of the process."**

[54] I agree with this statement and it is my belief that the process applied to the present case meets these criteria.

[55] I will make no comment as to the standing of the "bitter bidder". Sixth Avenue may have standing as a stakeholder while it may not have any, as a disgruntled bidder.

[56] I am, however, impressed by the comments of my colleague Clément Gascon, j.s.c. in *Abitibi Bowater*, in his decision of May 3, 2010 where, in no unclear terms he did not think that as such, a bitter bidder should be allowed a second strike at the proverbial can.

[57] There may be other arguments that could need to be addressed in order to give satisfaction to all the arguments provided to me by counsel. Again, this has been a long day, this has been a very important and very interesting debate but at the end of the whole process, I am satisfied that the integrity of the "Stalking Horse" bid process in this file, as it was put forth and as it was conducted, meets the criteria of the case law and the CCAA. I do not think that it would be in the interest of any of the parties before me today to conclude otherwise. If I were to conclude otherwise, I would certainly not be able to grant the suggestion of "Sixth Avenue", to qualify its bid as the winning bid; I would have to eradicate the entire process and cause a new auction to be held. I am not prepared to do that.

[58] I believe that the price which will be paid by the winning bidder is satisfactory given the whole circumstances of this file. The terms and conditions of the winning bid are also acceptable so as a result, I am prepared to grant the Motion. I do not know whether the Order which you would like me to sign is available and I know that some wording was to be reviewed by some of the parties and attorneys in this room. I don't know if this has been done. Has it been done? Are KSH and SIII satisfied or content with the wording?

**Attorney:**

I believe, Mister Justice, that KSH and SIII have.....their satisfaction with the wording. I believe also that Dow Jones, who's present, .....their satisfaction. However, AT&T has communicated that they wish to have some minor adjustments.

**The Court:**

Are you prepared to deal with this now or do you wish to deal with it during the week-end and submit an Order for signature once you will have ironed out the difficulties, unless there is a major difficulty that will require further hearing?

**Attorney:**

I think that the second option you suggested is probably the better one. So, we'd be happy to reach an agreement and then submit it to you and we'll recirculate everyone the wording.

**The Court:**

Very well.

The Motion to Approve the Sale of substantially all of the WB Group assets (no. 87) is **granted**, in accordance with the terms of an Order which will be completed and circulated and which will be submitted to me for signature as of Monday, next at the convenience of the parties;

The Motion of Dow Jones Company Inc. (no. 79) will be continued sine die;

The Amended Contestation of the Motion to Approve the Sale (no. 84) on behalf of "Sixth Avenue" is **dismissed** without costs (I believe that the debate was worth the effort and it will serve no purpose to impose any cost upon the contestant);

Also for the position taken by Dunes, there is no formal Motion before me but Mr. Ferland's position was important to the whole debate but I don't think that costs should be imposed upon his client as well;

The Motion to Stay the Assignment of a Contract from AT&T (no. 86) will be continued sine die;

The Intervention and Memorandum of arguments of BD White Birch Investment LLC is **granted**, without costs.

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ROBERT MONGEON, J.S.C.

Counsel and parties present: see attendance list annexed to the Procès-Verbal

Date of hearing: 24 September 2010

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