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• (1105)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 153 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates—the mighty OGGO—truly the only committee that matters.

Before we start, everyone, I will remind you to please keep your headphones away from your microphone so that we can protect the hearing of our very valued interpreters, who are working hard with us today.

We'll start off.

Welcome, Minister Hajdu. Welcome back to OGGO. It's been a few years since we've had you here. I assume you have an opening statement for us.

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services): I do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Please go ahead. The floor is yours.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I appreciate the invitation to come to OGGO. I think this is an important conversation about how we can focus our energies as a government and as a country on growing indigenous economy opportunities. Of course, today we're here to talk about the procurement strategy for indigenous business.

Investing in indigenous communities and building up indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs benefit all Canadians. According to the 2022 “National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada”, the continued exclusion of indigenous peoples costs the Canadian economy about \$27.7 billion every year. The National Indigenous Economic Development Board found that closing the existing employment gap could help lift over 150,000 indigenous people out of poverty.

Since 2015, we've been focused on strengthening self-determination and building capacity so that indigenous people and businesses have the tools and resources to fully participate in the economy on their own terms. For example, the government increased education funding by 80%, helping more kids access high-quality education right at home. Over the last decade, BDC found that expanded access to education has led to a 49% increase in the number of indigenous people aged 25 to 64 in full-time employment. That's right; there was a full 49% increase.

The indigenous economy has the potential to grow from \$32 billion to \$100 billion in the next five years, and leaders like Tabatha Bull from the CCIB have been clear that procurement is a key part of hitting that target. Since the 5% minimum target was implemented, the value of contracts going to indigenous businesses increased by \$1.5 billion.

Now, while I've only been the minister responsible for this file since 2021, our government has been engaging with indigenous partners from across the country for years. In particular, I'd like to highlight the ways that the department has engaged with indigenous partners to improve procurement procedures.

We are transforming the procurement strategy with indigenous partners. We are all focused on improving policies, safeguards and processes. They have told us what will work and what does not, and we are listening. We're also actively working with partners on how best to transfer the role of defining and verifying indigenous businesses to indigenous peoples. Transferring the definition and the registration of indigenous businesses from the government to indigenous peoples will help us reach the ultimate goal of increased indigenous economic activity.

Parliamentarians need to work together, including through studies just like this one, to identify the existing barriers to economic reconciliation and to identify new ways to break them down. Programs like the PSIB are getting us closer to a Canada that maximizes its true economic potential. The PSIB is opening doors for indigenous participation, and historically, those doors have been intentionally closed. Laws like the Indian Act systemically excluded indigenous peoples to the point of being “legislated out of the economy”, as described by many indigenous leaders.

Members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to reinforce the federal government's commitment to building Canada's economy in partnership with indigenous peoples, and I look forward to our conversation today.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll start with Mr. Genuis.

Before we start, though, everyone.... We're normally pretty loose watching the clock, but because we only have one hour with the minister, I'm going to stick exactly to the six minutes, five minutes, and two and a half minutes today, so please pay attention to your time clock.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Minister, should Randy Boissonnault still be in cabinet?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I can tell you that the business that Mr. Boissonnault was involved in was never on the indigenous business directory.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do you think he should still be in cabinet?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's not a decision for me to make, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

It's interesting that you're not saying yes. Do you endorse his conduct as minister?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I can tell you that Mr. Boissonnault's business was never listed on the indigenous business directory.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: He's a cabinet colleague of yours. You work together closely, I would presume. I ask if you think he should stay in cabinet, and you're declining to answer that.

Do you endorse his conduct as minister? What do you think of what he has done?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I can tell you that GHI, the business that Mr. Boissonnault was co-owner of, has never been on the IBD.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. I think you're saying a lot by not saying a lot, Minister, so I'll move on to my next question.

Is Global Health Imports still eligible to receive government contracts?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I believe they are, but as I said, they are not part of the indigenous business directory. I can't answer with an affirmative.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. They represented themselves as indigenous-owned. They did so falsely. They are still eligible to receive government contracts. Do you think there should be penalties for companies that misrepresent their indigenous identity? Should they be prevented from bidding further on government contracts?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In fact, there are penalties for fraudulent behaviour. I would hope that anybody who is procuring on behalf of the Government of Canada is careful about which businesses they procure from to make sure that proper business practices are followed. Certainly, the Government of Canada has measures it can take if it's found that businesses have acted fraudulently, and it should.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. You mentioned that there are consequences for fraudulent activity, which I hope would include misrepresentations around indigenous identity. Did Global Health Imports, in your view as the indigenous services minister, engage in fraudulent activity?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I can't make that determination, but I can tell you that the office of supplier integrity and compliance with PSPC can take steps, such as banning a business from future—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry. I'll just jump in. I know that there are options available.

Okay. You don't want to rule specifically on the case of Global Health Imports. Let's take a hypothetical case, a hypothetical case where you have a company that's involved in health imports, let's say, and owned by two people. Hypothetically, one of them happens to be a minister of the Crown. They are bidding on government contracts and, in the process, claim to be an indigenous-owned company. That claim turns out to be completely false.

If that hypothetical company, in the process of pursuing government contracts, falsely claimed to be indigenous-owned, would that be considered fraudulent activity?

• (1110)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It could possibly be, but that would be a decision by the office of supplier integrity and compliance. I don't run that particular organization.

I would say that, from my perspective, when there are allegations of fraud, it's very serious. I think departments have a responsibility to ensure that they're procuring from companies that are not fraudulent.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Right. Just definitionally, it would seem that the definition of "fraud" is misrepresenting the facts in some way in order to achieve a commercial advantage. It's pretending something is true when it's not in order to achieve a commercial advantage.

You have a company that pretended to be indigenous-owned when it wasn't indigenous-owned. The purpose of that pretense was clearly to increase its chances of getting government contracts that it wouldn't have otherwise gotten. Is that fraud?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I would say is that I think we're saying the same thing, that the process of ensuring—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Great.

I'm sorry. Go on.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The process of ensuring that people claiming indigeneity should be...with integrity. What we want is indigenous economic success, so I think we agree. I think any time there's fraud in terms of allegations of identity, that is a very serious infraction.

What happens next is up to places like the office of supplier integrity, but I can tell you that on our side, at Indigenous Services Canada, we take integrity around indigeneity seriously. Although it is a challenging—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Let me jump in here. I would hope that the Prime Minister would take that integrity seriously and fire this minister from cabinet.

In the time that I have left, Minister, are there any other companies owned by Liberal cabinet ministers or MPs, former MPs or Liberal-appointed senators who are on the indigenous business list?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's a great question. I don't know the answer to that. We can commit to checking that out for you and getting the information back.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Thank you. I think the committee would agree that we're interested in receiving, in the usual timeline, the names of any companies on the indigenous business list that are owned by Liberal MPs, cabinet ministers, appointed senators or former MPs.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Battiste, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Patty, for joining us.

Minister, we heard from Joanna Bernard, regional chief in New Brunswick. There are a lot of complexities involved in indigenous identity. She mentioned the challenges around the second-generation cut-off where, if you have children outside of people registered under the Indian Act for two successive generations, you lose your status as an Indian. There's a definite cut-off point for first nations or status Indians in Canada.

However, when we're talking about Inuit and Métis, there isn't that definition in place that we can look to. In fact, the Supreme Court of Canada said in the Daniels case that there was no consensus definition for what it is to be Métis, nor need there be.

During the study of Bill C-53, we heard that there were a lot of people who believe that, if you have indigenous and European ancestry, you're a Métis, but we know that's not the recognized definition from the Métis National Council.

When we look at this, at indigenous identity and the overall job of government to try to figure out who should be eligible and who shouldn't be eligible, do we have help from any organizations that can help guide government? It's pretty clear in UNDRIP, which is law, under article 33 that nations want the ability to determine who their own citizens are. That's part of why we're working with the AFN on the second-generation cut-off.

I'm wondering if you can speak to, first, the kind of outside help we are getting from indigenous organizations to help clarify these very muddy waters when it comes to people thinking they might be indigenous because they have some mixed ancestry somewhere in their family lineage. How do we educate Canadians as to what the definitions are of the different first nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada?

• (1115)

The Chair: I'm sorry; I'm going to interrupt.

Before you proceed—and I've stopped the clock—I understand that there are some people in the room taking photos. Please, that's not allowed. Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, MP Battiste. You've touched on something that I think is essentially very sensitive and a legacy of a colonial system that was designed to divide people into categories of indigenous and non-indigenous. The challenge is that, of course, those definitions evolve.

You mentioned a second-generation cut-off, and you would know, as one of the MPs heavily invested in the study that's going on right now, that even the issue of the second-generation cut-off is a sensitive issue for the families impacted but also for the communities impacted.

There is criteria for inclusion on the indigenous business directory. I can read it out here, but I'm sure you already understand that as part of your study right now.

We are working with first nations partners and business partners, in particular the NACCA, the CCIB, ITK, the Métis Nation and various different Métis nations that are not part of the Métis Nation of Canada. These are the commitments we've made as a government to continue to have these complicated conversations with indigenous people as they define for themselves their memberships. I think it is an important conversation for indigenous people to have, but it's also important for Canadians to understand that it isn't as clear-cut as some would like to think or some would like to have it be, quite clearly.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: We heard from Regional Chief Joanna Bernard that this was one of the things that was a concern for her. I offered to the AFN that they submit something to this committee that clarified where they stood on indigenous identity. I'm wondering if your department has received any kind of resolution from AFN stating where they would like to see this conversation go next.

You're right. The first nations I've talked to across Canada do not want a government committee or department stating who isn't a member of their communities. I think you've said that. I agree with it.

How do we best manage that situation when you have communities saying that they don't want the colonial mistakes of the past to continue but, rather, they want to be a part of the solution? How are we doing that?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: First of all, do you want to speak to the AFN resolution, Keith?

Mr. Keith Conn (Assistant Deputy Minister, Lands and Economic Development, Department of Indigenous Services): No.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: All right.

I will just say, first of all, that what we are doing is working with a variety of different indigenous organizations, including the AFN, to look at ways the government can transfer the responsibility for indigenous procurement, the indigenous business directory, to indigenous organizations. So far, as you would know, there isn't a consensus yet.

I've been thinking a lot about consensus in this space. There often isn't a consensus in Parliament, as you know, on legislation, on approaches. I think that sometimes the federal government looks for consensus in indigenous places or indigenous spaces in an unrealistic or maybe an unfair way.

We are working with partners right now about how best to transfer the responsibility for indigeneity and proof of indigeneity without driving towards a one-list solution. That may be part of the evolution of how this goes, simply because, as I've gotten to know the partners, it appears that consensus may not be feasible in this space. That is a reality with such a diverse group of indigenous people across the country.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Yes, and we've definitely seen—

The Chair: I'm afraid that's our time.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Okay. I'll get it in another round.

The Chair: Mrs. Vignola, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In recent months, certain businesses have claimed they were indigenous when they were not.

Madam Minister, when you did your audits, how many businesses did you find that were not truly indigenous?

• (1120)

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Every two years, the department audits the indigeneity of businesses, just because businesses transform quite a bit in between audits. In 2022, 1,100 indigenous businesses were removed from the indigenous business directory as part of a cleanup of businesses that were registered before 2019.

I could, maybe, turn to Keith to speak about those.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: What documents were requested to prove that those 1,122 businesses in that directory were no longer indigenous businesses?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Let me get the list. It says:

Evidence considered for registration on the Indigenous Businesses Directory of being an Indigenous person includes, but is not limited to:

Indian registration in Canada

citizenship with the Manitoba Métis Federation, the Northwest Territory Métis Nation, or a Governing Member of the Métis National Council, including: the Métis Nation Saskatchewan; the Métis Nation of Alberta; the Métis Nation British Columbia and the Métis Nation of Ontario

membership in an affiliate of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, or other recognized Indigenous organization in Canada

acceptance as an Indigenous person by an established Indigenous community in Canada

enrolment or entitlement to be enrolled pursuant to a comprehensive land claim agreement, or membership or entitlement to membership in a group with an accepted comprehensive claim

There are those criteria. There is documentation required for each of those claims.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Could you send the committee the criteria in question?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Yes, I will do that.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

There is a big issue right now involving control of the indigenous business directory. You also touched on this earlier. The question is who should be monitoring it, verifying whether a business is indigenous or not.

In my humble opinion, it is certainly not for us to tell a first nation whether or not it is a first nation. It is up to them to determine who its members are and which businesses are theirs.

You said you were looking for a consensus. I would like to know a bit more about transferring control of the directory.

Ultimately, what kind of monitoring would there be and under what conditions would it be monitored?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It is true that it is hard to reach a consensus. The government can make other choices regarding the partners. There could for instance be separate lists for each category.

[English]

Right now, we're still in discussion with indigenous partners about the best way to do this.

For example, maybe each partner could have its own list. I think what we would all agree on at this committee is that we don't want to do anything that weakens the opportunity for businesses. It's a delicate piece of work to find a path to transfer the list in a way that doesn't make it harder for government departments to procure from indigenous businesses.

What I really don't want to see is the government saying that this is too hard, so it won't do it at all. I think everybody at this table agrees that this is a big, important piece of Canada's GDP growth.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

When he appeared before the committee, Shannin Metatawabin, the CEO of the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, said that his organization had tried to work with the government, but that there had been many delays. He said that his organization needs to create an infrastructure, hire staff and launch the project, but that it is having trouble getting assistance from Indigenous Services Canada.

He also said that he had sent you a letter, as did the national chief. They did not receive a reply, though.

I would like to know who is discussing this and who should be listening to what they have to say.

• (1125)

[English]

The Chair: Provide a brief answer.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Really quickly, there are over 30 partners. I won't read them out, Mr. Chair, as that will take quite a long time, but we will distribute the list of the partners that have been involved in the consultations on how we move forward with the list.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the minister and her team for being here with us today to discuss this really important issue.

I really appreciate what you said about making sure that there's a process so that you can pass some of this on to an indigenous organization to do the work. I'm just wondering, though, if there is any discussion internally about recognizing that indigenous people should be the people who decide who their membership is. What does that process look like?

I expect it to be a bumpy road, but the one thing I have concerns about is that the decision isn't being made. It's just sort of a discussion that keeps happening.

What work is actually happening to get that to the communities who had it in the first place and need it to be returned?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Do you mean that the lists were in the communities to begin with?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It's for the nations to decide who their membership is.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: This is ultimately the goal of decolonization. It's for the federal government to be out of the space of defining who is indigenous.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: What's blocking that process from happening?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think you're hearing concerns—and I think they're rightful concerns—from a variety of partners about people claiming indigeneity or claiming connection to community without necessarily being indigenous or of indigenous descent. In fact, that's a part of this study, and I think this study is incredibly valuable.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm sorry to interrupt.

What I'm talking about is indigenous communities deciding who is indigenous and taking the government out of it completely. I understand what the intention is, but I'm wondering what the process is for that to actually happen.

It's something that keeps coming up in government after government, and it's not getting done. I'm wondering what part is—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would dispute that it's not getting done.

We've done quite a bit, as you know, on sex-based discrimination and restoring people's—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Excuse me, but you're still keeping it within the government. This is a colonial system. The longer we keep the identity of indigenous people decided by a colonial system.... That's the problem.

It needs to go back to indigenous communities. They should be the ones deciding how that's going to work and what kinds of processes they would have around identifying that. I understand some of the complexity, but I think indigenous communities understand it.

I think Mr. Conn is going to respond.

Mr. Keith Conn: Thanks for the question.

As it currently exists, we have, for example, the Inuit, who determine their membership—not Canada—in terms of land claim beneficiaries. The Métis nations and all their governing boards have criteria for membership. They determine the membership, not Canada. The same applies to first nations generally. The first nations either use the Indian Act system in terms of registration, or they manage their own membership codes for membership. They determine their membership.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It's still going through the Government of Canada. You know the process as well as I do.

Mr. Keith Conn: The liberty to remove themselves from the Indian Act is there, in order to manage their own membership rolls at their discretion.

I will follow up on a previous question. At this time, as a department, we are currently engaging with first nations leadership, communities and elders to find solutions for the second-generation cut-off as we speak. Those discussions are ongoing. Those are the—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that. I hear what you're saying.

I will respectfully say that the system is still in held by the government. This is how it works. We know that indigenous people trying to fight these issues often have no choice but to go to the federal government to get support. Often, the federal government says, "I don't want to touch this", because they don't want to be part of the identity process. However, they are also still holding the reins. My concern is this: Until that is done, it makes all of these other systems continue to falter. What that does is pit indigenous people against indigenous people, which is not very helpful. It also means that fraudulent claims are blocking legitimate indigenous businesses from finding those opportunities, because other people are using people or putting forward things that are not true.

I think it is incredibly important that this be stepped out of. Until it's gone—until indigenous communities and indigenous processes are in place—we're going to continue to see these things.

Minister, you talked about the fact that it is fraudulent to pretend you're of indigenous identity, and you talked about penalties. Can you talk a bit about what that looks like, and whether there is something actually being done to make people accountable? We're seeing more and more people pretending they are of indigenous identity, which I think is very interesting and concerning. Actually, in a lot of ways, it's pretty easy for indigenous communities to identify.

I'm wondering what the penalties are. How do you work with indigenous communities that have had people claim they belong to them, but don't? How do you support them as well?

• (1130)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thanks.

That's the flip side. Indigenous communities often feel threatened by new people who come in and claim connection to a community—sometimes through issues of the second-generation cut-off, quite frankly. That's why the study is so important. Some chiefs have said that people appear to claim membership. In fact, as leaders of the community, they don't recognize the lineage or connection.

I think you're also right that all of this is—

The Chair: I apologize, Minister. That is our time.

We're going to Mrs. Block for five minutes.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to all of you joining us here today.

Minister, we have heard repeatedly from indigenous groups that the majority of the money the government claims is going to indigenous companies is actually going to shell companies. We recently read in the news of a great example of this: the company owned by Randy Boissonnault, even though GHI was not listed in the indigenous business directory. You made mention of that, but your departmental officials know differently, I think. They agreed they are still eligible to receive funding from ISC.

We've also heard that there are few to no consequences for companies that pretend to be indigenous. I want to quote Shannin Metatawabain, the CEO of the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association. He stated that there are very few penalties, and that “There need to be penalties, for sure.” He went on to say, “It's criminal behaviour to conduct fraud, so we have to take other steps and demonstrate to the world and to Canada that those actors who are engaging in this activity don't use this window and this program to access the federal government in a bad way.”

Do you agree that it's criminal behaviour and that there should be penalties?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: First of all, I think we're saying the same thing, in that indigenous business procurement is a very critical aspect of Canada's economic growth. We have to take it seriously and—

Mrs. Kelly Block: Minister, I asked a very direct question.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm going to give you a very direct answer.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Then I would ask you to get to that answer, please.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Great. As I was saying, that's why it's so important that we ensure that there is no fraud in the space of claiming indigeneity.

Now, as you know, Indigenous Services Canada—

Mrs. Kelly Block: Minister, my question was this: Do you believe it's criminal behaviour when a non-indigenous company claims to be indigenous in order to steal money from indigenous-owned companies through the set-aside?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would say that fraud is fraud. We do have an office that can look into claims of fraudulent behaviour and can apply a variety of penalties. I can't specifically give a general sweeping statement because, of course, different companies have different circumstances. However, I would expect that anyone who's contracting through the federal government would ensure that the laws of the land are upheld, including ensuring that fraud is not rewarded.

• (1135)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

Randy Boissonnault is a cabinet minister in the Government of Canada. He's your colleague. He falsely claimed to be indigenous in order to steal money set aside for indigenous-owned businesses. As the Minister of Indigenous Services, will you commit to holding your colleague to account for running a company that falsely claimed to be indigenous?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: First of all, I just want to reiterate that any false claims of indigeneity hurt the goal that I think you are obviously in favour of, which is to increase indigenous economic activity in this country. I would say—

Mrs. Kelly Block: As the Minister of Indigenous Services, what will you do to hold your cabinet colleague to account for trying to defraud the Government of Canada by claiming to have an indigenous-owned business when it wasn't?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think I've been clear that Mr. Boissonnault's company has never been on the list and—

Mrs. Kelly Block: That's not the question I'm asking. His actions speak for themselves. He claimed to be indigenous. He claimed to be running an indigenous business in order to access the set-aside that was meant for indigenous-owned businesses. Will you join other members of Parliament in calling for his resignation?

This file falls directly under your authority. If you can go back to the indigenous communities in your riding and tell them that he should not be held to account and that what he did was just fine, then I think they will have something to say about that.

You are the Minister of Indigenous Services. You have ministerial accountability. When you know for a fact that one of your colleagues has defrauded or has attempted to defraud the Government of Canada by claiming to have an indigenous-owned business for the sole purpose of accessing something that they shouldn't have access to, I think you have a duty to call that member to account, especially when it falls under your jurisdiction as a minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm really excited that we're talking about my riding—

The Chair: I'm sorry, but—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: —but my time is up, so I won't get to share with you about my incredible riding.

The Chair: I have to interrupt. That is your time.

We are going to Mrs. Atwin, and I'm sure you might be able to give a response during her time.

Go ahead, Mrs. Atwin, for five minutes.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's always good to see you in committee, Minister, as well as our important officials.

Would you like to speak about your wonderful riding and answer that question?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Just for a few moments. In the current iteration of my riding, there are 12 first nations in my riding. In the new riding set-up, I'll have another seven first nations in northern Ontario. I rely on my riding quite a bit, actually. In particular, many chiefs in my riding—Chief Mushquash and Chief Michano, for example—have given me great advice about how to hold this very colonial portfolio with the utmost respect for first nations, so I'm very grateful for their advice.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you.

You mentioned the criteria for being listed in the indigenous business directory. Can you speak to some of the checks and balances that exist to ensure that process has integrity?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Absolutely. I have a whole list here of what the department does in order to ensure that people are on the list. I think I mentioned earlier that every two years an audit is conducted of the entire list to make sure that people's credentials have not changed in some way or that the corporate structure has not changed in some way. As you know, increasingly, this is a good sign that corporations are growing, that they're changing and that they are acquiring other corporations. All of that must be verified on the list.

Of course, if a business is found to be non-compliant, then it is removed, and it can't compete for any contracts through the indigenous business directory list. Of course, there are a number of pre-award audits that, in fact since December 2023, led to the removal of two businesses from the list. There are a number of post-award audits currently under way. Those are conducted by third party auditors to make sure that we are really protecting the integrity of the goal of the program, which is to increase Canada's GDP and business economic development for indigenous peoples.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you.

You mentioned that, in 2019, there was a cleanup of the list. Did the eligibility change, or was it just a process for the department to look back and make sure there was integrity?

• (1140)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It was really a process of looking back and making sure that integrity was still there and that the list was as refreshed as we could possibly make it. As I said, oftentimes, people start off in one business formation and may acquire partners or other corporations. This is why the audit every two years is very important. It's so that we can understand how companies are changing over time.

I would say most companies are good actors. They will tell us when things are changing and keep their information up to date. I think all colleagues around this table are very diligently working on ensuring the economic success of indigenous businesses, and we have to do that by preserving and holding close the integrity of the process.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: We know this largely targets individual businesses or entrepreneurs. It could be tribal councils as well. It also impacts the communities.

Can you speak to what the knock-on effects are of investing in indigenous businesses? What are those larger economic impacts for communities?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's such an important piece of this story. It's the growth of not only indigenous business but Canada's GDP through economic activity.

We've often talked about the cost of keeping people out. In fact, there's a lot of study around the continued exclusion. It's estimated that keeping people out of the economy costs Canada's economy \$27.7 billion each year. That, to me, is just a dollars and cents reason, never mind any other reason for supporting indigenous economic success.

I note you're from the east coast. There are a lot of very successful businesses on the east coast that are run by indigenous peoples. I imagine you see that impact in your own community.

I'm from northern Ontario. The CEDC in northern Ontario has partnered with a number of different first nations organizations to conduct a study of the economic impact benefit of indigenous businesses in northern Ontario. There are older studies that estimate huge amounts of revenue for non-indigenous communities that have a high degree of indigenous economic activity.

Exclusion is really expensive. The fiscally smart thing to do is make sure that people have this opportunity.

The last thing I'll say is that it's exciting when I visit first nations that have corporations that are benefiting their communities. Many first nations, for example, are now holding their own contracting and construction companies.

The Chair: I'm sorry. That is our time, Minister.

Go ahead, Mrs. Vignola.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Hajdu, until very recently, the children of an indigenous woman and a non-indigenous man were considered non-indigenous. That was the way it was for 50 to 70 years.

As I recall, and this might not be correct, I think it was part of section 6 of the Indian Act that was finally repealed. In the case of an indigenous man who had children with a non-indigenous woman, on the other hand, the children were considered indigenous.

It can be complicated for those children of indigenous women who are now recognized—but were not in the past—and who want to own a business that is recognized as being indigenous. It can be complicated because, as you said, there are various lists. The solution might be to keep various lists.

Why couldn't there be just one list, drawn from your partners' lists, as you refer to them, assuming that the partners would provide updated lists that truly represent their community?

That would put an end to situations such as those of children who are recognized or not, as the all-powerful federal government pleases.

Moreover, a witness who appeared before the committee, Philip Ducharme from the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, said that its list, along with the list from various other organizations, was not even recognized as valid even though it is a list of indigenous organizations.

So how can we discuss this honestly and thoroughly in order to reach a consensus if we don't recognize what indigenous businesses and organizations do?

• (1145)

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: First of all, I think the study this committee is doing is going to be very helpful in identifying alternative pathways to making sure that we keep the integrity of the indigenous business procurement strategy intact. I think we're all saying the same thing. We want indigenous businesses to succeed. We want indigenous people to have control over identifying who is indigenous, and we want the government, ultimately, to get out of the business of identifying indigeneity.

The challenge will be to make sure we do so in a way that doesn't make it more difficult for people to procure from indigenous businesses but really keeps that same system of being able to quickly identify indigenous businesses to reach the target.

I have to say, we've done incredible work as a government over the last 10 years to meet the—

The Chair: I apologize, Minister, but that is—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I have exceeded my time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We only have two and a half minutes, I'm afraid.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: No worries. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, please go ahead.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Chair.

I'll just come back to the idea you were discussing, Minister, about meeting with stakeholders. Looking at the plan moving forward and what that's going to look like, do you have any timelines you could share with the committee on that work? Are there actual timelines? I heard a lot of back and forth about the integrity of the process, but we also know that, even with the process, people were fraudulently accessing these funds.

I understand that, to the level of integrity that you can have in the process, it's there, but it's obviously not there to the level that I hope we would all like to see. I'm just wondering if you could share a timeline, moving forward, for how this process is going to actually unfold and how long we are going to have to wait.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'd like to turn to Jessica to talk about the consultations that are under way and maybe a little bit about the timeline as well.

Ms. Jessica Sultan (Director General, Economic Policy Development, Department of Indigenous Services): Since 2021, there has been work undertaken by something called the transformative indigenous procurement strategy, which is set to wrap up in 2025-26.

There have been extensive consultations both with indigenous economic development organizations as well as directly with indigenous businesses and communities. We're taking the feedback directly from those engagements to formulate next steps and move forward in the timeline. We're looking specifically at the transfer of the validation and verification function of businesses and changes to the existing procurement strategy for indigenous business that are designed to address the opportunities that exist for continuous improvement.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay. Thank you for that.

At what point does the government get out of the business completely so that it's indigenous-led? I mean, this is what you're talking about, and I just want to say that identity is not owned by first nations people, for sure. I have status children. Their children will have a lesser status because I'm not indigenous. That's how it works. That means you can eventually get to a generation where you don't have status, and to me, this is the problem. The problem is that the government is involved. You're talking about getting out, but when?

The Chair: Answer briefly.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think Jessica was clear that the goal is that we would be able to have something in place by 2025, and I would say sooner, if possible. I'm in conversations with the partners themselves, who all agree that, as soon as possible, they would like to manage the lists. However, they also all agree that they don't want a dilution of procurement from indigenous businesses, so that's the balance we're trying to reach.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is Mr. Barrett for five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Minister, today, Canada's first indigenous justice minister and attorney general, Jody Wilson-Raybould, who, as you know, was fired from cabinet by Mr. Trudeau for speaking out against and trying to stop his attempted obstruction of justice, issued a statement online, which said, "A Prime Minister committed to true reconciliation would have removed Randy (and the other Randy) from Cabinet long ago. Instead we get to watch white people play ancestry wheel of fortune. So shameful and extremely destructive!"

Do you agree with that characterization?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I would say is that any use of indigenous identity in a fraudulent way undermines indigenous people.

• (1150)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay. We have a member of your cabinet, a member of your caucus, a 50% owner of a company that claimed to be wholly indigenous-owned, who applied for government contracts under that false pretense. To dispense with the pleasantries, Randy Boissonnault lied about who he is in order to profit, and in doing so attempted to disenfranchise legitimate and actual indigenous-owned businesses. Do you think that is appropriate?

If you don't think it's appropriate, do you think he should remain in cabinet?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I would say is that GHI, the company in question, was never on the indigenous business directory—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Right, so they applied. They—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I cannot, for example, weigh in on what decision points were made when GHI was awarded contracts. I can tell you, though, with a very high degree of confidence, he was not on the list that defined "indigeneity".

Mr. Michael Barrett: He wasn't on the list. He has previously said he is indigenous. He is now saying he is not. We know he applied for a contract saying he was indigenous, and this is the point Ms. Wilson-Raybould has made—that it undermines reconciliation.

Would you agree that a cabinet minister claiming indigeneity to win government contracts and remaining in cabinet undermines the government-stated goal of reconciliation?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think Mr. Boissonnault's statement is on record. What I can say is what I've just said, which is I think that, when people utilize false claims of indigeneity, it's extremely harmful to indigenous people and it's extremely harmful to the process of reconciliation.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you for that.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister, Mr. Trudeau, said this morning, "I'm happy that he"—Randy Boissonnault—"is continuing to lead on issues around jobs and employment and represent Alberta in our government."

You agree it's harmful. The Prime Minister doesn't. Do you agree or do you disagree with the Prime Minister's delight that Mr. Boissonnault, who is a fraudster, is continuing to represent Alberta in the Government of Canada, in your cabinet, and all the while attempting to disenfranchise indigenous individuals and indigenous-owned businesses?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think what is important here is that it's not up to me or any other person to police people's indigeneity. For me, this isn't about—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Minister, you say it's not for you to police, but he said he lied. He's the one who said he lied. You know that he lied. You just need to have the moral clarity to say that what he did was wrong, that it undermines reconciliation and that this type of fraud is unacceptable in your government.

The rest of my time goes to Mr. Genuis.

The Chair: You have 50 seconds.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Are there any instances of companies facing consequences for indigenous identity fraud that you can identify?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I don't think I can answer that question as I don't—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. I'll go to something else, but could you provide us with a list afterwards of any instances of companies that have faced consequences for indigenous identity fraud and what those consequences would be?

It's been reported that Randy Boissonnault's claims that his great-grandmother was Cree were false. Those were claims he personally made in the House of Commons. They have now been revealed to be false. Do you have any comment on that?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: My comment stands. On the issue of indigeneity, it's not for me to determine who is indigenous, but in general, claims of indigeneity that are false are very harmful to indigenous peoples.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Chair, just in the seconds I have left, the minister in the last round referenced the office of supplier integrity and compliance as being able to answer certain questions she is not been able to answer. I wonder if there would be agreement for us to hear from the office of supplier integrity and compliance at some point to help shed some further light on these things.

The Chair: There seems to be agreement.

That is your time.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks.

We'll finish up with Mr. Battiste.

Go ahead, please, you have five minutes.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm finding the whole Conservative narrative a little bit problematic. There are several different groups, whether it be academia or music, that have struggled with this question of who is indigenous and who isn't. They're asking you to be the overall overseer in policing this. I can tell you that first nations don't want you, as a non-indigenous minister, to tell them who is and who isn't indigenous.

However, I feel it is even more hypocritical because, when I was the Mi'kmaq coordinator for the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia and their citizenship code, I was watching as the Harper Conservatives stumbled through this whole process themselves with the recognition of the Mi'kmaq of Qalipu, where they, as part of their government, used a Métis test for first nations in Newfoundland that resulted in 100,004 applications for a first nations band.

The Conservatives would have you believe that everyone who thought they had a family member who was Mi'kmaq committed fraud. All across the Atlantic, 104,000 people believed they were eligible for this process because of the Harper-led Conservatives in this space of trying to identify who was indigenous.

For them to sit over here and say that we should have all the answers, when they stumbled through their whole process on this.... I had people coming to my riding office who said that they were approved originally as a status Mi'kmaq, but that now their status had been revoked because they didn't have things and they were asking me why this was.

It's a complicated process. I'm just wondering, Minister, if you think it's a little bit hypocritical, this whole narrative from the Conservatives trying to make something that's very complicated as simple as just that the minister should check a box and say, "This is what it is to be indigenous."

• (1155)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think that's a really great point from an indigenous person, which is that it should never be the minister pronouncing from this seat, or really any seat, with such few facts or information, on who is indigenous. In fact, indigeneity, as you point out, is complex.

There is an individual from a riding near me who has been raised in an adoptive family in a first nation. He is non-indigenous by birth, but he was adopted as an infant and has been fully adopted by the community. If you met him, you would not think he was indigenous. He studies indigenous issues. He speaks the language. He has been raised as an indigenous person since he was two or three months old. Even his own narrative is one of complexity. How does he find himself in this place and how does he navigate as someone who is deeply steeped in his family, his culture and his tradition, yet is fully non-indigenous by birth—by DNA?

I am really glad that you raised this point. All of this is the legacy of a colonial government that chose, in those early days, to divide people and dispossess people of land, culture, language and identity. Now we're all here grappling with how to get back to a place where indigenous people define for themselves who the members of their communities are. It's also that we make amends

as a country by ensuring that there is more equity in the systems that serve us all.

Thank you.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Minister.

In the time remaining, these are problems that we have to resolve collaboratively with first nations communities. They have their own first nations procurement organization they are trying to set up because they have identified their problems around this.

I know the question that has been answered is about what we are doing to make space for them to take control. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about where we are in the second-generation cut-off consultation that we started with the AFN in December to address these very concerns that are being brought to this table right now, in a collaborative approach with first nations youth and with first nations communities.

Could you talk about what that process is looking like?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you again for your help in designing how to get this off the ground in a respectful way. Even the consultation has been designed by indigenous peoples because it is such an emotional and heated space. Ultimately, what we're talking about is families.

For example, Chief Bernard told me a very moving story that, with one of her children, her grandchildren are ordained indigenous. On the other child's lineage, those grandchildren are not, simply because of the nature of who her children chose to marry. She told me how painful that is for that family.

Those consultations are under way. I believe they're happening in a very compassionate way because we chose to design those consultations together with first nations people, so that we could get to the answers of how to support people to reunite their families.

The Chair: You can say thank you. That's about it.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Thank you, Minister.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Colleagues, that is our time.

We are going to suspend to excuse the minister and bring our next set of witnesses in.

We are suspended.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1210)

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. We are back. Thank you for your patience.

We are not doing opening statements, I understand—wonderful. Before we start with Mr. Barrett, everyone, just be aware that IT is going to contact Ms. Guay, so please just direct your questions to the two gentlemen here in person in the meantime.

Mr. Barrett, the floor is yours. Go ahead, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: In Emily Nicholson's email of June 17, 2024, to Minister Joly's chief of staff, she wrote, "Both CNGNY HOM"—that's Mr. Clark—"and staff have been instrumental throughout this process, with the HOM providing the greenlight for the selection of the new residence."

Do either of you have personal knowledge of Mr. Clark's involvement?

Mr. Robin Dubeau (Acting Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Real Property and Infrastructure Solutions, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Mr. Chair, no, I don't have knowledge of his involvement.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Have you spoken to Mr. Clark about this matter?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Who relayed to you the information about this process?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: It's a process that was a long process. It started 10 years ago, and all throughout those discussions there was a lot of interaction with mission staff. We had a lot of discussions with people on the ground in the real property and administration team, and that information would have come from the administration team.

Mr. Michael Barrett: When asked how she got this information, Ms. Nicholson stated that she "engaged with the property branch"—specifically you, sir, and your team, including the gentleman sitting to your right. Did you communicate, Mr. Dubeau, or correspond with Ms. Nicholson about the summary that she had provided in her briefing note?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Chair, I did.... We interact very often with the deputy minister associate office, and in this case—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay, so what was the date when you had that interaction?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I had a written interaction with Ms. Nicholson on June 14, when I was fulfilling a request to provide details with regard to the transaction.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What about you, Mr. Hounzangbé?

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé (Director General, Policy and Planning, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Yes, I had an interaction with Emily Nicholson on June 16 on that matter.

Mr. Michael Barrett: What about on the matter of the correction that she issued by email on July 25?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: On July 25, I had an interaction with Ms. Nicholson, but it was a request for additional information and clarification, which I provided. There was no notion of correction at that moment.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There was nothing that covered her previously having said that the head of mission was dissatisfied with his residence and was looking for a change, or that he'd been instrumental in selecting the new place. There was no change in the verbiage that she'd used in that briefing note.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: We took the July 25 opportunity to add more information and clarify because the message that came out on June 14, which I provided, was done very quickly and tried to summarize it as much as possible. On the 25th there were more details in the message.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay. Since we're going back and forth about a lot of dates, could both of you gentlemen please table for the committee any specific correspondence on this, surrounding those two dates, between you and Ms. Nicholson? Would you be comfortable providing that to the committee?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: We can go back and...but I believe that the correspondence would be included in the package that has already been submitted to the committee.

● (1215)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay. It looks like Ms. Nicholson shared the truth on June 17 in her email, and then there was interaction with the minister's office, then this committee sent for Mr. Clark as part of our investigation, then she issued a correction and then her story changed from the truth to what she offered later. The chronology, the path...it appears like that direction came from the property branch.

Gentlemen, you're the subject matter experts. Who in Minister Joly's office did you coordinate with in making those corrections, those clarifications that she mentioned in the July email?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: As I explained, the message on June 14 was to provide information on that transaction. On June 25 we provided more information. I did not coordinate directly with the minister's office. I was in contact with Ms. Nicholson, who's the chief of staff of the deputy minister associate.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did you have any interaction with anyone in the minister's office?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, I didn't have any interaction with the minister's office.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Between June 14 and July 25, you had no interaction with the minister's office.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No.

Mr. Michael Barrett: In the original summary that you said you provided to Ms. Nicholson, you said Mr. Clark was instrumental.

Was that the information you provided to her and was issued hastily, or was that something she surmised on her own?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: That information is not contained in what I provided.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay.

She described herself as merely "an air traffic controller". She was just taking bits of information out of the air and landing them on a piece of paper.

If not from you—the responsible individual and subject matter expert—where would she have gleaned that from?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I think Ms. Nicholson testified to say that was a misstatement she put in her email. She expressed that her intent was to convey that the head of mission was aware of the situation and didn't object.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sir, she said you provided her with the summary.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I provided Ms. Nicholson with a summary of the transaction. There was no mention of Mr. Clark being instrumental.

The Chair: That is our time, gentlemen.

We'll go to Mr. Sousa for six minutes.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me get this right. The consul general in New York is one of the most important missions we have regarding our relationship with the United States, and the official residence is home to one of Canada's most senior diplomats. Is that right? Concerns about the condition of the official residence were first raised in 2014. Furthermore, the new official residence, as I understand it, now has one of the lowest costs per square foot. It cuts monthly costs in half, with savings of about \$115,000 a year. It represents \$7.4 million in savings to Canadians, as a consequence of a sale from the old residence to the new residence.

Here we have a senior diplomatic mission in the United States, which all provinces use and many Canadians have taken advantage of in trade negotiations and discussions. In fact, I understand that the head of the mission's residence supports diplomacy and trade, and has hosted over 50 official functions in the last two years, including business events, round table discussions, seminars and briefings. It's a very active residence in regard to the work it does with our counterparts and partners in the United States.

The question now before us is this: Was the minister involved in the decision to sell the old official residence and purchase the new residence? Did that happen? Was the minister involved in those decisions?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, the minister was not involved in that decision.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Is it normal, however, to have the tenant of a residence be aware of what is taking place?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: It's absolutely part of the process to make sure the tenant is aware of the plan.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Would you ask the tenant about the status of issues that are ongoing and about their ability to make that move?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: In building a statement of requirements, we solicit input from the mission administration, which may include some—

Mr. Charles Sousa: Therefore, regardless of the semantics being passed around here today, there's nothing untoward about having that discussion. Is that correct?

• (1220)

Mr. Robin Dubeau: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: All right.

Did Tom Clark have any influence in the decision?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, Mr. Clark didn't have any impact on or influence over the decision. The decision followed a process that

was supervised by a governance body, which had stakeholders from all over the department.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I understand.

Did Tom Clark approve the decision to sell or buy?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, he did not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: All right.

Did Tom Clark approve the decision to purchase another residence?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No.

Mr. Charles Sousa: How many other options were available for the purchase?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: We reviewed 21 apartments when we did the due diligence and the review.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I know it's a complex process. There are a lot of diversified elements that come to fruition when making a transaction of this size a reality and part of your overall, entire portfolio.

Can you briefly explain, for the purpose of this committee, the process that leads up to that decision?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Absolutely. I will certainly ask my colleague, Mr. Hounzangbé, to provide more details—

Mr. Charles Sousa: Please do.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: —because he's really the person in charge of the process. What I can say is that there's a very sophisticated process by which we do a full analysis of the whole lifespan of the assets. Then, this analysis goes through different kinds of lenses. There's legal. There's security. There's procurement. There are a lot of—

Mr. Charles Sousa: Out of curiosity, if Mr. Tom Clark says, "I don't like that residence," does that mean it won't be purchased?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No. It would not be—

Mr. Charles Sousa: It's not up to him.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: It's not up to him.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Can you explain more, Mr. Hounzangbé?

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: Yes. I was very involved in this transaction. I did oversee the transaction from start to finish. I was the chair of the real property governance committee that oversaw the transaction, and I did sign the transaction, so I'm very happy to provide some clarification elements.

It's a three-step process to review these sorts of transactions. The first one is to establish what the requirement is. In other words, what is the problem that we're trying to solve with a given property that is overseen and approved by governance?

The second step is to think about the options analysis. What are the different options that can resolve the problem identified in step one? That is, again, approved by a governance committee.

The third piece is the expenditure authority, confirming that all of the conditions have been met with the property and that it's been thoroughly reviewed by security legal stakeholders.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Can you explain Tom Clark's involvement, at the beginning and at the end?

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: I've had no interactions with Mr. Tom Clark. He was, to my knowledge, not directly involved in either the decision-making process to dispose of the current official residence or the selection process to acquire the new one. He was aware of our intentions and our plan, and it was clear to us, but his role was limited to making sure that the doors of the unit could be open for appraisals, visits or things of that nature.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mrs. Vignola for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here again, gentlemen.

We have received or should have received the rules relation to the condominium, but I don't think we have received those regarding the co-op.

Could they be provided to us so we can do a full analysis of the restrictions that have been mentioned at other meetings?

Moreover, I think Canada's current permanent representative in the United States also resides at 550 Park Avenue.

Is that correct?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Do you mean the United Nations?

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Yes, I mean Canada's permanent representative to the United Nations.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes, that's correct.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: So he does live at 550 Park Avenue.

Does Global Affairs Canada intend to sell that residence as well?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: That's a good question. I will answer and perhaps Mr. Hounzangbé will have something to add.

Although the two apartments are in the same building, their layout and overall condition are different. The one currently occupied by Canada's representative to the United Nations is on two storeys. It is completely different from the other apartment. Moreover, it was renovated in 2010–2011, so it is not in the same condition as apartment 12E, where Mr. Clark lives.

• (1225)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

Are receptions, official dinners and other similar events held in the apartment of Canada's permanent representative to the United Nations?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes, they are.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: The rules that apply to apartment 12E therefore also apply to the apartment of Canada's representative to the United Nations, but in what way are they not as strict as those for the consul in terms of receptions and other similar events?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: The same rules apply to both apartments. Receptions and similar events are held in both apartments currently,

and both are subject to certain restrictions. The mission informed us of those restrictions which are related to the co-op rules.

So the two apartments are subject to the same restrictions, but not necessarily to the same extent, depending on the number of activities and the number of attendees at the receptions.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

You said that the condo occupied by the United Nations representative was renovated recently. Did those renovations include modifications for accessibility, which was an issue with the consul's condo?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: To my knowledge, the renovations done in 2010 did not necessarily include modifications for accessibility as we understand it now, since that new legislation came into effect in 2021.

That said, the apartment's equipment was renovated to modernize and extend its life.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Is there an assessment of the future potential cost of updating that apartment as regards accessibility in particular?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: That's a good question.

I would have to check. I know we have not yet fully assessed that apartment as we did apartment 12E because we thought it was still in good condition.

So we have not completely assessed the apartment's condition, but that will be one of the elements we consider when we get to that stage. We will then decide what would be the best option to update it, if necessary.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much.

These questions are not directly related to apartment 12E, but I would like to compare the two situations since the two apartments are in the same building.

Should you decide some day to purchase a property for the United Nations representative, I doubt it would be apartment 111, 57th Street West, since there are no more apartments available in that building.

Let's get back to apartment 12E.

I'm wondering whether the opinions of former Canadian consuls general in New York had been considered in any matters relating to the residence and its functionality.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I do not have specific information as to whether the opinions of consuls general who lived in that apartment are on file. On the other hand, I have been in touch with the administrative officer responsible for assets and property since 2022. He has clearly stated that the three elements we mentioned had been reported to him several times since 2014.

There was the issue of the layout, which wasn't optimal for holding receptions and living there, the co-op restrictions, and the accessibility issues, which came to the fore in 2021.

Those are the three elements that the officer reported to me personally during the two years that I was responsible for that file.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Mr. Dubeau.

I will let my colleagues use the rest of my speaking time. I will have other questions later on.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks.

Before we get to Ms. Blaney, we're going to suspend for just 30 seconds to do another mic check.

We're back. Thanks for your patience.

Ms. Blaney, you have six minutes.

● (1230)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today with us.

For me, when I look at this process, it's really about understanding the policy. I understand the concern about people asking for things they shouldn't, but it sounds to me like you guys did amazing work. I just want to say thank you. I know you are very diligent.

Could you explain to me a bit more about when you're looking at these properties and moving toward having these properties purchased? What do you look at in terms of being able to resell?

Canadians want to know that their investment is sound and will hopefully bring equity to the country eventually. I'm just wondering if you could talk about value for money and the process that you go through.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Thank you for the question. It's a good one.

When we do the life-cycle assessment in a real property transaction, we look at all of the costs associated with an asset and all of the potential gain in value this asset may take. As I'm sure you understand, New York is one of the highest and most active markets on the planet, so we looked at what the appreciation of the asset over time could be. We are not in the business of creating capital gains out of our transactions, but we certainly look at what the potential value is for Canadians in terms of not only being able to use it...

It's well located in an area that will allow us to do our work and be conducive to our business type, which is diplomatic activities. However, those areas are also areas where we will normally have assets that will retain and gain value, so we look at this. This is not a primary factor, but it is certainly a factor.

Maybe my colleague Mr. Hounzangbé wants to add a bit to this.

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: The question was also about the policies around this, and that's definitely part of my area of responsibility.

What we're using when we're selecting a property in New York, or anywhere else, is chapter five of the 2014 property management manual. It acts a little like a checklist for us to see.... For this class of official residence, these are the different elements that we need to take into account. We check them against the requirements of the official residence.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much for that, Mr. Hounzangbé. I appreciate that.

One of the things I've found out through my own personal research is that the contractor that was part of building this building was a non-union contractor and actually had some really poor labour practices during his time building. A lot of people were out wages and whatnot. If there isn't a policy looking at the ethical building of a place that we might be buying, is there a process that we could go through to make it a policy or a regulation that we look at when we're purchasing?

It makes me sad to think that people suffered and now a representative of Canada is living in that space. I'm wondering if there's any thought about that or if it could be something that's explored.

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: Thank you for the question and the opportunity to clarify. Certainly, that's something we are sensitive to. We understood the context surrounding the construction of this building via the work of this committee.

Currently, I'm not aware of any policy that governs that area specifically. With any acquisition, the Government of Canada is sensitive to the labour involved and the impacts on labour. Certainly, that's something we can take under advisement, but at the moment, I'm not aware of any policy that dictates a review of the labour conditions before an acquisition is made.

● (1235)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I have no more questions, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Officials, you have now confirmed that the consular office in New York City is one of the most important missions in America. By extension, clearly, the consul general, Tom Clark, is in a very influential position within America and in its relationship with Canada.

Would you agree with that?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: The mission in New York is one of the largest and most important missions we have.

Mr. Larry Brock: Tom Clark carries a lot of weight. He was chosen for a reason, and his position carries a lot of weight. Do you agree with that?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I would agree that all heads of mission have an important status.

Mr. Larry Brock: Right.

Tom Clark appeared at this committee September 12, 2024. I'm going to read out his words. He said:

Mr. Chair, I will repeat once again, and please, if you wish, you can put me under oath for this. I had nothing to do with the decision to sell the old [official residence]. I had nothing to do with the decision to buy the new OR. I had nothing to do with deciding on its amenities or its location.

Officials, we have two official documents from your department that say the contrary. The first was obtained through an ATIP. It says the consul general, in April 2023, two months after his appointment and shortly after his famous jovial ride in the limousine with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, informed ACM senior management, "that the property is not suitable for representational activities, and it is not suitable as a residence and requires immediate replacement."

That follows up with an email from Emily Nicholson, which confirms that the consul general, Tom Clark, and his staff were "instrumental throughout this process, with [Tom Clark] providing the greenlight for the selection of the new residence."

These are two official documents from your department that cast serious discrepancies on the veracity of Mr. Clark's statement. It's time for you to stop running cover for Tom Clark and to confirm, as you've already confirmed, that you've been in regular contact with his office and that he was indeed instrumental. He asked for an immediate replacement.

Both versions of the truth can't be right at the same time. Tom Clark has been lying to this committee and lying to the public, and you and other officials at GAC are covering up for this lie.

What do you have to say about that?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Thank you for the opportunity to clarify.

One comment that is being referred to in terms of Mr. Clark... What Mr. Clark would have said is like third-hand information that would have been reported by his team to the project team that has—

Mr. Larry Brock: Let's talk about that.

What does ACM stand for?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: It's an acronym, a symbol, that we use in the department.

Mr. Larry Brock: Okay.

He says that he informed ACM senior management. I want a list of everybody he spoke to. Can you give me some names right now?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: The document says that ConGen informed ACM. ConGen is the mission, not the consul general himself, so the mission has reported that the official—

Mr. Larry Brock: What were the names of the officials at GAC that ConGen reported to?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: We are ACM here.

Mr. Larry Brock: You are all ACM.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes, it's both of us.

• (1240)

Mr. Larry Brock: Will you table any and all documentation to this committee in relation to that level of communication in April 2023?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I can go back and look at what exists, yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: Okay, so we have you two individuals in person. We have one who's having difficulty connecting.

Was she also involved?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, I wouldn't think so.

Mr. Larry Brock: Is it just the two of you?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: Okay.

What about senior management? Were they informed?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: We did inform senior management, meaning the deputy minister associate, of the transaction on June 14.

Mr. Larry Brock: Who in particular at the mission itself in New York City were you communicating with?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: My interaction with the mission was through the head of administration.

Mr. Larry Brock: Okay. I want names.

Can you identify all the names you were communicating with at the mission?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes, I did provide the name at the last meeting. It would be the management consular officer.

Mr. Larry Brock: Was that the only person?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: There are two of them, because there was a rotation in 2023. However, yes, I have been in contact with two individuals.

Mr. Larry Brock: Have you supplied this committee with those names?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I did.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Mr. Bains.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our department officials for joining us today.

I wanted to first ask if it's common for a new head of mission to express views on their accommodations at all.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Thank you for the question.

Yes, it would be common for any head of mission or any occupant of our provided properties abroad to have an opinion about their housing.

Mr. Parm Bains: What are those kinds of opinions like? Is it not operational? Is it suitable for meetings? What can we host here? What are some of the views they would want to express? If you go into a workplace in a highly important role ultimately, and you have a strategy of how you're going to carry out your duties, how are you going to establish relationships and all of these things?

What are some of the views that other mission heads have stated when they've been deployed to certain mission regions?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Thank you for the question.

As we explained before, if we stick to official residences, those are workplaces in which employees will be delivering all kinds of representation functions. All of the criteria associated with being able to deliver those functions could be subject to an opinion. Sometimes the accessibility would be one. The security could be one as well, depending on where they are in the world. There is also the seating arrangements, the number of people who can be accommodated, or the kind and type of event that can be hosted there. Its location sometimes could be subject as well to an opinion that it's not the best location, because it's not attracting the kind of business or business people they want to bring into the official residence.

The second half of the official residence is living quarters for heads of missions. They will often have opinions about the living quarters per se. You also have a division of the two. In the case of New York, there were issues about the floor plan layout not dividing very well the representational space and the private space, which also is an issue that is often raised by heads of missions.

Mr. Parm Bains: It's important for a workplace area to be separated from a living space. When you're conducting business, people shouldn't be walking through certain areas that are private. I understand that.

I know we've talked a bit about selecting the present property locations based on where our allied nations and some of our greater trade partners may be. For example, in the United States, we now have a new administration coming in. It's important for G7 nations to ensure their priorities are met. Friendshoring is important right now.

Can you speak a bit more to how important this specific location, where it's situated, is for some of our key trade partners?

• (1245)

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Thank you for the opportunity to provide a bit of detail. I'm sure my colleague, Mr. Hounzangbé, will have a bit more to add.

I would start by saying that, for those official residences, one of the most important criteria would be security. We have to be located in secure areas for our heads of mission, which are normally in the vicinity of our like-minded allies, as you mentioned. Being close to our G7, G20 and other allies is critical for the conduct of the kind of business we have.

As well, the proximity of local authorities is important in making sure that we can connect with what are the local businesses, as well as diplomatic and governmental organizations. Another factor we take into account is the proximity of our office. We want to be in

the vicinity of where the offices are to facilitate the transit between the two facilities.

I don't know, Mr. Hounzangbé, if I forgot anything that you would like to add.

The Chair: We have no time is what I think he wants to add. Perhaps we can get to it with Mrs. Vignola's round.

Go ahead, Mrs. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dubeau, could you remind me when the decision was made to purchase rather than renovate?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I will let Mr. Hounzangbé answer because the process unfolded under his supervision.

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: Mr. Chair, the official date is June 29, 2023.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

A consul is appointed for a four-year term.

Is that correct?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes, it is a four-year term. An extension can be negotiated.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Okay.

When they appeared before the committee last year, the appraiser and the real estate agent said the average price of a condominium in New York is \$1.6 million. The report said the same thing.

I asked what you can get for \$1.6 million because I'm cheap. They said it would get you a studio. I thought that if a single person lived in a studio and could use the shared offices on Lexington Avenue, that could be satisfactory.

Then I wondered whether consuls are always single or if they sometimes bring their children with them.

When you are planning to purchase a residence, do you consider only the current representative or the potential number of occupants over 60 years?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: That's a very good question.

If we purchase something for the next 50, 60 or 70 years, we want to have as much flexibility as possible as to the number of bedrooms.

It is certainly true that family size can vary over the years. The occupant could be a single person or there could be families of various sizes.

We want to make sure that it is something that will suit various requirements over time.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

People often talk about a lifespan of 60 years for buildings. That may be common in America in general, but I think it is unfortunate. In other places in the world, 60 years is a very short time. There are buildings that are 600 or 700 years old, and newer ones that are 200 years old.

Why do we not aim for a longer lifespan for our buildings?

It would be wonderful if Canada had a 200-year-old residence in New York. That would be extraordinary.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, we do not have time for a response, but perhaps you can provide that in writing to us.

We'll go to Ms. Blaney, and then we'll finish up with Mr. Brock and Mr. Jowhari. Then I need about 30 seconds for committee business to do the budgets, which went out last week.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: You can respond to her question, and then I have no more questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Okay, thank you for the opportunity to clarify.

We are not necessarily aiming for 60 years. In terms of our financial analysis, we limit it to 20 years, because it is usually the next 20 years that are the most critical.

There is not necessarily an end date. I don't know if there are any official residences that are more than 100 years old, but it is quite possible that some might be in heritage buildings or buildings that are of a certain age, or at least ten or so years old.

You have to consider the condition of the building. Refurbishing is usually considered at the midpoint of a building's lifespan. We try to determine whether the property can be used until the building is 50 or 60 years old. Then a decision has to be made. Is it better to renovate or replace the property? We might decide to renovate and keep the property. We do not necessarily have a preconceived idea based on the age of the property. We do a cost-benefit analysis, whether it is better to keep it or replace it.

• (1250)

[English]

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Brock for five minutes.

Mr. Larry Brock: When the consul general, Tom Clark, was exposed as a liar in relation to the documents that this committee received, he wrote a letter to this committee. He said all his comments to GAC officials, meaning the two of you gentlemen, were only made in passing.

I think we can all agree as to what that term of art means, "in passing". If I say this meeting went well, that would be a comment in passing. If this meeting didn't go well, that would be a comment in passing. However, when Tom Clark, the head of this most important mission in the United States, calls for an immediate replacement of the old residence.... If that came from his officials, they certainly wouldn't be doing that without his authorization. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I wouldn't be able to comment on this.

Mr. Larry Brock: Of course. The bottom line is that he is the head of the mission. Someone five, six or 10 layers below him is not going to make a decision to GAC that says, in my view, this official residence is no longer suitable and we need an immediate re-

placement. That comes from the top, and it's filtered down. That was a direction made by Tom Clark.

He influenced GAC in making this decision. Isn't that correct? He was instrumental. He gave the green light. He has lied to this committee. Do you agree that he has lied to this committee?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: To my knowledge, he didn't lie to the committee. To my knowledge, I received a comment that had been referred from his staff to our project management team. It's been written in the document—

Mr. Larry Brock: You think the words, "we need an immediate replacement of this extravagant penthouse in New York City", were just made as a comment in passing, like "how's the weather today" or "what are you doing for the weekend?" It's a direction. Do you believe that's a direction? It's an immediate replacement. I want a new residence. This old residence is not suitable for me. That's a direction. Do you agree?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Clark didn't mention that to me.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

I cede my time to Mrs. Kusie. Thank you.

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much.

Are head of chancery and head of administration the same currently at CNGNY?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes. The management consular officer is the head of administration. I mentioned head of administration for simplicity.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Perfect. Thank you so much.

Who were the heads of property under Mr. Bot and Mr. Veenstra, please?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Who would report to them?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: That's correct.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I wouldn't know their names.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay. Could you please find out the information and get that to the committee, please?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I can look it up, yes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

Under the current platform structure, does WSHDC still have responsibility over CNGNY?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Can you repeat the first acronym? I'm sorry.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: It's WSHDC. Does it still have responsibility in the platform over CNGNY?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay. That's interesting. That's changed.

When I left the platform, Washington still had responsibility over CNGNY. In your opinion, as an employee at a mission, would you do anything you possibly could to fulfill the request of the head of mission?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: If you're at the mission, you try to do what is best for the operations of the mission, which includes the head of mission being able to deliver what he needs to deliver.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Certainly.

Would you say that the head of mission has the final say in terms of decision-making regarding the mission?

• (1255)

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Regarding mission operations, the head of mission has the authority.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you for that.

Mr. Chair, I will say to Canadians who are watching that I was at Global Affairs Canada for close to a decade and a half. I served in missions abroad, and I can tell you that the head of mission has the final say on all the decisions.

You, as an employee in the mission, will do whatever you possibly can to fulfill the will of the head of mission. If the head of mission wants an event, you will do whatever you can to create that event for that head of mission. If the head of mission wants a relationship built, you will do whatever you can to create that relationship for the head of mission. If the head of mission, in this case, wants a new property, you will do whatever you can in an attempt to get that head of mission the new property.

You said yourself that the mission informed you. Unfortunately, it seems to be that you continue to run cover for Mr. Clark, so I will ask you one final time: Did Tom Clark lie to this committee?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, Tom Clark didn't lie to this committee.

This decision was made independently by headquarters, and he didn't have influence over it.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Jowhari, please.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Dubeau. Welcome back to our committee.

Hopefully, after Mr. Clark, you can go back to the work that's very important, especially during this time.

I'm going to ask a bunch of very pointed questions. Hopefully, the answer is yes or no, and then we'll move on.

Let me start at the highest level. Did Prime Minister Trudeau have anything to do with or any influence on the purchase of this property?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, he did not.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Did Minister Joly have anything whatsoever to do or any influence on the decision to purchase this property?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, she did not.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Did anyone within the office of Minister Joly have anything to do with influencing the direction that this process was going?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Did Mr. Tom Clark, the head of mission, have any influence whatsoever in making the decision and influencing the process that your colleague Franck Hounzangbé had in influencing that decision?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, he did not.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Do heads of mission have influence in deciding whether they would like or not like to reside in a premises that's given to them?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, they would not.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Can you draw a difference between a desire to build or improve a relationship with a G7 or G20 mission and all the team members mobilized to make that happen as opposed to buying a property? That seems to be the last conclusion, that the head of mission gets whatever they want.

The basis for that comment is that, if a head of mission sees fit to build or strengthen a relationship with one of the G7, then that happens. What's the difference between that type of mandate, goal or desire? Compare that type of influence with their ability to be able to choose a residence to live in.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: What I would say is that, in this particular case, it was a great opportunity for us to solve a decade-long problem that we had with an aging property that was not meeting our requirements. We acquired a smaller and less expensive property, creating savings, not only immediately but also in the long term, for Canadians. I would say that was the driver.

Basically, there was no influence other than goodwill to fill a requirement that we had and to create savings for Canadians.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

There was no influence at any level. The process was followed. We've shown a positive value. There are processes in place to be able to divest from the portfolio. Can you give us a range of the number of initiatives as such that exist right now across GAC to be able to replace a residence for the head of a mission?

• (1300)

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Right now, working from my memory, I don't think we have a lot of projects to replace official residences, but we do have a lot of projects to renovate, maintain or upgrade some of those official residences. We came out of the pandemic with a large backlog. We had a lot of work that had been deferred. Our intention was to put our efforts into basically catching up on those delays.

We do have a certain number of official residences that are being looked at right now in terms of options analysis or projects that we would like to conduct there to bring them up to our standards. I don't have a number directly in my head.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: This mission office change is part of an ongoing process that the department is engaging in. Is that correct?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes. That's correct.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I know that you have a couple of budget items to pass, so I'll yield the rest of the time back to you.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Dubeau and Mr. Hounzangbé, thank you for joining us.

Ms. Guay, thanks for joining us for a second time. You're close to the record for the most appearances without actually being able to speak.

You are all dismissed.

Quickly, we have three budgets to approve.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair...?

The Chair: Can I get to my budgets first, please, and then return to you?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

The Chair: The first one is for the official residence of the consul general. It's \$2,500.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Wonderful.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's the budget and not the cost of the residence—right?

The Chair: Yes. Thank you.

With regard to the PBO meeting, we had him on for next week. The supplementary estimates have just come out, so we're going to move him back, because I don't think his report will come out in time.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Yes.

The Chair: We'll move it back. That's \$750.

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

The last one is for the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner and the procurement ombudsman. If you recall, we said we'd do one hour of each, but we have not scheduled a time yet.

Can we can have approval for that as well?

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you very much. I appreciate that, because I've already signed them in advance.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Genuis. Please be quick, if you don't mind, so we can get out of here.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sure. Thank you, Chair.

I think we're into committee business now. I'd like to move a quick motion that relates to what was discussed in the first hour.

I move:

That the committee call on Randy Boissonnault, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, to immediately resign from cabinet and that this call be reported to the House.

Mr. Charles Sousa: On a point of order, Chair, are we in committee business?

The Chair: Yes—for the budget.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I thought we concluded that already.

The Chair: We haven't concluded the meeting yet. I'm sorry.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Okay.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Colleagues, I think it's obvious why this is being put forward and why this is important. We have a minister of the Crown who pretended to be indigenous. He was described repeatedly by the Liberal Party as being indigenous. He described himself as having a Cree great-grandmother in the House of Commons, which turned out to be false. He misrepresented his identity. We have heard repeatedly how serious indigenous identity fraud is.

This minister did it for perhaps a variety of reasons, but clearly, one of the reasons—

Mr. Charles Sousa: I have a point of order, Chair.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —is that he was able to—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Genuis.

Go ahead, Mr. Sousa.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I'm having some misunderstanding here. Can the clerk define whether or not we are in committee business with the budgets? I'm being told that this is not committee business.

The Chair: We were in committee business for the budgets. We hadn't adjourned. It's committee business until it's adjourned or it's not committee business.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I understand, but moving budgets is not the same as committee business.

The Chair: Go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard): Yes, Mr. Chair, it's true that, for instance, when a committee does pass some budgets, for the purpose of writing the minutes we will say that the committee indeed proceeded with committee business.

Also, I did notice that the chair I think mentioned that he wanted to do some committee business.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I think you've ruled the opposite in the past, Mr. Chair.

● (1305)

The Chair: We are in committee business, and Mr. Genuis has the floor. I understand what you're saying, but we are in committee business. Mr. Genuis has the floor, so I'll put you on the speaking list after Ms. Blaney, if you wish.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, this may be an uncomfortable subject for the Liberals, but the fact is that we just had before this committee the Minister of Indigenous Services, who affirmed that indigenous identity fraud is a very serious matter and pointedly refused to defend the employment minister at all.

We have a situation where, unbelievably, you have a minister of the Crown who sits in the government whose company pretended to be indigenous in order to try to access government contracts. His company, GHI, did get government contracts—

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —and it's still eligible for government contracts.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Genuis. Excuse me.

Go ahead, Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: Chair, was this on the budget, or was this on the agenda? This is not related to the budget.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can you guys learn the rules, please?

The Chair: It doesn't have to be related to the budget. I stated that we'd go into committee business at the end. We did that, and we did not adjourn, so we're still in committee business.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

Look, the minister who was here wouldn't defend Mr. Boissonnault—

Mr. Wayne Long: I have a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —and it seems these Liberal MPs are using fake points of order to try to defend Mr. Boissonnault.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Genuis, but we have a point of order.

Mr. Wayne Long: Chair, I'd like to challenge your ruling, please.

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Clerk, call the vote.

The Clerk: The question is whether or not the committee would like to sustain the chair's ruling.

Mr. Chair, we have five yeas and five nays, so you must break the tie.

The Chair: I will sustain my decision.

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

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, please continue.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

This is striking, that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry.

An hon. member: We need you to talk a little quieter. It's the mic....

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's so striking, but I'll try to contain myself. Thank you.

The Liberal Minister of Indigenous Services is unwilling to defend Randy Boissonnault over this issue of indigenous identity fraud, yet you have Liberals who are trying to—

Mr. Charles Sousa: Excuse me, Chair. What is the motion?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: —avoid the discussion of this issue.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I have a point of order, sir.

Is there a motion? I don't know what he's talking about.

The Chair: He read the motion into the record.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I didn't quite understand that motion. I didn't quite hear it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Then why did you challenge the chair over it if you didn't hear the motion?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Because we're not in committee business.

The Chair: We are in committee business and I have rules....

Colleagues, please, let's address this.

Mr. Charles Sousa: I haven't seen that. I'd like to understand it clearly.

The Chair: It was read out, but I'll ask the clerk if he can send it to your P9.

Continue, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The motion has been moved, and it has been distributed. However, if members would like it read again, then the motion is as follows:

That the committee call on Randy Boissonnault, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, to immediately resign from cabinet and that this call be reported to the House.

Conservatives and, I believe, all other opposition parties are calling on the Prime Minister to remove Randy Boissonnault from cabinet. This is the minister who pretended to be indigenous and who told the House of Commons that he had a Cree great-grandmother, which he now admits is false. He has made all sorts of contradictory claims about his identity, and the Liberal Party said that he was indigenous at various times in the past.

This is a minister who engaged in indigenous identity fraud, and he did it perhaps for a variety of reasons, but one of which enabled the company he owned to claim that it was indigenous while bidding for contracts from the government that he is also a part of. He's a minister. He owns a company as well, and that company was bidding for contracts from the Liberal government. He was claiming to be indigenous, and the company was claiming to be indigenous-owned, but neither of those things were true. This was designed to advance the commercial interests of his company and to make himself wealthier.

That is the definition of corruption. It's identity fraud. It's corruption. It's lying about his identity in order to steal resources that should be going to real indigenous entrepreneurs and to real indigenous communities. If that's not the type of serious offence that leads to someone being removed from cabinet, then I don't know what is.

Mr. Chair, we have five Liberal members sitting across the way who tried to prevent me from moving this motion. None of them are in cabinet. I'm sure all of them would like to be in cabinet, yet Randy Boissonnault remains around that cabinet table despite his outrageous, offensive conduct.

The questions today are these: Are we going to be able to pass this motion? Are we going to see the Liberals who were passed over in favour of Randy Boissonnault filibuster to defend this corrupt pretender, or are we going to see this committee be able to get to a vote on this motion?

I hope we're able to get to a vote on this motion so that we can send a clear message that indigenous identity fraud is serious. It's wrong, and it's been done in this case in order to advance the commercial private interests of a minister of the Crown. This is deplorable stuff. The minister must be fired. I hope we will be able to get to a vote quickly so that this minister will be fired and a clear message will be sent to the House on this. Once we get to a vote, all committee members will no doubt be able to proceed with other things, so let's get this done.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1310)

The Chair: Thanks.

Next I have Ms. Blaney and then Mr. Sousa.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I just want to ask, first of all, if the clerk could send us a bit of a calendar. I know that's a side note, but I heard a lot of things that we're going to do. It would be great to have a calendar.

In response to this, I know that our MP, Blake Desjarlais, has very clearly asked for the resignation of this minister. I will say that I find it very sad and very frustrating. I am a white woman. When I was four, I was adopted by an indigenous family. I am very clearly white, but I belong to a family that is indigenous. I have to walk that line very carefully, and I do it very carefully, even when it hurts my family, because they feel that I belong to them.

When somebody is careless—and I'm not going to attribute ill intent—and I'm not going to say that he was a bad person who is outright lying. I don't know the story of his family. However, when you do these things, you must do it very carefully to respect a people who have been marginalized since the very beginning of contact. To be careless about it is very upsetting to me because it doesn't acknowledge the historical wrongs that have been done and the long-term implications of those actions. When somebody isn't very clear on who they belong to and where they come from, and they make comments, it is harmful.

I agree with this motion. I don't necessarily agree with some of the drama that I'm seeing around it, but it makes me very frustrated to see a human being tell those stories of history like they belong to him without clarifying that they belong to him. Who gets to share a story is very important, and how you do it is very important.

We heard today testimony from the minister about trying to get it right, and it's never going to be right as long as it's held within a colonial system. We need to make sure that the level of accountability is incredibly high and that we don't mistake a colonial histo-

ry and people losing connection to their traditions and their families because of that colonial history.... Those are complex stories, but when they are told, they had better be told correctly.

I'm very concerned and I don't understand why we have a minister who not only isn't being removed but doesn't gracefully and with dignity withdraw himself. Maybe there was a misunderstanding, but I have to say, when you're going to speak, you had better speak honestly and you had better make sure that what you're saying is correct.

It is wrong, so I will be supporting this motion and I certainly hope that we can get this work done. I really don't know why he hasn't stepped down.

• (1315)

The Chair: Thanks.

I have Mr. Sousa and then Mrs. Block.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Chair, I believe Mr. Boissonnault, the minister, is appearing before this committee. He's agreed to do so.

I am of the understanding that there is lineage within his family with indigenous members, and he's apologized for not making that clearer.

Regardless of all of that, it's also been very clear and it's been stated multiple times that the company in which he was a partner some time ago never received...and has never been put on the indigenous list. That doesn't exist. He never received contracts with regard to being an indigenous company. He's not on the list, he hasn't received contracts and he's made it clear that he's not involved in the day-to-day operations of this organization.

The purpose of this motion is to call into question the work of cabinet and of the Prime Minister's Office in determining, as we go forward.... It's not really relevant to this committee in terms of goings-on with respect to what the decisions of the cabinet should be.

I know they're so eager to be in power. They're already putting curtains up, trying to move furniture, trying to determine how to renovate the various residences and what they're talking about, but my goodness, we have ongoing...in regard to the workings of trying to enhance the contracts and the economic success of the members of the indigenous community. That's the whole point of going forward and of some of the practices that we have in place. We have systems to curb those who may try to be fraudulent in those activities with regard to any matter of procurement.

Mr. Chair, this motion is certainly all about politics. It's a great opportunity for them to get a few more social hits on YouTube. It's about their opportunity to get out there to provide even greater misinformation and manipulation of issues, just as they're trying to do with the residence in New York.

We have some serious...in regard to trying to help members of the indigenous community. We have very serious abilities to improve their lot in life. They have done an extraordinary job of getting involved in procurement and contracts with government. In fact, I'm very pleased by some of the meetings and engagements that I've had with some of their financing groups and so forth. That allows them to be at the forefront of major engagements in Canadian economic activity.

The members opposite, when they were there in power, so to speak, were certainly trying to engage and be powerful in their accusations, in their slogans and in claiming, falsely, the notions of people's integrity and engaging with, frankly, their own manipulation.

Frankly, it's somewhat disgusting to see the degradation they have, putting people through the wringer, from the bureaucracy onwards. Unlike the Conservatives of the time who were charged and who were found guilty...that was serious. What we're doing right now is trying to ensure that the indigenous community is protected and that those actions and activities have been taken.

When they were there, Mr. Chair, they destroyed that relationship. There was no real truth and reconciliation. There was no proper engagement with members of the indigenous community. In fact, it was the opposite. Now they're standing here, trying to be all holier than thou, when they're in fact the ones who were to blame from the get-go.

We're doing what's necessary to provide for true partnership and for true engagement. They're taking and abusing the system for their own gain and not for the gain of indigenous communities and certainly not for the gain of other Canadians who are working hard to establish that relationship.

I will be voting against this motion.

● (1320)

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Chair.

I appreciate our colleague's intervention at the very beginning. I believe she's captured very well the essence of the issue that we are trying to address.

It is welcome news to hear that Minister Boissonnault will be attending committee. That's a bit of a surprise to us, but it's a very welcome surprise. I do want to say that—

Mr. Charles Sousa: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Just to clarify, I believe he's appearing before the ethics committee.

The Chair: You stated it was here though.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Yes, I was wrong.

A voice: It was welcome.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Yes, absolutely. That's why it was a very welcome announcement here at committee.

I want to be clear, because we heard from the minister, over and over again, that Minister Boissonnault's company, Global Health Imports, was not on the IBD. That's not the point. The point that his company was not on the list is not the main issue here.

The main issue is that we have a parliamentarian, a cabinet minister, who has misled his caucus, has misled the cabinet, has misled parliamentarians and has misled Canadians in an attempt to defraud the government out of money that was intended to go to an indigenous-owned company. It was intended for indigenous-owned companies. It's a small set-aside.

We were very genuine, I believe all of us around this table, when we agreed to undertake this study on indigenous procurement and to get to the bottom of what was happening. We've heard from many witnesses, many indigenous organizations and witnesses, who have identified for us that there is indeed fraudulent activity taking place within this program.

I'm going to state it very clearly. The Liberal members around this table and Liberal members in the Liberal caucus cannot claim that this is a serious issue and that it must be looked into and then not deal with their own colleague who has admitted to misleading Canadians, who has admitted to misleading Parliament and who, by the Minister of Indigenous Services' own admission and testimony, is involved in fraudulent activity by the very nature of admitting that he misled Canadians by telling them that he was indigenous when he was not.

That is the issue that is before us. It is our duty to hold a member of Parliament, to hold a member of cabinet, to account when they lie about who they are, specifically to defraud Canadians out of their hard-earned taxpayer money and to defraud a program that was intended for somebody other than themselves.

I would ask that every member around this table support this motion so that we can demonstrate to Canadians that we are willing to take this situation seriously and that we do not support what this individual has done and the misrepresentation of his office and the authority he has. I would call upon all members to support this motion and call for the resignation of Randy Boissonnault immediately.

The Chair: We have no one else on the speaking list...

Colleagues, I'm going to remind everyone one last time, as I stated at the last meeting, to avoid this issue. I will announce the next two speakers. It's going to be up to you folks to maintain the speakers list if you wish to. If not, I'm going to go straight to a vote in the future.

I warned about this last week—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Let me finish, sir.

Colleagues, could you keep an eye on that, please, so that we can avoid that kind of conflict here?

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen, and then I have Mr. Bains on the speaking list.

• (1325)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Just as a point of order, with all due respect, a debate is about listening and speaking, so I might not know that I want to speak until I've heard the last words that have been spoken.

I respect that ruling, but I would encourage you to at least keep the door open to the possibility that we might want to engage in debate as to the last words we heard.

The Chair: That is why I recognized Mr. Bains and brought it up. It is not up to me to maintain the debate, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Bains, go ahead, and then I have Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Parm Bains: I want to add a little bit to this debate on this motion.

I see members across the way who also, like me, are serving on the ethics committee, where Minister Boissonnault is scheduled to appear. Maybe this could be one of those times that we can just have a friendly understanding. Many of the members here are also serving on that committee. They have the opportunity to ask these very same questions. He's already scheduled to appear. Instead of tying up the important work that we're doing here and duplicating that work, it may be an opportunity for us to agree that members who may be here quite often would come and sit on the ethics committee and have the opportunity to ask their questions there as well.

We do have an upcoming meeting where the minister is scheduled to appear. He's appeared there multiple times already. He's answered several questions on the magnitude of all of the investigations that are being directed his way. I think this could be a good opportunity to have an understanding and to have the questions that Mr. Genuis is bringing forward asked there in that committee. The minister is already scheduled to appear there, so I think if we can all agree, that could be a good solution to moving forward from here.

The Chair: Mrs. Vignola, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you for giving me a few minutes, Mr. Chair.

As I said at the outset, I have women friends who for much of their life were not recognized as indigenous because their mother was indigenous but not their father. That mistake was rectified no more than 15 years ago. They are older than me and I am 47. So they were raised in their mother's culture for many years but never had the right, under Canadian law, which claims to know everything, to seek legal recognition of their status and their true identity. So I am especially sensitive to this issue.

I did not hear the minister say that he is indigenous or is not. I hear what people are saying. On the one hand, people say he is indigenous, but from a grandmother who doesn't exist, while on the other people say that is not exactly what he said. So I reserve my right, as usual, to do my own analysis and not fall into partisanship.

His resignation has also been raised in the House of Commons since there is a question of privilege—

Voices: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: May I continue? Thank you very much.

I'm sorry, but I am more accustomed to a classroom where the students listen to what others are saying and then answer, as opposed to people talking to each other from one end of the table to the other, as is the case right now.

A question of privilege is before the House of Commons on this exact issue, and there is a study by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. This question of privilege must be resolved before any decision is imposed. Every person has the right to be heard on the question of privilege that is before the House of Commons on this very matter.

Before people demand that the minister resign, as people are doing here right now, at the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, I invite you to look at the whole situation, since the subject has already been raised, but it has not been thoroughly examined, and there are two versions of the story if not more.

Once the question of privilege has been examined and the study by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics has been completed, should the committee and parliamentarians determine that that is exactly what the minister said and that it isn't a partisan interpretation, it will be up to the minister to do the honourable thing, or it will up to the Prime Minister to make an honourable decision in this regard. This could literally amount to impersonation, which is serious.

I trust my fellow parliamentarians who are discussing this matter currently, both at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics and in the House of Commons, and I would like us to respect the process that has been established and requested by the Conservative Party when it raised a question of privilege in the House regarding this situation involving the minister.

I reserve the right to listen to my colleagues from the Conservative Party who want to discuss this matter in those two places, and that right requires me to vote against the motion introduced today by that same party, the Conservatives.

• (1330)

[*English*]

The Chair: We have Mr. Jowhari and then Mr. Sousa.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am trying to make sense of why members of this committee are trying to bring a motion on a study that we all agreed on. The importance of it is clear to everyone. I personally was the one who brought it up during the ArriveCAN study. I asked the Dalian president what kind of value their contract added to the indigenous community, how many employees they had who were indigenous and how they had built....

This study is very close to my heart and our team's. I think that a motion like this, coming out of this study and this committee, will actually do a lot of damage to that great work. I'm really looking forward to the report and some of the recommendations coming out of the report. I think this is going to do damage to it.

There are many unknown factors. What we know right now is that there is a media report. There is a claim that the minister had talked about the link to lineage under two different indigenous groups. He talked about his interpretation, and he has apologized.

Now, also, on the company that he partly owned, my understanding is that he had divested long before and was not on the list, as you heard today. There was no contract awarded. I'm not sure whether there was any contract requested, or there was no contract awarded. There was no set-aside.

When I look at this motion, I say, "Well, the way that we are asking that the minister step down and then report that to the House is almost...." If I want to be really partisan and if I want to draw a parallel, I can say, "Hey look—do you know what?—the leader of official opposition has refused repeatedly to get security clearance and to go and get the briefing that's needed." I see claims come back that say, openly, that these are the members of Parliament who are on the list.

Is it now fair and is it the right thing—not only fair but the right thing—to say, "Well, you know, let's pass a motion that the leader of the official opposition should step down because he's refusing to get the security clearance and then go and report it to the House"?

I think we should forgo this motion. I'll be voting against it.

Thank you.

● (1335)

The Chair: Mr. Sousa is next.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Chair, we've made it clear that this is being discussed at the ethics committee. We are all concerned about making sure that the indigenous community is protected, and I say that we stop the discussion and go to a vote.

The Chair: Is there anyone else?

We will go to a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We're adjourned.

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