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Chair: Mr. John Brassard



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC)): I call the meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 123 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Before we begin, I want to remind everyone to keep your ear-pieces away from the microphones so that no one, including our interpreters, will experience any feedback.

We are under committee business. I saw hands go up.

First, we have Mr. Barrett, Ms. Khalid and then Mr. Fisher.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: My point of order is that my understanding of the rules, Mr. Chair, is that the motion by Mr. Bains, being a privilege motion, supersedes any other motion before the committee and that we should be returning now to Mr. Bains' privilege motion. He agreed to allow a meeting to happen, when I don't think he had to on Tuesday, without going through his privilege motion.

Mr. Chair, my belief is that you should come to Mr. Bains.

The Chair: As I explained in the last meeting, Mr. Housefather, when we left the meeting, the meeting was adjourned; therefore, debate was adjourned.

When a member has the floor, they can move the appropriate motion if they want to resume debate. I mentioned that in the last meeting, and that's where we're going to start off today.

I've acknowledged that Mr. Barrett has the floor. When a member, perhaps Mr. Bains, has the floor and wants to move a motion to resume debate, he can certainly do that at that time, Mr. Housefather.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I also have a point of order.

I had let you know before the committee started that I would like to be first on the list, and I'm not sure why you didn't recognize me first. I would appreciate it if you would recognize me first.

The Chair: Yes, we've been through this before when hands have gone up before the meeting. As soon as the gavel dropped, I

saw Mr. Barrett's hand go up first, then I saw you and I saw Mr. Fisher, so—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You knew that I had—

The Chair: The meeting hadn't started at that point, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: But you knew, Chair.

The Chair: You could contact me at eight o'clock in the morning to tell me that you want the floor, but until that gavel drops and I acknowledge who has the floor, it doesn't work that way. Mr. Barrett has the floor—

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair...?

The Chair: Mr. Green, I'm still on Ms. Khalid's point of order.

Mr. Barrett had the floor, as determined by me, when the meeting started and the gavel dropped, so I'm going to continue with that.

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'd like to challenge your ruling on that, Chair.

The Chair: We have a challenge of the ruling on the list of the speakers. It's a dilatory motion.

Do we have consensus to challenge what the speaking list will be? We don't.

Just to be clear, the challenge is who has the floor and, Ms. Khalid, I'm assuming that you're challenging that you had the floor before Mr. Barrett. Is that correct? Okay. That's certainly not the way that I saw it, but we will go to the vote.

Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): The motion is that Ms. Khalid has the floor.

Mr. Bains.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): I vote yes.

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Parm Bains: You said the motion is that she has the floor.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: What is the motion?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Hang on. The motion is that I acknowledged Mr. Barrett at the beginning and Ms. Khalid has challenged that, so—

• (1110)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Why are you arguing if you agree? That's how he voted.

The Chair: Hang on a second, Mr. Barrett.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Just give me a second here, please.

• (1110)

(Pause)

• (1115)

The Chair: I welcome everybody back.

To recap, when the meeting started, I identified Mr. Barrett as having his hand raised first and moved the floor to him. Then I had Ms. Khalid and Mr. Fisher following Mr. Barrett's intervention.

Ms. Khalid challenged the ruling of the chair. The difficulty in challenging the ruling of the chair is that the ability of the chair to identify, with the help of the clerk, which members have their hands raised first is a very subjective matter. The difficulty, as well, is that—in challenging the chair on what is, effectively, not a rule or procedure but a very subjective matter—it forces the chair and the clerk to have less discretion with which to do their job identifying which members are to speak.

I identified Mr. Barrett. There is nothing to be challenged in that regard.

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

• (1120)

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll take responsibility for the fact that I'm tuning in virtually, but I want to note that I wanted to intervene on behalf of Mr. Housefather's point of order. I wasn't given that opportunity. Things rolled pretty quickly, and then devolved even faster.

I am hoping to have the opportunity to also contribute to Mr. Housefather's point of order.

The Chair: I appreciate that, Mr. Green.

Just give me a second here. The problem we have is that the challenge was that the floor wasn't given to Mr. Barrett, which it was, so I'm not sure, even if we were to move to a challenge of the chair, who would have the floor next, because we could devolve into a situation where we have continuous challenges of the chair on who has the speaking order. That's the risk we run here, but I'm prepared to play the game if everybody wants to play this game.

Mr. Green, I am going to go to you on your point of order, sir. Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: I do appreciate that.

I will say, maybe to back off some of the partisanship, that I think, given the best of your abilities, you do the best you can in this committee. I do disagree with you from time to time, but I do not think that you're overly partisan.

I would say that on the point of order regarding privilege, I wanted to go on the record on that point of order, which was the order raised by Mr. Housefather before things moved rather quickly, sir. The reason is that, in your ruling, you ruled that this committee was not the adequate committee for you to be able to rule on that point of privilege and that, indeed, it did have to go to the House.

For that reason, and given the seriousness both of the allegations that were made against Mr. Bains and given the seriousness of what I consider to be our parliamentary privileges, while I am not in the position to opine on whether or not a line was crossed, I certainly think that it was breached. It was right up against that line and, for that reason, I am in full support of seeing that motion of privilege go to the Speaker for consideration.

What I'm not interested in is devolving into a game of shotgun in terms of who sees who as first as it relates to our speakers list. I don't think procedurally that will get us anywhere. I think that as a committee we've done the best that we can to move through this.

Again, we do have, through our Standing Orders, the ability to participate virtually. I'm doing that here today. I'm glad I am, because I don't want to be caught up in what's happening there, but having said that, procedurally I feel that I didn't get a chance to contribute to Mr. Housefather's point prior to everything going off the rails.

I would say, just in closing, sir—I won't take up more of your time—that I would not support a challenge on who saw who first, because, as in the points you've raised I think it's a very subjective thing, but I would be willing to challenge who should have precedence procedurally in this meeting today as it relates to Mr. Bains.

That's what I wanted to put forward to the members. I hope you can take with seriousness the allegations on the point of privilege that Mr. Bains raised and that Mr. Housefather, I think, rightly provided to you as having precedence in the order for this particular meeting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. I appreciate that intervention, Mr. Green, and just for the benefit of the committee...and I appreciate your support on challenging the subjectivity of the chair and the clerk's responsibility to identify those who are deemed to be able to speak. That is one of the difficulties of being a chair, figuring out as hands go up...and I have seen people literally throw their bodies across the table to try to get the attention of the chair. It is rather difficult.

I will say that there are other avenues that members can take, through motions, to be heard if they choose, and that's not necessarily by challenging the chair. It's by suggesting that a particular member be heard. We have seen that many times in the House, and it's certainly something that can be dealt with at committee as well, just for the benefit of members on that.

Go ahead, Mr. Housefather, please.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you.

• (1125)

The Chair: Is this on a point of order, sir?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It is, sort of, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I believe you've made a ruling on the issue of whether or not Mr. Bains should have the floor. My understanding is that your ruling is, no, he shouldn't, and that you're allowed to go to either Mr. Barrett or Ms. Khalid, whoever would have the floor.

I know I have to challenge that as soon as I can. I believe this is the first time I've had the opportunity, so I want to challenge that ruling: the ruling that you're not going to Mr. Bains on his point of privilege. That would be what I would challenge.

Thank you.

The Chair: In effect, what you're suggesting—and because you had a point of order, you can't move a motion—is that the challenge, then, is to go to Mr. Bain first, based on the fact that we're dealing with a privilege motion. Again, Mr. Housefather, it goes down that pathway where the subjectivity of the selection process of hands needs to stay with the chair. If that's what you're challenging, and you're very clear on that, then I will accept the challenge in this particular case.

However, again, the responsibility of the chair is to deal with rules, procedures and regulations as they relate to the committee. On the subjectivity of the selection of members to speak, the chair needs to have that latitude. The clerk certainly needs to have that latitude. I'm hearing a little bit more clarity in what you're saying, so I am going to accept that you are asking that Mr. Bains be heard. Is that correct?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, Mr. Chair, I'm basically saying that the floor should first go to Mr. Bains, because he had a privilege motion that we should be coming back to.

The Chair: That's what you're challenging me on, sir.

I'll just go to the clerk for a second, but I see what you're saying.

The clerk just wanted me to restate this for the clarity of all the members.

What we are actually dealing with is that Mr. Housefather is challenging the chair's decision to not allow Mr. Bains to speak first on his question of privilege.

[Translation]

I hope that this is clear for everyone.

[English]

That's what the challenge is. It's a challenge, so it's not subject to debate.

Do we have consensus on that? No.

The clerk is reminding me that the question becomes important, then.

Shall the decision of the chair be sustained in my determination that Mr. Barrett...or are you challenging me, then, Mr. Housefather, that the question of privilege becomes a priority and that Mr. Bains should be given the floor? That's what you're challenging me on. Is that correct?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, that's correct.

The Chair: It's not a question of whether my decision is sustained to recognize Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: No.

The Chair: It's on this issue.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It's a question of whether Mr. Bains should have the floor. I'm challenging your ruling on that.

The Chair: On the matter of privilege...

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, it's based on the matter of privilege.

The Chair: All right. We don't have consensus. We're going to go to a vote on this.

The Clerk: Has everybody understood the terms of the motion?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: No, I don't understand.

Can you go over it one more time, Chair?

The Chair: The question is to challenge the chair's decision and allow Mr. Bains the opportunity to speak. It's that the question of privilege takes priority over any other matters.

Am I correct in that, Mr. Housefather?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It is correct, Mr. Chair, but I think, again, the lack of clarity....

I believe the question is this: Should the ruling of the chair be sustained? That's the subject of it.

However, if you don't believe the ruling of the chair should be sustained, you're voting no. If you do sustain the ruling of the chair, you're voting yes. I think that's where we're confused, because we're muddling in other questions.

• (1130)

The Chair: Okay, but my ruling, to be clear, Mr. Housefather, was to give Mr. Barrett the floor.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes.

The Chair: The problem we have is exactly what I said earlier. We could end up going down a pathway where every time the chair identifies somebody he or the clerk believes has the floor, that can be challenged.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: No, Mr. Chair, I'm not challenging.... I think there are two different things. I understand the question is this: Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained? If you don't agree, you vote no. That's, I think, where there's a confusion.

What I've challenged is not that you gave the floor to Mr. Barrett. It's that a privilege motion should supersede anything else. As a result, we had a privilege motion, and the floor should go to Mr. Bains. It's not challenging who you saw or didn't see first.

The Chair: I think that's what we're voting on. We're voting on the fact that you're challenging the fact that my decision to identify Mr. Barrett is not going to occur and that you believe that the privilege motion should supersede. I think everybody's clear on that. I think we've said it three or four times. That's what you're challenging my decision on.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Can I get that in writing?

The Chair: Do you want that in writing?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes, please.

The Chair: We're going to have to suspend in order to do that, Mr. Barrett.

Ms. Khalid, you have a point of order. I'm going to come back to that after we have the request from Mr. Barrett to put that in writing.

• (1130) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: I see your hand. Before I go to you, Mr. Brock, I want to thank everyone for their patience.

Mr. Brock, you have a point of order. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): I thank you for the indulgence you've granted the committee. I know we are well beyond one hour into our start time.

There's another option to consider to resolve the logjam we find ourselves in and move the business of this committee forward. It was referenced a couple of times on the last occasion by, I believe, MP Kurek. That's the issue regarding an apology.

I think the time has come that I make an unreserved apology to MP Parm Bains. It was one thing for me to repeat the evidence of former MP Kenny Chiu in relation to the evidence he gave on his last appearance. It was quite another for me to take those words and that message and amplify it in such a way as to justify expanding our study on misinformation and disinformation.

I took a step back and reflected on the comments I made, Chair, on the occasion. I essentially spoke for close to 45 minutes. Certainly, an independent observer could come to the conclusion that I was amplifying a message in the same fashion that Kenny Chiu had accused MP Bains of doing.

That, in my view, was unparliamentary. I offer my unreserved apology to you, sir.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Brock. I appreciate it.

I'm going to Mr. Bains right now.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I sincerely say this: I think it's extremely important that we continue to do the important work that this committee does.

I want to acknowledge and recognize Mr. Brock's apology. I accept the apology. I think the issues around misinformation and disinformation are far too important to continue to spread more misinformation and disinformation. I appreciate the apology Mr. Brock has given, and I accept it.

I withdraw my motion to take this matter to the House on a question of privilege.

The Chair: I appreciate the interventions by both members. I believe the work of the committee is critically important as we near the end of the session.

I appreciate your words, Mr. Brock.

I also appreciate your words and your offer to withdraw the motion.

I need unanimous consent to withdraw the motion.

(Motion withdrawn)

The Chair: Thank you.

That takes me back to where we were at the beginning of the meeting. I had acknowledged Mr. Barrett to start. I'm going to Mr. Barrett.

I have Ms. Khalid and Mr. Fisher, and I see Mr. Cooper's hand up, so that's where we'll start. We are still in public on committee business. We are checking on additional resources and whether they are needed. I will advise you when the clerk is aware of that.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, I want to move the following motion that, following media reports and Minister Randy Boissonnault's testimony on Tuesday, June 4, the committee call the following witnesses to appear: Stephen Anderson, co-founder of Global Health Imports; Kirsten Poon, Navis Group; Malvina Ghaoui, The Ghaoui Group LLC; and the other "Randy" referred to in Minister Randy Boissonnault's testimony who was formerly or is currently employed at Global Health Imports.

Chair, I've sent this motion in both official languages to the clerk for distribution. I'd like to make some brief comments on it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

We did have a motion that was presented at the last meeting. This has some changes in it from what I can tell, so I'm going to rule the motion in order.

I'm going to ask the clerk to distribute the motion to the members of the committee. The motion is in order, it's on the floor and I'm going to ask Mr. Barrett to start.

Go ahead sir.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, we've heard in Global News reports about Minister Randy Boissonnault. These reports have raised concerns with respect to Minister Boissonnault's involvement with Navis Group, which has lobbied the government—the government for which he is a minister. He received payments from that company during his time.

This, of course, raises questions under the Lobbying Act and the Conflict of Interest Act.

With respect to Global Health Imports, this is a company that Minister Randy Boissonnault co-founded. He owns 50% of the company through an Alberta numbered company that he wholly owns. In his evidence at the last committee meeting, he offered that he believed that Stephen Anderson, his partner, is the only other shareholder in that company and that they are, in fact, partners.

Global News this past week released text messages that refer to a “Randy” in the decision to solicit a \$500,000 wire transfer. This is now the subject of court proceedings. There are questions about fraud and wire fraud. The minister asserted to the committee that at this small company that he co-founded, in spite of the fact that in these text messages there's talk of a “partner call” and “Randy”, it's another Randy and he is not that Randy at the company.

It's important, then. We had the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner here, who testified that, in spite of having sent a letter previously saying that an investigation wouldn't be pursued, new concerns and new questions had been raised and he would examine the matter and then undertake a self-initiated investigation, should that need to occur.

The lobbying commissioner is reviewing the matter. Of course, due to the potential for Criminal Code violations and Lobbying Act violations, the RCMP will have to review the issue to see if criminal charges need to be pursued.

This motion is germane to the work the committee undertook at the last meeting. I think we were all surprised by the reports in Global News.

I think that having these witnesses come forward to get clarity and provide Canadians with assurances that all of the rules have been followed, specifically the ones whose commissioners fall under the purview of this committee—the lobbying commissioner and the Ethics Commissioner—with respect to the Lobbying Act, the Conflict of Interest Act and the conflict of interest code for members.

If rules haven't been followed, then the committee and Canadians would be aware of that and look forward to the expeditious passing of this motion so that we can get transparency for Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

On the motion, I have Ms. Khalid, Mr. Fisher and then Mr. Cooper.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This is not what I was expecting to speak on today, but I definitely will.

We just experienced in this committee an apology for defaming someone in this committee. I really appreciated the recognition of that defamation. I've been on this committee for a couple of years now, and I have watched private citizens get hauled in here and get really rammed through the wringer on issues that are pure speculation, that are based on conjecture and that are just based on making an accusation and then expecting that everyone will follow through. It seems like being presumed guilty until proven innocent.

What that does, Mr. Chair, is put people at risk. It questions their integrity and it really does not help how we function as parliamentarians and as ministers in this place. I think this specific motion is exactly the same. Are we going to drag private citizens who have nothing to do with the Conflict of Interest Act and the lobbying code into this committee and shame them publicly? If so, for what?

It is the minister who has a link to the Conflict of Interest Act. The minister came in here and spoke quite unequivocally about what he has and has not done and what he is and is not responsible for, and I don't think that we, as a committee, are in a position to go down that path. It is not helpful to who we are, it is not helpful to our democracy and it is absolutely not helpful to how we conduct ourselves as parliamentarians.

I would like to think that we have integrity, but the way that this is being framed and the way my colleagues are constantly and consistently being put through the wringer “just because” is not fair, and I do not want to watch private citizens go through that same thing. I'm not sure why the Conservatives are so determined, Chair, to continue the character assassination and once again drag regular Canadians before the committee to attack them and impugn them in order to get more social media clips. It's not helpful to what we're trying to achieve here.

I want to review what we actually heard on Tuesday and some of the reality of the issue. I want to talk about the June 4 Global News story.

First, let's be honest about what we're talking about here with this latest Global News story. The reality is that the basis of the story is pure speculation. There is absolutely no evidence that Minister Boissonnault is the person who was mentioned in these texts, and if the minister is unequivocally saying that he is not the person mentioned in these texts, then we should believe him. If any one of us were in that same situation tomorrow—God forbid—would we rely on our colleagues for integrity to ensure that we are taking care of our democratic process and making sure we are letting the rules we have collectively agreed to rule how we govern ourselves as parliamentarians and as Canadians?

The minister was very clear. He said that he is not the person in those texts and in that conversation, and I think that we should believe that. Mr. Anderson, who sent the texts, is quoted in the June 4 Global News story as saying that the minister is not the person referenced in those texts.

• (1220)

The Ghaoui Group is quoted in the same article as saying that it never had any contact with the minister. Of course it didn't, because the minister had ceased to have any role in the operations of this company a year before any of this happened.

Chair, there is really a circular nature with the Conservatives' argument. They incorrectly claimed that the minister was still involved in the company. He explained that he was not, but they expect him to prove that he was not by asking him to provide information about the company he is no longer involved with.

That reverse onus, Chair, is not something that we as parliamentarians should be dealing with. We are elected by our constituents to be honourable in this place and to work with integrity and honour, and I believe the majority of us do. I'm not just talking about the Liberal benches; I know that the majority of my Conservative colleagues feel the same way. They're here to serve their constituents, and I would remind them of that. Serve your constituents, folks.

This issue, very much like the apology we heard today to Mr. Bains, is the same. Let's not defame each other for clicks, for clickbait, for fundraising opportunities or whatever it is that you want to achieve by doing this. Let's not drag in private citizens to this committee to put them in a situation in which they're being harassed, a situation that is harmful to them. I think this motion should not pass.

If we focus on the date that this conversation is supposed to have happened, Mr. Chair, between "a" Randy, as has been previously noted, on September 8, 2022, Minister Boissonnault was in Vancouver. He was attending a cabinet retreat. We know this was a day that was especially hectic, because it was the day that Queen Elizabeth passed away.

The Conservatives are expecting us to believe that sometime during that day-long cabinet retreat meeting, when ministers didn't have access to their phones—even in our own caucus meetings, Chair, we don't have access to our phones—and as cabinet was being updated on the death of our head of state, Minister Boissonnault was stepping in and out to take phone calls about a business he had resigned from a year earlier. I find that really difficult to believe.

Dragging people through the mud is not acceptable. We have to do better. We have to do better, as committee members, on the issues that we bring forward.

Chair, I watched my own motion on artificial intelligence and social media and their role in the privacy of Canadians being completely killed by this committee. After we had spent months and months on it, and after I had personally experienced two kids committing suicide in my riding because of cyber-bullying—whose funerals I went to—for that motion and study to be quashed after the amount of time we spent on witnesses coming in and the amount of time our analysts spent on putting together a report....

• (1225)

I think we have better things to do in this committee. I think we need to focus in on what issues we need to discuss in this committee. We need to ensure that we are talking about and studying and working on the issues that Canadians want us to work on and that are having a real impact on Canadians, rather than conjecture and rather than vilifying each other for clickbait, for social media. I'm sure there's some competition going on somewhere as to who can get more "likes" based on what their tweets are.

Does that do us any favours? I don't think so, but that's exactly what this motion is about. It is not about making sure that our Lobbying Act is really performing for Canadians. It is not about making sure that our Conflict of Interest Act makes sure that we are accountable to Canadians on the work that we do and how we conduct ourselves. It is really about dragging people through the mud, whether they are parliamentarians or ministers or whether they are private citizens.

That is not acceptable, Chair. We have to do better. We have to make sure that the work this committee is doing is the work that Canadians need us to do at this point. This motion is very frivolous. It has no objective other than clickbait. It has no objective other than to create a frenzy. It has no objective other than to defame

Canadians, private Canadians as well as parliamentarians. I think we can do better than that.

Mr. Chair, it's been a difficult couple of weeks, I'm sure, for a lot of us. How we conduct ourselves in this chamber is very important. How we raise the issues that are important to Canadians is very important. The fact that we cannot come together and figure out what Canadians need most at this time is disappointing. I think what Canadians need most at this time—my own youth council has said so, my own women's council has said so, and my constituents write to me on a regular basis—is to know whether we can have trust in our democratic institutions. Can we have trust in the people we elect?

The fact of the matter is that when we defame one another in this place, just as Mr. Brock apologized to Mr. Bains earlier today for defaming him, can we put those partisan politics aside, come together and look at the issues that Canadians want us to work on? Do we need to study the Lobbying Act and find loopholes and fix them? Absolutely. Do we need to make sure that parliamentarians are held to account for their actions, by each other and by Canadians? Absolutely, we do, but should we be defaming parliamentarians? Should we be dragging private citizens into this committee and making speculative accusations against people? Absolutely not.

Where we have the privilege of representing our communities, we also have the responsibility of being parliamentarians with integrity. I don't think it's right for us to be accusing people of being guilty and then dragging them into our committee to prove that they're innocent. That's not the right approach. That's not the Canadian way of doing things. We have to be better.

There are so many more important things that we can do collectively on a consensus basis. I've worked with all my colleagues at this table on consensus on issues that matter to each and every one of us.

• (1230)

Let's not go down this route of clickbait. Let's not go down this route of defamation. Let's find the right way of solving the issues that each and every one of us may have, and that our constituents tell us we may have.

How do we improve our democracy? It's not by defamation and it's not by public flogging; it's by having reasonable conversations with each other. It's by talking about issues, not people. I think we have the ability and the opportunity to do that. I encourage all of my colleagues at this table to do that.

Folks, we are privileged to be sitting at this table. We have an obligation to Canadians to set a standard, to work with Canadians to ensure that we're doing right by them, and to set an example of how we should be functioning as a country. All 338 of us have an obligation to do that.

By presenting motions like this in this committee, and motions in the past, to drag people in and tell them to explain themselves and prove that they're innocent.... Why are we doing that? It's not fair to industry, it's not fair to private citizens and it's not fair to each and every one of us.

I think we really need to rise above and ensure that we are working in a non-partisan way or a multipartisan way—whatever way you want to frame it—to ensure that the issues our constituents raise for us are the ones we are working on in this committee.

I would have loved to continue our study on artificial intelligence, TikTok and social media, and how they impact young people especially, but that's not what we're doing. We really need to ensure that we're getting there, that we're working on those issues and that we're protecting Canadians, because ultimately, that's what they elected us to do, folks.

I'm not sure why I am sitting here, trying to help everyone here understand that we are elected to do the job of representing Canadians and that motions like these, in which we defame folks and drag them through the mud, don't help anyone. In fact, what they do is take away from the trust that Canadians have in our democratic institutions. Clickbait is not democracy. It's not the way to ensure that democracy happens for us.

Everybody at this table understands procedure in our House, in our committee and in committees across Parliament. We need to do better. We need to ensure that we are serving Canadians.

Mr. Chair, I'll come back specifically to the points raised by the Conservatives about the minister's integrity. I know the Conservatives are really clinging to this latest speculation about the minister being cleared by the Ethics Commissioner, because they know full well that the Ethics Commissioner looked into their previous allegations against the minister and didn't find anything to cause an investigation.

Mr. Barrett actually wrote to the Ethics Commissioner, who is a neutral party and is there to say whether or not there have been any violations of the Conflict of Interest Act. The Ethics Commissioner reviewed that letter and found no reason to look into this any further, so why are we using valuable committee time to continue this witch hunt? It makes no sense to me, other than just for clickbait.

• (1235)

The commissioner could not have been clearer in his testimony. He said explicitly that the minister—and I quote—“complied with the rules under the act and the code”. He reiterated in French: It appears that the minister has complied with the requirements of the code and the act with respect to matters relating to these companies, and therefore there is no need to proceed with a study.

I know how much the Conservatives give regard to our Ethics Commissioner. I think he's a great guy. He has come and appeared before our committee many times, and we always had the highest regard for him, but God forbid that his opinion deflects from the Conservative clickbait.

I think that if we are going to give regard to somebody whom I hold in high regard, and their opinion, then we need to be quite consistent with how we apply those rules. If the commissioner is

saying that there's nothing here, that this is a big bad nothingburger, then why are we spending time in committee going over this? Why are we trying to defame? Why are we trying to use committee to provide clickbait and to question the integrity not just of parliamentarians or ministers, but of private citizens who are just trying to do their work? I think we're better than that, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to leave my comments there.

I'm hopeful that we can come together on a consensus basis and find better things to do with our time here in this committee. We have Canadians to look after. We are elected to represent, we are elected to highlight and we are elected to reform what challenges Canadians have, and I don't think that this is one of those issues. I think the Conservatives need to stop using precious committee time to further their partisan objectives, to raise funds off clicks and to fundraise off the defamation of parliamentarians, of ministers and of private companies in Canada, and not just in this instance. I've seen it over the past number of years.

I think we can do better. I think we need to get back on track in this committee and actually start talking about the real issues of ethics, of privacy, of access to information, and I think the only way we can do that is if we are all willing to put our partisan politics aside and come together for Canadians and are willing to ensure that we put our heads together on a consensus basis and actually talk about the real issues Canadians deal with on a regular basis, and this is not one of them. This is far, far from it, Chair.

I'm hopeful that by the end of the meeting today we can come to a consensus and say, “Hey, folks, you know what? We're not going to defame anyone. We are not going to haul people before this committee just to throw them through the wringer. We are going to ensure we work on the real issues Canadians care about, whether it's about access to information and ATIPs or whether it's about privacy and the role social media and artificial intelligence have to play in how we conduct ourselves as a society.” Those are real issues that Canadians care about.

I will leave it right there, Chair, and I'm hopeful that my colleagues will find consensus.

Thank you.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

We have roughly an hour until 1:45.

Mr. Fisher, you're next on the list.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, one thing I asked when I was brand new to this committee, which was only three or four weeks ago, was, "Do we have a work plan? Are we working forward on a work plan?" You, with your sense of humour, said, "Welcome to the shooting-fish-in-a-barrel committee", which I did find quite funny.

I've sat on committees for eight and a half years and I've sat on committees with many ministers, and I've seen opposition members ask tough questions of the ministers, as they are wont to do. What I saw Tuesday I didn't like. I didn't find it to be very fair. I've seen in the House, during things like committee of the whole, that questions and answers are equal. I don't recall that at committee. There was a lot of talking over and a lot of interrupting—by everyone, in fairness. It wasn't a great committee meeting to be a part of.

There are 338 of us in the House of Commons, and we're all colleagues. I do remember that in 2015, 2016 and 2017, on a regular basis, I'd cross the floor in the House and sit down with a chum from another party or a friend from the NDP or something. I don't see that happening as much now. I'm not sure if that has to do with the fact that there's less committee travel these days than there used to be.

Again, going back to Tuesday, I found that there was a level of rancour that I don't think people back home want to see us engage in. I certainly know that people in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour do not want to see that level of partisanship.

I think that if you ask the average Canadian, they'll say you're innocent until you're proven guilty. The sense that I get is that some of the motions that have come forward recently—not just in this committee, but in a lot of committees—are based on speculation or a media report that vilifies or almost presents that person as guilty, and it's in the debate of the motions as well. I've seen names banded about of general members of the public and heard that they've received vitriol through their emails, their phone numbers or through social media. That's not fair.

We sign up for this. In 2014 and 2015, I knocked on 26,000 doors in that 78-day election campaign. I don't think Canadians want to see this.

I used to be on the environment committee and the national defence committee. I used to hear from people on a regular basis saying, "We like the work that you folks are doing." We would get consensus on things. We did some really good reports.

When I came on this committee just recently, we were talking about disinformation, misinformation and malinformation. The chair mentioned numerous times to the witnesses that this was incredibly interesting. I could see in the chair's eyes that he was riveted on what was coming up at committee. I made a comment the other day about how this type of motion—these off-the-cuff, shooting-fish-in-a-barrel motions that come to committee, which members have every right to move—interfere with the work plan.

We really do need to continue studying things of the kind that MP Khalid spoke to. Probably less than five or six hours after I joined this committee, Mr. Chair, you sent out a work plan, which was quite interesting, with some really good things and meaty topics that we could really dig into, but make no bones about it: This

motion and motions like it do interrupt a really good work plan. They just do.

One of the things I heard on Tuesday very clearly from the Ethics Commissioner was that he was not looking to investigate this issue. What was presented to him was not worthy of an investigation. He said very clearly that he could not find any cause for an investigation. Then yesterday in the House of Commons, Conservatives said—wrongly, I will say—that the commissioner has opened up an investigation on what we heard Monday in a Global News story.

• (1245)

That's not true. He did not say he was opening an investigation. He just didn't say it.

There was also something else. I don't know where I heard it. Maybe I read it on social media. It was that he was reopening the investigation. That's also not true. There was no investigation. The minister followed through on all the things the minister was required to do, as MPs, as PSs and as ministers always do. What the commissioner did say—exactly what he would say when he heard comments made by Mr. Barrett—was that he would look at it and decide if an investigation were warranted.

Now, committees of the past would say that we have an officer of Parliament here who we have tasked with doing those things on occasion. What would a normal committee do back in the day, before they got so partisan and vitriolic? The committee would say that the Ethics Commissioner said he's going to look into these new allegations. Normally, that's what you would do. You'd say, well, that's what the Ethics Commissioner is going to do. He's going to look into those new allegations. Then you would wait for him to come back with the results of that investigation.

If you surveyed 100 people, regular Canadians, and asked them if that seemed logical after there were some new allegations made in a news story in the media, would 95 of them say that it makes sense that we would wait until the person tasked with ensuring that a minister of the Government of Canada has done what he must do to fulfill his requirements in that role? It makes perfect sense.

I don't want to put words in his mouth, but the commissioner said he could be back by August, I think he said, which makes sense. I mean, we rise in a week or two. That's the person who's tasked with checking into those types of things. To say in the House of Commons yesterday that the commissioner has opened up an investigation, or to have someone somewhere suggest that there's a reinvestigation or a reopening of an investigation, that's absolutely false. That is not the case.

Again, as he is supposed to do, he has said that he absolutely will look into these new allegations, but he never said he will investigate. He never said he will reinvestigate. He never said he will open an investigation. The minister was very clear, I felt. He point-blank answered the questions that he is not this other person.

MP Khalid talked a lot about regular Canadians. I touched on it for a minute, but imagine inviting Kirsten Poon. What would that do to her future? She would be dragged through the mud in this meeting by the Conservatives with partisan attacks. She would receive social media hate and vitriol, as I have recently and as other members on this side of the House have. It would probably ruin any potential future for that person.

Is that what we want to do? Do we want to drag people up to the bar of the House of Commons, interrogate them, ruin their lives and attack their mental health because they're business people? I'd like to think that we're not going in that direction.

Something that the commissioner said the day before yesterday, which I thought was really prudent and good to hear, was "I deal with facts," not speculation. I suggest we allow him to dig into the facts to see if this is something that he sees as worth looking at. I don't think it's up to us to litigate that. I don't think it's up to us to invite regular Canadian business people here and grill them before a committee of Parliament. I say, let's let the commissioner look into this.

• (1250)

There was some talk also on the weekend about Minister Boissonnault's phone records. I felt that it was a little bit like those legal shows that used to be on NBC all the time. It felt like we were getting into some pretty interesting territory.

I'll go to the clerk for maybe a head nod about Minister Boissonnault writing to the clerk this morning and sharing the phone records of September 8, 2022.

That's through the chair to you, Madam Clerk.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ)): Yes.

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you so much.

Were they distributed to the committee members?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. René Villemure): Yes.

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher: That is excellent sharing.

Every member has those records. We can see very clearly that there are no calls on that phone from 11:12 a.m. to 5:37 p.m. Pacific time, which covers, the entire time frame Global News talks about in its coverage and the time frame Mr. Cooper—one of the two Michaels—brought up and talked about at length at our last meeting. Within that time frame, everyone involved was supposed to be on a partner call at 12:30 Pacific time. Clearly, from this phone record, Minister Boissonnault—that Randy—was not on that call.

I want to take a quick moment to thank Mr. Brock, as MP Khalid did, for his apology. Oftentimes, we do the bidding of our parties and take a hard stance, but we have to remember, as MP Khalid said, that we are here to represent our constituents and do that in the

best possible way. I thank Mr. Brock for those comments. I found that to be a sign of a possible positive directional move for this committee. I'm not sure how long that will last. I see some smiles and some minor head nods among some of my colleagues across the way.

However, I heard the minister very clearly answer the questions. No, he was not that person and no, he wasn't on those calls or text messages. Again, going back to the things we said earlier, are we guilty before we're proven innocent? Are we going to use speculation and news stories to drive the way this committee does its work? Are we going to bring in regular Canadians and business people from across the country, grill them and have them face scrutiny they don't deserve? I hope not. I look at my colleagues and say that there are ways we can ask the tough questions. There are ways we can get the answers people need.

We have our commissioners, and we can rely on them. It is their job. They are tasked with doing those jobs. The commissioner here on Tuesday is a neutral and independent officer. He will make the call on whether the act was violated based on the information he has. Regarding the speculation, he said he'll look into it. I don't know why we wouldn't just pause while he does that work. I don't see head nods to support waiting for his thoughts on this.

I would also hope we are not in this business for anything other than to represent our constituents and we're not trying to score political points. I will say that it's been very clear on committees, for the last year or so, that the clip rules. I've seen MPs get their clips, close up their iPads and their work is done. They got their clip and downloaded it to social media. They may or may not say things like, "Reach out to the Liberal members of this committee and tell them you're angry with them." I see that happening.

I follow MP Khalid on social media. I love her social media. I will tell you that I've seen some horrifying comments made her way. If you listened to her words today when she spoke here at committee, she talked about caring and respect. On one of our many suspensions, I watched her go over and give another member a hug. That's what we should be aspiring to. We should be aspiring to respect each other and work together to find the answers and not be throwing speculation to the wind and hope to get a wonderful piece of social media gold that will rile up supporters—who are probably already supporters of the members who do this.

• (1255)

It's like going to a debate. Sometimes you're not really converting any new voters. Your followers on social media tend to be people who support you already.

I met Minister Boissonnault in 2014 at the Edmonton Pride parade when I was a municipal councillor. I will tell you that I was impressed with him that day. He did everything he could to keep up to the then-leader of the Liberal Party. One of them remained dry. One of them did not. I'll let you guess which one was out of breath and which one wasn't out of breath.

What I saw was a person who cared about people. I saw a person who cared about his community and wanted desperately to represent the people in that community.

He said to me before that he represents everyone in the community, not just the people who vote for him. I'd like to think that we're all that way, so I would hope that we would get to a point where we don't make these allegations.

We can put the tough questions out. I've been in committees for eight and a half years, and I've seen some pretty heated conversations between opposition members and cabinet ministers, but I haven't seen what I saw on Tuesday. I haven't seen what I've started to see creeping into other committees now, which is a level of disrespect for another colleague. It's not just for a cabinet minister or not just for someone who's in a position of power, but for a colleague—someone who, eight years ago, would have walked across the aisle and sat down with you and said, "How's your family?" That happens a lot less and that's heartbreaking.

Again, I go back to my point. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that committees don't travel anymore. Maybe we need to find a way to get this committee to travel somewhere. My best friends on the opposition side are the people I have travelled with on committee travel. They are the people that I still see and still high-five when walking down the street. I still ask them about how their son or their daughter is doing, what their family's doing or how they are making out, how their mental health is here on the Hill when they're here from January to June and September to December, away from their families.

I used to lean on people from all the parties more than I do now. I still have a few people from other parties that I'm able to lean on. What I see in committees these days is taking us in the opposite direction.

Again, I go back to my points. I don't believe that this is what Canadians want from us. I believe Canadians want to see us ask the tough questions, hold people to account and ensure that we get the answers, but to do it in a respectful way. I don't think Canadians believe in the philosophy of guilty until proven innocent. It should be innocent until proven guilty.

There's nothing that I heard from the minister on Tuesday that made me think that he was anything other than a good-standing person who cares about people, cares about his country and cares about his constituents. To have him raked through the coals when, again.... Let's get the commissioner to take a look, if he wants to take a look. That's his job—to ask those questions and find out if there's something.

To say in the House of Commons—and I only reiterate this point because my jaw fell to the ground in question period when I heard this—that the commissioner was opening an investigation or re-investigating.... Again, these things aren't true. He has said that he believes in facts, not speculation, and that any new information that comes to him will be looked at. That's his job. That's the job description that he's responsible for.

We all appreciate him and know that he's someone of extremely high character, so I do not see why this committee would not support allowing the commissioner to do his job.

Mr. Chair, I think I'll leave it there for a bit and then possibly come back if I hear any other things that I may want to comment on.

Thank you.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher. We have until two o'clock now, so we're going to continue until two.

First, we'll have Mr. Cooper.

[*Translation*]

We'll then turn to Mr. Villemure.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Minister of Employment is under an ethical cloud with serious questions about whether he contravened the Conflict of Interest Act, the Lobbying Act and maybe the Criminal Code.

Let's look at the facts. First, the minister is connected to one Kirsten Poon. She is the minister's former business partner. She runs and owns a lobbying firm called Navis Group. Navis Group happens to pay the minister. The minister claims that it's for work that he did prior to being elected, except that he has also said that he has never done any work for Navis Group, which raises questions about why he is being paid by Navis Group.

In any event, the minister was a junior minister of finance when Kirsten Poon, his business partner, was lobbying not only this Liberal government but this minister's own department. Twice Ms. Poon lobbied officials in the minister's then department, and in the process, she secured more than \$100 million in grants for her clients. This raises serious questions about the fact that the Minister of Employment was being paid by a firm that was lobbying his department and securing a sizable amount in the way of grants for its clients.

Now, the minister has very selectively noted that the Ethics Commissioner is not opening an investigation. However, when he was asked about whether he has received a similar response from the lobbying commissioner, he couldn't answer in the affirmative because the lobbying commissioner has indicated that she is looking into the issue of whether the minister contravened the Lobbying Act by the very fact that his business partner, someone by whom he was being paid, was lobbying his department. Similarly, he could provide no assurance that the RCMP haven't opened an investigation.

Certainly, there would seem to be some serious questions about whether the minister violated the Lobbying Act, but it doesn't end there. There are other ethical issues that this minister faces that involve a company called Global Health Imports. It's a company that he and his then business partner, Stephen Anderson, founded shortly after Mr. Boissonnault lost his seat in the 2019 election.

This is a company that held itself out as selling PPE. Needless to say, it is a company that engaged in a whole host of shady business activities, including during the time that Mr. Boissonnault held himself out as a partner at Navis Group. Indeed, the Alberta Court of King's Bench has awarded clients of Global Health Imports who have sued Global Health Imports \$7.8 million in default judgments. Mr. Boissonnault says that he has, since being elected, had nothing to do with Global Health Imports, aside from the fact that he owns a 50% interest in the company, which he is lawfully able to do.

However, now there are legitimate questions about whether that, in fact, is the case, or whether, on the contrary, the minister was involved in the business operations of Global Health Imports.

• (1305)

Those questions arise from a Global News report in which text messages were leaked and reported on that indicate that there is a "Randy" involved in Global Health Imports. The context of the text messages is in relation to a shady business deal that occurred in September 2022.

In September of 2022, Mr. Boissonnault was a minister of the Crown, as he is today. The issue, as far as the text messages go, is with respect to a California-based client who was purchasing PPE from Global Health Imports. That company ended up wiring a deposit for over a half a million dollars U.S. to Global Health Imports. There was some back-and-forth between Global Health Imports and the California-based client.

During that back-and-forth, there was a text message from Stephen Anderson, the partner who I think owns 50% of the company but is the COO of Global Health Imports, to the California-based client, which said, "What is going on? I just received this from Randy!" Then, there is a message from Randy to Anderson talking about how it was so critical that the California-based client deposit the half a million dollars U.S. to Global Health Imports.

Now, why is that significant or of concern? First of all, if the minister was involved in any aspect of operating the business, as this Randy appears to have been by being involved in a wire transfer of half a million dollars to Global Health Imports.... Someone told Anderson in a text message to "be available in 15 for a partner call", so there was a partner or someone who viewed himself as a partner at Global Health Imports. If that Randy happens to be the minister, then the minister plainly contravened the Conflict of Interest Act, because the Conflict of Interest Act provides that ministers may not serve as directors or be involved in a business. They may have an ownership stake, but they may not be involved in those operations. That's number one.

Second of all, there is a lawsuit that is before the Alberta Court of King's Bench from the California-based client alleging, among other things, fraud by Global Health Imports with respect to its PPE purchase. The PPE was never delivered, and the half-a-million dollar deposit from Global Health Imports was never returned. The case is fairly strong. I believe they even obtained an attachment order from the Alberta Court of King's Bench, which, among other things, in order to obtain, the court must be satisfied that there is a reasonable likelihood that the claim would be established. Therefore, it is a situation where if the Randy in the text message is the

minister, then we have a minister who may have been involved in a transaction that involves fraud.

The minister has said that he's not that Randy; that it's some other Randy. Okay. You might say there could be a lot of Randys, except that when we look at the minister, he was previously a partner of Global Health Imports.

• (1310)

In the text messages, he's telling the COO, Anderson, to "be available in 15 for a partner call". He has a 50% stake in the company. That's a pretty significant stake in a company. The company, Global Health Imports, is not a big company.

When the minister appeared before a committee, he admitted that it comprises a handful of people. It appears there are only four or five people who are involved in Global Health Imports, so the question is, who is this Randy? Who is a partner at this four- or five-person company? It shouldn't be that difficult to track down who this other Randy is, but this other Randy can't be tracked down.

The COO, Mr. Anderson, said that there is some other Randy. It's not the minister, but he couldn't really remember his last name, this being his business partner who's telling him to be available in 15 for a partner call involving a wire transfer of half a million U.S. dollars. He can't remember his last name. He can't say who it is. He said that this Randy, who doesn't have a last name, was involved in logistics, except that when Global News looked into who was involved in logistics at Global Health Imports, it turns out to be Stephen Anderson's father, Edward Anderson. His story doesn't add up, on top of it not adding up that this Randy doesn't have a last name or that he never knew what it was.

Global News tried to track down this other Randy. They couldn't track him down. The minister says it's not him, but he has provided no explanation as to who this other Randy could be. He hasn't accounted for that. With his strong connection to this Global Health Imports company, including owning half of it, it wouldn't be very difficult for Minister Boissonnault to pick up a phone or to text Stephen Anderson and say, "Who is the other Randy?", but I guess Stephen Anderson wouldn't be able to help him because Stephen Anderson can't remember his last name. It is absolutely farcical.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist. It simply is a matter of common sense to realize that the reason that Randy Boissonnault can't track down the other Randy is because there is no other Randy. It is the Minister of Employment. Unless this mysterious Randy suddenly shows up, we have a minister who contravened the Conflict of Interest Act and we have a minister who is mired in a business transaction that is facing serious allegations of fraud, a lawsuit in which the California-based client even obtained an attachment order from the Alberta Court of King's Bench based on the strength of its action against the Global Health Imports company.

We need answers. It's not good enough for the minister to come here and say that it's some other Randy that no one can find, in the face of text messages from someone who was his former business partner, involving a company that he has a 50% interest in and that has only a handful of people who work there. I would say it's "highly suspicious" and, on that basis, it is important that this committee get to work, call Stephen Anderson, Kirsten Poon and the California-based client, and find out who the other Randy is.

• (1315)

I'd like to see this mysterious other Randy. I think the clerk's going to have a really tough time tracking him down.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Rest assured, I won't hijack the proceedings.

As committee members, we hear people's testimonies on relevant topics. However, I've always been uncomfortable with the committee's role as a court of law. I don't believe that we're a court of law and that we should make sweeping judgments. Ethics is about shedding light on matters in order to make the right decisions. To this end, we must be able to look at an issue in an unbiased manner. When a motion is worded to reflect a bias, problems arise.

A former Quebec premier, who was generally held in high esteem, once said, "*audi alteram partem*." This means "listen to the other side." In this situation, the Ethics Commissioner didn't say that he would conduct an investigation. He said that he would look into the matter. Personally, I think that this is a good thing. However, going back to the expression "*audi alteram partem*," I also want to hear what the other party has to say. I would like to give them the chance to state their case without facing accusations. I'm not comfortable with accusations. I have no issue with shedding light on things. However, I do have an issue with making accusations, especially on an a priori basis.

It may be appropriate to hear what some proposed parties have to say. However, the process mustn't go on forever either. This brings me to another concern. The committee takes on many projects without finishing them. I'm concerned about this too, given that 12 departures doesn't equal one arrival.

I want to ask my colleagues to act wisely and to make a decision on this motion with their hearts, souls and heads. It's a good idea to hear what the other party has to say. However, we aren't a court of law and this shouldn't involve a conviction. We all receive online messages of varying degrees of pleasantness. I'm uncomfortable with the idea of a member of civil society receiving the same treatment because of bias. We can still shed light on the matter or at least clear things up.

If we want our actions to have meaning, we need to know where we're headed. Simply making gratuitous accusations isn't the way to go.

• (1320)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

Mr. Housefather, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

I take the comments made by my colleague, Mr. Villemure, to heart.

That said, I want to point out two things. First, before his appearance, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner said that he had no reason to find fault with Mr. Boissonnault because Mr. Boissonnault had followed the rules and the law. Second, a number of the witnesses invited to appear, including Ms. Poon, have nothing to do with the issue raised at the committee's most recent meeting concerning the new text messages connected to Mr. Boissonnault.

A party involved in a dispute with a company that Mr. Boissonnault left in 2021 shouldn't come to this committee.

The plan is to summon people who say that they have never met Mr. Boissonnault or dealt with him directly, simply because these people are involved in a dispute with a company that Mr. Boissonnault left in 2021.

I think that the issue raised in this motion crosses the line. Stephen Anderson's name appears on the list of witnesses. He stated that he didn't receive any calls or messages from Mr. Boissonnault. It may be reasonable to ask him who sent these messages. However, apart from that, I think that the purpose of this motion is to bring before the committee people who, as the commissioner already pointed out, have nothing to do with Mr. Boissonnault.

The commissioner said that he would look into the matter. In my opinion, the most appropriate course of action is for the committee to ask the commissioner to appear again after he has reviewed the matter using all the tools at his disposal. We could then ask him questions. If the commissioner tells us that he isn't satisfied with his review, we can summon people to appear. However, if he decides to conduct an investigation based on the information reviewed, we can then proceed with the other committee business.

Right now, I think that some colleagues are accusing Mr. Boissonnault without any proof. They're convinced that he was involved in certain things while working for a company that he left in 2021. However, the commissioner is telling us that he believes otherwise, given all the messages between the commissioner's office and Mr. Boissonnault.

I find the idea of not trusting a member of Parliament or a minister despicable. I think that we should assume that the witnesses who appear before us are acting in good faith and telling the truth.

After his appearance before the committee, Mr. Boissonnault provided the TELUS invoice with the record of calls and messages sent and received on September 8, 2022. The invoice shows that he was in Vancouver that day. We all know that Mr. Boissonnault was in Vancouver for a cabinet retreat. The invoice shows that calls were made at 8:08 a.m., 11:05 a.m., 11:07 a.m., 11:12 a.m., 5:37 p.m., 5:39 p.m., 5:56 p.m., 7:52 p.m., 7:55 p.m. and 8:03 p.m. This is the complete record of calls sent and received by Mr. Boissonnault. No calls sent or received by Mr. Boissonnault indicate that he was involved in these events while working for the company in question.

You'll all recall that, at the most recent meeting, Mr. Cooper was absolutely overcome—

• (1325)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have a point of order, Chair.

It's been an observance by the government members at this committee that, unless documents are properly received by the chair and the clerk and circulated in both official languages, they not be entered into evidence, even if shared as a matter at hand at the committee.

Therefore, incomplete records or records from one of multiple phones, you know...it's irrelevant. Also, with documents that are shared with only some members of the committee, it's not appropriate unless these have been properly distributed to all members, including our members, who aren't regular members but are participating today.

The Chair: I do appreciate that. We did deal with this, I recall, when the RCMP commissioner was here.

It has been the practice in the past, Mr. Housefather, that any information that's been received has been shared with the committee. I can assure you that, first and foremost, we're in receipt of the correspondence from Mr. Boissonnault. It's in translation right now. It will be distributed when that translation is complete. The difficulty for other members, and I'm sure you can appreciate this, is that they don't have access to the same information that you have at this point.

Until that information is shared, I'd ask, sir, if you would just hold off on what you're referring to. In fairness to the committee, I think that's the appropriate course of action.

Mr. Darren Fisher: This is on the point of order, Mr. Chair.

Are the things that are being said during debate on this motion considered testimony or evidence? It's not the same as when you have a witness before you sharing things that the committee is not privy to. This is debate.

I will tell you that next to nothing that Mr. Cooper said in his entire speech is something that I had—

The Chair: Now you're into debate.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It was duly sent to the committee clerk by a minister, and it has not been translated and sent to all members of the committee.

The Chair: I have made my position clear. I would ask that you respect that, Mr. Housefather. This information will be shared in both official languages—very shortly, I hope—and then we won't put members on their back heels over the fact that you have information that they don't have.

This was sent to the clerk. It was sent by the minister for distribution. It hasn't been distributed yet. If you have access to something that the other committee members don't have access to, I would ask that you hold off on it until we're able to get it into their hands, sir.

Thank you.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chair, given that this is relevant to a motion that was raised today at the committee, why are we debating that motion without having this in front of us? You cannot argue that they're going to rush and put forward a motion and then negate the evidence that was brought to us by the minister—which was actually requested by the Conservative members at the last meeting—and say that I can't refer to it when saying that I oppose the motion they're putting forward to bring witnesses to the committee. To me, that is not actually a reasonable prospect.

Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn debate on this motion until such time as Mr. Boissonnault's documents are translated and sent to the committee.

• (1330)

The Chair: All right. We have a motion to adjourn debate. I would ask whether we have consensus to adjourn debate.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: We do not.

I will ask the clerk to take the roll. The motion is to adjourn debate.

The Clerk: The vote is five yeas and five nays.

The Chair: I vote no.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: The motion is defeated and—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): On a point of order, I wasn't asked for my vote. Is it appropriate that I be skipped?

The Chair: Is Mr. Longfield on the list?

The Clerk: At this point, I called Ms. Diab and Ms. Thompson.

The Chair: Ms. Diab and Ms. Thompson were on our list, but just hang on a sec.

The Clerk: I may be losing track of the many substitutions. If there is a later substitution, let me verify that.

Mr. Michael Barrett: On a point of order, Chair, would that change the outcome of the vote if Mr. Longfield...?

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I don't have the information in front of me for the debate either, so of course I wouldn't vote for this.

The Chair: It's not going to change the result of the vote. We had Ms. Diab and Ms. Thompson as subbed in. They both voted on the motion, so it's not going to change the result of the vote.

Mr. Green, I do see your hand. I assume that you want to be on the speaking list, sir.

Mr. Matthew Green: This is on the point of order on the ability to reference documents that have been received.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: I would agree that it is not testimony. There are all types of ways in which communications could have happened, whether it was a personal phone or whether it was a government phone or God knows what. We haven't determined that, but I do think, procedurally, it would be appropriate for any members of this committee, including the government side, to be able to reference a document that is in circulation. I do think that is appropriate.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Could we suspend until we can get that distributed to the committee? It's numbers. It doesn't need to be translated as much because it's all phone numbers.

The Chair: Yes, the clerk has assured me that it'll be very soon because it's a smaller document to translate. I'm going to accept that, Mr. Fisher. I want to make sure that everybody has this in their hands, so I am going to suspend for a couple of minutes until we have it in your hands.

Mr. Longfield, we'll come back. Your hand is still up, I assume.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, before you drop the gavel, we're 26 minutes from question period. You're going to suspend, but the duration isn't clear.

The Chair: We said until two o'clock or just before two o'clock. That's what I said.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay.

The Chair: We're going to suspend for a couple of minutes.

• (1330) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1345)

The Chair: We just received the email with the translation. Nancy is preparing to distribute that.

Given the fact that we are so close to QP, I'm going to suspend the meeting.

[The meeting was suspended at 1:46 p.m., Thursday, June 6]

[The meeting resumed at 5:07 p.m., Monday, June 10]

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I call the meeting to order.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 123 of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Before we begin, I would like to ask all members and participants in the room to refer to the cards on the table for guidelines on preventing audio feedback incidents. Please note the preventive

measures in place to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters.

[English]

Make sure that if you're not using your earpiece, it's on the place-holder that's clearly signalled on the desk.

We are resuming committee business. As members may recall, we suspended last Thursday with a motion that was presented. We suspended because of question period. We're resuming that motion.

I have a speakers list. When we left, Mr. Housefather was speaking. He moved the motion, so the floor now moves to Mr. Bains. I see Mr. Longfield is here as well, followed by Mr. Fisher.

[Translation]

We'll then turn to Mr. Desilets, who will be replacing Mr. Ville-mure. Welcome to the committee, Mr. Desilets.

He'll be the fourth speaker today.

I just wanted to let you know.

[English]

I see Ms. Khalid has her hand up, so we'll put her on the list.

We are going to resume debate on the motion.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I just want to seek clarification, please, if that's okay.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I know Mr. Housefather was on the list when the meeting suspended the last time and had moved the motion. Is it in the Standing Orders that once you move a motion, you lose the floor?

The Chair: It's a generally accepted practice that if a motion is moved, the member gives up the floor. We would go next to Mr. Bains. If Mr. Housefather—and I see him on Zoom—wants to put his name back on the list, he has the right to do that and can indicate it clearly to me.

So far on the list I have—and I'll repeat this—Mr. Bains, Mr. Longfield, Mr. Fisher and Monsieur Villemure.

Did your hand go up just to ask that question?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'd like to be added to the list as well.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): I have a question too. I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead. Is it a question of clarification or a point of order?

Ms. Pam Damoff: It's not a point of order.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Pam Damoff: It's just a really quick question. Given how late we're starting, I'm wondering what our resources are to see how long we can go.

The Chair: As it stands right now, we have two hours from the start of the meeting.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: I may request more time from the clerk depending on how we're getting on.

I have Mr. Bains on the list.

Go ahead on the motion.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to continue some of the debate we heard last time on this motion.

I think one of the challenges we had was that the commissioner indicated that the information he learned in the news article was new to him and that he would look into it. That turned into members stating that this is a new investigation and that reports about that matter happened. It's easy to see how things can grow a lot bigger than they are.

I understand. We all see and know the impacts of social media. One of the big challenges here is bringing people forward, people from general professional workplaces, to answer questions. I believe other colleagues stated that this isn't a courtroom. Sometimes it can be viewed as one, and some of these comments or questions that arise here can ultimately put implications on people when they're frankly doing their jobs. Then they're, as a result, met with a barrage of social media attacks with people's names put in the forefront. Those are some of the big challenges that we have when we're trying to bring people forward.

I believe the commissioner indicated that he would look into the matter. We've said this before: We should let those processes follow their course and allow the commissioner, if there's a complaint put forward, to look into the new information and, after whatever investigations or processes take place through their work, the office of the commissioner's work, come back to us with a fulsome report. We can look at that.

To have members from the professional community come here—and we respect the tough questions that are asked of people, of course—to put light on questions in advance of knowing all of the information could imply that they had done some wrongdoing. That is sometimes a challenge, and we've seen that. We've seen documents being asked for that have resulted in a lot of.... As we've seen in other committees, we've asked for a number of documents to be presented and nothing really comes of it. If we're going to move forward, we should have all the information that was looked at by the Ethics Commissioner. We know that he does a thorough job. We've heard him a number of times inform the committee of how that work is done and what the processes are. The results of those processes are reported to us here, where we can formulate better questions and have a strong understanding of what took place.

We sometimes take the extraordinary step of dragging people into extra meetings, and that has resulted in a lot of extra discussion. Sometimes that time could be used in a better way. If members have concerns—and we've seen letters written to the office of the commissioner in the past—maybe they can put forward some of those questions in a letter, in a complaint, so the thorough details of

those questions can be worked out through the office, which can come back to us to report back on what we're looking at.

I think we should be careful about who we're bringing in front of the camera, in front of Canadians. We should ask questions without impacting their personal lives in a negative way, quite frankly, as they may have nothing to do with any wrongdoing. Sometimes the questions we put forward automatically put these people in a bad light, just by bringing them before the committee. That is a big consideration we should have. We need to make those considerations before we look at a motion like this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate you recognizing me and giving me the floor.

At the last meeting, you were wondering who I was. I was surprised because we've sat across from each other for eight and a half years, but it's good to finally get to work together. I don't think we've ever been on a committee together, particularly one that you're chairing. It's super to be part of it.

I'm looking at this as a process question. Quite often, what I see in the House is that members of Parliament's roles get confused. We are here to ask questions on behalf of Canadians, but we aren't a judge and jury over the activities within departments of government. We advise departments. We give them guidance and we give them laws to work within. Really, it's up to the professionals in our civil service to conduct themselves in the way that befits the roles they play. We also don't ask them to be politicians, and they're very good at not being partisan. They're very good at providing us with the support we need as the politicians in the room.

How does this work when the committee is dragging regular Canadians before it to get social media clips? I understand this meeting is not in camera, so when the cameras are rolling, we have to respect the Canadians coming in front of us and the position we're putting them in to look at what they've heard and how it relates to the policies we develop from our side.

To be honest, I think what we're looking at is something that came through the media. It was a Global News story that was put out there as speculation. There's no evidence that Minister Boissonnault is the person mentioned in the text. In fact, the minister was clear that he wasn't the person in the text conversation. The person who sent the text, Mr. Anderson, was also quoted as saying that the minister wasn't the person referenced in the text.

The Ethics Commissioner reviews the information they have in a factual way and in a way that is non-partisan. We have to take them at their word with the job they do.

The Ghaoui Group is quoted in the article as saying that they've never had contact with the minister. Of course they didn't, because the minister had ceased to have a role in the operations of the company in question more than a year before any of this happened. He was elected and he's serving the Government of Canada. The Ethics Commissioner will be looking at how that is done. We all have to do our disclosure statements. I've just finished my disclosure statement. It's an annual thing we have to do for any changes in our marital status, in whether we've bought stocks or in whether we have interest in any of the businesses we might be dealing with.

I was chairing the science and research committee and I'm now a master's student. I saw myself having an issue there, so I contacted the Ethics Commissioner. Graduate students are asking for more money. I'm a graduate student and I was acting as a chair of a science and research committee, so I stepped down as the chair of that committee to make sure there were no perceived conflicts. I think all of us do that as part of what we face on a day-to-day basis. We make sure that we're not putting ourselves in a bad position. Regardless of the party, we're all members of Parliament and we all know the duties we have under the act we serve.

It's also been noted that back on September 8, Minister Boissonnault was in Vancouver attending a cabinet retreat. We know that that day was especially hectic because it was the day that Queen Elizabeth passed away—God rest her soul; long live the King. The Conservatives are expecting us to believe that sometime during the day, sometime during the retreat meetings, when the ministers had their phones—they don't have their phones during cabinet meetings—somehow Minister Boissonnault was stepping in and out to take phone calls about a business that he had resigned from a year earlier. With all the things going on, this would not have been on Minister Boissonnault's mind. However, again, we're not the judge and jury. It's up to the Ethics Commissioner to take a look at that and see whether anything was being done in a way that wasn't ethical.

It's really hard to believe that Minister Boissonnault was.... He turned over his phone records to this committee, and that shows no phone calls happening during the period of time in question. We have evidence as if we were acting as a judge and jury, but we sat through Mr. Cooper going through the fanciful bit of conjecture that it must have been the minister because of the references to eastern standard time, even though the minister was on Pacific time. We're now hearing from him a wild conspiracy theory in the House, accusing the minister of having a secret burner phone, which is totally ridiculous. I don't think any honourable members are working with burner phones. We have a parliamentary phone that we use for business. We have personal phones that we use for personal things and fundraising. We separate those two things, but we don't get burner phones. It's really for the cameras that a statement like that would be made.

If you look at the evidence we have from Minister Boissonnault's phone records from September 8, 2022, the phone records shows very clearly calls between 11:02 a.m. Pacific time and 5:37 p.m. Pacific time. That covers entirely the time frame that Global News talked about in its coverage and the time frame that Mr. Cooper talked about at length during the minister's appearance. In that time frame, everyone involved was supposed to be on a partner call at

12:30 Pacific time. Clearly, from this phone record, Minister Boissonnault was on no such call.

Here at the committee Mr. Brock asked the minister to look at his phone records and provide them. The minister did that before the clerk even sent him a formal request. There's nothing to hide here.

Also, I'm informed that Mr. Boissonnault shared this with the Ethics Commissioner. Of course he would, and the Ethics Commissioner will look at it in due course and take it into account, doing his job, the job that we trust him with. It's not the job of the committee to try to do an investigation. That's why we have an Ethics Commissioner.

Just to review, the minister was clear that it wasn't him. When he came to this committee, he was unequivocal on this, as virtually any answer I have seen at the committee reveals. He did not dodge. He didn't avoid questions. He did not give any clever comment or leave any room for doubt. He said that this was not on him.

The Conservatives say that's not good enough. They need some kind of substantiation for what that denial means. They say that we need to be sure and that we need to hear from Stephen Anderson. Well, we heard from Stephen Anderson. He's quoted right in the Global News article, saying that it was not Minister Boissonnault. They say they need to hear from the Ghaoui Group about this, but the Ghaoui Group was noted in the article as saying they've never spoken to Mr. Boissonnault. It seems the Conservatives are not willing to accept the Global News article at face value—a bit odd since it's the basis for their argument—so let's take a step back and look at the actual day.

We know from public records that Minister Boissonnault was in Vancouver at the time. We also know this from the phone records. This is despite the fact that Mr. Cooper walked us through a long discussion about the mountain time zone and the eastern time zone, even though the minister was in neither time zone at the time. Minister Boissonnault was in Vancouver at a cabinet retreat. Members know cabinet retreats consist of wall-to-wall meetings. Much of the day is taken up. The ministers don't take their phones into those meetings. We don't take our phones into our caucus meetings. Those meetings are times when we are in camera, and we have to make sure we're in camera. The RCMP makes sure that we haven't taken our phones in. In fact, we have had caucus meetings where the RCMP has said that somebody inadvertently walked in with their phone, iPhone watch or even a security buzzer. Anything that connects to Wi-Fi is checked through, so even if there was a hint that he had walked in with the phone, the RCMP would have been on that and made sure the phone wasn't in the room. He didn't have access to a phone.

This day would have been particularly busy given the passing of Queen Elizabeth. I know cabinet would have been thinking about that: What does this mean for the governance of our country? How do we respect the passing of the Queen but maintain governance? What does this mean for the change of monarch? She was with us for so long. Since we were born, she was our Queen. Then she wasn't, and what does that mean? That would have been the issue of the day, I'm sure. It would have interrupted the cabinet discussions that were planned.

It's a real stretch to think the minister would say to wait a minute; he has some business to conduct. The Conservatives have heard this, but they're still not convinced. The minister has now made additional efforts to prove a negative. He provided his phone records. Regarding the phone calls that were supposed to have happened, he showed us they were not there. There's a certain point where the holes in this Conservative theory need to square with reality. It's obviously a story for social media. It's conjecture. It's biased and politically motivated. It's not the way ethics are handled in this country. That's done by non-biased professionals who don't have a political stake in the game.

This is why we have the office of the Ethics Commissioner. They are continuing to do their job every day. When I gave my submission, they came back to me and said I missed something and I had to resubmit. Whatever that something I missed was, I didn't think it was important, but they did so I resubmitted. They came back and said, "Thank you for your prompt response. We'll make your statements public."

All of that is done, as we all know, every year, so I'm not prepared to drag regular Canadians before this committee to feed the story. We have to be fair to the Canadians who are witnesses here, not bring them into the political melee when there shouldn't be a political melee in the first place. They can work with the Ethics Commissioner, as I'm sure they will be if the Ethics Commissioner feels that's where they need to be. We're clinging to this latest speculation while knowing full well that the Ethics Commissioner looked into the previous allegations against the minister, didn't find any cause for investigation and will continue to work on information as it is presented. Phone records that came through our committee were presented, but they were also presented separately.

Mr. Barrett wrote to the Ethics Commissioner, who is the neutral party who says whether or not there have been any violations of the act. The Ethics Commissioner reviewed that letter and found no reason to look into things further, so it's politics. The commissioner couldn't have been clearer in his testimony. He said that the minister "complied with the rules under the act and the code." He reiterated this in French, saying that it appeared the minister had complied with the requirements of the code and the act with respect to matters relating to these companies and that therefore there was no need to proceed with a study.

The Conservatives will, of course, never let the facts get in the way of a good story. To them, there must be some ulterior motive going on and someone must know. They'll get up in the House and say what they can say. They'll go to committee and try to get a story created. It's funny how the story always coincides with the announcement of our budget. They do this instead of talking about our budget or interest rates dropping last week, which was the story

of the year, if not the last five years. We're now getting to a point where interest rates are coming down, which is good news for Canadians. We have support for our budget, which is good news for Canadians. There may be some things in the budget the Conservatives want to talk about, like the capital gains tax, which has been contentious in our ridings. I've had several calls from businesses. I've talked to them about capital gains. Instead of talking about that, they're creating some kind of faux narrative that there is a scandal we have to talk about; they're creating a scandal.

The commissioner did what he always does with allegations. He said he would look at them and decide whether an investigation was warranted. That's exactly what happened with Mr. Barrett's previous allegations about the minister. The commissioner reported to the committee that there was no need to investigate. He suggested to us that he was satisfied with the information that he was able to obtain through his investigation. However, suggesting that the Ethics Commissioner is not considering all the information is just not true. That's not how our Ethics Commissioner operates. Here's what the Ethics Commissioner actually said: "I think it would be absolutely irresponsible to make a premature decision as to what we're going to do and how. All I can tell you is that we will look into it."

The Ethics Commissioner is always on guard. He's looking at us, looking at how we conduct ourselves and making sure that we're doing our job in an ethical way. Let's allow the commissioner to continue to look into things. He'll look at this, and he'll look at everything else that's going on. If he thinks there's a need to do an investigation, I'm sure he will do it. He doesn't need us to tell him that he needs to do his job. He does his job every day, and he's public about what he does. He's transparent. He doesn't have a political stake in any of the games. He will report to us at the committee, to parliamentarians and to the public at large if something needs to be brought forward as a result of his ongoing investigations.

I've also been informed that the minister has written to the commissioner, and he's requested that he come to a conclusion on this whole matter as soon as possible. Then we can continue to get on with the work of Parliament before we drag everyday Canadians before this committee to become fuel for the Conservative rage machine. I've seen that. We need to allow the commissioner to do his work and make a call about whether there's any substance to the allegations.

A witness came to one of the committees I was serving on. I met her later, and she said that after the way she was treated by the Conservatives, she wouldn't come to a parliamentary committee again, which is a terrible thing. We won't have her voice at the table, an expert voice that we relied on, because of the way she was treated by the Conservatives at committee. She said that she wasn't going through that again. She said she went home and was upset. She was upset a week later, and she was upset two weeks later. She felt she was being treated like a criminal.

These are real people and they're people with families. They're proud to come to Ottawa to be in front of a parliamentary committee. We see people coming to our committees every day. For these people it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to serve the country, and we need to keep that in mind when they're here. They're honoured to be here, and we have to honour them by treating them properly when they are here. We're not asking them to cover things up and not asking them to act as if they're a spokesperson for a political party. They're here to share their expertise so the studies we do have the right information and we can come to the right conclusions and recommendations for the government to consider.

As members, we're experienced in this detailed process of how committees run, how the Ethics Commissioner operates and how elected officials interact. We go through questionnaires with the Ethics Commissioner about all our personal relationships—our assets, our debts, our significant others' assets or debts, and whether our kids are involved in anything. All of the professional experiences we have must go to the Ethics Commissioner, and witnesses may not even realize how much we do for disclosure.

As I said, I had a business that I put on hold when I was elected. I stopped operating the business. A year later, I was asked whether the business was still not operating, and I confirmed that there was no operation. They asked me for the financials, and I said that I'd give them my last financials but that there was no financial activity after 2015, when I was elected. I said I couldn't give them what I didn't have, but gave them what I did have. That was the way I disclosed to the Ethics Commissioner that I wasn't operating my business.

They could look at Canada Revenue Agency records. They could see whether I was not disclosing. There are ways for them to do their job that I don't know about. I don't know their sausage machine. However, I disclosed from my side what I knew was true, and they had their ways of confirming whether it was true. We provide our documentation. The commissioner and their staff do all they do to make sure the right questions are being asked and to maintain the confidentiality while going over the records. We're on camera right now, and I'm letting the public know that I had to disclose things. Otherwise, the commissioner worked with me on a confidential basis, unless there was something that needed to become public.

Then you have conversations, in some cases, where they ask follow-up questions: How long have you known that person for? How did you meet? How long was it that you were investing in something together? Has the value changed? Do you still have shares? What's your percentage of the shares?

I had a change in my circumstance when my wife was diagnosed with Parkinson's and I was volunteering for Parkinson Canada. I asked the Ethics Commissioner, "As a parliamentarian, what are the limits to me working as a volunteer for Parkinson Canada?" They gave me four pages of what I can and can't do. Lobbying the government is not something I should be doing. I'm not fundraising for them, but I'm working with Parkinson Canada as a caregiver to a person with Parkinson's.

From my experience in doing that, I'm organizing a day on the Hill this fall where senators and members from all parties will

come. Parkinson Canada will be there. Researchers will be there. We'll have people coming in as clinicians, and hopefully we'll have some family health team members and people who have been diagnosed with Parkinson's. That's all within the agreements that I have with the Ethics Commissioner, and I will follow the guidelines they gave me. I do follow those guidelines, and I will be public about what I can be public about. I will disclose to the Ethics Commissioner what I'm doing to make sure that I'm following the guidance they've given me.

We know first-hand that the Ethics Commissioner does an incredibly thorough job, and he will inform us. He will continue to investigate us all, as we're members of Parliament. I have to say how disappointing it is to see the Conservatives falling over themselves to try to get this motion through, to try to create a story, to have a diversion from all the issues in the budget that we should be talking about.

We've taken all these steps of dragging members to special meetings. We put this one in between other meetings, long votes and midnight sittings, and we have our regular meeting scheduled for tomorrow. What's this all about? It's not an urgent matter that has to come before the committee before tomorrow's meeting. I don't get it. I'm here. I'll continue to serve. I'll serve as a substitute, as asked. I get to see all the different committees. I was just in the security committee while we were voting. In between votes, they're doing a clause-by-clause study. I was doing the clause-by-clause review.

Subbing in committees is a great chance to learn and for us to get to know each other, but this type of work is outside of our normal work plan or the strategy that we develop as a committee. Vice-chairs work with the committee chair to get a schedule together. We're outside that schedule now. I'm surprised the Conservatives have jumped to conclusions, beginning with this saga. However, I think they're really just trying to turn up the lights, trying to get the cameras rolling. Remember that all of this has been in front of the committee, and information was provided to show that the allegations were just grasping at straws.

I want to be clear that Mr. Barrett had every right to reach out to the commissioner. We all should do that for ourselves if we see something we don't think is right. We should bring these issues to the commissioner as a matter of process. We should make sure that parliamentarians are being ethical in everything they're doing. If members have concerns, we all know how to get in touch with the Ethics Commissioner's office.

They're always very prompt in getting back. They're always very thorough with the information they give us. They always ask at the end of a conversation if there's anything else. It happens at all of the offices we connect with, whether it be at the library or in the House of Commons. They'll always ask if there's anything else. I'll tell them, no, thank you and that they've given me great information, but they'll ask again if there's anything else. They always stay on top of things.

Mr. Barrett was doing his job, and I appreciate that. The Ethics Commissioner did his job, and I appreciate that. There are no social media clips in this. It's not about letting the process play out for the cameras. It's about doing our job by involving the Ethics Commissioner when we need to. Instead of rushing to pass a motion to have Mr. Boissonnault appear, the committee could be deciding their business. The minister has been appropriately questioned on this. The committee could get back to the business of the ethics committee, but we're continuing on, so here we are.

We've found additional information since the motion was passed. Mr. Boissonnault has given us that information and given it to the Ethics Commissioner. There's still an open phone line to the commissioner's office if anything else comes up. However, the minister has come. He has addressed us. He has talked to us publicly. He has answered the questions we've given him.

Once again, we're jumping on a story to try to divert from talking about the budget and the 400,000 kids who will get a school food program as a result of what we're putting forward. Hopefully, the Conservatives will support us in that work, because it shouldn't be partisan. We're trying to help young Canadians who are hungry when they're in school so they can have food and do their studying without wondering when they'll have their next meal.

Looking into this and looking at where we go from here, I really hope the committee can get past this motion, defeat the motion and get back to the business of serving Canadians. To be honest about what's going on, I think if we turned off the cameras and got to work, we'd be great. Somebody asked me over the weekend how I put up with the drama every day, as I come from manufacturing. I said that in manufacturing we didn't have any cameras. We worked on problems. We had to figure out ways of automating equipment. We had to figure out ways of meeting production schedules. We had to figure out ways of onboarding employees. We didn't have cameras when we were doing our jobs.

Sometimes I think that in Parliament, if we got away from trying to serve the media's interests and instead served Canadians' interests, we would all be better for it. There's no doubt that we're not coming at this with an open mind. This is a clearly partisan exercise that we're in the middle of. The conclusions that Mr. Cooper is making are showing us perfectly clearly that his arguments are coming out of left field. There is no basis in the arguments he's putting forward. We know that the Ethics Commissioner has already confirmed this and will continue to work with us and confirm that we are being open by default. We are involving the Ethics Commissioner every step of the way.

I'm about ready to go back to my tea. I appreciate you giving me the chance to speak as an outsider of the committee. The committees I serve on are the environment committee and the science com-

mittee. I am now a member of the science committee instead of being the chair. I am trying to serve people through my background. I'm trying to do it in as non-partisan a way as I can. I really hope we can see that starting to happen at the ethics committee, where things shouldn't be partisan. They should be based on ethics and information.

Mr. Chair, I'll give it back to you and my colleagues. I look forward to the conversation. I hope it becomes more positive. I hope we can get back to serving Canadians instead of trying to create diversions.

Thank you for allowing me the time to speak today.

The Chair: Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the member for Guelph for his words. I remember that in 2014, when I was a candidate, I was walking across the street and met him and his wife on Wellington Street, down toward the Confederation Building. It probably meant a lot more to me than it meant to him. Over the years, Lloyd, you've been a wonderful colleague. As I said at the last meeting, I have many wonderful colleagues on both sides of the House.

I thought a lot about this over the weekend, and this is not something I usually do. I don't go home and think about what happened in committee, because I want to go to events, like Boys and Girls Club Day, or visit with constituents. I thought about this a lot over the weekend.

It's nice to see you today, Luc. I haven't seen you at committee in some time. We've served on the health committee in the past.

I was thinking about some of the things I said at the last meeting. To me, words matter. In the House, during question period, someone said something about the Ethics Commissioner reinvestigating or reopening the investigation, but there was no investigation. The Ethics Commissioner did his work and said there was nothing to see here; it didn't warrant opening an investigation. When a new article came out, Mr. Barrett asked the Ethics Commissioner to take another look at it. He said that absolutely he would take another look at it. That's not the same thing as reopening or opening an investigation.

I was thinking about some of the comments we made around the table on Thursday. It's almost like scandal creation. You have somebody who has done everything the Ethics Commissioner has asked for, and the Ethics Commissioner has looked at it and said we're good. As Lloyd said, oftentimes, the Ethics Commissioner's office will come back and say someone is missing this one form, this one bank account or this one piece of paper, or ask if they meant to put something down. Before it's made public, before they sign off on those forms and before they sign off on the work the Ethics Commissioner has looked at, they go over it with a fine-tooth comb.

He went over it. He went over all the information that was presented to him. Because he's the quality guy he is, when he heard new information and was asked by Mr. Barrett to take a look at the new information, he said, "Of course that's what I will do." He works on facts, not on speculation or on conjecture.

René was here the other day, on Thursday. I wish I had the piece of paper on which I wrote down some of his points. He said this committee is not a court. However, some members of this committee want to act like it is a court. They want to bring someone forward and want to question regular, everyday business people in Canada.

I know what that looks like, and I know the vitriol it will bring upon them. I know the social media feedback they'll get. Most of us have been here for quite some time. We have a thick skin. We're used to being pilloried in social media by people who don't necessarily agree with our points of view, our thoughts or the things we say. However, for an everyday Canadian who works in the business sector, being brought before a committee of Parliament is a daunting thing to go through. Make no mistake. I guarantee you that there aren't going to be friendly questions. They are going to be questions that, in my opinion, border on mean-spiritedness.

I've been going to committees for eight and a half years, and I've seen some pretty horrible incidents. Not many that I've seen are as disappointing as what I saw last Thursday. It's scandal creation, and I don't want to be a part of scandal creation. Hold someone to account, for sure. Bring someone to committee. Bring a minister to committee. I sat on the national defence committee for eight years. We had defence ministers coming every two or three weeks for eight years taking the hard questions. Sometimes it got a little fiery, but the minister's job is to work with committees, present to committees and be available for committees when requested, when demanded or when expected. That's the nature of what we do here. However, we see what happens to a regular Canadian when they're grilled by parliamentarians, who are used to doing this.

On the motion itself, I'll go back to my comment about what was said in the House of Commons during question period last week. The motion says, "considering opening another investigation". How can I vote for a motion that is factually incorrect? The Ethics Commissioner is not considering opening another investigation. There was no first investigation. There was the report to the Ethics Commissioner filed by the minister and approved by the Ethics Commissioner, and then the opportunity to take a look at what may or may not be new information. Again, words matter.

My friend Mr. Cooper, during his speech last week on Thursday, was talking about the other Randy and then made a comment. He said the other Randy was the Minister of Employment. Then René rightly said that we are not a court. We are not in charge of our own facts, and we can't make our statements that are patently false and misleading. That's something I've seen an awful lot more of lately in the House of Commons and in committees.

I'll go back to the comment I made on scandal creation. Everything has to be a scandal so you can call it a scandal in the House of Commons and push the envelope in the messaging that you want your supporters to believe is the case. Then all of a sudden you get social media anger or frustration being sent your way: "You're full of scandals. There are scandals every day." It's scandal creation. It's really frustrating and it's not fair. It's below us as parliamentarians.

I was at home on the weekend, and I heard from a few people who happened to tune in and watch a bit of the committee. They

asked if it was really getting that bad in the House of Commons. I said that it's absolutely getting that bad in the House of Commons.

It's funny. Parliamentary privilege in the House of Commons allows us to say anything we want to say, but it doesn't allow someone to call you out for not being honest and not telling the truth. I'm thinking of Mr. Kurek, who spoke for, I don't know, four hours one day on the British Westminster system. It felt like four hours. Anyway, he gave us a history lesson on the Westminster parliamentary style.

It's getting to the point now where we're hearing politicians cite reasons why they're not going to run again. We have one here in this committee, Pam Damoff, who's just not willing to take the hate any longer. We were doing the misinformation, disinformation and malinformation study, which I think is super fascinating, but it's unfortunate that it's such a prevalent topic. It's unfortunate that it is so prevalent in our world right now. We're seeing AI-developed videos that look real and are not real. Those are things we could be talking about. I've watched many videos people are making with AI that they probably think are funny.

Concerning the NHL playoffs, you see false videos of Connor McDavid saying things like, "Our goalie lost the game for us." These are pretty provocative, real-looking videos. Of course, he never said it; it's completely manufactured. The public may know or they may not know. I did hear someone say, "Oh my God, did you see that video? Why would Connor McDavid say something like that about his goalie?" He didn't say it. It's not true; it's AI. The technology out there right now can make us all news broadcasters and journalists. It's a scary situation.

When I was on the national defence committee, someone sent me a video that looked so real. The news broadcast looked so real. It said something along the lines of Russia attacking an American ship. It obviously wasn't true, but it was shared 3,000 or 4,000 times on Facebook. This video was not from a real news source but from one that looked pretty slick. You could tell there was money behind it. It's absolutely incredible what we're seeing today, so the misinformation, disinformation and malinformation study is super important. I know René is a big supporter of getting back to it.

The other day, Mr. Chair, you said something that I thought was really funny when you welcomed me in. You said, "Welcome to the shooting fish in a barrel committee." If it's the nature of the committee, so be it.

The Chair: It's the nature of the government. That's what I meant.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Mr. Chair is in the background refuting what I'm saying.

The Chair: You took it out of context.

Mr. Darren Fisher: That's a fair point, Mr. Chair.

What we should do—it's the same thing that I suggested Thursday—is exactly what the Ethics Commissioner said he would do. He said he would look into this and get back to the committee, and if he saw smoke he would assume there was fire. We asked him to. He said he would. I see no reason to move in a direction like we see in this motion. Give him the time that he needs. I can't remember what he said, but he received information that we couldn't talk about on Thursday until it was translated and sent to the committee. That caused a very long suspension at the committee, but it was important to get that stuff out so that all committee members had a chance to have it in English and French. That was submitted, translated and absorbed by committee members.

We saw that the minister couldn't possibly have sent texts or made phone calls at that particular time in Vancouver at the cabinet retreat, as they were locked down on the day the Queen died. It's important that we let the commissioner do the work he is tasked with doing on our behalf. We should continue moving in that direction rather than continuing to talk about bringing in regular Canadians, putting them in this room and grilling them over their business practices. Give the Ethics Commissioner the time to do that.

We can review this pretty quickly. The minister said very clearly many times during his one hour that it wasn't he who sent the texts or made the phone calls. He was as unequivocal as any minister I've ever seen at committee. He wasn't wishy-washy; he was solid. He said it wasn't him. Clearly, that wasn't good enough for the Conservatives. I don't know what kind of substantiation they need—innocent until proven guilty.

We already heard from Stephen Anderson. He's quoted. We're taking the Global News story as the genesis of this entire fabricated scandal, as we heard from Stephen Anderson. He's right in the Global News article saying that it was not the minister, but Conservatives aren't willing to accept that the Global News article is accurate in that particular case.

Most of the things I'd still like to say were said by Lloyd, and I would be repeating the important things that he said, so I'm going to cede my time now and hear from the next speaker.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, Mr. Villemure was the next speaker on the list. If you want, you can take this opportunity to speak to the committee about the motion before us. Would you like to speak?

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you. I'm ready to speak about this topic.

We'll be moving an amendment to tone down and slightly alter the motion before us all. The goal is obviously to try to reach a consensus.

This amendment calls for the deletion of the word “each”, points (c) and (d) and the last paragraph.

Do you want me to read the amendment or send it to the clerk?

The Chair: I think that the text of the amendment was sent to the clerk.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Has everyone received it in both official languages?

The Chair: The clerk tells me that she sent it to the committee members.

If Mr. Villemure's amendment were passed, the motion would read as follows:

[*English*]

That, in light of media reports, Minister Randy Boissonnault's testimony at this committee, and the Ethics Commissioner's confirmation that he is considering opening another investigation into Minister Randy Boissonnault's actions, the committee call on the following witnesses to appear before the committee individually and testify for no less than one hour each....

That would strike part c, which is “Representatives of the Ghaoui Group”, and part d, “The other ‘Randy’ referred to in Minister Randy Boissonnault's testimony”. It would also strike “That these witnesses appear on or before June 18th, and that the committee seek additional resources to facilitate these meetings if needed.”

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, you may comment on the amendment if you wish. The other committee members can then make comments.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Two changes weren't included in the text that you read. There are three in total. We want to delete the reference to witnesses in points (c) and (d), even if it means extending the meeting by an hour. Our amendment refers to a meeting that runs for at least an hour, rather than one hour for each witness. We removed the word “each”.

We propose to delete the last paragraph and the word “each”, in addition to what you said about the last two witnesses, because it doesn't seem relevant. If we need more time, we'll obviously extend the meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

[*English*]

I see Mr. Green. I have him first on the amendment, and then Ms. Damoff rose her hand.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Forgive me. I'm going to seek your indulgence.

Perhaps it's a previous motion, since there have been a lot of them at this committee, but I'm pretty sure that I already amended some of this language out, particularly as it relates to “additional resources”. Did that not occur? If not, I will go on the record to state that I have no intention of arbitrarily providing you or anybody infinite resources and infinite dates to deal with this matter. I certainly want to address this matter, but I want to address it within our calendar sitting days and regularly scheduled meetings, without additional resources and the ability to arbitrarily call meetings.

I'll go on the record to state emphatically that I believe there is a common courtesy in committee. We have a subcommittee that plans work. It cannot be at the call of the chair. I've stated this on many different occasions. From my perspective, I am very comfortable calling in the witnesses together on one day for two hours. They can give their opening statements, and we can ask questions to whomever we see fit. I'm very keenly interested in that. I've expressed as much in conversations with all parties. What I'm not looking for is turning this into a never-ending story that becomes meeting upon meeting—a reflection of the current filibuster we seem to find ourselves in. That's my position on this.

I move that we subamend this amendment and strike out the last line about “additional resources”, as available, which seems to be a new Conservative catchphrase. We'd get rid of that and have it be “in existing scheduled meetings before the House rises”.

The Chair: To address the point on the subamendment, Mr. Green, the end of the amendment proposed by Mr. Desilets says “one hour” and he strikes “each”, so it's at least one hour of testimony. Then part a and part b stay, and it deletes part c and part d. It also deletes the last line.

It's the last line you're referring to. Is that correct?

Mr. Matthew Green: My apologies. Maybe something got lost in translation there.

I am firmly against having the ability to call meetings at your will. I like you, John, but I don't want to give you that much power. I'd prefer to have consultations with parties, particularly on the opposition side, or at least have the ability to give input on our schedule.

The Chair: Does that clarify things for you?

Mr. Matthew Green: Can you please, just for my indulgence—and then I'll be satisfied—reread it as amended?

The Chair: This is the amendment as proposed by Monsieur Desilets:

That, in light of media reports, Minister Randy Boissonnault's testimony at this committee, and the Ethics Commissioner's confirmation that he is considering opening another investigation into Minister Randy Boissonnault's actions, the committee call on the following witnesses to appear before the committee individually and testify for at least one hour:

- a. Stephen Anderson;
- b. Kirsten Poon.

That's how Monsieur Desilets' amendment reads right now.

Mr. Matthew Green: He took out the Ghaoui folks.

The Chair: He took out the Ghaoui folks and “the other ‘Randy’ referred to in Minister Randy Boissonnault's testimony”.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'd love to hear from the other Randy if the other Randy exists.

The Chair: So would I.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'll go on the record and state that.

The Chair: That's for at least one hour.

I think I see where the confusion lies here, and I hear what you're saying. It's “to appear before the committee and testify for at least one hour”.

Mr. Matthew Green: That's fair enough. Thank you for that. I'm in full support of the amendment.

The Chair: Let me clarify this.

Mr. Matthew Green: I would like to hear from the Ghaoui's, but maybe we'll save that for another day.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Desilets, I would like to clarify something.

The amendment that we received asks that the motion be changed by deleting the word “each” and by deleting points (c) and (d). However, you said that you wanted each witness to speak for one hour.

Mr. Luc Desilets: To make things simpler, we could delete the word “individually” from the wording “before the committee individually and testify for no less than one hour each”.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Luc Desilets: If the committee wants to make it even more specific, it could be written as follows: “one hour for both witnesses”.

The Chair: I want to make sure that things are clear.

[*English*]

It would be “to appear before the committee and testify for no less than one hour”.

[*Translation*]

Do you agree?

Mr. Luc Desilets: Yes, I agree.

The Chair: Okay.

[*English*]

Are we clear on that? I think that clears it up.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Can I see it in writing?

The Chair: I'll get the clerk to send it out, but it's a fairly minor change to the amendment.

Matt, I also want to address the other point you brought up about the amendment you proposed. If you recall, the motion was put forward by Mr. Barrett. For the amendment you spoke about, we adjourned debate and when we continued again, Mr. Barrett proposed a different motion than the one that was proposed.

The debate adjourned on Mr. Barrett's motion and your amendment on it as well. It was picked up again when Mr. Barrett proposed a new motion, so that's how we ended up in this place.

Mr. Matthew Green: It feels like *Groundhog Day*, but that's fair enough. Thank you.

The Chair: You should walk in my shoes, Mr. Green.

[*Translation*]

The clerk will send the committee members the change to the amendment moved by Mr. Desilets.

We'll keep discussing the amendment.

[English]

I'm going to read it into the record: "the committee call on the following witnesses to appear before the committee and testify for no less than one hour". That's really the—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I don't think that's what we discussed, Chair.

The Chair: Was it for at least one hour?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: No, I think it was for just one hour.

The Chair: All right. It's "for one hour".

Ms. Iqra Khalid: It's not "individually". I think "individually" was removed.

That's why I'd like to see it in writing, so that none of us have any confusion about it.

The Chair: Okay.

I'll read out that part again: "witnesses to appear before the committee and testify for no less than one hour"—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: No, Chair. It's "for one hour".

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: It's also deleting "individually", I believe.

Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes. I have that.

The confusion was that it was stricken in the last part of it, but it wasn't stricken just before "for one hour".

I'll read out the last part of it again:

...the following witnesses to appear before the committee and testify for one hour:

- a. Stephen Anderson;
- b. Kirsten Poon.

Is that correct?

[Translation]

This is the amendment moved by Mr. Desilets.

[English]

There's a lot of scribbling on my paper.

[Translation]

We'll turn to Ms. Damoff.

[English]

We are on the amendment proposed by Monsieur Desilets.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank my Bloc colleague for bringing this forward. Like his counterpart Mr. Villemure, he is truly one of the most ethical people I've met in Parliament. I don't say that lightly; he is. We will support it, especially with the changes that have clarified that the two witnesses are coming together for one hour.

I share Mr. Green's concerns about a meeting being scheduled outside our regular time, which isn't reflected in this motion. I want to put that on the record. This committee does have a habit of just having meetings. It's the chair's prerogative and I acknowledge that.

It's just unlike any other committee I've been on, in that there are no conversations with other parties when scheduling meetings.

I don't want to see this meeting scheduled on July 21 or some day in the middle of the summer. I don't know if my colleague wants to add anything to that effect, but I think the intent was that it be held during our regular sitting time. I'm just looking for clarity on that.

Maybe we can just leave it. It's not a hill I'm going to die on. I just want to get on the record that I agree with Mr. Green that we should have consultation with the chair and the other parties before meetings are scheduled.

As I said, I'm not going to propose an amendment, because I appreciate what the Bloc has put forward. I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

I'm going to address the issue you brought up about meetings. The committee will recall that back in April, we sent out....

Madam Clerk, was it April that we sent out the meeting schedule based on the motions that had been proposed?

The Clerk: I don't remember the date, but I can—

The Chair: It was sometime back in April. A game plan was indicated in the meeting schedule of what meetings we were going to have and on what days based on the motions that were proposed. There's been a lot of back-and-forth and a lot of motions have been moved. It's a very dynamic and fluid situation on this committee that I've been trying to get through. The analysts have written a report on the data collection and information tools that we've been trying to get to, too. Unfortunately, there's no way we're going to end up presenting that report to Parliament before this session is over.

That game plan was shared with the committee back in April, with specific dates, specific studies and specific meetings. It did not necessarily have specific witnesses, but it was shared with the committee. What I've been trying to do—and we've had extreme difficulty in doing this because of motions that have been moved, which is the right of every member to do—is work within that game plan. Unfortunately, we haven't. That was shared with all members of the committee back in April.

Any sense or thought that somehow I'm trying to have meetings that haven't been scheduled...with the exception of one. That was the one on the Thursday that we were going to start the Winnipeg lab documents study. We had the Information Commissioner, who was here for one opportunity. In terms of the other two witnesses, one was on the list and the other wasn't. It was the current president of PHAC. We had them come in at that time because we were running out of runway, frankly, on all the other dates we had put on the schedule.

Look, there's nothing I hate more than coming in on an off week, but my job, in conjunction with those of the clerk and the analysts, is to ensure that this committee functions and that we have meetings. The game plan was laid out in April. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to meet up with it. If you go back to April, it was shared by the clerk with all members of the committee and had exactly what those meetings were going to be.

Ms. Khalid, on Monsieur Desilets' amendment, please go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks very much, Chair.

If you want to schedule tomorrow's meeting for that report, I think we can pass it tomorrow, but I leave that to your discretion.

I share the concerns Ms. Damoff has raised. I know “silly season” is upon us. I also know that each and every one of us has very important work to do in our constituencies over the summer. I want to register my concern about the perceived urgency, or the lack thereof, of what we're discussing here—not its importance, its urgency. We leave it in your good hands, Chair, to ensure that we are judicious with how members spend their time over the summer. I, for one, have been away from my constituents for a very long time. I would really like to spend as much time with them as possible and listen to their concerns.

Over the past two meetings, we have been discussing the motion that's been presented. There's obviously a lot of grandstanding, lots of partisan politics being played with it—not to take away from the importance of transparency and what we need to do as the ethics committee. The amendment proposed by Monsieur Villemure, through Monsieur Desilets, is fair. I am willing to support this amendment. I will not propose any further amendments with respect to timing because I trust you, Chair, to have that judiciousness in scheduling the meeting when you do, if you do. I appreciate that.

This amendment really helps take the majority of the partisan nature out of the original motion. It brings the issue in a condensed way to our committee. As Mr. Fisher said, we are not a judiciary. We are not here to cancel people on social media. We are here to look into the specific role of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. If it is the will of the committee, or the majority of the committee, to look at this issue, then so be it.

The majority of our challenge has been to take the partisan politics out of it. I am quite frankly concerned. I have faced a lot of the backlash that comes out of that partisanship. I have seen other witnesses get dragged before this committee and have to deal with a lot of hate and a lot of backlash on social media. I'm also very concerned about who we bring to this committee, and whether the Lobbying Act or the conflict of interest code is applicable to them.

We really need to understand what we are doing here and why we are doing it. Is the minister responsible regardless of what accusations are made and where they're made? Should we be hauling people from industry, private citizens, before the committee and defaming them? I don't think this is fair. We need to be a lot more careful.

I'm looking at and contemplating the amendment. It takes some of the partisan grandstanding out of the motion. We as a committee need to think about how we treat witnesses who come before this

committee, and we need to think about what the consequences are when witnesses come before this committee. As committee members, we need to be a lot more judicious and careful in who we bring here and why we bring them, and we should refrain from using private citizens as props for political grandstanding.

I'll park my comments here, Mr. Chair. I'm still mulling over what I'm going to do with the main motion, but I am cautiously accepting of the amendment. I am hoping that I'll hear from some of my opposition colleagues as to where they stand on the issues, the concerns, that have been raised by me and my colleagues with respect to not just the motion but the amendment as well.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

I have Mr. Barrett.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: On the amendment that takes out the other Randy—the subject of great interest, this other Randy—and the Ghaoui Group, I have a curiosity. Members opposite, Liberal members, have said they don't want to drag citizens in front of the committee, but these two people are certainly citizens, and 50% of the amendment removes the other Randy. What are they looking to achieve with the protection of this other individual?

We have someone who's named in these texts—Randy—working at Randy Boissonnault's company, and when Mr. Anderson was asked if there was another Randy, he said that he did work with one. He wouldn't say what their name was, but they were the head of logistics. It's highly suspicious, to say the least, that Randy Boissonnault owns 50% of this company but can't tell us who the other Randy is who works for him at a small company, and that his partner and co-founder also won't say who the other Randy is.

It strikes me as a bit disingenuous, to say the least, that the Liberal members are saying that they're not just—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'll remind the member that this amendment was not moved by Liberal members. It was moved by Bloc members.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm happy to reacquaint members with what *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* says. That's not a point of order, but first days are tough for everyone. I understand that.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That's really cheap, Chair.

Mr. Michael Barrett: We have Liberal members saying they don't want to bring members of the public before the committee, but they're going to vote for an amendment that does that. That seems really weird, but they say one thing and do another quite often. They say Canada has the strictest, most stringent conflict-of-interest rules, yet they break those rules all the time. It's a cabinet of serial lawbreakers. They routinely break the law and then say they broke the law and got caught, but they'll move on. They completely disregard the rules.

In this case, it seems like they're looking for the same thing to be accepted. The minister came before the committee and said he'd give us all his phone records. I'll accept that we got all the phone records from the minister if he only has one cellphone. He can write to the clerk and commit that he only has one cellphone and that's why he only gave records for one cellphone. He can say he doesn't possess one and hasn't used another one since he's been minister. Well, that may be, but again, I don't believe that this is it.

He gave us some call records and then said that, not only that, he couldn't have used it because he was in lockdown. They keep saying they're in lockdown. There was no lockdown. They were in a meeting, and their phones were in a box outside the meeting. When they took breaks and when they had their lunch, they took their phones out of the box. It's ridiculous. They're trying to say one thing when they know another thing to be true.

My question to all members, to my colleagues in the other opposition parties as well, would be what satisfaction we can get with respect to the question of the other Randy. Would they be amenable to a subamendment that had GHI provide a complete list of their staff names or, specifically, just the name of their head of logistics, whose first name is Randy? We don't need to hear from the other Randy. We just need confirmation of the other Randy's existence. Then we can hear from Minister Boissonnault's partner. Would that subamendment be well received by them? That, of course, achieves part of the stated goal of the the Liberals, who said they don't want to bring individuals before the committee, even though they're still going to support the amendment that calls for two, just not the other Randy.

So far we've only had one Randy come before committee, and it's most likely that he is in fact the other Randy. However, let's have a discussion about having Global Health Imports provide to the committee in writing the first and last name of this individual. That would answer a number of questions. Of course, it's not wholly satisfactory. This individual should come before the committee. That's why it's in the motion that was put forward. However, I think it gets us part of the way there. It's a big compromise, guys, so let's compromise on that.

I'm curious if that would find favour with the other opposition members, because although Liberal members may vote for the amendment, the indication is that they may vote against the main motion. Let's find something that satisfies our obligation as the opposition to have accountability.

To my colleagues in the other opposition parties, would you support a subamendment or, on passing the amendment, amending the motion to have GHI, Global Health Imports—Mr. Anderson and

Mr. Boissonnault's company—provide the full name of the head of logistics, who is styled as the other Randy?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett. I'm not hearing you propose that as a subamendment, but I do have a list. I have Mr. Brock, and then Mr. Green right after.

Mr. Brock, go ahead on the amendment, please.

Mr. Larry Brock: I can be brief, Mr. Chair.

I wholeheartedly agree with my colleague Mr. Barrett's suggestions to the other opposition members. I want to clarify a couple of loose threads that I think need to be focused on.

Canadians watching this may be left with the impression that there's nothing to see here, that Global News conducted a most thorough investigation on their own and the Liberal bench, including the Prime Minister, satisfied all the queries that opposition members made on this issue. However, this is a serious matter.

To Mr. Barrett's point, I know that good governance and high ethical standards are very elusive concepts for the NDP-Liberal government, but not for Canadians. The allegations are really damning. A minister, who had been a minister for close to a year, was communicating via a device to a company, demanding, within so many minutes, a \$500,000 payment to a company that he still has a 50% interest in. The text message made it clear that there ought to be a partners meeting. Minister Boissonnault confirmed that he views himself as a partner. This was a two-partner company. What concerns me is that the Liberal bench could have cleared this up the moment the issue rose by simply identifying the surname of this other Randy. It amazes me the length to which the Liberal government will go to conceal the identity of this other Randy.

Canadians watching this are saying to themselves, "What's the big deal? If it's not Minister Boissonnault, then identify the person." However, every Liberal member on this committee, as well as Liberal members in the House, is dodging, deflecting and not answering the question on the minds of Canadians. Clear this up. Why are we wasting government resources and arguing about this, with the filibustering not only today but last week? Canadians want government to work, and when they see the kind of gamesmanship that's happening right now and the attempts to not shed any sort of transparency and light on this, it is extremely concerning.

To answer Mr. Fisher, who said this committee has never been designed to be a judge and jury, well of course not, but our role as parliamentarians is to ask tough questions. Some of us have more skills than others in asking questions, probing questions, that might ultimately elicit a response from a commissioner and/or provide the basis by which we would extend an invitation to law enforcement to investigate, but that's our role. That's what we do day in and day out at committee. It is improper to equate this lawful parliamentary privilege and process as a means of acting as judge and jury. That's just not the case.

What's also concerning is that in the Global News report, Mr. Boissonnault's other partner flat out deliberately lied when he said that the other Randy is the head of logistics. The report indicated, in fact, that the head of logistics is Mr. Anderson's father, whose first name is not Randy. We're not talking about a large corporation. We're not talking about a multinational. We're talking about a small start-up company with maybe one or two other employees.

When asked by the Global News reporter to give them the surname of the other Randy, no one in the organization could answer, in much the same way that every Liberal member of this committee and this government has refused to give us the name of that person. That's why we are here. That's why I fully support Mr. Barrett's recommendation that we need the other Randy appear and/or have the government provide us with the surname so we can make our own inquiries.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have a point of order, Chair. I believe the member should be speaking to the amendment on the floor.

Mr. Larry Brock: I have been—

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm speaking, Mr. Brock.

Both he and Mr. Barrett talked about possible subamendments, but there haven't been any put forward. Should he not be speaking to the amendment, as opposed to imaginary subamendments that they don't seem to want to move?

The Chair: It's their prerogative, Ms. Damoff, to move a subamendment if they choose to or to speak to the amendment, which I believe they are. If, at the appropriate time, they want to move a subamendment, they can, but I don't think they're talking in theory; they're just talking about the amendment.

Ms. Pam Damoff: They're not, Chair. They're talking about how they would like to amend it, but they're not amending it. Shouldn't they keep their comments to the amendment on the floor?

The Chair: The amendment is to strike the other Randy referred to in Minister Randy Boissonnault's testimony, and I think it's extremely relevant.

You've been on this committee for a while. You know that I give members a lot of latitude. I think it's extremely relevant to be speaking to the amendment on the floor, which I believe Mr. Brock is doing at this point.

I'm going to ask Mr. Brock to continue.

You have the floor.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Chair.

The last intervention is proof positive that they don't want to hear from Conservative members, who are asking appropriate questions that Canadians want answers to.

The other concern I have with the proposed amendment is the duration of the meeting. The original motion had individuals appearing for one hour each. Let's take a look at the logistics behind the passing of the amended motion. The passing of the amended motion would give every member of this committee one hour with two key witnesses. Their evidence, as I've indicated already, is far more important to Canadians and reaches further than what the Global News reporter asked. The Global News reporter simply asked what the surname of the other Randy was.

There is a multitude of other probing, relevant questions that need to be put to both Ms. Poon and Mr. Anderson. However, the amended motion would deprive us of a fulsome opportunity to ask those probing, relevant questions. Let's look at logistics. With possibly two opening statements of five minutes each and an opening round of six minutes each for each member, we're at 34 minutes. There would be another 15 minutes for a second round and possibly another 15 for a full third round, presupposing that we don't have interpretation issues, that we don't have interventions and that we don't have points of order.

It does not move like clockwork. Ultimately, at best, we might have three rounds for two highly relevant, important witnesses. I'm strongly suggesting that we reconsider having one hour and that we go back to the original motion terms, which had them appearing for one hour each, because quite frankly, we're simply going to scratch the surface by having interventions of two key witnesses in one hour.

The Chair: Mr. Green, go ahead on the amendment.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll take the bait. I think it's goofy when Conservatives, outside of the House of Commons or outside of their question period theatrics, refer to the "NDP-Liberal" government when they know full well that at this committee, I do my work in holding the government accountable. I, too, want to find out who this Randy person is.

My friends from the Bloc want to play a conciliatory role to try to move things along, and I understand why they might put water in the wine on this, but I am still left unsatisfied given that the minister's testimony is wholly inadequate. I would consider it to be obstructionist. I would consider it to be, at times, arrogant. It was just a basic refusal.

The quickest thing that could have happened for Mr. Boissonnault... Whether he wants to pretend like he knows or doesn't know this person or whether he has one phone or two doesn't matter to me. The company in question has likely watched the testimony, certainly given the interest the Canadian public has in it, and it could have cleared things up in an instant by disclosing this person in their entirety, coming clean with Canadians about the nature of this other Randy's contract with the company and their employment there. However, they haven't. I would suggest to you that the longer it takes to do that, the more suspect it seems.

For that reason, I will not be supporting this amendment. I would move a subamendment to include a formal invitation to the other Randy via the company in question. That is my subamendment. We will find out one way or another if this person exists. If they do, will the real Randy please stand up? That's my subamendment.

The Chair: Mr. Green, I heard you propose a subamendment. You did it very quickly, so I'll need you to read it slowly into the record so that, first and foremost, the clerk can interpret what you said.

Please state your subamendment again.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm just formalizing what my Conservative colleagues have pontificated about. The subamendment would include a formal invitation for the other Randy—Randy Doe or Randy John Doe; I don't know what we want to call him without the surname—to appear before this committee as part of the witness list.

Will that suffice, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Hold on.

Mr. Green, thanks for your patience. I just needed some clarification on this.

The challenge is that we're on an amendment that effectively deletes what you're proposing, so we will need to dispose of the amendment. Then if you want to, you can introduce an amendment similar to the one you are introducing right now.

For the benefit of members of the committee, I hope you can understand and appreciate the difficulty of what's being asked here in the sense that we don't know—neither the chair nor the clerk—who the other Randy is. The difficulty lies in sending out an invitation to somebody who hypothetically may or may not exist. That's challenge number one.

Challenge number two is that I need clarification, because as the motion reads now, subject to amendment, it's "testify for one hour". Would the other Randy be asked to testify for an hour with the other witnesses? That's what we will need clarification on when the time comes to propose an amendment after we dispose of this amendment.

Mr. Barrett, I saw your hand up. I don't know what you were—

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, on that point—

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: When we're inviting an organization or a registered company, it would be quite appropriate, through the president or the CEO, to extend the invitation to demand the appearance

of certain employees supposedly employed within the context of that company. It would be quite appropriate, through the CEO and the president, to extend an invitation to this Randy John Doe character.

The Chair: It would be completely appropriate. We can try, Mr. Green. There's no guarantee that we can have that happen, but if it's the will of the committee and the committee chooses to invite the other Randy, we will do our best to invite the other Randy.

We're still on the amendment. I don't see any further discussion on it.

Are you still on the amendment, Mr. Barrett?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead on the amendment.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There's obviously an interest by some members to not remove both the Ghaoui Group representatives and the other Randy. I know the timing of the meeting is something members perhaps want to prescribe, and the duration of the meeting is of interest so that this isn't a multi-day event.

To Mr. Brock's point, if it's 60 minutes and we have three witnesses on one panel and potentially 15 minutes of opening statements, that would be a challenge for productivity. We'll have spent many orders of magnitude more time on the effort to make the meeting happen than we will expend during the meeting itself.

On the question of supporting the amendment, we heard from Mr. Green, and I appreciate his response. I'm just wondering if my colleague from the Bloc would like to speak to what his interest is.

We support a two-hour meeting. We support it occurring within the regularly scheduled rubric of meetings for the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. We understand that should the clerk extend an invitation to the organization for the individual who's identified as Randy, if they come back and say they can't help, that exhausts the clerk's ability to do that. She executed the will of the committee, and then it can come back to us and we can decide how we would like to proceed. I don't think it further advances our cause to issue a summons for someone for whom we don't have a last name or coordinates, but that would be something for the committee to consider at the time.

To my colleague from the Bloc, I wonder if there is a willingness to advance the issue. If the question is about removing the Ghaoui Group, we could support that. That's obviously not our preference, but we could accept that as an amendment to resolve the discussion. Then we'd have Mr. Anderson and Ms. Poon come, who are in the amendment, and leave the invitation to the other Randy in, and it would occur over two hours during a regularly scheduled meeting of the committee, with one witness panel for the two hours. Then it's not a multi-day affair and we can put the issue to rest.

I want to give an opportunity to my colleague to speak. I want to hear him out if he's interested. I spoke to Mr. Villemure to that effect prior to the meeting, and he seemed to think that was interesting. I'm curious if his colleague is of the same view. If he's interested in responding, I'd appreciate that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Typically, questions of other committee members are not asked.

[Translation]

Mr. Desilets, since no one wants to speak right now, I'll give you the chance to talk about the amendment or the discussion around it.

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Chair, the amendment is quite clear. It involves deleting the names of two witnesses. If the discussions aren't as productive as the committee members would like, we can invite someone else to appear.

We're speculating, but the amendment on the table is clear. I simply hope that we can vote on it. Even though the Bloc Québécois is prepared to add an hour, we aren't discussing that. We're discussing the amendment, and no subamendment has been moved. I don't see where this discussion is headed.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desilets.

It seems that no one else wants to talk about the amendment. Since there doesn't seem to be unanimous consent from the committee to pass it, we'll hold a recorded vote.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

[English]

The Chair: We're back to the main motion as amended.

Is there any other discussion on this?

I see Mr. Barrett. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I just want to get an understanding, Mr. Chair, of the motion. Does it dictate, in its most current form, the duration of the meeting?

The Chair: In looking at the motion. Our understanding—I've clarified this with the clerk—is that both witnesses would be here for one hour at a time when we're able to get them here.

I'll just clarify that it is one hour for the two together. That's our interpretation of the way the motion reads, and I think that's been explained.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'd like to move an amendment that the motion be amended after the word "hour" to add the word "each".

The Chair: Clarification is needed on this, Mr. Barrett. The motion as amended was for one hour for both witnesses. The original motion had "each" in it. That was amended and the amendment was accepted, so I can't accept your amendment to have them each here for an hour when we've already disposed of that.

Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you have anyone else before I continue?

The Chair: No. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Then I'd like to offer a further amendment, Mr. Chair.

After "Kirsten Poon", the motion would read:

That the Committee order Global Health Imports to submit the names of all past and present employees, in order to reveal the identity of the other "Randy" referred to by Minister Randy Boissonnault within 7 days of this motion being adopted.

The Chair: That would add a "c". Is that right?

Mr. Michael Barrett: No, I don't believe so, Chair. It says, "the following witnesses to appear before the committee and testify for one hour". Then it's a and b, and then as a new paragraph it would say, "That the committee" and so on.

I'll send that text, as I read it, to the clerk right now.

The Chair: Yes, you're right. It would not add a "c". It would be a separate sentence at the bottom of the proposed motion.

Just hang on a second. Have you sent that yet, Mr. Barrett?

Mr. Michael Barrett: I did.

The Chair: Okay. It's been distributed.

Can you do me a favour? Just read it out again, Mr. Barrett, if you don't mind, so that everybody is clear on it.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The amendment would follow the name "Kirsten Poon". The new paragraph would read:

That the committee order Global Health Imports to submit the names of all past and present employees, in order to reveal the identity of the other "Randy" referred to by Minister Randy Boissonnault, within 7 days of this motion being adopted.

The Chair: I think that's pretty clear. Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Ms. Khalid, on the amendment, go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Chair.

I'm wondering if we can suspend for a bit while I confer with my colleagues.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Are we going to get that in writing?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, can we at least suspend while it's coming in writing, Chair?

The Chair: I'm going to suspend for a couple of minutes. It should be sent any minute now.

The meeting is suspended.

● (11455) _____ (Pause) _____

● (11500)

The Chair: The amendment proposed by Mr. Barrett has been shared with committee members in both official languages.

On the amendment, I have Mr. Longfield. Go ahead.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Perhaps because I'm subbing, I haven't received a copy yet, but I can make a general comment. The employee lists of corporations or companies are not public, and that's done for a very specific reason: to protect employees. Directors and officers are registered with the company, and the ones registered as directors and officers...are done through Industry Canada. Those lists are available.

If we're starting a witch hunt looking into the employee directory of a company, first of all, that's not something companies would have any right or any need to disclose. As to the request for something that would be against the standards put forward by Industry Canada, we aren't a court of law, and that's something that a professional court would strike right away.

I'm disappointed, but then again, it's maybe the first time that some people hear about how corporations and companies are run, about the structure of business and employee relations with business and about the requirements under the labour laws and labour codes that Canada functions under, which protect employees for very specific reasons. Maybe we don't all need to know that because we're not in business, but the committee would have to be very careful before they ask for some information that businesses do not disclose.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Longfield. The amendment has been shared with you.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm seeking some clarification with respect to this amendment. I'm wondering if it would violate labour law.

The Chair: I don't know. On what basis would you make that argument?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: There may be privacy concerns with respect to former employees or current employees. I am not a labour law expert, and I know that some members on this committee are very experienced litigators and perhaps have better knowledge. However, I think it's very important for us to clarify this before we move forward with the amendment.

The Chair: I'm not the adjudicator of whether it constitutes anything against labour law.

The committee can pretty much ask anything if it deems it appropriate and deems it its will. It would be up to the employer at that point to determine whether in fact it constitutes a breach of labour law, and they can simply redact information. The committee at that point can determine which direction it wants to go.

That's my initial assessment on where things are, but the committee is the master of its own domain. It can ask anything it wants of anyone, any corporation or any business. If they choose to provide that information, that's up to them. If they don't, that's up to them as well.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That's the question, Chair. I think the objective of this amendment is to get the information in. It is not to ask the question; it's to receive the information.

I'm also wondering what would happen if the company comes back to us and says, "Sorry, this violates labour law." What position would the committee be in in that instance?

I obviously want the work we do to be effective and efficient and to the best of our capacity. I know we don't have a lot of days left in this session. I'm just asking those questions and I'm hoping we can get some answers.

Ultimately, I think what we're trying to do here is get an understanding of what has occurred with the Global News article. From my understanding, we're adding this particular amendment, after talking at length about the amended motion as presented, for one of two reasons. Either the other folks in it were just a front to get to the other Randy and to sensationalize or grandstand—whatever objectives the Conservatives may have—or it was to understand what exactly has happened. It's one or the other.

I'm trying to understand the practical implication of the amendment to this motion. We're basically asking a company to give up all their records of all previous employees and all current employees, and if the Conservatives would have it, perhaps all future employees too. It seems to be a bit of a witch hunt, in my opinion, to see who this Randy is. What happens if there are multiple Randys on this list? What happens if somebody named Randeep goes by Randy? There could be many other instances of this.

This is not the most efficient way for us to conduct our business. I think the best way for us to go forward is to keep the currently amended motion, as it stands now, and see if there's something to sniff here. Then we can go from there.

At this point, as I've said before and will say again, I don't think what we're trying to do is achieve any real work. What we're trying to do is grandstand, to create scandals, to witch-hunt and go after people who, God knows, may or may not exist and to create a target on people's backs. Quite frankly, I've been a victim of that myself. I don't think we should be putting civilians up for that at all. We need to be very judicious in how we conduct ourselves at this committee, who we call before this committee and what kind of documents we order to be produced before this committee. We need to take into account what the practical implications of such an amendment would be. We need to take into account and perhaps pre-empt, or think about it at the very least, what a private company would have to go through to release private information of all former employees and all current employees.

I hope we can be a bit more judicious in what kind of amendments we're proposing. I would hope that we not partake in political grandstanding or in trying our very best to defame people in the House.

I am quite humbled and honoured to serve as a member of Parliament. I take my responsibilities very seriously. That includes the privilege we're given that says we are honourable; our words are not supposed to be questioned. Members here need to remember that as well. Ensure that we are being honest. Ensure that we are working to the best of our ability to do the work that Canadians sent us here to do, not to sensationalize things and not to create scandals out of something.

We really need to get back on track. I know I keep saying this again and again, but I'm hoping that we can find a way to build consensus on this committee. I'm hoping that we can find a way to get some real work done.

Mr. Chair, I know I've said this before, but I was quite disappointed in not being able to complete the study that I put forward and that we had spent a lot of resources on.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, I'll have to cut you off there, unfortunately. We are running out of resources, but before we go, I'll note this—I did look it up—for the clarity of members of the committee:

The Standing Orders do not delimit the power to order the production of papers and records. The result is a broad, absolute power that on the surface appears to be without restriction. There is no limit on the types of papers likely to be requested; the only prerequisite is that the papers exist in hard copy or electronic format, and that they are located in Canada. They can be papers originating from or in the possession of governments, or papers the authors or owners of which are from the private sector or civil society (individuals, associations, organizations, et cetera).

I have a list. We will continue tomorrow with Ms. Khalid, Mr. Green, Mr. Barrett, Mr. Longfield and Mr. Desilets.

We're suspended until tomorrow.

[The meeting was suspended at 7:12 p.m., Monday, June 10]

[The meeting resumed at 11:13 a.m., Tuesday, June 11]

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

I want to welcome everybody back to meeting 123 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

As a reminder about the earpieces, make sure they're the approved ones. When you're not using the earpieces, make sure they're in their proper place.

When we last left, we were on an amendment to a motion. The amendment was put forward by Mr. Barrett, and it reads:

That the Committee order Global Health Imports to submit the names of all past and present employees, in order to reveal the identity of the other "Randy" referred to by Minister Randy Boissonnault within 7 days of this motion being adopted.

I have a list. I intervened when Ms. Khalid had the floor, so we'll start with Ms. Khalid. We'll then go to Ms. Damoff, Mr. Green, Mr. Barrett and then Monsieur Villemure.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead on the amendment.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair. I really appreciate that.

I may not speak as eloquently as Mr. Barrett speaks, and I may not have the litigation experience that Mr. Brock has, but one thing

I do have, Chair, is decency. I really would not do to my colleagues what my colleagues do to me.

Yesterday, Mr. Barrett posted a clip of me on social media, taking what I was saying completely out of context. I would like, for the record, to reiterate what it was that I was trying to get across.

In this committee, we are tasked with a certain thing. We need to bring it in tighter together. If the Conservatives have allegations to make, let's bring them in here. That's what this motion is about.

However, what I do not appreciate is the dehumanization of members of this committee or of private citizens, as I've seen in the past, who come here and are faced with allegations and outright conjecture. I don't think that is helpful to what we are trying to achieve collectively as a committee.

I've said many times, Chair, that I am willing to work with all of our colleagues on consensus because, ultimately and hopefully, we are all here to make sure that Canadians are well represented and that our democracy is well supported through our parliamentary system. The behaviour of my colleagues, with respect to creating that conjecture and creating false scandals is absolutely not right.

Once again, we see the Conservatives wanting to go on an overboard fishing expedition, and that's what I think this amendment has really been all about. I raised these points yesterday, only to be taken out of context in a two-second clip. Let's not do that to each other.

The Conservatives are proposing a comprehensive order with absolutely no consideration for the privacy or the safety of everyday Canadians. We are obligated, as a committee, to ensure that the people we bring in to this committee have both. Asking an employer to reveal the identities of every single employee the company has ever had is the definition of overboard. It is way too broad of an amendment for us to consider while we're considering this issue at hand. It would include individuals who, perhaps because they left the company, had nothing to do with these text messages, and for what purpose? Why would we make that public?

Yesterday at committee, I raised a legitimate argument about employment law, the rights of workers and the responsibilities of employers to protect the privacy of their employees. I would not subject my employees to this kind of.... I don't even know what to call it, Chair.

Mr. Larry Brock: A witch hunt.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, exactly, Mr. Brock. It is a witch hunt that you guys are—

An hon. member: *[Inaudible—Editor]*

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Please don't chirp at me.

Chair, if you can...?

The Chair: Mr. Brock, we're not intervening. Ms. Khalid has the floor. What I expect today from all members is that, when you have the floor, that will be respected.

Thank you.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much for that intervention, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate it.

Chair, your response to the concerns that I raised yesterday was accurate—to a point. With respect, it didn't respond to the actual point of the question. You explained how committees have significant power to request documents from government, from organizations and from Canadians, and I absolutely accept that. That is the power of Parliament. The question is not whether we have this significant power. The question is what our responsibility with that power is.

If every time the Conservatives want to go on a fishing expedition, we're going to start issuing massive orders to organizations to turn over employee information, that is something that I want no part of and I do not want this committee to set that precedent whatsoever. I don't think it is the right approach to how we conduct ourselves and how we represent Canadians here.

Who are we going to be implicating in all of this? Is it the administrative assistant who organized the email four years ago? Is it the 21-year-old summer intern who helped out by answering phone calls?

This is not a responsible way of going about this. If we were to let the Ethics Commissioner look into this matter, that might be the more responsible approach. When his office conducts a review, he does so privately and for good reason—all of those reasons that I just outlined. If he's going to take a look at the employees of this company, they can be assured that their privacy will be respected, as it should. Our laws in this land make sure that privacy is respected.

The Ethics Commissioner has already told us that he needs to decide whether an investigation is warranted, so why not just let him do that?

The reality is that the Conservatives aren't interested in the opinions of an independent officer of Parliament. They're interested in turning this committee into a partisan circus, and they have no regard whatsoever for the innocent individuals they drag into this. That is absolutely unfair to Canadians.

I have to ask what the Conservatives' real goal is here.

On one hand, they're saying that all they really want is the surname of this individual. On the other hand, they're calling all kinds of additional witnesses and requesting all kinds of additional names. Mr. Barrett seemed to acknowledge, in his remarks yesterday, the incredible overstep of dragging regular Canadians before this committee. They suggest that they are concerned about who this other Randy is.

If that's the focus, why do we need these long hearings? Why do we need Ms. Poon? She isn't mentioned in these text messages. We don't need the names of the intern or the person who emails the office. We don't need the names of any additional people named Randy who may have worked for this company in the past, the present or the future.

Who we need, however, is Mr. Anderson as to who Mr. Anderson spoke to on that day. Perhaps the solution is this. We simply request that Mr. Anderson turn over his phone records and text mes-

sages for September 8, 2022. The minister has shown his phone records. We can ask Mr. Anderson to do the same. This will show whether or not he texted or called the minister on that day.

We have seen from the minister's records that there is no such phone call, so why not check both?

I think that it would be a very reasonable way to continue to protect the privacy of Canadians and to make sure that we are doing our work here in this committee. Should we receive that information and it shows no communication with the minister, there would be no need to drag these witnesses before the committee to face abuse.

I've seen witnesses face abuse in this committee, Mr. Chair. We would have our answer about whether or not the minister was called or texted.

I have a rather bad feeling that the Conservatives want more than the facts. They want angry social media clips. They want to tar and feather these witnesses in public view and then send a fundraising email bragging about it. That's the method of operation. I've been a victim of this too.

Let's see if that's right, Mr. Chair. Let's see if they're interested in evidence or if they're interested in politics. I suspect that the Conservatives aren't interested in the actual evidence because they are disregarding the real evidence that we have. It comes from Minister Boissonnault's phone records from September 8 of 2022. We can see very clearly on those phone records that there are no calls between 11.12 a.m., Pacific time, and 5.37 p.m., Pacific time.

That covers entirely the time frame that Global News talks about in its coverage and the time frame that Mr. Cooper talked about at length during the minister's appearance. Under that time frame, everyone involved was supposed to be on a "partner call" at 12.30 Pacific time. Clearly, from this phone record, Minister Boissonnault was on no such call. An examination of Mr. Anderson's phone records would, I think from this, show no call from the minister either.

Let's also remember that on September 8, 2022, Minister Boissonnault was in Vancouver attending a cabinet retreat with wall-to-wall meetings where ministers lock up their cellphones, a day that was especially hectic because it was the day that Queen Elizabeth II passed away. May she rest in peace. This was real evidence, Mr. Chair, but the Conservatives are just disregarding it to the point that Mr. Cooper has ridiculously suggested that the minister had some kind of burner phone that he used. How conspiratorial can we actually get here?

Are they going to accept to see the evidence? Let's see.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to move a subamendment to Mr. Barrett's amendment as proposed yesterday. It is that the committee delete the words "order Global Health Imports to submit the names of all past and present employees, in order to reveal the identity of the other 'Randy' referred to by Minister Randy Boissonnault", and replace those words with, "request that Stephen Anderson produce for the committee all of his phone records and text messages from September 8, 2022", and to keep the words at the end, "within 7 days of this motion being adopted".

The Chair: Okay. Have you shared the subamendment with the clerk, Ms. Khalid?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, I will just flip it over right now.

The Chair: I want to make sure that this is in everybody's hands.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): I have a point of order, Chair.

Just to make sure that we understand exactly what Ms. Khalid is proposing, it might be best to suspend for a few minutes because certainly I'd like to see some text.

The Chair: Yes, I was moving in that direction, and I'm sure members want to see the subamendment.

I need to talk to the clerk.

Let's suspend for a couple of minutes until everybody has it.

• (13125) _____ (Pause) _____

• (13135)

The Chair: The subamendment as proposed by Ms. Khalid has been sent out to the members of the committee. It is in order because it's in relation to finding out who Randy is, potentially.

We are on the subamendment by Ms. Khalid, so I have Mr. Green first, and then I'm going to go to Mr. Kurek.

Go ahead, Mr. Green on the subamendment, please.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

You're quite right. I think the heart of the matter of where we're at right now is trying to find out who this Randy is—the person I affectionately call “alibi Randy”. There have been lots of bizarre twists and turns at this committee in just trying to get to the heart of the matter.

Quite frankly, whether it was the minister or the company in question...and I respect that the minister would have to say, of course, that he wouldn't have any knowledge of anybody inside this company. However, we've heard arguments from the governing side here, from the Liberal Party, that somehow disclosing this information is a grave violation of privacy. It has been equated to some kind of circus. I would say that in this particular case, the circus is of the minister's making.

Just to recap, this is a company with millions of dollars in contracts, something like \$8 million. There are allegations of fraud, which, to my understanding and publicly reported, haven't even been defended, and then there's just the whole structure of the way in which the minister has such a close relationship to this day. It doesn't pass the smell test, quite frankly.

Really, all of this—I'll say it again—could have been avoided if the real Randy had just stood up. If the company had just said it—this is Randy, this is what Randy does, this is Randy's contract—it would all have gone away. Now we're going down some rabbit hole about phone records. While I think the use of the term “burner phone” might perhaps come off as a bit dramatic, the truth is that it would be expected that a minister and it would be expected that most members of Parliament would have their own personal phone

lines. Of course they would. You wouldn't want to conduct anything personal or non-business-related on your cabinet cellphone.

I'm unwilling to accept all of the drama around time zones and cabinet retreats and faraday boxes and all of these different types of things. I'm simply interested in finding out, officially, who this Randy is. Who is alibi Randy? Absent alibi Randy, I would say that the minister has dug himself into quite a hole here. On the surface of it, he lacks credibility in his testimony. On the surface of it, on the stories that have been reported—they are publicly reported and have not yet been refuted, I think, in a meaningful way—that a minister would even want to be tangentially related and connected to a company as nuclear as this, in this moment, seems beyond my understanding. He wouldn't answer basic questions about payouts, and was obstructionist and obfuscated on what I think were very straightforward questions. For that reason, we're at this point.

I would have liked to hear from the Ghaoui company. I would have liked to hear from all of the witnesses to get to the heart of the matter. If it is the case that this story, as convoluted and bizarre as it is unfolding, was technically legally allowed, we have problems. To the average person, to the objective person on the outside looking at this, given the facts that have been reported, given the lack of any, I think, substantive defence by the minister and by this company, I think it puts it all at risk, quite frankly. Any time there's a scandal in this committee, I believe the general public doesn't necessarily discern whether it's Liberal, Conservative, Bloc or New Democrat. In their minds, I believe they just see all politicians as being corrupt. There's a kind of broad brush.

We've heard today in the arguments from the Liberal side that they're now being pulled into this. Why? Why are you allowing yourselves to be pulled into this mess when it's not your mess? You are not receiving deferred payments from this company. You do not have a 50% interest in a company that had almost \$8 million in contracts that, as I understand, are being pursued for various allegations of fraud. That's not your mess. Why you're putting in the extra overtime work to try to make this go away doesn't make sense to me as a New Democrat.

While I appreciate the way in which social media, personal attacks, ad hominem attacks and information taken out of context has a direct impact on the way we do our business, this simply could have been solved, absent the filibuster last meeting, with straightforward answers and with a minister who was willing to take responsibility and accountability for the role and involvement they had in this company and whether or not they were in contact with them.

What we have to do, as a committee, when this is done, hopefully, is provide recommendations to close whatever gaps and loopholes seem to exist and are present here.

For that reason, Mr. Chair, I certainly will not be supporting this amendment. I don't want to go down this bizarre rabbit hole of the forensic auditing of people's phone accounts, assuming that they only have one phone line. I don't know what Randy's number was before he was a minister. I don't know what phones he has or doesn't have. I don't think we have the power to investigate that.

This notion that we're just going to take their word for it, quite frankly, doesn't cut it. It just doesn't cut it. I'm unwilling to do that.

I have no ill will toward Mr. Boissonnault or my Liberal colleagues here. I get along with them, I think. We work together. I work together with members on the opposition side to hold the government accountable. That, ultimately, is our role.

Again, for the people who are watching, all of this can be solved by Mr. Boissonnault and the people who are connected to this company proactively disclosing who alibi Randy is. That, to me, would have been the simplest thing to do a week ago to make all of this go away. Say, "My name is alibi Randy, and this is who I am. This is what my job is. Here's my contract. Here's long how long I've been working" and it's case closed. We can move on.

I'm telling you that all of this extra effort.... I said this to the minister. I'm going to say it to my Liberal colleagues. It doesn't look great. It just doesn't look good from where I sit, which is certainly not anywhere close to the Conservative caucus, but as an objective person of this committee, from where I sit, the more you all dig in on this, the worse it's going to look for everybody involved.

Let's avoid all of that. Let's have alibi Randy stand up, maybe even do an interview, talk about the good work of this company and perhaps provide some kind of defence for the allegations that have been thrown their way—I don't think they've done that in court yet—and then let's move on.

I'm not going to be party to some procedural shenanigans or anything else, like some subamendments to an amendment that will take us off track and ultimately try to obstruct, delay or frustrate our just getting to a basic answer. I don't intend to participate much more in this meeting beyond this. I just want to go on the record and be very clear on where I stand.

I support this. I think it's a reasonable motion that Mr. Barrett has put forward. I think it could all be solved if this company just took some accountability and responsibility for once and disclosed who alibi Randy is.

What I'm telling you right now.... I'm just going to say it. You have all had your time for your filibusters, so I'm going to have mine right now. I don't think there's an alibi Randy. There it is. There it is folks. I don't think there's another Randy, and I think that's why we're in this mess.

Now it's left to Mr. Boissonnault and his colleagues at this company, which he supposedly no longer has any dealings with, but still receives 50% ownership and, ostensibly, payouts to the extent that we aren't fully clear about.... I don't think there's a Randy. The onus is going to be on this company to prove there is, not on us to prove there isn't.

Thank you.

The Chair: We are on the subamendment. I have Mr. Kurek, followed by Ms. Damoff.

I see your hand, Mr. Housefather.

On the subamendment, it's Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thanks very much, Chair.

I always find it interesting because quite often I hear from Liberal members of this committee that they're concerned that we're distracted doing other things and they want to get back to the hard work of what this committee is doing. I know we have some reports and whatnot that are sitting on the table, yet here we are into a multiple-meeting filibuster by Liberals based on the answer to what seemed at the time, when initially posed by the media, by Conservative members and by other opposition parties, to be a pretty simple question: Who is this Randy that's in question?

We now have parliamentary resources, hours and hours of committee time and the Liberals doing backflips trying to make excuses and muddy the waters. They're saying phone records but not witnesses, and this but not that and the other thing. It all comes down to a very simple question: Who is this individual referred to as Randy in these text messages?

I don't understand. It is truly bewildering that the Liberals would burn so much political capital, that they would burn so much time and that they would spend so much energy trying to equivocate on this very simple question and turn a simple question into a scandal.

While the Liberals are blaming opposition parties for asking these questions and suggesting that maybe there's something to hide here.... Mr. Chair, the reason we are asking these questions is that the Liberals refuse to answer that one very simple, straightforward question.

In the absence of an answer to that question, one is inevitably led to the conclusion that they are trying to hide something, whether it is the members of this committee doing it willfully or whether it is a direction from the top that they cannot allow these answers to be given. Whatever the case is, quite frankly, that's their internal policies and, I would suggest, an attitude that has led them to the situation they're in today.

When it comes down to it, Chair, what this committee needs to get to the bottom of is that very simple question, and then we can proceed very logically after that point.

The one question I would hope that all members of this committee.... I understand there are some question marks around the conduct of these companies and contracts, including some government contracts and some very suspicious things. I know that when the minister came before this committee that was one of the most partisan attitudes that I've ever seen a minister of the Crown present before committee. He, members of the Liberal Party and so many others simply refuse to answer the very basic question of who this Randy in question is.

My encouragement to all members, to you, Mr. Chair, and to those who are watching is that until there is a forthrightness and willingness from the Liberals to answer that simple question, the inevitable conclusion is that they are trying to cover up and hide something damning.

I would simply leave it there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kurek.

I have Ms. Damoff next, followed by Mr. Housefather.

Go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

First, I want to offer to Mr. Green that it was Minister Boissonnault's personal phone records that were provided to the committee.

I have a question through you, Chair, to the clerk. Has the request ever been provided to Minister Boissonnault from the committee to provide the information that was asked of him?

I know he provided his phone records proactively, but have we ever requested that information from him?

The Chair: I'm going to leave that to the clerk to respond to.

Madam Clerk, I know that we did ask for the phone records. That was one of the requests.

Have there been any others that you had acted on?

I'll let you address the committee on that.

The Clerk: I have not specifically sent an email to flag the questions because it's really the responsibility of the minister if he wants to answer the questions or not.

Questions were asked. He has access to the blues and he can send the information.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: Does that clear it up?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes, it does.

I want to clarify, because Mr. Green said that we needed to see his personal phone records, and I wanted to clarify that what he provided were his personal phone records. Any other phone that he might have, be it ministerial, would be a whole.... First of all, he wouldn't and shouldn't be using a government phone for personal business. When I deal with my Terry Fox Run stuff, I use my personal email account, and we all do that with our personal business.

I would also like to make a comment on Mr. Kurek saying that we were filibustering. I think through yesterday and today.... We put forward an amendment today—thank you to my colleague Ms. Khalid. I sat through days, in fact, Mr. Kurek was there, when the Conservatives were filibustering Bill C-21, and it went into the night for hours and hours and hours with no productive amendments put forward and the abuse of public servants who were there at the time.

I don't think that we need Mr. Kurek mumbling to me, Chair, as I'm trying to speak.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: He's mumbling under his breath. He's not disrupting the committee hearings. If he was, I would stop him.

I have a point of order from Mr. Barrett.

Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I am loath to intervene, because I know it upsets the other side if we raise anything that they say in front of a 4K camera and a microphone. They claim that they're never interrupting, only interrupted, but yesterday Ms. Damoff was very sure—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, what's the point of order here?

The Chair: I'm waiting to hear it.

Mr. Michael Barrett: —that there must be relevance in what we're talking about.

Again, there were cries foul about interruptions, and we have it happening right now. Rules for me but not for thee. The relevance—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, what's the point of order? You can't call a point of order and just go on a rant.

The Chair: He's claiming relevance.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There is relentless interruption. The Liberal members don't like to be interrupted but like to interrupt. They don't allow for leniency on relevance but they expect it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

I get it. Thank you.

Mr. Michael Barrett: She's talking about C-21, and that didn't happen at this committee.

The Chair: Again, generally I try to give a wide latitude and expect that members are going to come back.

We are on the subamendment.

We have Ms. Damoff on the subamendment, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

I was talking about the accusation of filibustering and giving examples of my colleagues across the way who filibustered and do it quite regularly.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Against corruption....

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Damoff, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff: It's difficult to have a conversation, Chair. I'm just going to say that I think we need to be respectful.

To Mr. Barrett's point about our not liking to be interrupted, the issues that I have are when clips are taken, especially when they're taken out of context, and put on Twitter, which I'm quite certain has driven horrific traffic to Ms. Khalid.

I'm supportive of what has been put forward by Ms. Khalid and will be supporting it.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Housefather, go ahead on the subamendment, sir.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, it is on the subamendment.

Mr. Chair, I think that there are just a couple of things I wanted to say.

First of all, the Ethics Commissioner told us that he felt there was nothing further to investigate on issues other than, now, the new question of who Randy is in these text messages. I agree that the one question the committee needs to actually understand is who the Randy is in the text messages. I think everyone here, on all sides, is unaware of the answer to that. We all have our own pre-suppositions, our own ideas, but what's happening is that people are now speculating idly and the real question is this: How do you find out?

To me, Mr. Barrett's original proposal calls for the company to release the names of all the different employees. Who is to say that this Randy is an employee of the company? Randy could be a consultant. Randy could be somebody else, so Mr. Barrett's proposal doesn't resolve the question of who Randy is by simply producing a list of employees. You could argue that it's overbroad to produce all the employees. To me, the answer is to ask the company who Randy is. Ask Mr. Anderson who Randy is. Ask Mr. Anderson these questions. To me, the list of employees was irrelevant. The question to ask the company is this: Who is Randy?

At least Ms. Khalid's subamendment requires Mr. Anderson to produce his text messages for that day, and we will see what number this comes from. Presumably, at least from the text messages Mr. Anderson put out on September 8, we will have all of these answers.

I prefer Ms. Khalid's subamendment to the original amendment because the original amendment doesn't actually necessarily tell us who Randy is. It provides a list of employees from his company, and nobody can say that Randy was an employee. He could have been a consultant, or she could have been a consultant. We don't even know if it's a guy.

In any case, I will vote for Ms. Khalid's subamendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Green, I have you next, followed by Mr. Barrett.

Go ahead, sir, on the subamendment.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much.

I appreciate Mr. Housefather's intervention. He makes a very compelling case to call Mr. Anderson as a witness. That was the intention, yet we end up down these other rabbit holes, so I am for that.

Mr. Chair, I have lost track between the subamendments and amendments. Where are we with that? Have we now, based on the last votes, removed our ability to call any witnesses, and we're now just relying on this, or does that still exist, based on the original motion?

The Chair: The main motion was amended, and it still calls for two witnesses to be called: Mr. Anderson and Ms. Poon. The amendment proposed by Mr. Barrett calls for the employee list—correct me if I'm wrong, Madam clerk—with Randy, to be submitted within seven days of the passing of the motion. We are now on the subamendment of Ms. Khalid, which calls for the phone records of Mr. Anderson.

That's where we're at. Nothing has stopped or precluded us from having those two witnesses appear because it's still part of the main motion.

Mr. Matthew Green: I apologize. The twists and turns are sometimes hard to follow.

Given that, and given that it's a subamendment, I'm to understand that, procedurally, there can't be a subamendment to a subamendment. Is that correct?

The Chair: That's correct. We would have to deal with this matter and then would come back on the amendment. Only then can a subamendment be moved, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your handling of this meeting. I know it's probably not easy in person there. It's kind of torture to experience online, but here I am.

At the appropriate time, I will be moving an amendment to Mr. Barrett's original motion, which would extend his motion to include the language of “employees and consultants” because I think Mr. Housefather raises a good point. Hopefully, the question of who alibi Randy is may emerge that way.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

We're still on the subamendment.

I have Mr. Barrett next on the subamendment.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks very much, Chair.

I wanted to just refer to Krista Hessey from Global News, who published an article on June 4, 2024. Ms. Hessey has in the article here questions asked of Mr. Anderson:

When asked if he worked with another Randy, Anderson stated that he did, but would not disclose the employee's full name. He said the other Randy was “head of logistics.”

I do want to note that.

We have a challenge when we're looking for records from this company, I think. It's not because of the size of the company; it has a handful of employees. However, of course, there is the matter of the fire that may cause a challenge for us in getting records from the company. On September 25, 2022, GHI's Edmonton unit was set ablaze, and detectives working alongside Edmonton Fire Rescue Services determined that the fire had been deliberately set following a break and enter to the premises, destroying inventory and records.

This, of course, preceded the lawsuits that followed with GHI, and, of course, the Ghaoui Group made a \$7.3-million claim for loss and damages. There is the claim on the missing money—the outstanding money—that the intention of GHI was that they would pay Ghaoui back with insurance money. We're unsure if the deposit was used to procure product or what had taken place there, but questions abound after that fire, including whether they have a list of their employees.

The public reporting is that Randy—other Randy or alibi Randy—is an employee, but I think, to just capture it all, yes, let's ask for contractors, subcontractors, consultants and employees who are named Randy. Simply getting phone records and not other Randy is a problem because we don't know the application that other Randy and Mr. Anderson were using for communication. There are too many messaging apps that are in common use to itemize, but we don't know. That simply because someone ought not use their phone for something means it is therefore excluded from the interest of the committee in getting an answer is not sufficient.

We would need to see messages from all messaging apps, and we would need to see call logs from all calling apps for both Mr. Anderson and the minister—Randy—as part of our inquiry into who the other Randy is, but that's not a conclusion.

Certainly, in having Mr. Anderson come before the committee to answer questions, he would be forewarned that question one will be the first and last name of the other Randy or Randip or alibi Randy—we need to know. That's going to be question one, so of course Mr. Anderson must come to the committee. We need answers to our questions. An exhaustive review of communications logs from all telecommunication devices owned by Mr. Anderson is the only way to give credibility to this question here. Barring that expansion, we can't support this.

We've gone from having Ghaoui Group, Anderson, Poon and other Randy come to committee—the subject of the messages, the third party—to eliminating other Randy, which is the question in front of us.

Now there's the suggestion that we'll get these messages. We're going to amend the motion to get messages from one device and potentially eliminate the call for the other two witnesses. Come on, that dog won't hunt. We're going to need to see all messages, all call logs and all devices owned by Mr. Anderson, and the same goes for the minister.

If we're going to follow this thread on devices, it needs to be complete. That's what Mr. Brock asked for. The clerk might not have sent a note to the minister, but he was here. He heard the request. He also had a gaggle of staff with him who, I'm certain, minuted the request. I'm sure they watched the game tape after and saw that the request was there.

The one phone just isn't sufficient. It just isn't sufficient that what went through his wireless provider is it. I can say with a great deal of certainty that almost everyone in this room—members and others, members and strangers—uses applications for messaging other than the native messaging app on their phone. There's Wickr and WhatsApp. Here we go. Let's name some. I know people use Facebook Messenger often. I find that surprising, but to each their own. People DM on Instagram and Snapchat. I don't think people use it to instant message, but there's an app called BeReal that people really like. There are lots. People will make calls on Skype, Teams and Zoom as well. People will instant message on those. There are a variety of encrypted and unencrypted messaging apps. They're quite common in government, in politics and in military and civilian applications.

It's really half-hearted in its current form. We'd need more meat on those bones, because this thing has been pared down so much that we've gotten away from the penultimate question. Who is other Randy?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

I have Mr. Brock next.

Go ahead, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you.

Mr. Barrett, my colleague, stole a bit of my thunder. I was going to bring to the attention of this entire group that simply getting all communications, potentially, between the minister and Mr. Anderson only scratches the surface. As Mr. Barrett indicated, there are so many applications out there. I know personally the frustration I have with my teenage daughters, who use Snapchat for the sole purpose that it does not allow anyone to retain the actual message. It's a moment in time. It literally disappears within, I think, 10 or 15 seconds. I believe it would be foolhardy for anyone on this committee to believe the minister, as experienced as he is, would be that naive to actually use his own cellphone or, to Ms. Damoff's point, his government cellphone and implicate himself in a serious violation under the Conflict of Interest Act: benefiting himself while being a minister of the Crown. It would be foolish, and I don't think, for one minute, he did that.

However, it's a step, and it was a step I that thought was necessary because—and I wholeheartedly agree with my colleague Mr. Kurek—the display we all witnessed from Mr. Boissonnault was one for the ages. I have been privileged to attend numerous committees since my election in 2021, but nowhere had I ever seen the complete lack of respect for the process and the hyperpartisanship of the minister. Literally, right out of the gate he had an agenda and wanted to distract this committee. We're not going to allow that to happen.

Sometimes I think that my Liberal colleagues simply don't want an opposition. They want an audience.

Mr. Michael Barrett: That's right.

Mr. Larry Brock: Whenever we ask the tough questions, we're maligned and criticized by them. Quite frankly, this is the role of the opposition. For those members I'm staring at right now, who may have the privilege of being re-elected in the next election—although I think the odds are slim to nil—they're going to have the ability to be an opposition MP. They're going to, obviously, change their mindset because they're going to want transparency and accountability from their government.

To go back to reflect on the original motion, amendment and subamendment, we're losing track of the evidence we have before you. I think it's important I talk about evidence because Ms. Khalid talked about evidence over politics or evidence versus politics. The questions we put to this committee in the filibuster—and this is exactly what it is. Ms. Damoff may be offended by that, but that's exactly what she has been doing, as well as her colleagues. We heard some evidence from the minister himself. We received evidence by way of media reports. That's not political. They may not like the message and the content, but that doesn't—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Larry Brock: Chair, Ms. Khalid and Ms. Damoff had some issues about my talking over them when they had the floor, and again they display the absolute lack of respect for me and this process. I am calling them both out for talking over my time at the mic.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Brock. You have the floor.

Mr. Larry Brock: I guess we need a refresher on the evidence.

I'm going to reflect on what the minister had to say. The minister made it abundantly clear that he has complied with all the rules and that he has retained a 50% interest in his business with Mr. Anderson. The rules allow that. Many members have businesses on the side. However, as a minister, he can't have a controlling interest in that company. He's essentially a silent partner.

He confirmed in evidence, when he attended, that he considers himself a partner in this small, two-person company. His other partner is Mr. Stephen Anderson. That's the first piece of evidence.

I'm taking a look at the actual text exchanges between Mr. Anderson and, potentially, the minister. It's dated September 8, 2022.

Stephen Anderson states, "What is going on? I just received this from Randy!" Now, this is a text message that he is sending to someone at Ghaoui. The person—the other Randy or the minister, Randy Boissonnault, doesn't call Stephen by his first name. It's simply Anderson.

It reads, "It's 13:14 MST and 15:14 EST it literally takes 10 seconds to complete a transfer, I am telling you, we are NOT ALLOCATING like this, please reach out and see what the reason is now, you assured me this morning".

I'll stop right there. He wrote, "you assured me this morning". Was that a telephone call? Was that another text exchange between the minister and Mr. Anderson? I don't know. It appears, just by reading between the lines, that the failure of Ghaoui to make this deposit had been an ongoing concern.

I know that I originally asked for records of September 8, 2022. It may find favour with all committee members if perhaps we go back 30 or 60 days for all communications between the minister and Mr. Anderson because it tells me that this is an ongoing issue and concern.

It continues, "you assured me this morning this was done first thing; and allowed you to hold this stock today". This is the stock that was supposed to be delivered to Ghaoui, which mysteriously burned up in a deliberately set fire. It continues, "it's midday and

nothing is completed"—this is the other Randy or it's the minister—"I am calling Felix to discuss."

Now, who is Felix? We've heard that name before. According to Mr. Anderson, Felix's surname is Papineau and he is Stephen Anderson's "right-hand man in Quebec".

It goes on: "I am calling Felix to discuss. Be available in 15 for a"—wait for it—"partner call". It's not a consultant call. It's not an intern call. It's not an employee-to-partner call. It's partner to partner. Minister Boissonnault is a partner. His own words confirm he's a partner with Mr. Anderson.

That's evidence. That's not conjecture. That's not a witch hunt. This is real evidence shared to Canadians by Global News.

The reporter for Global News obviously asked a number of questions. When asked by the reporter if he worked with another Randy, "Anderson stated that he did, but would not disclose the employee's full name." Of course, his partner wants to protect Minister Boissonnault.

He knows what the rules are, and Mr. Boissonnault can't be involved in the day-to-day affairs as a minister of the Crown, so conveniently, he declines to provide the name of the alibi Randy, or the other Randy. He said that the other Randy was head of logistics, and I referenced this yesterday, Mr. Chair, in my discussion at committee. Head of logistics.... Well, as any good reporter would do in this case, she did not accept that at face value. She conducted further interviews. She spoke with GHI's former suppliers.

Edward Anderson, who is the father of the partner, Stephen Anderson was identified as the company's logistics lead. His email signature had the title of logistics supply chain at GHI in 2021, according to emails viewed by Global. She reached out to Mr. Anderson. He, too, declined to comment. He, too, declined to identify who the other Randy is, because, again, he's the father of one of the partners, the other partner. He wants to protect the business relationship between his son and the minister, so of course he's going to decline and give no comment.

She also reached out to Felix Papineau—I referenced that—Anderson's right-hand man in Quebec, and Shawna Parker, Anderson's sister. Again, both declined to respond to questions. I referenced this yesterday, and I'm going to highlight it today. Mr. Anderson deliberately lied to the reporter when he said that the other Randy, or the alibi Randy, is head of logistics. It was his actual father. It wasn't the other Randy; it was his father.

Now, this is why we, in our original motion, wanted a representative of Ghaoui here, because they are part of this, They have a different perspective and a different interest. They're not here to protect Minister Boissonnault. Quite frankly, they want to get paid back the money that they lost or the product that they originally contracted for. They're out of pocket.

The reporter reached out to Ghaoui, and I'm going to read out this passage in the press release, because I think it's quite telling. It says, "It was Ghaoui's understanding"—during that text message that I referenced on September 8—"that Anderson was referring to Boissonnault"—Minister Boissonnault, not an intern, not an employee, not a consultant, not GC Strategies, not McKinsey but Minister Boissonnault—"whom Anderson had told her"—in a previous conversation—"was a partner in GHI and"—wait for it—"a public official".

This is not only confirming Minister Boissonnault's partnership status but also his political status—a public official. This was confirmed by Ghaoui. They confirmed, "We have had no direct communication with Mr. Boissonnault at any point in our dealings with Stephen". Well, of course not. He's not that naive to physically pick up the phone and write directly to Ghaoui. He's going to do that through back channels. He's going to deal with that through his partner, Mr. Anderson.

Anderson, again, was asked further questions and would not respond regarding any of the nuances of the text.

Then the story goes on and talks about how GHI has been embroiled in lawsuits, even though Mr. Boissonnault, Randy Boissonnault, the minister, was listed as director of the company for more than a year after his re-election.

Going back to Ghaoui, it looks like, as a result of the intervention of either the minister or the other Randy, they ended up later that day sending nearly a half a million dollars as a deposit to Anderson. The company says that it never got the gloves that it was contractually promised and that all that money was stolen.

Mr. Anderson and GHI deny that claim and, coincidentally and suspiciously, 16 days after Ghaoui wires the deposit, a fire breaks out, which the police say was deliberately set after a break and enter, and all product, including records and all invoices, literally goes up in smoke.

The author of the report opines why a former politician, referencing the minister, and a hockey coach, referencing Mr. Anderson, launched a PPE business in the industry's most tumultuous times. It remains a mystery; however, court documents and interviews with suppliers and buyers who did business with GHI reveal the inner workings of a start-up fraught with problems from the start.

In lawsuits against GHI dating back to 2021, suppliers claimed that the company did not pay for products they delivered. On May 3, the minister told Global News, "When I was running the company, all of the bills were paid."

Court documents dispute that statement. A lawsuit filed by supplier Patterson Dental against GHI about two weeks after Boissonnault's re-election claims that the company did not pay 15 invoices between November 2020 and January 2021 totalling just under \$400,000.

I think, sir, that I have made my point in terms of evidence versus politics versus conjecture. This is not a witch hunt. This is a function that any opposition member, particularly at this committee, would want to carry out to determine who this other Randy is. That is the \$64-million question.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brock.

I've exhausted the list on the subamendment. Do we have consensus to adopt the subamendment?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: We are on the subamendment vote. We've exhausted the speaking list on that.

We don't have consensus, Madam Clerk, so go ahead with the vote, please.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We're back on the amendment to the motion.

Do we have any speakers on the amendment as amended?

Ms. Damoff, go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I thought that the amendment carried yesterday, so now we would be on the main motion, Chair. Am I confused here?

The Chair: Just give me a second here.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I could be wrong.

The Chair: Just to confirm—and thanks to the clerk for this—the Bloc did move an amendment by Mr. Desilets, who is here, and that was adopted. Then, Mr. Barrett moved an amendment, which led to the subamendment that was just adopted.

We're on the amendment to the motion as amended. Does that make sense?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, could you read the motion in its current form for us?

The Chair: I will not be able to do it out of my head, but we will—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Perhaps circulate it while we suspend.

The Chair: Just give me a second here.

Madam clerk, you're on top of this, I know. Can you...?

The Clerk: Do you want me to read it or distribute it?

I will read it, and then distribute it because I cannot talk and distribute at the same time.

The text of the motion as amended, twice, now would read:

That, in light of media reports, Minister Randy Boissonnault's testimony at this committee, and the Ethics Commissioner's confirmation that he is considering opening another investigation into Minister Randy Boissonnault's actions, the Committee call on the following witnesses to appear before the committee and testify for one hour:

- a. Stephen Anderson;
- b. Kirsten Poon;

Now we get into the motion as amended:

And that the Committee request that Stephen Anderson produce for the committee all of his phone records and text messages from September 8, 2022, within 7 days of this motion being adopted.

The Chair: That's where we are right now.

I will take a couple of minutes. I'm going to allow the clerk to put it all together and send it out to committee members.

We are going to suspend for a couple of minutes so that you can have a look at this.

• (13225) _____ (Pause) _____

• (13245)

The Chair: Let's get started again.

For clarification, everybody has the motion as amended. Right now we are on the amendment that was put forward by Mr. Barrett and subamended by Ms. Khalid.

[*Translation*]

The next speaker is Mr. Villemure. He'll be followed by Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm rather sorry that I wasn't here yesterday, because apparently some good discussions took place.

I want to remind my colleagues that we're here in pursuit of the public interest and not the truth, which is a bit complicated. Certainly, in a case of this nature, questions must be asked and answers must be provided. That much is clear.

I think that we should also keep in mind that, in addition to these questions that must be asked, we have work to do. We have a report to revise. The TikTok study and the misinformation study aren't finished.

I can see that we spent five meetings wondering who Randy Boissonnault is. I'm not saying that the question isn't valid. I'm just saying that we need to weigh the pros and cons. We need to figure out where we're headed with this.

I would like to ask my colleagues to act wisely so that we can quickly resolve the matter before us. However, let's try to do so with the public interest in mind. There's a public interest component to all this. The public interest is much broader than knowing who Randy Boissonnault is.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

Mr. Barrett, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move an amendment.

Where the motion reads:

And that the Committee request that Stephen Anderson and Randy Boissonnault produce for the committee all of—

We would replace “his” with the word “their”.

—their phone records, text messages, iMessages, and all instant messages and call logs from all applications from September 8, 2022, within 7 days of this motion being adopted.

The Chair: Have you shared that with the clerk at this point?

Mr. Michael Barrett: No.

The Chair: You're going to have to repeat that very slowly, Mr. Barrett, if you don't mind.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'll send it to the clerk.

The Chair: Okay. Send it to the clerk, if you don't mind. Thanks.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Shall we suspend, Mr. Chair?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: How long do you have resources for, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: We have resources until 1.30.

I'm going to have to suspend because I'm going to need it distributed to all the members of the committee in both languages.

We are going to suspend again.

• (13245) _____ (Pause) _____

• (13300)

The Chair: We're back. I appreciate the patience of everyone.

The clerk has sent the subamendment proposed by Mr. Barrett to everyone.

The subamendment would read:

And that the Committee request that Stephen Anderson and Randy Boissonnault produce for the committee all of their phone records, text messages, iMessages, and all instant messages and call logs from all applications from September 8, 2022, within 7 days of this motion being adopted.

Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thanks, Chair.

We won't be supporting the amendment.

I will remind the committee that the committee already asked Mr. Boissonnault for his phone records.

Chair, I wanted to just read what happened that day because there was no follow up. You said:

Thank you, Mr. Green.

On that, I am going to ask the clerk on your behalf, sir, to review the Hansard and to submit the questions that have been asked of Mr. Boissonnault and have him respond to the committee.

Madam Clerk, just make a note of the time on that.

Then you said:

Thank you, sir.

I'm going to take that as a request from Mr. Brock. Again, I'm going to ask the clerk to follow up on that request.

Mr. Boissonnault is attempting to get the records for his ministerial phone. It's not as easy as submitting the records from his personal phone, which he proactively submitted to the committee.

We won't support the amendment from Mr. Barrett. I hope that this doesn't turn into a fishing expedition and that we can deal with this motion this afternoon and move on.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

I don't have anybody else on the speaking list on the subamendment.

Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'm just wondering if we can do a sound check with Mr. Green there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: His sound was fine before.

The Clerk: Mr. Green is actually not in his seat now.

The Chair: There he is.

Mr. Green, it's good to have you back. We see you.

I don't have anybody else on the speaking list, so I am going to call the vote on Mr. Barrett's subamendment, if we don't have consensus.

The Clerk: It's five yeas and five nays.

The Chair: I vote yes.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Amendment as amended agreed to on division [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Now we are on the main motion as amended.

Do you want to speak on the main motion, Mr. Fisher?

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I spoke at length and shared my thoughts on how I disagreed with bringing regular Canadians in front of this committee and hav-

ing them interrogated and having them potentially receive vitriolic social media feedback and hyperpartisan questions at committee.

However, I'm going to support the motion. I feel and I've talked about how committees can do really good work and how I have been disappointed in the fact that committees have gone down a real partisan road, but I do see the last three days of hard work by all parties and all parliamentarians here to get to this point. I am willing to accept that there is some form of consensus with all the work that's been done.

I've said very regularly that I'm not in support of bringing regular Canadians before this committee to face what I really hope isn't going to be a firing squad, but due to the hard work the committee has put in, I'll support this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

I don't see any further discussion on this, so I'm going to ask if we have consensus on the main motion as amended.

Do you want to call the roll? Okay.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, I see your hand. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'd like to move to adjourn.

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn. Do I have consensus?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We are adjourned.

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