



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 124

Tuesday, June 18, 2024

Chair: Mr. John Brassard



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

Tuesday, June 18, 2024

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC)): I'm going to call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 124 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Before we begin, I want to remind everybody about the earpieces. Make sure you put them in the proper places. That way we can avoid potential injury to our interpreters.

When we last left our superheroes—that was last Tuesday—the committee will recall that a motion was passed to invite.... Well, first of all, Stephen Anderson was invited, as well as Kirsten Poon. Within the motion, there was also the request for “records, text messages, [emails, etc.,] iMessages...instant messages”, etc., for Stephen Anderson and Randy Boissonnault.

I just want to update the committee on where we are. I can tell you that immediately following that meeting there were invitations that were sent to Ms. Poon and Mr. Anderson. There was a lot of back-and-forth that went on between the clerk and the two invitees. Unfortunately, they declined the committee's request. I tried to get them here today. We tried to get them here this morning.

Subsequent to that, I asked the clerk to make available additional time on Wednesday evening, and then, of course, on Thursday morning, we have another meeting of the committee scheduled. At this point, we heard back from Ms. Poon—and that correspondence was sent to the committee members this morning—that she is available the week of July 15.

Up to this point, on the subsequent invitation, we haven't heard back from Mr. Anderson, but the message we heard from Mr. Anderson last week was that he felt it was short notice, that he was out of the country and that he would be available at some point in July. I'm not certain when that point might be, but it's at some point in July.

That's the status of the invitations for the witnesses right now. As I mentioned earlier, the committee did receive correspondence this morning—it was distributed after it was translated—that Ms. Poon is available the week of July 15. There is still no indication with regard to Mr. Anderson at this point, other than that he is available in July.

With respect to the phone records, the committee will recall that the motion did state “within 7 days of [the] motion being adopted”. This is the seventh day, and it certainly wasn't to the hour. My ex-

pectation is that we are going to get phone records—as requested by the committee—text messages, iMessages, instant messages, call logs, etc., by some point today. This morning, the clerk was in touch with representatives of the minister, and he expects that this will be available to the committee by later today. We still have not heard anything from Mr. Anderson, except for last week, when he indicated that it should not be a problem for him to meet the request of the committee based on the motion that was passed.

Madam Clerk, if I'm missing anything... I think that pretty much gets us up to date on where we are.

I certainly need some direction from committee on where you want to go, given the information that we received this morning and the additional information that I've just given you. As I said, there was a lot of back-and-forth over the last week to try to accommodate the witnesses appearing today.

Mr. Barrett, I saw your hand up first.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'd like to move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee summons the following witnesses to appear before the committee for no less than one hour together, during the week of July 15:

a) Kirsten Poon — Navis Group

b) Stephen Anderson — Global Health Imports

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett. The motion is in order.

I have Mr. Green on the motion.

Do you want to say anything?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes.

Just very quickly, Chair, in your explanation this morning about both witnesses, we learned that Mr. Anderson is not available until July and Ms. Poon is available that week in July. To be consistent with the initial motion that was passed by the committee, I'm not looking to relitigate the length of time. I think both witnesses should appear for an hour independently of one another, an hour for Ms. Poon and an hour for Mr. Anderson, but that was not the will of the committee at the previous meeting, so I won't relitigate that.

This will be the committee's last substantive opportunity to plan and to get some answers on this question. Having both Ms. Poon and Mr. Anderson with an obligation to appear that week, knowing that they both have July availability, when members' availability will be limited during the month of July, when they have not previously planned time in Ottawa, it is incredibly important to get answers to questions that have been dogging this committee for weeks now. We need to find out who the other Randy is, what Minister Randy Boissonnault's involvement was with Global Health Imports while he was serving as a minister, and, of course, what his ongoing interests are with Navis Group, a lobbying firm that lobbied his government and from which he was receiving payments while serving in cabinet.

This is an opportunity to do that.

The Chair: Okay.

I've started a list. I have Mr. Green next.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you.

The Chair: Then I have Mr. Fisher and Ms. Damoff.

Go ahead, Mr. Green, on the motion that Mr. Barrett just moved.

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

Certainly, members around the table are very well aware of my feelings about arbitrary meetings in non-sitting times. I would caveat it by saying that this isn't arbitrary, given the fact that Ms. Poon herself volunteered to be here on the 15th.

Notwithstanding the fact that we have to respect that, I would ask you this, Mr. Chair. I see that you're getting some direction from the clerk, but I'm unclear, on the escalation of inviting witnesses, that a summons is particularly necessary. I know it fits a certain dramatic theme in communications, but given that they have not put in writing, or we have not received in writing, a refusal, but are volunteering to come here, I think the language of a summons, although it may suit certain communication styles, isn't necessary.

I'm wondering, through you, Mr. Chair, to the mover of the motion, what the intention is of using the language of a summons. I'll say on the record that I believe we have the power to summons anybody, but I think it's a professional courtesy, in working with witnesses, to find an available time and escalate in a manner that is consistent with their agreement to participate. This witness has not refused to come to committee.

I'm wondering if the mover of the motion would be open to and consider just removing the term "summons" and continue with the language "invite" until such time as the witness decides they're going to send us, in writing, a refusal.

• (1110)

The Chair: You have a point of order, Mr. Barrett, and I believe Mr. Green asked a question through the chair. I know that the clerk has some information that she wants to share with the committee.

Go ahead on the point of order.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The motion I moved is different from the motion I provided in writing to the clerk, which was circulated to members of the committee.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Michael Barrett: In the motion I moved, I said, following the word "together", that it was "the week of July 15", not on July 15.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I wanted to provide that latitude.

When the chair will allow, I'll respond to Mr. Green.

The Chair: That was one of the things the clerk had brought to my attention.

Just so we're clear, it's the week of July 15.

[Translation]

Mr. Villemure, do you have a point of order?

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

The French and English versions are different. The French version is more in tune with the spirit of Mr. Green's intentions, while the English version is harsher.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: It's simply a matter of aligning the languages.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

The clerk may be able to fix this.

[English]

Mr. Fisher, are you looking to have the motion in front of you? Is that what you'd like?

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Yes. I'd like to get that printed so that I can take a quick look.

The Chair: I am going to suspend for a couple of minutes so the clerk can get the motion to members of the committee.

We are suspended.

• (1110) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1120)

The Chair: Welcome back.

The email with the motion has been sent in both languages to all members of the committee. There are a couple of things that I note would need to be clarified within the motion.

Somebody needs to add, "further to the motion that was passed". It needs to be added to this so we are clear on the direction of the committee.

The other thing is “the week of July 15”. I’m going to need a year, because we all know words matter. We’re in the year 2024. If we leave it open-ended, it is open to interpretation. I want to make sure that’s clarified.

Mr. Green, when we left, you still had the floor, sir.

Go ahead.

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

I want to make one note as it relates to the spirit of the motion that was originally passed. You stated that we need to add an amendment: “further to the motion that was passed”.

If you recall, I believe the motion that was passed suggested the witnesses meet together.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: For me, whether they’re together.... Does this say that as well?

It’s “one hour together”. Okay. That’s good.

I will then move that the motion be amended by adding the words “further to the motion that was passed”, replacing the word “summon” with the word “invite” and adding “2024” after the words “July 15”.

The Chair: Mr. Green is moving an amendment.

I don’t think I need to stop the meeting for that to be understood.

I appreciate your clarifying that, Mr. Green. Do you have any other comments on your amendment?

Mr. Matthew Green: No.

The Chair: We’re on the amendment.

I need a new list. I have Ms. Damoff on the amendment.

Go ahead, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thanks, Chair.

I have a request. If the clerk could circulate the emails to us, we could get the full email chain. We can only see part of it. If there is an email exchange that’s being sent to us.... I don’t remember seeing those before, but if they are going to be sent, could we get the full email exchange, as opposed to parts of it?

The Chair: Is that on your iPhone? Just so I’m clear, you’re referring to what you see on your iPhone.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I’ve seen it on my computer, too. It shows part of it—

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Pam Damoff: —but we don’t see whether there’s a response. Can we make sure we see everything, Chair?

That’s all.

The Chair: Okay. That’s not a problem.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: We’re on the amendment here.

Go ahead, Mr. Fisher, on the amendment, please.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Further to what Pam said, to the clerk through you, Mr. Chair, I saw some of that stuff, too, but I didn’t see the invites. I saw the responses. I’m interested in knowing when those invites were sent.

This speaks to Mr. Green’s amendment to the motion to say, “invite”. It was a week ago that we passed the motion, and I didn’t see anything in what the clerk said that indicated they were not willing or somewhat enthusiastic to come to committee. I think “summon” is a strong word. It’s probably a word we may have to use someday, but I’d say that, in this situation, I agree with Mr. Green.

I’d be interested in knowing when the invites were sent, what dates were offered, when they responded—whether it was immediate—whether the witnesses ever refused or hesitated to appear, and what other dates have been offered since their response.

• (1125)

The Chair: I tried to clarify that at the beginning of the meeting. I turned to the clerk and asked if I had missed anything and whether she needed to fill in any of the gaps.

If you want the entire list of the invites and correspondence back and forth, I know the clerk.... Do you want an email on that, or...?

Mr. Darren Fisher: Well, it’s just to see the—

The Chair: Okay. If the clerk is prepared to answer the question, she can go ahead.

Go ahead, Madam Clerk, if you want.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): Is the question on when it was sent?

The Chair: It’s when the initial email was sent, when responses came back and when the follow-up emails were sent.

Mr. Darren Fisher: It can be sent to us. I’m curious now. It doesn’t have to be read out now, if you don’t want to read it.

The Clerk: Okay. Well, again, I have no issue saying it.

I touched base by phone to get email addresses as soon as the motion was adopted, so it was within a few hours of the meeting being over. That was on July 11. The two witnesses talked to me over the phone—

The Chair: It was June 11, just to be clear.

The Clerk: I’m sorry if I said “July”.

They gave me their email addresses, and I proceeded to send the invitation right away on the same day. That was on June 11. Then I talked with some. Some came with an answer by email faster. Last Friday, I sent a renewed invitation, offering other dates.

I can prepare all of that and send a distribution.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I'll support that amendment that Mr. Green....

The Chair: There was some back-and-forth with legal counsel representing the two witnesses as well, so we can include all of that in an email, if you like. Is that okay?

On the amendment, I don't have any other discussion.

Do we have consensus on the amendment?

Mr. Michael Barrett: No.

The Chair: We don't have consensus. We'll go to a vote on the amendment. Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The amendment carries, so we are on the main motion as amended. I had a list going on the main motion.

Mr. Fisher, I think you were on the top of that. Do you want to cede your time? Okay.

Is there anybody else? I had Ms. Damoff, and then I had Monsieur Villemure.

Okay. Do we have consensus on the main motion as amended?

We do?

Mr. Matthew Green: No.

The Chair: We're going to call the vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: That's unanimous. The motion passes as amended.

For the sake of the committee, in the week of July 15, I am going to shoot for July 16, on the Tuesday, just so that everybody's clear. That's the date I'm going to propose to the witnesses. It falls within the scope of the motion. I'll do it in the morning as well, just to be clear. That's the offer that's going to go out.

Mr. Green, go ahead.

• (1130)

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move a motion.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: It reads:

That, notwithstanding the week of July 15, 2024, as per the usual practice of House of Commons standing committees, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics shall not meet during Parliament's summer recess unless the requirements of Standing Order 106(4) of the Standing Orders are met.

The Chair: Just to be clear, you said the week of July 16. The 15th is the Monday. Is that right?

Mr. Matthew Green: It doesn't even have to be in the motion. I'm just saying that I'm accepting that week because of the work we just did.

The Chair: Okay.

We're in committee business. The motion is in order. Is there debate?

Mr. Green, do you have anything to say?

Mr. Matthew Green: I think the motion is self-explanatory.

The Chair: Okay. Is there anybody else?

Mr. Matthew Green: Is there anybody else?

Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, I think it's important that we recognize that the Standing Orders of the House allow for the chairs of committees to use their prerogative to call meetings when it's necessary and within the mandate of the committee. As an opposition-chaired committee, it's incredibly important that this is an accountability committee. Often, we see there are members who don't recognize the need for all members, including all backbenchers, to hold the government to account. Members on all sides of the House need to make sure that the executive is kept in check.

When the Standing Orders have been adopted by the House and allow for the chair of a committee to call a meeting, the committee must not act contrary to those Standing Orders of the House. It's a power that is used sparingly or rarely, but I think that it's important that it's one that's preserved.

When we look at the work this committee has done, and you look at the issues that have been in front of this committee, whether it's the \$60-million arrive scam and a government that says, "There's nothing to see here," and, "This was necessary in the context of the pandemic; therefore, all expenses were justified and everyone should move on"....

It's taken incredible lifts by the committee and an awful lot of energy just to get committees to lift this off the ground. Once it was off the ground, we seemed to find new information that revealed this government's lack of respect or fiduciary responsibility to Canadians.

We have \$60 million for an app that saw massive subcontracting, and 30% of those subcontracted fees were for people who did no work on the app. That's not acceptable, especially in the context of Canadians struggling to pay their bills and struggling to just get by.

This committee has been seized on multiple occasions with ethical scandals involving the Prime Minister. Again, there was important work done by this committee on the "Trudeau Report", when the Prime Minister was found guilty of breaking the Conflict of Interest Act. It was not just in one instance. He broke multiple sections of the act—I think it was four—by taking illegal vacations to "billionaire island", where he was joined by the then president of the Liberal Party, who's now a Liberal MP, by the labour minister and by Mr. Pitfield, the gentleman whom he just relieved of a real estate burden at the taxpayers' expense.

That came from the work of this committee. We were able to expose and challenge the narrative that the government was putting forward.

Again, with the “Trudeau II Report”, much work was done at this committee. The ability of the chair to call meetings outside of regularly scheduled slots is sometimes necessary in order to fulfill our mandate.

• (1135)

In that case, it was the Conflict of Interest Act again, and it was the Prime Minister who was found to have interfered in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, a firm that had illegally funded the Liberal Party of Canada but also was found guilty of bribing Libyan officials in the Gaddafi regime to the tune of \$48 million and defrauding the Libyan people of more than \$100 million.

We saw—related, of course, to the Prime Minister—the “Trudeau III Report”, in which another member of the Prime Minister's cabinet—in that case, his then finance minister, Bill Morneau—was found guilty of breaking the Conflict of Interest Act.

These issues are part of the work of this committee. The billion-dollar green slush fund—because we're not duplicating the work of other committees—is being addressed at the industry committee, but it has also seen hearings here and in government operations, and I think in public accounts, but this was important for this committee to introduce, to examine and then for the committee to get.... It ultimately got housed elsewhere, but when important issues come forward, the committee needs to be able to do its work, and that's what the Standing Orders allow for.

It's not infrequent that we find ourselves dealing with issues that touch on members of the executive and their obligations having been breached and what that looks like in terms of the erosion of Canadians' confidence in our public institutions.

The president of the King's Privy Council, Minister LeBlanc, was found guilty of breaking the Conflict of Interest Act in the clam scam. That was on lucrative contracts that went to a family member of the minister's spouse. Again, work that's not part of the scheduled work plan but needs to be part of the consideration for when the chair exercises his role in calling meetings.... Minister LeBlanc was found guilty of breaking the act in that case, and it was not part of our regular work plan.

Previously, I mentioned former Liberal finance minister Bill Morneau, sometimes referred to as “Bill no more”, having broken the conflict of interest code and the Conflict of Interest Act. The code violation was, of course, the forgotten French villa—who among us hasn't forgotten to declare their French villa?—and with respect to the scandal, the WE scandal involving the billion-dollar Canada student service grant going to Justin Trudeau's buddies, the Kielburgers. Bill Morneau was found guilty of breaking the act three times for his private interests and failing to recuse himself from decisions relating to the WE organization.

I should circle back to Minister LeBlanc, because we hear from, as part of the mandate of this committee, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. Now, when Commissioner Dion resigned and his role wasn't filled, the government, of course, appointed an interim commissioner, and that interim commissioner was the sister-in-law of the minister, Minister LeBlanc.

• (1140)

Part of our role is to hold the government accountable, because the appearance of a conflict can be as damaging as a real conflict. The appointee and the minister can say, “Oh well, we weren't involved in the decision”, but what does it look like to the public? That's what we talk about here and that's what we examine here at this committee.

Of course, when we have the regular work plan for the committee, the regular sitting calendar for the committee, sometimes we're able to insert items into that. Sometimes we have meetings that are called pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), at which we can deal with an issue.

We also had the issue of Liberal Trade Minister Mary Ng, who was found guilty of breaking the Conflict of Interest Act, under sections 6 and 21, when she gave her best friend, Amanda Alvaro, contracts worth tens of thousands of dollars. Those were not tendered, but she had a comfortable relationship with a Liberal insider, a former Liberal staffer, and thought, “You know what? This is the right fit for me.” She was not concerned with the appearance or the reality of that for taxpayers. Would she have spent tens of thousands of dollars on that service if it weren't to her friend? Would Canadians have been on the hook for that expense when she already had ministry staff and member staff to fulfill that function?

It's interesting now, because the Speaker is an elected Liberal member, but he was then the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister and parliamentary secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, and he was found guilty of breaking the Conflict of Interest Act by using his position to try to influence the CRTC to the benefit of a personal interest of his.

This is something that is important. Mr. Fergus, who is now Speaker and was then a Liberal parliamentary secretary, was a member of this committee, but once he had that role and once he swore that oath, it became the responsibility of all parliamentarians to make sure that accountability function was being exercised, because that's what Canadians expect.

The Standing Orders allow for chairs—not just of opposition-chaired committees but also of government-chaired committees—to do certain things, such as scheduling a meeting, calling the meeting to order, suspending the meeting, adjourning the meeting and responding to those Standing Order 106(4) meeting requests. We have seen government chairs and opposition chairs employ all of those powers to call meetings outside of the regular time.

We know there have been instances in which it has been essential that this committee step up and respond to something that has been in the public interest at that time and to examine the issue. Sometimes where there's smoke, the fire has gone out, but sometimes we find that where there's smoke, there's actually an inferno, and that is very often the case. I would be uncomfortable abdicating my responsibility, as an opposition member, for having the tools in the tool box available, or if the chair called a meeting and I were not there or there wasn't someone there in my place.

• (1145)

I don't want to presuppose what the next 90 days are going to bring, because I don't know. Every time I think there's going to be nothing that touches the mandate of this committee during a recess period, we find ourselves unpleasantly disappointed to see that we have to come back and deal with an issue that has cropped up. The appearance of a conflict can even rise to that test.

We saw an example of that in January, when the Prime Minister ended up taking another one of his vacations at a luxury resort. Yes, there was a great expense to taxpayers for the Prime Minister's security, but the stay at this luxury resort was also a gift.

What does it look like to Canadians when someone who's involved in the Trudeau Foundation, which of course is an issue that we've examined at this committee, and the Trudeau Foundation's many ties to the government...? This is a Trudeau Foundation booster or member who's giving the Prime Minister a substantial gift.

We need to be able to exercise our mandate, so I'm not comfortable with the limiting of powers that are afforded under the Standing Orders. I'm not actually sure that, by motion at committee, we can do that. I would be interested to hear from someone from the law clerk's office as to whether there is any precedence for committees limiting powers that are given under the Standing Orders. We can pass whatever motions we want, but what is the effect? What is the force of that motion?

I'm not comfortable with this. I am curious as to whether there's any nuance available, because we've just had a case that demonstrates why it may be necessary to have meetings. Those were the hearings with Ms. Poon and Mr. Anderson with respect to Minister Randy Boissonnault's involvement with those two companies and the questions that have come up about that. That's pushed our agenda now into July.

It's important that we keep all of the tools that are available to us in the tool box. I think it's an open question as to whether or not the committee has the ability to limit powers that are given under the Standing Orders. I'll take a look at the motion and listen to what the other members have to say, if anyone else has anything to say about it, but at first blush, based on the important work that we have done and the work that we can do, I don't think that I'm comfortable supporting this motion.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

I have a list. The list includes Mr. Brock, Mr. Cooper, Ms. Damoff, Mr. Green and Mr. Villemure.

Mr. Brock, you have the floor on the motion. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank my colleague Mr. Barrett for his thorough review and rationale as to why he has concerns with limiting the ability of this committee to do its important work. At first blush, I really don't need time to review the content of my colleague Mr. Green's motion, because I'm certainly not in favour of that.

We have to take a step back from time to time and remind ourselves of why we're here. We're here because Canadians in our constituencies voted to put us here to be their voice and to do the necessary work not only within our communities but also here in the nation's capital. We're all privileged to be on this particular committee, one of the most important committees that government operations have, because we are in the position to study the actions of others and to determine whether or not laws have been broken.

Canadians expect us to do the work year round. They certainly understand the necessity of having personal time with our families. When you take a look at the actual parliamentary calendar, we have an abundant amount of time to spend with not only our families but also our constituents. In fact, it's a running sort of point of contention between me and my spouse, who quite often is supportive of the work I do here on the Hill but misses the old Larry Brock, who, although he could be busy throughout the day in courts—

A voice: I miss him, too.

Mr. Larry Brock: You miss him, too? Thank you.

She and my children had comfort in knowing that I would return to the house in the evening and wake up in the house in the morning. It's a difficult task being a parliamentarian, and we probably all have similar stories with our respective families. It's an ebb, and it's a flow. There are good times, and there are bad times. However, ultimately, the job entails our being away at significant points of time.

When you look at the entire calendar... This is how I justify it to my spouse. Quite often, it goes in one ear and out the other, but I think she listens to and understands the rationale. I'm actually working here in Ottawa less than I was actually inside a courtroom. We have a very generous summer break. We have an extremely generous Christmas break. We are off at Thanksgiving. We are off at March break and often two weeks at a time. We are off during the May holidays.

When you take a look at the actual amount of time that we are here doing the work of parliamentarians, it really begs the question... Canadians don't have the same sort of privileges we have. They are working largely through the entire year. Depending on the nature of their employment, they might be able to secure two, three or maybe four weeks of summer holidays throughout the entire year and the usual statutory holidays throughout the year.

Parliamentarians are different. When I take a look at the nature of this motion, what message am I communicating to my constituents? Is it that my two and a half months of summer vacation are more important to me and to my family than doing the work of parliamentarians here in Ottawa, particularly when we have dark clouds of unethical, scandalous and corrupt behaviour by this government?

There was a point in time in the last six or seven months when I often remarked that pretty much every other week or so another scandal would erupt from this government.

• (1155)

However, lately, it's almost on a daily basis. There are nuances coming out of scandals that we have been studying in numerous committees.

I read a recent report in one of the nationals that drew a conclusion I totally agree with, unfortunately: This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the level of corruption in the Justin Trudeau government. Without even taking a straw poll of constituents in my riding, if I said, "My two and a half months trump the purpose for which you sent me to Ottawa," I can well imagine they would be appalled. As adults and parliamentarians, we can walk and chew gum at the same time. We can spend the quality time we need to with our families and in our constituencies, but we can come back from time to time to do the important work of this committee and get to the bottom of these scandals. I'm not saying we're going to complete this, Mr. Chair, by the end of the summer. However, I think completely shutting off our ability to conduct work unless it's an emergency under Standing Order 106(4) misses the point.

As I indicated, I have been party to a number of committees where I have been parachuted in to examine the multitude of scandals. Let's face it: We haven't even gotten to the bottom of the SNC-Lavalin scandal yet. I can't remember the actual date, but I believe it was in this committee before I was a permanent member. We invited the RCMP commissioner to attend. It didn't meet the agenda of the Liberal Party of Canada—the members opposite to me. I seem to recall it may have even been on a break week, because this committee has sat, on a number of occasions, during break weeks. I remember how, even before the RCMP commissioner had a chance to give his opening statement, a motion to adjourn was brought by a Liberal member and was granted, because it didn't fit with their narrative. Their narrative has been—literally since Justin Trudeau took government—that there's absolutely nothing to see here. "We made mistakes. We offered partial apologies, but trust us when we say there's nothing to see here." I can't accept that. I know my colleagues on this side of the room can't accept that, either.

On the SNC matter, there are lingering questions. I know I'm going to have the ability, hopefully at some point today—depending on the length of time for voting this afternoon—to try to close the circle and deal with the hanging threads with the RCMP commissioner, who is coming to public accounts for two hours. I know he testified here earlier, but there were a number of outstanding questions that were not answered satisfactorily. For instance, why did it take literally five years for the RCMP to conclude there was no probable case to charge Justin Trudeau with obstruction of justice? In the convoluted way that they tried to demonstrate the inability to close out their investigation, from a former prosecutor's perspective, it was challenging to truly appreciate what they were saying.

• (1200)

There was a changing narrative with respect to their onus. They were conflating their onus with the Crown's onus in terms of producing evidence to convince a trier of fact of proof beyond a reasonable doubt. That has never been and never will be the prerogative of police agencies. Their sole mandate, which is an extremely low standard, is whether there are reasonable and probable grounds.

For instance, are there reasonable and probable grounds to believe Justin Trudeau should be charged with the criminal offence of obstruction of justice?

There are two facets to the prosecution of obstruction of justice. One is this: What is the *actus reus*? What did he do to obstruct justice? I think the evidence is abundantly clear. It's unchallenged.

It's confirmed in the report by former commissioner Dion that he had a political agenda and that he knew there was a tool available to his then first indigenous, female Attorney General and Minister of Justice to intervene in the decision made by the director of public prosecutions not to offer SNC-Lavalin, which was facing corruption and bribery charges.... They are very serious charges in this country. A conviction could have landed executives in prison to serve a sentence.

He wanted Jody Wilson-Raybould to deviate from her prosecutorial independence and intervene in that decision on whether to offer the deferred prosecution agreement. This was in September 2017.

My colleague Mr. Cooper actually had the privilege of questioning Jody Wilson-Raybould at committee, and that was followed by her writing a book. I read that from cover to cover, and it's appalling the extent to which our Prime Minister crossed the line between interference, obstruction and allowing her to exercise her independence.

She made it abundantly clear to him during that first meeting.... That first meeting in September—for those who have read the book, and she may have highlighted this in her testimony—was to discuss a number of other issues, particularly her priorities as they related to indigenous matters. Justin Trudeau came into that meeting red-hot. He had no intention of discussing any issue, particularly indigenous issues, other than SNC-Lavalin.

He reminded her of a couple of things. He reminded her of a pending provincial election in Quebec, which he felt would be very problematic if this multinational corporation was still subject to criminal prosecution in Canada. More importantly and more damning, I would suggest, he reminded Jody Wilson-Raybould that he was the member for Papineau, which is the riding where SNC had its headquarters.

Jody asked if he was asking her to make a decision contrary to a decision she had already made. Was he interfering in her decision?

• (1205)

For any impartial observer of what took place during that discussion, the proverbial fly on the wall, you would conclude, absolutely, that the Prime Minister of a G7 nation preferred the interests of a corrupt corporation and that he wanted his attorney general, who wore two hats—which begs the question about the utility of a two-hat minister—moving forward, to make that decision in his favour and in the favour of SNC.

He backed off, of course, and said that, oh, no, of course, that decision was hers, but the damage was done. That was the *actus reus*. That was the act by which he.... It was then followed by PMO staff, then followed by ministerial staff in other departments, and ultimately concluded with former Clerk of the Privy Council Michael Wernick, unknown to him, being audiotaped in that fateful telephone discussion—meeting, I should say—in December 2017.

Commissioner Dion clearly articulated and outlined all of the attempts to interfere in her decision-making. Jody Wilson-Raybould truly demonstrated the integrity that you'd expect from an attorney general, and she probably felt immense pressure as a member of the Justin Trudeau cabinet. She was mindful of her dual role, and she held firm.

Michael Wernick came into that meeting, also red-hot. The purpose, according to Jody Wilson-Raybould, was to discuss, again, other issues. Those other issues were never discussed. Michael Wernick came in hot and made it known to Jody Wilson-Raybould, on more than one occasion, that the Prime Minister was adamant about this.

Now, why is that term “adamant” important? For the lawyers in this committee, you'll remark, for those who practice criminal law, about the second aspect of prosecutions. We talked about the *actus reus*. Now, we have the *mens rea*, and that is the “intent”. The obstruction of justice is a specific-intent offence. Then, when Michael Wernick comes into this meeting, red-hot, and references the Prime Minister, on more than one occasion, being adamant that he is going to find a solution, “one way or another”, it's indicative of intent. That is the only plausible legal definition of what the Prime Minister had instructed Michael Wernick to do.

Now, Michael Wernick testified, and he would have everyone believe, as nonsensical as this is, that he took it upon himself to initiate the meeting and that he was not directed by the Prime Minister, in any which way or form, to again put that final element of pressure on her, which is just preposterous. No one believes that. He lied.

When I take a look, from a former prosecutor's perspective, at the charge of obstruction of justice, I'm mindful of the case law that exists in this particular area—I can't remember the name of the case, but it came under the Supreme Court of Canada—which set out the essential elements to the offence of obstruction. It made it abundantly clear that “success” to the obstruction is not necessary. An “attempt” is all that is necessary.

• (1210)

That's exactly what we had in this particular case. Jody Wilson-Raybould held her own, maintained her position and never deviated from that position. Next thing you know, she's facing a cabinet

shuffle, with, again, a preposterous explanation offered by the Prime Minister and his government that it was because of the sudden resignation of Treasury Board president Scott Brison.

Was she the only high-profile minister that could have filled that role? I don't think so. No one believes that for a minute. She was demoted because she had the audacity to say no to Justin Trudeau. Take a look in history at all the MPs who've said no to Justin Trudeau, who proclaims—proclaims—that he is a feminist Prime Minister, another blatant lie.

Let's take a look at MP Celina Chavannes. She had great difficulty with the Prime Minister during her entire tenure. Ultimately, she felt that he was pressuring her in ways that she was completely uncomfortable with. Again, this feminist Prime Minister showed her the door, just like he ultimately showed it to our first indigenous Attorney General.

He had no difficulty as well with the excellent work that was done by cabinet minister Jane Philpott. I believe she was Minister of Health at the time. What was her mistake? What was her crime? Her crime was supporting Jody Wilson-Raybould in suggesting that the Prime Minister was completely out of line, absolutely out of line. She was shown the door.

I remember—I wasn't a parliamentarian back then—how gleefully the Liberal government and its backbenchers were clapping on television, in front of all of Canada.

Mr. Bains is smiling as well, but he wasn't there. Had he been there, he might have been smiling and clapping as well.

I said to myself: “What are you so damn happy about? What are you smiling about, Justin Trudeau? You're Canada's first feminist Prime Minister, and here you are, clapping like a seal to celebrate the demise of two strong cabinet ministers who had the strength to say no to Justin Trudeau.” That's what happens to Liberal MPs who have the audacity to challenge the almighty wisdom of Justin Trudeau.

You're right: I'm absolutely right to have these questions still percolating in my mind as to why the RCMP did not complete the task when the evidence was right there. I'm also mindful of the fact that Michael Wernick shared with us not too long ago that this particular issue was never discussed at cabinet.

I wonder if people around this table remember that actual piece of evidence. It was never discussed at cabinet, yet we heard from the RCMP commissioner that his requests for documents were blocked by Justin Trudeau and the government because of cabinet confidences. Well, if there were no discussions at cabinet, then there were no confidences. That's another issue I need to raise with Commissioner Duheme this afternoon, because I didn't have that information available to me when he first attended.

Why was it important for Commissioner Dion to interview 14 people—literally anyone who had anything to say—about the SNC-Lavalin matter? The RCMP, in their infinite wisdom, decided to limit that to four individuals. Can you say that was a thorough investigation? I think not.

• (1215)

Again, when I posed that question to them, their nonsensical response to it certainly didn't satisfy me, and I'm sure didn't satisfy Canadians. Some of those at this table may remember my final question to the commissioner at that time. I phrased it in such a way as to say along these lines: "You'll forgive me, Commissioner, when I say to you that your handling of this investigation can only lead to the inevitable conclusion that there exists a two-tier level of justice in this country, particularly as it relates to Justin Trudeau."

He, his deputy and other members have responded to committees that no one is above the law, and that "no one" includes Justin Trudeau, and although no sitting Prime Minister has ever been charged with a criminal offence, the RCMP has left the door slightly ajar. I don't have the actual verbiage, the words in front of me, but the report that I had access to when I questioned our current Attorney General at committee of the whole concluded that the RCMP would continue the investigation if they had access to further documents.

I'm going to explore with the commissioner what that means, when he attends. We've already satisfied the issue regarding cabinet confidences, which obviously was not discussed. What does it say to Canadians? What does it say to Canadians under investigation? Can they simply refuse to cooperate with law enforcement? Would they have the same ability to shut down an investigation as Justin Trudeau did, by simply refusing to hand over documents? I think Justin Trudeau is the only Canadian in this country who has that ability, and apparently that's okay with the RCMP.

I can tell you emphatically, Mr. Chair, that it's not okay to Canadians—absolutely not. As I've indicated at the outset, the obstruction of justice charge is not a difficult prosecution. I put this to the commissioner, that I've actually dealt with cases where the police have investigated a historical homicide, have put together thousands of pages of disclosure...a trial that literally took maybe a couple of years to start, a trial that may have lasted 30 or 45 days... I have personally completed far more serious prosecutions than an obstruction of justice charge.

It really begs the question: Why did they delay for the years that they did, other than because they had no political will to charge a sitting prime minister?

Are they truly independent? Well, the RCMP Act may differ on that issue. The RCMP Act makes it abundantly clear that they report to the Minister of Public Safety, and it's the government that actually appoints the commissioner. That begs the question: How independent can you be under those circumstances? These are the questions I get from Canadians from across this country. These are the questions I get from my constituents.

I look at the time. I have many more thoughts in my mind on a multitude of other scandals, but I'm going to cede my time now to my colleague Mr. Cooper.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1220)

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Brock.

Continuing with the list on the motion, I have Mr. Cooper, Ms. Damoff, Mr. Green and Monsieur Villemure, and then Mr. Kurek has indicated he wants to speak.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead, please.

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

I would make a few observations with respect to this motion that has been put forward by Mr. Green.

First of all, this motion is not unique to this committee. This is part of a coordinated campaign between the Liberal government and their NDP coalition partner in which, once again, the NDP is doing the bidding of the Liberals.

We have a Prime Minister and a government in chaos. We have a government that is 20 points behind in the polls and a Prime Minister who is literally despised by Canadians. We have a government that has managed to screw up just about everything they have touched over the past nine years, from record deficits and debt leading to 40-year-high inflation, to high interest rates that have all created a cost of living crisis. The Liberal response to the cost of living crisis they created is to make life even less affordable for Canadians with carbon tax hikes and now this latest tax hike on health care workers, specifically doctors, farmers, small businesses and home builders. They claim it's a tax hike on the so-called super rich, when in fact everyday Canadians are going to pay, and pay dearly, as a result. On top of that, we have a government that is mired in scandal. In fact, it is arguable that this is the most corrupt government in modern Canadian history.

I see that one Liberal member thinks it's funny, but we have Dominic LeBlanc found guilty of breaching the Conflict of Interest Act. He's a senior minister in this government. We have Mary Ng, who was found guilty of breaching the Conflict of Interest Act. She's a senior minister in this government. We have Bill Morneau, who was found guilty of breaching multiple sections of the Conflict of Interest Act. He was the finance minister in this government. We have a former member of this committee, if you can believe it, a Liberal member, who was found guilty of violating the Conflict of Interest Act. Then we have the Prime Minister himself, the first Prime Minister in Canadian history to be found guilty of breaching the Conflict of Interest Act. He was found guilty not once but twice. Now we have the minister from Edmonton, Mr. Boissonnault who has so much to answer for. I'll get into that momentarily.

We have a government that has a history of entitlement, patronage and straight-up corruption. There is a culture of corruption embedded within this government. That's just established based upon the nine-year history of these Liberals. In the face of all these failings and all the scandals and how frustrated and angry Canadians are at these Liberals, it's no wonder they want to get out of town. They want to hide over the summer. They want to shut down the ability of parliamentary committees to provide appropriate oversight. I won't be a party to doing any of the bidding for the Liberals.

• (1225)

There is a reason we have three oversight committees that are chaired by the official opposition—the government operations committee, public accounts and the ethics committee. Boy, all of these committees are working overtime in the face of all of the mismanagement and all of these Liberal scandals.

To simply bring forward a 106(4)... I say it's not good enough. It's not good enough because we've seen the NDP work with the Liberals to adjourn meetings to prevent 106(4) motions from being debated and voted on.

What is the rationale for this motion? The only rationale that I can see is that it's about doing the bidding for Justin Trudeau and the Liberals.

There is a reason, in the Standing Orders, that the chair has the discretion to convene a meeting. I say, leave it to the chair of this committee, who is a very good chair.

I want to zero in on the matter that we were discussing earlier today, which is the cloud of scandal that hangs over the Minister of Employment, Mr. Boissonnault. We are going to hear, hopefully, from his former business partners, Ms. Poon and Mr. Anderson, but I would submit that we can't wait until the fall before there's any further scrutiny undertaken by this committee of Mr. Boissonnault and the series of questionable activities he has been connected with in relation to both Ms. Poon and Mr. Anderson.

Let's look at what we're dealing with for Mr. Boissonnault. We have a minister who had started up a company—a lobbying firm—after he lost his seat in the 2019 election. There was a loophole that allowed him to set up a company, even though he couldn't lobby. He hired Ms. Poon, who lobbied for his company. When he was returned to the House of Commons in 2021, he appropriately wound down that company. Ms. Poon took over, but Ms. Poon then set up her own lobbying firm that was lobbying this government and was also lobbying Minister Boissonnault's own department. It also received \$110 million in government contracts as Ms. Poon's company was paying Mr. Boissonnault.

Mr. Boissonnault was not transparent. In fact, he attempted to hide his connection to Ms. Poon's lobbying firm in the declaration that he made to the Ethics Commissioner, in which he hid behind the numbered company, not the name that the company held itself out as.

As a result, the Ethics Commissioner was unaware that the firm that was paying Mr. Boissonnault was lobbying his department and other departments within this government in securing contracts. Mr. Boissonnault said that there was nothing to see here because the payments he was receiving from Ms. Poon's lobbying company were in relation to accounts receivable from work that he did prior to his election, except for the fact that he never did any work for Ms. Poon's company.

• (1230)

Why is he being paid by Ms. Poon's company—a company he did not work for and one that was lobbying his department and benefiting handsomely by securing \$110 million in contracts? Mr. Boissonnault has provided no explanation for why he was being

paid by Ms. Poon's company. It doesn't add up. We need to probe that.

We also need to understand why it is that Mr. Boissonnault hid behind a numbered company. Why was he not transparent? Was it just sloppiness on his part? He says he was cleared by the Ethics Commissioner. He hasn't been cleared by the Ethics Commissioner. He was asked about whether he's been cleared by the lobbying commissioner. As far as I understand, this issue is on the lobbying commissioner's radar. There are many questions to be asked of Mr. Boissonnault in regard to what is, at the very least, the very questionable arrangement of having one's business partner lobby a department the minister is connected to, and where that individual is being paid by a company while that company is securing money from the federal government for clients.

However, there is the issue around Global Health Imports Corporation and the questions, "Where is Randy?" and, "Who is Randy?" This is a company Mr. Boissonnault set up at the beginning of the pandemic. He had no experience in the PPE business and neither did Mr. Anderson, whose career was that of a hockey coach. Amazingly, they set up this company right at the time of the pandemic and began to secure millions of dollars in government contracts for PPE. It raises some questions about how they managed to pull that off. Experts and those familiar with the industry say that it's almost impossible for, essentially, a two-person company with no track record or experience to suddenly start up a company and secure millions of dollars in this area.

I digress.

Needless to say, all has not gone well at Global Health Imports Corporation. Mr. Boissonnault held himself up, as he confirmed when he appeared before this committee, as a partner at Global Health Imports with Mr. Anderson. Global Health Imports did not appear... Well, I shouldn't say "didn't appear", because there are judgments to back it up. It did not operate as a good, ethical business. This is a company that has been hit with \$7.8 million in judgments by Alberta courts for ripping off clients. It is a company Mr. Boissonnault started and held himself up as a partner in, in which he continues to have 50% ownership.

What does that say, before getting into the bigger issue involving Mr. Boissonnault?

• (1235)

Just on that basis, what does it say about the standard of ethics within this Liberal government that Justin Trudeau has appointed a minister who was involved in a shady PPE company that, under questionable circumstances, secured government contracts, that ripped off clients and that has essentially been found guilty by Alberta courts? Judgments to the tune of \$7.8 million have been awarded to those clients who were ripped off by Mr. Boissonnault's company, a company he was engaged in and a partner in during some of the instances of business dealings that led to the lawsuits that resulted in the \$7.8 million in judgments.

The fact that there is a minister in this government who was involved in those kinds of shady business dealings, who has a 50% interest in a company that is on the hook in judgments in the amount of \$7.8 million, I would think would be enough for the PM to say to Mr. Boissonnault, “You’re done. You’re fired. You don’t meet the ethical standard of serving in the federal cabinet.”

But, again, Mr. Boissonnault is not an outlier in this government when it comes to ethical misconduct. Dominic LeBlanc was guilty; Mary Ng was guilty; Bill Morneau was guilty; Greg Fergus was guilty, and Justin Trudeau was guilty twice. In the case of Randy Boissonnault, it sort of fits into the culture of corruption that I alluded to that is so embedded in a government that is frankly rotten to the core. Mr. Boissonnault said, when the \$7.8 million in judgments came to light, that those lawsuits arose after he left. Well, it turns out that’s not true. He lied. He straight up lied.

Again, that’s par for the course with these Liberals. That’s the ethical standard of these Liberals. On the very day that Mr. Boissonnault was set to appear at this committee, where he was going to peddle the falsehood that he had been cleared by the Ethics Commissioner, Global News broke a story in which there were text messages from Randy to his then business partner at Global Health Imports, Mr. Anderson. Now, the text from Randy amounts to basically a shakedown of a client from California who is suing another one of the many companies. Those who’ve had the misfortune of doing business with Global Health Imports have commenced a lawsuit for fraud against Global Health Imports. The context of his text message was that Randy Boissonnault was writing to Mr. Anderson, saying that the California-based client, the Ghaoui Group, had better wire over what was equivalent to a \$500,000 Canadian deposit for the purchase of PPE.

• (1240)

According the Ghaoui Group and its records, it transferred the \$500,000 to Mr. Boissonnault and Mr. Anderson’s company, and then the PPE never arrived. Global Health Imports just didn’t deliver it.

Then, mysteriously—and some might say not so mysteriously—the warehouse of Global Health Imports was burnt to the ground weeks after the \$500,000 was wired over to Global Health Imports. It was burnt to the ground. The Edmonton Police have concluded that it was likely arson.

One might wonder who was responsible for that arson. Global News reported that Anderson spoke about paying vendors after his company received insurance money. That’s just another coincidence.

You have a minister who is involved in this very sketchy company. However, what is really problematic, of course, about this text from Randy is that if, in fact, it is Mr. Boissonnault—and there’s every reason to believe it is—it means that the minister was engaged in and participated in a \$500,000 fraud. Also, it’s not only that. Mr. Boissonnault was a minister of the Crown on the date of the text messages and when this fraudulent transaction occurred, which Global Health Imports and Anderson orchestrated.

Now, what is at issue there? Well, very simply, it is a blatant violation of the Conflict of Interest Act for a minister to be involved in

the operations of a business—of any business. Mr. Boissonnault can retain ownership, but he cannot be involved in the operation of the business. Therefore, it’s a straight-up contravention of the Conflict of Interest Act.

Again, he would join the club of Dominic LeBlanc, Mary Ng, Bill Morneau, Greg Fergus and Justin Trudeau in breaching the Conflict of Interest Act.

When Global News reported on these text messages, Randy Boissonnault said that it isn’t him, that it’s a different Randy. When he came before this committee, I asked Mr. Boissonnault if it would be fair to say that this is a fairly small company, with a handful of people, and he acknowledged that it would be fair. Then I asked who Randy is. He said, “I do not know who [that] Randy is.” He said, with a straight face, that he did not know who that Randy was.

It would be laughable—it’s farcical—if the matter were not as serious as it is. I mean, we’re talking about a minister of the Crown who was potentially tied up in a \$500,000 fraud and who potentially violated the Conflict of Interest Act if, in fact, Randy the minister is the Randy in the text messages.

Now, it really shouldn’t be that hard to find Randy. Could there be another Randy? Well, if there is another Randy and Mr. Boissonnault can’t identify him—and he should be able to identify him—why can’t Mr. Anderson identify him?

• (1245)

Mr. Anderson told Global News that it was a different Randy, that it was a Randy who was involved in the logistics of the company, but when Global News looked into who was responsible for logistics, it turns out it’s not someone named Randy; it’s someone entirely different. One could say it’s highly suspicious.

Mr. Larry Brock: It was his father.

Mr. Michael Cooper: In fact, it wasn’t just anyone. It was Anderson’s father who was responsible for logistics, not Randy. Not a Randy, and then he couldn’t verify....

Global News wanted to know the last name of this Randy, and he couldn’t say. He didn’t know. I mean, this is a guy who’s supposedly involved in logistics, one of the key people in his company, and he can’t cite his last name. We should trust him, though: It’s this Randy, this mysterious Randy without a last name.

Give me a break.

How does that add up? Global News can’t find this Randy. Anderson can’t remember his last name. Randy Boissonnault can’t be bothered, evidently, to pick up the phone and text. I mean, he seems to have been quite comfortable texting Anderson, but all of a sudden he can’t text Anderson to ask, “Who is this Randy? I need to clear the air.”

Could Anderson not pore over all of the employment records of the five people who work at the company to find this mysterious Randy? Then Boissonnault said that he turned over his phone records to this committee. He stood in the House and said that he had turned over his phone records to the committee.

It turns out that it was another lie from Randy. He didn't turn over his phone records. He turned over one device. What a coincidence. How convenient. You know, some of this is almost funny, but again, I underscore that it really isn't funny. It isn't funny at all when we're dealing with allegations around a \$500,000 fraud and the potential that a minister of the Crown violated the Conflict of Interest Act and is playing Canadians for fools—as if Canadians are foolish, as if everyone is an idiot. No one is fooled by this. No one is. Everyone knows that the Randy in the text messages, the Randy involved in the \$500,000 fraud, is the same Randy who sits as a minister in Justin Trudeau's cabinet, and his name is Randy Boissonnault. Everyone knows that.

• (1250)

It speaks to how little respect Justin Trudeau and his ministers have for Canadians and how little respect they have for the law. They think they're above the law. They think the law doesn't apply to them. Dominic LeBlanc didn't think it applied to him. Mary Ng didn't think it applied to her. Bill Morneau didn't think it applied to him. Greg Fergus didn't think it applied to him. Justin Trudeau didn't think it applied to him. Randy Boissonnault doesn't think it applies to him.

Mr. Chair, we need to get answers. When Mr. Boissonnault came before this committee, he didn't answer any real questions. He wasn't fully truthful. In some cases, he lied outright. In other cases, he gave partial answers or non-answers or interrupted, all to avoid accountability. It was not a pretty spectacle, what this committee saw, but it was another exhibit, another example, of how this government and the ministers in it operate.

We need to keep probing. We need to continue to hold hearings. Yes, it's good, and yes, it's fine that this committee adopted a motion today to invite Mr. Anderson and Ms. Poon, who very conveniently have been unable, supposedly unable, or unavailable to attend at this committee until, very conveniently, the summer, when they know the House isn't sitting.

We've dealt with that. We passed a motion today. That's fine, but I don't think it should take, after that, Standing Order 106(4) to continue the probing on this very, very serious matter. If the Randy in the text messages isn't the same Randy who is the minister in Justin Trudeau's cabinet, the air would have been cleared long ago.

I say we need to leave it to the chair. It's in the Standing Orders. If we need to have additional meetings this summer on the matter of Mr. Boissonnault, then we should do that. We don't need to come here for a 106(4) to then schedule additional meetings. Keep it simple. Leave it to the discretion of the chair to call a meeting. Maybe we need to call Mr. Boissonnault back. We probably do after we hear from Ms. Poon and Mr. Anderson. Let's provide the chair with the flexibility to do that. We can continue to have conversations off-line as these matters progress.

That's the case of Mr. Boissonnault, but I would go back to what I said at the beginning, that this is part of a coordinated effort by the Liberals to shut down the work of all committees. Several other committees are holding hearings on Liberal corruption, including the \$60-million arrive scam at government operations and the green slush fund at the public accounts committee, a slush fund involving Liberal insiders who, under the watch of Navdeep Bains and the

current minister, engaged in 186 conflicts in which board members funnelled hundreds of millions of dollars to their own companies. In some 63 cases involving \$76 million, board members at the green slush fund actually voted to funnel money into their own companies.

• (1255)

It's straight-up conflicts. It's straight-up corruption. The public accounts committee has been holding hearings now that we have the benefit of the Auditor General's report, which made those findings, but it's no surprise that the Liberals want to shut down the work of the public accounts committee over the summer as well.

I get it. I get why they want to shut things down. They don't want to have to deal with all of these scandals that they have to somehow justify and defend, but I can't understand why the NDP would be a partner of the Liberals in this regard. I guess the reason is part of the fact that they're in a coalition with the Liberals and propping up the Liberals not only in matters of policy but in terms of covering up their corruption.

Now, I think this committee is a very busy committee after nine years of Justin Trudeau. Mr. Brock is going to be questioning the commissioner of the RCMP this afternoon on, among other things, the SNC-Lavalin scandal—another massive scandal involving this Prime Minister.

It's a scandal that I'm quite familiar with, because I sat on the justice committee when the justice committee held hearings on SNC. We heard from Jody Wilson-Raybould, who appeared at our committee in the spring of 2019, on what was truly a historic day, but not in a good way. She came before the committee and spoke about all the times she was pressured by Justin Trudeau and those around him, including Mr. Wernick, the clerk of Justin Trudeau's personal department, the PCO; Katie Telford, the Prime Minister's chief of staff; and Gerald Butts, the Prime Minister's then-principal secretary. She was repeatedly pressured to interfere in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, and she laid that out in detail.

The RCMP did launch an investigation into what happened during SNC, and Mr. Brock detailed the fact that it took them five years, and then they, for reasons that are not fully understood, shut down that investigation, an investigation that, among other things, looked into whether the Prime Minister obstructed justice.

One of the things that is important to understand about the RCMP's investigation into Justin Trudeau is that the investigation was obstructed by Justin Trudeau, and that was confirmed when the RCMP came before this committee, including by the RCMP officer who headed the investigation.

• (1300)

How the Prime Minister obstructed the RCMP investigation was by hiding behind cabinet confidence in refusing to turn over key documents to the RCMP, documents that the RCMP had requested be turned over to them. The RCMP requested those documents because the RCMP determined that they were absolutely material to determining whether in fact the Prime Minister obstructed justice.

Now, to provide a bit of background on what the RCMP requested, the Prime Minister's refusing to turn over the documents and what the Prime Minister did turn over versus what he didn't turn over, you have to go back to the spring of 2019. You have to go back to before Jody Wilson-Raybould came before committee. She essentially had a gag that had been placed over her by the Prime Minister, having to do with cabinet confidence. She said, look, there's a lot I'd like to talk about in terms of what went on behind closed doors, but I can't because of cabinet confidence.

I can remember the day that Bill Morneau brought down the budget in 2019. We shouted at him: "Let her speak. Let her speak. Take the gag off Jody Wilson-Raybould." Well, in the face of significant political pressure, the Prime Minister partially did—partially, but not fully. The Prime Minister lifted or waived cabinet confidence up until Jody Wilson-Raybould was shuffled out as the Minister of Justice. What she could not reveal, what cabinet confidence has not been lifted, is what happened from the time that she was shuffled out of the portfolio of Minister of Justice and Attorney General to the time that she was fired from cabinet altogether by Justin Trudeau.

Why does that matter? Well, according to the RCMP, when they appeared before this committee, the strongest theory that the Prime Minister obstructed justice was that he removed Jody Wilson-Raybould as Attorney General and installed a new Attorney General because that new Attorney General would make a different decision from the one Jody Wilson-Raybould had. In other words, the new Attorney General would do the Prime Minister's bidding.

That is what the RCMP said is the strongest theory on the question of whether the Prime Minister committed obstruction of justice. It's why the RCMP requested cabinet documents during that period. The RCMP did confirm at committee that, yes, that period is absolutely material to determining whether the Prime Minister obstructed justice, and the Prime Minister has consistently refused to lift cabinet confidence during that period, so what we have is a Prime Minister who is obstructing the RCMP investigation.

Now, one can draw conclusions as to why.... Jody Wilson-Raybould has said that there are things she would like to say, but she can't—about that—period. The RCMP says that all of that evidence is material to getting to what is the strongest theory that the Prime Minister obstructed justice.

• (1305)

Could it be that the Prime Minister is hiding behind cabinet confidence because there's strong evidence that he obstructed justice? I would submit or suggest that this is the case. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the Prime Minister, if he didn't cross the line of obstructing justice, came right up to the line in the best-case scenario for the Prime Minister.

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you very much.

I hate to interrupt, but can you let the committee know what resources...? I understand we have resources to 1:30.

The Chair: It's 1:12 today.

We have a maximum of two hours. The meeting started at 11:02; we suspended for 10 minutes, and that brings us to 1:12.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Is there no way of getting more, so Mr. Cooper can continue?

The Chair: I'm not sure. The instructions I have were to a maximum of two hours today.

Hold on.

We have until 1:12, Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, you have the floor.

You can continue, please.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to conclude that either the Prime Minister obstructed justice or, in a best-case scenario for him—and it's not a very good scenario—he came right up to the line of obstructing justice in pressuring Jody Wilson-Raybould repeatedly, in what amounted to a coordinated campaign, to interfere in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, which was a decision that had been made independently by the director of public prosecutions.

The Prime Minister would not take no for an answer. When it came to the conclusion that she would not budge and that she was going to stand up to the Prime Minister and stand up for the rule of law, he fired her. Then he covered up, and is now covering up, the evidence that the RCMP says it needs to complete its investigation.

As I said, if the Prime Minister didn't obstruct justice, he came right up to the line. I would emphasize, in that regard, that no matter how you look at it, Justin Trudeau doesn't come off favourably in this. He may very well have broken the law—a serious offence under the Criminal Code—but at the very least he engaged in behaviour that is completely unethical. He engaged in behaviour that fits every definition of "corruption".

It goes back to what I was saying earlier, which is that there is this culture of corruption within this government, and it starts at the top. The corruption starts at the top, and it starts with the Prime Minister.

I have no doubt that the culture we have seen is a direct result of the standard he has set. It's that the Conflict of Interest Act doesn't apply to him. As the all-powerful Prime Minister, he's going to put pressure on his Attorney General to interfere in a prosecution that he doesn't think should go forward, notwithstanding that the director of public prosecutions made the independent determination that the prosecution ought to go forward. He's going to fire his Attorney General when she stands up for the rule of law, and he can get away with it because he'll just cover it up and hide behind cabinet confidence.

My colleague, Mr. Brock, talked about Jody Wilson-Raybould and Jane Philpott. When they were kicked out of the Liberal caucus, Justin Trudeau invited the media to come. They found out, I think, basically through the media.

• (1310)

Mr. Darren Fisher: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I know it's 1:11, and you're going to get ready to bring the gavel down, but I request that you suspend the meeting rather than adjourn it, just like

we did the last time we didn't finish debate, so that we can get to a vote at the next meeting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Justin Trudeau invited the media to watch the spectacle of Liberal MPs who, as Mr. Brock said, acted like trained seals and gleefully cheered on the Prime Minister's corruption—

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, I'm going to have to cut you off there, because we have reached the limit of our resources.

The challenge, Mr. Fisher, is that if I suspend and we don't have a meeting on Thursday, the suspension carries over to the summer. That provides all kinds of difficulties for the committee and me, as the chair, so the meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>