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Chair: Mr. John Brassard



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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• (1640)

[English]

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

I want to welcome everyone to meeting 126 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Before we begin, I want to ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines that are written on the updated cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You'll also notice there's a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video. If you want to watch the video, I suggest you do it a little bit later, not during the meeting, please.

I want to bring everybody up to date as we start committee business.

I have Mr. Barrett and then I have you, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Chair—

The Chair: You were at the back when the meeting started, and Mr. Barrett raised his hand.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Yes, he spoke to the chair before.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Oh, that's unfortunate.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Shanahan.

I will just update the committee on some of the actions of the committee as well.

I see your hand, Mr. Cooper. You'll be third, after Ms. Khalid.

As you know, our last meeting was on July 17 with Mr. Anderson. The committee had demanded that information be provided. Over the course of the following months, the committee did receive information that Mr. Anderson had not provided what the committee had asked for. This morning, as per the motion of the committee adopted on July 17, I presented a report to the House about Mr. Anderson not responding to the committee's request that the information be provided by the deadline.

The other thing I want to say is that I have planned a subcommittee meeting for today to get direction from the committee. On Thursday, as you've seen in the notice, we will have Minister Boisjournault coming back, followed by a subcommittee meeting for approval of the work plan I hope to get to today.

Next week, just for the sake and the benefit of the committee—we haven't put the notice out, but there has been work and the clerk has notified witnesses—we can continue with the misinformation and disinformation study. As committee members know, we've done quite a bit of information gathering with respect to that study. There were some witnesses who, because of technical issues, were not able to come before committee, so I've asked the clerk to reconnect with those witnesses. Right now, they're on hold. They're aware that we want them to come, but again, it's going to be up to the committee to determine whether we maintain that schedule.

I will remind the committee that, before we broke in June, we had the RCMP information tool-gathering draft report. That needs to be dealt with and presented. The report has been written, but we haven't got to it at this point. I believe at some point during this session we will have to get to that important study and present it to Parliament with the recommendations contained in it.

Speaking of direction, I can't stress enough how difficult it was for me as chair and for the clerk and the analysts to do planning in the last session, so I am going to need that direction from committee. That's one of the reasons I put in that subcommittee part of the agenda for today. I've started with committee business in public because numerous motions have been put on notice. Effectively, if this were a game of poker, I would want you to splash your chips in, all in, and start presenting your motions if you wanted them to be debated on the floor. Through the subcommittee, we can get direction from the committee on the priorities of those motions, and we can do the work of actually gathering witnesses and doing the important work of this committee with a plan.

It was difficult, as I said earlier, to plan for anything in the last session. That's why I've decided to start today's meeting with open committee business and not just with the motions that are on notice. If anybody has anything else they want to discuss within the committee, let's get to it now and then we can start planning for the future meetings.

That being said, I'm going to start with Mr. Barrett and then I'm going to go to Ms. Khalid and then Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead. We are in committee business.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I move:

Given that the Prime Minister has appointed Mark Carney as chair of the Liberal Party task force on economic growth, and this position shields Mark Carney from Canada's public disclosure and conflict of interest laws, as he is not deemed a public office holder, and Canadians have a right to know about the financial and corporate interests of individuals shaping economic policy that impacts their everyday lives, the committee call Mark Carney to testify for three hours within 14 days of this motion being adopted.

The Chair: I'm going to accept that motion as being in order.

Do you want to speak to it?

Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: We have a conflict of interest regime in this country that was set up so that Canadians know what interests an individual who is a designated public office holder has. Conflict of interest screens should then be set up or divestitures can be taken. However, in the case of Mark "carbon tax" Carney, we don't know. We don't have the full picture of what his holdings and financial interests are.

He's advising the Prime Minister. I understand he's going to be holding cross-country pre-budget consultations, and he's been hired by the Liberal Party. The only reason that can be inferred from this is that it is to avoid the conflict of interest regime.

Even this past week, we had an announcement from the government of a \$2.14-billion loan to a company called Telesat, just days after Mr. Carney was given this new job advising the Prime Minister. Mr. Carney is a personal friend of the head of that company and has a financial interest in it. Again, this is information that Canadians need to know.

We have advocated—I have advocated—for the government to bring in Mr. Carney, have him sworn in as a public office holder and have him be subject to the Conflict of Interest Act, so that Canadians know.

Look, I wouldn't pick Mr. Carney to advise me, but that's a choice they've made. They're the government. That's their purview. However, the manner in which this has been done appears to be to subvert the conflict of interest regime. There are specific provisions in the act with respect to ministerial advisers. How do we know what the framework is for Mr. Carney's employment, his interactions with ministers and his interactions with the Prime Minister, versus his interactions with the Prime Minister who is also the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada?

It's about transparency. It's about clarity. We have some information through public, open sources about the interests of Mr. Carney, but we need the full picture. It's important for Canadians to get a good understanding of that. The best way to do it would be to have a conversation with Mr. Carney.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett. It could be a bit of a challenge. You're calling for a three-hour meeting. We're going to have to check our resources to make sure that they're available for three hours, but I understand that's what your motion calls for.

[Translation]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor on the motion moved by Mr. Barrett.

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

Welcome to the committee. We're all glad to have you back. I also want to welcome all my colleagues.

I'd like to raise a couple of points on the motion and ask for some clarifications.

We agree that the purpose of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics is to study specific circumstances. My first question is this: Do these circumstances fall within the mandate of the committee?

I would, however, like to sound a note of caution.

Mr. Carney most likely has interests, but do these interests really constitute a conflict of interest? I'm not sure. It might be worth investigating that. I am somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of asking someone to explain themselves to a parliamentary committee when that person was hired by the Liberal Party of Canada as a consultant—I will use that term—and not by the government, just like Jenni Byrne, who was a consultant for the Conservatives.

Obviously, if this person were an elected official, or even if they'd been hired by the government, I would be more comfortable. However, when it comes to someone who is a consultant, who do you even call in the first place? Many people could potentially have conflicts of interest. It seems to me that we should be a little more specific.

The member who moved the motion said that Mr. Carney has interests, that they are known, and that they are documented. Fine. However, the simple fact of having an interest is not a crime. Not every interest is a conflict of interest. In that sense, we need to avoid engaging in unnecessary witch hunts. I'm not saying that we shouldn't shed light on all of this, but at first glance I would say that this is somewhat out of proportion. I think we're creating a problem here, rather than trying to solve a problem. I would urge us to be cautious in this matter. Again, not every interest is a conflict of interest.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

Next on the list, I have Ms. Khalid, followed by Mr. Fisher and Mrs. Shanahan.

I did, at the top, forget to welcome some of the new members to the committee: Mr. Cooper, Mr. Caputo and, as well, Mrs. Shanahan.

Are you subbing in or are you a new member of the committee, Mrs. Shanahan?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: That will be clarified shortly.

The Chair: Subject to confirmation—okay.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I'm not on the speakers list yet.

The Chair: You're after Mr. Fisher.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead, please, on the motion as proposed by Mr. Barrett.

• (1650)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I love to see a motion presented to Elon Musk on Twitter before it's presented to our committees. I think it's a wonderful way to conduct democracy, and a weird way, to be quite frank, to conduct democracy here.

Speaking of weird, we've had a very weird summer with Pierre Poilievre and his Conservatives. It's quite strange—

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm so sorry, Mr. Green. I can't hear myself over what you're saying.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid has the floor, please.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Mr. Matthew Green: You can J.D. Vance them. Don't J.D. Vance me.

I don't want things to get weird, Mr. Chair. I apologize.

The Chair: Let's have some decorum, please. Whoever has the floor is the one who's going to be speaking.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'll just wait for everybody to chime down, Mr. Chair, if that's okay.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: There are going to be side conversations where members are going to be talking amongst each other. I'm going to ask, if it does get loud, that you just step back a bit, if you don't mind, please.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

This kind of behaviour is not unprecedented. We've seen it before. We've seen a lot of distraction, and I think that—

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Khalid. You have the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, this is quite uncomfortable for me to make a point when members are clearly talking over me.

The Chair: I encourage you to make your point. I'm not sure he's talking over you. He was talking to Mr. Caputo.

As I said, there are going to be some side conversations here.

Please go ahead, Ms. Khalid. If it causes problems for me, then it will cause problems for them.

It's not causing a problem for me. I'm listening to what you're saying and I know that the clerk, the analysts and everyone else is.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll just turn to you so that I'm not distracted, if that's okay.

We saw, over the summer, that Pierre Poilievre had to remove an advertisement because it contained stock footage of Russian fighter jets doing a training mission in Canadian skies, Serbian schoolchildren and homes being built in Slovenia.

Pierre claimed not to know anything about the far-right group, Diagon, when he spent a lot of time snuggling up with it. He was photographed with it and some of its members in the spring, and he previously denounced them for comments made by their founder about his wife a couple of years ago.

Pierre and his Conservative Party have faced criticism this summer for calling the Holiday Inn lavish and swanky, whereas he hosted a fundraiser there at that same location earlier in January.

We've had members of Parliament in that caucus, such as Michelle Ferreri. She had to delete a tweet after claiming that, in Peterborough, the cost of living crisis has driven parents to traffic their own children. Michelle was found to have posted a doctored Global News report that edited out most of the video because it was critical of her.

There was a weird case of online social media bots that were posing as Pierre Poilievre supporters and trying to boost the Conservative Party's messaging about a rally in northern Ontario.

In recent days, reports have come out about a right-wing Indian media personality calling for the Indian government to wage an information campaign in support of Pierre Poilievre. The FBI has seized a Russian-backed fake news site that posted anti-Trudeau and pro-Poilievre content.

I'm listing all of this, Mr. Chair, because this is exactly what this motion is about. It's about a whole bunch of misinformation and disinformation. It's about a whole bunch of nothingness to delay the work that this committee has put in.

Mr. Chair, you know how passionate I've been about the work on our social media study, which got shelved. You know how passionate I've been about the work on the misinformation and disinformation campaigns that our country has been dealing with—with respect to our elections and with respect to foreign interference—that Mr. René Villemure put forward.

I think that we need to be better. I think that we need to move past the politics and move on to what genuinely helps Canadians with respect to the mandate of this committee, and this is not it.

If we're talking about the specifics of the motion, talking about the Liberal Party hiring or bringing somebody on as a volunteer to provide advice on economics, on the economy, somebody who has significant contribution and expertise on the economy, not just here in Canada but also across the G7, what is the Conservative Party trying to achieve here? Are we trying to malign yet another person by dragging them here before this committee? Are we trying to malign...? What is the objective? Are we trying to move our country's economy forward, or are we not?

In the same breath that the Conservatives have taken this motion with, well, what about the flip of that coin? To my understanding, Jenni Byrne is also in exactly the same scenario as Mark Carney by all the wording of this motion. Why is she not part of this motion? She would be unless this motion is presented to be a partisan hack on what we are trying to make sure, as a collective between all parties: that our country is thriving and that our country is progressing.

I'm really wanting to understand what the crux of this motion is about.

• (1655)

Is it to, one by one, malign and shame anyone who has contact with the Liberal Party, regardless of their expertise, their aptitude or their experience and the wealth of knowledge they can bring to make our country better, or is it just Conservative hack politics? I think we can do a bit better than that.

In the interest of being non-partisan and really exploring what this motion is trying to do, I want to bring in the flip side of that coin and say, "Hey, why don't we bring in Jenni Byrne as well?" If you want to bring in Mark Carney, sure, you guys have your day. He knows how to handle himself, I'm sure. I am not speaking for him, and I don't think any of our members on this committee are. He can speak very well for himself, given his track record over his entire career for being the expert he is.

Let's even the score. If somebody is going to be brought in by a political party to give expert advice on an issue, let's talk about Jenni Byrne and her expert advice on grocery prices. Let's talk about why the Conservatives feel it is necessary to talk out of both sides of their mouths when it comes to grocery prices.

To be fair, I'm happy to support this motion, with an amendment including Jenni Byrne for the same number of hours this motion presents for Mark Carney. I am happy to propose the specific amendment that we can add to this motion.

Again, I would say that Mark Carney has been brought in by the Liberal Party—whether he is paid or not paid is not a question—the same way Jenni Byrne was brought in by a political party. Let's bring them both in and figure out—as I've been saying for many months now, Chair—how we make sure that our rules and regulations ensure there is no conflict of interest, no violation of lobbying and no violation of that public trust that we really should be holding dear to our hearts. How do we ensure that we are talking about policy, not people?

Let's broaden the horizon. Let's talk about both sides of the coin. Let's bring in these people who have been appointed, with whatever

expertise they have, for the exact same amount of time the Conservatives are proposing. Let's just have it out.

I'll leave it there, Chair.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

I have Mr. Fisher next on the list on the motion.

Go ahead.

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

I'm in complete agreement with Iqra. She asked a rhetorical question, though. She asked if we are once again trying to malign a future witness at this committee, and I would say in answer that these nicknames that get tied to people already malign their character. They remind you very much of a former president of the United States.

I have to tell you, as Iqra asked, we would like to think we're better than that here in Canada. When you start the motion, or the preface to the motion, with nicknames attached to people's names, you're already maligning a potential witness.

I thought I heard the possibility of an amendment or more amendments coming later, but I would be interested in hearing from some of the other members as to whether they support going down the road of asking someone who may or may not be a chair, may or may not be hired or may or may not be an adviser. I would like to think that every political party is smart enough to have advisers and to bring smart people in to help advise them on how their party would proceed.

I think it was René who made a comment very similar to that. I would be very surprised. We know the Conservatives have advisers. We know the Conservatives have people who attend their caucus meetings and advise their leader, and I can only assume that the other parties do the exact same thing. Why wouldn't they? It makes perfect sense to try to get smart people in to try to advise your party. There are a lot of assumptions in that motion, whether it's a chair, whether it's a hired person or whether it's...who knows?

I will leave it there, Mr. Chair, and let other people speak as to whether the committee wants to go down this road. You started your conversation at the meeting today, Mr. Chair, about the sub-committee, which I support greatly, and finding a calendar. I remember when I first joined this you were very hopeful that we would stick to a calendar, and we didn't. I'm sure all parties played a part in that. I do like your hopeful direction that we can move forward on things, tie some bows on some reports and do some actual good work here rather than a motion by tweet in the middle of an afternoon on the day of the committee. I don't think that's productive. It becomes reactive rather than proactive. I don't think it gets us, as Ms. Khalid said, where we need to be. We're better than that.

I will pause for now and listen to other speakers to see if there's an interest in going down the road on a motion like this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

I'm going to go to Ms. Shanahan now on the motion that Mr. Barrett put forward.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to be back on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

I agree with Mr. Villemure's comments. I always read what the analysts have to say regarding our mandate and the principles of committee management. It reminds me that the mandate of this committee is to look at the work of each of the commissioners: the Information Commissioner, the Privacy Commissioner, the Lobbying Commissioner and, of course, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. I therefore strongly agree that we have other things to do and that going on a political witch hunt is not useful.

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Shanahan.

Mr. Housefather, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Very briefly, Mr. Chair, I had only one thing to say.

[*Translation*]

The reason we have an ethics committee is to apply the law that Parliament has written. If a situation arises that is not provided for in the law, I don't see how it would fall within the committee's purview to rewrite the law to take account of someone else's situation. If that's what we want to do, we have to ask Parliament to amend the law. I don't see how it's within the committee's mandate to summon someone who is only a volunteer. We all have volunteers in our respective political parties who help us write policy. Are we going to say that anyone who works for a political party can be summoned before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics? That seems very strange to me.

I therefore rather oppose this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

I see that no one else wishes to speak to this motion.

Do we support the motion as moved by Mr. Barrett?

We'll go to a vote.

Madam Clerk, call the vote, please.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 4)

[*English*]

The Chair: We're still on committee business.

I'm going to go to Ms. Khalid next.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair.

In my remarks earlier, I mentioned how important it is for us as a committee to combat the threat and the danger of disinformation

campaigns we've seen not just the opposition run but also foreign state actors take part in, whether through funding or through the creation of bots, etc.

I propose a motion to add onto the very important study by Mr. Villemure on the state of disinformation in our country and what it means to all of us and our safety and security.

I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the committee immediately expand its study on misinformation and disinformation while focusing on foreign interference and domestic deception to investigate:

(a) The devastating impact of malicious, artificially generated online bots used by foreign and domestic actors. This includes Russia's propaganda machine to manipulate the public discourse and fake bot accounts claiming to have attended a rally held by the Leader of the Official Opposition, Pierre Poilievre, on July 31, 2024;

(b) Russian disinformation sites posting Canadian political content;

(c) Recent reports suggesting India may be using social media bots to interfere and wage "information warfare" against Canada to influence the upcoming Canadian elections; and

that the committee immediately devote the next three meetings to these critical matters and invite relevant witnesses to provide expert testimony on these subject matters. The committee shall then report its findings and recommendations to the House.

Chair, I'll say a few words on this motion.

I think the testimony we have heard—

● (1710)

The Chair: Just hang on, Ms. Khalid.

Everybody should have a copy of the motion.

[*Translation*]

It was sent by the clerk before the start of this meeting.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair. I believe that it was circulated earlier. Thank you.

As I was saying, through the study we initiated on social media and their practices with respect to privacy and to online safety and security, and then moving on to the misinformation and disinformation study—knowing and understanding how technologies can impact and sway public opinion and having watched it in real time, whether it was in 2016 through the Trump election or currently with Timbit Trump—we're really trying very hard to ensure that Canada and Canadian democracy are protected. I think the overall study is very important for us to understand what the dangers are and to outline what our government can do to ensure we are protecting and safeguarding not only Canadians individually but our entire democratic institutions.

Quite frankly, I have seen over the summer, as I outlined earlier, too many people making all kinds of outrageous claims that are absolute lies, and with the public influence they're able to wield, it has negative connotations. With respect to these media reports, whether it is fake Russian bots being bought out by the Conservatives or other parties, misinformation campaigns being paid for by the Government of India, for example, as is alleged in news articles, or Russian misinformation sites that are being seized because of their disinformation being spread about Canadian politics, our democracy is under attack.

If we keep on squabbling amongst each other, we are going to lose the very essence of who we are as Canadians—that is, a democratic state. I think it is of the utmost importance for our committee to pick up this very important issue and say, “You know what? Let's put all our partisan politics aside. Let's see how we can work together to ensure that disinformation does not become a tool for toppling our beautiful democracy that is Canada.”

Chair, I'll park my comments there, and I'm hoping that members all across the aisle can support this, because of the gravity of it and the importance of it with respect to maintaining our democratic values here in Canada.

Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

The motion is on the floor. I have Mr. Barrett and Mr. Villemure, and then you, Mr. Caputo. I see your hand.

I just wanted to bring the committee up to date on where things are at, as we've been gone for the summer. If you recall, there was a motion that was passed before we left in June to add three additional meetings to the misinformation and disinformation study. As I mentioned at the top of this meeting, our plan is to have, not this week but next week, two meetings—two full meetings—on Tuesday and Thursday, on that study. We've already contacted some witnesses in regard to that.

I will let you know that the witnesses we did contact are the only witnesses we have. We didn't get a long list of witnesses from members that would even accommodate those additional three meetings that were approved by this committee before we took our break in June. I want to just throw that at you as you contemplate this motion: We are going to need witnesses. If you want to start this study or continue this study next week, we're going to need more witnesses.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks very much, Chair.

I want to share with the committee an example of real-life disinformation, and it's been propagated by Ms. Khalid and her colleagues: disinformation while talking about disinformation. I'm going to share a Canadian Press story from August 28, 2024. It deals exactly with some of the contents of the motion and what Ms. Khalid talked about before.

It reads:

There is no evidence that indicates the federal Conservatives were behind a bot network on social media that praised a Pierre Poilievre rally, a new study has found.

The Canadian Digital Media Research Network launched an investigation after hundreds of X accounts posted about the Conservative leader's July rally in Kirkland Lake, Ont., all using the same language with phrases like “buzzing with energy” and “as a northern Ontarian.”

The fact that the posts were so similar immediately raised questions about who was behind the network of bots, with the NDP and Liberals pointing the finger at the Conservatives.

The Conservative Party denied having any involvement.

Results from the investigation were published on Wednesday.

“Despite this significant speculation and associated accusations, we find no evidence that indicates a political party or foreign entity employed this bot network for political purposes,” said Aengus Bridgman, Director of the Media Ecosystem Observatory and a contributor of the report.

Instead, the researchers said they believe it was an amateur experimenting with a bot pipeline by sourcing content from news stories, and the Poilievre event was caught in the mix. The rally had been reported on in mainstream media in the days leading up to the mass posts.

“This is not done with intent to manipulate, it's with intent to experiment,” Bridgman said.

Very few Canadians saw original bot posts and the report said their impact was considered to be insignificant, but Bridgman said the narrative about the bots was “hijacked”.

The followup conversation about the posts ended up getting millions of views on X, and millions more through amplification by media, the report shows.

Many of those posts attacked the Conservative party and Poilievre for attempting to mislead Canadians about his popularity.

It also says:

Liberal MP Mark Gerretsen, too, pointed the finger at the Tories, claiming without evidence that the Conservative Party of Canada purchased the bots on social media.

...Ultimately, nearly half of the Canadians who heard about the bots believed a political party was to blame, with a vast majority of them thinking it was the actions of the Conservatives....

Bridgman described the political discourse around the bot campaign as “toxic” and said it should serve as a lesson for future Canadian elections.

Also, this quote is really important:

“The finger-pointing without evidence is actually quite destructive and leans into the hyper-partisan, hyper-polarized information ecosystem that we find ourselves in today in Canada....

Here we have the Liberal MPs who are talking about disinformation actually propagating it. They actually spread disinformation. The false claim they made was disproven by experts, and the report went on to say that it's only because of their disinformation campaign that the effect of these bots was amplified—hook, line and sinker.

Ms. Khalid has said that she wants to put partisan politics aside, but they've put them in the shop window. They've put them to the forefront. We heard her say we're better than this. No, they're actually not. They are actually called out for spreading disinformation.

Let me tell you that I have a few minor amendments to the motion, but we think this is an excellent study. We think it's terrific. I think there are some great witnesses who are listed in this Canadian Press report.

We think the impact of foreign interference in our democracy is troubling. We think that, irrespective of the country, any foreign meddling in our democracy is unacceptable. That's why we've had to drag the Liberals, kicking and screaming, to implement legislation like Bill C-70 on foreign interference or a foreign agent registry. My goodness, it was worse than pulling teeth to try to get the Liberals to do it.

Also, like in many such cases, we needed the FBI to tell Canadians what these Liberals deny and, actually, the public safety minister, a minister in Trudeau's Liberal government, lied about Beijing-operated Chinese police stations in Canada. He lied about it.

• (1715)

Again, that's disinformation—

Mr. Darren Fisher: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, you can't say a member has lied. You can't say that.

The Chair: I don't think he accused a member.

• (1720)

Mr. Darren Fisher: Yes, he did.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I didn't.

The Chair: No. I think he was just talking in generalities.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Dost thou protest too much, Mr. Fisher?

The Chair: Go ahead. You know the language you can use and not use.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Absolutely.

Mr. Matthew Green: Shakespeare...?

Mr. Michael Barrett: For the kids, we're bringing in Shakespeare as we talk about the disinformation spread by the Liberal government. We saw it, and that's a great example.

We're lucky to live next door to our friends in the United States, because they've provided great cover to the incompetence of these Liberals on matters of terrorism and foreign interference. We're so fortunate that they brought it to light for Canadians, because it would have died in darkness with Ms. Khalid and her colleagues.

We very much look forward to more information about the effects of misinformation. It would be interesting to get some of the people cited in the article—not just the authors, but those who intentionally and without evidence spread false information. That's a damning indictment of this Liberal government after their nine years. They're unapologetic about it.

Ms. Khalid talked about wanting to strip partisan politics out of it. I have an amendment that looks to achieve some of that. I also have an amendment that looks to solve some of the scheduling challenges it creates. The quantity of the meetings is of no issue. The broad substance of the subject is important.

My goodness, look at the ineptitude and failures of the Liberal government on foreign interference and its intentional spreading and amplification of disinformation. We know it should be more concerned about exposition potentially than foreign governments. I think that domestic interference or domestic deception is a giant problem with these Liberals, who also want to seek, of course, to censor what Canadians see on the Internet.

They create the disinformation, limit the channels or the ways Canadians can receive it and then say anything that's offside with their narrative is a lie, when we've seen countless examples that these Liberals are, in fact, the perpetrators of the very thing they claim to detest. It's very timely that we're going to deal with this. I think it's important that we do it.

In paragraph (a), the motion reads, “The devastating impact of malicious, artificially generated online bots used by foreign and domestic actors.” That's fine. It continues to read, “This includes Russia's propaganda machine to manipulate....”

I'll ask the clerk to take note of this. My amendment would strike the word “the” and continue to leave in “public discourse and fake bot accounts”. Then strike all of the words after that up to paragraph (b). That way, we're capturing all incidents of this, not just the one that was already studied. It would include it, of course, and it would allow us to call the witnesses and the experts from the Canadian Digital Media Research Network who created this report.

The last two changes to the motion are in the final paragraph, where it reads, “that the committee”. I would strike the word “immediately”, leave the word “devote” and strike the words “the next”. I would leave the words following that, including “three meetings”.

I think you've probably been able to capture that. It expands the scope in paragraph (a), so it's actually more substantive in its amended form, including the incident that's cited, but it goes beyond that as well.

• (1725)

Because we have a subcommittee meeting after this to talk about scheduling.... Oh, we don't. We have a meeting scheduled Thursday. It would step on that meeting and probably also not give us enough time to spool up witnesses for it. We'll be able to schedule that as part of the other study and for the three meetings that are requested.

Let's get to the bottom of this. Let's do that. I think it's important as part of the public discourse. People are concerned about this. Canadians are rightly concerned about it. They've asked and been begging the government for action on foreign interference. We dragged them, kicking and screaming, to bring in Bill C-70, and though it doesn't go far enough and is not a perfect bill, it got some things right. We're pleased that it's moving forward—and, indeed, with no thanks to the Liberals—so let's do that. Let's have this conversation. Hopefully, these amendments can be included so that we can get the speedy passage of the motion.

Note, Chair, that side conversations didn't require any kleenex over here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

The amendment is moved, and it's been shared by the clerk to all members of the committee. I am going to just review it. The changes that I see are, after the words "to manipulate", to remove the word "the", and then, after the word "accounts", to strike that remaining part: "claiming to have attended", etc. Then the last change is to, after "that the committee", strike "immediately" so it says "devote", and then strike "the next" so it says, "three meetings to these critical matters". Does that capture it?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Yes, it does—100%.

The Chair: We're on the amendment.

[*Translation*]

I saw that Mr. Villemure had his hand up.

[*English*]

Just so everybody knows, I cancelled today's subcommittee meeting. We'll resume that on Thursday. We have, roughly, about an hour and a bit left. I cancelled it because the list of names was long.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor to discuss the amendment.

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

I have to tell you that I'm going to try the unlikely feat of reconciling Ms. Khalid and Mr. Barrett, because the two points they made are very interesting. Obviously, we shouldn't underestimate the study on disinformation, specifically electoral disinformation—I think that's something that could be added. Mr. Barrett suggested removing the line that refers to the Leader of the Opposition. That is quite fine with me, because the topic needs to be dealt with in a general way, and as Ms. Khalid said, we need to take the partisanship out of it. So it's not an issue at all.

However, if we remove the words "immediately" and "next" from the last paragraph, I am afraid that it could mean "never." I have a problem with that, because we could get bogged down in a number of considerations and never do it. So I have a concern about that.

I can provide you with a list of witnesses that would satisfy everyone, no problem. I think we need to move forward.

I would just ask for something minor from Mr. Barrett. I think that adding the word "electoral" to "disinformation" would be appropriate, and I would ask for flexibility in terms of the time frame, because I fear that we will never do it. I would like him to comment on that.

Those are basically my two questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

You have raised a very interesting point, because the motion proposes that the committee devote the next three meetings to the issues mentioned in this motion. At the beginning of the meeting, I told committee members that Minister Boissonnault would be coming this Thursday. After that, we will have a subcommittee meeting. Over the next week, two meetings are proposed for this study. If members can send us a list of witnesses quickly, we might be able to invite witnesses to those meetings. So we will hold two meetings

quickly. The following week, we can hold more meetings on this study.

I've said a lot, but I really agree that it will be difficult for the committee to devote the next three meetings to this study. We can propose other amendments to correct that.

• (1730)

Mr. René Villemure: It's important to add the word "electoral".

[*English*]

The Chair: Before I go to Mr. Caputo, I want a second with the clerk.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, I have another question to ask you.

Where do you suggest adding the word "electoral" in this motion?

Mr. René Villemure: I'll read it to you. "That, pursuant to Standing Order 108 (3)(h), the committee immediately expand its study on electoral misinformation and disinformation while..." and so forth.

The Chair: You're suggesting adding the word "electoral" before the word "misinformation".

Mr. René Villemure: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Are you moving a subamendment?

Mr. René Villemure: Yes. I'm proposing a subamendment in support of Mr. Barrett.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: It's what we're discussing now.

The Chair: Yes. I accept that the amendment be moved.

Am I able to do so, Madam Clerk?

[*English*]

Are members fine with Mr. Villemure's proposal to insert the word...or do we have an agreement on his subamendment?

I don't think it changes much. I think the intention is there.

(Subamendment agreed to)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Very well. We will accept Mr. Villemure's subamendment.

[*English*]

We don't need to deal with that. We're still on the amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: I am concerned, based on some of the comments I received from people who were parked outside on Wellington Street, about disinformation still about COVID, and disinformation about the nature of government, conspiracy theories, outright delusion and political violence.

I worry that if we just say “electoral”.... Does that limit the scope? I don't want to limit it because I do believe that a lot of the social upheaval that we have been witnessing post-COVID comes from a bunch of different streams of wackiness that, when balled up, could lead to electoral interference, but might not be, on face value, just electoral interference.

Mr. Villemure, just to get the spirit of the amendment, would this limit us from looking at ways in which other tangential conspiracies and disinformation also affect the electoral process, or are we solely going to be looking at commentary on political actors, parties and leaders?

The Chair: It's funny. I just turned to the clerk, Mr. Green, and I asked if she had the original motion that started the study of misinformation and disinformation.

Give us a second because she's going to pull it up.

I suspect if we're going to....

Mr. Matthew Green: If I recall anecdotally from the feedback I got from some of the people who were frothing at the mouth out on Wellington Street—

The Chair: Yes. The initial motion is very general because it speaks about undertaking a study of misinformation and disinformation and the impact on the work of parliamentarians. It says, “that the committee devote...the next three available meetings” and “that the committee invite experts in the field of misinformation and disinformation; and that the committee report its observations and recommendations to the House.”

With the initial motion, which we're going to carry on with, and the additional up to three meetings that we talked about, we can propose to expand that study any way we want. The initial motion, in my view, captures precisely what you're talking about. This motion, in the context of that study, adds to it.

If you're satisfied with that.... I know I am. The intention of the committee is very clear to me, and I think it's clear to the clerk as well. If it wasn't, I'd tell you.

Again, what comes with this is a list of witnesses that we need to contact in order for this study to continue. I throw that out to you guys.

We're going to stick with the subamendment as agreed to by committee on “electoral”.

I'm now on the amendment. I have Mr. Caputo, Mr. Cooper and then Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Caputo, on the amendment proposed by Mr. Barrett, go ahead, sir.

• (1735)

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to be here at the ethics committee, first and foremost.

I wholeheartedly support Mr. Barrett's amendment. The reality is that, if we are going to take the partisanship out of it, then why are we naming any parties? This is coming from the Liberals, who, through their public safety minister, whom I had the pleasure of questioning, have refused to name the 11 MPs who are part of undermining our democracy.

If we're going to have a fresh look at electoral interference—and this is a genuine, bona fide attempt by the Liberals to get to the bottom of something—I find it a little bit disingenuous when the Liberals are refusing to name people who are alleged to have committed some of the most serious offences known to Canadian law.

I wholeheartedly support Mr. Barrett's amendment. I think it is truly non-partisan and in the best interest of Canadians, and that's something that I, both as a member of Parliament and as a Conservative, support.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Caputo.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead on the amendment proposed by Mr. Barrett.

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

I fully support the amendment put forward by Mr. Barrett, but I do have to say that when it comes to issues of disinformation, particularly from foreign state actors, the Liberals have absolutely no credibility whatsoever on this issue. We have a Prime Minister who covered up Beijing's interference in our democracy—

Mr. Darren Fisher: I have a point of order. The amendment we're talking about right now is to remove the partisanship. I would just ask him to get back on track and be a little bit relevant and speak to the motion.

The Chair: I've allowed a lot of latitude on both sides, Mr. Fisher. You know that, and I expect that Mr. Cooper will bring it home.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

Before I was so rudely interrupted—

The Chair: We're going to stop the crosstalk here, please.

Thank you.

Mr. Michael Cooper: The Liberal government has absolutely no credibility when it comes to foreign interference, because this is a Prime Minister who turned a blind eye to Beijing's interference in two federal elections. This is a Prime Minister who was repeatedly briefed about Beijing's disinformation campaign. This is a Prime Minister who turned a blind eye, along with his officials, when a sitting member of Parliament, Kenny Chiu, was specifically targeted in a sophisticated campaign of disinformation by the Beijing-based regime using various online platforms, which contributed to his defeat in the 2021 election.

In fact, the Liberals didn't just turn a blind eye to the campaign against Kenny Chiu, which had real direct electoral consequences; they actually amplified that disinformation, spreading lies about Kenny Chiu's private member's bill to establish a foreign influence registry, something that CSIS and national security experts have long said would be an important tool to combat disinformation and other foreign interference activities from hostile foreign states.

This is a Prime Minister who, out of direct electoral concern, allowed a Liberal candidate, who is now the member for Don Valley North, to stand even after he had been briefed that Beijing had actively interfered on his behalf to help him secure the Liberal nomination. When I say that the Prime Minister made a decision to allow that to happen out of direct electoral concern, those are not my words. Those are the conclusions of Madam Justice Hogue. In other words, according to the findings of Madam Justice Hogue in her first report, we have a Prime Minister who put his partisan interests and his personal interests ahead of our national security and ahead of our democracy. That is the record of this Prime Minister.

● (1740)

Mr. Darren Fisher: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair, please, on relevance to the amendment to remove a sentence or two. On the amendment.... Thank you.

The Chair: Yes. I'm going to ask Mr. Cooper to stick to the topic at hand here.

Mr. Darren Fisher: We'll be on the topic for the main motion.

The Chair: Yes, and I expect you to do that.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Michael Cooper: It simply illustrates why one party is singled out.

An hon. member: That's right.

Mr. Michael Cooper: That's what I'm getting at when we talk about the total lack of credibility, and not just the lack of credibility, but a record—a disturbing record—with respect to the Prime Minister and how he has handled things.

Of course, I spent much of the last two years as the vice-chair of the procedure and House affairs committee, working to shine a light on foreign interference and, to Mr. Barrett's point, the Liberals have been dragged kicking and screaming.... They obstructed—repeatedly—our efforts to get to the bottom of foreign interference.

So far did they go that the Prime Minister appointed his ski buddy, David Johnston, to serve as his fake rapporteur, who then hired a bunch of Liberal hacks, including Liberal donor Sheila Block as the counsel. His report, when he came to committee—the Prime Minister's ski buddy, Mr. Johnston—had no credibility. His report was ripped to shreds within minutes of questioning from members—of course, not Liberal members, who tried to cover for him, but members of the other opposition parties.

Then, of course, we have, as Mr. Caputo said, a Prime Minister who won't name the 11 compromised MPs. In fact, speaking of the public safety minister, I was at the very committee that Mr. Caputo was at, back in June, when I asked Minister LeBlanc whether any of those 11 MPs were sitting in Justin Trudeau's cabinet, and he

wouldn't answer. We don't know. I think it's quite telling that the minister refused to answer.

Look, the bottom line is that we'll support this motion. I support the amendment and I support the motion, but I will not stand and take lectures from the Liberals on matters of foreign interference, because I'll put our record of standing up to foreign interference any day against the record of their efforts to cover up sophisticated campaigns that benefited the Prime Minister and benefited the Liberal Party.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

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

Mr. Darren Fisher: I was going to suggest a subamendment, but I get the sense that people are generally in support of moving forward on the motion, so I'll take my name off the list.

The Chair: Yes, that's my sense too.

We're on the amendment.

Go ahead, Ms. Shanahan. I'm sorry. I didn't see your hand. I didn't have you on my list. Go ahead.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, Chair, just on the comments of my colleague Mr. Cooper, methinks he doth protest too much. Yes indeed, so we're going for the Shakespeare references, because when we look at the amendment that is being proposed, it in no way.... The amendment proposes to delete the reference “claiming to have attended a rally held by the Leader of the Official Opposition, Pierre Poilievre, on July 31, 2024”, but if you look at the entire sentence, deleting that example—and it is an example, and one that I would agree is egregious to anybody who is ethically conducting their political business—removes the context of the sentence.

We can look at that part (a): “The devastating impact of malicious, artificially generated online bots used by foreign and domestic actors. This includes Russia's propaganda machine, to manipulate public discourse, and fake bot accounts”. I take it there's a period somewhere in there maybe, but there's no context there. We could include other examples, but if I were on the other side, which I once was some 20 years ago—but we'll get into that another time—I would be very much concerned about clearing the names of those political organizers who indeed were directly affected by these fake bot accounts.

I am against deleting the remainder of that sentence because I think that example gives a very clear context, Chair.

● (1745)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Shanahan.

We're on the amendment. I don't have any other speakers on the list.

We're going to call the vote on the amendment. Madam Clerk, go ahead, please, on the amendment—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm sorry, Chair. I know you already called the vote, but I just want to make sure I know what I'm voting on.

The Chair: You're voting on the amendment that was sent to you.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Does that amendment include Mr. Villemure's...?

The Chair: The electoral part in the subamendment was already approved by the committee. What you're voting on is the amendment proposed by Mr. Barrett, which I read out and which you were sent right off the top of his moving that amendment.

I'm going to continue with the vote.

(Amendment as amended agreed to: yeas 8; nays 2 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I have a list on the main motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure is first on the list.

[*English*]

Okay.

I then had Mr. Caputo on the main motion—

Mr. Frank Caputo: I'm sorry, but I believe.... Mr. Barrett, do you want my turn? I think I said what I needed to say.

The Chair: Okay, so I had Mr. Fisher.... Are there any other speakers on the motion as amended? There are none.

Do we have consensus on the motion as amended? We do. I am seeing heads nod.

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

The Chair: I go back to the top of my list. I have Mr. Cooper.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper, please.

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

I move the following motion:

That the committee expand its study on the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages by no less than four meetings; that the committee invite Elections Canada officials; representatives from Shepherd's Care Foundation and/ or the Christian Care and Support Association/ Christian Care at Home Trust; Malvina Ghaoui; officials from Edmonton Police Service; Ian Stedman, assistant professor of ethics and governance at York University; Curtis James, Super Poly employee; Carla Rodych, president of Canada Medical; and any other related witnesses.

• (1750)

The Chair: Thank you for that motion, Mr. Cooper.

The clerk has the motion in both languages. It's being sent now.

I'm going to come back to you, Mr. Cooper.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Can we have 10 minutes?

Mr. Darren Fisher: Chair, can I have the motion on paper?

The Chair: It's coming.

I'm going to suspend for five minutes to give everybody a chance to have a look at the motion. We're going to come back to Mr. Cooper.

The meeting's suspended.

• (1750)

(Pause)

• (1755)

The Chair: Thank you for your patience. We are resuming the meeting.

Before we left, we had a motion that was put forward by Mr. Cooper and I have him speaking on it. It has been shared electronically and in paper form. We do have a copy if you don't have one yet.

Mr. Cooper, I will ask you to go first on your motion to expand the study that is currently under way. Go ahead.

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

We have Justin Trudeau's Minister of Employment, Randy Boissonnault, who for months has been under an ethical cloud involving shady business dealings with his shady company, Global Health Imports, which is embroiled in allegations of ripping off clients. It's a company that has been ordered by Alberta courts to pay more than \$8 million back to clients who were ripped off. It's a company that was involved in a shakedown, a half-million dollar fraudulent shakedown, of a client who had purchased PPE equipment. Someone named Randy was involved, based on text messages, in the shakedown and was involved in what may amount to wire fraud.

Now, Minister Boissonnault says he's not that Randy, yet for months no one can find Randy. According to Mr. Boissonnault, only a handful of people worked for Global Health Imports. If the Randy in the text messages involved in the shakedown is not Randy Boissonnault, then who's Randy? Where's Randy? We need to find out. It should be noted that we now have at least nine text messages in which Randy was named, including one text message that situated the Randy in the text messages in Vancouver, which just happened to be, I'm sure by coincidence, at the very same time Randy Boissonnault was in Vancouver as part of the Liberal cabinet retreat.

Why is that relevant in terms of Randy Boissonnault's involvement or potential involvement in this half-million dollar shakedown and potential wire fraud? To begin with, it's very concerning that Justin Trudeau has in his cabinet a minister who was involved in a shady company that has been ordered by Alberta courts to pay \$8 million for ripping off clients. I think that ought to be a fireable offence. But if Minister Boissonnault was the Randy in the text messages, then Minister Boissonnault violated Canada's ethics laws. He violated the Conflict of Interest Act. The Conflict of Interest Act is very clear that ministers cannot be involved in the operations of a private company.

There's more. We have recently learned that this very same company that Randy Boissonnault up until last month had a 50% interest in entered into a contract with Elections Canada. This is in violation of subsection 13(2) of the Conflict of Interest Act, which says that no minister shall have an interest in a partnership or private corporation that has a contract with a federal department or agency "under which the partnership or corporation receives a benefit".

The bottom line is that, after months, the ethical cloud over this minister continues. Every week there are more questions, more allegations, and we still don't know who Randy is and where Randy is. This motion I believe is timely to expand the scope of the study and to call in additional witnesses so that we can get answers for Canadians and we can hold this minister to account for his potential corruption.

• (1800)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Mrs. Shanahan, go ahead, please.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Chair.

Chair, I do need to point out—I've been reviewing all of the materials and so on—that this motion has just been tabled-dropped on this committee. We're already running 30 minutes over time. It's the first time we are seeing it. There are many names in this motion that we are not familiar with. I understand, as you've mentioned it several times, that we do have Minister Boissonnault coming on Thursday. Members will have many questions, I'm sure.

With that, Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Michael Barrett: No.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Is that the peanut gallery?

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn the meeting. It is non-debatable, so I am going to ask the clerk....

I suspect we don't have consensus on this.

• (1805)

Mr. Michael Barrett: We do not.

The Chair: Okay. That was a little premonition on my part.

Madam Clerk, do you want to take the vote on the motion to adjourn?

The vote is a tie.

My vote is no, because we have time. We started late, so we can continue. My vote is no.

(Motion negated: 6 nays; 5 yeas)

The Chair: We will continue the meeting.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: On a point of order, it's the practice in some committees that the person who was speaking before the vote continues to have the floor. Do I have the floor?

The Chair: I haven't been notified of any other speakers. Go ahead, Mrs. Shanahan.

Then I have Ms. Khalid and Mr. Housefather.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

It was in the interest of time that I kept my remarks very short, so I have to say, just from what I've heard about this study, because I believe this study was undertaken.... I am referring to the analyst's notes now, and maybe the analyst can help me out on that.

[*Translation*]

When did we begin the study on Minister Boissonnault?

[*English*]

The Chair: We started it just before the summer recess. We've had two meetings on that, I believe. We had Minister Boissonnault and then we had Ms. Poon and Mr. Anderson appear before the committee. We've had two meetings up to this point. We have Minister Boissonnault coming on Thursday as well.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay, and the last meeting is the one referred to here as being on July 17.

The Chair: That was July 17—right.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: All right, so this is an ongoing study. It's well on its way. The minister is coming on Thursday, I would think. It's a normal practice of the committee for members to prepare for such an appearance. The effect of this motion is to upend the work the committee is already doing, yet in no way would it prevent members from asking questions about what appear to me to be very random names.

I don't know if Mr. Cooper is going to provide us with background information on what is driving him. Aside from the litany of the best hits, maybe some informative information would be helpful to the other members who are here, because, of course, we all have a concern with anything having to do with a conflict of interest or ethics.

However, primarily, I would say...and I'll have to ask the analysts again.

Have we heard from the Commissioner of Conflict of Interest and Ethics on this issue? We have. We have heard from Mr. von Finckenstein? Again, this motion seems to have come out of nowhere. It's not something we've had a chance to discuss.

I don't know if the chair is open to doing another time out, but honestly, I am in no position to support this motion at this time. I wonder if there are other members who agree that there are many ways to address this issue. Dropping random motions on this committee doesn't seem to make any sense to me.

I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Shanahan.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our committee members for bringing forward this pre-emptive motion, I'll say.

I say that because we know that Minister Boissonnault, who is the Minister for Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, is coming to this committee on Thursday. I know that all of us have a lot of questions to ask the minister, including me and everybody here at this committee. We've been given the opportunity to do so, as is the right of this committee. I am very glad that the minister has been forthcoming to come forward and answer all of these questions.

I find this motion pre-emptive because perhaps it would make more sense if this was presented after the minister has come, given his testimony and answered all of the questions. This motion is pre-emptive and lists a lot of people I'm not familiar with. I'm not sure about my colleagues, but it's pre-emptive because it seems like it is a fishing expedition.

We have spent a lot of time and government and House resources trying to go down this rabbit hole with the Conservatives as they lead us down this path. In the interest of transparency and in the interest of upholding our ethics and the values of this committee, we on the Liberal side have gone along with it, but at what point, Chair, do we say, "Enough"? At what point is it safe to say, "There are no fish in this lake"?

What this motion really represents is an underlying continued aggression against our Ethics Commissioner, against our democratic values and what this institution, Parliament, represents.

I say that because I watched the mover of this motion in the industry committee yesterday being shut down, question after question after question, by the Ethics Commissioner. All of this was posed in the industry committee and put forward to the Ethics Commissioner, and the Ethics Commissioner outright said that there's no investigation here and that there has been no violation.

My understanding here is that, if you can't get it right in one committee, let's come to another one and try and try again until something gives. Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, what that ultimately ends up doing is wasting the resources of the House and wasting the resources of this committee.

As I have said today, as I have said for months and months and months, week after week, there are very important studies for us to start working on in this committee. They include misinformation and disinformation campaigns. They include the impact of social media on our young people and on Canadians at large. They include how the Lobbying Act impacts public officials or the people we have contact with and, as we discussed earlier today, issues of how to strengthen the regulations of our Ethics Commissioner and how he governs himself and his office.

• (1810)

There are ways for us to move forward. There are ways for us to conduct our business in an effective manner, business that matters to Canadians, business that has a direct impact in each and every household of Canadians, and this is not it.

We're talking about no less than four meetings, when you just finished telling this whole committee, Chair, that you couldn't spend the next three meetings talking about one of the biggest issues not just in Canada but across the world in all democratic

states, which is disinformation campaigns. We just discussed how it is not appropriate for us to go and study this issue because of "timing", yet I'm sitting here looking at this motion saying, "no less than four meetings". Why?

Why are we spending all of this time when the Ethics Commissioner very clearly has told the opposition quite unabashedly in the industry committee and otherwise that there is no investigation? Why are we wasting House resources and time? Why are we trying to go on a fishing expedition while ignoring some of the most critical issues of our time? They include misinformation and disinformation. They include our democratic institutions and the perception and trust that we have within them.

Chair, this motion is pre-emptive as I've said. It has no place to be discussed today. If anything, I encourage Mr. Cooper to bring this forward after Minister Boissonnault has come to this committee to testify and has answered all of the questions that any of these members would have. Go from there.

Again, I come back to my original point. Why is this brought in today when we know that the minister is coming in on Thursday? If we are being genuine, then why not pose all of these questions to the minister and then whatever is left over you bring forward in a motion to say, "All right, these are the questions that I don't have answers to and I want answers to." We've had answers from so many different committees, from so many different witnesses. Again, we'll refer to the industry committee yesterday, where Mr. Cooper got told off by the Ethics Commissioner who said something like "What are you doing, buddy, and why?"

It doesn't make sense to me. Again, I'm happy to go down their rabbit hole, but I don't want to do it pre-emptively. I think that we need some time to really question the minister, who is coming before us on Thursday, to ask our questions to our hearts' content and then to re-evaluate as to whether we are effectively using House resources, whether we are doing something that is going to benefit Canadians, or we are taking away from what Canadians can really benefit from, which is a study on misinformation and disinformation, which is a study on social media, which is a study on the Lobbying Act and perhaps the conflict of interest code, etc., to see how we can better reframe ourselves to build that public trust and to protect the public in these times of artificial intelligence, social media and a lack of privacy for individual Canadians as well.

• (1815)

We try our very best to ensure that there's transparency within our government institutions and public institutions, and we try to protect Canadians along the way.

I will say again that this motion is very pre-emptive. I think we should wait until the minister has testified before we revisit this motion, and go from there.

I'll park my comments there, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Housefather.

[*Translation*]

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

I agree with what Ms. Shanahan and Ms. Khalid have said, for a number of reasons.

From what I understand, the committee reported to the House of Commons on the issue involving Mr. Anderson. The real question is the following: Did Mr. Anderson lie to the committee? He clearly refused to say who the “Randy” in his text messages was. I think we should be putting our questions to Mr. Anderson, who should be sent before the House to provide answers. In my opinion, it would be good to consider that after having heard from Mr. Anderson.

What is alleged is that the company acted in a non-ethical manner once Mr. Boissonnault left and was appointed minister. That may be true but, for the committee, the only issue of interest is whether Mr. Boissonnault was involved and whether he was there at the time.

I've seen the names. We're told that one of the people involved is an ethics professor who was quoted in a Global News article. However, he could not say whether Mr. Boissonnault was part of the company. I read all the Global News articles, and these names come up either in those articles or in the ones from Rebel News, if I've understood correctly. Nobody has relevant information that would tell us whether Mr. Boissonnault was involved. That is information that only Mr. Anderson and Mr. Boissonnault can give us. The latter has already testified before the committee and will be here on Thursday. Witnesses cannot give us this information. The only thing they can tell us is whether the company acted properly in terms of the contracts between these companies and Global Health Imports, or GHI. If someone worked in the GHI building, they would be able to tell us whether they had hired a certain person and how many people worked there. However, I don't think that any of the people here can tell us about the only thing that concerns the committee, and that is whether Mr. Boissonnault breached the ministers' code of ethics.

I don't think it's relevant to know whether the company acted appropriately with the other contractors. This is not an issue for the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Rather, it would be an issue for the civil courts and the police, among other entities. We are here to deal with the issue of Mr. Boissonnault. None of the proposed witnesses can tell us who “Randy” is or whether Mr. Boissonnault was involved during the period during which he has said he was not involved.

For my part, I find it a bit strange to put forward a list of the names in this article in Global News. I also find it a bit strange that we were not given notice of this motion so that other members of the committee could look at who these witnesses are. I was only able to do a very quick search on the matter.

Finally, I think that what's important is to get answers from Mr. Anderson. I must say that I completely agree with the fact that Mr. Anderson was not a very good witness. He did not keep his word before the committee and we should demand that he answer our questions.

• (1820)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Next up is Ms. Shanahan, followed by Mr. Fisher.

Go ahead, Ms. Shanahan.

[*English*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

I'm sorry that we have to speak further on this matter, but I see that the plot thickens. I have seen this movie before. It's a list of random names of ordinary people—ordinary citizens—carrying out their day-to-day business, who happen to be linked in some way by a reporter, by a political operative or by somebody on Facebook or social media, and they're called before this committee or any other committee. I have seen this before. People's lives are being trashed.

I ask the members and I'm looking at the members right now. Is it your intention to intimidate ordinary Canadians? Is it to bring people in front of this committee on these absolutely egregious, absurd claims?

This is something that the Conservative Party of Canada is engaging in on a regular basis. I saw this with ordinary business people carrying out a business. It was Speakers Spotlight. They happened to be hiring and managing different people as speakers. They were dragged in front of this ethics committee.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, I think you were there at the time. What those people went through was appalling. They received death threats, and their employees were followed from office to home, all for a “gotcha”. There you have it.

I therefore hope all Canadians and Quebecers listening to us, as well as reporters, will pay attention to what's going on here and to the strategy the Conservatives are using to intimidate ordinary Canadians.

Mr. Chair, I'm not used to talking this way. I want to study the issues and help the committee fulfill its mandate. We have questions to ask Minister Boissonnault, but a motion like this—which names people just because they had the misfortune to be mentioned in some article—is an abuse of Parliament's power. I know I am new to this committee, but I assure you that I will use my voice to stand up for ordinary Canadians before they are targeted by MPs whose actions I question. I look forward to continuing our work on this committee, because I think we're going to see the true face of the people who do this.

I could go on, but I'd like to hear from the other members of this committee. I think this is something that should be of concern to us. Yes, we have questions to ask, but it makes no sense to call in people who have no connection with this story, other than the fact that they made a comment. I'm thinking of the ethics professor, for example. Mr. Villemure, I imagine you've had to appear before the committee several times.

Normally, people are very happy to come and testify, but when it's about something far-fetched and random, it's not the same. People should pay attention to what's going on here. It's an unhealthy strategy, unworthy of this committee and its members.

I'll stop there.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Shanahan.

[English]

Mr. Fisher, go ahead, please.

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

I didn't get to hear everything that Mr. Housefather said, as I stepped out for a moment. I'm taking a look at this. I know we don't do back-and-forth here, but I don't get a sense of why all of these names are here and what their connections are. With the Edmonton police, I don't see—

The Chair: Hold on, Mr. Fisher.

You can go through the chair and ask the mover of the motion, if that's what you like. It's just the back-and-forth between members I don't appreciate, but it's there for you, if you like.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I understand.

I don't see any reason why the Edmonton police, which has nothing to do...that I can see, anyway.

Ian Stedman seems to, again, have nothing to do with this matter. He's not an involved party. I think he was just quoted. Some of the other individuals may have had legal conflicts with GHI. Minister Boissonnault is not named in those. We're not a court. It's not up to us to bring the courts into committee. I think someone—maybe it was Iqra—said this is an absolute fishing expedition. Curtis James I don't know....

Through you, Mr. Chair, perhaps Mr. Cooper can give us some feedback as to why he's giving us this grocery list of just about every name he may or may not have read in the newspaper.

• (1830)

The Chair: I think that's a fair question, Mr. Fisher. I'll go to Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Fisher has the floor. You're answering his questions, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd be happy to note each of the witnesses we were calling on.

We need to hear from Elections Canada because of the contract between Randy Boissonnault's company and Elections Canada. The Shepherd's Care Foundation and the Christian care and support association are suing Randy Boissonnault's company for ripping them off. It's the same with Malvina Ghaoui from the Ghaoui Group, who was a victim of the half-million dollar shakedown in which there were nine text messages referencing "Randy". That's very relevant.

We need to hear from the Edmonton Police Service because, within weeks of the half-million dollar shakedown, there was arson at the warehouse of Randy Boissonnault's company—arson the Edmonton Police Service has determined to likely be arson.

Ian Stedman is an expert. Curtis James works as an employee at a company located next to the former warehouse before it was burnt down. He has information about the number of employees and who was working there. There is contradictory evidence between what Mr. Boissonnault said and what Mr. Anderson said. Carla Rodych, again, is another victim of Randy Boissonnault's company.

These are hardly names out of thin air. They're very relevant to getting to the bottom of the corruption that surrounds this minister.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Fisher, you have the floor. Hopefully that answers some of your concerns.

Mr. Darren Fisher: It does, but it just makes it look like Elections Canada, really, would be the only one that seems viable to invite to this committee.

I was in the House this morning when Mr. Barrett talked about bringing Mr. Anderson before the House on his question of privilege. I think Mr. Anderson was a bad witness. I think the issue is more with Mr. Anderson.

I will certainly listen to what others have to say.

Mr. Cooper, thank you very much for the explanation. However, I don't buy most of those names on there. I see some value in Elections Canada, but I don't see any reason why many of these names are on this motion.

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan, go ahead.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

I thank Mr. Cooper for that further explanation, because it only proves my point that these names were chosen because they have some kind of dealings—legal cases and so on. The Conservative Party of Canada is exploiting people who have legitimate or legal concerns. They have issues. There are things that could be conflicts. Whatever it is they are going through, the Conservatives think, "Wow, this is going to be great. Let's exploit this. Let's drag these people in here and expose them outside of a court of law, where they would have certain protections and so on. No, let's do that."

It's really an exploitation and fishing expedition for people I would guess would.... Maybe they've been promised something. Maybe they've been told, "Oh, you're going to get justice. You're going to get this. You're going to get that." Maybe they are going to be very disappointed. In fact, I hope they are listening to me right now, because, please, be observed—

• (1835)

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan, I'm sorry, but there is a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Caputo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: They may well be listening and have something to say. Be that as it may, to suggest that any member on this side here has promised something to somebody in exchange for their coming here is not only inappropriate, it is highly inflammatory and should be withdrawn.

The Chair: That's fair enough. Thank you.

Mrs. Shanahan, go ahead. You have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Chair.

Indeed, in an earlier intervention, we talked about who the people were who would be concerned about this. That would mean, perhaps, a further appearance by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, who is our independent officer of Parliament who deals with these issues and, certainly, can deal with any confidential.... That's the other part of this: the confidentiality and that people may inadvertently reveal information. They don't necessarily have the benefit of having guidance or legal representation in a forum such as this. Certainly, I'm not sure that their best interests are at the heart and purpose of this motion.

I am moving an amendment to delete the text after "Official Languages by no less than four meetings" and continue after "officials" to add "and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner." That is the proper term in English, I believe, and then delete the rest of the text. There would be a period after "Commissioner".

The Chair: It substantively changes the motion here, so I'm going to defer to the clerk on this one. This is a pretty significant change, Mrs. Shanahan.

Repeat it again, so that we're clear.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: To preface, you know that motions which restrict, predict, enforce timelines and the calling of certain witnesses, I believe, really prevent the committee, through its sub-committee, through you, Chair, to do the work that you and the team so ably do in calling witnesses and so on.

I will read the clean version. It would say:

That the committee expand its study on the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages; that the committee invite Elections Canada officials; and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to testify on this study.

I will leave that there.

The Chair: I didn't hear you say the second time that you want to strike the rest of the witnesses. Is that what you're suggesting? I heard it the first time, but I didn't hear it the second time.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, that is the clean version with the amendment I'm suggesting. There are two ways we can do that. We can use the clean version, or I can repeat "delete", "add" and "delete".

The Chair: The way I read it now is, "That the committee expand its study on the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages; that the committee invite Elections Canada officials; and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner."

That's the way—

• (1840)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: It's "and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to testify on this study." That's just to round it out.

The Chair: Give me a second here, please. Thank you.

The amendment is in order.

On the amendment, I'm going to go to Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There's a lot to unpack here, Chair.

I will just say that Mrs. Shanahan, in her concluding comments, said that she doesn't support motions that would prescribe when the meetings occur, but her colleague Ms. Khalid just put forward a motion saying that a study should happen immediately. Her colleague proposed a motion mere minutes ago that did the exact thing that she's decrying.

Look, the motion by Mr. Cooper seeks to invite, not to order, any of these people to appear, in spite of Mrs. Shanahan's objections and her thinking that we need to worry about the police feeling victimized by receiving an invitation from the clerk of the committee. I think they will probably be okay if they get that invitation. For any of the folks on here who haven't expressed an interest in appearing, they might just decline the invitation. If it would perhaps be useful to the chair and other members of the committee, I'm quite sure that we could make an overture to anyone who's interested in appearing, and they could come and appear.

It's also standard that we would, just on the study, be able to invite witnesses based on the agreed-upon number of slots per party. If the idea is to just take out all of the witnesses and that all the parties can submit names of witnesses to appear, I think that's great. I would be worried that the Liberals might invite someone who would feel victimized by having received that email. I think having Elections Canada and the folks Mr. Cooper named, including the Edmonton police, come would provide us important context. We've had witnesses, including a minister and his business partner, come to committee and cook up some whoppers about what has been going on.

It speaks to the.... I hear Ms. Khalid ask if it's lying. I'm not sure if Mr. Boissonnault is lying. Perhaps he is.

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

I don't want any crosstalk here, and that goes for both sides. I'm trying to deal with the clerk on an issue. I'm listening as I deal with it, but I can't hear and I can't deal with it if I have crosstalk on both sides. Let's stop that, please.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: We're not sure who's lying. I think that's the important thing. Ms. Khalid is very frustrated today that she has to defend the most corrupt government that Canada has ever had, with a Prime Minister twice found guilty of breaking the law. It's the first time that has ever happened in history.

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

Mr. Michael Barrett: He was twice found guilty of breaking the law. That is Justin Trudeau, her Prime Minister.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair.

I've been accused of clutching my pearls. I've been accused of needing kleenexes. I've been accused of a whole bunch of things by Mr. Barrett. He's more than welcome to bring me a box of kleenex at the next meeting he comes to. I don't appreciate this misogyny that he delivers very deliberately against me on this committee, Chair. I'm just trying to move forward in an efficient way to do the work of this committee.

Help me out here, Chair. This is not fair to any of these members on this committee. I'm not talking about myself. I don't need to be talked down to by anybody at all.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Ms. Khalid and her colleagues are so frustrated about having to defend the most corrupt Prime Minister in history.

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

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

I do believe the Standing Orders state that there should be parliamentary language and decorum in the way we conduct ourselves. I find that extremely lacking in Mr. Barrett's behaviour. I am not frustrated at all. I am a very passionate person in the work that I do

for my constituents on a regular basis. Regarding the work I do on this committee, I would like for us to get to that work and not play all of these political games that the Conservatives keep using this committee to play. These are government resources and House resources that we should be using in an effective manner.

• (1845)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

I do expect decorum on all sides. I could probably go back through the blues and cite numerous examples where decorum...and I'm not looking at you directly, Mr. Green, but you're looking at me.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm not looking at you either. I'm just in your sight.

The Chair: Decorum has been lacking. Therefore, I'm asking for some decorum not just for today but for every single day we're here.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, it's important that we have decorum when we discuss the Liberals' staunch defence and their frustration in having to do that, but the most corrupt—

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

Mr. Michael Barrett: —Prime Minister in history, Justin Trudeau—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Chair, I find it to be—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Ms. Khalid can't even let me get a sentence out of my mouth.

The Chair: Hang on a second.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I will not—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I would say, Chair, that she seems to be creating disorder in the committee.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I will not put up with bullying. I'm sorry.

The Chair: It's 6:46 p.m., and we have resources until 6:47 p.m. Unfortunately, I don't have any more resources—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Ah, the cover-up Liberals shut down the meeting.

The Chair: —so I am adjourning the meeting right now. Thank you.

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