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# Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

EVIDENCE

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Chair: Mr. John Brassard





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Thursday, September 19, 2024

• (1545)

[English]

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

Good afternoon, everyone.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 127 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, May 7, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of the compliance of a minister with the Conflict of Interest Act.

[English]

Before I begin, I want to talk about a couple of housekeeping rules.

First, obviously, the committee has been in receipt of a lot of information over the summer, so I expect, Minister, there will be some very pointed questions today.

Second, I want to limit the disruptions as much as possible. This is a reminder to all committee members that any comments are to come through the chair; they're not to go across the table. I'm going to strictly enforce that.

The other thing I want to remind everyone about is the interpreters, and the need for a question to be asked and an answer to be given, even though we may not like the answer or we may not like the question. I want to remind all members that every member has the right to ask whatever question they want in relation to this issue, even if you don't like the question that's being asked.

With that being said....

Ms. Khalid, what is this on?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** It's on exactly what you were saying. I want to add something, if that's okay.

**The Chair:** I don't think there's a need to add something. I think I've been pretty clear.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Chair, I just wanted to reinforce Standing Order 18. Yes, absolutely, everybody has the right to ask the questions they're entitled to ask, but they must do so respectfully and refrain from calling people names, etc.

**The Chair:** I think I made that clear. Thank you.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** If there is respectful discussion, I won't need to step in to make sure that the disrespect is—

**An hon. member:** Three strikes [Inaudible—Editor].

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Khalid, for that.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** You can already hear the chirping, Chair, so I'm putting it out there. I would appreciate it if you could be proactive.

**The Chair:** I am the chair of this meeting and I will conduct the meeting in the manner in which I think it needs to go. Thank you for that.

Mr. Boissonnault, you have five minutes to address the committee. Go ahead, sir.

Thank you.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and colleagues.

Every member of this committee and every member of Parliament has an obligation to conduct themselves in a manner that respects both the letter and the spirit of Canada's strict ethics regime for public officials. Throughout my time in public life, I've always done just that.

As I explained to this committee in the spring, I respect the role of the opposition in holding the government to account on important issues. However, it's no secret that our conversations on accountability can, more often than not, be clouded by partisan interests. This has been particularly evident in the conduct of Conservative MPs in this Parliament.

When we are talking about people's reputations and people's ethics as they work to organize their financial affairs following an election, conversations that are marked with partisan suspicion and bad faith are neither helpful nor fair. To ensure fairness, we have a non-partisan and independent Ethics Commissioner to advise us, to help ensure compliance with our legal obligations and to adjudicate matters when concerns are raised.

With that in mind, I'm happy to inform this committee that the Ethics Commissioner has written to me and told me that he has completed his assessment, including the examination of my phone records. He has once again—for the third time—come to the conclusion that there is no cause for concern and he considers this matter closed.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

To keep Parliament impartial, we have an independent, non-partisan Ethics Commissioner responsible for advising us, helping us comply with our legal obligations and adjudicating any matters that arise. With that in mind, I'm pleased to inform this committee that the Ethics Commissioner has written to me to say that he has completed his review, including the examination of my phone records. For the third time, he has come to the conclusion there is no cause for concern, and he considers this matter closed.

[*English*]

I thank the Ethics Commissioner and his office for reviewing the facts and the evidence and confirming to me once again that he sees no reason to believe the allegations made about me in the media and by Conservative MPs.

Colleagues, the commissioner has no reason to believe these allegations, because they simply aren't true. That said, I do recognize the distraction that this matter has become. I sincerely regret and am disappointed by the partisan attacks the allegations have prompted, and the effect they've had on my family and those around me.

With the benefit of hindsight, I should not have gone into business with Mr. Anderson. While it has had no impact whatsoever on my duties as a minister, and while I have always followed my ethical obligations, it is clear in hindsight that this is not an individual whose actions and choices I want reflecting on me.

[*Translation*]

With the benefit of hindsight, I realize that I should not have gone into business with Mr. Anderson. While it has had no impact whatsoever on my ministerial duties, and while I have always honoured my ethical obligations, it's clear, in hindsight, that this is not an individual whose actions and choices I would want reflecting on me.

[*English*]

Like all of you, I had deep concerns following Mr. Anderson's testimony before this committee. Like all of you, I believe he has an obligation to be forthright with this committee about the facts of this matter, in particular because I know those facts would further confirm that I'm not involved.

If Mr. Anderson was in fact intending to refer to someone else in the text messages he sent, he should give that person's name to this committee. If he was in fact using my name without my knowledge or permission, he should tell that to this committee. I do not know which is the case, but I can say unequivocally that I absolutely did not take part in the conversations referenced. I sent no such messages to Mr. Anderson. I had no involvement with any dealings or business with the Ghaoui Group, and any suggestion to the contrary is not true.

In the spirit of transparency, I proactively sent my own records for September 6 and 7 to the clerk of the committee this morning, which I previously gave to the Ethics Commissioner at his request prior to his most recent letter to me on this matter. I trust this will further illustrate the simple truth. Whatever happened there, I was

not involved, and I invite the members here to review those records for themselves.

Once again, I thank the Ethics Commissioner for impartially reviewing the evidence and confirming this for a third time.

[*Translation*]

Friends, I'm here to provide what clarity I can, even though I was not involved in the events this committee has questions about.

[*English*]

However, I am here to provide the clarity I can today, even though I was not involved in the events this committee seems to have questions about. Let's have a conversation about the facts. Let's move beyond the baseless accusations and innuendo. Then let's all get back to work delivering for Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault.

For the benefit of the committee, we received that information at 1:08 this afternoon. It has been sent out to translation. It will come back translated. I will certainly share that with the committee when it comes back.

Again, I remind everyone to be mindful of our interpreters. Members have time to ask questions. Minister, you have time to respond. I don't want to be in a position of refereeing and getting in the middle of the questioning. Ask the question, answer it and let's go.

Go ahead, sir.

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

May I ask, in keeping with the concern related to disruptions, that if there are points of order, the point of order be stated in advance of the intervention?

**The Chair:** Okay. It's a fair ask.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Mr. Boissonnault, who's Randy?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Barrett, could you clarify your question?

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** There are a series of text messages from your discredited business partner, Mr. Anderson. Those messages refer to "Randy".

Is that you?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It is not.

In fact, as I indicated in my opening statement, I've turned over my phone records to the Ethics Commissioner and now to this committee. As you will see, they show none of the text messages that have been reported on by Global News. The messages—

• (1555)

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Okay.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** —that I turned over were across all platforms, Mr. Barrett—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Okay.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** —and across all the telephones I have. The Ethics Commissioner has come to the conclusion that I am not that Randy.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Where were you on September 6?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Let's walk through a timeline, which I think will be helpful.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** You have the same amount of time to answer that I used to ask.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It's up to the chair to decide.

Chair, how are you managing time? Do I get to do full answers?

**The Chair:** It's similar to how we managed it last time. The time in which the question is asked is the time you will have to respond. Mr. Barrett asked you where you were on September—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Sixth....

**The Chair:** Answer the question.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I was in Edmonton, and I travelled to Vancouver in the morning.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Were you at the Liberal cabinet retreat?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I arrived in the morning, Vancouver time. The cabinet retreat started in the evening of September 6.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Okay.

You spoke on the phone that day to your business partner, Stephen Anderson. Is that correct?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Chair, I have a timeline that I would like to share with this committee. It will answer Mr. Barrett's question.

There was a one-minute phone call that followed a text I received from Purolator—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** It's a yes-or-no question.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** —asking for an account to be settled. I texted Mr. Anderson. He called me back. We had a one-minute phone call about this issue, and then I sent the text to him.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** You called and texted Mr. Anderson that day, yes or no?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I did not call him. He called me.

I texted him to let him know that I had an account—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Okay. You spoke to him on the telephone that day—

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Barrett.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Okay. We've established that you spoke to him on the phone and you exchanged text messages with him on the date of September 6.

I want to refer you to a statement from your staff in regard to this matter. It said it wouldn't have been possible on the 8th of September because you were at a cabinet retreat in Vancouver and had no access to any electronic devices. You were also at a cabinet retreat

on the 6th of September, 2022, and of course you had access to your devices that day, as you did on the 8th. Is that not true?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** That is not true. During the 7th and 8th, during cabinet meetings during the day, our devices are locked up in lockboxes. On the 6th, there were no cabinet meetings during the day, and I can tell you the time, Mr. Barrett. The time that I got the voice mail to transcription was 11:28 a.m.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** On the 6th—

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** The conversation with Mr. Anderson took place at 11:29 and lasted for one minute.

**The Chair:** Mr. Barrett, ask your question, please.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** On the 6th and 8th, did you have access to electronic devices during the day at all?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** On the 7th or the 8th?

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** On the 6th or the 8th, did you at any time have access to your electronic devices, yes or no?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I had access to my electronic devices when I was not in confidential cabinet meetings, yes.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** You were in Vancouver on the phone with your discredited business partner, Stephen Anderson. We have text messages from Mr. Anderson to a client that your company ripped off.

Those text messages say, "I have Randy and then I need to update. Asking as west coast is closing in 7 min"—you were on the west coast—"and Randy is in the Vancouver office."

You're the Randy that was on the west coast in Vancouver. Isn't that right?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Barrett, let me refer you to the Ethics Commissioner's letter from June 25, when he stated very clearly:

Other than the name 'Randy' being used in text messages from Mr. Anderson to Malvina Ghaoui, messages which according to the published excerpts were neither addressed nor copied to you, I do not have any information before me to support the allegation that you were involved in managing or operating GHI....

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** You expect Canadians to believe that the Randy referred to in these texts nine times is anyone else but you, that the Randy who was in Vancouver and who needs to be updated on the money transfer is anyone else but you. You admit to speaking to your business partner on the phone. Why don't you just admit that you're the Randy that he's talking about?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** The person in question was no longer my business partner. I was simply a shareholder of the company. I had no operational role in that company. Because Purolator was looking to settle an account, they had my number still in their logbook. They reached out to me. They could not contact GHI. I informed Mr. Anderson of that fact. He called me. I informed him that I would send him the text, which I did, and the conversation ended there, and the texts are with the commissioner and with this committee, Mr. Barrett.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** A year after you claim to have been done being involved in the operations of this business, you're expecting us to believe that you are dealing with your business partner on accounts payable but you're not dealing with him on accounts receivable. That, of course, is far too incredible for anyone to believe.

Have you ever been given money from Mr. Anderson since 2021 to either your...from his personal bank accounts or from any bank accounts of people that he is connected with? I ask, Minister, because I've got to say that where there's smoke, there's fire.

• (1600)

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, Mr. Barrett. You're simply mistaken. Purolator reached out to me because they had my number in an old logbook—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** The question is about the money: Have you received money?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** You had several questions in your statement and you had a long time. Am I able to answer with the time that he used, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** I'm going to give you a couple of extra seconds. Go ahead.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Thank you very much.

Look, I was very clear that I earned no income from GHI after I stopped working for the company when I was elected. There was one end of...or a wrap-up payment for 2021 that came to me to wrap up the 2021 business, but those monies came from GHI.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Shanahan, go ahead.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Just in trying to follow the jumble of dates and so on that Mr. Barrett was referring to, Minister Boissonnault, can you explain the context of this phone call that Mr. Barrett is asking about? I'm hearing the dates of the 6th and the 8th. Which is it?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Ms. Shanahan, I'm happy to provide context for this call.

These were the additional records and dates that the Ethics Commissioner reviewed prior to his September 12 letter. On September 6, while I was en route to Vancouver, a call came in that I was not able to take regarding GHI's account with the company. They were using records they had on file in an attempt to reach somebody from the company.

Despite the fact that I had not been involved in the company for more than a year, I then got a voice mail to text indicating Global

Health's import account with Purolator. I texted Mr. Anderson to let him know about this voice mail. He then called me at 11:29 Mountain Time for a one-minute phone call. At 11:30 Mountain Time, that phone call ended. We discussed this account entirely. That was it. I forwarded the messages from Purolator to Mr. Anderson, and the conversation ended.

This is all documented clearly in the records that I provided to the Ethics Commissioner and that we have submitted proactively to the committee today for your information, and it was after reviewing these messages that the Ethics Commissioner wrote to me on September 12 and declined to investigate and closed this matter.

If I may, Madam Shanahan, the commissioner said the following: "On the basis of the information you have provided, and in the absence of any evidence giving me reason to believe you may have been operating or managing GHI in contravention of the act, I consider this matter closed."

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Thank you very much for that clarification, Minister. I'm sure Mr. Barrett appreciates it as well.

[Translation]

Minister Boissonnault, I'll switch to French.

My constituents in Châteauguay—Lacolle, soon to be Châteauguay—Les Jardins-de-Napierville, are very interested in this issue because they hear a lot about what one might call "fake scandals". They ask me what's going on in Ottawa when there's a conflict of interest or something fishy.

Every MP who comes to Ottawa goes over their public and private interests with the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. An MP may own or have owned a company or a portfolio of shares and properties, for example. Some MPs own a lot of properties. I imagine that analyzing the situation takes much longer for some than for others.

Can you tell us how that process works?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Yes, absolutely.

As you noted, Mrs. Shanahan, there is a very important process. All MPs have legal responsibilities. We must all comply with the Conflict of Interest Act and ethics guidelines.

When you become a minister, the process is much more complex. You have to spend time with the Commissioner and their officers. You have to submit your bank statements, all documents concerning your investments, all the information about your spouse and any business or businesses that your spouse is in charge of. The point is that the Commissioner looks at all of those documents. Then there's a conversation about how assets, shares and anything else can be transferred to ensure compliance with the act, if necessary. The process can take several months. In my case, it took six months before everything was settled. Then, all that personal information has to be updated annually. That's another very important part of it.

Perhaps the best way to explain this to our fellow citizens is to use a sports analogy: The referee is there to see if people are following the rules. In our case, the referee is the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. He indicated, not just once, but three times, that the allegations made by the Conservatives and the allegations that appeared in the media were indeed only allegations and that he considers the matter closed, period.

• (1605)

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** That's very interesting, Minister, because MPs sometimes make mistakes. You realize things, and then you get an email, for example. It's very reassuring to know that you can contact the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and it'll all be looked into.

If I understand correctly, in your case, it wasn't just once or twice, but three times that the Commissioner said it was nothing but allegations. Is that right?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It happened three times.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** On three occasions, your activities were scrutinized and nothing was found.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Absolutely. The Ethics Commissioner was very clear, Mrs. Shanahan. Last time, he indicated that, based on the information I provided and in the absence of any evidence that would give him reason to believe I could have managed the company in question, which would have been against the law, he considered the matter to be closed.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** That's great.

What information did you provide? What evidence did the Commissioner ask you for?

**The Chair:** Give a brief response, please.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I provided a log of my phone calls and text messages from the dates in question.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Shanahan and Mr. Boissonnault.

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Minister, I listened carefully to the sequence of events. For the benefit of my fellow Quebecers, we'll go over a few things again in French.

Despite the Ethics Commissioner's three findings, here we are today.

Why do you think that is? What's the real reason?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** That's a question for your colleagues.

I think there are some people around the table, Conservative members, who don't believe the truth and don't believe the Ethics Commissioner's findings.

That's too bad, because he's the referee. He's an officer of Parliament. Parliament pays his salary and provides him with a team, and when an officer of Parliament issues a ruling on personal matters,

business matters or matters involving compliance with the act, it's important to take him at his word. I think that's important.

Mr. Villemure, I'm telling you and your constituents that I take my oath as an MP and minister very seriously. That's why I'm appearing here a second time, so that we can put this matter to rest and so I can answer the honourable members' questions very clearly.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Thank you very much.

I want to touch on a few things. The Commissioner found that your actions complied with the act that he is responsible for implementing. Is that correct?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Absolutely. He reviewed my file three times.

**Mr. René Villemure:** You'll probably agree with me that some things may be unethical despite being legal.

Do you believe that some things fit that description?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Not at all, because, if they did, the Ethics Commissioner would have said so. He conducted a preliminary investigation, and he said three times that he didn't need to conduct an in-depth examination because there was no evidence to indicate that I had put myself in that grey area or done something that conflicted with the intent and wording of the act.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Initially, he found nothing, and you're telling us that makes sense because there was nothing.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Absolutely.

Mr. Villemure, right at the beginning, on June 4, the Commissioner told the committee that I had followed the rules set out in the act and the code. He said:

it appears he has complied with the requirements of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons and the Conflict of Interest Act related to matters involving his companies and consequently there is no need to commence an examination.

• (1610)

**Mr. René Villemure:** Okay.

Given these reports and the situation we're discussing, do you think the rules are good enough?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** We have one of the most robust conflict of interest and ethics systems in the world. This is always something we can discuss as parliamentarians, but all ministers are subject to the same code and the same rules. Not once, not twice, but three times, the Ethics Commissioner indicated that I had followed the rules and that, as of September 12, he considers this matter closed.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Wow. I'm going to tell you a little story that's not directly related to this.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Yes.

**Mr. René Villemure:** In Quebec, we had an inquiry called the Charbonneau commission.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Yes.

**Mr. René Villemure:** The commission investigated the construction industry. During testimony at the beginning of the Charbonneau commission, a man was asked who he was with. He said that he was with the person he was with. Okay. That's needless repetition.

I get the impression that, when we say "Who is Randy?", it's kind of the same thing. I'm not saying it's you.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Yes.

**Mr. René Villemure:** I'm saying that it's more or less the same kind of question that brings us here again today.

Who is Randy, as far as you can tell?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** The only answer I can give is that it wasn't me. The Ethics Commissioner also made it very clear that it wasn't me. So, moving on—

**Mr. René Villemure:** It's not you.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It's not me.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Okay.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** There are two possibilities: either Mr. Anderson dealt with someone by the name of Randy and did not identify that person, or he used my name to suit his purposes without my knowledge, which would be unfortunate and disappointing.

If that's what he did, he must answer to this committee.

**Mr. René Villemure:** What's your intuition on that?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I have no idea. It's up to Mr. Anderson to answer that question.

**Mr. René Villemure:** So, either Mr. Anderson dealt with someone by the name of Randy and lied, or, somewhere out there, there's another Randy, whom you don't know.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It's not me.

**Mr. René Villemure:** You wouldn't know him.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I don't know him at all.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Thank you very much.

Earlier, you talked about a sequence of events. Would you fill that in so we can see where we're at now?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Which sequence of events are you referring to?

**Mr. René Villemure:** Earlier, you referred to a sequence of events several times, but you weren't given a chance to talk about it. I'm giving you the opportunity to tell us about it.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** On the morning of September 6, I left Edmonton to go to Vancouver. I received a text from a Purolator representative indicating that he wanted to be put in contact with someone from Global Health Imports Corporation. I got that message because there was old information in the Purolator system. At 11:28 a.m. Mountain Time, I texted Mr. Anderson to let him know that. At 11:29 a.m., he called me, and we then had a one-minute conversation so he could resolve this matter. At 11:30, the conversation ended, and I sent him the Purolator text. All of this is indicated in the statements I sent you today.

**Mr. René Villemure:** So you had no further communication, nor did you communicate with another Randy.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Not at all.

Moreover, Mr. Villemure, having seen that—

**The Chair:** Wrap it up very quickly, please.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** —information, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner said this matter is closed.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Okay. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

[English]

Mr. Green, for six minutes, go ahead, please.

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

Clearly, you don't know who the other Randy is because Mr. Anderson admitted under testimony that he was lying about the other Randy. Is that correct?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I'm not going to put any words in Mr. Anderson's mouth, Mr. Green.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Did you watch Mr. Anderson's testimony?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It was painful.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Can you take me back to the moment you met Mr. Anderson?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I can't recall exactly when I met Mr. Anderson. I met him at a couple of community events in Edmonton, and then we reconnected on a flight early in the pandemic. It would have been probably in the late winter or early spring of 2020.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** In those couple of times that you met him in the community, what was your perception of Mr. Anderson?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I knew that Mr. Anderson had run an import-export business. He informed me that the business was doing well and that he had a successful business.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Did he pitch you on the plane to start a business together, or did you pitch him?

● (1615)

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Neither of us pitched each other, whatsoever, on starting a business, on that plane ride.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Was that a fabrication from Mr. Anderson as well?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No. What happened is that—and I'm happy to share this information—it was several days or a week later, and I was a private citizen at this time. I received an email or a communication on my phone indicating that the country needed people who understood how to bring—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Mr. Boissonnault, at what point did you start a business relationship with Mr. Anderson?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It was in April of 2020, Mr. Green.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** How would you have characterized Mr. Anderson's competencies? Did you believe him to be competent?



**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I believe that he knew how to do import-export activities, because that was his business.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Did you believe him to be honest?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I had no reason not to believe that he was honest.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You say it's clear, in hindsight, that you would not have gone into business with Mr. Anderson. When did you have that epiphany?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I think it had been building for some time in 2024, Mr. Green. I've seen—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** It wasn't when you were under allegations of fraud?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Can you clarify this question?

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Was the company not under the proceedings of a civil case?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Not at the time that I was involved in the operations of the company.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** What about afterwards?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I had no operational role in the committee—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** However, you would likely have been listed as a director.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I was not a director.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You were a shareholder.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I was only a shareholder, so I was not listed in any of the legal proceedings.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** That was fortunate for you.

How many shares did you own, percentage-wise?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I owned 50% of the shares—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You owned 50% of the shares.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** —and I have, since that time, unilaterally and voluntarily disposed of those shares.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You were a silent partner, an investor, with 50% investment in this company.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Yes, I had 50%. Sure.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Okay, I'll take that. Now, in a fifty-fifty partnership, your number was still listed on Purolator some time after the case. Did you ever have any other instances when there was a crossover between business inquiries and your personal phone?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It might have happened before, but it took place on September 6. I informed Mr. Anderson of the fact that Purolator was trying to get in touch with GHI.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** What number did they call?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** They called my personal phone.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Okay, so they still had your personal phone on—

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Purolator must have still had it in its old records.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Where does Purolator deliver information or packages, or whatever it is you'd be receiving? Where does it deliver for GHI?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I have no idea.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You don't know the address of GHI.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I do not, because I haven't been involved in the company in over three years—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** When you were involved, where did stuff get delivered?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** There was a warehouse that it was directed to on the south side of Edmonton. For a time, it was at a medical supply company that had an extra bay, and then Mr. Anderson picked another warehouse on the south side of Edmonton.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** All your deliveries and mail were going to warehouses.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I can't comment on mail. Mr. Anderson would have received physical mail at a business address.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** But Purolator reached out to you.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Purolator reached out to me because for a time I was the contact for the Purolator account, and it was just a legacy number left on their system. That's simply how they contacted me.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** I would put it to you that within the six minutes of Mr. Anderson's testimony, as somebody who doesn't know him but who has also been involved in business, I didn't see him as being a credible witness. I didn't see him as being credible. In fact, I saw him unravel right before us in the stories he was telling.

How come it took you so long to realize that you were dealing with somebody who couldn't be trusted?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I said in my opening statement, and I'll say it again, Mr. Green, that with the benefit of hindsight and having been dismayed by that testimony, I would not go into business with Mr. Anderson if I had to do it all over again.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Was it lucrative?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** You'd have to define "lucrative".

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You were in a fifty-fifty partnership. Mr. Anderson testified that he was drawing \$250,000 a year. Is it safe for me to assume that this was also your income?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** My income has been declared to the Ethics Commissioner.

You know that when we are private citizens, we don't discuss those matters in these forums. We have a place—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** I'm going to ask you, because it's public testimony. He suggested, when I put these questions to him, that you were receiving \$250,000 a year in compensation.

Was there additional compensation over the \$250,000, or was that just your base salary?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** These matters have been shared with the Ethics Commissioner, because that's the right place to share that information. All of this information was disclosed in my initial filings to the commissioner.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You suggested that the wrap-ups for your payments from GHI were a wrap-up in 2021. What was the nature of that contract, and did that contract continue to be executed into 2023-24?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** That's a very fair question.

When I said there was a 2021 year-end wrap-up payment, it was exactly that. It was for work that was done in 2021, but it did not continue after I was elected to office in September 2021.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** When was the absolute last time you received any money from Mr. Anderson and/or any related parties?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It was late January 2022 or early February 2022.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Green.

Thank you, Minister.

That concludes our first round of six minutes.

We're going to now start with five minutes, and I'm going to go to Mr. Cooper.

Go ahead, sir.

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

Minister Boissonnault, when you last appeared before this committee, the committee had text messages referencing a "Randy" from September 8. You said the Randy referenced in those text messages was not you. Your office even put out a statement saying you were in Vancouver and had no access to electronic devices, and you made no phone calls during the time frame in question on September 8.

Since you appeared before committee, we have a new tranche of text messages from September 6 that reference Randy in Vancouver. You, Randy—through you, Mr. Chair—were in Vancouver, and now you tell the committee that you did talk to Anderson. You did text Anderson. You didn't say that before. You left this committee with the impression that you had no communications with Anderson, and now you say that you did.

I would submit, Mr. Boissonnault—through you, Mr. Chair—that it is a material omission. It is a material misrepresentation.

Why didn't you tell the full truth the last time you appeared before the committee? Why are we only finding out about this now? Is it because you need a new cover story?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I emphatically reject the ending of your question, Mr. Cooper.

The testimony I gave at this committee when I was last here was about September 8. After summer testimony, I proactively provided my text messages to the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Cooper, I don't have data in my phone that indicates who I texted over two years ago—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Minister, Minister, you had a choice. You had a choice to—

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Chair, I believe I—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** —come to this committee and be forthcoming—

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** —have more time.

**The Chair:** Hang on, Mr. Cooper.

I'm going to give you a couple more seconds to respond. Members have the right to reclaim their time as well. I'm trying to be as fair as I can.

Minister, please go ahead.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Cooper, on the morning of September 6, as I indicated, I got a text message from Purolator. I indicated this to Mr. Anderson. He called me. We had a one-minute phone call—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** You had a choice to disclose that to committee and you didn't do so.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper—

**Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** I'm going to Mr. Cooper.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** You didn't do so, very conveniently.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** I had a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Hang on.

Go ahead on the point of order, Mr. Fisher.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** As Mr. Green recommended, it is Standing Order 16(2), on interrupting a witness.

**The Chair:** I listened to Mr. Green's questioning, and there were several times when he reclaimed his time in advance of the minister responding.

I'm going to ask, Mr. Cooper, that we give ample time for the question. I know you had a long preamble. The question was in there.

You have the floor, sir. Go ahead. Ask your question.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Mr. Chair, the minister had a choice to come here and be forthcoming. He didn't do so. He misrepresented at this committee by omission.

I have to ask you this: You said you had nothing to do with the operations of GHI. Now you admit that in fact you did. The paying of the bill is an operational matter. If you had nothing to do with GHI, why wouldn't you simply pick up the phone, call Purolator, tell them you have nothing to do with the operations of the business and ask them to call Mr. Anderson? Why didn't you do that?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Minister.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** That is a great question.

The answer is that I did—three times. It was a collections group at Purolator that I had never contacted, which still somehow had my information in their database.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** You could have—

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, Mr. Cooper, let me finish—

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Mr. Boissonnault, why didn't you, at the very least, text him and say, "Contact Purolator"? Why did you then pick up the phone? Isn't the reason you picked up the phone that you wanted to talk about the half-million-dollar shakedown? That's why you called Mr. Anderson, isn't it?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No.

**The Chair:** Minister, go ahead.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Not at all. That is simply false, Mr. Cooper.

As I indicated before, I have nothing to do with the Ghaoui Group. All of those deals with Mr. Anderson took place after I was an operational member of this company.

I did text Mr. Anderson. He responded to me by telephone. I indicated to him that this bill was there and he should take care of it, because I didn't want further text messages from Purolator.

• (1625)

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Minister Boissonnault, no one believes you. After you misled this committee by leaving out a material fact, you lost any benefit of the doubt.

You have yet to explain how there are nine text messages referencing "Randy" when the only Randy at GHI—ever—was you. You had a 50% interest. You have a text message placing you in Vancouver. You were in Vancouver. You've now admitted that on that very day, you spoke and texted with none other than Anderson, which you weren't forthcoming about until you had no choice, because you wanted to cover your butt.

Very simply, Minister Boissonnault, do you think Canadians are stupid? Everyone knows it's you. The Randy in the text messages and the Randy in the half-million-dollar shakedown is you. You, sir, lack the character and judgment to serve in cabinet. If you had any integrity, you would resign.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Minister Boissonnault, I'm going to give you some time to respond quickly, if you don't mind.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Sure, I will go quickly.

**The Chair:** Go as quickly as possible.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Cooper, if the allegations you just threw at me were true, the Ethics Commissioner would have seen, in an exhaustive evaluation of all the text messages on all the telephones I have, across all platforms, that those text messages exist. They do not. I am not the Randy in question. The Ethics Commissioner has said so, and he considers the matter closed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** No one believes you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bains, you have five minutes. Go ahead, please.

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

Thank you, Minister, for joining us again.

Isn't this case closed?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Bains, that's certainly what the Ethics Commissioner thinks and has stated in his letter to me, as has been now reported in the media. This matter is closed because not once, not twice, but three times now, I have shared exhaustive information with the Ethics Commissioner and with this committee, indicating that I have followed the rules, starting back with my initial filings with the commissioner, proceeding then to when the story first broke on Global.

That is when I was asked to provide text information about September 8, which I did, again, across all platforms and on all devices that I have. Based on that, the commissioner said there was no need to have further examination of the matter.

Then, following summer testimony, we provided more text messages for the 6th and 7th of September to the commissioner, which the committee now has, and that is how the commissioner, for the third time, has indicated that I have no involvement in operating this company and that he considers the matter closed.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Despite that, we're still reviewing the matter, so how closed is it? Do we need to go back to the commissioner again and do it a fourth time?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I hope not. I'm always happy to participate with questions from the Ethics Commissioner, but I'm here today to clarify matters, to share the information that I have, and I hope that this allows the ethics committee to get on with its very important business. I know you have important studies that you want to undertake, and I'm here because I take seriously my oath as a minister and my responsibilities under the act.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Thank you for that.

Despite the matter being closed three times—and maybe we're anticipating a fourth time for the matter to be closed—I do have just a few questions here.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Sure.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Have you ever spoken to or met with anyone from the Ghaoui Group?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, I have not, and they acknowledge that themselves in media reports on the matter.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Were you involved in any way in a business deal between Ghaoui and GHI?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No. My time with GHI concluded prior to Mr. Anderson's business deal with the Ghaoui Group, and I have had no contact with the people in that group.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Did you send any of the messages shared between the Ghaoui Group that have been reported on by Global News?

• (1630)

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I did not. I shared my text messages on all platforms and all devices with the Ethics Commissioner, and the Ethics Commissioner has indicated that I am not the person in question.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Have you had any role in the operations of GHI since you were elected in 2021?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I have not.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Have you been kept up to date since being elected regarding who the employees of GHI are, or who may have been hired or quit or are in the active workforce, etc.?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, I haven't, and I'm not aware of GHI's new businesses or any contracts they would have pursued or any legal activities. It would not be appropriate or compliant with the act to do so. I took my disclosure process seriously, and when I stopped being involved in the operations of GHI, I stopped being involved in the operations of GHI. Since that time I have unilaterally surrendered my shares for no compensation.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** So you're not a shareholder of GHI. Did you receive any compensation for your shares when you surrendered them? You just said you didn't.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I did not receive any compensation, and—this might also answer one of Mr. Green's questions—I also did not receive any dividends from the company as a shareholder at any time.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Have you ever met Carla Rodych, president of Canada Medical?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I have not.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Have you ever met Ian Stedman, assistant professor of ethics in governance at York University?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, I have not.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Have you ever met Curtis James, who ran a warehouse next door to GHI's warehouse?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I have not.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Have you ever been contacted by the Edmonton Police Service in relation to GHI?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, I have not.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Have you ever met Francheska Leblond?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, I have not. I do not know who that person is.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Have you ever been involved in any business dealings with Francheska Leblond?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Not at all.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Okay, well, those are my questions. I consider this matter closed for the fourth time.

**The Chair:** Well, we certainly appreciate that, Mr. Bains, but we'll carry on with Mr. Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

I'm going to give my time to my colleague, Matthew Green.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Green, you have the floor.

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

Mr. Boissonnault, you've stated many times that the Ethics Commissioner cleared you three times—not once, not twice, but three times. You would also acknowledge that in order to open up an investigation, the Ethics Commissioner would have to have some kind of reasonable grounds to even embark on something so as not to be frivolous or vexatious. Would you not agree?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I understand that's the process, yes.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** In that process, while you say you've been cleared and it's been closed three times, it's also true that every time something's closed, new information comes out, and you're back under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I'm not sure that it's called an investigation at this stage. He asked me for information.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You can save the semantics. The point is that a case was opened, it was closed, another case was opened, and it was closed. It's because the Ethics Commissioner has no real legal authority, investigative authority, to take warrants, subpoena or use anything that could get beyond voluntary disclosure. Is that not true?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No. If the Ethics Commissioner asks you for information, you comply. It's not optional.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You voluntarily give it to him. Is that correct?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I would have to ask my team and look at the act as to what the penalties would be for noncompliance, but I take my responsibilities very seriously.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** The penalty for being in violation is only \$500, so I can't imagine that it's material when you're in an industry where you're getting a payout of \$250,000 a year.

You've said that you received no earned income and no dividends. At any time did you loan money to the company?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** There were never any shareholder loans?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** With that said, during this process of the Ethics Commissioner's review—I'll call it a review to be charitable to you—you stated that he emphatically cleared you. Then you went on to state that he does not have any information before him, and it's on the basis of the information you've provided.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Those are the words in the commissioner's letter—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** That's correct.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** —and what is different is that the third letter he sent me was the first time that the commissioner said, "I consider this matter closed."

**Mr. Matthew Green:** That's the matter that was under review, correct, but I think we can all agree that he has no authority or resources to do the work that we've witnessed the media do, which, quite frankly, has resulted in more information and disclosures that have in turn resulted in additional—I'll call them—reviews. I say it's an investigation, but I'll give you "review". It was not once, not twice, but three times.

Do you have any knowledge of any information that could come out in the future that would put you back before this committee?

• (1635)

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I do not, Mr. Green.

I said to Mr. Villemure in French that we do have one of the most robust ethics and conflict of interest systems in the world. We go through a lot of steps to make sure that we comply with the rules, and I followed those rules.

I think what is important to remember from the three letters that I've received from the commissioner is that every single time, he's indicated that I've followed the rules. In the case of the last two issues, the issues related to text messages, he indicated very clearly that I had no operational role in the company, which is what I've always asserted to this august committee.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** You would agree that dealing with matters of outstanding bills is an operational feature.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, I did not settle a bill. I informed Mr. Anderson that I received a text from Purolator.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** I would love as much as anybody to be able to move beyond this particular issue. The challenge that faces me is that from the get-go, this has been a sorry tale of allegations of fraud and corruption in some instances. The stories do not add up.

I'll share with you, Mr. Boissonnault, that the testimony of Mr. Anderson, within six minutes.... He's certainly not somebody that I'd be doing business with. I'm quite frankly shocked that as a minister, a senior minister in this government, it took you until 2024 to come to those same conclusions. I would hope that in the days and weeks to come, the Canadian public does have all the information that's available to it.

In closing, I just want to give you the opportunity to state whatever you feel like in your defence so that we hopefully do not see you back in front of this committee on this particular issue.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Green, I really appreciate your frankness. We don't agree on everything in the chamber, but I appreciate your comments today.

I should have done more due diligence on Mr. Anderson. In hindsight, I would not have gone into business with him if I had to do it over again. I was dismayed by his testimony. Quite frankly, I regret all of the time that officers and members of Parliament have had to spend on this matter.

With your good graces, we could put this behind us. That's entirely in your hands.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Green.

We have a five-minute round. Mr. Barrett is going to start, and then we're going to go over to Mr. Brock.

You have five minutes, Mr. Barrett. Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** I have an official document from the Government of Alberta dated March 28, 2020. It's two days before you incorporated Global Health Imports and officially entered into business with Stephen Anderson.

It shows that Stephen Anderson listed seven vehicles as collateral. There were five 2019 Land Rovers and two 2019 Porsches, totalling about \$1 million.

Did you know about this, yes or no?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I did not.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** You were unaware that your business partner posted seven high-end luxury vehicles as collateral. Is that your story?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I didn't review that as part of the filings of the company. It was his decision to put collateral. I didn't have any collateral up in my particular—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Are you currently driving any of the Land Rovers or Porsches?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I am not.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Okay. I'm quite sure that no one believes you, "Other Randy".

Mr. Chair, I'll turn it over to Mr. Brock.

**The Chair:** Mr. Barrett—

**An hon. member:** Come on, Chair. That's absolutely absurd, Chair.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** It's Standing Order 18.

**The Chair:** Mr. Barrett, I'm going to suggest that this was not appropriate.

I'm going to go to Mr. Brock.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Minister, despite your best efforts, this story is not going away anytime soon. The cloud of suspicion will hang over you until the next election, after which time you'll be looking for a new job.

Let's take a look at the facts.

Ghaoui Group knew of only one Randy, and that Randy was a minister of the Canadian government. That's yourself. At all material times prior to your election, you were in a fifty-fifty partnership with Anderson. During your time with the company with Mr. Anderson, you in fact were the only person named Randy.

Mr. Anderson, whom you're now deeply disappointed about, although you didn't say that when you first testified, blatantly lied to the committee about lying to Canadians and lying to the press that there was some other Randy. He also promised this committee to provide us with details as to who the other Randy is, but—surprise, Minister—he couldn't because by doing so, he would identify you.

Then we now find out that on September 6 you were in a text communication with Anderson and in a phone call with Anderson, despite you assuring us at committee the first time that you've had no communication with Mr. Anderson. It's highly suspicious, Mr. Boissonnault.

Furthermore, you know full well that for any minister to engage in a management capacity or an operational capacity is indeed an operational issue that is banned by the ethics laws. You could have had a staffer reach out to Anderson. You could have simply told the courier company, "I have nothing to do with the company. Deal with Anderson. Go pound salt; it's not my responsibility." Instead you chose to take matters into your own hands to deal directly with Mr. Anderson. Those are the incontrovertible facts.

Now you're also relying upon the fact that you exercised your due diligence with this committee and your due diligence with the Ethics Commissioner. I asked you specifically to provide us with details, including all your text messages on all your devices. You failed to do that, Minister. You gave this committee only one set of records pertaining to one device. I was led to believe that you told the Ethics Commissioner you had two devices.

Again, the Ethics Commissioner is not an investigator. He doesn't have investigative powers like law enforcement. He can't obtain production orders on service providers to verify what you are saying. The Ethics Commissioner has to take it on good faith that you're being honest. I have some serious reservations about your honesty, as do Canadians.

Will you provide this committee with all text records on all your devices and tell us how many devices you had in your possession in the fall of 2022?

• (1640)

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Chair, will you give me two and a half minutes to respond?

**The Chair:** We have to move on.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** There's only one question.

**The Chair:** I think it was a very simple question. Mr. Brock was commenting.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It was a two-and-a-half-minute question. There was a lot there.

**The Chair:** I realize that, but it was a very simple question. I'm going to ask you to answer the question and then I'm going to go to Mr. Housefather.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Mr. Brock, the information that you cited in your monologue was reviewed by the Ethics Commissioner.

I'm not the Randy in question. It is not me. It's not possible for it to be me. That is in the commissioner's letter of September 12. He considers this matter closed.

Look, I'm at the committee's disposal and I provided the committee with the information that it required of me—

**Mr. Larry Brock:** It's insufficient information. Minister, will you provide us with full information?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I think that's time, then.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** What are you hiding, Minister?

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Chair—

**The Chair:** Just relax.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** What are you hiding?

**The Chair:** Minister—

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I've never seen you do that to anyone else.

**The Chair:** It's because when I get you in my ear over here and I'm trying to listen to what's going on, I can't focus on the questioning, Ms. Khalid, okay?

Minister, on behalf of Mr. Brock, you've been asked a very specific question about the devices. Are there any other devices that you can provide to the committee, sir?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, Mr. Chair, because I provided all text messages across all devices for the dates in question across all platforms, as asked for by the committee.

**The Chair:** Mr. Housefather, go ahead for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** I have a point of order before we go to Mr. Housefather.

**The Chair:** On your point of order, go ahead.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** Telling a member to relax, I think, is inappropriate, sir, as a chair.

**The Chair:** I think I said right at the outset, Mr. Fisher—and I appreciate the challenge—that it's difficult when there's crosstalk that's going on.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** Understood.

**The Chair:** I'm trying to listen to the conversation that's going on.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** It's just the word "relax".

**The Chair:** When I'm hearing it from this side, I can't focus on what the minister and Mr. Brock are talking about. I said that right at the outset. I was going to enforce it, and I did.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I would like to comment on that same point of order, Chair.

**The Chair:** On the same point of order, go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I'd respectfully like to ask you why it is that you only hear it from this side and never from any other part?

**The Chair:** I think I did that the other day, actually. I think I heard it the other day. You might want to review the tapes, Ms. Khalid.

Mr. Housefather, go ahead.

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

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** If we were going to start counting, then I think that the tally would show—

**The Chair:** Review the tapes and you'll see how I acted the other day when I heard it coming from this side.

On the point of order, Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Chair, I think it's an unacceptable practice in any committee to have a member's staff or House officer's staff making audible interventions overtop of members of the committee, the chair of the committee or a witness of the committee. Perhaps you could give a gentle reminder to staff who are here, such as House officers from the government, that if they're interested in intervening at this committee, they can put their name forward to appear as a witness or they can run for Parliament. They're not to yell overtop of us.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** I've dealt with that issue before a couple of times, and that's a good reminder to all staff who are here.

Mr. Housefather, please go ahead for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Boissonnault, if you used bad judgment to enter into a business relationship with Stephen Anderson and he shouldn't have been somebody you entered into business with prior to your election and becoming a minister, would that be the purview of the Ethics Commissioner? Would that be something you're not allowed to do—enter into business with the wrong guy?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** In the event that you were paid in any way before you were elected as a minister, whatever the type of arrangement that you had fiscally with the company, would that be something that would be under the purview of this committee or anything the Ethics Commissioner should be interested in?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, but in your disclosure process, you would be required to inform the commissioner of that and to provide all of the documentation. To make sure that the minister is compliant with the act, they must organize their former private affairs in a way that complies with the act.

For example, if you personally have any actively traded stocks, you have to get rid of them or you have to sell them. You can't even put them in a blind trust. I followed all those rules.

If you'll allow me, Mr. Housefather, I want to state, so the committee hears it again, that I submitted all the messages across all devices for the date requested on September 8, and I've now done the same for September 6.

It's simply not true that I didn't fulfill the request from this committee.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Coming back to the issue, the first time you were asked about September 8, and today we're talking about text messages and one brief phone call on September 6. Is it still true you never spoke to Mr. Anderson on September 8?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Yes.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** It's still true that you never texted Mr. Anderson on September 8. Is that correct?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It is.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Now I'm going to come back to the text messages you exchanged on September 6, because I'm sure I don't want you to get called back here for more questions about the 6th.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Sure.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** The first one from you says "Hello". Then the next one is, "Where in the world are you? Great to hear your voice". Somewhere in this, I assume Mr. Anderson called you, if you texted first and he responded and you heard his voice.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** That is correct.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** It would have been after "Where in the world are you?", perhaps. Is that correct?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Correct.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** What you probably told him was, "Hey, I've got a Purolator account collection thing that came in. I'm going to send that to you." Is that right?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Yes, and that I didn't want to receive any more, so take my number off the list.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Basically, a second later, at 5:30:33 p.m. UTC, or whatever, you sent him the Purolator text.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Just so we're clear for the record, that is Greenwich Standard Time, so this happened at 11:40—the time that you're asking me about—11:28 a.m. Mountain Standard Time and then 11:29 Mountain, and at 11:30 Mountain, I forwarded the Purolator message.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you very much.

Then you said, “Saturday, drink”. Did you ever end up meeting him for a drink?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No, we did not.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Okay.

After you left the company, did you socialize frequently with Mr. Anderson?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** No.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** After you left the company, you had very sporadic conversations with him. That is what I understand.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** That's correct.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** How many conversations do you think you had with him after you left as a participating member of the company?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** I couldn't even speculate a guess: four, maybe six, in a year or two.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I would imagine that if you were operationally involved in the business, you would have had way more conversations with him.

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** During the time that you were operationally involved in the business previous to your election as a minister, how many times a week would you talk to Mr. Anderson?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** It would have been several conversations, text messages, emails a day.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Perfect.

I think we're left with the question....

You're here because Mr. Anderson chose to reference “Randy” in multiple text messages. That's the reason we're here. There are people claiming that you're that Randy. There's no proof of that. All we know is that Mr. Anderson either has somebody else named Randy, and he needs to tell the committee who it is, or he misleadingly used your name with different clients of his trying to somehow bring you in—perhaps there was a minister of the Crown involved—and trying to make himself more important.

However, the only person, Minister Boissonnault, who can actually answer that question is Mr. Anderson, correct? None of these other people that Mr. Bains asked you about—the list of people that you didn't know—would know if Mr. Anderson had exchanged text messages with you or not, presumably. Is that correct?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** Not only is it correct, but it's verified in at least two letters from the Ethics Commissioner, one, that I can't possibly be the other Randy because there are no text messages to that effect. Then, in the most recent letter, he indicated very clearly that I've not been operating the company and considers this matter closed.

• (1650)

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Again, the goal, I believe, of the Conservatives on the committee is not to find out who the other Randy is, if it's another Randy; their goal is only to try to make you be that Randy. The only issue here that can be answered is in text messages between you and Mr. Anderson and claims Mr. Anderson made. Truthfully, the only person who can answer that question—

other than yourself, and you've clearly told us you're not that person—would be Mr. Anderson. Is that correct?

**Hon. Randy Boissonnault:** He should indicate whether he used my name to advance his business interests without my knowledge or if there's somebody else out there with a name that's the same as mine.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** He should. I absolutely agree.

Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

That concludes our round of questioning for today. It's been an hour.

**Some hon. members:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** No, it's been an hour after the second round. That's the way it goes.

Mr. Barrett, I see your hand.

I'm going to suspend for a couple of minutes. I want to thank the minister for appearing before the committee today. I'm going to suspend for a couple of minutes. We're going to come back with open committee business, and I'm going to go to Mr. Barrett when we're back.

• (1650)

(Pause)

• (1655)

**The Chair:** I appreciate the patience on the suspension. I'm going to call the meeting back to order. We're in open committee business.

Before we broke, Mr. Barrett had his hand up. Go ahead, please, Mr. Barrett.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Thanks very much, Chair.

I don't feel, having heard from the minister, that we're any further ahead. Frankly, we heard a lot that the minister is unable to corroborate. The revelation that wasn't offered in the minister's first appearance before the committee—that he talked and texted with Mr. Anderson on the dates in question—seems to be a basic opening statement-level detail that he would have provided in his first appearance before the committee.

I'd like to move, given today's testimony, that the committee expand its study on the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, and call related witnesses.

**The Chair:** Was that to call...?

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** It's to call related witnesses, period.

**The Chair:** I heard him say “call related witnesses, period.”



**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** I have a point of order. We didn't hear that either.

Could you please read it out slowly?

**The Chair:** Repeat it again, please, Mr. Barrett.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Given today's testimony, the committee should expand its study on the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, and call related witnesses.

**The Chair:** Okay. It's very straightforward.

I suspect you want the committee members to submit the names of those related witnesses, or do you want us to...?

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** As is the committee's practice, yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. I accept that.

Mrs. Shanahan, I had you next, but not on the motion. The motion has been moved, so we're going to speak to the motion right now. I'm going to start a list. Mrs. Shanahan is next, followed by Ms. Khalid.

Go ahead, Mrs. Shanahan.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Chair, you know, I'm still finding my feet in this committee. However, from what I heard today, and in the time I've had to review previous testimony, the work this committee has done and the clarification that....

Indeed, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has reviewed this matter. May I say that this is an independent commissioner? The commissioner is not there to score political points. The commissioner is there to review the facts and interview the person in question. The commissioner acts under a law we put in place here in Parliament to deal with these very issues of conflict of interest, either with MPs or ministers.

It's not once or twice: It's three times that this commissioner has come back with a conclusion, letter or report saying that this allegation does not stand up under scrutiny.

I think this will be interesting. I know it's coming up in a different study, but given that it's part of the mandate of this committee to review the commissioner's work, we can have a better understanding. I think it was Mr. Green who was questioning the quality of the commissioner's work and what he can and can't do, and so on and so forth.

I don't know. If we start having a court of—

**Mr. Matthew Green:** It was scope.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** It was scope. Okay. However, if we start having judicial powers when dealing with conflict of interest issues, I think it's going to be a whole other ball of wax. It could be used, for example, as a political or partisan weapon against anybody the majority decides should be on the receiving end of that. This is where I really feel that this....

You know, I read the evidence. I looked at it again. I listened carefully to all the questions that were asked. I asked my own questions. There's really nothing more to be said. It has all been clearly dealt with.

Chair, I just want to....

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Sometimes my constituents ask me what committees are and what they do. They hear things, and then they ask me how they can keep an eye on MPs' and ministers' work.

I mentioned fake scandals earlier. People ask me what's going on in Ottawa and tell me there must be a way to look into allegations. They want to have confidence in their MPs and their ministers. They ask me why people are always stirring up fake scandals. They see all this and they hear about text messages and Purolator and so on.

They wonder if that's why they're sending MPs to Ottawa to get paid big bucks. We know exactly what we get paid, what our budgets are and how much we get to spend on staff. Are we being paid to look at MPs' texts about a Purolator account? This is so weird.

I'm very happy with the answer the minister gave today. I think I'll make a little clip and post it on social media. It doesn't really come naturally to me, but I do my best. People are wondering if the process is thorough and trustworthy, so I want to show them the minister's response. That way, they'll have a better understanding of the Commissioner's investigation process and see how the minister answered his questions. When I show them that the issue was text messages about a Purolator account.... I didn't get to hear Mr. Anderson's testimony, but, based on what my colleagues have told me, he's not a very trustworthy person. That may be worth looking into, but we're not talking about him, are we? We're talking about the minister, and the minister provided all his information and all his communications. I wonder what would happen if officials had the right to search everyone's phone.

I was here when the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics examined the use of parliamentary email addresses and resources by political parties. I think Mr. Cooper and Mr. Barrett were here. In 2019, 2020 and even 2021, I was still getting fundraising emails from the Conservative Party of Canada, since I used to be a member, as well as emails from some MPs that were sent from their parliamentary email addresses. It was interesting. I should have suggested that we look at the use of parliamentary resources for partisan purposes. Maybe I'll get another chance. That might be interesting, so I'll jot it down and come back to it at another time.

This motion is really just a witch hunt. Actually, it's not even a witch hunt, because there are no witches. The rabbits are

[English]

down the rabbit hole. The rabbits are gone.

[Translation]

There are no witches. Nothing to see. It's just about a few text messages and a silly story about a Purolator account. I think all of us have given our information and phone number to a business and then received a call telling us to forward something. It's seriously annoying. For sure, it can lead people who don't trust the process to speculate and make assumptions. The Conservatives certainly do that. I see that Mr. Green does not trust the work of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. I would like him to explain exactly what he would like from him. Obviously, my colleagues don't think his work is comprehensive enough.

I am just a member of Parliament. I do not have a big portfolio, nor am I in business. I find that he follows up the files very well. He asks us questions, follows up, gives us deadlines to meet, and all the information we provide ends up being made public. I imagine that this makes for very interesting and relevant reading, not only for the other members, but also for all the employees who work here.

• (1705)

There is certainly a reason why Parliament created the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. It wasn't just a matter of having a regular way for the public to find out about the profile of MPs. The public has a right to know that because we are responsible for millions if not billions of dollars. This is even more true for the people who form the government.

Also, I'm not sure when the Conflict of Interest Act was enacted. I think it was in the 1980s or 1990s. The analysts can help me with that. That was the act that created the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

**Ms. Alexandra Savoie (Analyst):** It was in 2006.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** It was in 2006? That's great. It's quite recent. Updates can always be made. I know that there are normally reviews every five years and the act can be renewed. In 2006, Parliament felt it was important to create an independent office and not leave the matter in the hands of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. That's what I read in the documents from the time of the late Mr. Mulroney, whom I was lucky enough to meet once. He was a man who may have made mistakes in his life, but he really served the country well.

Back then, the role was assigned to the ethics committee. It was like a zoo. It really wasn't appropriate or respectful. It was not the right way to provide the public with relevant information. The point of this exercise is not to crush an adversary. I think we're all in agreement that we don't do it to crush anyone. The purpose of the Office of the Commissioner is to reassure the public, that is to say Canadians and Quebeckers, that everything is done properly. When there's a breach of the rules, then it has to be dealt with. There is obviously a whole range of consequences that can be imposed.

In this case, there was no follow-up. Not just once, not just twice, but three times the commissioner found that the allegations and accusations—

• (1710)

[English]

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

We still don't have the language of the motion in our emails, and I'm wondering if that's being sent.

**The Chair:** The clerk is working on it right now. It's a very simple motion, but we're going to send it out to members of the committee now.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Is it true, Mr. Chair, that we don't have the translation of the motion?

**The Chair:** The clerk has translated the motion. I have it in front of me, and that's what's going to be distributed to members.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Okay. As it happens, I too like to see things in writing. Sometimes we miss things when we hear something verbally. I think we can wait until we can get the motion in writing.

[English]

Can I ask that we suspend until we get it in writing?

**The Chair:** It's being delivered right now. It's very simple.

Go ahead.

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** Okay. It's coming in to the phone. It's a good thing I had the charger.

Thank you so much, Anthony.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Have you received the motion?

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** I have.

[English]

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** [Inaudible—Editor]

**The Chair:** No. We're continuing.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan:** I want to reassure my fellow citizens that in this matter of text messages and Purolator and all that, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner said on three occasions that Minister Boissonnault was telling the truth about the incident and how things unfolded. The Commissioner feels that the file is closed; he agrees with Minister Boissonnault. I think this shows the wisdom of the parliamentarians who put forward the bill to create an independent commissioner. They got it right.

I imagine that some parliamentarians are frustrated and would like us to go back to a kangaroo court. In a kangaroo court, random people ask questions, judge and decide whether or not to convict the person. In a just society, that is not how things work. The laws and regulations in place are not designed to protect members of Parliament.

Mr. Chair, I don't know if you've experienced this, but when we receive an email or a request from an office because information was missing from our statement, it can be annoying, but at the same time we're happy to see that the system is working as it should. I am pleased to be able to assure my constituents that the system is working.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Shanahan.

[*English*]

I will say that, like you, I get asked many times—I know you brought this up at the onset of your remarks—about the ethics committee, and, particularly in chairing the ethics committee, “What's the function of the committee?”

Well, we have a clear mandate of what our function is, but I tell people in my riding, as you tell people in your riding, that it's an oversight committee. There is a majority of opposition members on this committee for a reason—that's true not just for this committee, but for government operations and public accounts—and that is to hold the government to account. I think we do that job very well.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead, please, on the motion from Mr. Barrett.

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

I think Ms. Shanahan made a lot of excellent points. I'll be brief. I will speak to three reasons as to why I cannot support this motion.

The first is with respect to timing. As you have indicated many times, Chair, our work on social media and on disinformation and misinformation has been quite prolonged because of the timing, because of the scheduling, and you've clearly outlined that. I don't agree with this motion, because I think we've heard from the Ethics

Commissioner on three occasions that there is no violation based on our rules of conduct from the Ethics Commissioner. I will leave that be.

The second reason is with respect to witnesses. There aren't any listed on this motion. It seems again as though this is just broadening the scope to the point where it could be anything and everything, which doesn't help the work this committee is doing. It makes us less efficient. It makes us basically waste resources of the House.

Also, as you said, Chair, one purpose of this committee is to provide that oversight. This motion does not help in achieving that purpose.

The last is with respect to the purpose. We're not achieving our purpose, what this committee is supposed to be doing, with this motion.

With that, I will conclude my remarks and say that I will be voting against this motion, and I'm happy to go to a vote now.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Khalid.

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

• (1720)

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** MP Khalid just said basically everything that I was planning to say. I'm not interested in supporting this motion.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

I do not have any other hands. The motion moved by Mr. Barrett is on the floor. Do we have consensus on the motion proposed by Mr. Barrett?

We don't, so I'm going to call the vote.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** The motion fails. I don't see any other business, so I am going to adjourn the meeting. We'll see you all next Tuesday.

The meeting is adjourned.





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