



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

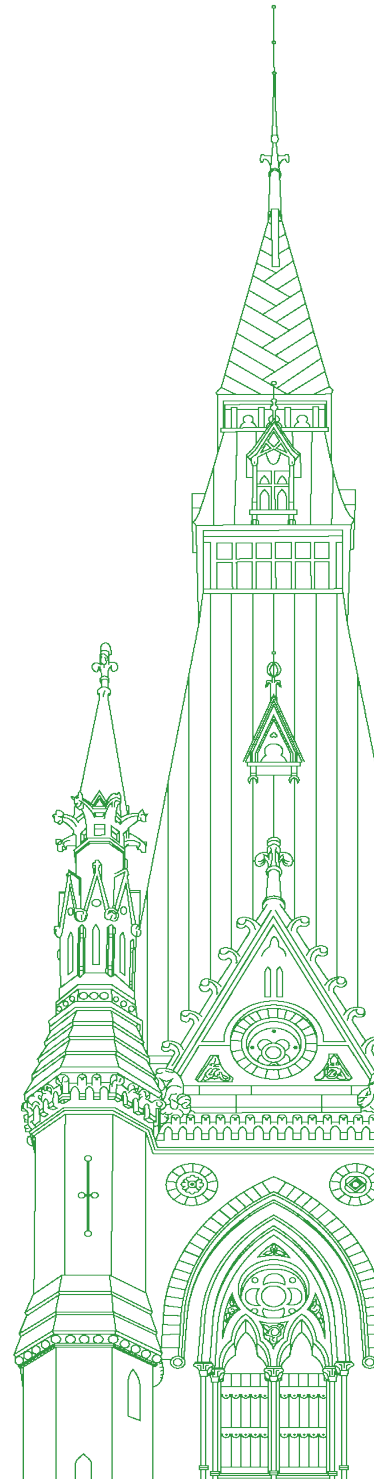
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 040

Tuesday, October 6, 2026

Chair: Chris Bittle



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 40 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), the committee is meeting for an update on the implementation of the foreign influence transparency registry.

Today's meeting is taking place in public in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely on the Zoom application.

I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, especially our interpreters.

As per normal, if you want to speak, please raise your hand. The clerk and I will do our best to manage the speaking list.

All comments should be addressed through the chair.

I would now like to welcome our witness for today's meeting. From the Office of the Foreign Influence Commissioner of Canada, we have Anton Boegman, the foreign influence transparency commissioner. Mr. Boegman will have five minutes to deliver opening remarks, and then we'll proceed with rounds of questions with members.

Mr. Boegman, you have five minutes.

Anton Boegman (Foreign Influence Transparency Commissioner, Office of the Foreign Influence Commissioner of Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

It is my pleasure to appear before this committee to speak about the implementation of the registry of foreign influence activities. On August 4, 2026, I was formally appointed as Canada's first foreign influence transparency commissioner.

In this role, I am responsible for overseeing the administration of the transparency model established under the Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act. I maintain a public registry and provide guidance to people and organizations whose activities may fall within the scope of the act. I promote public awareness

and understanding of the new framework and its requirements, and I engage constructively with stakeholders, including communities, civil society and all levels of government, to better understand the issues. When necessary, I will carry out investigations and enforce compliance with the act, which should also act to deter non-compliant actors, and I will report publicly on the activities of the office on compliance and on emerging issues.

[Translation]

The registry provides Canadians with a clear and accessible tool to see who is acting with a foreign principal to influence political or governmental processes in Canada, as well as the details of their activities. The arrangements on the registry are transparent and comply with the act.

The registry makes this information available so that Canadians can better understand who is seeking to influence Canada's civic and democratic institutions and processes and how it is being done.

[English]

The act requires individuals or organizations to provide information to my office when they enter into an arrangement with a foreign principal that involves activities intended to influence a Canadian political or governmental process. They must register with us within 14 days of entering into an arrangement. If the arrangement existed before August 4, 2026, and continued after, they had until October 3 to submit their registration. Submissions are published in the registry after they've been reviewed and validated.

During the first two months, my office has focused on establishing effective processes in supporting stakeholder understanding of the act and in promoting compliance through outreach and guidance. I conducted several interviews with national media and have been implementing an engagement strategy that includes broad outreach to stakeholders through targeted email campaigns and public webinars. As an example, I delivered a focused engagement session for the academic sector with over 300 attendees.

[Translation]

We met with universities, government relations firms, international consular groups, industry associations and diaspora organizations. We've also worked with provincial and territorial governments as well as election agencies.

My office will continue to meet with stakeholders, promote awareness of the act and support understanding and compliance throughout the implementation process.

We continue to receive submissions as individuals and organizations assess their obligations under the act and determine whether registration requirements apply to their activities.

• (1105)

[English]

The registry is central to the administration of the act, and the development of a more robust registry that can better meet long-term business requirements continues to advance. This long-term solution remains a key organizational priority and will be critical to supporting the office's future operational requirements.

By registering their arrangements, individuals and organizations demonstrate their commitment to operating openly and transparently. The registry, the transparency requirements and public reporting on compliance and enforcement will also serve to deter those who may want to undertake influence activities in a covert fashion. Transparency in foreign influence activities supports legitimate advocacy, public debate and international co-operation. Providing Canadians with accessible information about certain foreign influence activities promotes openness and helps strengthen confidence in Canada's democratic institutions and processes.

I believe my office has made a positive start in implementing the mandate and is currently planning and preparing for the extensive work still to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to questions. We'll turn to Mr. Cooper of the Conservatives for six minutes, please.

Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Boegman.

The registration deadline for individuals and entities with pre-existing arrangements with a foreign principal was October 3. Is that correct?

Anton Boegman: That is correct, yes.

Michael Cooper: Okay, so it's October 6. The deadline has passed. When I pulled up the public registry online, there are two filings listed: one of an individual who did work for the U.S. state department, whose work has now concluded, and only one filing involving an active individual, namely an honorary consul for the Republic of Korea.

It's pretty obvious, isn't it, Mr. Boegman, that that doesn't even begin to scratch the surface of persons and entities who are acting on behalf of a foreign principal for political or governmental processes? Is that fair?

Anton Boegman: Yes. I would like to explain that the registration deadline was on the third. Like many registration deadlines, people leave it to the last minute. Over the weekend, we received over 30 submissions to the registry. Prior to those being published,

we, of course, must validate and confirm the information on them, to make sure the registration meets the requirements of the act and to make sure the information is accurate. Upon completion of that, it will be published.

Michael Cooper: Do you have any idea of how many persons or entities should be registering?

Anton Boegman: At this time, I don't have an idea of the different persons or entities across Canada who should be registering. The act is very specific in terms of... While the breadth is there, and it applies to—

Michael Cooper: With the greatest respect, how is it possible that you don't have the faintest idea of the number of persons and entities who should be registered? I didn't ask for a specific number. I asked for a ballpark number. How do you not know that?

Anton Boegman: I have an idea of who the participants in the debates that are covered by the legislation are. We have an understanding of activities that are happening in different sectors. There is certainly not a measure across Canada of the exact number, but we do have an understanding of the numbers that are there, and we have an understanding, based on assessments that have been done, prior to the registry going live—

Michael Cooper: What would that number be?

Anton Boegman: The expectation is that the number of registrants could exceed 1,000 registrants.

Michael Cooper: You're at 30 right now, who have applied to register.

Anton Boegman: After two months, yes, we're at 30.

Michael Cooper: We're actually two years into this, and there are only 30, out of a potential 1,000.

You were appointed on August 4. In an interview in August, you indicated that you had not yet been briefed by CSIS. Have you since been briefed by CSIS?

Anton Boegman: I have, yes.

Michael Cooper: Okay.

On the registry's website, the registry provides Canadians with a clear and accessible tool to see who is engaging in foreign influence and the nature of their activities. A foreign influence transparency registry means sunlight, transparency. Do you not see it as a problem when only 30 submissions have been made out of a potential list of 1,000 people who are engaging with political actors and public office holders on behalf of foreign governments, and they're not listed?

• (1110)

Anton Boegman: This is a brand new registry. The requirements are brand new. Our focus has been on reaching out and communicating with industries, with sectors and with individuals and organizations who may have a registration requirement. That's certainly what the focus is right now. As the information becomes better known, as individuals understand more about the registry, I expect that the number of registrants will increase.

Michael Cooper: Okay.

Your office receives potentially sensitive information from persons who are the subject of surveillance by hostile foreign states, including the P.R.C. Why does your office not have an encrypted channel set up for persons who may be the target of hostile foreign states to be able to securely communicate with your office and register?

Anton Boegman: We're currently working on having an encrypted channel set up.

Michael Cooper: I spoke with Dr. Charles Burton, a China expert and retired former diplomat. He met with you. He met with your deputy, Mélanie Thériault. He indicated that in that meeting, Madame Thériault said that the matter had been considered and a decision had initially been made not to go ahead with setting up an encrypted channel. Why was that decision initially made?

Anton Boegman: I believe that decision was initially made because there are other encrypted channels available for people to use to report information to the government, whether that be through CSIS or through the RCMP. However, since being appointed commissioner, I have made it a priority of our office to set up an encrypted channel dedicated to the Office of the Foreign Influence Transparency Commissioner.

Michael Cooper: When is that channel going to be up and running?

Anton Boegman: I don't have a firm estimate yet on that date, but it is something that I am interested in getting in place as soon as possible.

The Chair: You're right at six minutes. Thank you so much.

We will turn to Ms. Vandenberg, please, for six minutes.

Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

First of all, congratulations on your appointment. I don't think we have to tell you how important the role is to decision-makers, to keeping Canadians safe and to transparency.

You of course mentioned that you're communicating with people who may need to register. I think there may be some misunderstanding out there about what kinds of entities or persons need to register in this registry. It's not necessarily nefarious actors.

Could you talk to us a bit about the types of people who would register and how you're reaching out to them to make sure they understand their requirements?

Anton Boegman: While the act is quite broad, it applies to influence activities across all governments in Canada right now: municipal, federal, provincial and territorial. It is intended to also apply to indigenous governments. That has yet to be brought into effect.

It's also quite narrow in terms of the specific activities. An individual organization has to have an arrangement with a foreign principal. That arrangement has to undertake some influence activities, which could include communicating with a public office holder, communicating to the public or providing items of value. Also, then, they have to be targeted to a Canadian political or government process, so that needs to be a specific process, not kind of broadly.

Really, it's been trying to reach out to any sector that may have a requirement to register, whether that's the legal sector or the indus-

trial sector. In academia, there are a lot of partnerships. It's also with non-governmental organizations that have agreements with other countries.

It's really to ensure that they know what the specific requirements are that would trigger a registration. There are a lot of exchanges that happen that do not require registration. It's only if the influence activities are done in association with or under the direction of a foreign principal and it's targeting a specific governmental or political process.

Anita Vandenberg: We know that in some countries that are leaning more toward authoritarianism, they use laws that they call "foreign registries", but in fact, these are laws that attempt to silence civil society groups. If there's, for instance, international development funding or funding to NGOs or organizations that are working toward human rights or democracy, they're calling these foreign agents just because they get foreign funding. This is a completely different thing from what this registry is.

If somebody is working in a non-profit sector to fight for human rights and they happen to get funding from another government overseas, that entity would not be subject to the regulation here.

• (1115)

Anton Boegman: The law is intended as a transparency mechanism. It's intended as a mechanism whereby, if the criteria that I've already highlighted are met, registration would be required. I would view it as akin to the lobbying registry in terms of the activities that meet the specific requirements of my legislation.

It's not intended to restrict people's activities. Being on the registry should be seen as a positive thing for someone who's interested and wanting to act in accordance with the law and wanting to be transparent about their activities. It's not meant to be seen as someone has done something wrong or someone is doing activities that are not considered acceptable.

On the flip side, I will say that if a registration should have taken place and it hasn't taken place and we need to do a compliance activity, then that will be highlighting where registration should have happened but didn't.

Anita Vandenberg: Do you have teeth? What kinds of tools do you have if there is non-compliance?

Anton Boegman: I have a range of monetary penalties that I can administer myself, as well as what I'll call more facilitation-type tools. I can do compliance agreements. I can do compliance letters to people. The initial focus is really on facilitating that compliance, because it's a brand new model. There are brand new requirements, and I would rather work with people to facilitate compliance.

If required, however, there are teeth in the legislation. I have a range of penalties—between \$250 and \$1 million—that can be administered monetarily. There's also a provision for, perhaps, more serious cases. I can refer those instances to the RCMP, under the law. The RCMP would investigate those. This would be carried out as a criminal investigation, and there would be penalties—potentially jail time on conviction or a penalty of \$5 million.

Anita Vandenbeld: At this stage, most of your work, I would imagine, is to alert people who may need to comply and to try to make sure they are within the requirements. There's probably not a lot of that other side of it, at the moment.

Anton Boegman: Up until the deadline on October 3, and certainly for pre-existing arrangements, everybody was onside. The deadline had not passed. Now that the deadline has passed, we're in a better position to examine the registrations we've received and to think about where, perhaps, we should have received a registration and didn't.

The big focus, and it's critically important for me, is on people being aware of the rules. It's that people are aware of the registry, that they're aware of the types of activities that require registration if undertaken, that they know how to register on the list and know how to contact the office if they have questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Boegman, for being here. We really appreciate it.

I would like to continue in the same vein as Ms. Vandenbeld, but perhaps by addressing the issues a little differently.

I would like to talk about the exclusions set out in section 3 of the act. On the list, there is indeed a fairly large number of entities whose arrangements are not subject to a registration requirement.

Ultimately, I wonder whom it applies to once all the exceptions have been removed. Do we not risk missing some blind spots by excluding all members of Parliament and the legislatures of all provinces and territories, public administrations, Crown corporations and organizations?

Ultimately, isn't everyone excluded from the act's application?

Anton Boegman: Thank you for the question.

The act states that there are a few exclusions because in a functioning government, activities are already transparent. If there is a mission to another country to potentially set up a plant, share information or make other arrangements, it's already transparent. There is no need to register in that case. In addition, when diplomatic representatives act within the scope of their diplomatic duties, and do so transparently, there is no need for them to register.

However, for all other situations that are not part of the government's responsibilities and operations, there is an obligation to register. Registration is required if there is an arrangement with a foreign principal, if there are influence activities and if a government or political process is targeted.

• (1120)

Christine Normandin: I understand the idea of not covering what falls under normal, official relationships, but isn't there a risk that normal, official relationships will be used to conceal influence activity and exclude people from the registry's application?

Anton Boegman: Yes, that could happen. One of my responsibilities is to look at how the act has been implemented. If I find situations or opportunities to improve the act to close any gaps, I can report to Parliament with recommendations for the future.

Christine Normandin: You actually made a good segue into my next question, which concerns the report to Parliament or the report to a committee.

Section 31 provides that a committee must examine the act following a general election. The last one was in April 2025, but section 31 was not yet in force.

Do I understand correctly that only after the next general election would there be a review, potentially by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, of the legislation on the registry?

Anton Boegman: I think so. It will be after the next election. However, I have an opportunity to submit a report to Parliament before that if I find things that I think would be important for parliamentarians to see.

Christine Normandin: Given that the act took two years to come into force and there were a lot of delays, wouldn't it be appropriate for us to take the initiative to summon you sooner than the act provides to testify on the registry's implementation and effectiveness?

Anton Boegman: Yes, maybe. That said, I was not the commissioner before August 4. I had a contract with Public Safety Canada to help find office employees, but I had no official authority before that.

Christine Normandin: I would like to follow up on a question from Mr. Cooper about the fact that there are few entries on the registry at the moment. At our last meeting, you told me that that you were agnostic in your way of assessing different countries or sources of influence.

Do you think this approach is still appropriate, given the low registration rate?

Anton Boegman: Yes, I think it's a good approach. As I said, the act and its application cover a wide range of activities and sectors, but it's specific. If an activity meets all three conditions, meaning that there is an arrangement, that it concerns influence activities and that a political process is targeted, registration is required.

However, it's important to look at this for all processes in the provinces and territories, and also for federal processes.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll turn to Mr. Cooper for five minutes, please.

• (1125)

Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Boegman, in answer to a question I asked in the previous round, you stated that you estimate that 1,000 persons and entities are subject to registration. I would note that Public Safety's analysis for the draft regulations estimated that 2,422 persons and entities would be subject to registration, including 872 individuals and 1,550 businesses. Public Safety estimated 2,422. You've said 1,000. Why is there a difference?

Anton Boegman: I stand corrected. The Public Safety numbers were the basis on which we were going.

Michael Cooper: You weren't even in the ballpark. You said 1,000 out of 2,400. You didn't get the numbers even close.

Anton Boegman: I stand corrected.

Michael Cooper: Okay. It certainly doesn't exactly instill confidence, I would submit.

I was going to say that there was a 3% compliance rate. Based upon Public Safety numbers, there's a 1% compliance rate, and in answer to a question posed by Ms. Normandin, you said you're satisfied with everything and it's good. Shouldn't alarm bells be going off with a compliance rate of 1%?

Anton Boegman: I think that, if you look at the estimates that were done, my understanding is that the estimates show a range of registrations that may be required over the course of a registration period, not instantaneously, not all at once. There are different political and government processes—

Michael Cooper: But 1%? Thirty out of a potential 2,422 based on Public Safety's numbers is not even coming close to scratching the surface.

I just want to be clear that if you are acting on behalf of a foreign principal to engage in political or governmental processes and are subject to registration, that's not an option, is it?

Anton Boegman: It's not an option.

Michael Cooper: It's not an option, and if you don't, you're breaking the law, aren't you?

Anton Boegman: If you don't, you're breaking the law, yes.

Michael Cooper: What steps is your office taking to enforce the law?

Anton Boegman: As I said, we are looking at the registration requirements. We are looking at those registration submissions that come in. We are working with partners to identify potential instances where registration should be—

Michael Cooper: You may be doing a lot of looking, but you're not doing a lot of acting.

Anton Boegman: The registration deadline was October 3. Prior to that—

Michael Cooper: Are you in the process of issuing any notices of violation?

Anton Boegman: Not currently, no.

Michael Cooper: Are you in the process of opening any investigations?

Anton Boegman: We have not yet reviewed fully all of the information that was received over the weekend.

Michael Cooper: You've just explained you've taken zero steps. You're not even in the process of taking steps to enforce the law.

Do I have that right?

Anton Boegman: No. We are taking steps to enforce the law. However, we have not yet commenced any work on that side. The registration deadline recently passed, and we're currently looking at all the registration submissions that we have seen. We're currently validating those, and we are currently determining whether we need to take any additional steps.

Michael Cooper: In short, you've done nothing with 1%, but, as you said to Ms. Normandin, you're satisfied with that.

Now I want to turn to another matter, and that is the privacy breach that your office committed in relation to retired diplomat and prominent China expert, Dr. Charles Burton.

Dr. Burton submitted a submission to register, and when your office replied, the reply was sent not to Dr. Burton but to a third party and, as a consequence, disclosed personal information of Dr. Burton's that was intended for your office. It constituted a privacy breach, did it not?

Anton Boegman: That's correct.

Michael Cooper: Okay.

Dr. Burton has been targeted by the Beijing regime. He has been told by CSIS that his encrypted communications are being monitored and have been monitored since 2012. He was detained in 2018 by Beijing's ministry of state security, the same ministry, by the way, that the Carney government has entered into a law enforcement co-operation agreement with, as surreal as that is. Dr. Burton is the target of Beijing's transnational repression activities, and his information, which was in the care of your office, was recklessly leaked to a third party.

Given that, how can other Canadians who want to register and are the targets of hostile foreign states have any confidence that your office will properly safeguard their personal information?

• (1130)

The Chair: Give a very quick answer, please.

Anton Boegman: Protecting personal information is, of course, a priority for the office. The information in the leak regarding Mr. Burton was a misdirected email. It had information related to the registration number. No other personal details were contained in it. Of course, it should not have happened.

Michael Cooper: How many other emails have been sent to a third party?

The Chair: We are over time. Thank you so much.

We'll go to Ms. Mingarelli for five minutes.

Giovanna Mingarelli (Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us today, Mr. Boegman.

We often assume foreign interference targets elections, but strategic sectors, such as agri-tech, may be equally valuable targets.

Is Canada's new registry designed to expose those activities, or will it largely depend on the voluntary co-operation of the very actors it seeks to monitor?

Anton Boegman: The mandate is broad. The registry is designed to be activity-focused, not country- or sector-specific. If there are activities in any of these sectors that meet the requirements of the law, then the individuals or entities who are doing the influence activities on behalf of the foreign principal would need to register. That would happen in agribusiness, it would happen in other business sectors, it would happen in procurement and it would happen in academia. Our focus has been to identify sectors and sector organizations so we can work with them to make sure those sectors are aware of what the registration obligations are.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Your mandate is also to increase transparency around foreign influence activities.

What specific indicators will you use to demonstrate that the registry is deterring foreign influence rather than simply making it more visible?

Anton Boegman: The main deterrent, of course, is the enforcement provisions in the legislation. This would be the ability to issue administrative monetary penalties, the ability to have more serious transgressions referred to the RCMP, and the public nature of that. All compliance actions will be disclosed and put up on our website, which will have the names and details of these types of activities. That tool is intended to have a deterrent effect, so individuals who may want to do so in a covert fashion may think twice about doing that.

In terms of measures around deterrence, certainly reporting on compliance activities would be a key measure for how deterrence is effected in the system.

Giovanna Mingarelli: If those who are most likely to register are already acting transparently, how will your office identify and expose foreign influence activities carried out by individuals or organizations that choose not to comply?

Anton Boegman: We have partnerships with other agencies that are in the national security space. We're able to receive information from them. The act allows for quite broad sharing of information, both to our office when it relates to our mandate, as well as from our office to other law enforcement agencies where it may relate to their mandate. We do have the ability to share that information.

We also have our own internal resources, which are mainly looking at activities that are available through open source—through the media or through other sources like that. We anticipate that we will hear about that through relationships with our partners.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you so much.

That completes my questions.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[Translation]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Christine Normandin: Thank you.

There is a finding that came out of the Australian experience with the registry: The more authoritarian a foreign government is, the more it tends to add layers of complexity so that we can't see what the real sources of influence are. That led, in some cases, to a situation where the arrangements listed were generally low-impact arrangements.

We talked about the quantitative aspect, the number of registrations, but I'd like to hear you talk about the qualitative aspect. Is there a risk that there will be more low-influence arrangements registered and that it will seem like a good number, while more significant ones are downgraded?

Also, do you analyze the level of influence for all the arrangements that are listed and those that should be listed?

• (1135)

Anton Boegman: Yes, I think there's a risk that entries on the registry involve activities that aren't very significant, but we need everything to be registered. It's important to know where the entries are, in what sectors and what types of influence activities there are. It is also important to know whether we will have to do other things to detect activities that may be more significant.

Christine Normandin: Isn't this form of relationship assessment less than agnostic? Should your office focus more on arrangements that have a greater influence by analyzing them beforehand and trying to force registration more?

Anton Boegman: Maybe it should, maybe it shouldn't. It's hard to know right now, because the regime is new and there aren't a lot of registrations yet. Once we've had a chance to raise awareness about the rules, we may be able to do so.

Christine Normandin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes, please.

Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Boegman, for being here today.

I want to go back to the 2,422 number that was indicated in the draft regulations by Public Safety Canada. That's a very precise number, which tells me that there's a list.

Has that list been shared with you?

Anton Boegman: There is no list. The number was developed through a business case analysis, looking at types of organizations and types of things that happen.

Blaine Calkins: You're telling me, then, that it was just a guess, and 2,422 is just a random number developed by an analytic process.

Anton Boegman: It was an estimate developed on the parameters of the business case.

Blaine Calkins: Well, that business case would have had the parameters in it that would include individuals and organizations. That's how we got the number. There are, in fact, people, organizations and entities that Public Safety is aware of.

Do you have any interest in what that analysis uncovered and who those individuals might be, or those organizations? It's an estimate of things—material people and entities. It's not just a random number. If you're going to figure out why people aren't complying, wouldn't that be a great place to start?

Anton Boegman: A list has not been shared with me. I do not believe there is a list out there.

Blaine Calkins: I'm not sure what kind of convoluted logic is used to not find any value in an analysis done by Public Safety Canada that came up with 2,422—a very precise number—individuals and entities that ought to be registered on the list. You have no interest in how Public Safety used that criteria or what kinds of individuals or entities would be included to get to that number.

I find that shocking.

Anton Boegman: I have read the report. I've read the analysis that came with the introduction of the legislation and the analysis that came with the introduction of the regulations. I reviewed how the numbers were determined.

The numbers are an estimate based on the types of activities that take place. The numbers do not represent specific actions by individuals or organizations to influence political and government processes in Canada.

Blaine Calkins: You indicated that you have some more applications that came in at the deadline. Even if all those applications were vetted and found to be eligible to be placed on the foreign agent registry, we're still well short of anything that even remotely resembles 2,422. Also, ironically, it doesn't appear that anybody or any entity is from China. At least, this committee has no such knowledge.

The whole debate about whether or not we needed this registry was in large part due to the foreign interference studies conducted by this committee and others on interference by the P.R.C. in Canada's elections and domestic affairs, yet there doesn't appear to be anybody on the list from the People's Republic of China or the government in Beijing.

I'm wondering if you have any concerns about that.

• (1140)

Anton Boegman: As I said, the registry speaks to specific requirements for someone to be put on the list. It's not in general.

Blaine Calkins: Okay. Would somebody engaged in national security conversations between Canada and China be exempt from that list?

Anton Boegman: The exemptions in the list refer to someone working as part of official government business—as part of a government activity.

Blaine Calkins: In the 2025 election, the Prime Minister said that the biggest threat to Canadians' national security was the P.R.C. Then, in January of this year, he entered into a security dialogue with the P.R.C.

Does that exempt the P.R.C. representatives in that dialogue from being on the list?

Anton Boegman: The list is not a registry of foreign agents. The list is a registry of transparent activities. The list has exclusions in it that are part of the model. One of the exclusions is for governments acting in their official capacity, doing official business.

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Blaine Calkins: There's a change in the Prime Minister's tone from 2025 to January 2026 when it comes to the P.R.C.

I'm wondering if that change of tone has anything to do with this registry.

The Chair: That was longer than five seconds, but we will have more time for another round of questions.

We will go to Madame Brière.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us. Congratulations on your appointment.

[Translation]

Do you think that publishing certain information in the registry could have the opposite effect of what is intended and jeopardize Canadians' trust?

Anton Boegman: I don't think so. The purpose of the act is to increase transparency with respect to certain arrangements with a foreign principal. The law does not regulate political opinions or limit participation in a debate. It is simply a tool to increase transparency regarding certain arrangements involving an individual, an organization, a private citizen or a foreign principal concerning influence activities.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Going back a few months, can you tell us what indicators we should look at to measure the effectiveness of the registry in future?

Anton Boegman: Obviously, the number of submissions is a first indicator. There's also the number of questions we received. We received more than 130 questions from individuals about the registry and the registration process. Those may be two measures. That said, we are in the process of developing a strategic plan that will include a number of indicators and measures as to the effectiveness of the system and the regime.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Still on the topic of indicators, since you took office, have you realized that other elements should be included on the list of things you will have to track to ensure the registry's effectiveness?

• (1145)

Anton Boegman: It's true that in future we will obviously have more information and will know more in order to determine the best indicators. If there are opportunities to add other measures, that's something we should do.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Yesterday was an election day in Quebec. During the election campaign, information circulated that raised doubts about possible foreign interference. I don't know how far you can go on this issue, but my question is broader.

Have you and your office put in place coordination mechanisms with provincial electoral authorities, such as Elections Quebec, in order to intervene quickly before the democratic process can be affected?

Anton Boegman: We have good relationships with election agencies. I attended a conference in July where I introduced the act, its specifics and the opportunities to collaborate with all election agencies in Canada. We've had a number of conversations. In areas where we have overlapping mandates, we have to establish ways to provide information if necessary.

I think that, if necessary, we have an opportunity to intervene. Under the act, there is a 14-day period between the start of an arrangement and the deadline for registration. It's a short period of time. It falls entirely within an election period.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: How does it work—

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We'll have time for another round of questions.

We'll give five minutes to the Conservatives, five minutes to the Liberals and another two and a half minutes to the Bloc, and then we'll call it a meeting.

We'll turn to Mr. Cooper for five minutes.

I will be unusually strict on timing for this last round.

Thank you.

Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Boegman, there was a privacy breach in regard to the personal information of Dr. Burton. How many other emails have been sent to third parties in error from your office?

Anton Boegman: There have been zero.

Michael Cooper: Have there been any other privacy breaches that you're aware of?

Anton Boegman: Yes. We published information on the registry two weeks ago. That included some information that should not have been on the registry. We pulled the registration off the registry. We examined why that happened.

Michael Cooper: Is that the filing involving a P.R.C. principal?

Anton Boegman: That's correct. Yes.

Michael Cooper: That is actually inconsistent, by the way, with what your office said. Your office, according to a Bureau article, said that due to technical issues, it had been taken down and would not be put back up until those technical issues are resolved. What your office was quoted as saying versus what you're saying here today are inconsistent.

Anton Boegman: I don't believe so.

The reason the incorrect information was displayed on the registry was some technical limitations on the current registry system. We are working to make the necessary fixes to the technology, and the information will be republished when it's possible.

Michael Cooper: Will that filing be republished?

• (1150)

Anton Boegman: Yes.

Michael Cooper: Okay. Thank you for that.

Speaking of technical issues, there have been a lot of technical glitches and problems with the registry. Isn't that fair?

Anton Boegman: There have been a number of technical problems with the registry. Yes.

Michael Cooper: You bet there have been.

Following the registry's privacy breach of Dr. Burton's personal information, a telephone call with Dr. Burton was scheduled to discuss the breach. That call did not happen due to a "major technical outage" that prevented officers from accessing the system and reaching Dr. Burton. Is that correct?

Anton Boegman: I believe so, yes.

Michael Cooper: Your office didn't have the capability of making a telephone call.

That's not the only "technical outage" that occurred. During the week of September 7, an online information session about the registry was scheduled. Dr. Burton and several Chinese diaspora democracy activists were blocked from the information session. Is that correct?

Anton Boegman: I would not say that they were blocked.

Michael Cooper: Well, what do you call it when they attempted to access the session and received a message stating, "Sorry, but you do not have access to this event"? That's called being blocked.

It's another glitch and another screw-up. Is that right?

Anton Boegman: There have been a number of technical issues, as you have highlighted. Whenever technology is used to facilitate communications, there is a risk that there can be an issue.

Michael Cooper: Mr. Boegman, there was, as you acknowledged, another glitch involving none other than someone who's connected to a P.R.C. principal. It's been weeks since that filing was removed from your website, a website that's supposed to be transparent in providing Canadians with information about who's acting on behalf of foreign governments.

I will note that, according to Public Safety's analysis, the estimated cost for the IT system at the registry is \$29.41 million. Is this what \$29.41 million of tax dollars gets Canadians, a completely botched IT system?

Anton Boegman: The current system that we are using for the registry is called the MVP. The MVP stands not for the most valuable player but for the minimum viable product. It was a system that was put in place to enable the registry to be launched on August 4. It is built on existing systems that are at play. It's also reliant on manual processes—

Michael Cooper: You can't even make a phone call. You can't even set up a conference call. Have you thought about calling in GC Strategies?

Anton Boegman: No.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will now turn to Madam Kayabaga for five minutes, please.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I would like to start by thanking Mr. Boegman for returning to our committee. It's always very useful for us to have these dialogues. Thank you for being available to do that.

Commissioner, you're now just over two months into the implementation of the registry. From your perspective, how has the roll-out gone so far, and what have you learned in the last two months?

Anton Boegman: From my perspective, I believe that it has been a positive launch of the registry. In particular, I have been pleased with the outreach that we have been able to conduct and the different industry groups and associations that we have met with to explain the registry and the requirements.

We've published a wide range of guidance documents and are working on more to help inform people on what their requirements are and how the registry interacts with those sectors. That's been, I think, quite effective. We're going to continue to do more of those.

I'll be honest. One of the things we have found is that there was a plan to have everything ready for the launch. My military background has told me that no plan survives initial contact, and there are things that we have not found out until we've actually tried to do things. That has resulted in some challenges, but we are working diligently to rectify any issues that we see and to make sure that the registry functions as it should.

There have been some technical challenges. Those have been, I would say, government-wide in terms of inaccessibility of systems. Unfortunately, it happened when we had some activities scheduled, but we have been able to make up that opportunity and reschedule those activities for the stakeholders that want to be there.

We are now moving into the next phase, where we will be looking at any compliance and enforcement activities following the deadline on October 3. That's going to be a key focus of the office going forward, as well as supporting individuals who are looking to register on the registry.

• (1155)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: That is reasonable, given that it's been two months.

Anton Boegman: That's right.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: One of the challenges with a new regime is making sure that everyone understands how it actually works and when they have an obligation to register. What are the most common areas of confusion that you're seeing from individuals or organizations when it comes to registering?

Anton Boegman: I think the biggest one is not understanding the specificity of the legislation: In having a meeting with someone from a foreign country or doing typical international exchanges and engagements, do I need to register for those? Of course, the answer is no. If you're just exchanging information and ideas, of course international engagement can take place. It's only if the three triggers on the requirement to register apply that registration is needed. I think it's just a misunderstanding of what those are. That is something that we've seen.

As well, the registry is intended as a key transparency mechanism. It's one tool. It's an additional tool, but there are many other tools that deal with foreign interference writ large: the responsibilities of CSIS, the RCMP, the Communications Security Establishment and others. Not necessarily understanding the role of our mandate and the Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act and what that means, but conflating the work we do with the work of the other agencies is another area where there has been some confusion. Each agency has its own responsibilities and its own levers. Ours is about transparency of activities, whereas other agencies have their own levers.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: For a system of this magnitude and given the importance of the different collaborations that are happening, how long would you say that it would take you to see the registry begin to eventually lose some of the glitches? Two months is clearly not enough, but....

Anton Boegman: I'm very hopeful. I think it will be in the near future. We have staffed some key positions. We now have a permanent manager of the registry. I have both of my deputy commissioner positions filled. There have been some transitory staff in place, and now we have a more permanent team. Part of that, then, is that we have the ability to really drill down and make sure the processes are robust.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will now turn to Madame Normandin.

[Translation]

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Christine Normandin: Thank you.

Mr. Boegman, you mentioned that there was no list for the 2,422 entities that were reported by Public Safety Canada, but that it was more a business case analysis based on criteria.

Do you know which criteria were used?

Anton Boegman: I don't have the specific criteria, but from what I understand, we looked at the other systems in Australia, the United States and England to see how many entities were on their lists. That's one indicator. I think we also looked at all the activities in various sectors, such as the defence sector, the legal sector and the academic sector. We need to know what the types of arrangements are. We got a percentage. We have criteria or a method for determining that the number is 2,400.

Christine Normandin: Okay, 2,400 is a lot. You mentioned that you didn't have a proactive approach to encouraging people to register. I imagine you can't register 2,400 entities at once. You can't approach them all at once. However, it might be a good idea to target those with the highest risk of influence.

Would knowledge of these criteria and better co-operation with the other international bodies that also have registries be useful in determining who should register sooner than others?

● (1200)

Anton Boegman: Yes. We've had initial conversations with other countries to better understand how their lists work and to see if there are lessons for us. That's something we'll have to do another time.

Christine Normandin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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