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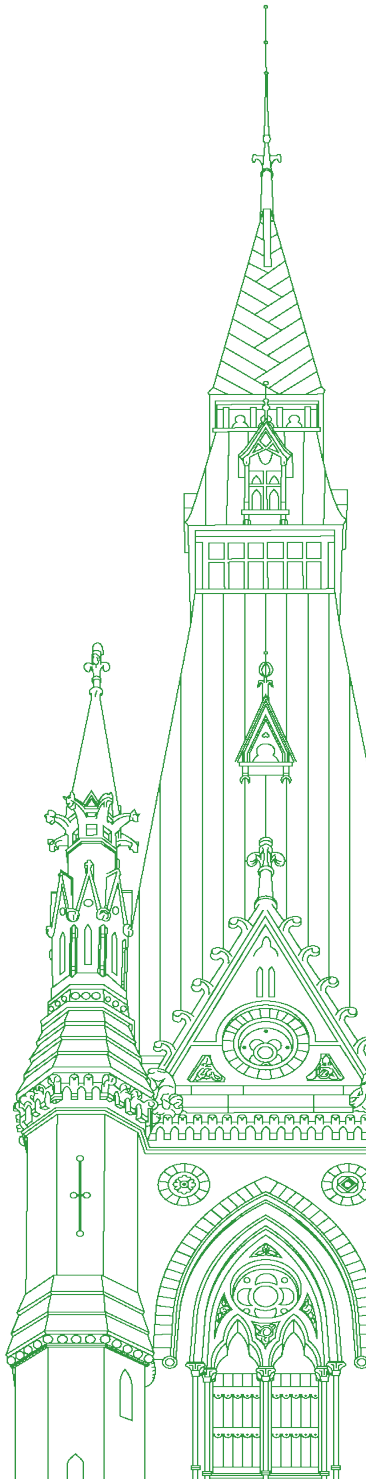
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Chair: Chris Bittle

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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● (1100)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 44 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), the committee is meeting to resume its study of artificial intelligence and Canada's democratic institutions.

Today's meeting is taking place in public, in a hybrid format.

Before I continue, I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents, as well as to protect the health and safety of all participants, especially our interpreters. I'd like to remind the witnesses that committee members may ask questions in either English or French. If you need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel you need in advance, in order to take full advantage of the time allotted for questions.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members.

All comments should be addressed through the chair. Whether you're in the room or on Zoom, raise your hand. The clerk and I will do our best to manage the speaking list.

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses.

We have Dr. Catherine Régis, full professor, Université de Montréal, by video conference; Dr. Semra Sevi, professor, University of Toronto; and Angus Lockhart, senior policy analyst, The Dais, Toronto Metropolitan University.

We will now go to Mr. Lockhart for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Angus Lockhart (Senior Policy Analyst, The Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University): Mr. Chair, vice-chairs and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today as part of your study on artificial intelligence in Canada's democratic institutions.

My name is Angus Lockhart, and I am a senior policy analyst at The Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University, a public policy and leadership think tank working at the intersection of technology, education and democracy.

Since 2019, The Dais has been conducting the annual survey of online harms, the longest-running longitudinal study of the online ecosystem in Canada. In that time, we have seen how AI is further contributing to the erosion of the civic information commons in Canada.

Our findings highlight three key trends in this environment.

First, exposure to and belief in misinformation are increasing. Sixty-one per cent of Canadians encounter false information monthly, and 38% see it multiple times a week. Crucially, Canadians are not just encountering misinformation. Only 16% of respondents are able to confidently identify whether common misinformation statements seen online are true.

Second, Canadians are increasingly seeing deepfakes on social platforms, with 50% reporting exposure monthly. However, when asked to recall specific examples, only 23% spontaneously cite synthetic images, audio or video involving Canadian political figures. Celebrities and American political figures represent a significant portion of the deepfake content that Canadians are seeing online today. At the same time, trust in AI entities like OpenAI to act in the best interest of the public sits at rock bottom, alongside exceptionally low trust in major social platforms, such as Facebook, X and TikTok.

Third, regarding policy solutions for synthetic content, our research on labelling shows that Canadians want clarity. Eighty per cent support mandatory labelling for AI-generated political content. However, in a survey experiment we conducted in 2025, we found that current platform disclaimers—the small notices above or below posts—are ineffective. Users are no more likely to prefer them to no labelling at all. Instead, they prefer content acknowledging provenance to be hidden behind a screen until they click through.

Understanding the threat is only half the battle. At The Dais, we are actively testing and scaling interventions to build resilience. In particular, we have worked with large Canadian employers, labour unions and libraries to develop asynchronous learning modules that can help build both civic and digital literacy. To date, these modules cover misinformation and disinformation, generative AI, deepfakes and core Canadian democratic principles. This not only builds resilience across the general public but also offers a model for training government workers and public servants.

To address these challenges, we recommend three policy solutions across the information supply and demand sides.

One, legislate mandatory AI labelling. Enact clear, enforceable labelling standards for AI-generated political communications, ad campaigns and election-related content, moving beyond ineffective platform disclaimers.

Two, invest in digital and AI literacy to equip Canadians. Scale public education to build resilience against misinformation, disinformation and deepfakes. This should build on the Dais's model of working with employers, unions and libraries, while also supporting mandatory AI and cybersecurity training for parliamentarians and staff.

Three, rebuild the journalism ecosystem. Support high-quality independent reporting, including addressing the availability and distribution of verified news across social platforms so that Canadians have access to trustworthy news to inform their democratic participation.

Thank you again for prioritizing this vital subject. I welcome your questions and look forward to this discussion.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Dr. Sevi, please proceed.

Dr. Semra Sevi (Professor, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me.

Let me start with what we already know. AI chatbots can change people's minds. Because they are cheap and can hold millions of conversations at once, they are already being used widely by citizens looking for information and by those who want to persuade them.

This is a fast-growing field. For the past four years or so, my colleagues and I have studied it in different countries and settings around two main questions. The first one is, can AI help citizens become better informed? The second question is, can AI change what they believe? Today I'll briefly share three of those studies and then three suggestions that I have. We have much more work under way. I would be happy to share those results as they come in.

The first work we did was around informing voters. Working with colleagues at Columbia University, we built a chatbot that explains where the parties stand, using the parties' platforms and official voter guides. We tested it with young Americans who don't identify with any party. After one short conversation with the AI chatbot, they were much better at knowing where the parties stood on particular issues, but they did not change their views on how they evaluated the parties or the leaders. Information seemed to work here, but it didn't sway where the individuals stood about those parties. We are currently extending the study in Canada.

The second project is on changing attitudes. In this study, we built another chatbot that had a brief conversation with Americans about transgender rights. Support went up right away after the conversation they had, but much of that change faded within a week, when we went back to the respondents. Therefore, one conversation might not last to reduce prejudice, but repeated conversations, which AI makes easy to do, might. That's exactly what we're doing in follow-up studies in both Canada and the United States.

In a third study we did here in Canada more recently, Canadians told a chatbot about issues they cared about at the time we did the study. These issues varied. They included things like housing, the cost of living, immigration and American tariffs on Canada. The chatbot then tried to either strengthen or weaken the views of the respondent. Overall, our findings are consistent with the notion that AI chatbots are very good at persuasion for Canadian voters as well. There may be differences in how strong these effects are, depending on the direction of the persuasion. This pattern seems to hold in other countries as well. We're currently investigating why this is the case.

Other researchers have taken this step a bit further. Basically, they've looked at what people actually do. After a short conversation with AI, people were much more likely to sign a real petition. They did this not because the information was new but because the chatbot asked them if they would sign a petition.

How are people using these tools today in the real world, outside an environment in which they know they are part of a survey or an experiment? Data shared by the company that is behind the Claude chatbot recently gave us a first look at this. In the United States, only a small share of conversations are about politics. Almost no one asks the chatbot, “How should I vote in this election?” That's probably good news.

Most people use these tools like smarter search engines. They can be a good thing, especially given the fact that local news is starting to disappear in some places and voters are not getting local information about the candidates in their riding. However, the answers are only as good as the sources behind them. Some partisan groups are already creating websites that look like local news in the hope that search engines and chatbots will treat them as real.

That brings me to the three suggestions I have. The first is to make official information easy for AI to find. Elections Canada and the parties here should publish candidate and party platform information in a form that chatbots can use directly so that answers come from trusted sources.

● (1110)

The second is to tell voters when AI is involved. Ads, messages and chatbots used by campaigns or third parties should be clearly labelled.

The third is to keep watching and help Canadians spot persuasion. This could be in the form of funding independent testing of what chatbots tell voters during elections or investing in public education. We know from research that when people know they are being persuaded—

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to cut you off as you're over time. You can bring out the rest of the information through the questions that come through.

We will now go online to Dr. Régis, please, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Catherine Régis (Full Professor, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Good morning.

I'm a law professor at the Université de Montréal and a researcher at Mila, the Quebec Artificial Intelligence Institute. I'm also the director of social innovation and international policy at the Institut de valorisation des données, or IVADO, a Canadian consortium for research, training and knowledge translation in artificial intelligence. I am also the co-director of the Canadian Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute research program at CIFAR, the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research.

All of my professional and research activities have led me to the following conclusion: Artificial intelligence can serve our democracy, but it also puts it at significant risk. We need to act quickly to keep it from eroding. However, this issue is part of a worrying global trend. Autocracies now outnumber democracies. They make up 74% of the world's population, with only 7% of people living in a liberal democracy. Canada must therefore act and build alliances with other democracies to give the actions it takes on artificial intelligence greater reach.

You've already heard about the risks that artificial intelligence poses to information integrity, including amplified and striking deepfakes, microtargeting, manipulation, incorrect electoral information given by artificial intelligence chatbots and, ultimately, increasing difficulty to tell what is real and what is fake in our society. Democracy cannot function without the protection of information integrity, which requires action to be taken on several fronts.

In addition, I would insist on addressing a risk that is less frequently discussed, namely, artificial intelligence's impact on the effective democratic participation of certain groups of people, starting with women. Women make up 99% of the victims of non-consensual sexual deepfakes. This violence, and other types of violence involving degrading content, discredits them and discourages them from engaging in politics and the public sphere. The harm doesn't only impact these women. It also affects the vitality and strength of our democracy.

I propose two potential solutions.

First, we need to clarify our expectations on the responsible use of artificial intelligence in our democratic processes and enshrine them in law when necessary.

In Quebec, during this year's election campaign, an initiative led by researchers, IVADO and the Montreal International Center of Expertise in Artificial Intelligence, led to the creation of the code of conduct for the responsible use of artificial intelligence by Quebec political parties. That is great news for Quebec's democracy. Four main political parties signed it, including the party that formed the outgoing government and the one that forms the current government. For example, they committed to clearly identifying content generated by artificial intelligence and to training their staff on the principles of the code and on the risks artificial intelligence pose in electoral processes. Our analysis to date indicates that the parties respected the code during the election campaign. A similar commitment by the federal parties would be worth considering.

However, these voluntary commitments do not replace legislation. In terms of violence generated by artificial intelligence, Bill C-16, adopted in June, is an important step. It expands the offence of non-consensual distribution of intimate images to deepfakes. However, it still contains a flaw—as does federal Bill C-34, which addresses digital safety and is currently in its second reading—in that the image must be likely to be mistaken for a visual recording of the person. It is therefore enough for someone to place the victim in a clearly fictitious setting, the jungle for example, to evade the law. However, the work I am doing, in particular with Emma Kondrup, a doctoral student, and Professor Reihaneh Rabbany of McGill University, specifies that the harm stems from the image itself, not solely its realism. Victims report the same in their testimonies.

I therefore have three recommendations for the committee. First, the relevant criteria must focus on the person's consent to have their intimate image used, not the realism of that image. Next, the aim must be to prohibit the creation and solicitation of such images, not only their distribution. That is what the United Kingdom decided to do in 2025. Finally, victims must be given suitable and accessible means of recourse. A law that can be enforced builds trust in our democratic institutions.

Second, we must support socio-technical research to equip our democratic institutions with the tools they need.

We funded a tool through the Canadian Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute research program that helps courts detect falsified images and videos presented in court. Judges expressed that need. Other projects, such as CIPHER, are helping civil society organizations identify and counter disinformation campaigns and foreign interference. These research efforts must be supported over the long term and amplified, as they help our institutions and the actors at the heart of our democracy, while providing robust data to public decision-makers to enable them make the necessary decisions.

● (1115)

In closing, I would add that protecting our democratic institutions requires sustained moral and political effort, and urgently. Every gesture counts, whether legislative, educational, scientific, technical or collaborative, or even international leadership.

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's five minutes exactly. Thank you.

We'll turn to Mr. Calkins for six minutes, please.

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

I have questions for each of the witnesses.

If you can give me as brief an answer as possible, I would appreciate it.

At the speed at which artificial intelligence is growing and being used—whether through chatbots or agents—and from what we know from what's being published for the various creators of artificial intelligence.... The speed at which this is evolving is quickly outpacing the speed at which our democratic institutions can keep pace with it.

How would you suggest that we reorganize our democratic processes to keep pace with how we govern ourselves and with how we can govern AI at the same time?

Angus Lockhart: t's basically impossible to keep pace with the changing speed of AI if you want to set up formal institutions to do that. More important is making sure that the staff members behind those institutions are trained and up to date with what the technology is, what it does and what the risks are.

I would say that the key is making sure that we have proper training in place for everyone from parliamentarians to staff and anyone involved in these processes so that they know what to look for, what to avoid and how best to utilize the technology to promote democracy.

Dr. Semra Sevi: I agree with what was said. I would add that there should always be checks and balances. Having a human element involved at every stage would be very important.

Blaine Calkins: There should be a human in the loop.

Dr. Semra Sevi: Yes.

Dr. Catherine Régis: This is certainly a big challenge. The example that I gave about the code of conduct for the responsible use of AI by political parties in Quebec is an illustration of how we need to be creative to react rapidly to some challenges.

This code is not a law, but we were able to rapidly respond, with the agreement of the political parties, to define some norms. This is an example of how we need to adapt to the pace of AI to explore our normative tool box and enlarge it. This doesn't mean that we should give up from the legislative perspective. We should base our analysis on solid research and be able to react when we have the evidence and the proper information about the risk—which we now have.

Also, we have good examples of what is happening around the world right now. A few years ago, Canada was one of the leaders proposing the first kind of overarching AI legislation, but that didn't happen. Since then, many countries around the world have developed legislation and institutions to frame AI, to provide an adequate framework. We can learn a lot from that, and we have something to look at.

We also need to—

● (1120)

Blaine Calkins: I'm sorry to interrupt. I only have a limited amount of time. I'm looking for brief answers.

I'll go back to what you talked about, Mr. Lockhart—and Ms. Sevi as well—if I can expand on your answer.

You're talking about having a human in the loop. It depends on whom you believe, but theoretically, AI is going to replace most of the entry-level jobs when it comes to simple tasks. Those entry-level jobs eventually lead into people who have the ability to know whether AI is giving us good or valuable information.

If AI is the blocker for human professional development at the entry level, how are we going to have, in a couple of iterations of employees, the technical capability for that human in the loop to know if AI is doing what it's supposed to be doing?

Angus Lockhart: I don't have a good answer for that.

What we know from The Dais's research is that jobs, especially within the federal government, are very susceptible to either augmentation or automation from AI. It looks as though a large chunk of them are going to be automated in some way.

The best I can say is that we really need to focus on the ones that are going to be automated away so that we can make sure that we still have that kind of skill and knowledge. In terms of places in which AI is just augmenting tasks, we don't need to focus on them.

I also don't have an answer for why or how we could make sure to keep those skill sets.

Dr. Semra Sevi: AI can be a really good resource in helping different industries be more productive, but I still think that you need a human in the loop to oversee that information to make sure that things are being done properly.

We know very well from the research that has come out that AI can also hallucinate and make up a lot of things. To make sure that AI is following through with the tasks that it is being given, a human element needs to be involved.

Blaine Calkins: My issue isn't that we have a human in the loop but that we have a capable human in the loop. That is the crux of my question. I don't know if we have a good answer on that.

I appreciate the honesty, Mr. Lockhart, that you had in your answer, so I'll go back to you.

You've been a bit critical, and your organization has been a bit critical, of Canada's adoption of AI in both the private sector and the public sector. I think we're at best in the middle of the pack in the OECD.

This study is happening here. I don't think it's happening just willy-nilly. I think there are going to be changes in how we conduct ourselves here in the House of Commons, in our Parliament, and perhaps even through Elections Canada. Do we need to ramp up what we're doing? Where are we going to get the best bang for our buck?

Where should we be looking in the public sector? I'll leave the private sector to other committees. However, when it comes to the public sector and specifically here in the House of Commons, what can we realize that we are not realizing right now? What is some low-hanging fruit?

Angus Lockhart: I think that low-hanging fruit for the federal government means first keeping pace with workforce transitions. You're going to see a lot of employment in the federal government change very rapidly as some tasks are automated away. We need to make sure that job descriptions keep up with this, that roles keep up with it and that we're planning and making sure that we have the people who have the new skills needed, not the old skills. The federal government has a great opportunity to be a leader in AI adoption because there are so many places in which AI can either augment or automate tasks for public servants. Making sure that we're automating tasks away responsibly and that we're augmenting workers who still exist, as well as making sure that they're able to be more productive, is essential.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now go to Madame Mingarelli for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Régis, you said that artificial intelligence should be governed based on human rights and equity. At the same time, several countries are racing to develop and roll out artificial intelligence. What protective measures do you consider vital to prevent this technology from exacerbating existing inequalities within and between countries?

● (1125)

Catherine Régis: First of all, I don't think anyone is going to win the race to violate human rights. It's important to keep in mind that rights are our goal.

Canada has a long tradition of valuing human rights and must uphold this tradition when it comes to artificial intelligence. Different instruments are being used at the moment, including the Council of Europe's Framework Convention as well as European regulations, which have a strong human rights foundation.

Different requirements are in place now, to develop human rights impact assessment tools before rolling out artificial intelligence. We must use these tools. They are really the key to ensuring that this development benefits the entire population, not just a few companies or individuals. Let's keep that in sight. There are concrete examples that can help us.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you.

Let's continue along the same lines. You argued that artificial intelligence governance should favour an equitable distribution of its benefits among nations. In light of what you are hearing today, are we moving toward a more equitable artificial intelligence ecosystem or a world in which technological power is increasingly being concentrated in the hands of a small number of countries and companies?

Dr. Catherine Régis: Option 2 is the reality at the moment. I think we need to be clear-headed about it.

That said, in the current geopolitical context, different countries, including Canada, have a greater desire to create alliances between partners who have values aligned with democracy and human rights. It's precisely to become less dependent and increase its sovereignty and power in the ecosystem, knowing that we will never reach the level of China and the United States, of course.

I can tell you that there are people who are, very concretely, dedicating a lot of their work and their lives to ensuring that the benefits of artificial intelligence are shared more equitably worldwide, between countries and between individuals. There are efforts that deserve to be supported, especially at the UN. In fact, various Canadian actors are strongly supporting these efforts, and they need to be sustained so that everyone benefits. I think we can play a leadership role in Canada in this regard.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I'm now going to turn my questions to Dr. Sevi.

Your research suggests that conversational AI can reinforce existing political beliefs by increasing users' confidence in them. If AI makes citizens more certain of their views without making them better informed, should that be considered a democratic strength or a vulnerability?

Dr. Semra Sevi: That's a good question.

I wouldn't go so far as to say that it makes people more certain of their views.

In fact, the research we have, which is still a work in progress, shows that we can weaken their beliefs more than we can strengthen them. We can put doubt into what they believe in, and we can have them question it, but we're not finding strong evidence that we can make them even more hardened than they currently are.

This is a work in progress, and I'd be happy to share the results as we study this in more places, with bigger samples, as we move forward.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you.

Mr. Lockhart, Canada often frames AI adoption as an economic race. Is there a danger when countries treat AI primarily as competitive for either economic or technological reasons? Are there concerns that these could be obstacles to our democratic institutions, rather than supportive?

Angus Lockhart: Yes, we try to take a middle-ground view on AI adoption, so it's not just a question of being the leaders in the world on adoption rates but also a question of making sure that we're adopting it responsibly.

When we look at how Canada ranks globally, we're behind a lot of countries that are adopting it responsibly. There's pretty clearly room for faster-paced adoption in Canada without going overboard.

When you look at the longer-term race to see how far we should go in adopting AI, there is still a very important question on when it is actually valuable to adopt and it is going to increase productivity and improve the lives of Canadians, versus when it is going to harm the lives of Canadians or harm democracy.

● (1130)

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you.

Do you think there is value in increasing the requirements for governments to legislate verifiable claims—basically, the verification of AI-generated content—to prevent abuse?

Angus Lockhart: We don't necessarily have research into whether governments should or should not verify the accuracy of AI-generated claims. What's important to us, and what we've seen, is that people in Canada want to know if what they're seeing is AI-generated, regardless of whether it's true. They want to know whether a human or a computer wrote it in the first place.

When it comes to that, we think it's pretty important to make sure that when people are consuming information online they know where it came from. Deciding on whether to label content as true or false is a different question.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Is that a risk—

The Chair: I'm sorry. You're right at six minutes.

Giovanna Mingarelli: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

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

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you to all the witnesses.

Professor Régis, I'll start with you. I would like to hear a little more about the code of conduct signed by political parties in Quebec. I would like you to give us examples of what it contained with regard to another question, namely how the code of conduct could be turned into legislation. Personally, I see some pitfalls: I imagine that it cannot be done mutatis mutandis, that you can't take the code of conduct and turn it into a law. I imagine that there are issues that are more a matter of good faith and that cannot be measured quantitatively in a legislative sense. There may also be matters of the different levels of government to address, which could prevent certain aspects from being coercive. There is also the issue of monitoring. This might not allow us to determine compliance or non-compliance with the code. I would like to hear you talk more broadly about the code of conduct and how to turn it into a law.

Dr. Catherine Régis: That's perfect.

Before giving you some concrete examples, I would point out that there were four main principles underlying the code of conduct. Among other things, the parties agreed not to use artificial intelligence in a way that would unnecessarily make their colleagues look bad. In addition, they had to identify, with suitable labelling, if they used artificial intelligence. Also, in the event of a major, fierce attack on the electoral process or certain candidates, they agreed to come together to denounce this behaviour and report it to the appropriate authorities. They also committed to training their staff—which IVADO helped with—particularly on the principles of the code, and also on the challenges that could arise, including the risks artificial intelligence pose in electoral processes. So it's really broad. It also has elements concerning privacy, good governance, transparency and more.

The interesting thing is that this code also allowed us to document things. It was viewed as a major first in an election held in the generative artificial intelligence era. We were committed to documenting what would happen during the election campaign based on the principles of the code and to draw up a review. For example, were there any instances in which the principles were violated? What, in particular, did we see emerge? This review shows us where we stand. What does it all mean? What's happening in Quebec? What does it mean, too, for all the other governments across Canada? We're still working on this review, because we gathered a lot of information. I think that we will learn from this and it will help us make legislative recommendations. This can be in Quebec as much as at the federal level.

We're building this knowledge, developing expertise based on a swift response to a challenge. It might eventually lead us to propose suitable legislative changes that may vary, depending on the level of government.

I think that was one of the strategies of the code, and I hope that we will use it.

Christine Normandin: I now have a question for you, Mr. Lockhart, about the issue of labelling content generated by artificial intelligence.

I would like to hear your thoughts about the form that could take. I suppose from a qualitative standpoint, there's a difference between a text that's edited or translated using artificial intelligence and a text generated by artificial intelligence completely.

What type of labels should be assigned so people can tell what has been created with artificial intelligence? Or should that simply be done in a binary way, such as “I used artificial intelligence” and “I didn't use artificial intelligence”?

[*English*]

Angus Lockhart: That's a really difficult question. When we're talking about labelling AI-generated content, typically what we're talking about is content posted to social media. Right now posts are labelled in a binary way, and you'll see that on most social platforms: Either above or below the content it'll tell you, “This post contains AI.” That is actually very misleading. If you're on TikTok, and someone uses AI to generate a voice on TikTok even though it's their own text, it will label it as AI-generated, and there's no way to know whether the text was written or done by a person.

I'm not proposing any specific standard for how to label AI. I think that we should set expected outcomes, and then these tech platforms that have the resources to do it should be expected to go out and test different methods of labelling AI to see what's effective, what gives people the information they need to know and leaves people well informed about the content they read.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Ms. Sevi, you said that fortunately, not many people are using artificial intelligence to determine who to vote for. I take that to be good news. However, I would like to hear your opinion on trends, particularly where we're heading and perhaps what needs to be monitored.

Have you seen any progress on this type of issue? Are you more worried about some trends than what a snapshot of the current situation shows?

[*English*]

Dr. Semra Sevi: Yes, that's a great question. It's too early to talk about trends because a lot of this research has been done by different researchers deploying different types of chatbots during elections and seeing whether they can convince voters one way or another. The bigger question is this: How many people are actually using chatbots in this way? We don't really see a lot in this area. We currently have something in the field right now, during the American mid-term elections, and we'll be able to answer that question.

The good news, as you pointed out as well, is that not a lot of people are going to the chatbot and saying, “Who should I vote for?” Rather, they're asking questions like, “Where can I vote?” They're more technical types of questions, and people find that more acceptable than asking a chatbot to give them recommendations on exactly who to vote for.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have Mr. Caputo, for five minutes, please.

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

[*Translation*]

Thank you witnesses, for being here.

[*English*]

I'm going to continue in English, unfortunately. I'm working on my French a little.

I'm not generally a member of this committee, so I didn't anticipate intervening, but I'm going to take the opportunity to do so while I'm here. I'm going to ask about two very specific areas, and if this isn't within your expertise, that's fine, and I'll throw it back to my colleague, MP Calkins.

I'm the critic for public safety, and I see a lot about Canada Border Services Agency and immigration in that, so there are two areas I'm hoping to get your opinions on, please.

The first is about AI in corrections. Right now, there's a thought about using AI, when it comes to federal corrections, to prepare reports, streamlining the process so that a human being doesn't actually write the report: They'll compile the information, and it's likely to spit out some sort of boilerplate information. I'd like to get your opinion on that.

The other one—and this is probably more of an issue, and it touches on MP Rempel Garner's portfolio—is the use of AI for granting visas to people who are hoping to visit Canada. I don't know if a lot of people know this, but AI is used in this regard. I'd like to get your thoughts on that. Should it be a blanket policy? Should we be very selective, given the emergence of AI? I invite your comments on that. Thank you.

Angus Lockhart: I would say that this probably is, relatively, outside our scope of expertise. However, when we talk about AI adoption, one thing we see is that the place it's adopted quickest is the place that has the highest tolerance for risk, places in which incorrect decisions have the lowest potential for negative consequences. I imagine that, in the example of corrections or visas, we would call both of those higher-risk areas, so we'd want to be more cautious about bringing the technology in.

Frank Caputo: Can I follow up on that, Mr. Lockhart?

That's a very interesting thought. I don't know about anybody else, but visas are an area of tremendous risk, in my view. Somebody is asking to come into the country, and you are essentially opening the door for them.

A member of the IRGC, during the World Cup, was granted a visa and came in on the plane. CBSA rightly said, "You are a member of a designated terrorist organization", and turned that person away. They caught it. They did their job. We don't know how the visa was issued. We don't necessarily know how it came to be known.

You made such a good point about risk. My concern is that the stakes are really high because, once somebody is here, it's very difficult to remove them. When the risk is so high, are we in a place yet when it comes to AI and its ability wherein we should be taking those risks on something that's so material to our public safety?

● (1140)

Angus Lockhart: I don't think I can speak any more specifically about it. It seems to be an area in which someone is going to have to make a judgment call, and I think that's true about all cases in which we adopt AI. People have to make the decision.

Frank Caputo: That's fair enough. Thank you.

Blaine Calkins: I'll take over with the remaining time, which is one minute.

I have a general question. How can we improve AI literacy in a way that doesn't require a whole lot of government bureaucracy and legislation or even a lot of government cost? Do you guys have any idea how we would do that?

Dr. Semra Sevi: We know from existing research that folks are more resistant to persuasion if they know that they are being persuaded. If we can show voters and Canadians what persuasion looks like, they can watch out for it more than if we just let them do as they normally do.

Blaine Calkins: We've already heard testimony today that 74% of the world's countries are autocracies. Some of these countries aren't necessarily our democratic friends in our democratic western civilization or the society that we have here, so how do we make sure that some of these other actors aren't interfering in our decision-making processes here at home?

The Chair: That was an exceptional question, but unfortunately, we are over time. I don't think it's even fair to say "a brief answer", because that was a very good question that I hope you will come back to answer.

I'm sure you will have much more opportunity to ask that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brière, you have five minutes, please.

[*English*]

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

Welcome to our three witnesses.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Régis, it's always a pleasure to welcome folks from Université de Sherbrooke.

I read your policy brief entitled "Governing with artificial intelligence: a new artificial intelligence implementation blueprint for policymakers" keenly. A lot of it is focused on institutional capacity, the fact that artificial intelligence should not be a shortcut to reforming government, and the need to identify our weaknesses and current dysfunctions so that artificial intelligence does not amplify them.

I would like you to speak to that a little bit. I'm looking for concrete options because that's the goal of this study. We want to see how we can use artificial intelligence within the government machinery, from a technology standpoint—because you've said that the focus should be on institutional capacity and not on technology—and training for our public servants and for all of us.

Dr. Catherine Régis: Thank you very much for your question.

The argument is as follows: If we don't diagnose the current issues in the public service or in government more broadly and deploy artificial intelligence, we are going to automate existing problems, but on a bigger scale and at a faster speed.

We have to do this work. We cannot skip the work without understanding what we want to improve, what will work well and what we want to automate in that machinery. The diagnosis has to be defined accordingly in order to use artificial intelligence responsibly.

I honestly believe in that, and all the experts who provided input for the policy brief said they believe in that too. At one point or another, it's going to become an issue. If the government or the public service doesn't use artificial intelligence and yet artificial intelligence is used in other parts of society, this is going to create an issue of trust and credibility. That is what we're proposing.

Among its recommendations, the policy brief emphasizes the importance of drawing on public servants' expertise rather than excluding them from the process. We need to understand and build on their experience, identify what they have achieved, and pinpoint major weaknesses and areas for improvement. This is one of several ways to develop a clear diagnosis of the current situation before moving on to automation.

Nevertheless, allow me to quickly draw your attention to an emerging issue. People are increasingly using artificial intelligence to fill out forms and request a range of things from the public service. This quickly increases pressure on government. There is an example from England, among other places, where a so-called chatbot was created to assist fill out certain property tax applications. This led to a 400% increase in volume for government.

That should be anticipated. People may exercise their rights more actively and make greater demands. However, how should the government respond if it cannot address those demands? This is a complex issue that raises a number of challenges and calls for a technical and human response, among other measures. We may need to review the criteria for accepting these applications to reflect proportionality.

People often judge the health of democracy by their access to these services. If the government cannot anticipate and respond to this surge in demand, that will also be problematic.

● (1145)

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: I have the impression that this diagnosis may require the use of artificial intelligence. It's kind of like a loop.

Dr. Catherine Régis: That is one of the solutions.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: The city of Granby established a partnership with IVADO to launch a municipal laboratory. Do you think something similar should be expanded to other municipalities? Do you think the ensuing findings can be replicated by other levels of government?

Catherine Régis: The answer is yes.

Obviously, that concerns my team, so, yes, I believe that can be done. Réjean Roy and I have worked on that project extensively at IVADO.

I strongly believe in the use of these practices that increase understanding and scaling up. I think that's how we learn and gather valid, relevant data that can help us develop broader principles.

Obviously, changes will be required based on the size of cities, realities and procurement systems. Those are some of the major challenges in this context.

So the answers to your questions are yes and yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: That was five minutes exactly. Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

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

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lockhart, in your remarks, you spoke to the need to rebuild journalism. However, I'd like to refer you to testimony from a witness before the committee who said that during the last election in Quebec, chatbots were almost exclusively based on generative artificial intelligence text to answer election-related queries, because journalists had, and rightly so, restricted chatbot access to their content. One of the reasons for that was intellectual property, because chatbots were generating content without paying royalties to journalists.

I would like you to tell us how we can legislate that. Supporting journalists through grants is one thing, but if artificial intelligence is understood to refer solely to generative artificial intelligence, then that's like trying to fit a round peg in a square hole.

Can you tell us how this can be done and if there are international models that can serve as examples?

[*English*]

Angus Lockhart: Right now, as Dr. Sevi has said, not many people are necessarily using artificial intelligence to get that kind of information. At least right now, it's not the largest issue. We see a bigger issue in that young people especially are very reliant on social media for their news, and that's a place where they can't necessarily get trustworthy information. At least in the short term, it seems more important to solve that issue and make sure that there is trustworthy news on social media.

In the longer term, there's a question of whether journalists and the AI companies can make agreements so that their information is available on AI chatbots, but journalists and news companies are also still getting appropriately compensated for their research and original work.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: The second part of my question is as follows: To your knowledge, are there any international models that we could learn from? By that I mean examples of countries that have forced web giants to take action.

[*English*]

Angus Lockhart: There are none that I know of.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: I've run out of time for a third question, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: The chair will remember that in the next round. I'll be generous during the next panel.

Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes, please.

Blaine Calkins: It's a common theme today.

I'll follow up on the question I was asking. We've seen that non-democratic countries, or agents from non-democratic countries, can affect Wikipedia pages by providing alternative information that discredits scientific research or calls into question all the information. AI is not programmed or coded. AI is trained. It's trained on data. One of the principles of anybody who's ever been a database administrator—I was one—is that garbage in equals garbage out.

How do we prevent foreign actors from using their version of the data and what they want AI to use in order to influence or run a psy-op on the citizens of our country? How do we prevent that? How do we know? It's one thing to say that it's generated by AI; it's another thing to say that this AI is premised on data that's no good. What can we do to clean up the data space? What should we have when it comes to tools or powers to look at the algorithms or anything that AI must be using?

We did have a piece of legislation before Parliament called AIDA, the artificial intelligence and data act. It basically died when Parliament was prorogued in 2025. All we really have now in Canada is a patchwork of regulations and strategies. We don't have an overarching legislative framework. What should we be doing about that?

I'll start with you, Mr. Lockhart.

● (1150)

Angus Lockhart: I don't have a good answer to that question. The Dais was quite supportive of the AI and data act, or at least the direction it was going in. Bringing in place a similar piece of legislation, or something that would work sort of in lockstep with what Europe has already done on the issue, would be a good step to move forward and be a way to do it relatively quickly and efficiently.

Dr. Semra Sevi: The AI answers are as good as the sources that go into them, as you said, so one way to tackle this would be to make good sources more accessible and available. A lot of the information we have from Elections Canada or about candidates or parties is not in a very accessible format. Make that more accessible so that AI can use it more easily.

Blaine Calkins: The government should be adopting a strategy of making at least all the information it publishes very readable, recognizable and learnable by AI. Is that right?

Dr. Semra Sevi: Sure. Make it more accessible.

Blaine Calkins: Madame Régis.

Dr. Catherine Régis: A lot of what you're referring to is about cybersecurity research as well. This absolutely needs to be a priority. We do a lot of that at the CAISI research program, which I co-direct, but we need more.

On the point you mentioned, from recent data and information that we've obtained, it's very easy to poison the data and kind of switch the direction of models and outputs. First, really invest in research. We're super good in Canada. Our claim to fame is being good at AI research, but we need to support this. This is important. We need to have strong legislation that prevents this kind of interference, but we also need to have protocols of collaboration with other countries. It often comes from other countries. An attack on one democracy is an attack on another. We need to be really strong in building this partnership and the capacity to react when an attack comes.

Blaine Calkins: I'll go back to Madame Sevi.

From your research, you were talking about changing public opinions. The research you're working on is about the power of persuasion and where artificial intelligence fits into the power of persuasion.

Based on the conversations we've had, looking at the sources of data and the ability of AI to generate accurate responses, what are the risks that we have right now in Canada when it comes to the public's being manipulated with false or misleading information? Where is the trend going when it comes to the use of persuasion either as a tool for good or as a tool for nefarious intent?

Dr. Semra Sevi: That's a good question. Persuasion can be used by different parties for different purposes. You can use it as a tool for good or as a tool for bad. We do find that people are persuaded by AI. Even if it's labelled as AI, people are still persuaded by the AI conversations. Part of the reason is probably that the AI has an ample amount of information and can tackle and tailor its responses to the respondent at a much faster speed than a regular individual would do. It can be used as a tool for threat, and I do think we need to be cautious about it.

Literacy is very important. Educating voters and Canadians on how persuasion is being done is important, because if they understand that it's persuasion, they are more likely to guard themselves than if they do not. AI labelling doesn't help in this area. We already have research that shows that even if you label a conversation as one that you're having with an AI, people are still persuaded by it.

● (1155)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll go to Mr. Caley for five minutes, please.

Braeden Caley (North Vancouver—Capilano, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the three extraordinary witnesses for all of your insights thus far. It's really fascinating.

I want to pick up on what Madame Normandin was asking Mr. Lockhart. That's exactly what I had wanted to start with today, so we can dive a little further into it.

The reflection from hearing some of what we're saying today, and my own from seeing campaigns, is that there is such a full spectrum of the kinds of content that campaigns, political leaders and political candidates can put out. People talk in the abstract about labelling video, but of course there's also audio, as in ads that would go on radio, and there are even simple images. In my home province of B.C., we just had a provincial election. The amount of AI-generated shareables people made and put out is probably in the thousands. Some platforms would mark it as “contains AI” and others would not.

Some of this is quite harmless perhaps, but, Mr. Lockhart, you touched on how there is a spectrum of how much AI is used in this. You talked about expected outcomes we might want to seek from the platforms themselves.

Do you have any sense of what those expected outcomes that we should maybe drive toward might look like?

Angus Lockhart: The biggest one for us is making sure people know whether content was created by AI. Whether there are downstream impacts of that.... We know that people, when they go online to consume information, want to know where it comes from, so we need the interventions and the tools that exist on those platforms to effectively do that. There's no evidence, at least that I know of, that platforms have made sure their current AI labelling approach does that.

Braeden Caley: As I hear that, though, I think that if you ask our constituents if they want to know whether something is made by AI, most people would intuitively say yes. In practice—in the legislative role we'll have in taking lessons from this committee—if you have a radio ad in an election campaign that uses a sound effect and makes the sound of a bell from AI, does it then need to have a seven-second thing that says AI was used in the production of this radio ad? It could get a bit silly at that point.

In your opinion, should we have a legislative framework that marks all content as AI? Will it stumble on things like that?

Angus Lockhart: In my personal opinion, you're exactly right.

Braeden Caley: We're lucky to have you here.

Angus Lockhart: Yes, there is a difference in things that are very minimally AI-generated. I don't find it super useful when I'm on a platform and it tells me the audio is AI-generated even if it was written by a person, but if I could know that the content or the visuals were AI-generated, then I would like to know that. The key is finding where the actual benefit is. Making sure that people know that the information or the content they see is AI-generated is much more important than knowing that sound effects are AI-generated, the lighting has been toned by AI or something like that.

Braeden Caley: Yes, we would need to, as a committee and as a society, think about how we delineate some of those things.

I'll change gears quickly.

How much time is left for me, Chair?

I have two minutes. Okay.

Ms. Sevi, you spoke to this a little, and so did Madame Régis: The ubiquity of chatbots—for lack of a better term—is now a reflection of mine. Think about Google, for instance. A search becomes a possible engagement with one. They can surround so much of our life at home, through the phone and the rest of it. In a democratic space, this matters a lot. Certainly, with that ubiquity, there could be a sole proprietor with a slant to their platform. X comes to mind. That proprietor commented very recently that, in his view, Quebec should separate and Alberta should separate.

When there is that ubiquity on these private platforms, how can we guarantee that the answers are...? We've almost assumed, in these discussions, that there will be a faithful, even answer to questions. While being mindful of the free speech implications of all this, how do we contend with it, as a democracy? What people might trust as a neutral arbiter could very well be deployed as a means of changing their mind, as you said.

● (1200)

Dr. Semra Sevi: It really depends. There are chatbots that are prompted to say they are neutral, but they're actually not. They're still trying to persuade you. There are chatbots that say they are meant to be persuasive, and then they persuade you. The research shows that even if you tell voters that the bots are neutral, they are still persuaded by them. If you tell them, “This is a persuading chatbot”, they're still persuaded by it.

These tools are very effective, but they're only as effective as the types of prompts you give them. Depending on the different types of prompts you give them, they can go in different directions. Prompting is just as important as what the output is.

Braeden Caley: I meant more—

The Chair: We are over time.

Braeden Caley: Are we done? Okay.

Thank you.

The Chair: I apologize.

Thank you to our witnesses.

We'll suspend for a few minutes as we go to the next panel.

● (1200)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1205)

The Chair: Welcome back.

Before we begin with our second panel, I understand there's a routine motion that has been circulated to the members and that there is unanimous consent to pass this motion.

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

The Chair: We will now go to our second panel, which I'd like to welcome.

From the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, we have Antoine Hersberger, vice-president, translation group. From OpenNWT, we have David Wasylciw, principal.

We will start with Mr. Hersberger for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Antoine Hersberger (Vice-President, Translation Group, Canadian Association of Professional Employees): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. My name is Antoine Hersberger, vice-president of the translation group, Canadian Association of Professional Employees, or CAPE. I am a translator by training and a member of our translation group, which represents approximately 800 translators, interpreters and terminologists working at the translation bureau.

I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for taking the time to hear from me today.

I would also like to thank the booth interpreters, Alena, Olivia and Charles, who are all CAPE members, and Jean-Pierre, who is our freelance colleague. These interpreters are ensuring that today's session is fully accessible in both official languages.

I am here to talk about the impact of artificial intelligence on translation and official languages, and by extension, on our democratic institutions. CAPE members play a vital role in ensuring that the work of Parliament as well as that of the public service, which implements the government's projects and priorities, is accessible in both official languages and compliant with the Official Languages Act.

To put my remarks into context, I wanted to start by talking about the use of artificial intelligence in translation. Translators have been using artificial intelligence on a daily basis for nearly 10 years. It is a useful tool that sometimes offers relevant suggestions and saves us from having to type as much. Combined with the full suite of language technology software that the average translator uses, it's an asset.

However, artificial intelligence is far from being a technological revolution in translation, and when we are promised that artificial intelligence will double or triple our speed, what we're actually being promised is that the quality and reliability of the translations produced will be sacrificed.

I want to emphasize the word “reliability” because the fundamental function of a translation is to convey information from one language to another. If we use an artificial intelligence tool to produce a text from another language that appears fluent and readable, but we cannot guarantee the reliability of the information it contains, we simply fail to fulfill the basic function of a translation. That's why we need to maintain the human element in the creation of a translation, even in the age of artificial intelligence. This is still the only way to ensure the reliability of texts produced.

Without that, we jeopardize the proper functioning of our democratic institutions since the transmission of information is fundamental to their operation. I would also add that since more than 90% of translations at the translation bureau are from English into French, compromising the quality of translation would have a disproportionate impact on francophones and on the substantive equality of official languages within our most prestigious democratic institutions.

However, in our view, the translation bureau's decisions in recent years are jeopardizing the expertise of its translators. Indeed, with the recent surge in interest in artificial intelligence, a new quality standard has emerged: “good enough”. We are extremely concerned about this trend toward lower quality standards, which comes against the backdrop of announced budget cuts of 25% over five years at the translation bureau.

The translation bureau claims that it can compensate for the staff shortage by using artificial intelligence and uses artificial intelligence as an excuse to increase the workload of translators without regard for the fact that artificial intelligence tools cannot keep up with the required pace. As I mentioned earlier, when you increase the workload without taking into account the actual impact of the technology, reliability suffers, and that is exactly what we are seeing with this decline in quality.

Settling for “good enough” in the language services provided to our democratic institutions would be catastrophic. Specifically, as members of parliament, you would risk having your remarks distorted or misunderstood, whether in Hansard or in committee transcripts. The English and French versions of the laws and regulations you wish to adopt might not match. Language is the primary working tool of democratic institutions. Sacrificing its reliability to save a minimal amount of money strikes us as extremely careless.

We believe that to ensure the proper functioning of our democratic institutions, artificial intelligence must be strictly overseen by qualified professionals at the translation bureau. The bureau should be provided with the necessary resources to innovate, by drawing on the experience of the hundreds of language professionals who work there, and ensure that the highest standards of quality and reliability are maintained within our democratic institutions and the federal public service. This is not only essential to the proper functioning of our institutions, but also to the equality of the official languages.

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to answer your questions.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

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

David Wasylciw (Principal, OpenNWT): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for having me here for this important study.

My name is David Wasylciw, and I live in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

Fifteen years ago, inspired by openparliament.ca, I started OpenNWT, a volunteer project focused on the Northwest Territories, publishing and improving the usability of public information, including Hansard debates, bills, votes, election results and all kinds of government information.

You've heard a great deal about sovereign AI and regulating AI. I strongly agree with the need for both. They're vital to Canada's future, and that kind of oversight is why you're here.

Last week, this committee asked how we can make sure AI draws on the information that is verified and true. That's what I will speak to: the information underneath any AI system, sovereign or not, regulated or not. Those systems are only as good as the information they're trained on.

Here's a small example to illustrate the point.

Earlier this month, I sent an ATIP to Library and Archives Canada for the results of a territorial by-election from the 1970s, when Canada ran our elections. The staff, who have been great, first replied that the details were online and sent me a link.

That link was to a page on OpenNWT, my website, but there was no form of any digital record, and that means this by-election effectively didn't exist digitally. It existed only in a box of thousands of pages waiting to be reviewed. Someone had treated a volunteer website to incomplete information as an alternative source for the official record because it turned up in a search and was easy to find. This is exactly what AI does every day, but on a very different scale.

The same thing happens with the legislation we publish. Search engines and AI tools often send people to OpenNWT instead of official sites. The pages say they're unofficial and the machines don't read that line—or care.

However, they are reading. In the last 30 days, OpenNWT has seen 42 million unique visitors. There are about 45,000 people in the Northwest Territories. There aren't anywhere close to that many real people who will ever be interested in the material we publish. Most of the visitors are machines collecting records to try to answer someone else's questions.

That said, it's not just machines that use our tools. In addition to members of the public, we see assembly staff, government employees and journalists all as regular users, because it's the easiest way to find what they need.

When our institutions make information available, there are often gaps, or they aren't in easy-to-understand formats. For example, ask a chatbot about legislation that's been passed but is not yet in force, or about previous acts, and you'll likely be confidently sent in a very wrong direction.

Parliament sets a high bar for our country when it comes to publishing, but Canadians don't live with just one parliament. Many of the decisions that impact people most often—like schools, health care and housing—are made in provincial and territorial legislatures. Many people don't even distinguish between levels of government. They just want an answer. More often, that means that they ask AI before they ask their MP or their MLA, but provincial and territorial assemblies do not have the same resources to invest in information publishing. These aren't gaps created by AI, but it has made those gaps much more significant.

It can be especially true in the north. Our legislatures are small; our communities are far apart, and much of our history isn't online. Some of it's only on paper and stored in a box on a shelf somewhere, but when the record is thin, AI doesn't say, “I don't know.” People get guesses written with confidence. It gets even more difficult when taking into account numerous official languages. For northerners, the answer about their own democracy is often the least reliable.

Right now, it seems as though our democratic institutions are like islands in a vast body of water: nearby, but not connected. Legislators need to work together across those islands to make sure we all do better. The U.K., for example, has developed a shared publishing and drafting legislation platform that's being extended across all the parliaments of the U.K. Our parliaments and assemblies share practices and procedures well, but they can do more when it comes to technology and information.

I'll leave you with three suggestions.

First, continue to make it clear that Parliament's records and Canada's laws are free to reuse. The committee could consider updates to the Speaker's permission for the AI era and encourage other legislatures to follow. Right now, copyright rules can leave careful people unsure, while others just take the records anyway.

Second, keep making information available in open formats, with context, including history and timelines, so that people and machines can understand what changed when. The historical record and context matter more than ever. It's what today's AI tools are often missing. Open records are how the public—and you—hold government to account.

Third, work with legislators across the country to strengthen democratic institutions through shared standards and shared tools. Otherwise, the problem compounds and misinformation perpetuates itself. The more blanks there are, the more the AI fills them in itself.

AI will keep changing. Used well, it can help Canadians find and understand our government and support the engagement and education that democracy depends on. We might not control the models, but we do control the records underneath them. I'd like Canadians to know that the information behind the answers they get is open, accurate and reliable.

Thank you. I'm happy to take your questions.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will turn to Mr. Calkins first, for six minutes, please.

Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Hersberger, you made a very passionate plea to the committee about the issues surrounding the translation services with the loss of human staff and the move towards using AI to help with the translation process. I can understand why you would be frustrated with this. The official languages commissioner has issued some warnings about this type of change.

You focused on having a human in the loop. You were probably in the room when I asked my questions last time, saying to the witnesses that if we don't have entry-level positions—because entry-level positions have been replaced by artificial intelligence agents, chatbots or whatever the case might be—pretty soon we will come to a point at which we won't have anybody in the loop who has any experience or any functional knowledge of how the systems they're overseeing actually work, because they won't have any ground-level, entry-level experience and didn't work their way up to that supervisory capacity the way we did pre-AI.

My question for you is this: Are you concerned that the government's not doing what it's supposed to be doing to ensure the integrity of the translation by having the right people in place to oversee what artificial intelligence is doing?

Antoine Hersberger: Thank you for the question. I will address it from the standpoint of the entry-level position and the fact that there's currently a hiring freeze across the board at the translation bureau while we're doing attrition. This means that we're losing people, often with decades of expertise, who don't have a chance to transmit that knowledge to new hires.

A translator would normally be hired in an entry-level position and would go through a very strict one- or two-year program in which every single word they translate is reviewed by an experienced translator. That's a crucial part of the transmission of knowledge, which we're currently losing with every departure and every new person who graduates from a translation program and does not get hired.

Blaine Calkins: I appreciate that.

You also intimated that the quality of the translation services could lead to egregious errors. In the context of what we do in Parliament, in our legislative assemblies and in municipalities across the country, not getting the translation right could be quite problematic.

Do you have any cases so far of egregious errors that haven't been caught by the human in the loop?

● (1220)

Antoine Hersberger: The issue is often that while we correct the errors that we see as translators as the humans in the loop, in a lot of cases we don't see the errors that are happening, because they're being done all across the federal public service by people using....

Blaine Calkins: So far, nothing has come back to you that you've missed.

Antoine Hersberger: A recent example that was in the media, which is not something that we saw from the translation bureau, is that during the last federal election campaign, the Prime Minister's website had translation errors from machine-based translation.

Blaine Calkins: Thank you.

I'm going to move to Mr. Wasylciw.

The point you're making is very valid, and it's my concern too. It's that we don't have enough data out there—enough verified data—for AI to be making informed choices.

I don't remember what the search engines were, but they used to return accuracy rates, such as “97% accurate”. They used to judge themselves on the accuracy of their responses. I don't see any of the chatbots using AI doing anything like that right now.

This is going back to a search. I don't know if it was DuckDuckGo. Whatever the case might be, when I was in the IT business 20-some years ago, I tended to use the nonconforming search engines. I used MetaCrawler and stuff like that. It isn't the Meta that exists today. MetaCrawler, I think, was the search engine that I used, and it used to give me those accuracy rates. We don't see that right now.

Is that something that would be useful? If AI told us, “I'm 20% confident in my answer”, would that be helpful?

David Wasylciw: Thank you for the question. Of course it would be useful if it judged the accuracy. However, what you're getting right now are very confident answers that are just wrong. If we're saying it has to judge its own confidence rate, while it would be useful, I don't know if there's a model or a way that we have to do that properly.

Blaine Calkins: Well, that's the question.

You talked about the fact that you were basically sent on a loop. AI sent your folks on a loop back to your own information. Is it broadly because we haven't digitized enough of our history? How much of our past is in boxes, papers, files, microfiche, whatever, that AI doesn't have access to?

At some point in time, we're going to have to make a decision that we're going to digitize some of this stuff and make it a matter of public record, accessible by AI.

What's that going to cost? What does that look like? What would that look like for the Northwest Territories?

David Wasylciw: That's a huge question.

The Chair: I'm sorry. The chair was a little negligent. We are well over six minutes. Next time, I'm willing to bet Blaine will have more opportunities to ask questions—my apologies.

We will now turn to Madame Kayabaga for six minutes, please.

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

In the same vein, around the collection of information, as my colleague MP Calkins mentioned, AI currently provides false information with confidence. As we look to use AI in Parliament, as you were suggesting we should, we see that we don't have the control of the data that AI provides. What does that look like for you? What are your thoughts on Parliament's using AI, knowing that it spews false information with confidence all the time?

I have a 17-year-old who uses AI, and I constantly tell him to double-check and never use AI unless.... If he doesn't have the information to begin with, he shouldn't be using it. Why should we use AI if we know that it produces false information confidently?

David Wasylciw: Thank you for the question.

There are more layers to it. Whether or not Parliaments are using it in operations is a bit of a different piece. There are certainly ways, but at the end of the day, people in the public are using it. My 20-year-old daughter is the same.

You pull up Google, and the first thing you get is an AI answer. Whether you want it or not, it's there. Often people click, follow and engage with it. That just happens. That's happening anyway. To combat that, one thing is making sure that information is available from Parliaments across the country.

What Canada often does with information is scan old records, and there are documents available. We don't add any context to it. We have legislation, but a lot of the AI bots don't understand time—that bill A was good at this point, that bill B is coming up or that these are changes. We're having to add that kind of information to it. There's a lot of good work being done in the U.K. around that at a government level, looking at legislation and how to make sure that the base information is there. One of the gaps that we have is making sure.... The only way to combat those wrong answers is to make sure we have the right information.

● (1225)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: I would agree with you on areas in which there's just a lack of information. For instance, I've seen AI provide the wrong information about elected officials. I can't come up with a question right now, but I think if you prompted, for instance, who was the youngest parliamentarian to do something, it might give you two or three people who are no longer elected. If you asked it to consider someone in a specific region for something—these are things that I've prompted AI to do before—and it listed multiple people who are no longer elected, who were elected in past years.... That record of who's elected in 2025 or 2026 is public knowledge.

I think AI is a bit lagged in how it collects information as well. How do we make sure that we are using it appropriately so that we don't mislead people to believe something that is not...?

I want to use AI. I already use it in some capacity, but I find that it lies to me often. I try to give it the right information so that next time we engage, it's kind of spewing what I want it to spew to me. In a context in which someone doesn't have that information, what happens then?

David Wasylciw: One thing that's happening is that you're getting institutions with their own AI chatbots. Parliaments might have their own. In Canada, there are some really good sources. CanLII has its own AI chatbot to search for legislation.

One of the next problems we're seeing is with specific chatbots. If Parliament sets up a chatbot that has information from Parliament, that's great, but people have to use it. It's great that we have very specific legislative ones and all kinds of different language models, but if the average person who pulls out their phone to ask a question doesn't get to it....

The practitioners and the people who are experts, like the folks in this room, would know how to find a good answer from a parliamentary system. The average person might not have that information and might not be inclined to find it.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: There's been a lot of conversation around watermarking AI. Lots of Canadians, including myself, want to know when we are engaging with AI. There's also been conversation around MPs who are using AI to write or generate speeches, whether there's some human component to it or not.

What are your suggestions around that? The understanding is that we are moving towards AI. There have been some very interesting interactions online around MPs using AI. I'd love to hear your thoughts on MPs' using AI to communicate and how much of a human component there should be versus how much AI there should be.

David Wasylciw: Thank you.

About 10 or 15 years ago in Germany, there was a bit of a scandal because there was an MP who essentially had researchers write their thesis for their master's degree. It got discovered by some media that they had submitted it to their school, and they got their degree. That was a problem at the time. That sort of thing happened even then, so it wasn't AI doing it, but somebody was finding a shortcut to do something. That's not uncommon, and there are lots of ways to do it.

One thing is to let people know. In the previous panel, there was a discussion about what counts as AI. If AI did your spell-check or if somebody used Grammarly, does that matter in the same way it would if I didn't write any of this speech and AI did it for me? It's a matter of finding that line and that threshold for MPs, especially in communicating with the public.

We recently had a municipal election, and there were a lot of news stories around candidates who used AI to generate campaign materials—photos or graphics—and that became a big deal. It got to the point that they're talking about legislating it now for the next election.

The Chair: Thank you so much. That was six minutes exactly.

Madame Normandin, you have six minutes. I'll give you the extra time in your next round.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the two witnesses for being here.

Most of my questions are for you, Mr. Hersberger.

My colleague Mr. Calkins started to talk about gaps and errors that had been generated because there was no human oversight in the loop. Estelle Côté Sroka from Radio-Canada for example, reported that “TB” for translation bureau was translated as “tuberculosis” and that the same word is used to translate “should” and “must”, which could pose significant legal risks.

I would like to hear your thoughts on the concerns this raises for you and the fact that people are increasingly using artificial intelligence without a human element being involved. What risk does that pose for democratic institutions?

As a follow-up, I would also like to ask you the following question: Given that journalists have sounded the alarm, have you been consulted on possible alternatives or, to your knowledge, have discussions about the artificial intelligence tool remained internal?

● (1230)

Antoine Hersberger: Yes, we are already seeing the consequences of using a tool. Those are very good examples, and I was about to cite them. They show what can happen when an artificial intelligence tool is used without human oversight. It results in very sloppy errors in meaning.

Indeed, what is concerning, from what we are seeing now, is that the tool has been deployed freely to members of the public and public servants who may not have the expertise to assess a translation. They may catch glaring mistakes, such as “tuberculosis” instead of “TB”, which doesn't make any sense.

Generally speaking, identifying subtler errors, which are more dangerous—and this ties back to what I said about reliability earlier—requires professional expertise. I'm thinking, for example, of mistranslations, shifts in meaning when something doesn't mean quite the same thing, and outright hallucination. The Radio-Canada article provides other examples where pronouns differ in English and French. Such errors are often buried in sentences that are well written and read well. That's why we need professionals.

Perhaps I can draw an analogy here to explain why being bilingual doesn't make someone a translator. You wouldn't ask a butcher to perform surgery simply because they have experience cutting flesh and bone. It's the same principle here. That's why we believe these tools should be used by professionals and not made available to everyone freely. We believe that is risky.

Christine Normandin: Specifically, with regard to professionals to oversee use, can you give us more details about translators' expertise? What specific tools do they use to deliver reliable translations, as you said, that artificial intelligence doesn't have?

Antoine Hersberger: I would say there are two types of tools: the skills we develop through training, and the technical tools. I will discuss both briefly. As I mentioned earlier, from a technological standpoint, artificial intelligence is one tool among many in our comprehensive suite of software. We have specialized translation software that displays English and French texts side by side and includes what are known as translation memories—databases of previously completed translations—and a bilingual concordance that retrieves and reuses previous translations, including partial matches. Sometimes, the texts are a complete match, and this allows us to reuse previous translations and to ensure reliability.

We have access to terminology databanks that incorporate research to ensure terminology consistency. And, of course, we have access to a request management system, and so forth. Artificial intelligence is therefore integrated into this suite of software, and that's extremely useful. For example, it can provide suggestions when no matches are available in our translation memories or help us interpret the meaning of a particularly challenging sentence. However, effectively using these tools requires the skills we develop through translation training and experience, which enable us to validate the results generated by artificial intelligence.

Translators hold a university degree in translation. When they join the translation bureau, as I said earlier, they are supervised for one to two years, after which their work is reviewed by experienced colleagues. After that they specialize in specific fields and in many cases focus on one or a few specific clients. For many translators, this specialization is developed over many years or decades of experience during which they work with one client or on one subject matter, follow developments and gain familiarity with context and terminology. Often, they build relationships with clients and know whom to consult and where to find the terminology needed to deliver an accurate translation.

Finally, I would add that in addition to reliability, which we ensure as professionals, we also create more concise and seamless texts that facilitate access to information. I think that somewhat aligns with my colleague's remarks that artificial intelligence should not undermine access to information and that we should make space for people who can actually ensure texts are accessible to the public.

● (1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We will turn to Mr. Calkins, back by popular demand, for five minutes, please.

Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Chair. It's good to be popular.

It's also good to know the difference between data and information. The conversation we were about to embark on, Mr. Wasylciw, was about how we are going to get all of these data points that artificial intelligence doesn't have access to right now because of the format in which they are stored. You talked about the context of those data points, and that's actually a transition from data into information, to a certain degree.

How difficult and daunting of a task will it be? You have 30-some years of your information on OpenNWT. We have open government stuff here at the federal level, and of course we have two more territories and 10 provinces all trying to put information out there for public consumption.

How close are you, and how long did it take in the Northwest Territories to get to where you are now? Do you think you're ahead of the Government of Canada or behind? Where are you in relation to other provinces and territories? How far behind are we on making sure we have accurate data and information in the contextual form available for AI to use, to make sure that Canadians are getting proper information?

David Wasylciw: Thank you. There were a few questions there. I'll try to go through a few parts of that.

In context and data, and data and information, there is an important distinguishing piece. There are international standards around data. There are certain formats. For legislation, there's a common international format that has the ability to add context. It's the same with things like Hansard.

If you hand somebody a printed copy of Hansard, they can read it and see a transcript. That's great, but adding context to that is knowing, when a member is referring to another member, who that member is or what riding they're from; being able to access information about a bill; when you read legislation, knowing that a word is a defined term; or, when you read a regulation, knowing that word means something specific. These are all contextual pieces.

Canada is pretty good at it. Parliament does great things with what it publishes. Elsewhere, a lot of what's available is a PDF that doesn't have any of this. There are all kinds of versions of it.

In the Northwest Territories, right now we're working back to the fifties, so we have about 80 years that we're trying to put together and add context to, to make it more useful than just a scan that somebody can read and see.

Parliaments across the country are at very different levels and very different stages of it—even being able to access it. Much as the earlier panel talked about how some news outlets are not accessible to AI, certain parliaments are blocked from machine access.

In a level above that, the Speaker's copyright blocks reuse in some cases. Legislation is federally open and shared, but in many cases in the provinces, it's blocked by Crown copyright. Some have licences to allow individual use, some allow non-profit use and some don't allow any use.

There's a huge scale of difference across the country in what that information looks like. These are the basic building blocks of democracy. Hansard and legislation are pieces that are there. There are formats people can use, but it's just very disparate around the country in what it looks like.

I'd like to think we do some great stuff in the Northwest Territories, having been doing it for 15 or more years, by accident. We have to carry that on, and elsewhere it needs to, but not a lot of places have the resources or choose to invest the resources to do that sort of thing. Now it's getting more important, with AI.

Blaine Calkins: What are we going to do about protected information or copyrighted information? What's your advice to make sure more information does make it into the public domain?

David Wasylciw: There are a few things.

One is to look, federally, at the Speaker's permission and the Speaker's copyright. Legislatures hold the copyright on material developed through the parliaments and the assemblies. That should be opened up. There's not a reason that it needs to be copyrighted or with access from each Speaker. It's something that each assembly would need to decide on its own, but certainly, the words spoken in the House, how the House decides, bills that are passed.... When you look at copyright and its intention to protect people's creation, a bill isn't an individual creation. These are things that should just be out there.

● (1240)

Blaine Calkins: The other day I tried to look up voting records on certain pieces of legislation. I was shocked that AI had trouble compiling the list of voting records for members of Parliament and members of the legislative assemblies in various provinces. Is that a problem in the NWT?

David Wasylciw: No, it isn't, because I have done a whole lot of work to combine it and pull it together.

However, it is a real problem. It doesn't exist beyond what's in Hansard. We've written scripts and things to pull that information out to make it available.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Jeneroux, you have five minutes, please.

Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, Lib.): Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today.

It's fascinating testimony, Mr. Wasylciw.

I suspect, in answer to my previous colleague's question about pulling from your website, that would be similar to other websites, if there was an “OpenAlberta”, an “OpenBC” or an “OpenSaskatchewan”.

That leads to some of my line of questioning. I would love to get your thoughts on the disclosures, to follow up on my colleague Ms. Kayabaga's questions, and on where we're heading with some of these shared tools and what you think.

You mentioned it as one of your three points. I'd love to hear a bit of an expansion on that. I'll let you choose the order you want to dissect those in. I hope we can have a chat about that.

David Wasylciw: Thank you very much.

About a decade ago, there was a group in Nova Scotia trying to do a similar thing, putting Hansard and legislative details out there on the Internet and making it searchable in open formats. They shut it down after a few years because they said that most of their users were from media, government and the House of Assembly, and none of them would pay for it. None of them would produce it themselves, and nobody would contribute to it, so they didn't have the capacity or the know-how to do it. They pivoted off to talking about democracy in Nova Scotia. It was a great effort, what they were trying to put together.

The benefit is that I've cared enough to keep doing this, and I bring people in to make this happen, but this is the responsibility of governments. When you look at the U.K. example for legislation, that's a great example. It's a platform that ties together England, Scotland and soon Wales in developing, writing and publishing legislation on a common platform. I'm not aware of very many common platforms in Canada around things like votes and Hansard, on things like legislation, on any of those sorts of parliamentary pieces and technology. I don't think there are common solutions that people are using. They all have different contract services and have gone about it in very different ways.

Matt Jeneroux: Presumably, libraries of Parliament and legislative libraries would be the reasonable historical go-to for those services.

In terms of your suggestion of a shared service model, would that be a partnership between the respective libraries, as you see it?

David Wasylciw: Sure. The libraries of Parliament are probably the simplest, but in any case, every assembly is set up differently. Some of the functions might not be in the same area, but when you look at how the governments are set up and function, a lot of the core things are still happening. In Canadian democratic institutions, every jurisdiction has an elections body. Every jurisdiction has a parliamentary body. Every jurisdiction produces similar materials. While the structures might look a little different, a lot of the commonalities are there.

Matt Jeneroux: I'm trying to get to what your suggestion would be, whether it is for everybody to start a version of OpenNWT that's presumably run by the legislatures and parliaments, or whether there's a separate approach. I want to get to some of the disclosure stuff, too, so if there's something missing, I'm happy to touch on it.

In a follow-up to some of Ms. Kayabaga's questions, I'll say that as members of Parliament, we stand up and give speeches in the House of Commons; we then go and put them on...we don't do TikTok, but on Instagram and such. If we were to do a voice-over, perhaps it would say that this is AI-generated, as in our previous testimony. Our voters would then perceive that the entirety of it was AI-generated, the visual to the voice-over and whatnot.

Is there a percentage model in terms of how much AI versus non-AI content you see as a solution to some of that in the context of parliamentarians?

● (1245)

David Wasylciw: For the end of the first part, the tools that we've developed in the Northwest Territories have been in spare time and generally because it's interesting. I've presented it to parliamentary librarians, to Hansard editors and all kinds of folks. It shouldn't be that difficult. It shouldn't be things that our governments can't produce if it's something we can do in our spare time. I think we can do better.

As for content and what you're saying, there's a line. I think the previous panel spoke to it. When it looks like a voice-over, at least to me personally, it isn't that concerning; however, you're still using technology in different ways.

If it has changed what was written because it was inconvenient or it wanted to tweak wording, then it could be a problem, but it's not just a blanket term. I think the concern is that the blanket term “AI-generated” doesn't really tell you enough about what it is. Any kind of regulation or rules in the Standing Orders around what that's going to look like will have to be more in depth because you'll need to know if it is the voice-over and if the actual content was generated that way. You'll need that additional information because it's not as simple as a small label.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for three minutes, Ms. Normandin.

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hersberger, last week, we heard from your colleagues from AIIC, or the International Association of Conference Interpreters. They told us they really have the impression the government is trying to save a few pennies. We've seen that with the 25% cuts over five years that have been announced and in the use of artificial intelligence in translation. Most of that is clearly being done at the expense of francophones, because most translation is from English to French.

You spoke about the potential loss of in-house expertise because of attrition. The number of people losing interest in a career in translation is growing. All of this serves the interest of the company behind GCtranslate, a business that, as far as I can tell, remains largely unknown. Ultimately, the government can be captive to a single business and end up losing human expertise.

Do your AIIC colleagues have the same concerns? Do you share these concerns? Ultimately, the savings are not significant, especially when you know the government's capacity to run into problems with anything related to information technology.

Antoine Hersberger: I would just like to clarify that GCtranslate was developed by the translation bureau. It's an in-house tool that leverages private sector technology. I think I'll leave it to translation bureau officials to share the technical details about the tool with the committee.

We're certain that the risks are simply not worth it. The risks are too substantial just to save a few pennies, to continue with the analogy. This issue is about the federal government's ability to communicate with millions of Canadians in their first official language. We know that not everyone in Canada is bilingual. For unilingual francophones who need to interact with their government to access services or who need information about how Canada's democracy works, if the reliability of these services is cast into question, their direct access to their own government and their own democracy is cast into question.

Christine Normandin: You sounded the alarm in Estelle Côté-Sroka's article. Has the government taken your concerns into account? Do you somehow feel it has tried to put a lid on the issue to try to manage it internally?

Antoine Hersberger: So far, we've not seen any change in direction by the government or the translation bureau concerning GC-translate. The tool is being rolled out in all departments, with the aim of making it available as widely as possible, even though in-house translators have sounded the alarm for nearly two years, going back to when the project was launched, and not just over the previous week.

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: I know this will shock a lot of people, but we will go back to Mr. Calkins for five minutes, please.

● (1250)

Blaine Calkins: I did not see that coming. All right.

I want to flesh out a few more things when it comes to the Northwest Territories. You said that you got millions of requests, or hits, on your data from what you're in control of. You know that many of those sources are not.... There are maybe 40,000 people in the Northwest Territories. I'm assuming that you don't have a massive data centre. You've got some data capabilities with what you're doing in the Northwest Territories, but most of the data that you guys publish on behalf of the Government of the Northwest Territories is published in the Northwest Territories. It's in data centres in the Northwest Territories. Is that correct?

David Wasylciw: It's in Canadian data centres.

Blaine Calkins: Canadian data centres, so it is in the rest of the country. You're not worried about territorial sovereignty, but you are worried about domestic sovereignty when it comes to making sure that the data is in Canada. Is that correct?

David Wasylciw: Yes. Frankly, it's nice to have it in Canada. What we're publishing, the original source, is in Canada because it's coming from there, but I think it's important to have it here.

Blaine Calkins: Are you able to discern what the nature of the requests or queries for your data is as they come in, or do you just get a hit counter on requests?

David Wasylciw: We publish Hansard, legislative records, legislation, procurement data—a number of things—to make it more usable, and the accesses come across all of those channels. There's a lot of procurement data, and there are lots of bots accessing the government procurement data. There is a lot of Hansard and historical records like that, and it's largely scraping. We can see where it comes from, what kinds of bots. Some you can block easily, and some aren't easy. It's the same problem governments face. Lots of governments and all kinds of businesses and non-profits face huge hit counts from bots right now.

Blaine Calkins: I'll go back to my previous question, then. When it comes to knowing what historical information you're going to go and dig out of the archives, let's call it, and make it more serviceable when it comes to machine queries, are the requests a driver in that? Is the nature of the requests driving that? How do you decide what's valuable and what you should be putting out for open use, versus things that you're going to pass over? Who makes that decision, and how do you make that decision?

David Wasylciw: Generally, I make that decision, and it's from talking to people about what they find useful. For example, there was no consistent record of election results, so we went to a lot of effort to make sure there was good, easy access to election results in the history of the NWT. I missed one from the 1970s, and I'm just working on getting that one, but that was important to build out. Hansard was a personal interest. I saw a federal project doing similar things and said, how hard can that be? I'll do that. It was pretty difficult. I had to learn a lot of things, talk to a lot of programmers and do a lot of work to make that happen 15 years ago. It would be a lot easier to do it now.

You just look at what's useful and what data needs to be visible. As for procurement, I was curious. I started by looking at a Hansard contract and wondering when it happened. It turned into a large database system because it was hard to use, and I was finding out that people found it useful. People could come and say, “Hey, it would be really great if we could get an alert when something's said in the House, so we can put that in Hansard.” If they're really interested in procurement data, we can build that out.

It's from talking to people and just finding out what people find useful in government information.

Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Madame Vandenbeld, you have five minutes.

Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

This entire session has been very enlightening, but I want to focus on you, Mr. Wasylciw.

You've made it easy for AI to source information on your database, but I would imagine that others could do the same, and AI chatbots are not necessarily discerning that yours is legitimate and somebody else's isn't or is different.

During the course of this meeting, I went into ChatGPT and asked who I should have voted for in the last election in my riding. It actually pointed out that I was on the ballot, which was fascinating, but then I looked at the sources.

One of the sources was a website called firearmrights.ca. I asked ChatGPT why it chose that source, and it responded, “The firearmrights.ca document appeared in the search results, but I did not open it or rely on it for my answer. Its appearance in the results was not a deliberate choice of source or an endorsement of the organization.” It was saying, “I didn't use that one.”

It raises a lot of questions in terms of the reliability of sources and how it's choosing sources. How do we ensure that these chatbots are providing information that is legitimate, as opposed to something that it says it didn't open?

● (1255)

David Wasylciw: There are a number of pieces to that.

One of them is making sure that information from valid sources is available. Another part of it could be regulation on using it.

The problem, though, is that people expect a lot out of an AI chatbot. All chatbots do is read a whole lot of information into a system. There's a big probability thing that says, “You've typed in this word and this letter, and we think the next word or next letter is going to be this.”

People attribute thinking and other pieces to chatbots, but they don't do that. They're just looking for that next word that, in the billions of things that have been entered into it, is most likely to appear, based on all the other context in your conversation and everything else that's happening. They're just looking for words that fit.

That's why, in the north, I can search for “maintenance enforcement” and I can get an act that never existed. I eventually found the report from a law society that it had read, and it was in the same sentence as something from New Brunswick. The only sentence and the only material published was this one sentence. That's how it drew those links: It knew the words “Northwest Territories” and “maintenance enforcement”, and there are not a lot of sources that say that, so that's what it came up with.

They're not as smart as we think they are. They're just looking for words and letters that would fit. For those big public ones, there's not a lot we can do to stop that.

Anita Vandenbeld: It could be very misleading. We saw that example when they talked about the one source that it went to for the Quebec elections.

My other question is similar to what Mr. Calkins and Mr. Jeneroux were also asking about.

When you use AI for something, I think a lot of it depends on the prompt and what sources you ask it to look at. If I'm writing correspondence, my staff gives me a piece of correspondence, and I ask ChatGPT to find a speech that I did a few months ago and add it so that it sounds more like me in the correspondence, it would immediately say that I've used AI for it, would it not? How do we distinguish between a use of AI that is making a voice more authentic or is using sources that will strengthen an answer, as opposed to a use of AI to create something? Can we even do that?

David Wasylciw: The concern would be that when you do something like that and say, “Hey, here's something else I've written and here's my voice”, if you're not checking everything that it's done, it might also go a little sideways. It might say, “Oh, great. This is the way you normally speak”, and if you were talking about a topic way out in left field, it may insert something from that because it was that topic. That's one of the problems with doing that. It can lead to unintended uses of AI and unintended pieces.

When you look at translation, as my colleagues have been talking about, AI might have certain things right, but then it might go off, depending on what the context is. Those are the kinds of areas in which it needs to get labelled and be clearer, but that's where there are opportunities in Parliament to have internal tools that might use AI to say, “Here are all of the speeches you've made in the House” or “Here's everything you've done” and find some commonalities in language.

If things are restricted in our information, it's safer, but it still needs checking. The more you scope it down, the better it can be, but there's always that risk. That's why, at the end of the day, somebody needs to read things, understand them and make sure that they can stand behind what they say.

Anita Vandenbeld: That's where training and guidelines come in.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for appearing here today.

This committee has no further business, so it stands adjourned.

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