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Chair: John Brassard

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● (1530)

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

Welcome to meeting number 26 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h) and the motion adopted on Wednesday, September 17, 2025, the committee is resuming its study of the challenges posed by artificial intelligence and its regulation.

With us today we have the Honourable Evan Solomon, who is the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation, and with him from the Department of Industry is Mark Schaan, who is the associate deputy minister.

Minister, I'm going to allow up to five minutes to address the committee and then we'll be following that with questions.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Evan Solomon (Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Members of the committee, thank you so much for the opportunity to appear before you today.

As you said, Mr. Chair, I am joined by officials from my department. I appreciate the committee's deep interest in this kind of work.

As some of you know, I've already appeared before the science and research committee in the fall session and again just this week to discuss my mandate and share with committee members the work we're doing to build trust with Canadians concerning artificial intelligence.

[*Translation*]

I am honoured to be here today and to participate in this essential study on artificial intelligence.

[*English*]

To put it simply, AI is a transformative technology, and if used properly, it will improve people's lives and serve Canadians for the better. That is our mission, and that is our goal. I'm glad this committee is here to dig into the foundational issue we need in order to have responsible, reliable AI, and that is trust.

[*Translation*]

If Canadians want to reap the full benefits of artificial intelligence, they must be confident that this technology is being used safely, fairly and responsibly.

[*English*]

The countries that succeed will be those that use this technology responsibly in ways people can trust and that actually make life better. AI is meant to serve people, not the other way around.

As the first Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation for Canada, I've been working towards a renewed national AI strategy for Canadians almost two years ahead of schedule. Trust, safety and responsibility are the foundations of that work.

Our AI strategy is anchored in one core principle and three pillars.

The core principle is very simple; it is "AI for all", and the three pillars are build, empower and protect.

"AI for all" means this: No matter where you live in Canada and no matter your background, your age or your income, this technology will work for you responsibly, reliably and safely. It will strengthen our democracy and deliver better public services if we manage it correctly. It will create good jobs for Canadians and protect people, especially children and vulnerable communities, from harm. That's what the principle is.

"AI for all" is already being put into action. It is guiding the final stages of our refreshed national AI strategy, which we'll be launching very soon. Our strategy is shaped by real input, ideas shared by Canadians through our public portal, expert advice from our AI task force—their reports are now available to the public online—and insights from researchers, workers and industry leaders across the country.

The goal is simple: to set a clear direction where Canada is going in AI and how we will get there on our own sovereign terms for our benefit.

If I may, I'll walk you very briefly through what this means in practice and our three pillars: build, empower and protect.

With respect to the first pillar, we are building a strong, sovereign and safe AI foundation to drive economic growth and create prosperity. That requires the infrastructure and, in plain terms, the compute power that allows Canadian companies to build and use Canadian technologies right here at home.

That means security for Canadian data and peace of mind for the citizens of Canada. That means more opportunity for Canadian innovators, more resilience for our economy and more jobs staying and being built right here at home. This also means digital sovereignty. Sovereignty does not mean isolation—we're a trading nation—but it does mean having the capacity to choose where we build and where we scale to keep Canada under Canadian law.

[*Translation*]

It is a matter of digital sovereignty and choice for Canada.

[*English*]

The second pillar is empower. Canada already has extraordinary strengths in talent and research. I just look at our three great AI national institutes: Mila in Montreal; Vector in Toronto; and AMII in Edmonton. They're global anchors of excellence, built by pioneers who helped shape modern AI.

Our focus now is to shorten the distance between impact and insight, turning Canada's world-leading AI science into real-life adoption, higher productivity and companies that scale here at home.

I'll give you an example. We have a new initiative in just the last month: the $100-million venture scientist fund launched by Mila and the VC company Inovia to invest in scientists to turn their ideas into action.

That progress only matters if Canadians are part of it. Investing in skills and training is an essential part to make sure people in every region succeed in our AI-driven economy.

The third pillar is protect. Trust must underpin everything we do. It is the foundation. That's why in 2024 we launched the Canadian AI safety institute, bringing together leading researchers from inside and outside government to focus on the real risks and the real safeguards associated with advanced AI. This work is connected with international partners, because safety in AI is a global challenge that requires global co-operation. We're committed to modernizing Canada's privacy framework to protect Canadians' data, safeguard children online and ensure as AI evolves that people's rights remain at the centre of our approach.

Protection means that Canadians will have the tools to protect them from harm.

AI is moving quickly. So are we. We're building in Canada. We're buying in Canada. We're building a safe AI for all Canadians to thrive in the future.

Thank you.

● (1535)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to questions.

For the first round of six minutes, Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): Minister, I have a bunch of questions. They're going to be brief. I appreciate that it's a complex topic, but I'd ask that, if you could, you keep your responses equally brief.

The first thing I'd like to touch on with you is that the Canada Revenue Agency developed Charlie the chatbot. Charlie the chatbot did a really bad job. Its reliability certainly did not meet minimum service standards or the expectations of Canadians who have to get it right to the penny when they deal with CRA.

The chatbot didn't even get it right half the time with the advice it gave. Are you drawing from this lessons that you are going to apply to the use of AI in its rollout across the federal public service or the government?

Hon. Evan Solomon: Yes. I appreciate the question.

I'm obviously aware of how our government is scaling the use of AI across departments and agencies. There is an effort to drive transformation across government and support a more efficient public service so that we can serve Canadians better and, of course, AI is meant to serve public servants. We have CANChat and GC-translate.

I will say that the Treasury Board Secretariat has a public register of hundreds of government uses of AI. When something is not functioning as it should, obviously there are specific measures to make sure that action is taken to serve Canadians more accurately and in a better fashion—absolutely.

Michael Barrett: Minister, just for clarity, this cost taxpayers $18 million and 66% of the time it provided incorrect information to tax filers. Is that acceptable or unacceptable?

Hon. Evan Solomon: I think that in every moment when the government serves Canadians, Canadians demand the highest standards and the highest form of efficiency. I know that the Treasury Board and PSPC have rigorous regulations and rules about how they procure, and the standards, and absolutely, meeting the high standards is the expectation of Canadians in any department. Working to improve that is core.

Michael Barrett: Minister, you'd say that 34% accuracy is not acceptable.

Hon. Evan Solomon: I would say that the goal for the use of any technology is to make sure that we serve Canadians with the highest accuracy level and the highest efficiency.

Michael Barrett: I wouldn't say that was the most efficient way to say that getting the answer right 34% of the time is unacceptable. You can have the opportunity to say that in your next response.

We've seen that the government is going to make a move to reduce access to information for Canadians by limiting the retention of instant messages and email messages. We saw in the ArriveCAN scandal that key actors simply just deleted files. We've seen that departments are taking years to respond to access to information requests.

What commitment or guarantee are you prepared to make that all of the audit trails in fact will be part of the integration and rollout of any AI systems in the government? Are you prepared to make that commitment today?

Hon. Evan Solomon: It's a great question.

I want to say two things about how both the Treasury Board and Minister Shafqat function under this. All procurement and all the regulations are followed rigorously to make sure there's transparency and accountability in our communication and in how any procurement and any use of this technology will function.

● (1540)

Michael Barrett: As an example, when an email is sent, there should be the opportunity for access to information requests to be made, but that happens from person to person. If there's simply work product being generated through an AI system, there's no paper trail of how we got to the end result. If the end result is simply printed out on a piece of paper at an office and the audit trail disappears instantly or after 15 days, obviously that doesn't provide the level of transparency that Canadians would look to have by getting the information, for example, through an ATIP, through an inquiry of ministry or by asking individuals to appear before parliamentary committees.

We don't have that option with AI, unless you would be personally responsible for coming to see us every time we had a question about an AI system.

Hon. Evan Solomon: I appreciate the question.

To make sure that we're clear, all records of business value are retained. Obviously, records that are transitory are not retained. They're transitory in nature.

Again, we follow all of the rules in terms of our record-keeping. When we're making a decision about procurement, as Treasury Board will, we're following the guiding principles across all of that.

I will say that Treasury Board work does have some principles on the automated decision-making system and guides for generative AI usage. There are guidelines for that.

Michael Barrett: Minister, can we expect new rules and public consultations on what that's going to look like with respect to deepfakes and how we're going to protect children from the use of sexually exploitive and non-consensual image creation through AI systems?

The Chair: I need a very quick response.

Hon. Evan Solomon: It's an excellent question.

Absolutely. We already have a bill, tabled by the justice minister, that it would make it a criminal offence to share sexually explicit...that deepfake imagery. We would love to have support on that.

I have lots more to say about deepfakes. It's a key question.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

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

Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I would like to welcome the witnesses and thank them very much for being here today.

I believe you were referring to Bill C-16, the bill introduced by the Minister of Justice, which will deal precisely with what my colleague mentioned earlier.

You said earlier that a strategy on artificial intelligence would be launched soon. Can you be a bit more specific?

[*English*]

Hon. Evan Solomon: Again, I'm happy to talk about the bill we've put forward on the sharing of non-consensual sexualized imagery, especially those generated by deepfakes, the so-called synthetic imagery. We consider that a form of a criminal offence. We have legislation about that. This is a form of violence against vulnerable communities that we will be taking action on in some legislation. We've tabled some legislation and there will be a suite of legislation to deal with that part of our privacy, updating our privacy laws, which is part of my remit, but also I know part of Heritage under Mr. Miller.

These are genuine concerns Canadians have. In terms of our strategy, maybe it's good to just tell Canadians that we had a national task force of 28 different experts from across the country who submitted their reports from all different aspects, some on safety, some on workforce, some on skills and training, some on infrastructure, some on adoption. They're very thorough. They're very interesting.

We had a series of round tables. The public can see all those. It's very transparent.

We also had more than 11,000 public responses, which is the largest, I think, in the ministry's history. Those were long, thoughtful responses from Canadians. They're posted as well, so people can read them.

We've also had multiple round tables. This morning I had a fantastic round table. It is Black History Month, and I had a round table with black Canadians in the tech space who had real concerns about things like bias. We talked about transparency and automated decision systems to make sure that there's not built-in bias. Those are the kinds of things that we're looking at in our legislation.

In our AI national strategy, as I say, building the infrastructure is part of it. Empowering a workforce, skills and training, to make sure the workforce of the future is here, are critical. But for this particular committee, I know you're seized with the protect side, the ethics of it. This is a really important conversation. How do we have responsible, reliable AI to get the benefits and mitigate against the harms? Part of that protect strategy is our legislation, and part of that protect strategy is to build sovereign data centres and sovereign companies because we believe sovereignty is a form of safety.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much. We still have some time left.

I found it interesting that you brought up deepfakes and non-consensual images again. Everyone is definitely interested in that. You talked about the pillars. You talked a little bit about your strategy. You have held several consultations and are making progress on the issue. I assume you will analyze all of this before presenting the strategy.

You also mentioned the three pillars you are working on. Could you give us more details about these three pillars?

[*English*]

Hon. Evan Solomon: Sure.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about them.

[*English*]

Let me just dig, maybe I can get a little more detail on them.

Just so Canadians are aware, we have something called the Canadian sovereign AI compute strategy, which is a $2-billion investment so that Canadian businesses, innovators and researchers have access to the compute capacity. Some people think compute capacity is kind of like the fuel that you need to fuel innovation and ingenuity. That's really important. We've got our AI compute access fund where we have targeted companies to help support getting access to the compute they need for innovation.

Ninety-five per cent of our economy is small businesses, and they need access to the tools or they can't become productive. That's helping. Our compute challenge is also helping build infrastructure.

We're supporting researchers as well. This year we will be building a supercomputer that will be available for universities and researchers across the country. It will make us in the top class of the G7, and will allow us to remain at the forefront and the frontier of research. There's a research side, there's an infrastructure side,

there's support for businesses, and again, there will be an aspect of training and skills because that's really important. AI literacy, making sure that people are comfortable and understand this technology and have the skills to use it, is critical.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much. Your comments are interesting.

You mentioned an investment that would benefit universities, if I understood correctly.

Do you have sufficient funds to invest? You mentioned a super data centre. Can you elaborate on that?

[*English*]

The Chair: I need a response in less than 10 seconds, Minister. I'm sorry.

Hon. Evan Solomon: We have the AI compute challenge. It's a $700-million fund. We've already funded that. Yes, we absolutely have the horsepower to get this up and running.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much. That was very interesting.

[*English*]

The Chair: That's wonderful. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister.

It's good to see you after 10 requests to appear before this committee.

Earlier, you mentioned the 11,300 submissions you received, which are informing your strategy. Several experts—160, in fact—signed a letter questioning the basis of your consultation. One of the problems is that, because you accepted anonymous responses, experts were able to use AI to flood the consultation with AI-generated responses. The consultation was conducted in record time, prompting the following comment from Jonathan Roberge, a professor at the Institut national de la recherche scientifique:

> It is frankly problematic to have chosen to process public responses using AI, because certain biases come with that kind of use. Asking AI to produce a report on AI is like a dog chewing its own tail.

How do you respond to the fact that we can't even be sure that the analyzed submissions come from real people and that the basic analysis performed by AI is not skewed by its own biases?

● (1550)

Hon. Evan Solomon: Thank you very much for that good question.

[*English*]

Again, let me just say that I want to thank the task force, the 28 members, who worked quickly. I want to thank the over 11,000 Canadians who took the time to weigh in. That was part of it. Having an open and public consultation of this size is really important. It generated genuine feedback that we have now posted. People can see and get into this conversation to try to create as democratic, open and transparent a process as possible.

I know the honourable member will understand that this technology moves at speed. If we had not deployed some new efficiencies to help us analyze the 11,000 documents, it would have taken eight to 10 months. Instead of eight months, we had help to make sure that we could process in eight days and meet with these task force members.

I think it's very important to realize, if I may, that speed matters, but thoroughness matters.

We will have other consultations, and they will continue.

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: Did you use AI to conduct those consultations, yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Evan Solomon: I just want to differentiate. Regarding the 28 task force reports, we, of course, read those. I read those personally, and my team read those personally. Yes, for the 11,000, we did develop, according to government regulations to make it safe and secure with the help of AI inside government and on a government system, AI to help us understand the data and go through the 11,300 comments from people, absolutely.

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: Then you confirm the concerns raised by experts, who point to potential preconceived notions in your assessment.

A total of 160 academics, lawyers, experts, civil society organizations and human rights organizations issued the following statement regarding your process:

> The current consultation process suggests serious disregard for the Canadian public's known and wide-ranging concerns about the demonstrated risks and harms of technologies currently classified as AI. This impression arises from the contrived urgency imposed by the short timeline for submitting informed views on a topic as complex and consequential as AI; the leading language, predetermined framing, and prioritization of business and economic interests in the associated survey; and the lack of human rights and civil liberties representatives on the AI Strategy Task Force….

How do you respond to that criticism?

Hon. Evan Solomon: Thanks again for the question.

[*English*]

Just to clarify, I think that the public would want the Minister of AI and Digital Innovation to be using the very tools that we're making sure are responsible. We want a government that's innovative, but we want it to be responsible.

I hear the member's concerns. The AI summaries that helped us were not determinative. Real humans engaged. Obviously, our teams engaged, but we want tools to help the government to work more efficiently and to make sure that we're moving at speed so we don't fall behind.

Again, I'm really proud of the fact that we are trying to find efficiencies, that we could do in eight days something that could have taken eight months, and that there's transparency. You can read all of those responses just to make sure you appreciate that.

Finally, to make sure it is not precooked, we have not launched our national AI strategy. We are still engaged with stakeholders. I had a stakeholder meeting just this morning, a phenomenal round table. I met with the National Chief of the AFN at a round table on AI.

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: Excuse me.

[*English*]

Hon. Evan Solomon: I met with provinces and territories just last week.

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: I'm sorry, I don't have a lot of time.

How many of those 160 experts who voiced criticism have you actually met with? How many of the 160 experts who signed the letter did you meet?

[*English*]

Hon. Evan Solomon: To be candid, I'm not aware of the names of these 160, because I don't know who you're talking about, but we have been engaged in stakeholder relations round tables. We're using the tools we have. I'm meeting people to make sure that this national strategy reflects and protects our values in the best way possible.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up, Mr. Thériault.

[*English*]

Mr. Cooper, for the second round, you have five minutes. Go ahead, sir.

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

Thank you, Minister.

Minister, your government gave $240 million in taxpayer dollars to Cohere as part of your government's so-called Canadian sovereign AI compute strategy to build an AI data centre.

We now know that Cohere handed the same $240 million in taxpayer dollars to a U.S.-based company, CoreWeave, to build and operate the data centre. Effectively, this is a $240-million handout, not to a Canadian company but to a major U.S.-based tech company headquartered in New Jersey.

Is it the case that, in the lead-up to this $240-million handout, your government knew that it was going straight into the pockets of a U.S. headquartered company?

Hon. Evan Solomon: I hope that Canadians recognize that we're very proud to have invested in Cohere.

There are only four countries in the world that have large language model companies. Those are the companies that are inventing, as people know, the open AIs. There are the Americans. There are the Chinese. France has one. Canada has one. The company in the enterprise space is Cohere. They built in Canada—

Michael Cooper: Minister, respectfully, I asked a very specific question, and that is, at the time and in lead-up to handing out $240 million in taxpayer dollars to Cohere, was your government aware that it was going to go straight into the pockets of a U.S.-based company, yes or no?

Hon. Evan Solomon: Again, let me just say we are very proud to have invested. Our investment was in a Canadian company, Cohere, that has Canadian jobs, Canadian IP and Canadian innovation. They're headquartered here. They were built here, and they're absolutely an important company to support.

Michael Cooper: Minister, my time is limited, and perhaps you're not answering my question because the answer is an embarrassing one for the government, and the answer is yes.

An official from ISED, for example, is quoted in a December 23, 2024, article in The Globe and Mail indicating that CoreWeave had been brought into the process and that the $240-million handout was made because your government saw it as an opportunity to act quickly. In other words, your government was more concerned with holding a press conference to look good rather than ensuring that a quarter of a billion taxpayer dollars would stay in Canada. Isn't that right?

Hon. Evan Solomon: Again, our goal is to invest in Canadian champions. We're not trying to tell companies how to innovate and do business. That's the job of the CEOs, and I know the member appreciates that. Government's not telling people how to do business, but we are investing, and we are going to support a Canadian champion like Cohere when they have Canadian IP and Canadian headquarters, and they're a company that we want in Canada. I know the member would support that.

Michael Cooper: Minister, if the government is truly interested in supporting Canadian champions, we know there are several Canadian-owned companies that have comparable expertise and technology to CoreWeave. For example, eStruxture has operated 14 data centres. They built them. If you're going to hand out $240 million in tax dollars to build and operate a data centre, which is exactly where this tax money went, why did your government fail to make as a condition of funding that the data centre be built and operated by a Canadian company?

Hon. Evan Solomon: I appreciate the question.

Our investment was in Cohere, a nationally important company. By the way, we as a government signed a memorandum of understanding with Cohere to make sure that we, in the government, are using Canadian technology. We want to make sure that a company like Cohere, that has world-class technology, is employing Canadians and stays here.

You also mentioned eStruxture and Denvr. There are also some other great Canadian companies. We have ways to—

Michael Cooper: Minister, the bottom line is your government handed out $240 million in tax dollars with no strings attached. Worse than that, your government knew all along that the money was going straight to a U.S. company. It's the straight-up quarter-billion-dollar subsidization of a U.S. company, courtesy of Canadian taxpayers—and it didn't have to be that way.

● (1600)

Hon. Evan Solomon: We're proud to invest in Cohere. They built a data centre here in Canada. I'm not here to tell CEOs how to build a business. This is a unicorn. This is a great company. I'm not going to talk down Cohere. We're very proud, as a government, to make sure that we are supporting one of the world-class companies. It's a matter of sovereignty. I know the member is seized with sovereignty, as are we. We want to make sure that Canadians are using Canadian AI foundation models—not American ones, not Chinese ones, but Canadian ones. Cohere is that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Church, you have five minutes.

Leslie Church (Toronto—St. Paul's, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister. Welcome, Deputy.

Picking up on that last exchange, I think it is really important that Canada is concerned about its sovereignty in this area. In marshalling and supporting the researchers and the industries that we have, we are planting a flag internationally in an industry that is going to very much shape our future in ways that we are just beginning to grapple with.

Minister, I also met with a terrific organization this morning— the Coalition of Innovation Leaders Advancing Respect, CILAR— which is in town. They represent leading companies, educational institutions, community organizations and employers. They are setting out with a mission to equip 100,000 Canadians with AI and digital skills in the coming years. It goes to show how much this sector, again, whether we like it or not, as much as we hope to be ready for it or not, is coming. It is upon us, and we have to be smart and strategic and sovereign in how we approach it.

My question for you today is on how we are doing on AI infrastructure investments in Canada. Are we doing enough to address the infrastructure challenges that might be faced by this sector, by researchers in it and by companies looking to grow?

Hon. Evan Solomon: I appreciate the question. I'm sure the meeting that my honourable colleague had was interesting.

Let me say something about skills and talent because, in a sense, that's another form of infrastructure. You have to have the intellectual property, IP, and you have to churn out the research in order to build these companies. We're very proud of the last budget, as the member knows, in which there's a $1.7-billion talent attraction investment to recruit 1,000 of the world's top world-class researchers and their labs, to get the doctoral fellows and to support the universities. That matters because many of these companies are spinoffs from incubators. If you go to Waterloo, to Sherbrooke, to the University of Toronto, to the University of Alberta or to UBC, our campuses are churning out some fantastic companies.

It might be worth mentioning to the member, as well, that we have 800,000 people working in the digital sector in Canada. That is the fastest growing part of our economy, so investing in the sector matters. In the AI sector alone, for some perspective, we have about 3,000 pure-play AI companies right now. These are people starting companies—we mentioned Cohere—and there are, literally, thousands of companies doing things in health care, transport and agriculture.

I was at the University of Guelph: They're using AI to help grow food for farmers here. In the health care sector, to cut wait times, to help surgeries, to reduce second surgeries and brain surgery...the technology is fantastic and it's going to be transformative. That's really important, so we have to invest in that kind of infrastructure, and we're doing that. We have three research chairs...our Canadian Institutes of Health Research are doing that, our Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council.... Those are really important.

There's that kind of infrastructure we're investing in, but we're also investing, as I said, in building the actual.... This year you will see we're investing in our compute challenge so that we can build data centres that are sovereign and make sure that we have the infrastructure. I know there are some people who have concerns about that.

I was at a data centre built by a great Canadian company called QScale, outside of Quebec City, in Lévis. They built a $1.2-billion data centre, which is about 140 megawatts, with clean energy. There are some concerns about water use. It has what's called a "closed-loop system". In other words, they cycle the same water through; they're reusing water. Many of these data centres are also about to capture heat for greenhouse growth, because they generate heat. There are ways to build this so that it generates and drives innovation and very efficiently uses water and energy. That was, by the way, all private investment.

This is happening. The infrastructure is being built, but we have to make sure that, once the infrastructure is built, people trust.... I'm just going to return to that. The trust is important. I often say that technology moves at the speed of innovation, but citizens move at the speed of trust. People have to trust this stuff or they're not going to use it, so that's really important.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor for five minutes.

Luc Thériault: Thank you.

Minister, some companies have explicitly stated that artificial general intelligence could surpass human intelligence. A consensus emerged before this committee, where experts distinguished between, on the one hand, artificial intelligence known as "AI tool or specialized AI," which is promising in certain areas such as medicine and economic growth, and, on the other hand, artificial general intelligence, which may be problematic at present because it is neither controlled nor understood by those who create it.

Minister, these are Nobel Prize winners, leading AI scientists, and CEOs of major AI companies such as Anthropic, OpenAI and Google DeepMind, who are warning us that artificial superintelligence poses risks to humanity.

What measures will you take to manage artificial superintelligence?

Hon. Evan Solomon: That's a very important question.

[*English*]

We have three national institutes.

Vector is in Toronto. Geoffrey Hinton is one of the godfathers of AI. Many Canadians will say, "Oh yes, Dr. Hinton has warned about that." He has won the Nobel Prize. He's concerned about that.

Yoshua Bengio won the Turing Award. He's in our Mila institute, and he's part of our AI safety ecosystem and our safety institute. I've spoken to them a lot.

I would say that Rich Sutton, who runs AMII, the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute, has a slightly different view.

There's not necessarily a lot of consensus, but there are real questions and concerns. I've read about what artificial general intelligence would be, and people ask me a lot about it.

I think our job is not to be cheerleaders or doomsayers but to find a pragmatic way to use this safely. By the way, that is why we have an AI safety institute, and that is why we will have legislation on privacy and data to keep Canadians—

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: Some are suggesting that Canada should be a global leader in working to avoid these problems.

You say there is no consensus. I think there may not be consensus on how much time we have before we are surpassed, but there is consensus around there being a risk. Over 350 people signed that letter, including Yoshua Bengio, Geoffrey Hinton, and others. So don't tell me there is no consensus. Where we disagree is whether we are playing Russian roulette with one, two, or three bullets in the chamber. On that point, we don't know where this is headed.

This fall, you also saw a large-scale cyber-attack successfully carried out by AI without substantial human intervention. All of the Canadian government's strategies against cyber-attacks were developed before that incident.

What is the government actually doing to prepare Canada for this kind of large-scale, autonomous cyber-attack carried out by AI, as described to our committee?

[*English*]

Hon. Evan Solomon: Your concerns are shared by all of us. We all have real concerns about any potential abusive uses. This is why protection is so important.

On cybersecurity, our Minister of Public Safety, Gary Anandasangaree, has introduced Bill C-8 to fortify our cybersecurity system and responses. That's really important. I would urge members who are deeply concerned about cybersecurity, as we all should be, to support that piece of legislation, because it's really important.

On protecting our digital infrastructure, I will say one that concerns around cyber-attacks that could breach current systems are important. This is why we've invested in quantum technology, because, as you know, quantum computing poses a genuine potential threat.

In December, we launched our Canadian quantum champions program to keep our four phenomenal Canadian companies here in Canada, including Nord Quantique in Quebec, Photonic and Xanadu. We need to make sure Canadians own the potential to protect ourselves from cyber-attacks and have quantum-level security. That's why we launched the Canadian quantum champions program; it was for that reason.

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: Do you think there should be a consensus—

The Chair: Mr. Thériault, please wrap up quickly.

Luc Thériault: Like experts such as Hinton, Bengio, etc., do you recommend pausing the development of generative and artificial general intelligence? Will you work with other countries to create a structure that would prevent us from being overtaken in the race for artificial superintelligence?

[*English*]

The Chair: I almost need a one-word answer.

Hon. Evan Solomon: We have invested $50 million in the AI safety institute working with Yoshua Bengio, who won the Turing Award. He's very aware of that. Safety is top of mind in our national strategy. I very much appreciate the question.

The Chair: That was 38 words. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hardy, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you for being with us, Minister.

I am completely changing the subject.

You said earlier that Canada's plan is AI for all. No matter where you live or how much you earn, you can all have safe access to AI.

We know that Canada's population is growing every year. If I understand correctly, in order for everyone to have access to AI, more data centres will be required. Data centres are part of your plan, which calls for building more and more of them.

Am I wrong?

[*English*]

Hon. Evan Solomon: Yes, the member is right. Part of our "build" pillar will include supporting some sovereign data centres, absolutely.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: You intend to build more and more data centres.

That being said, according to the latest data we have, energy demand is increasing by about 30% per year, mainly because of data centres. We are told that by 2030, energy demand will double.

Yesterday, I met with representatives from Énergir, a wonderful Quebec company. They told me that, currently, during peak periods such as the cold spell we experienced over the past few weeks, Énergir was already struggling to provide the energy needed to meet the population's heating needs alone.

Have you assessed the energy requirements for building so many data centres in the coming years? How will this work out? Finally, who will supply the energy so we're able to run these data centres?

[*English*]

Hon. Evan Solomon: The member is asking an absolutely crucial question. I really appreciate it because energy is uniquely tied to this technology.

The electrification of the world is happening. This is why as government, through our Major Projects Office, we are investing in building out new grids.

I also just want to point out that it is the provinces and the regulators in the provinces that are in charge of how they allocate energy on the grid.

I've spoken, in meetings with the provinces and territories, a lot about the energy use and how each province is allocating energy. I'll give you an example. In Ontario, we are now building small modular reactors. We're just starting that in Ontario because they need more electricity generation. It's not all for AI, of course. AI might be 2%. Some experts say it's 2% of our energy needs.

Nonetheless, we are very mindful, and the provinces and the regulators are mindful, that any use of electricity doesn't get downloaded on ratepayers. They're mindful of water usage and they're mindful of heat capture, yet we don't want to constrain innovation. We don't want to stop it.

● (1615)

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: As for your plan to build more data centres, production capacity will inevitably be important, because it's the law of supply and demand. On the one hand, if we can't supply more energy and demand goes up, the price has to go up and someone will have to foot the bill. Right now, if there are more and more data centres, citizens or businesses will have to pay more for their electricity.

What do you think? If it's more expensive for businesses, they won't want to come here. People won't want to pay more either. What's your strategy on this?

[*English*]

Hon. Evan Solomon: Again, it's a great question. The provinces have regulators. The federal government doesn't regulate electricity allocations of megawatts or gigawatts.

Every province has a different landscape here. For example, the regulator in Alberta, AESO, recently released 1.2 gigawatts of power tied to the grid. They have natural gas and they believe that's a really important investment. They don't think that will impact their ratepayers.

Just in the last week, B.C. has also released about 300 megawatts of power tied to the grid. Others will incentivize companies—again, not through the federal government—to build what's called "behind the fence". They'll build data centres not tied to the grid, so you'll have to bring your own. It's like BYOP: Bring your own power.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy: I think there's one thing we agree on: One way or another, the big projects are going to have to move a whole lot faster if we're going to be able to deliver what you're talking about.

It raises other questions as well. When will you be announcing projects? When will shovels hit the ground to get those projects going? If you're saying that a large number of data centres are going to be built, you're going to have to speed things up. I'm sure you've done the calculations.

What are the production years? When are you going to sign the contracts so that we're able to move forward? Will taxpayers be on the hook until you're ready to build, in order to accelerate projects and ensure the availability of that power?

The Chair: You're out of time, Mr. Hardy.

[*English*]

Minister, can you give a quick response, please?

Hon. Evan Solomon: The national strategy will have more details on that. Again, we are mindful that this is not done on the backs of ratepayers, but that is provinces, which we're working closely with to make sure that this industry is built in collaboration with the provinces and to make sure that it's done transparently and efficiently.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Sari, you may go ahead for five minutes.

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you very much for being here and providing us with answers. They're giving committee members clarity on a number of things.

My questions today are primarily meant to reassure Canadians who are following these proceedings. I think we all have the same concerns when it comes to the risks of AI. I'm going to split my questions into two parts.

First, Canada has always been able to attract talent in several fields, including information technology. Does your strategy have some sort of facet, component or dimension aimed at attracting more experts in the field of AI?

Hon. Evan Solomon: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

Chair, my honourable colleague understands this industry extremely well. He's very well versed in it. I appreciate the question on talent. We have to build on our foundation of talent. That's the talent attraction strategy. There will be more elements to make sure that we capture the talent.

There are opportunities out there. Some fantastic programmers who can't get into some other countries right now are looking for a place to build that is safe and that protects their values, and where they can have the security. We're attracting; this is a place to build. We're absolutely doing that. We are investing in our talent. The $1.7 billion is part of it, to recruit 1,000 world-class researchers. That's really part of it.

I should say that we're also creating talent here. I mean, this is one thing we shouldn't sell ourselves short on. Maybe we as Canadians don't celebrate our own successes.

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

It goes beyond our three institutes, Mila, in Montreal, Vector Institute, in Toronto, and Amii, in Edmonton. Many universities are producing some highly skilled people.

[*English*]

The University of Waterloo is among the very best in the world. Simon Fraser is among the very best in the world, as are Sherbrooke, Université Laval, the Université de Montréal and McGill. We are producing more talent and engineers, but I should say that it's not just people who understand the technology. We need Canadians from all sectors to understand. Some like to talk about STEM, which is science, technology, engineering and math, but there's also STEAM, which is science, technology, engineering, arts and math, because there are remarkable.... We need to make sure that "AI for all" means that all these folks have the literacy to use these tools.

The last thing I'll say is that the good news is that these tools are getting a little easier to use. To use a kind of cool tech term, it's called "vibe coding". It used to be that you needed a real technology degree to be able to really use these tools to produce some benefits. Now it's so easy to use the interfaces. They call it vibe coding. People who may not have a tech background can use it for their companies.

So it's becoming more inclusive. We have to make sure it's safe.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: Thank you for your answer. It's reassuring to hear how you'll be supporting Canada's AI ecosystem so that it can be competitive.

That brings me to my second question. It pertains to an issue that, as you well know, Minister, is very important to me. It's clear that AI is moving at breakneck speed, becoming a part of our everyday lives. I'd like to give you an opportunity to talk about digital sovereignty. We and the Prime Minister talk a lot about that, because it's something we care about deeply.

How can the government ease people's concerns about our digital sovereignty, as we negotiate with, unfortunately, an increasingly hostile neighbour to the south?

Hon. Evan Solomon: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

There are two aspects of sovereignty. The first aspect is making sure that Canadians' data and privacy are safe. Let's be clear: The people who are watching this want to make sure their kids' data is safe. They want to make sure they're protected from deepfakes and protected from malign forces, people who are trying to undermine our democracy.

One of the reasons we will be tabling legislation to update our privacy laws, which are still functioning—Canadians' data is safe—is to make sure that we have the tools to protect Canadians' privacy. Earlier, one of the other honourable members here raised a question about deepfakes. It's a good one. We have the legislation that the justice minister—

The Chair: I'll need you to wrap up, Minister.

Hon. Evan Solomon: Okay.

I'll have legislation on privacy and data. Sovereignty is a form of safety. We need to be under Canadian law to keep Canadians safe.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Sari.

[*English*]

Mr. Barrett, you have five minutes.

Michael Barrett: When we spoke last, you referenced Bill C-16. I want to start by identifying what I hope is some common ground on a very important issue. I'm hearing about it all the time. As a Canadian, as a concerned citizen and as a parent, I think it is very important that we get our arms around this thing. I, along with my colleagues and, I think, uniformly with members of the government caucus, support banning deepfakes of intimate partners. This especially protects women from non-consensual intimate images being created and shared online. We think there should be mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse material because this is going to help keep our children safe. We have agreement on that. This is included in Bill C-16.

Also included in Bill C-16 are provisions that deal with something that your government would know the official opposition does not support. Specifically, that is a provision that allows judges to ignore mandatory prison sentences for serious crimes like human trafficking, aggravated sexual assault with a gun and violent firearms offences.

We have an issue that we know we don't agree on, and we have an issue that we know we agree on.

Minister, this is a really important time for our country. I'm looking to see if, in the spirit of collaboration, you would say, "Yes, we agree on the things that we agree on. Let's split this bill." The government can find another dance partner on the provisions that the official opposition disagrees with. Let's deal with what we could probably pass unanimously in the House to protect vulnerable people, to protect victims and to ensure their dignity. Would you support splitting Bill C-16?

● (1625)

Hon. Evan Solomon: First, I'll take 10 seconds to say that I know, Mr. Chair, that this member is a father and has served the country. I'm a father. When it comes to talking about protecting, I know this member feels it personally. I respect that, and I always thank him for his service.

We agree personally and professionally that protecting Canadians is our number one responsibility. Let me just say that the non-consensual sharing of sexualized deepfakes is a disgusting practice. It harms women. It harms vulnerable people. The fact that we have shared agreement on this is absolutely critical.

Now, I know the justice minister is in charge of this bill; I'm not going to negotiate on behalf of the justice minister. However, I will say this: I absolutely appreciate the open, transparent and good-faith negotiation. I know there are always elements of disagreement and agreement on some aspects of a bill. I can't negotiate for the justice minister on a bill, but I will say that I share your concern and your need to protect.

Part of deepfakes will be captured in Bill C-16—the sharing of non-consensual sexualized imagery. Part of that will be, I hope, captured in the privacy legislation because there's an element of deepfakes there that we have to protect citizens from and consumers from. We are looking at various things there very closely, things that the honourable member's party has raised, things like the right to deletion and other things.

I know that my colleague Marc Miller, the heritage minister, is also looking at harms in relation to social media.

We have a suite of protection mechanisms, and I know we're working closely on that. I appreciate the spirit of good faith. I hope we can act fast on making sure that we criminalize the sharing of non-consensual sexualized imagery.

Michael Barrett: Okay, I have 30 seconds, so I can't get into another question.

Will you undertake to share this feedback directly with the minister on my behalf and that of my Conservative colleagues? Will you undertake to share that collaborative offer?

Hon. Evan Solomon: Absolutely. I always appreciate the dialogue from the honourable member, and I will absolutely share that with the justice minister. I appreciate the question.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Grant, you have five minutes.

Wade Grant (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you very much, and thank you for your hospitality to the ethics committee for allowing me to be here today.

Thank you, Minister, for your presentation and the answers that you have given.

I think I'm the lone British Columbia MP. I thank you for the shout-out to UBC and SFU and the work that they're doing. I do know that building homegrown talent is one thing, but you talked about the AI workforce and talent attraction. Why is attracting international AI talent important for Canada's research ecosystem and an essential pillar to the pan-Canadian AI strategy?

Hon. Evan Solomon: That's a great question.

I like that the honourable member always champions his region, which is great. The ecosystem and the businesses that are coming out of Vancouver and the entire region are phenomenal, especially in things like the life sciences. And also, frankly, they are a magnet for talent. We need talent. Canada's international talent attraction strategy and action plan is really about reforming the immigration system to meet new labour market needs. That's what we're trying to do. This technology is evolving. We need skills. We need folks to come here. The purpose of the talent attraction and the accelerated processing is to attract investment and talent to Canada, to start their business in Canada, to come to Canada to invest here and to bring their intellectual property here.

There was a long time where Canada, sadly, was the farm team where we had the talent and we did the great research. And then maybe it was access to capital, but folks were leaving. Now they're coming. We have a system to attract brain gain, not brain drain. That is the goal of the mission. We need it because it's a very competitive landscape.

The Prime Minister talks about this moment that we're in, a political realignment happening at the same time as a technological revolution. If we seize that, get new partners, expand our trade and have pathways to permanent residency for people who are investing in this country, absolutely that's a way to turn this into an opportunity.

● (1630)

Wade Grant: Just expanding on that, what new measures are needed to help talented researchers come to Canada and stay?

Hon. Evan Solomon: One of them is a talent attraction. One of them is our CIFAR chairs. One of them is the ability to start a company here.

The honourable member knows our budget. We have the productivity superdeduction, which means.... I don't want to get too wonky, but these are moments that I think all honourable members from any party will appreciate.

Our marginal effective tax rate now after this budget—and we hope it passes with the budget implementation bill, let's pass that—would make that lower than it is in the United States after their One Big Beautiful Bill Act. What that means in real terms is this is a good place to invest. This is a good place to start a business. This is a good place for talent to come. This is a safe place for talent to come. There's also talent that you can hire here based out of our universities. Attracting talent is one way to do it.

When you start a company here, you can get a SR and ED credit. That means you can actually hire, and we've reformed that system. There are incentives for small businesses to hire and to use those credits to hire innovative employees, and we're helping them. There are lots of mechanisms to attract talent here.

Wade Grant: Given the recent changes, what is the government doing to ensure top global talent can come here quickly and contribute to our research ecosystem?

Hon. Evan Solomon: Again, I'm really happy to say that I know my colleagues at IRCC will be delivering the accelerated processing for recruitment talent, and then making sure that there's a pathway to PR to make sure that the talent can come here. This is why the Minister of Immigration, knowing our file, is working so closely, getting our levels plan done, getting control over our immigration system and making sure that it is used for the benefit of all Canadians to invest here in Canada.

Wade Grant: I'm a father of a 17-year-old and a 15-year-old. My son's about to go to university. You said AI is the future. It's here now. What can he expect if he wants to go into this? How can he be supported?

Hon. Evan Solomon: The best advice I give to my kids and to everyone is to get a good education. The technology is changing, but investing in a good education and making sure they have the skills to adapt are absolutely crucial. I know the hon. member is a good dad, and he raised those kids right.

Wade Grant: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: The best advice we got, as a committee, was when we did our misinformation and disinformation study, which used to be known as "lying". We had a witness come before us who told us to assume everything online is fake until it's proven to be true.

I am not looking for a response. I am just saying that we've had witnesses come before us and state this. That's how the state of deepfakes, AI and all that stuff has evolved.

Minister, I want to thank you for being here and—

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The floor is yours, Mr. Thériault.

Luc Thériault: I'm a bit surprised to hear you thanking the minister. According to the motion, which was adopted unanimously, the minister was supposed to be here for two hours.

Would he be kind enough to stay a few minutes more to answer some questions?

● (1635)

The Chair: We sent the motion adopted by the committee, and the clerk spoke with the parliamentary affairs office, but the minister's office said that the minister was available for only an hour, despite the motion adopted by the majority of the committee.

I can ask the minister whether he can stay another hour, if you like. I have no problem with that, because I know many of the members here today have questions they'd like to ask.

Luc Thériault: At the very least, can we ask him to stay for the remainder of the hour, until five o'clock, so we can do another round?

[*English*]

The Chair: Minister, you know there was a motion passed by this committee to have you here for two hours. We asked you through your office, on 11 occasions, to come before this committee. This was the date that was accommodated.

The question Mr. Thériault has is this: If you're available, can you stay?

I'm going to leave that with you.

Linda Lapointe: Can I say something?

The Chair: Wait a second, please.

Hon. Evan Solomon: We scheduled an hour here.

By the way, I'm very happy to appear, but it was scheduled for an hour on my schedule. Unfortunately, I have other events, but I very much appreciated the questions today.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right.

[*Translation*]

Sorry, Mr. Thériault.

[*English*]

I'm going to suspend for a bit until we get the next panel up.

Thank you.

● (1635)
_____(Pause)_____

● (1640)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

We're continuing our study on challenges posed by artificial intelligence and its regulations.

You're going to be up first, Mr. Majumdar.

Before I start, and before we start resuming questions, I want you to know that my understanding is that the House leaders did not discuss at any point this week the need for concurrence for this committee to study the lobbying report. I'm asking members to push their House leadership teams to make sure they do that. It's just a simple UC motion presented in the House, among agreement of all parties, to give us the authority to do the study on the lobbying report.

Thank you.

Mr. Majumdar, you have the floor. You have six minutes.

● (1645)

Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): I'd like to move a motion.

The Chair: Is this related to the motion that is on notice?

Shuvaloy Majumdar: I believe so.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: I move:

> That, having regard for the recent reporting that characterized the state of access to information in Canada as "dismal" and noted that the Privy Council Office is "among the worst offenders", and having regard for the Treasury Board Secretariat guidelines for the public service that allow for the deletion of instant messages after 15 days, and emails after 30 days, the committee undertake a two-meeting study on the state of access to information in Canada, and, for the purpose of this study:
>
> a) Invite Caroline Maynard, Information Commissioner of Canada, for one hour;
>
> b) Invite Leslie Weir, Librarian and Archivist of Canada, for one hour;
>
> c) Invite the appropriate officials from the Privy Council Office, for one hour;
>
> d) Invite the appropriate officials from the Treasury Board Secretariat, for one hour; and
>
> e) At the conclusion of this study, the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

I'd like to provide a copy of this to the clerk if it's of use.

The Chair: It's already been distributed to members.

The motion is duly moved. The notice was on.

Do I have consensus among the committee members to deal with that motion?

Leslie Church: No, Mr. Chair. I think we'd like to propose some amendments to the motion, at least for consideration.

In particular, we would like to propose striking:

> having regard for the recent reporting that characterized the state of access to information in Canada as "dismal" and noted that the Privy Council Office is "among the worst offenders", and having regard for the Treasury Board Secretariat guidelines for the public service that allow for the deletion of instant messages after 15 days, and emails after 30 days,

In its place, we propose:

> In light of recent reporting on the state of access to information in Canada, the committee undertake a two-meeting study on the state of access to information with particular attention to the deletion policies for instant messages and emails;

Then, after "for the purpose of this study", we invite Caroline Maynard, Information Commissioner, Leslie Weir...that's fine, but at the end of the motion, we would add, after the words "the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House", the words "and request a government response".

The Chair: I'm going to take a quick suspension on that, because I need the clerk to ensure she has the proper wording. If you can share that with her, we'll make sure that we share that with the committee members.

I'm going to suspend for a couple minutes. Let's do this quickly, please. We're suspended.

● (1645)
_____(Pause)_____

● (1700)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Are there any questions on the amendment? Let's go to a vote.

It is a tie, so I will vote. I vote nay.

(Amendment negatived: nays 5; yeas 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: On the motion of Mr. Majumdar, we have Ms. Church.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, I am disappointed that the amendment was rejected, and I would urge committee members to consider a few things.

First of all, if we do take this seriously as a study that the committee wants to weigh in on, I think it's important that we ensure that there's a government response to any study this committee does. I think that's an important part of any motion and any study that we do as a committee. If we are going to take the time to assess access to information and to encourage the appropriate interventions by the commissioner, the librarian and archivist and others, I think it's not only important that we report our findings to the House but that the government has an opportunity to respond.

Second, I do think it is worth ensuring we're on the record in this committee that we recognize that part of the rationale for an amendment was to ensure that we were not misleading Canadians with Treasury Board Secretariat guidelines that are misstated in the body of this motion.

Even in the last hour of this committee's work, we've heard about the different types of guidelines that exist in record-keeping within government and within the public service, the difference between records that constitute a permanent record, a record that encapsulates a decision within government and a record, for example, that is transitory. Unfortunately, the motion as it's worded now serves to substantially mislead Canadians on guidelines for the public service that in no way, shape or form demand the deletion of emails after 30 days. There is a lack of nuance to the way this motion is currently recorded to reflect that. I think that does an injustice to Canadians. I think it does an injustice to the House.

This committee has been through this before as a team of parliamentarians concerned about access and ethics when we presented incorrect information to the full House of Commons. That has reverberated in the work of this committee. I would urge us to recall the lessons of this committee's work before the holiday break and think carefully about how we present a motion to the House in a study that touches an appropriately serious issue like this one.

Mr. Chair, I would urge us to reconsider. As I've moved a motion, perhaps other colleagues might consider further amendments. I think it's very important that we add a government response here and consider rewording that first paragraph of the motion.

● (1705)

The Chair: I appreciate the intervention. I want to clarify that, regardless of whether the amendment was accepted, any time the committee does adopt the report, we will ask at that time whether the committee does, in fact, want a response from the government. We will have that opportunity when and if the report is adopted by the committee.

I wanted to clarify that.

[*Translation*]

You have your hand up, Mr. Sari.

Abdelhaq Sari: Yes, I'd like to speak to the amendment and the motion itself.

Mr. Chair, I've said over and over again that our non-partisan role as members of this committee is simply to communicate accurate information to the public and, above all, to reassure people about the things our government and public service are doing. However, it is clear from the text of the motion that we are misleading Canadians, as Mrs. Church pointed out.

How can an ethics committee go…. What if a researcher were to reuse the text of this motion and the inaccurate information it contains? Because of that, as committee members, we will be voting against the motion, even though I know it will pass since you have the majority. Nevertheless, I want to say again that members of the committee are putting forward information that is not entirely correct. We need to be very careful about that. We are not here for sound bites. First and foremost, we are here to reassure Canadians and show them that the work we are doing is going to help them and give them accurate information about government operations.

For that reason, Mr. Chair, I wholeheartedly agree with what Mrs. Church said about the motion's content, which is not completely accurate.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Sari. I appreciate that.

There are no other speakers on the list, so I am going to call the vote on the motion. We don't have unanimous consent, I assume, so I'm going to call for a recorded vote.

It is a tie, so I will vote. I vote yea.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We have about 20 minutes left with the officials. We have a hard stop at 5:30.

Thank you for your patience, gentlemen.

We're going to have three five-minute rounds with officials.

Go ahead, Mr. Majumdar.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, officials, to this committee. It's a pleasure to see you here. Thank you for the work you do day-to-day in a field that's largely ungoverned in a regulatory world that's not really well written.

I want to talk for a minute about accountability, not censorship by proxy, especially when it comes to AI. Without ironclad free speech protections, a lot of regulatory watermarking can be technically useful, but it can also become a tool for pre-emptive censorship. I am referring to the AI governance frameworks we see coming out of the UN, the ITU or any body where China or Russia have a veto power. I'm very skeptical of the kinds of regulations that are proposed for sovereign regions to adopt.

What's your perspective on establishing binding red lines against authoritarian AI practices while rejecting EU-style precautionary regulation that actually kills innovation?

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mark Schaan (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Industry): Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

It's a really interesting one that I'll try to tackle in a couple of ways.

One is that it's super-important that we recognize the import at this time of pursuing research into AI safety and evaluation mechanisms to be able to understand the underlying mechanisms and potential for harms within algorithms. That's at the heart of the Canadian AI safety institute and at the heart of our work with the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research in their role in the Canadian AI safety institute: It's to be able to advance the science that's helping us know how actual AI algorithms and advanced AI systems are playing out and to help create evaluative mechanisms that are going to assist developers and deployers to test effectively what the potential vulnerabilities and harms are in relation to their systems. That's one important piece.

The second is that it's super-important that we also continue to advance international efforts toward the ways that standardization can assist industry and provide certainty to industry in ensuring that there are effective mechanisms they can readily tell their users and their customers that they are complying with to ensure that they're not actually deploying systems that have the capacity to harm their customers. Canada is participating in a number of those efforts, whether it's within our standards bodies themselves or within the safety institute and some of our research communities that are pursuing some of that effort.

It's increasingly important that we also set out some of the ways in which industry can commit itself to being able to do some of that work in their own development and deployment. That's where the voluntary code for industry on the use of generative AI is extraordinarily helpful. It provides assurances to the market as well as to industry about their ability to assess whether or not they've met the basic terms by which they are doing things like ensuring transparency in the development and use of their algorithms or their work as it relates to things like red teaming, actually testing whether or not they know the potential outcomes and are creating mechanisms for some sort of feedback mechanism when actual risks and harms are adjudicated. I'd say that's one of the ways that we're going to be able to find that space.

The other, which I'll just briefly mention, is that there's an assumption that the only way we're going to get to good outcomes in artificial intelligence is through generalized AI legislation or generalized AI regulation. That's an open debate, but one of the things it misses is that there's extraordinary room within sector-based and existing verticals of regulatory efforts to be able to get at potential AI harms, whether that's capacities for our medical device examiners to know how to effectively interpret the safety of a medical device that utilizes artificial intelligence or whether it's the use of our private sector privacy laws to ensure that when an automated decision-making system makes a decision on the basis of someone's personal information, they get to know which aspects of personal information were used in that decision.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you.

With the time left, I'll ask this question because I also think carefully about how Hamas, Iran and Qatar spend tens of millions on TikTok and Instagram influence operations. We're not entirely confident that we see how these algorithms are multiplying things that radicalize aspects of Canadian society and distort truth or history.

Particularly in the information space, how do we establish a system that actually respects free speech but also exposes the presence of some very bad actors in our information market of ideas that are trying to deeply polarize our communities, go after minorities and make life intolerable for people?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Majumdar. We're over the five minutes. I actually miscalculated. We can have six-minute rounds, so you have half a minute to answer that, sir.

Mark Schaan: Thanks. I'll be super-quick.

There are a couple of ways that come to mind as I think about that question.

One is that there are a number of civil society efforts under way to look at verifiability of information and provide for mechanisms to assist people in knowing the provenance of the information that they're looking at and how it can be authorized.

The other is that we do have concerns about certain actors and their role in our systems. One of my other jobs is as the director of investments under the Investment Canada Act. We have guidance on things like electronic media and video games, and we have asserted guidelines about the ways in which those can be used for other purposes.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lapointe, please go ahead. You have six minutes.

Linda Lapointe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Schaan, for being with us today and helping us advance our work on access to information, among other things.

I have questions for you about the AI ecosystem. Ideally, it should be in Canada, but I'd like you to talk about how our government, how Canada, is making sure that our AI research ecosystem remains competitive on the world stage.

Mark Schaan: Thank you for your question.

To my mind, it's really about creating stability in Canada's research system and ensuring its continued success. Canada provided a tremendous foundation for AI research. It's no exaggeration to say that Canada contributed to the emergence of the technology now used in the field of AI. That is thanks to the work of Geoffrey Hinton, Yoshua Bengio, Rich Sutton and all the other godfathers of AI.

It's important to note that 130 researchers are in Canada today thanks to the CIFAR AI chair program. CIFAR helped develop the pan-Canadian AI strategy, launched in 2017. It's more than 130 researchers; it's 130 researchers with their labs and student teams. It's really an ecosystem.

Today, the challenge for the government is figuring out how to leverage, and build on, that success. Global competition in the field of AI is fierce. One good strategy is probably to make the necessary investments to ensure that the CIFAR chairs can continue their work. Other strategies exist as well, such as the $1.7-billion investment in attracting talent, and initiatives to connect the community, industry and research ecosystem. Commercialization is the area Canada wants to focus on now.

Linda Lapointe: Has the $1.7 billion you just mentioned helped to attract any talent yet?

Mark Schaan: The universities and research councils are working hard right now to make sure the program moves ahead quickly. I was there when discussions with university vice-presidents took place, launching the process. Things are looking good so far, but the process isn't over. The universities and research councils need to keep working, but the first signs are positive.

Linda Lapointe: That's excellent. I'm glad to hear it.

You said 130 researchers have come here since the pan-Canadian AI strategy was launched. Do you expect that a certain number of people outside the country will join their ranks?

Mark Schaan: Absolutely. It's interesting, because the CIFAR AI chairs continued their work throughout the period following the strategy's launch. The most recent chair appointments are incredibly interesting. There are new chairs in health, energy, manufacturing and other extremely interesting fields that use AI in their economic sectors.

Linda Lapointe: Thank you. That is quite interesting.

How does the government intend to protect our digital sovereignty? The minister talked a bit about that earlier, referring to the negotiations with our neighbour to the south, whom we're having a hard time with. How should we approach the matter, knowing how interconnected we are? I'd like to hear your comments on that.

Mark Schaan: Digital sovereignty is definitely more of a sensitive area, one that presents more complications. In the AI value chain, it's not possible for a country like Canada to have all the value chains here. For instance, the top chip makers are in the U.S. Taiwan makes them as well. It's tough for Canada to have a champion in that sector right now.

Strategic autonomy in the AI value chain is something the government and the department really have to build. That relates not only to data centres and infrastructure, but also to research areas with comparative advantages, and companies that are really champions in vertical AI solutions, for instance, in health care and energy. Our digital sovereignty will really grow when we're able to have Canadian capacity and resources located here, in Canada, while purchasing that capacity from other places in the world so it can be exported.

● (1720)

Linda Lapointe: I know that here in the Ottawa area, we have leaders in the field of photonics. That's also the case at Université de Sherbrooke. I got to see a component that's used in large data centres, in fact, but you brought up chips. As I understand it, we don't make any here in Canada.

Is that true?

Mark Schaan: We don't have any large-scale manufacturing in Canada right now, but we do have certain elements of the chip value chain. One that comes to mind is the Canadian Photonics Fabrication Centre, which has the capacity to manufacture III-V chips. They don't really use silicone, but they have other really interesting manufacturing methods. That capacity exists here in Canada.

Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much. That's quite interesting.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Mr. Thériault, over to you for six minutes.

Luc Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Schaan, this is an odd question, but we have a new AI department, so can you tell us about your background?

Mark Schaan: I graduated from the University of Waterloo with a political science degree. Then I got a master's degree and Ph.D. in social policy at Oxford University.

My career in the public service has covered a number of interesting areas, including social policy. When I was the director general of the marketplace framework policy branch, I developed the first regulatory approach for AI in Canada. I was also involved in establishing new international AI organizations, namely the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence.

Luc Thériault: Now I understand the connection.

You heard my line of questioning earlier. A lot of people have sounded the alarm about super AI. You spoke about competitiveness. Here, we are investing $1.7 billion, while our neighbour to the south is investing $400 billion. We'll never be able to compete with that.

Nevertheless, the witnesses we've heard from told us that we may very well need to apply what the Prime Minister said in his Davos speech to how AI research is organized around the world. Perhaps middle powers should work together, especially to lay the foundations for an international AI treaty.

Would an initiative like that fall under your strategy? If not, don't you think that's irresponsible vis-à-vis everyone in our society, given that we have a real problem?

One witness, Mr. Miotti, told us that it was crucial for Canada to, one, prohibit the development of super AI on its soil and, two, encourage other countries to do the same by laying the groundwork for an international treaty.

What's your position on that?

Didn't you hear that from people during your consultations, unless they all refused to participate, preferring to publish their assessments in the form of briefs at some point?

Mark Schaan: I'd like to thank the member for his question.

Research on the future of AI and the possibilities that super AI, and AI in general, hold is a key element of Canada's ecosystem, as is the government's support for building that capacity.

For example, the Canadian AI Safety Institute is very aware of the possibilities AI offers. In addition, the advisory council on artificial intelligence has a subcommittee that looks at the issues associated with the safe and responsible use of AI. Yoshua Bengio is on the committee, and so is Joëlle Pineau.

In fact, we have a good relationship with Mr. Bengio's new organization, LawZero. It does research on advanced AI, in order to promote the more responsible management of AI in a way that is simpler for Canadians and all citizens of the world.

It's important to note what Mr. Bengio said in the conclusion of his report for the UN on the state of AI in the world. He said that there was no consensus on the future of AI, and that it was up to governments and societies to determine the future and trajectory of AI. That is why one of the pillars of our strategy is about protecting Canadians. That includes research into the responsible use and reliability of AI. It's also important that all countries put money and effort into developing assessment standards and advancing research on AI's potential to benefit all Canadians and citizens of the world.

● (1725)

Luc Thériault: In concrete terms, what are you going to do to foster that sense of community and international co-operation? You can't do it alone. Just because Canada decides that AI will be deployed responsibly in accordance with the will of citizens does not mean that it's going to happen. That's not how things work.

As we speak, the technology is even surpassing the people developing it. It can't be controlled; you know that better than me. It's re-

assuring to hear that your strategy addresses that control, but I haven't heard about how the strategy is being deployed. What's being done?

Mark Schaan: There are three points I want to highlight.

First, the government is engaging multilaterally, namely with the creation of the International Network of AI Safety Institutes, which brings together Australia, the U.S., France, Germany and South Korea, among others. Canada is leading one of the pillars of that initiative, with its research on the risks associated with synthetic content.

Second, Canada is engaging bilaterally. Canada signed a new agreement with Germany with respect to digital affairs. Co-operation on AI safety research is an element of the agreement.

Lastly, the government is supporting the work of external experts in the field. That includes support for LawZero and our research community, to step up those efforts domestically and globally.

The Chair: Thank you.

Pardon me, Mr. Thériault, I made a mistake with your time. I gave you an extra minute.

Luc Thériault: It was useful.

The Chair: It's fine.

[*English*]

I want to thank our witnesses for their patience, first and foremost, and for their input.

I have no other business.

Have a great weekend, everyone. I'll see you on Monday afternoon.

The meeting is adjourned.