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Chair: John Brassard





## Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

Monday, April 13, 2026

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (John Brassard (Barrie South—Innisfil, CPC)):** Welcome, everyone.

I'm going to call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 35 of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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

I've been asked to read this, so I want to make it very clear.

Before we continue, I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the tables. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You will also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

For the benefit of members as well, wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand.

I saw your hand already, Mr. Barrett.

For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Before we start, I did decide to move to committee business. There were two motions put on notice, one prior to the break and another one that came in last week. We were supposed to start the Lobbying Act with witnesses, and I did not want to have that interrupted.

Fill your boots. If you want to move the motions, move the motions now. We are going into committee business afterwards in camera to deal with the Conflict of Interest Act.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

**Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC):** I'll move a motion, Chair, and then I'll speak to it once you have received it.

I move:

That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto, and the Minister's claims that he has recused himself from decisions his government made related to Alto; that, for the purpose of this study, the committee invite the following witnesses to appear by May 8, 2026:

1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for two hours;
2. Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours; and
3. The Minister of Finance and National Revenue, for two hours;

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

Chair, it's been sent to the clerk and distributed to all members in both official languages.

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

The motion is in order. It was put on notice.

You want to make comments on that, and then I'll open up the floor to any other comments.

**Michael Barrett:** The Alto high-speed rail project is the largest infrastructure project in the history of our country. Its current estimate is up to \$90 billion, but evidence from other jurisdictions where they've pursued projects of this kind have seen the costs rise by many orders of magnitude, and there's a lot of concern.

I have a boutique set of concerns from my region with respect to this project and the impact that it will have on members of my community—the damage to the environment, the destruction of heritage sites—as well as the consultation process, but that's not what this motion is about. The issue that's come up arises from a revelation about a week ago that the Minister of Finance has a partner, a spouse, in the executive offices of Alto.

The minister revealed last week, once this information was publicly available, that he had informed the Prime Minister in the fall that he had imposed a conflict of interest screen on himself, that he had identified the potential for a conflict of interest based on his relationship with this Alto vice-president and that he had recused himself.

No formal recusal has been published on the Ethics Commissioner's website and no conflict of interest screen has been established with the Ethics Commissioner's office.

The minister has identified this risk of a conflict of interest, and when we have a scenario like this, which is governed by the Conflict of Interest Act, the act tells us that the minister can't participate in decisions, discussions, debates or votes on the matter, but the problem is that the minister has done all of those things. We can infer from the absence of recusals published online that the minister also participated in cabinet decisions that concerned Alto.

There were specific votes in the House on including this in the BIA. The minister is not the Minister of Transport, but in his bill he included a measure that was very specifically transport-focused, and we had a standing vote in the House on removing the creation of the high-speed rail network act from the BIA. The minister voted against removing it. He voted to keep it in place.

What this motion seeks to do is have three individuals testify at the committee, including the Ethics Commissioner, who can officially and directly speak to this matter. I think it's important that Canadians understand the rules and why what he is saying is contrary to what the minister is saying.

It's the minister who has raised the prospect that there is, in fact, the risk of a conflict of interest. The motion is to have the minister come and address that with the committee and, importantly, also to have the CEO of Alto.

The motion says "executives", plural, and I previously did note that the conflict arises, as the minister has said, because his partner is an executive at Alto. She's a vice-president. Unless another member or other members have a compelling reason, I don't see why that particular vice-president would need to speak to the committee.

● (1540)

However, it does give bandwidth for the committee to invite the CEO. If the CEO wanted to bring another member of his executive team with him, then that makes sense, but it should be the CEO who comes to speak at the committee.

Why do we need to have someone from Alto come? First of all, this is Alto-specific. It's this \$90-billion project, but, also, the enabling effect, the creation of that high-speed rail network act in Bill C-15, which the minister had put forward, and which Conservatives and Bloc members voted against, what would that have meant for Alto had it not passed? This is something that the minister took an active decision to involve himself in.

It presents an opportunity for this committee to further examine the impacts of the act and how effective it is at doing the thing it's supposed to do. We need to protect the confidence that Canadians have in all of the different levels and parts of our system, including the executive, including Parliament, and this allows that to happen.

It's rather narrow in that it's not seeking to strike the special committee on the examination of potential conflicts of interests with the \$90-billion Alto project. It's very narrow, and that's why I've looked to establish what our rationale is in seeking to have these specific witnesses appear at committee. I've observed the public interest in this matter to date, and what precipitated the minister re-

sponding wasn't Parliament, and it wasn't a committee. It was the online sleuthing which discovered this connection that forced a response from the minister.

Let's just re-establish the transparency; get an understanding of why the minister took the decisions that he did; find out how the act should be applied and understand why the commissioner is interpreting in the way that he has, is or will; and also get an understanding of what the impacts are, based on the decisions that have been taken to date, and how they do impact this Crown corporation. That's what we're looking for.

I think that, as a measure of transparency, Chair, it's something that could conceivably be dispensed with quickly today, and over the next two weeks in....

Pardon me?

**Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** That's wishful thinking.

**Michael Barrett:** It sounds like we're in for a filibuster from the Liberals. Mr. Turnbull says it's wishful thinking to think that it would be dispensed with today, but we think it's an opportunity for transparency. Unfortunately, it's telling that the committee won't be able to get on with other business, including the report on the Conflict of Interest Act, which was supposed to follow in the second hour. However, I guess we'll start the filibuster clock.

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

Mr. Turnbull, I know you've been to this committee before. If you have any comments, they don't go across the table. They come to the chair. You were not in a position to speak at that point, so I ask you to respect the committee, please.

Madam Lapointe, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

The Alto high-speed rail project is very interesting. This train will pass through my riding, in Saint-Eustache. From Mirabel, it will pass through my riding. This high-speed rail project will connect Quebec City to Toronto. The project involves structuring investments, the largest in Canadian history. It will result in jobs. It will contribute close to \$35 billion to the economy, create close to 51,000 jobs and improve productivity for future generations. Can you imagine the greenhouse gas savings this will generate, considering the number of people who travel between Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto? Let's also think about how fast we'll be able to travel.

Personally, I don't know if we'll still be sitting here once we have high-speed rail. However, this is a structuring project that will enable people to continue working while on the train and to travel quickly from one city to another.

It is clear that the route hasn't yet been finalized in my riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, which includes Deux-Montagnes, Saint-Eustache, Boisbriand and Rosemère. We are currently at the consultation stage. Alto is going around, meeting with people and addressing their concerns. It's far from over. It's important to continue to hold consultations. People can submit briefs. Some cities are submitting briefs. People are concerned. Alto is currently testing the soil.

Personally, I'm going to talk to you about the section between Montreal and Ottawa, because that's the one we're focusing on right now. We haven't gotten to the section between Montreal and Quebec City yet, which will go through Trois-Rivières. Right now, the first section we're analyzing is the one between Montreal and Ottawa. The good thing is that consultations are currently being held in both provinces. Consultations are being held in Quebec and Ontario. After that, consultations can continue for the regions further away. The section between Montreal and Ottawa will be the first to be built. There are lessons to be learned every time a structure like this is built. We will use that experience to continue on to Quebec City. We'll do the same thing to continue on to Toronto from Ottawa. We know that, when undertaking a major project like this, we must ensure that people are consulted properly.

At present, there is a fairly wide corridor, about 10 kilometres. In the end, the train won't be 10 kilometres wide. It will have a right of way of 60 metres wide. However, it is clear that, wherever it's located, it raises some concerns. It's important to keep in mind that my riding is south of Mirabel. Those who remember will recall that expropriations took place in Mirabel in the 1970s. Those expropriations were carried out under legislation that no longer exists. Under the new legislation, agreements must be reached before expropriations can proceed.

I can tell you that when the people of Mirabel heard about the high-speed rail, which could potentially pass through Mirabel, they were very anxious. From one generation to the next, they remember the expropriations for the airport. Where do the people of Mirabel who were expropriated in the 1970s go? Most of them moved to my riding, to Saint-Eustache. People have spoken to me about their concerns; we're here to listen to them.

Alto is currently conducting consultations. It's important to begin with that first step. Following the soil assessment—environmental assessments are currently being done—we will be able to determine what the exact route between Montreal and Ottawa will be. That's the first section, as I mentioned earlier. Later on, there will be the section extending to Quebec City and the one going as far as Toronto.

I, for one, am very pleased with this project. I'm happy about it, and I support it. That said, I also listen to people who have concerns. We need to listen to them. As members of Parliament, that's exactly what we're here to do.

• (1545)

As I mentioned earlier, this is a project that will inject \$35 billion to the economy, create 51,000 jobs and boost productivity for generations to come. As I said earlier, I don't know if we'll be able to take the train from Montreal to Ottawa to come to work here, but we'll see. Imagine this: The trip from Quebec City to Montreal

would take 90 minutes by train. It's a dream. In addition, when you take the train, you get to see the scenery, it's fast, you can continue to work, and you can get things done.

By the way, 76% of Quebecers support high-speed rail. The majority of people support the project. The proposed high-speed rail act would cut the time to start construction in half, with a launch scheduled for 2029, instead of 2032, according to the Prime Minister. It's 2026. It's coming up fast. Canada is investing \$3.9 billion in project design, route planning, station location, environmental assessments and consultations. There would be up to 25 trains a day. That would be fantastic.

For the first segment alone, thousands of tonnes of steel and concrete, as well as significant amounts of copper and aluminum, will be required. I assume my colleagues have heard about our buy Canadian policy, which aims to prioritize steel, concrete and all precious metals sourced from Canada, especially aluminum, which is produced in Quebec. That would be used. There is no doubt that, with everything happening south of the border, it is important to reinvest in our economy, and everyone will benefit from it.

Alto is applying the principles of the buy Canadian policy and is working with Canadian industry for the required materials. That matters a lot, but it will also create good jobs for Canadians and Quebecers.

I've met with people in my riding who had questions for me. In Spain, 30% of high-speed rail users are people—

• (1550)

**Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm new here, but I just want to understand why we're discussing the project in general when a motion has been moved on a very specific subject. We have an hour. We're here to talk about a minister who said he recused himself but didn't. We don't want to hear about the project; we've already voted on it in the House. We want to know whether or not the minister recused himself and whether we can conduct our study. We could spend 10 years talking about the pros and cons of the project.

Can we stick to what we're supposed to be doing today?

**The Chair:** You're right, Mr. Hardy, that the motion is on the floor.

[*English*]

I give a little more latitude when it comes to debate. I've done that on all sides consistently, but I will ask that we bring it back to the motion, Madam Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

**Linda Lapointe:** I will be happy to do so, Mr. Chair. That said, I was referring to the motion, which begins as follows:

That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto [...].

I was in the process of describing the Alto company to you. I was talking about the high-speed train and explaining what a high-speed train is. There is a lot of misinformation circulating. There is misinformation everywhere. My colleagues in the opposition should know that some information is not always accurate. I am talking about the train. I am simply trying to update the information regarding the train.

The motion continues as follows: “and the minister's claims that [...]”. We read the motion earlier.

The motion proposed by our colleague Michael Barrett is about the train. What I'm saying is that it will pass through my district. The line will start in Ottawa, cross the Ottawa River, and return to Mirabel. It will pass through my riding and through Laval, and it will go to Montreal. I feel very well positioned to talk to you about this and explain what it will mean for us, since people are talking to me about it. High-speed rail is a positive thing; people want it, but there is still some concern. We and Alto are here to listen and understand what people think about this whole project. People will want to take the high-speed train, but we need to make sure we've consulted people properly, provided the right answers, listened, and taken into account what local residents tell us. That's what we're doing.

Earlier, we were talking about the route and the 10 kilometres under study, but in the end, the line will be 60 metres wide. A lot of misinformation is circulating everywhere. You surely have some great ideas, but sometimes what circulates on social media isn't entirely accurate. So it's important to know that the right-of-way will be 60 metres wide, and that the goal is to cause as few problems as possible for the landowners. There will be ways to do this, and it will be worked out. We met with the Union des producteurs agricoles to make sure we were really listening to their concerns and what they wanted. As I said, I'm here to listen to people.

I'll continue talking about the train. I haven't given any examples yet. In Spain, 30% of high-speed train users are people who didn't travel before. That means people who have never taken the train are potential high-speed train users.

It must be said that here, when we want to take the train, we don't have a fast and consistently reliable service. I believe cars are more reliable. When you take your car to go somewhere, you know how long it will take. It takes six hours between Montreal and Toronto. However, taking the train results in fewer greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, it's safe, and you have time to do other things on the train. You can therefore use your time more wisely.

By the way, there is community support. Discussions with provincial governments have contributed to the development of this initiative. Ontario and Quebec support this project. The Ottawa City Council has passed a motion strongly supporting this project. It unanimously adopted a motion calling for the implementation of this high-speed rail system. Just imagine if Montreal supported the project. It would certainly help, because people could live in Trois-Rivières and work in Montreal. According to estimates, the trip would take 30 or 40 minutes. People could stay in Trois-Rivières and visit their families in Montreal easily and quickly. The same goes for Toronto. The mayor also supports this initiative. High-speed rail will make travel between Toronto and other cities easier.

I'm not telling you anything new when I say that the majority of Canadians live within 100 kilometres of the southern border, specifically between Quebec City and Toronto. These are the people we want to serve. Of course, we also want to serve the people in the surrounding areas. People will be encouraged to use it.

As for the business community, the high-speed train will enable faster travel, more jobs and a stronger economy. As the Canadian Chamber of Commerce has said, this is exactly the kind of ambitious investment Canada needs.

We are encouraged by the government's plan to introduce legislation that would accelerate the development of the Alto high-speed rail project, which will provide a vital link between Quebec City, Toronto and the cities in between.

• (1555)

Can you imagine how easy it will be to get to Quebec City, no matter what the weather is like? You can go to Quebec City on the weekend, and it will take you 90 minutes. The round trip will be safe and pleasant.

I think I'm the only one who's had the chance to sit in Quebec City. In fact, Mr. Thériault, who's online, has also sat in Quebec City. Instead of taking Highway 40 in the snow and spending three hours on a dangerous road, it would take 90 minutes by train. I could have studied my documents and prepared myself.

Of course, right now I'm in Boisbriand, in the riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles. To get here, I have to drive two hours on Highway 50. Are there people here who have ever driven on Highway 50? Personally, I find this highway very dangerous, especially in winter. The provincial government supports the Alto project. It must know that Highway 50 is a dangerous road. This train would help everyone, and all those who want to come work here. Beyond work, it would also help people visit cities.

The president and CEO of the Ottawa Chamber of Commerce also supports the project. As I mentioned earlier, this is a high-speed rail project that will serve the most heavily populated corridor, between Toronto and Quebec City. It's like a global business hub attracting new investment.

There are surely some among us who have had the chance to try high-speed trains in Europe. We go to Europe, we come back, and we wonder why we don't have that here in Canada. We've been talking about this for a long time in the various caucuses. We've long wanted a great infrastructure like this, precisely to mobilize people and attract investment. We want something we can be proud of.

You know that Canada is a great tourist destination. High-speed rail will allow people to travel between Canada's major cities and visit all the tourist attractions they have to offer. That is my view. The Ottawa Chamber of Commerce, which represents tourism in Ottawa, considers the Alto project a unique opportunity. How long has it been since we've undertaken a project of this magnitude? Yes, we have the train, the Trans-Canada Highway, and the Trans-Canada Trail, which is accessible by bike across Canada. We have those things, but the investment in high-speed rail is an investment that will benefit the construction sector. Canadians and Quebecers will work on the project. Plus, we have steel, aluminum, and all the minerals. We have everything we need right here. We're going to have a modern train.

This is a project that will increase workforce mobility. For my part, I'm lucky that it's happening here. As I told you, the line will pass through my riding. To get from the Outaouais to Quebec City, you have to go north of the Ottawa River and through my riding.

It is important to listen to people and their concerns. People support the project. In fact, 76% of Quebecers support it.

In summary, this project will increase workforce mobility while removing barriers to domestic trade, diversifying markets, boosting productivity and supporting our climate goals. That is very important.

Indeed, every time we fly, it takes a tremendous amount of energy to get the plane in the air and bring it back down. However, taking the train takes almost the same amount of time. When we fly, we have to get there early and go through security, so it ends up taking about the same amount of time when you factor all that in. Plus, the train will emit fewer greenhouse gases. That is what we want for future generations. We must stop climate change. High-speed rail is one way to do that. By investing in high-speed rail, we will help mitigate climate change.

Ensuring that Peterborough is a stop on the high-speed rail line has been a priority for the local Chamber of Commerce. High-speed rail is an essential way to connect communities to the rest of the province.

Currently, cities are submitting information and briefs. They too would like to have stations.

● (1600)

That said, when carrying out a project like this, we must still consider that if there are too many stops, travel times between major cities will be reduced. We need to keep that in mind. This is an important opportunity that will benefit Canadian workers and industries.

I know that my colleague Mr. Thériault is listening to us, and I also know that one of his colleagues, Mr. Alexis Deschênes, member of Parliament for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, said he was in favour of this project. I was glad to hear that, because I've heard different things. We're in the middle of a by-election today in the riding of Terrebonne, and people have said that what's happening is appalling and that we've scared the people of Terrebonne by talking about the high-speed train. That is shameful, and it is misinformation. They have been fearmongering, and

people are asking questions. I'll go back to what I was saying at the beginning: There will be consultations on the route, among other things. We must not scare people. Mr. Deschênes said he was in favour of the project.

Here is a quote from the former member for Trois-Rivières, Mr. René Villemure, who was a member of the Bloc Québécois:

Today's announcement is in itself excellent news that aligns with a greener and more modern vision of transportation.

He added:

[...] it is not only a tremendous time saver for users, but also a valuable infrastructure asset for Laval and Trois-Rivières [...]

The train would stop in Trois-Rivières, and people would be connected.

Personally, I have family in Trois-Rivières. Being able to visit them quickly, without taking my car, I find that appealing. Plus, it's safe.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval, a member of Parliament, said:

[...] we will remain vigilant in the face of cost overruns, which can sometimes be astronomical for projects of this magnitude.

He did not say he was against the project; he said we would remain vigilant.

This legislation reduces the risk of cost overruns by cutting down on administrative red tape. That is well said.

I return once again to Mr. Villemure. He said:

When you care about a project, you put in the necessary energy to make it happen, and right now, that's not what I see. Quebecers and Mauricians must give up on the idea of a train in the foreseeable future.

It takes a long time to build a high-speed train, after all. As I said, we're still in the consultation phase. We don't need obstruction.

This legislative measure comes from Mr. Barsalou-Duval, who stated in 2024 that he didn't feel there was any sense of urgency. He also encouraged the government to build a high-speed train. Shouldn't we be focusing on high-speed rail, which, in addition to saving time, would encourage more people to switch from cars to trains?

This brings us back to the issue of greenhouse gas emissions. It could help and increase the use of high-speed rail.

There are also the Conservatives. I'm going to share another quote, and I'll ask you to identify who said it.

Here is the quote:

People in my region are tired of waiting decades for this project to become a reality. When will the government decide to get these projects off the ground [...]

The person who said that is Mr. Jamie Schmale, the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes. He's happy.

I have no quotes from the New Democratic Party, since there are no NDP members on the committee.

Who said that high-speed rail in Canada would be a very good thing? It was the only NDP member from Quebec, Mr. Alexandre Boulerice, who represents Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. Mr. Boulerice has gained a great deal of experience since 2011; he has learned a lot. He uses his judgment, and he believes it is a good thing.

Who said this was a truly exciting project that meets the needs of Canadians? That person also said that Canada should have had high-speed rail a long time ago and that we are talking here about projects of national interest or national scope. Once again, it was Mr. Alexandre Boulerice who said that.

I could go on and on about the Alto project. We need to be visionary, invest in our workers, and invest in our industries—particularly the steel and aluminum sectors—to ensure we have a project that will usher Canada into a new era.

• (1605)

I could go on about this for a long time, if you'd like, but I think I'll yield the floor to my colleague.

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

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Then I have MPs Turnbull, Fergus, Sari, Church, Cooper and Hardy.

[*Translation*]

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

We are discussing the high-speed rail project, whereas, as the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, we must take a position on a motion that would allow us to determine whether there is an appearance of conflict of interest or an actual conflict of interest involving the Minister of Finance, who sponsored Bill C-15 until the very end and voted in favour of it. Why did he not recuse himself from the process surrounding Bill C-15, if only as a precaution?

My colleague Ms. Lapointe cited a few colleagues who have taken a position on the high-speed rail project. This was done before the power play of passing Bill C-15. Everyone can be in favour of the high-speed train. In fact, 76% of people support this project. Everyone likes apple pie. However, it all comes down to how things are done.

Back then, Mirabel Airport was hailed as the seventh wonder of the world. We saw how that turned out: It was a complete mess. When we listen to the people of Mirabel, we see that they do indeed have reasonable concerns. Personally, I'm a bit worried to hear Ms. Lapointe say she's already in favour of the project as it stands, when we don't even know what it looks like, how much it will cost, or if it will destroy farmland.

It's all well and good to talk about greenhouse gases, but at the end of the pandemic, we realized we needed to bring producers closer to our plates, because we had experienced shortages in the supply chains.

In Quebec, the proposed line actually runs through my region. If Ms. Lapointe met with members of the Union des producteurs agricoles, she would have seen that they are clearly opposed to the high-speed rail project. There are two things that concern producers regarding the project in its current form.

The consequences of the high-handed move to pass Bill C-15 are the suspension of the Expropriation Act and the removal of powers from the affected parties, rather than the application of this law, which had been enacted following the Mirabel Airport fiasco and the power grabs of that era. In that sense, it's all well and good to say we support a concept, but it's another matter entirely to figure out how to implement it.

Today, that is not the question we are asking ourselves. Rather, we are asking whether, from an ethical standpoint, the Minister of Finance has crossed the line. He certainly acted wisely by consulting with people and seeking to establish a conflict-of-interest filter. The problem is that we don't know what that filter consists of. How is it that, if some kind of filter was applied by people around him, he was able to vote on Bill C-15?

The question is not about what the Ethics Commissioner said. In one of his responses, the commissioner states that Mr. Champagne does not manage human resources, but rather the Department of Transport. He therefore cannot be in a conflict of interest.

The question we might ask is this: Is there indeed an appearance of a conflict of interest? After all, we are talking about his spouse. Did Alto hire his spouse because he is Minister of Finance? As Minister of Finance, did he consider that he had to see Bill C-15 through to its passage, while allowing himself to vote, even though his wife worked for Alto? These are entirely legitimate questions.

According to a document on the Treasury Board website, when it comes to conflicts of interest, the key factor is not the integrity or good faith of the public servant, but the appearance of a conflict of interest in the eyes of the public. I suggest that my colleagues read the McKendry decision.

• (1610)

Today, instead of obstructing proceedings, the Liberals should simply acknowledge that Mr. Champagne needs to come and explain himself, and that the commissioner should tell us why we need to investigate to understand what happened, because there is a lack of transparency regarding access to information. The head of Alto should also explain, in the chronology of events, how the minister's partner came to be hired, and why the minister does not seem to see a problem with taking a stand and voting. That's what blows my mind. How can he vote? How can he decide not to recuse himself during votes on Bill C-15?

If the concept of the appearance of a conflict of interest applies to a public servant, it should also apply to a project like this one, which effectively pushes people aside. Telling people that we're listening to them isn't enough. As the Minister of Transport said during today's oral question period, it's going to happen because it's the seventh wonder of the world. It's the greatest project we can achieve, but at what cost? How is this happening? At whose expense is this being done? These are questions that need to be answered.

We're not talking about public consultations. No one seriously believes that Alto is conducting genuine public consultations. These are more like aggressive promotional and public relations activities. Why are they so aggressive? It's because they have the law on their side. They've just been given a blank check. When the president of Alto says he wants to avoid expropriations and prioritize agreements, that also means he holds all the cards and can impose his will.

Before supporting a project like this, perhaps we should get answers to our questions. That is fundamental. All the colleagues the member mentioned would agree with me on this point. There is a gap between the concept, the idea, and the implementation. Today, we see that, in this project, the Minister of Finance has decided to take a stand, defend his bill, and include an amendment in the budget implementation bill, which means that the Expropriation Act no longer allows affected individuals to be represented.

If we truly want to listen to and respect people, as the Minister of Transport said this afternoon, why was this provision introduced? Why was it necessary for Bill C-15?

We can certainly accuse each other of spreading misinformation. I've heard it said that the Bloc Québécois is trying to create fear. That is not the case. We are asking questions, and we have no answers. Alto doesn't have those answers either. Until we have answers to our questions, we must exercise caution.

Has there been any questionable behaviour? Personally, I would like the minister to have the courage to come meet with us rather than asking his colleagues to filibuster in order to run out the clock and avoid a perfectly legitimate motion for an ethics committee. Let him come meet with us, let the president of Alto come explain himself, and let the Ethics Commissioner tell us why, in his view, there is no problem.

• (1615)

In the next few hours, we'll be finalizing our conflict of interest report. Perhaps there are things we will need to add.

I can certainly say that a high-speed train is an extremely appealing project, but the people at the Union des producteurs agricoles, or UPA, said they would prefer a high-frequency train, because it would have less of an impact on farmland. The proportion of very productive farmland in Quebec is about 2%, and this project could seriously threaten that land.

I think it's time to get on with things. It's 4:19 p.m. Mascouche time. I've never heard Ms. Lapointe be so talkative during our proceedings. It's inspiring, but it's important not to dodge the issue.

The committee is not the issue. The committee has a mandate to explicitly, publicly and transparently uncover what happened between when the minister expressed his initial concern, when he took the specific measures he took, and when he determined that he did not have to recuse himself and was free to vote. We also need to understand why he included provisions in Bill C-15 that could derail the project and make certain people apprehensive.

I met with the people of Mirabel, and they don't want to relive what happened to them. The same goes for farmers in Lanaudière.

The UPA has come out against the project as it currently stands. Meaningful consultations have to take place.

As far as I'm concerned, it would be inappropriate not to shed light on the minister's ethics and involvement. I heard him say this afternoon that this was a disgrace. He should be careful with his words. Is it a disgrace every time someone asks a question about the ethics of a situation? The disgrace, to my mind, is having to ask the question. Someone somewhere showed poor judgment and didn't do what they should have. This is about the appearance of a conflict of interest and the credibility of our institutions. Everyone could end up being muzzled.

The Liberals like muzzling people, and they've done so in the case of major bills. However, they're asking people to trust them. If they want to rebuild trust, they need to be transparent every step of the way, and for us, figuring out whether the minister broke the rules is an important step. We want to understand what happened. Everyone should [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. This isn't a partisan comment.

Mr. Chair, I would like us to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, your mike isn't working.

[*English*]

I don't know how to say it in French, but the sound is muffled. Can you give us a bit of a test, please?

[*Translation*]

**Luc Thériault:** Is this better?

**The Chair:** I think so, but talk a bit more.

**Luc Thériault:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

I've been talking for a while. I hope everyone can hear me now.

**The Chair:** Yes, that's better.

You may carry on, Mr. Thériault.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, this situation with Alto and Mr. Champagne involves a sequence of events, and we need to understand that sequence of events. What happened between July and now?

When was the Minister of Finance's partner hired? Why did the Minister of Finance not take the necessary steps to recuse himself? If he did recuse himself, when did he do it? In what circumstances did he recuse himself and from what decisions? To me, the only way to look at this is in the context of Bill C-15's implementation. How is it that he was the leading sponsor? You'll say that it was the budget implementation bill, and we understand that. However, why did he include provisions in Bill C-15 giving Alto carte blanche going forward, particularly in relation to expropriating property? Why did he do that? How does that have nothing to do with his connection to Alto through his wife? Why shouldn't that raise questions in people's minds about the appearance of a conflict of interest and credibility? Doesn't he want to come here to explain his position?

I'm sure he didn't ask his fellow members to filibuster the committee today and talk out the clock. I'm sure he didn't do that. I am sure he is a man of honour and will appear before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to explain what happened. If he did anything wrong, he will admit his mistake. Personally, that's what I would do in his shoes.

The same goes for Alto. I'm not sure that Alto doesn't want to shed light on the situation. It's important to hear from the Ethics Commissioner, so he can explain how he handles situations like this one. Is a conflict of interest screen in place? Did he require one? Did he not? Why did he not require one?

Why isn't Mr. Champagne, the finance minister, in an apparent conflict of interest, given that he made the decision to put these changes in the budget implementation bill, including amendments to the Expropriation Act?

I want to thank Mr. Barrett for raising this issue and working on it while Parliament was on break. It's unfathomable to me that the ethics committee, whose primary focus is literally to examine conflict of interest issues, would be prevented from adopting this motion today.

We have three minutes left, Mr. Chair. I don't see any indication that my Liberal colleagues agree with what I've said. I wish they would have told me that they agree with me on the need to get to the bottom of this situation. Not doing so could sully the project.

Mr. Champagne apparently wrote to the Prime Minister on September 10, telling him that a conflict of interest screen had been put in place. It is nevertheless legitimate to ask what that means in practical terms. What does it look like? What is allowed and what isn't allowed under the screen?

• (1625)

Apparently, he sought advice on the ethics implications. How did that advice not result in his recusing himself from the vote on Bill C-15 or his recognizing that it was better to do so? That's really hard to wrap my head around. Perhaps he should get a new ethics adviser. I will do it for free.

That said, right now, we aren't discussing the crux of the high-speed rail issue. This whole thing got off to a bad start. Why? It got off to a bad start because the government hurriedly passed this legislation and gave carte blanche to a company that doesn't consult

stakeholders in a meaningful way. Rather, it puts on information sessions as a public relations exercise.

If the company engaged in proper consultation, perhaps the farmers, the people of Mirabel and others who may end up in the corridor could get answers to the legitimate questions they are asking. In Quebec, we usually consult stakeholders on all aspects of the project.

We're told that the 10-kilometre-wide corridor will eventually be narrowed to 60 metres. Obviously, there won't be further easements. Why start with such a wide corridor? At what point will people lose the ability to do any work on their property until the project is completed? This is going to have a major impact on people's lives, and the government gave Alto carte blanche.

If listening to people is just about understanding their concerns and frustrations, not about allowing them to exercise their rights, well then, the project is off to a very bad start. This is looking like Mirabel 2.0.

It's almost 4:30, Mr. Chair, and I think we should adjourn debate and move on.

• (1630)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, you're proposing a motion to adjourn debate. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

**Luc Thériault:** Yes, that's correct.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** It's a dilatory motion. There's no debate on that.

The motion proposed by Mr. Thériault is that we adjourn debate on the motion. A yes vote means debate is adjourned, and a no vote means that debate keeps going.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

**The Chair:** The debate has been adjourned.

Ms. Church, do you have your hand up? I had you on the speaking list.

**Leslie Church (Toronto—St. Paul's, Lib.):** Yes, Mr. Chair. I'd like to move my motion.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Leslie Church:** It has been sent to the clerk.

In light of the need to ensure government operations remain modern, secure and effective so that Canadians can benefit from efficient and innovative public services, and recognizing the rapid advancement of digital technologies and their implications for the protection of personal information, I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the committee undertake a study of not greater than ten meetings to review the Privacy Act; that the committee invite:

- (a) the President of the Treasury Board of Canada for one hour;
  - (b) the Privacy Commissioner of Canada for two hours;
  - (c) the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta for two hours;
  - (d) any other witnesses the committee deems relevant;
- that the committee report its findings to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

**The Chair:** Ms. Church, the motion is on the floor. It was placed on notice, so if you have some things you want to say, you can start now.

**Leslie Church:** Okay.

It's been about a decade since the Privacy Act was last examined at committee, well before the rise of artificial intelligence and other modern technologies that now fundamentally shape how personal information is collected and used. With the Treasury Board having launched a review of the act and with our government committed to modernizing its operations, we believe it's essential that the committee members receive, first, a thorough briefing on the Privacy Act, including hearing from the Treasury Board, the Privacy Commissioner, relevant department officials and other commissioners and subject matter experts, of course, to understand what issues should be on the table and what considerations should guide our work.

In particular, we are suggesting to invite the Alberta commissioner, because Alberta's Protection of Privacy Act came into force in the summer of 2025, making it one of the most recent provincial privacy reforms in the country. Hearing from Alberta's commissioner would prove valuable in understanding how they've approached changes to their privacy act and what lessons might be applicable at the federal level. Of course, we would be open to extending invitations to privacy commissioners from other provinces as well.

Also, it's hard to imagine an area that could be more relevant to Canadians today than looking at this act in light of the wide range of developments we've seen in the 10 years since the act was last investigated at committee. The act itself has been in force since 1983. It's become a different world since then.

When the act was created, it set out the rules for how federal institutions were going to collect, create, use, retain and disclose personal information. Certainly with the methods we now employ to collect data, the types of data we have seen become relevant and become targeted for scams and become core to the digital realm we operate within, and in terms of the disclosure and retention of privacy and how it's retained, now that most of our data is in a technological form, it's worth looking at this act very carefully.

The act was originally intended to give individuals the right to access their own information and to request that it be corrected if they believed it to be inaccurate, but we know that many of the systems and processes around that collection, retention, use and disclosure of information have changed so much that the act itself may be found to have many vagaries and many gaps in light of how data is used today.

The act itself is applicable to federal institutions. The private sector is subject to different privacy legislation, but from a federal point of view, understanding how the federal government uses, col-

lects, preserves and retains data and ensures the careful handling and privacy of the data that federal institutions use, out of necessity, for serving Canadians is also a very important part of the scope of the investigation we should be doing.

We know that the act applies across more than 250 federal institutions, so this is not a small and narrow piece of legislation. It's one that has a very core role in the functioning of so many of our government institutions and the broader public set of institutions serving Canadians.

• (1635)

Within that privacy regime, Treasury Board Secretariat has a central role to play in issuing the policies, directives and guidance to help ensure that federal institutions are compliant with the Privacy Act, providing government leadership, oversight and operational support to ensure that privacy practices are consistent across institutions, including the central registration of personal information repositories.

Even in terms of some of the work that we've been doing over the past number of months as a committee, there's no question in my mind that privacy has come up in many different forms, particularly in our study into the adoption of artificial intelligence and the concerns around the growth of that capability, and privacy has come into other aspects of our work as well.

This will touch everything: how we approach the retention of information, the role of Library and Archives Canada and the whole host of federal institutions that have a mandate to utilize, collect and maintain data. I think this is going to be a very important study.

The federal government actually has an opportunity to learn from other privacy regimes and commissioners across the country. We are, I think, certainly in a position where it will be useful to understand those best practices, understand how different provinces have adapted their legislation in recent years and adapted the types of structures they have in place to ensure that we, as servants of the public and as stewards of public institutions, are equipping those institutions to handle data as well as people's privacy and private information effectively.

I think we'll have a lot to learn from those other jurisdictions, in addition to always having an eye on the services and institutions that operate across jurisdictions, as well as the private sector companies that operate across jurisdictions and certainly Canadians themselves who have a foot in several jurisdictions, provincially and federally, as they move through different parts of the country. We want to make sure that we are, as well as possible, understanding the interconnection of those systems and trying, as we always do, to ensure that as we develop federal policies, they are in step and actually working towards and supporting our ideal of having a system of privacy that is intelligible, that is understandable and that supports the work of each jurisdiction, but that at the same time understands the necessity of operating as one country, where we are trying to find new ways to deliver government services and government benefits as expeditiously as possible, without friction, while always having an eye to people's individual privacy.

This continues to be an area where we're seeing how much modern technological developments are reshaping how we look at these privacy systems. For us to meet the goal, as I set out when moving this motion, of ensuring that Canadians can benefit from efficient and innovative public services that are both modern and secure is an important objective. Ensuring that we have a study that looks closely at balancing those objectives and understanding those objectives and making the most of the technological tools that help Canadians to access government services, while at the same time being very aware of the challenges, the gaps and the opportunities for harm when they aren't monitored or aren't as secure as they need to be, is a very important role for us as parliamentarians.

• (1640)

I commend this motion to my colleagues around the table. I hope that we will have the opportunity to explore this, to bring in some very credible experts from right across the country to add to our understanding and to be able to provide a report back to the House that will help guide the work of the government, and particularly Treasury Board, as they also work to progress with their review of the Privacy Act, which I think my colleagues will know was launched earlier this month on April 2.

This is with a view to ensuring that the Government of Canada can examine federal law to enhance service delivery, including modernizing processes that allow the secure sharing and reuse of data across government programs when it directly benefits individuals or the public, including establishing designated official sources of key data to reduce duplication and improve accuracy, which I think is a very important function.

I know that Treasury Board is going to be working at this over the next number of months. I think they have called for consultations, comments and feedback from the public until early this summer and have embarked as well on a series of consultations and meetings with federal institutions and subject matter experts. I think the work that we would do as a committee would greatly enhance the work that they're going to be embarking on over the coming months.

Finally, I want to say one quick thing before turning back the floor, Mr. Chair. It is just to thank the committee for allowing representatives like me to participate remotely on occasion. It is Yom

HaShoah, which is Holocaust Remembrance Day. It is important for parliamentarians to be present in our constituencies at important times like this. I just wanted to recognize that and thank you for allowing me to appear in hybrid format for this particular meeting.

• (1645)

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

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett, on the motion.

**Michael Barrett:** Chair, I move that the committee now proceed to the consideration of the draft report, the review of the Conflict of Interest Act.

**The Chair:** The motion on the floor is a dilatory motion, so there's no debate. We're going straight to the vote.

We have a tie. I will vote yes.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

**The Chair:** We're going to move in camera. This meeting is suspended until we set it up.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

• (1840)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Hardy, on committee business. You have the floor, sir.

*[Translation]*

**Gabriel Hardy:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to move that we resume the debate adjourned earlier today on Mr. Barrett's motion.

*[English]*

**The Chair:** The motion has been moved.

We are resuming debate on Mr. Barrett's motion. Do I need to read the motion again, Madam Clerk?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Nancy Vohl):** No, because the vote is on resuming debate.

**The Chair:** Okay.

*[Translation]*

Do you have anything to say, Mr. Hardy?

**Gabriel Hardy:** No, Mr. Chair.

*[English]*

**The Chair:** Mr. Fergus, I have you next on the list. Go ahead, sir.

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would definitely like to ask the clerk a question. Can the debate be reopened during the same meeting?

**The Chair:** I'll answer your question.

[*English*]

A motion was moved to resume debate, so it is my responsibility to then ensure the motion is in order. It's in order, but we have to have approval of the committee to do it. Because we are in committee business, it is in order.

Do I have consensus on the part of the committee to resume debate?

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Chair:** That was my procedural error, and I apologize for that.

Let's go to a vote on that then, please.

We have a tie. I vote yes.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

**The Chair:** We are resuming debate on the motion moved by Mr. Barrett. I have Mr. Fergus and Mr. Sari, and Ms. Church, I see your hand up.

Mr. Fergus, I apologize for interrupting you, but I had to deal with that.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mr. Chair, we've had the vote, but I would appreciate knowing, going forward, if, within the same meeting, you can reopen debate on a motion that has been adjourned.

It's my understanding that you can't do that within the same meeting. I would like to know on a go-forward basis, so perhaps we can have that clarification, sir.

**The Chair:** I'm going back to the book.

It's a fair question, so I'm going to suspend for a minute. The clerk needs a little more time for clarification. I want to make sure we get this right.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1840) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1855)

**The Chair:** We are resuming. I'll give a reminder that we're in public.

To Mr. Fergus's question, we did seek guidance. I'll read what it says:

“That the debate be now adjourned”

A member who moves “That the debate be now adjourned” wishes to temporarily suspend debate under way on a motion or study. If the motion is carried, debate on the motion (or amendment or subamendment, as the case may be) or study ceases for the moment and the committee moves on to other business.

If a motion to adjourn is defeated,—

In this case, it was not. It was adopted.

—a second such motion may not be moved until some intermediate proceeding has taken place or item of business has been considered. However, members may alternate between moving motions to adjourn the debate and to adjourn the committee, as these motions do not have the same effect and are considered intermediate proceedings.

Mr. Hardy's moving that motion to resume debate on Mr. Barrett's earlier motion as presented is in fact in order. My decision is my decision. You can challenge my decision if you like, but I'm reading it from this. If you want to challenge my decision, you can go ahead.

That's not you, Mr. Fergus, but—

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, regarding your decision—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Fergus had the floor.

You asked a question to which I gave an answer. Do you still wish to have the floor? I do have Mr. Sari next.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I would like to add my name to the list as you have it.

**The Chair:** That's fine.

Go ahead, Mr. Sari.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** First of all, Mr. Chair, my name was on the list when you suspended the debate.

If I understood you correctly, you were talking about a motion to temporarily suspend debate, but that's not what this was. This was a motion to just suspend the discussion. We moved on to something else, knowing that what had been understood, perceived, and agreed to, by members when they voted was that the discussion was being discontinued until further notice, until such time as the committee met again.

The rule you cited today clearly refers to a temporary suspension. I realize that the committee can choose to suspend the debate temporarily, move on to the next agenda item and then resume the debate. However, the rule you read clearly states that the suspension is temporary, and that wasn't the case here. Rather, the discussion was discontinued, because the members opposite didn't want to continue the debate today. Discussion of the motion stopped.

• (1900)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** So are you—

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Had the word “temporarily” not—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** There's no debate on this. My decision is my decision. If you're challenging my decision, I invite you to do that, but I was pretty clear in the explanation that this was allowable.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I'm not challenging your decision, Mr. Chair, on the contrary. You said something, and I was just trying to explain how I understood your comment.

You clearly said that the rule applied when someone sought to temporarily suspend debate, but that wasn't the case here. The basis for your decision, according to you, doesn't apply.

The premise you gave to explain your decision does not reflect the circumstances.

Will you revisit your explanation regarding a temporary suspension and the circumstances to which it applies?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The debate we're having right now is on Mr. Barrett's motion.

I made a decision. I'm not open to any discussion on that. I invite you to challenge my decision if you like, but the debate is on Mr. Barrett's motion.

We'll continue.

Ms. Church, go ahead.

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, is it in order for me to move a motion to adjourn and reconstitute this debate on Thursday?

**The Chair:** You can make a motion to adjourn, if you like. It's not going to determine the date. It would be up to a member to introduce a motion to resume debate on this motion. If you wanted to do that on Thursday, you have the ability. You don't have the ability to dictate what day this resumes. The dilatory motion, if you're presenting it, is to adjourn the meeting.

**Leslie Church:** Is it possible if there's unanimous consent around the table? I'm not sure if there is, but if the idea here was to move a motion to adjourn, with the caveat that debate on Mr. Barrett's motion would resume on Thursday, would that be amenable to the chair and to the committee?

**The Chair:** There are two types of motions that you can move. You can move a motion to adjourn debate or to adjourn the meeting. If you move anything else beyond that, then it becomes a substantive motion and it is open and subject to debate.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you. If it were open and substantive, I would be open to that.

**The Chair:** Again, let me know what your motion is, please.

**Leslie Church:** The motion would be to adjourn with the understanding that the committee would return to Mr. Barrett's motion at its next meeting on Thursday.

**The Chair:** The only thing I would suggest is that a substantive motion....

We already have a motion on the floor from Mr. Barrett. If you want to adjourn the meeting, then you can do that. Anything in addition to that, with any conditions at all, would be deemed inadmissible, and I would rule it inadmissible. If you want to adjourn the meeting, you can go that route. Anything further than that is not admissible, because we're already dealing with a motion that's on the floor. I hope I explained that properly.

**Leslie Church:** Yes. That's very helpful.

Then, Mr. Chair, it would be my intent to move a motion to adjourn.

I would say to members of the committee that our intention would then be to agree to a motion to resume debate on Thursday, but yes, I'm moving to adjourn.

**The Chair:** I can't accept that part of it. What I can accept is a motion to adjourn the meeting. I can accept that, Ms. Church, if that's your intent.

I'm not going to speak to the intentions of other members of the committee. I know we have plans for Thursday, including the OECD coming in on the Lobbying Act review. These are people who have committed their time to us on Thursday and they have allowed us Thursday as the time. They're in Europe, so I would really like.... We also have the B.C. commissioner coming in person on Thursday as well. I'm just telling you what I have planned for Thursday already.

Anyway, the motion is to adjourn the meeting. I'm not sure we're going to have consensus on this, so I'm going to ask Madam Clerk to take the vote.

We have a tie. I will vote no.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** The motion by Ms. Church to adjourn the meeting has been defeated.

We're going to resume debate. I have Mr. Fergus on Mr. Barrett's motion.

• (1905)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I have a very quick point of information that I'd like to ask before I get to the substance of the motion.

Mr. Chair, would you and the clerk be able to tell us until what time I could plan to be here?

**The Chair:** We're working on that now. As it stood, we had resources until 9:30. The suspensions are going to add to that, so there's a likelihood that we could be here until 10:15 or 10:45. The clerk is working on that.

**The Clerk:** It's until 9:58 p.m.

**The Chair:** It's 9:58. There you go. We have resources until that time.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Very good.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fergus, you have the floor on the motion.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, there was a speaking list before the debate was suspended. Does that list still apply?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We did. I'm sorry, Mr. Fergus.

You're quite right, Mr. Sari. I had Mr. Turnbull. I do have Mr. Fergus and then I have Mr. Sari.

Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

Mr. Sari, you're next. Thank you for bringing that to my attention.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to have this opportunity, because it gives me a chance to add my voice to the discussion on Mr. Barrett's motion. I would like to draw my colleagues' attention to a specific part of the motion, the last sentence.

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

Again, if we want to proceed quickly with this study, a study Mr. Barrett deems necessary and Mr. Hardy sees as pressing, in addition to the fact that we are going to spend the next three hours discussing the motion for the study, I have trouble with that last sentence. Not only could it prevent the committee from proceeding with the study right away, but it could also go against what we as members want to do. It could spark a lengthy discussion in the House, instead of a debate that should be taken up by the committee, a standing committee of the House of Commons.

As you well know, the purpose of standing committees is to make effective use of members' valuable time, given that members have an array of responsibilities, including sitting on other committees. They have responsibilities to their constituents and as parliamentarians. Using the House's time for this kind of debate brings to mind what we went through at the end of the 44th Parliament, in the fall, when debate on a question of privilege went on for more than 70 days. Yes, there were amendments and motions for concurrence in a report, but the whole time, it was impossible for Parliament to do its job.

How did that debate turn out? We can say that almost every member had the opportunity to share their views on a series of discussions. I think it's important that members be able to have their say. However, it gave Canadians, ordinary folks, the impression that Parliament was no longer a place to debate issues that regular people care about. Although the question raised at the time was important, it did not reflect the interests of all Canadians.

● (1910)

Frankly, it caused trouble for us. Those who were seen as being responsible for the debate didn't fare well in the last election. It would appear that Canadians took a very negative view of those who tried to waste Parliament's time and voted accordingly. What we should learn from all that is that we should use our time very effectively.

A number of outs have been proposed today. I recognize that they weren't in order, but my colleague Mrs. Church proposed that the committee debate the matter at its next meeting. Her motion wasn't in order, but I completely understand her intention, her rationale, and she was entirely right.

This motion is about Alto. My colleague Ms. Lapointe spoke very eloquently about Alto and the importance of the project, not just to her constituents, but also to all Canadians.

I had the privilege of being there when the project was announced, in my Hull—Aylmer riding, just before the holidays. I have to say that the proposed route doesn't go through Hull—Aylmer, but still, my constituents found the project very interesting, especially those in central and western Gatineau, which is part of

the beautiful riding of Hull—Aylmer I have the pleasure of representing. In fact, I encourage everyone to visit it. Mr. Hardy is one of my temporary constituents, since, as a Quebecker, he lives in my riding temporarily, just like several of the members at the table who live in Hull—Aylmer. The project is very important to Gatineau and its residents because people know it will create jobs. Creating jobs in Quebec is in everyone's interest. In fact, the project is so important that the City of Gatineau passed a motion expressing its support for the project. That's how important it is.

It's estimated that the project could boost GDP by some \$35 billion and generate more than 50,000 jobs. Those numbers aren't just really good; they're excellent. I have the right figures. The project is incredible news for the people between Quebec City and Windsor, who make up about half of Canada's population. This is a proven technology.

● (1915)

I remember when I was small, a young boy, and France launched its high-speed rail network around 1977. It was amazing, and it made all the difference in France.

France's national railway, the Société nationale des chemins de fer français, quickly realized that it was much more efficient to move people across the country by high-speed train than by plane. National airlines like Air France concluded that it was even more cost-effective not to provide short-haul domestic service. It was easier and even faster to encourage people to take the train to the airport when travelling outside the country.

Personally, I'm very eager for Canada to have that capacity and for us to move quickly to make that happen. My fear is that this lengthy discussion will become yet another waste of Parliament's time, for political reasons I don't grasp. If every effort was made to have the committee undertake the study right away, without reporting to the House that it was doing so, I think it would be a much better motion, but that's not the case.

This project has been long-awaited in Canada, some 50 years. The official opposition voted against it at the finance committee, but then asked for and received permission to change its vote in order to support the project. When the issue was referred back to the House of Commons, the official opposition voted in favour of the budget implementation bill, which included measures to fund all this, but for whatever reason, that suddenly has to change.

The motion says the following:

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

All that will do is get in the way and drag this debate on and on.

I want to get back to why this is important to the people of Hull—Aylmer. How is it important? My colleague Ms. Lapointe talked about this in her remarks, when she did a very good job of explaining why the project is important. She talked about Highway 50.

• (1920)

In the Outaouais region, we sometimes say that we're both far from Ottawa and far from Quebec City. We don't have all the infrastructure we need for our economic development. For generations, we've had to cross into Ontario to get to Montreal, Quebec's largest city. For years, it was Route 148, a secondary road, that connected the two. Highway 50 had been promised since 1976. A small segment was built near Mirabel.

[English]

**Gabriel Hardy:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Hardy.

[Translation]

**Gabriel Hardy:** Again, we are discussing Mr. Barrett's motion, which calls on the committee to undertake a study into the minister's conflict of interest and recusal in relation to government decisions, and to invite three witnesses for the purposes of that study.

I think the member's comments about the history of Highway 50 are off topic. It would be great if he could get back to the matter at hand. I think everyone wants to get somewhere.

As you said, Mr. Chair, we are in public and everyone is watching us. We need to stop wasting time on history lessons and the weather. What we want is for the minister to come before the committee and answer our questions.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** It's non-debatable. On the point of order on relevance, again, I do give some latitude, but, Mr. Fergus, we're not talking about the merits or the values of the Alto system. We're talking about a motion that the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto and the minister's claims that he has recused himself from decisions his government made related to Alto, and that for the purposes of this study, the committee invite the following witnesses to appear by May 8: the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for two hours; executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours; and the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, for two hours, and that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

If you want to discuss the merits of Alto, I suggest that you go to the transportation committee and deal with it there. Stick to the motion. That's what we're debating.

Please continue.

[Translation]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I very much appreciate and respect Mr. Hardy's comment, but he is mistaken in thinking that I strayed from the substance of this motion. Had he been listening carefully, he would know that what I was saying was relevant to the last sentence of the motion, as I pointed out a number of times.

I'm going to read out the motion, so that it's clear why my comments are relevant and why I talked about Highway 50. The motion reads as follows:

That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto, and the Minister's claims that he has recused himself from decisions his government made related to Alto; that, for the purpose of this study, the committee invite the following witnesses to appear by May 8, 2026:

1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for two hours;
2. Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours; and
3. the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, for two hours;

Now here's the operative sentence:

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

That's the problem, in my view. Alto is a crucial project, one that is important to my constituents and my region, and as a Canadian member of Parliament, I would say my country and its economic development. Frankly, it's even a matter of life and death for the constituents in my region, because Highway 50 is what links people in the Outaouais to Montreal, the province's largest city, without leaving Quebec. People regularly have to take other routes, and I'm sure my fellow member from Quebec is quite familiar with the situation. He is well aware that it is one of the most dangerous highways in all of Quebec.

Nearly 20 years ago, or maybe in the early 2000s, the road connecting the Lac-Saint-Jean and Quebec City regions was finally turned into a dual carriageway. Why? Because it was a dangerous road, with moose and all kinds of things. It runs right through a provincial park and is very unsafe in the winter. It's an important region to Quebec.

The same logic applies: our region is important too. If we take population into account, it is more important. The city of Gatineau is Quebec's fourth-largest city, and our only link on Quebec soil is Highway 50.

• (1925)

Highway 50 isn't a real highway, though. Most of the way, there's only one lane in each direction, and that results in all kinds of accidents. Sometimes the accidents are caused by human error, with people speeding or driving aggressively, but other times they're caused by moose or deer. That is a fact. We don't have any other connecting road, which is why the Alto project is so important.

• (1930)

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

I just want to let Mr. Fergus know that he forgot to mention wild turkeys when he was listing the dangers of driving on Highway 50.

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault had a point of order, but I didn't hear what he said.

[English]

What did he say?

[Translation]

**Luc Thériault:** I'll repeat it, Mr. Chair.

I said that Mr. Fergus forgot to mention wild turkeys when he was listing all the dangers of Highway 50.

**The Chair:** That's not a point of order.

Carry on, Mr. Fergus.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I thank Mr. Thériault for his comment, Mr. Chair. I assume he wasn't being flippant, because this is serious. Not a month goes by when there isn't a serious accident or collision on the highway. A long-time friend of mine actually died on that highway. This is very serious.

Until we have an alternative that safely connects us to the rest of Quebec, the Alto project will be a safe way for people to get to Montreal—in 40 minutes, no less. People will be able to get to the provincial or national capital in two hours instead of five hours by car or on Via Rail.

Often, Via Rail doesn't own the tracks. You're lucky if you make it to Quebec City in five hours. I know quite a few people who were delayed by three or four hours, sometimes by as much as eight hours. As everyone will recall last summer, an incident involving freight trains made headlines across Quebec when Via Rail passengers were stranded on a train between Montreal and Quebec City, having to spend the night on board. That illustrates how important this project is and how important it is not to waste time if we want to have a serious discussion on the matter.

Speaking of wasting time, I would note that when Mr. Barrett spoke to his motion, he said he had written to the Ethics Commissioner in the wake of media reports.

I wouldn't want to speculate on what the Ethics Commissioner will tell the committee, but if memory serves me correctly, the commissioner did state in a letter that the individual in question, the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, took the necessary measures and did what he was supposed to, and that there wasn't a conflict of interest. The question that comes to mind, then, is why we are considering this motion if everything was done according to both the letter and spirit of the Conflict of Interest Act.

• (1935)

I won't dwell on that point, because I want us to get on with this quickly. I hope my fellow members are open to that. I move that the meeting be adjourned.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We have a motion to adjourn the meeting. I don't suspect we'll have consensus on that.

It's non-debatable. I'm going to ask Madam Clerk to call the vote on the motion to adjourn the meeting.

There is a tie. I vote no.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** Mr. Fergus, you still have the floor.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** I gave you back the floor, but you were actually not supposed to have the floor, because you concluded your debate and moved a motion.

Since I gave it to you, Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mr. Chair, I don't want to put you in a position where you could leave yourself being open to being challenged by members of the opposition who wouldn't think I deserve—

**The Chair:** I don't think they really care.

You have the floor. Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I'm happy to pass it on, but I'd like to add my name to the list.

**The Chair:** Your name is already on the list. You said that before.

Mr. Sari, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The main reason I'm here is to speak to those who are following these proceedings and those who are hopefully very interested in this debate, so they can understand what this is all about.

Two things are going on. There is an opposition member who is still trying to undermine the momentum that brought our new government to power. Our government was given a clear mandate by Canadians: build a strong and vibrant economy, and get projects worthy of this country done.

I'd like to say something before I go further. I'm someone who loves to travel. I've been all over the world, and my sense of belonging to this country is so strong that I sometimes get jealous, especially when I go to places like Europe, where I can get from Paris to Geneva in about three hours. I can go from Paris to Nice in under six hours. I can go from Paris to London in less than two and a half hours. Even in the Kingdom of Morocco, I can get from Casablanca to Tangier in under two and a half hours, while seeing both the Mediterranean Sea and the ocean.

Back in Canada, we can see what's going on here. People are saying the motion is being filibustered, but that's not the case. The real obstruction is members' inability to move forward as a country and to build a high-speed rail network, which has broad public support.

That brings me to say a few words about the committee. I am very pleased and honoured to be on the committee, because the work it does is very relevant. Why is it so relevant? Because we are called upon to consider motions based on facts.

When I listen to Mr. Barrett and Mr. Thériault, however—and I hope those following these proceedings will relisten to what they said—what I hear are hypotheticals. How can we move forward with a project as important as a high-speed rail network with filibustering, when the matter has already been voted on? Members want to carry on the filibuster and vote again to delay the work. One thing certain members excel at, one thing they deserve an award for, is hindering progress, hindering development, despite quite a clear mandate.

When I listened to Mr. Thériault earlier, he raised the possibility of delaying this important project. However, my colleagues have explained, quite eloquently, might I add, why this project is so incredibly important to people, to Canadians. It will reposition Canada on the world stage. No matter what some members across the way seem to want, we cannot imagine our beloved country without a high-speed train.

Before becoming a member of Parliament, I was a city councillor, and I can tell you that public transit, rapid transit and multi-modal transportation are priorities. Municipalities such as Montreal, those in the greater Montreal area, and Toronto are strong supporters and advocates of the project. They aren't saying the same things as the members opposite trying to obstruct progress. This is clearly a filibuster designed to initiate debate on various issues, using various motions, to reopen the debate yet again.

Personally, I am happy to debate this motion and the importance of the high-speed rail network until midnight. To do so would be my pleasure, because this debate is that important.

• (1940)

However, the people listening to us are wondering what this is about. What are we talking about here? We're talking about hypotheticals and a highly important project that members are trying to delay. That puts a label on the Conservative Party, which is joined by another party that is trying to hinder progress that we, on our side, want to see materialize as soon as possible.

Let's look again at the motion itself and what it seeks to achieve. Then, if I may, Mr. Chair, I'd like to propose an amendment, since you said we're straying from the motion, but it's quite the opposite. This is indeed relevant to the motion. When we talk about Alto, we are talking about the motion. When we talk about the importance of interprovincial travel, we are talking about the motion. When we talk about how you are obstructing the project, we are talking about the motion. That's what you are doing.

You're asking us to turn our backs on a project that Canadians want to see built now. You're asking us to delay a project that municipalities want to see now. You're asking us yet again to examine hypothetical information about a project all stakeholders want to see built. You're asking us to delay the use of our routes in Quebec.

• (1945)

**Gabriel Hardy:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hardy has the floor on a point of order.

**Gabriel Hardy:** That's not at all what we are asking. I don't know what Mr. Sari is talking about. He seems to be accusing us of asking for things, but he's not talking about anything that's in the motion. Can he get back to the motion?

Thank you.

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

[*English*]

I'm actually confused about what you're talking about, Mr. Sari, in terms of this hypothetical. We're dealing with a motion "That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto, and the Minister's

claims that he has recused himself". There's nothing hypothetical about that. It's well documented in the media.

Nobody's trying to delay Alto here. We're trying to deal with the motion that's in front of us. I give a lot of latitude. Everybody knows that.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** May I respond, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You can respond, but let's try to stick to the motion here.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Yes, of course, Mr. Chair.

There's a thing called Google, and if you type "Conservative Party and Alto high-speed train" in the search box, you'll see that everything I'm saying is based on facts. I'm not making anything up. The Conservative Party's motion is proof of that. It's a clear sign of the party's obstructionist efforts. I didn't say that's what was in the motion, but it is yet another layer. I hope the members will listen to what I have to say on that point, because once again, they are adding something that shows they disagree with the progress we, as a new government, want.

What we want is for Canadians to benefit from a stronger economy and better quality of life overall. When we look at countries with a high-speed train system, it's clear that the benefits are quite significant, whether for tourism, the economy, the movement of workers, human resources or the appeal of cities and urban areas. The benefits are certainly considerable.

I want to follow up on something. I said there was a thing called Google, but there's also a thing called ChatGPT or Claude. When you search using one of those tools, you see that this isn't an expenditure; it's an investment. This is an investment in young people and the safety of travel. This is a major green investment when it comes to the environment. I won't dwell on the environmental merits of the project, since I don't think my colleagues across the way would be all that interested. The project will reduce traffic congestion and strengthen regional economies.

As we know, this is a vast country. The ability to travel long distances faster would make it easier for people, including workers, to get around. I won't get into the billions of dollars the project will generate, but the point I want to make is this: we are giving Canadians faith that we are a country brave enough to take risks.

The opposition is just scared of moving forward. Every time we seek to tackle a challenge with Canadians, and leverage the country's skills, universities, and physical and human resources, the opposition tries to block us. It's very unfortunate for those listening to us.

There is no way to consider this motion in isolation. It's impossible, because it's all related. It's all related to the Conservative Party's behaviour, to the fact that, once again, it lost the trust of Canadians, including some of its own party members.

I want to say this, because it's what I am seeing. When I see this motion, I think to myself the opposition shouldn't be doing this; it shouldn't be blocking a project that Canadians are proud of. The project is about improving mobility. That brings me back to the benefits. The reason the city councils of Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and other municipalities support the project is that it will strengthen the connection between these cosmopolitan areas and the economy. Silo approaches and silo thinking will give way to integrated solutions, thanks to an integrated transportation network.

I repeat, our goal as a government is to protect the environment and provide an alternative to car travel. That matters to Quebeckers listening to us.

● (1950)

As my colleague said, travelling on Highway 50 is a challenge. I wonder if it can even be called a highway. Forgive me, but when you've travelled all over the world, you can't really call it a highway, as it lacks many safety features. I'd like to go over all these points.

When I saw the motion, which we received during our party convention—where people were dazzled and very happy to see our country's progress—I told myself that I truly understood. There were 4,500 people who made the trip to Montreal, and they know why they came.

When I see people crossing the floor of the House, I tell myself that I fully understand why. As for me, writing this today and debating it until who knows what time—I'm not saying it's a waste of time, far from it. I am very proud, and I'll say it again. I am very proud to be a member of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

However, since I've been here, this has been a committee that produces sound bites. We don't really create laws; we produce sound bites. When I see these taken out of context, I'm surprised. We spend hours debating issues that are very important to Canadians, and in the end, all we get out of it is a sound bite. The opposition wants to produce sound bites, but we want to tackle major projects. They want to make sound bites, while we want to earn the trust of Canadians. If they want to disseminate these clips to show them in their ridings, there are other ways to do it.

No one should come here to sow doubt in the minds of Canadians. We saw that during the election, and I don't think it worked—we can still see it in the polls.

On the contrary, Canadians want a government that can take risks, that can say it takes pride in its identity and that can ensure

that major projects move forward. The government's not afraid. Canadians should not be afraid.

Once again, let me return to the issue of costs. I'll say it again: If you do a quick search using the terms "high-speed rail" and "Conservative Party", the results are all about costs and spending.

Basic economics clearly shows that this isn't an expense—it's an investment. It's an investment in a public good. It is for the public. Its value does not lie in recouping fare revenue, but in the economic activity it will generate. This is very important, and it is what is called a return on investment, including implicit factors—

[*English*]

**Harb Gill (Windsor West, CPC):** I have a point of order, Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. Gill.

**Harb Gill:** I'm looking for relevance. We are not talking about Alto's viability as a project. We are looking at a minister coming here and providing us an explanation as to why we should not have the opportunity to speak with him, why the Ethics Commissioner should not be invited here and why the Minister of Finance and National Revenue shouldn't be here. That's it.

**The Chair:** I take your point of order, Mr. Gill. It's a relevant one.

We're dealing with the motion that's in front of us, and I suggest that we get back to it.

I've said this twice now, but I'll say it a third time. We're not dealing with the merits of the Alto project. That's not what's under consideration here. What's under consideration is the Minister of Finance making a claim that he recused himself from the decisions the government made related to Alto and calling in witnesses.

Mr. Sari, you have the floor. Bring it back, please.

● (1955)

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, I invite my colleague to read the second bullet point. What is being requested here? The appearance of "executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours." Why? Let's look back at the Conservative Party's history at the ethics committee. I invite my colleague across the floor to look at what transpired when other groups were invited.

This is quite simply a smear campaign. It is a smear campaign that cannot be considered. We cannot be the ones to trigger this kind of situation.

I appreciate your point of order, Mr. Gill. However, please consider how your colleagues treated people when they appeared before us. They put words in their mouths.

**Gabriel Hardy:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hardy, go ahead on a point of order.

**Gabriel Hardy:** Mr. Sari is debating the relevance of our committee and the way we do things.

Could he please come back to the motion? We are not going to start debating how things are done here.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I have the right; this is a public meeting. I can talk about what's happening here. Everyone saw it.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Hold on. Everything should be through the chair, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hardy, that's not a point of order.

**Gabriel Hardy:** It's not relevant to the motion, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I understand the relevance of your remark.

Mr. Sari, please go ahead on the motion.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** The first and third points request that individuals be invited here as witnesses. The second point requests that Alto's executives, including the CEO, appear as witnesses.

When I've seen people appear here to share their very relevant opinions and explain issues related to conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest, it was not only for committee members but also for Canadians listening to us. Unfortunately, what we're seeing is that there's no effort to explain procedures, regulations, or laws, or to demystify them. On the contrary, what I've experienced here—and I'll say it again—is beneath the committee's purpose and mission. That is not why we are here.

As for the Alto people, we are told there will be no consultation. I think that when they come to testify, they'll explain the procedures they've implemented. I should really say "if they come to testify".

The conditional tense is used a lot, as Mr. Hardy noted. It's good that he made that point, since everything the people opposite are saying uses the conditional tense. If these people appear, they will clearly explain the work they plan to do to consult the public regarding this project. They will explain how these public consultations will take place and how they will work with all stakeholders—and I mean all stakeholders, because no one should be left out. We must work with everyone, particularly those involved in the agricultural sector. This is truly very important.

Whether in government or in the opposition, a fear-based approach is unacceptable. Canadians know there are challenges, but they do not want an approach based on fear.

The sessions organized by the people at Alto will help gather input from the public, stakeholders in the agricultural sector, and all those affected—including those who will benefit from the project, both during its implementation and afterward, once it is operational.

Returning to the motion, Mr. Chair—otherwise people will say I'm straying from it, though that's not the case. The motion also raises allegations regarding the Conflict of Interest Act. I believe this is a very serious matter, and we really must discuss it. This is an issue that must be examined by independent institutions; it is

very important. These institutions must be independent, but also competent.

However, we must not confuse accountability mechanisms with the merits of the project itself. That ambiguity is what is problematic in the motion. Even if we set aside the political, economic and environmental arguments, the arguments in favour of high-speed rail remain very strong. I am speaking to the public now: the arguments presented by Mr. Fergus, Ms. Lapointe and others are very strong.

Should we disengage from government and rely on privately funded infrastructure? Is that what people want?

No country in the world has built a real high-speed rail network solely through private investment. Whether in France, Great Britain, the United Kingdom, Switzerland or Morocco, we see that partnerships are always involved.

• (2000)

Neither in Japan, nor in France, nor in the United Kingdom did these projects come to fruition without a certain degree of public leadership, of course, because the benefits are widely shared on both sides. When we talk about the private sector, who is working in that sector? Canadians are. When we talk about the public sector, it is because we want to ensure a certain level of leadership.

The long-term benefits are significant and widespread. They affect many sectors. Private capital also has a role to play, and that is very important.

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

**The Chair:** Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Thériault.

**Luc Thériault:** Is it because there are long-term benefits that we shouldn't hear from the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Alto executives and the minister? I don't see the relevance of what my colleague Mr. Sari is saying. I don't see where he is going with this.

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

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I'll answer the question.

**The Chair:** As I said, the debate is on the motion. You have to talk about the motion. That's my advice to Mr. Sari.

Go ahead on the motion, Mr. Sari.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, I mentioned major investments because this motion invites us to think small. Instead of looking at the big picture, the focus is on hypothetical details and prioritizing short-term costs. That is what this motion invites us to do. We must not interpret the motion solely on the basis of its three points, namely calling witnesses. Behind the motion lies a problem, a pattern of behaviour, and a history from which the Conservative Party, unfortunately, cannot distance itself. This motion is merely a continuation of that. That is the real issue that needs to be explained today.

I'll come back to the motion once again. Let's assume that people come to testify, that a company explains it will hold public consultations, that it wants to speak with stakeholders in the agricultural sector and explain how the project works, its governance and the shared responsibilities. Let them come here and explain it; I agree with that. However, the way they might be treated—given that we want a long-term partnership—is problematic for me, especially since this is no longer a luxury but a strategic necessity. There's no room for this type of behaviour or tactics that I do not particularly like.

On the contrary, the opposition parties should also behave responsibly. The Conservative Party and the Bloc Québécois—Quebec will benefit greatly from this project—should adopt a different approach than the one in the motion. The motion is intended to filibuster, hinder and slow down the work.

I am keen to see the day when all members stand up in the House of Commons to say that we are going to take the risk, that we are going to move forward and that we deserve this high-speed train. We're not going to play these games, with little motions here and there.

It's not that we didn't want to be here today; it's just that we had planned to meet with other groups whom we had promised we would join, because this issue is important to us. Yet, we are here because we have this responsibility, and I am proud to take it on—though I would like it to yield a result that benefits our listening public.

Instead of debating the project's relevance—as my colleagues have done—we are discussing aspects that will simply delay the project's completion.

As a Canadian, I choose to be a leader. Other groups here seem to want to lag behind. By introducing the motion today, they are choosing to lag behind. I don't think that's what Canadians want.

We must invest in the future. We cannot be paralyzed by fear or hypothetical concerns. Personally, I would have preferred not to debate this motion today. I would have preferred that it not even be on the table and that we move beyond these political considerations. Personally, I would have rejected the motion outright. Not because the concerns raised do not merit debate, but because its conclusion is problematic. What is important now is not to sow doubt in the minds of the public. In the current situation, in Canada as elsewhere, certain conclusions could be fundamentally flawed.

• (2005)

The high-speed rail project must move forward. If Canada wants to move forward, it cannot do so by standing still.

In closing, let me summarize. It's happening in Europe. It's happening in Africa. High-speed rail exists. The results are clear. Its impact is clear. When I travel, I'm very happy to use it. On the other hand, it always breaks my heart a little, because it's not available in Canada. I understand why: It's because on several occasions people lacked the courage to act. Yet when they do show courage, others try to stand in their way.

I see my colleagues opposite laughing at this, but it really hurts me. If they can laugh, it's because, to them, it's okay. Perhaps some

aren't receptive to the arguments we're making because they're economic. My colleagues opposite don't understand economics. I won't even mention environmental arguments.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to move an amendment.

Madam Clerk, I move that we keep the motion as follows:

That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto, and the minister's claims that he has recused himself from decisions his government made related to Alto; that, for the purpose of this study, the committee invite the following witnesses to appear by May 8, 2026:

1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for two hours;
2. Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours; and
3. the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, for two hours.

I move that we end it there, meaning that we delete the last part, which reads:

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (2010)

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

[*English*]

I'm going to suspend for a minute, because I want to make sure that every member understands what the amendment is. It will also give me some time to circle back with the clerk on some other things that I've been thinking about.

The meeting is suspended.

• (2010)

(Pause)

• (2020)

**The Chair:** Before the pause, an amendment had been put forward by Mr. Sari.

[*Translation*]

He sought to delete the last line, which reads:

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

Two people wish to speak: Mr. Hardy and Mr. Thériault. I also see that Mrs. Church has raised her hand, as has Mrs. Goodridge.

Mr. Hardy, you have the floor regarding the amendment.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I believe my name was added to the list before the break, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC):** His hand was up before the amendment.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** No, it was after the amendment.

**An hon. member:** He was after me.

**The Chair:** I'm going to go with the list that I have.

Mr. Fergus, I'll put you on the list. That's not a problem.

I'm going to Mr. Hardy first and then Mr. Thériault second.

Mr. Hardy.

[*Translation*]

**Gabriel Hardy:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm happy to take the floor.

It's now 8:22 p.m. We have been here since 3:30 p.m. to debate Mr. Barrett's motion, which asks the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics for something quite simple, I think. The motion is asking to consider the connections between the Minister of Finance and Alto, a Crown corporation. We want to know more about the recusals. Recusals are not something we invented. For the last while, it's felt like we are being accused of wanting to do terrible things, but it was by his own admission that the minister said he had recused himself.

It was the minister who saw a potential conflict of interest, and we just want to look into the matter further, to understand it better. So he asked to recuse himself upon seeing an apparent conflict of interest, but he spoke between 12 and 16 times during debates or to answer questions. He even voted on the project. So we have questions. Canadians are asking questions. For the last little while, we've been telling people that what's happening here is important, that they should take an interest in politics, since it's their money and the future of their country that are at stake. We're here to discuss this together.

I looked up what "recuse oneself" means. It means withdrawing from a matter owing to a conflict of interest or incompetence. Earlier, I was invited to do a Google search. We'll look it up on Google; that's what it says. I'll let my colleagues decide between conflict of interest and incompetence—it's not up to me. He asked to "recuse himself", and that's the definition. He asked to recuse himself, so I imagine he saw a potential conflict of interest.

Here at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, we are requesting a meeting with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Alto executives, who could pose a conflict of interest risk, and the minister in question. We're not questioning the project as a whole. That's not the committee's role. We're trying to understand a situation that is potentially problematic from an ethical standpoint. We want the minister to explain what happened, so that Canadians can see clearly and have confidence in our institutions. This is a concern that comes up every week.

Earlier, my colleague Mr. Sari talked about wasting time, but the Conservatives have not spoken since the beginning. The meeting began at 3:30 p.m.; it's now 8:25 p.m. I'm the first to take the floor. Yet we're being accused of filibustering. I don't know what's going on. This is the first time I've experienced this. I feel like this is a monumental waste of time. We're hearing about Highway 50, about the future, but that's not today's topic.

The topic is a motion to invite witnesses who themselves have raised a potential conflict of interest. The minister voted and has

not lived up to his own words. We want to understand why he gave himself the right to vote between 12 and 16 times, to defend the project and to answer questions. Why did he highlight the fact that he had a potential conflict of interest with Alto? We'll invite Alto's representatives to tell us about that. We are being told that this makes no sense and that it shouldn't be happening here.

We've also been hearing, for the past little while, that the project runs through my riding. I have to say that this is none of the committee's business. The interests of the committee members are not at stake here. This is not about them. We're talking about citizens; we're talking about Canadians. We're talking about a multi-billion-dollar project. It's not a question of whether it suits the committee members or whether they like the project. We just want to know whether the billions of dollars that belong to Canadians—at least \$90 billion, of which \$3.5 billion has already been spent on studies, even though not a single railway line has been built yet—have been used appropriately. We want to understand how a minister decided to recuse himself without anyone knowing, without anyone being informed, while continuing to vote. We want citizens to have access to that information.

We are also told that certain statements are hypothetical. Again, this is not hypothetical. These are proven facts. What the motion calls for is simply to invite the minister to clearly explain why he asked to recuse himself.

Earlier, it was said that the government should be able to take risks, and it was said that the Conservatives are always opposed to everything. I would remind you that we must take into account the fact that the government wants to take risks with other people's money, even though families are already struggling financially.

● (2025)

When this is brought in committee and people talk about a "minor motion" or "political formalities", I'm sorry, but every time I come here, I do so to stand up for my constituents. I do so in the interest of Quebeckers and Canadians. I do it because I think it's really important for people to be able to see what's happening in Parliament and to take an interest in politics. We need to democratize federal politics so that people will take an interest in it.

When people say that these are minor formalities or minor motions, I'm sorry, but, as a reasonable and informed citizen, I want the minister to come here to answer questions. I want the president of Alto, a Crown corporation, to come and tell us whether or not there was a violation, whether there was an ethical breach. I want the commissioner to come and explain to us how the very definition of recusal was not respected, and why he considers this not to be an ethical issue. That's all. We don't want to remake the world. We don't want to debate the high-speed rail project in general. We want to understand what happened in this specific case. That's the purpose of this motion.

Mr. Chair, it's now 8:28 p.m. I hope I haven't take up too much time. We started the meeting at 3:30 p.m. I don't want to filibuster. I want this to move forward. Canadians who are watching have a right to wonder whether we can move forward on such a simple and effective motion, instead of wasting time talking about Highway 50, the future or the past.

Can we get back to what's before us?

Thank you.

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

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor on the amendment.

**Luc Thériault:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

For several hours now, my colleagues across the way have been talking about the opposition filibustering. However, they are the ones talking. There is, in fact, filibustering. You don't have to be an expert in debates to see this; even people who don't follow the proceedings will clearly understand that the Liberals aren't happy with the motion and that they've been ordered to filibuster.

• (2030)

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sari, go ahead on a point of order.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** First, I have not received any orders from anyone. Second, we are discussing the amendment. Earlier, I was talking about the motion. Let's stay on the topic of the amendment.

**The Chair:** That's fine.

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, it's quite ironic to see Mr. Sari react this way to the very first sentence I've uttered, when he spoke at length to discredit not only his colleagues across the way, but also our committee.

Mr. Chair, this is the ethics committee. This is not a marketing committee or an exercise in promoting a project that has been touted as the eighth wonder of the world. We're here to determine whether it's appropriate, from an ethical standpoint, to summon the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, to summon the Alto executives, including the CEO, and to summon the Minister of Finance. The latter himself deemed it necessary to consult an ethics adviser. He also saw fit to write to the Prime Minister to indicate that a conflict of interest screen had been put in place. Therefore, he must have felt at least the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Anyone who learns that the minister's wife has been hired as vice-president may have questions, particularly about the fact that he finalized Bill C-15, which suspends certain provisions of the Expropriation Act.

There is talk of time being wasted. Mr. Fergus, who served as Speaker of the House, really offended me with his remarks, even though his tone was very calm. He said that, in his opinion, this was a waste of time and a squandering of Parliament's time.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, we are having trouble hearing what my colleague is saying.

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, there is still a problem with the microphone. Is it old or new?

**Luc Thériault:** It's a new microphone.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Luc Thériault:** I'll make sure I don't move around too much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, maybe just instruct him on what he might be able to do to correct it.

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk:** Sometimes, it's as simple as unplugging the microphone from the USB port and plugging it back in.

**The Chair:** So you can unplug it for a second and then plug it back in.

**Luc Thériault:** Can you hear me better?

**The Chair:** Lower your microphone a little, Mr. Thériault.

**Luc Thériault:** Is that better?

**The Chair:** Yes, that's fine.

Go ahead, Mr. Thériault.

• (2035)

**Luc Thériault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was saying that I was quite offended by the comments made by Mr. Fergus, who was once Speaker of the House. He claims that the last sentence of the motion, as drafted, would cause us to waste time. I just think it's the role of members of Parliament to demand accountability. The members who, among other things, sit on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics have just reviewed the Conflict of Interest Act.

Mr. Chair, this is simply a matter of transparency. There's no connection to delaying anything. Just because it says in the last sentence that we want to report to the House on what we have heard, it doesn't mean that this delays the progress of the project. Does that mean that, in the meantime, Alto will not continue its marketing or public relations activities? No, absolutely not. There is no connection between what the government is claiming and the actual effect of the motion. No evidence has been presented to that effect. What the Liberals have done tonight is filibustering. For some reason, they don't want this motion, as it is written, to be adopted. They keep bringing us back to the substantive issues of the project, its merits and its justifications, even though that's not what we're debating.

By Ms. Lapointe's own admission, many people who do not live in Montreal, Gatineau, Toronto or Ottawa will see a high-speed train pass through their farmland. This is land that could be cut in two. That could jeopardize the remaining 2% of farmland in Quebec. The owners of those lands have questions.

On the other hand, enough has been said about the substance. However, the problem is that we don't have an answer. We have no idea what the cost is. Aside from the \$3.9 billion that was just given to the Alto consortium to determine the station locations, the route and the timeline, we're talking about a range between \$60 billion and \$90 billion. There is a small difference of \$30 billion. Mr. Fergus was talking about the dangerousness of Highway 50. That highway could be made a lot safer for much less than \$30 billion.

Asking questions is not delaying the project. Asking questions is the role of members of Parliament. I suggest that my colleagues review their job descriptions. If, every time we ask for accountability, we are accused of partisanship, we will never move forward. Today, it is the Liberals who have shown partisanship by refusing to shed light on the issues raised by the motion.

If the Ethics Commissioner comes and tells us that he doesn't see a problem with the current legislation, perhaps we can make a connection with the amendments we've made to the legislation. Perhaps these amendments would provide a different framework for the commissioner's analysis. So there is a direct link to the work we've been doing since the beginning, particularly regarding the appearance of a conflict of interest that we are now introducing into the legislation at the Ethics Commissioner's request.

If there were any impertinent remarks today, from 3:30 p.m. to 8:38 p.m., they did not come from the opposition. It's normal to ask questions. Why? Because on November 18, there was the first reading of Bill C-15, which was sponsored by the Minister of Finance.

Division 1 of part 5 of this bill enacts the High-Speed Rail Network Act and establishes a legislative framework to facilitate the implementation of the network. This act changes the expropriation process for high-speed rail networks. Between November 18 and February 26, when the bill was passed and sent to the Senate, the minister took the floor and voted on that bill. Was it necessary to include this provision? Why did he do it? Is there a connection with the hiring of his wife? These are questions people may have. This is not in any way questioning the merits of the project. The purpose is simply to determine whether there was any funny business. Was there any or wasn't there? That doesn't delay the timeline at all.

They got in a state and tore their shirts saying that it was terrible, that the people on the other side wanted to filibuster and prevent this project—which is the eighth wonder of the world—from happening. That's not the case at all. We're only talking about the ethical implications related to a minister who felt he was in a conflict of interest. Yet we hadn't heard a thing about it. There has been a lack of transparency on this. We want to ask legitimate questions.

• (2040)

I believe that the people of Quebec want us to ask these questions. The credibility of democratic institutions is at stake. The House of Commons is the seat of parliamentary democracy. That's where the debates take place. Debating this issue in the House of Commons does not mean we are delaying anything.

The problem with this motion is not that it slows things down, but that it ensures that things are done properly, according to the rules, by the book, and in accordance with ethical standards, as required by the Conflict of Interest Act. That's the problem.

We've heard all sorts of things from the other side; they've said all sorts of nonsense. Now, after hours of filibustering, they want to remove the single sentence that would allow a report to be made to the House if there was a problem, if the minister's answers were unclear or if we felt that the House should be seized of the matter. They say we absolutely must not be able to do that. This reflects a desire for opacity.

I think that, as parliamentarians, we're not here to create opacity around ethical issues that may be raised. In this case, these issues have been raised not only by the official opposition, but also by the minister himself.

Mr. Chair, I won't dwell further on this issue, and I won't waste parliamentarians' time, as Mr. Fergus said. However, I will definitely be voting against this amendment, as our duty is accountability. Parliamentary democracy takes place in the people's legislative assembly. That's where debates must be held. When one goes so far as to say that a debate in the House of Commons is a waste of time, one is adopting a position that belongs to the government and the executive branch. This is not worthy of a legislator; it's about being a lackey to the executive branch. That's why people are fed up.

I travelled across Canada and Quebec as part of a study on electoral reform. Do members know what Quebecers and Canadians from coast to coast were saying? What kept coming up was that they were fed up with the party lines. I ask my colleagues to think about that.

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

[English]

On the amendment, I have Ms. Church.

Go ahead.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When Mr. Thériault speaks about people who have had enough, they have had enough of games, and they have had enough of delay. There are ramifications to this motion that we need to consider legitimately as parliamentarians.

The amendment, which struck the line that the committee is to report to the House that it is undertaking this study, ahead of any testimony, ahead of any recommendations, speaking of a misuse of the House's time and the committee's time, I think that would fall into that category. I may be a new MP, but I was not born yesterday when it comes to these types of motions and the delay and muddying of waters they cause on very important issues.

If we want to have an informed and comprehensive debate about the merits of high-speed rail, we should absolutely have that. However, what we're talking about here with this motion, of which this amendment is a part, is about something that does serve to get in the way of committee business. We have established that there are motions right now on artificial intelligence, on algorithmic or surveillance pricing. We have a privacy motion. We have a lobbying motion. We have studies under way that do take the real time and energy of this committee.

I would say it is not a misuse for us to thoroughly debate this motion and consider it on its merits as to whether or not it is an appropriate use of time, because it does have the impact of changing our committee's focus and changing our committee's business.

I would also note, as we look at this, when Mr. Barrett originally introduced this motion earlier tonight, he led off the debate speaking about his opposition to Alto and to high-speed rail. He framed this motion around that. That set the tone and the boundaries of the debate that we're having tonight. The motion that's introduced calling executives from Alto, including the CEO, to talk about a matter within the purview of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner, speaks to a motion that is intended much more as a fishing expedition or as a way to stall the progress of a major national project, than it is a serious call to investigate.

When the opposition seeks to drive opposition to a particular project or initiative, this is the playbook. This is how they seek to muddy the waters through a motion like this, like having the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister's staff appear at committee to discuss allegations that the Conflict of Interest Commissioner has already essentially waved away, as we see in this case as well.

I believe the major reason we're even debating this motion is that the opposition is seeking to distract from their own approach to this. Delegates at the 2023 Conservative policy convention voted in support of a high-speed rail project between Quebec and Ontario. During the clause-by-clause consideration of the budget implementation act at the finance committee earlier this year, Conservatives initially voted against the Alto high-speed rail clauses only to seek unanimous consent to rescind and retake the vote. The opposition then supported the budget implementation act on division, only to publicly criticize the Alto high-speed rail project weeks later. Which is it? Why are we seeing this flip-flopping by the Conservative—

• (2045)

**Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Point of order.

**The Chair:** Point of order, Ms. Goodridge.

**Laila Goodridge:** Mr. Chair, we're speaking about the amendment—

**The Chair:** What is your point of order?

**Laila Goodridge:** It's regarding the relevance of what the member is saying. We're supposed to be talking about the amendment to Mr. Barrett's motion, what Ms. Church is saying perhaps has relevant points, but it's something that should probably be brought up at the transportation committee and not necessarily here at ETHI about what we're currently talking about.

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

For at least four or five occasions this evening, I've tried to bring this back.

We're on the amendment, Ms. Church, to remove that last line and I'll remind you, "That the committee report to the House that it's undertaking this study." That's what we're on, the amendment.

We're not on the merits of the Alto system. We're on the amendment proposed by Mr. Sari to the main motion.

Go ahead, Ms. Church.

• (2050)

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, I appreciate that point, but as I stated at the outset, I believe if the member, Ms. Goodridge, was here at the outset of this committee when Mr. Barrett introduced his motion, she would know that his first introduction of this motion included a detailed description of how the Conservative Party viewed high-speed rail and the Alto project, so when I talk about how that set the frame for the discussion of the motion over the past couple of hours, that's what I'm referring to. I think it is related to the motion and to the amendment at hand to understand why the motion is drafted in the way it is and why members like me are concerned about it passing in the form that it is and are supportive of amending the motion.

When I think about high-speed rail in Ontario and the impact it's going to have across the province, I think this is a very worthy project for us to be considering and debating. It's a project that's going to lead to a number of benefits for Canadians: shorter travel times, more frequent service, reliable travel, 50,000 jobs created over the next 10 years of construction, and economic benefits for Canadian suppliers and industry. It's not just about what we think, but about how others are standing up as well in support of this project as a whole without what we're being faced with in terms of this motion today.

We've heard from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Toronto Region Board of Trade and municipalities across Ontario and Quebec that have come out in support of high-speed rail and have come out in favour of a nation-building investment at a time when our country is pulling together to make precisely these kinds of investments.

One of the most important voices on this in Ontario has been that of the Mayor of Peterborough, who issued a statement on March 31 saying how he and his colleagues on the Peterborough City Council and the broader Peterborough community, where there would be an Alto stop, are quite disappointed at the opposition's calls opposing the Alto project. I thought it was very interesting that they said, "This project will significantly strengthen economic development, business investment, tourism, and employment opportunities in Peterborough, and the construction will create jobs and opportunities for local businesses."

In particular, the mayor said:

The last time the Conservatives destroyed a national building project was the Avro Arrow in 1959. That shortsighted decision devastated Canada's aerospace industry, with many of the country's top engineers leaving the country. The talent that left Canada from that Conservative decision helped put the Americans on the moon in 1969.

The City of Peterborough will continue to work closely with ALTO and the Government of Canada to take advantage of the economic and social benefits of this important project.

That's an interesting point to reflect on this week of all weeks when we've seen Canadian ingenuity go back to the moon with the Artemis mission.

I don't want to get too far off topic. I want to come back to the motion at hand and why I think it's imperative that we amend this motion and defeat the main motion overall.

We have to understand that not only does our committee have important work to do going forward with an agenda that we've already set out, but there's actually a greater reason at stake here. As we look toward the future, we need to make transformative investments in nation-building projects that are both necessary and inevitable, and that type of project could be high-speed rail.

We have set out a vision. We've set out an ambitious mandate to build one strong Canadian economy, and high-speed rail needs to be a part of that. It shouldn't be seen as a transportation upgrade, but truly as a nation-building project, one that strengthens our economy, connects our people and helps position us among the world's leading nations.

• (2055)

I want to talk a bit about some of the places where I think we should be drawing some inspiration from. Rather than going down a rabbit hole like this motion proposes, we should be considering where high-speed rail can operate as a fundamentally different system, one that operates on—

**Laila Goodridge:** Point of order.

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

**Laila Goodridge:** It has now been three minutes since the amendment was broached in any subject, so I'm just asking if she can bring it back to the amendment.

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

Ms. Church, on the amendment, try to keep it on line, please.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On the amendment, I come back to the fact that we are asking to delete a requirement that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study without testimony, without recommendations and without evidence from witnesses. It seems to me to be quite a logical request to remove that particular line from the notice of motion.

However, I do think that in raising this motion, the opposition has strayed from what is most important on this issue, and it isn't trying to litigate a connection here set out in the motion that has already been decided on by the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. It's actually hiding the true concerns of the opposition with respect to this project. It's those concerns that I'm trying to allay, because to understand why on this side of the table we are opposed to this motion, it requires an understanding of why we support high-speed rail and the Alto project and refuse to allow that project to be derailed by the fishing expedition of this motion.

The Leader of the Opposition recently went to the United Kingdom. It's a country that has a fantastic train network. If we look at the United Kingdom, we see a country that, despite being far smaller than Canada, has made bold investments in high-speed rail. High Speed 1 connecting London to the Channel Tunnel revolutionized travel between the U.K. and mainland Europe. The U.K.'s is one of the most respected rail networks in the world because it spent the time and the money to develop its infrastructure.

We need to be doing the same here. The goal shouldn't be just speed, but capacity and economic rebalancing, linking regions more effectively and spreading growth beyond capital.

Across the channel, France offers another powerful example of this with the TGV network, which was launched in the 1980s. It has become a cornerstone of national mobility. It has dramatically reduced travel times between major cities, making rail the preferred mode of transport for millions. Importantly, it has also driven regional development—

**Tamara Jansen:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead on your point of order.

**Tamara Jansen:** It seems that Ms. Church has now talked about travel to the moon, travel to England and now travel to France, but is not talking about the motion. I wonder if we can get back to the amendment so we can stop travelling everywhere else. Let's stick to the amendment.

**The Chair:** Ms. Church, I'm going to ask you to keep it on the rails, if you don't mind, and get back to the amendment.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I expect, on the amendment, this is exactly the kind of testimony we might see, the kind of evidence this committee might consider if it were undertaking a study in the normal course. Instead, this motion, as drafted, asks the committee to report to the House that it is merely undertaking this study.

We should ask why that is. Why is this motion drafted to report to the House before the committee undertakes any substantive work? Why would we do that? Why is the opposition proposing this motion in a way that would have that reporting done at a time when the committee has done no work on this topic? We should raise our eyebrows a little at that, and that's the point that I'm trying to make. In the absence of any evidence, testimony and recommendations, why would we report back to the House at that stage?

Mr. Chair, there's feedback on the line. I'm just going to let that clear.

• (2100)

**The Chair:** There's feedback on the line?

**Leslie Church:** It seemed like there were translators speaking.

**The Chair:** Is it better now?

**Leslie Church:** I think it's better now. Sorry; that was confusing for a moment.

It is important that we understand if we are looking at this motion and we're reporting back to the House merely that this committee is undertaking a study, we should know why and what the opposition's intentions are in doing that.

What can we expect in front of the House when they inform the House, through this motion, that it is merely undertaking a study? Why wouldn't we consider the types of evidence the committee should be looking at if we're going to be talking about high-speed rail? Again, for the benefit of my colleagues across the table, the Liberals did not actually raise this. This was your motion. You raised the motion about high-speed rail. You introduced it with your opposition to the Alto project. We are merely reacting and responding in a way that defends a project that we are strongly behind, that was passed in the budget, that you supported. I think we should be a little bit forgiving in terms of how we are approaching this, in terms of a debate here at the ethics committee late on a Monday evening on a topic of high-speed rail, which the opposition members chose to introduce.

As you've heard from my colleagues this evening, we are quite happy to talk about high-speed rail because of the impact it will have and because of the support that it does have from Canadians who don't want to be distracted by frivolous fishing expeditions. They want to see the government and the House of Commons get down to work and get big things done, which is exactly what we're trying to do.

When Canadians went to the polls, they made it clear they wanted a government that has elbows up with the intent to build a strong Canadian economy that gets people to where they want to go, that uses Canadian civil engineering, Canadian project management, Canadian manufacturing and advanced technology, Canadian steel, Canadian aluminum, Canadian products to build the kind of projects that are going to grow our economy and make us more sovereign and more resilient as a country. They're also interested in opportunities that are going to create jobs that are about building expertise, jobs that are about developing supply chains and a whole host of adjacent economic benefits and the type of economic activity that's going to strengthen Canada's industrial base.

Time is unquestionably one of the most valuable resources we have. It's a resource in this committee. It's a resource in the House. It is a resource in our economy. We look at the time we've spent debating this topic this evening. It is important to protect and preserve the time of our committee. It is important to protect and preserve the time of the House. It is certainly important to protect the time of all of the folks that are working to bring together Alto high-speed rail that will benefit Canadians faster than has been set out before, accelerating this, working with cities and communities across the line to determine the best possible way forward, doing this hand in hand in a responsible way. Doing that responsibly means ensuring that we are being very clear-eyed about how Parliament, how the House of Commons uses its time. That has to be one of the considerations we look at when we're considering this amendment and the motion behind it.

If I could talk about one final point on this topic, it really would be about the importance of focusing on Canadian infrastructure, focusing on getting it done, getting it built, focusing on infrastructure of a scale that's designed to last for generations. The benefits of that infrastructure, where it creates economic growth, where it creates environmental benefits, where it creates an improved quality of life can accrue over decades.

• (2105)

When we look at it over its life cycle, high-speed rail is not just affordable; it can be highly cost-effective. We've seen this before in Canadian history. The construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway was a major investment and a source of major debate at the time, but ultimately it unified the country and enabled the country's economic development. The same can be said of the Trans-Canada Highway and major urban transit systems.

The real risk we have is not the cost of building high-speed rail. It is the cost of failing to build it, the cost of failing to have the ambition for Canada to build projects at scale, to move forward and to progress in ways that will benefit Canadians, benefit our economy, benefit communities. Without action, we know that congestion will worsen and emissions will rise. We know that we are leaving potential on the table in terms of a corridor that transports so many Canadians.

There is a broader vision always at stake. In a country that is defined by distance, connection is power. Connection is unity. High-speed rail represents a bold forward-looking investment in that connection. It aligns with values of sustainability, innovation and inclusivity. It signals to the world that Canada is ready to lead, not lag, in building the infrastructure of the future.

[Translation]

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

**The Chair:** I'm listening, Mr. Thériault.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, I find you very patient.

Members are defending a project we know nothing about yet, according to Alto's own executives. We have to discuss the motion and the amendment. At some point, I'm all for engaging in filibustering and promoting a project for a great country. We're now talking about the ninth wonder of the world. In terms of infrastructure, plenty of things could be done with \$90 billion. Jobs could be created.

Can we discuss the motion, Mr. Chair?

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

[English]

Procedurally, members are entitled to speak. It's my sixth intervention or more now on this now that we are on the amendment. There's nothing I can procedurally do to stop members from talking this out.

I appreciate what you said, Mr. Thériault, but I'm going back to Ms. Church. I'm going to ask her again to speak to the amendment.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate your patience, Mr. Thériault. I was in the process of wrapping up.

I do want to point out, though, and put on the record that over the course of this evening, we have had many opportunities as a committee to conclude this debate, to move it to our next meeting, to adjust our approach on this. Part and parcel of moving forward is being able to fully illuminate the challenges of this motion and certainly of the amendment.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will wrap up just by saying, on the amendment specifically, it is my great worry here that we should make this amendment and withdraw the requirement for the committee to report to the House that it is undertaking this study partly to preserve, I would say, the credibility of our committee and that of the House. Then we can look at the approach to the motion overall after we have fully considered and made our votes known on the amendment itself.

• (2110)

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

We are going to switch tracks here to avoid a train wreck and go to Ms. Goodridge.

Ms. Goodridge, you're up, on the amendment.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I find it very interesting how keen the Liberals are to talk about anything other than what we're here to talk about at the ethics committee.

Many of the arguments that have been put forward would be quite relevant arguments at the transportation committee if they wanted to speak to the merit of Alto, but what they are here for is a motion that was put forward by my colleague, Michael Barrett, which they are actively filibustering. They are talking about everything from sending a man to the moon to different types of rail systems, but the reality is we're here to discuss a motion to bring people before the ethics committee because there are some serious issues at play when it comes to the Minister of Finance and National Revenue.

What the Liberals are trying to do with their amendment is remove the opportunity to report this to the House. This is a very boilerplate sentence. It's in many motions. It might not be in every single motion, but it is not uncommon.

Mr. Fergus can say whatever he would like. In the short period of time that he was the Speaker, he might not have seen it, but that does not mean this is not a fairly standard sentence. Regardless of the piece, it's the fact that they are so terrified to have a conversation about the fact that this could be sent to the House. That is what they are filibustering. They have been so clear that they do not want to have a conversation because the Minister of Finance and National Revenue has someone that sometimes goes by the moniker of partner, sometimes spouse. In French, it's *conjoint*. There are many different terms, but it is someone that seems to have a close enough relationship that he went to the Ethics Commissioner and installed an ethics screen.

I don't think it's unreasonable to just defeat the amendment, stop filibustering and let us get on with our night. Then we could all go home and have a relatively decent sleep. If the Liberals want to

continue obstructing, it's their choice to continue obstructing. They're the ones doing this.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I very much appreciate the comments of my colleagues across the table.

I'll be very frank. First of all, I regret that my colleague Mr. Thériault felt offended by my comments. I'll accept what he's saying, namely that he truly wants to get to the bottom of things and understand what happened.

However, let's talk about the facts. The minister knew there were discussions regarding Alto. His wife was hired by Alto. He contacted the Ethics Commissioner to check if there was a conflict of interest. The commissioner said there wasn't. Despite all that, he went above and beyond what was required of him. He implemented an ethics screen. He didn't have to do that, but he did. He recused himself from certain cabinet decisions concerning Alto.

Even Mr. Barrett, who proposed this motion, has written to the Ethics Commissioner to get clarification and further information. I don't know if the commissioner has replied to Mr. Barrett, but it seems to me that we're putting the cart before the horse when we ask for written explanations, while simultaneously trying to intervene through this committee.

Mrs. Goodridge has often emphasized the importance of letting Parliament do its job. However, there are also officers of Parliament. The Ethics Commissioner is also an officer of Parliament, and he must be allowed to do his job. They want to have a discussion to find out why the minister went beyond his responsibilities. If we really want to get to the bottom of this, why not simply invite the Ethics Commissioner to testify before the committee and answer our questions? What can the Alto executives tell us about our own ethics rules and obligations? They can't comment on that. This is a witch hunt, Mr. Chair.

I hate to say this to my colleagues across the way. This committee already has a bad track record when it comes to conducting witch hunts. Mrs. Church brought up a few examples.

People are invited to testify before the committee, but this is a witch hunt. We just want to see if there's something wrong. However, in this case, we are talking about an individual who went above and beyond what the Ethics Commissioner had asked him to do. If we want more information, a committee member has already written to the commissioner. However, we are not waiting for a response. The problem is that we want to anticipate that response. Some of my colleagues are smiling, but it's not funny at all. This is serious. The committee's powers are serious. Those of the commissioner are just as serious. Yet, by acting this way, we are not respecting them at all.

• (2115)

We have a track record because we saw what happened during the 44th Parliament. Witch hunts were conducted and rules that should be used for very serious purposes were exploited. That was done for partisan purposes, and that is the problem.

If everyone is serious—I imagine everyone is—then let's invite the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to testify before the committee and answer our questions. If we're not satisfied with that, we can take things further.

Everyone around the table knows—even though this is not necessarily the case for all Canadians who don't follow parliamentary procedures—that including the following sentence at the end of the motion has several implications:

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

That leads to other things. It comes down to the issue of wasting time. There are a number of other obligations. Everyone knows that. Everyone claims to be an altar boy, but political games are being played.

That is why we are proposing to remove the last sentence of the motion at the very least so that the committee can do its work.

I repeat to Mrs. Goodridge that this does not mean that the committee's work will be done in secret. The committee will not hide the results, and this work will not be done behind closed doors. Each committee will do a study and produce a report that reflects the view of the majority of the committee. If necessary, there may be dissenting opinions, presented by members or groups of members who do not agree with the conclusions of the study the committee will produce.

That's why we are proposing this amendment. We truly want to get to the bottom of things without engaging in political games. Where is everyone? No one wants to make this decision. Why? Because it doesn't serve their political objectives. They're looking to rattle the cage, to shake things up, just because they can. However, that's not responsible.

I hope my colleagues will understand that. Otherwise, we can keep wasting time. We can keep talking. Every member has the right to speak, and that's an important tool. If the goal is to impose something that doesn't hold water, that isn't seeking the truth, but rather seeking to tarnish someone's reputation, as we have seen in the past, then I will continue to speak out. That's my right as a member of Parliament. I can put my two cents in, hoping to convince my colleagues that this approach is not the right one.

At the very least, we could adopt the amendment. I don't understand this stubbornness.

To my dear colleague who said that we've been wasting time since 3:30 p.m., I would say that we adjourned debate for those watching us before going in camera.

• (2120)

We discussed certain matters in camera, but I can't talk about them here, since the meeting is now public. Suddenly, at the end, we were thinking of adjourning the debate and moving on to other business, since everyone had commitments this evening. No, we're

back to the same debate, which had been adjourned an hour earlier. It's the same debate.

We even tried to propose, since everyone is busy, to postpone this until Thursday, at the usual time of the committee's next meeting.

Mr. Chair, you rightly pointed out after the vote that there were now items on the agenda. I understand that. However, the fact remains that this is the same debate we had adjourned.

Yes, there were procedural reasons that enabled us to resume consideration of the motion in due form, and you did a very good job of applying those rules, Mr. Chair. However, for the average person outside the room, it was understood that the discussion would be postponed to another meeting. Yet, at the last minute, we've come back to resume it. So who's playing games?

• (2125)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Are you accusing me of playing games, Mr. Ferguson?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Ferguson:** Not at all, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's the impression I got.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Ferguson:** I'm not accusing you at all, Mr. Chair. I even praised your decision, saying that it was consistent with procedure. However, the average person believed the debate had been adjourned. You made the right decision. I support you; I'm not challenging you at all.

That said, there are procedural reasons, and unfortunately, we spend too much time on these issues. Yes, you can even accuse me of doing the same thing right now. However, I'll exercise my right to say that this is not a good motion to adopt.

The least we can do, in my view, is to adopt the amendment that was proposed by Mrs. Church. I think she was the one who proposed it. Then, we must limit ourselves to the first point.

When we talk about members' obligations regarding conflicts of interest and ethics, what is the connection to inviting Alto? If we want to invite Alto, why not limit the invitation to the CEO? Would other people be better positioned to speak about members' obligations? I highly doubt it.

I'd bet a pretty penny that the Minister of Finance's wife will be invited to testify. She'll likely have to answer most of the questions asked by members, regardless of whether other individuals higher up in Alto's hierarchy are present. Everyone says she's a vice-president, but she's the vice-president of environmental assessment. I'm sure she'll receive an invitation. I know this may make some people smile, but this is not a trivial matter. It's very serious.

I hope that, instead of playing political games, we'll get back to the basics. As I said, it's not as if anyone tried to circumvent the rules. The minister did what he had to do, which was to consult the Ethics Commissioner. The minister went above and beyond what he was required to do to eliminate any doubt regarding his involvement in this matter.

• (2130)

At least Mr. Thériault said he wasn't concerned about any of this. All he was concerned about was why the minister voted on the budget implementation bill, Bill C-15. He's been consistent on that point. However, we can conduct an analysis without hearing from Alto's leaders. I don't understand why we're trying to repeat what was done in previous Parliaments. We're inviting people who are not our equals, who don't have the same privileges we do, to ask them questions that can lead to unfair situations.

If there is a problem, we can first determine it by hearing from the Ethics Commissioner, who is an officer of Parliament. If any questions remain, then we can go further and invite the minister.

I would like someone to explain to me why it is relevant to invite Alto executives. What can they contribute in terms of our obligations as parliamentarians or those of a minister when it comes to conflicts of interest? That logic is a bit beyond me.

I'll stop there, as I'm interested in the answers to these questions. I see that Mr. Thériault has asked to speak, and I imagine that he will provide some answers.

Mr. Chair, I would like to be added, again, to the list of speakers on this amendment.

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

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor on the amendment.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, I nearly heard Mr. Fergus move a sub-amendment, and I was wondering if we were going down a rabbit hole.

Sophistry is often used in making an argument, and I've identified ten or so examples of that. On a number of occasions, Mr. Fergus falsely impugned the opposition's motives, suggesting that their motives are not honourable. He repeated that over and over again. That is an error in argument. It doesn't make sense. That is a basic principle that I taught in philosophy 101.

Beyond that, Mr. Chair, quite frankly, I had not thought of inviting the minister's spouse. That might be a good idea, but I'm more interested in hearing from the CEO, Mr. Imbleau. If Mr. Fergus doesn't have any questions for Alto, that's his choice. For my part, I have several. For example, how is it that the spouse of a minister, who is shepherding the bill from A to Z, ends up being hired by the business in question? What is the business hoping to gain? What is the minister's interest in allowing this, knowing that he himself is shepherding a bill that amends the Expropriation Act and the rights of those whose land is expropriated? They're saying it's in order to move things along more quickly.

Meanwhile, south of the border, there is a tariff war. Yet we are taking on projects that will stretch out over eight, 10 or 15 years, while the threat from south of the border will be resolved long be-

fore that, probably by next fall. We are not getting any clear answers though, even with an investment of \$3.9 billion and a specific mandate.

My role is to hold people accountable. The government doesn't like that. I am bothered by what the former speaker of the House of Commons said. I am dismayed that he has taken the position of the executive branch, as though the legislative role were secondary. Debating in the House is inevitably a waste of time, it's a big show for the former speaker of the House. I am absolutely shocked by this attitude.

I understand that the executive branch doesn't like to lose control of the agenda. Nonetheless, we did not put ourselves in an apparent conflict of interest. The question now is how it was managed. Citizens, ordinary citizens, as Mr. Fergus calls them, have a right to know. To me, citizens are citizens. They are not ordinary. They have a right to get answers to legitimate questions through us. That's what it means to consider ethical questions.

If Mr. Fergus thinks that is exaggerated or partisan, that we have malicious intent, I think he has a strange way of seeing the work of parliamentarians. It's being completely cynical about our work. Ultimately, it's like saying that parliamentary democracy is useless, that we don't need it and that the only thing we need is a good government to direct us. It's like saying that it's not important to ask questions. It's as though I were saying that, since I don't have any questions for Alto, only the Ethics Commissioner should come and testify. We may however have questions for the other executives and the Minister of Finance, who is an honourable man that we respect.

• (2135)

That said, I don't understand why he shepherded a bill from A to Z, when he was in a situation which, at the very least, was ethically awkward. I don't understand why no one on the other side thinks that is a problem. Everybody seems to be comfortable with it. They're so comfortable that they don't want to talk about it. They really don't want us to inform other parliamentarians or the public of the issues and the questions it raises. I find that troubling. Then we wonder why citizens become ironic and cynical. Seeing Mr. Fergus's cynicism, I can understand the public's cynicism.

I, for one, am not cynical and I believe in parliamentary democracy. Accountability is at the very heart of our role. I don't want to question people's motives. I would like to hear other kinds of arguments.

We're here to deliberate. Right now, we have a minority government. So they have to deal with the opposition. Perhaps they would like to have a majority in order to impose their decisions, particularly in relation to Bill C-15 and the amendments to the Expropriation Act. They're telling people that they are listening to them, but that they're going to be steamrolled in any case, but it's not a big deal. That's not what we're debating tonight.

Our purpose is to determine whether there were ethical breaches. No matter how great a project might be, whether it's the seventh, eighth or ninth wonder of the world, no matter how great it is for Canadian unity, it cannot be at the expense of ethics rules. When we ask questions about that, about whether there have indeed been breaches, we're doing our job. That's what the public expects of us, regardless of their position on the project itself, which has nothing to do with what we're discussing tonight.

The resistance of certain members, who should be acting as legislators and representing the people, disappears in the steering committee. We understand how strong this government's party line is. It makes me wonder what could happen if the government were to win a majority this evening.

I'll leave it at that, but I don't think I need to take any ethics lessons from Mr. Ferguson.

• (2140)

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

Mr. Sari, go ahead on the amendment.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Of course, Mr. Chair.

What I see is that some people find this amusing. They're laughing about it—at least they will have got something out of this evening. If they don't want to recognize the relevance of the project, at least they'll get a few laughs out of it.

Having said that, I want to talk about two things. The first concerns the people we will invite and the reasons for inviting them. The reason I moved an amendment to the motion is that the motion is based on something that no one here considers irrelevant. That matter has already been referred to the Ethics Commissioner. He advised the Minister of Finance, who complied with those recommendations and beyond. To date, the mover of the motion has yet to receive a response.

Despite that, they are choosing to proceed. Why? So they don't miss an opportunity to produce clips. They will go ahead and table a motion, produce clips and publish them saying that the opposition has received instructions from the executive branch, which is completely false. What has been said today is completely irresponsible.

As to Mr. Thériault's question about a majority government, that's not something we're deciding here today. That was a choice made by Canadians, including Quebecers, when they elected their members to the House.

Getting back to the amendment, my proposal is simple: Remove the reference to the committee reporting to the House that it is undertaking this study. I think that is very appropriate. Even by suggesting witnesses, I have given them the benefit of the doubt. Even though Mr. Barrett didn't wait for the Ethics Commissioner to respond, I thought it would make sense for an ethics committee to wait for the opinion of the appropriate person who has the relevant knowledge. Since I was elected, most of the people who have appeared before the committee have said that we have one of the most interesting systems in the world. In this case, however, the Ethics Commissioner has yet to respond to the member. The member thought it was appropriate not to have the answer as to whether

there was a conflict of interest or the appearance of conflict of interest.

Unfortunately, for that member, finding the truth does not seem to be the most important thing. It's a waste of time. Since I've been a member of this committee, I sense that members just want to produce clips. That's their goal. If they're here to produce clips—

• (2145)

[*English*]

**Laila Goodridge:** I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Just a moment, Mr. Sari.

Mrs. Goodridge, go ahead on a point of order.

[*English*]

**Laila Goodridge:** Mr. Chair, I appreciate that the member opposite thinks that if he repeats himself multiple times somehow that might stick, but repetition is not permitted in the course of debate. I would just ask that he be a little more succinct and perhaps speak to the amendment and not on all of the other pieces that he is currently talking about.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sari, we're talking about the amendment now.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I have been talking exclusively about the amendment for a while now, Mr. Chair. Once again—

**The Chair:** You're repeating things you said earlier. Speak directly to the amendment.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, when I said that, even though I didn't completely agree with the three points, I still gave them a chance by proposing to remove the last sentence. Was I speaking to the amendment? Yes, I was clearly speaking to it.

Once again, the fact that I did not accept this amendment makes me wonder what the objective behind all of this is. For our part, we are trying to move forward by thinking about the people who are listening in. In fact, people who were following the proceedings earlier this afternoon think the debate has already been adjourned. They're now doing other things, because they think the discussion was finished. That is not the case though. The debate is continuing, since we're still talking about it.

I am not questioning your decision, Mr. Chair, but we have to recognize that, when Mr. Barrett asked at about 5 p.m. that we adjourn debate on his own motion, thinking it was appropriate to stop discussing it, another member wanted to revisit the issue. As a result, people who are listening to us and who thought the debate was relevant went about their business and don't know that we're still debating it. People are interested in this issue, but they are no longer listening. That is very important. Are those people important? Does this debate concern them? Yes, but they were led to believe it was over, but we're still debating it. I should point out that there it's nearly 10 p.m.

I want to inform the people listening to us that, even though we disagree with the motion and its objective, even though the project is relevant and the Conservatives are slowing it down, we proposed an amendment to determine the relevance of the work. The purpose of that amendment is to invite the Ethics Commissioner to come and testify, so that he can respond to a request that was made to him by email and for which no response has yet been received.

As to the other witnesses, I don't see why we need their testimony. Nonetheless, we have acted in good faith. We have not received any instructions. We're just assessing what's relevant to this committee. For an ethics committee, what matters is the issue of conflict of interest or the appearance of conflict of interest.

I want to pick up on a point that Mr. Hardy made. He made some statements that need to be corrected. He said that the minister recused himself because of a conflict of interest. That is false, completely false. The commissioner never asked him to recuse himself for that reason, on the contrary. It was the minister himself who thought it was appropriate to do so.

Since the debate began, I've heard my colleagues on the other side of the room, particularly Mr. Thériault, debate something other than removing the last line that calls on the committee to report to the House that it is undertaking this study. I've heard the others talk about this amendment, and no one has made a clear argument to justify keeping this line.

On the government side, on our side of the room, we agreed, despite our reservations, to the list of three witnesses. However, I'm sure that list will be expanded over time.

Is this a witch hunt? I think so. Based on my experience here, every time we invite witnesses, we expand the list, we try to make them say things they never said, we put words into their mouths and we don't let them explain what's going on. I want to prevent that; I want the committee to get back to its primary purpose. I want the committee to be more serious in its work.

• (2150)

What I want to do here is simply to shift the main objective from clips to restoring public trust and reasserting the relevance of the work we do here. The people who follow our work, whether it's at 5 p.m. or 10 p.m., need to know that we are here to look out for their interests, to make sure that public money is spent appropriately, efficiently and transparently. We're not here to say that we need to move quickly without following the rules, on the contrary. On that point, I think everyone here is saying the same thing, or nearly the same thing: the Minister of Finance has not—

[English]

**Laila Goodridge:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead with your point of order.

**Laila Goodridge:** Mr. Chair, we are not here to decide whether people have or have not done anything. We're actually here to discuss a motion, and the motion is simply to bring people before a committee so that we can hear for ourselves, not because a Liberal says we should just trust them.

Mr. Chair, I'm just really asking that they get back to the—

**The Chair:** It's not necessarily a point of order. I get your point, though.

[Translation]

Mr. Sari, you are speaking to the amendment.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I'm speaking to the amendment, Mr. Chair. We are tired, as it's 10 p.m. We're being cut off, but—

**The Chair:** You can't be talking about me because I have a lot of energy.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** So do I; I'll go play tennis afterwards; that's no problem. However, the person who raised the point of order was not even present during the debate, either in public or in camera.

I'm speaking from my experience here. I'm talking about what I've heard and the way certain witnesses have been treated. I'm talking about facts. I would say that, on a number of occasions, witnesses have not been treated with the respect they deserve. I don't want to go through that again. The people who appear before the committee do so to share their expertise with us, to inform the committee, not to say who's right and who's wrong.

On the amendment itself, I haven't heard anyone explain why the last line is needed. No one has demonstrated why it's needed, far from it. No one has explained why it should be reported to the House that the committee is undertaking this study. What more will that do for Canadians? I would have loved to hear arguments on that specific point, rather than accusations that we received instructions. I thought that was really irresponsible on their part. We have not received any instructions. On the contrary, we came here ready to debate. It was Conservatives who interrupted the debate, which was resumed later when some people had stopped following the proceedings. Those are the tactics and manoeuvres we have witnessed today.

For our part, let me say again that we have been open. Even though we had reservations about the three points, we still accepted them. We simply moved an amendment. That amendment could have been passed quickly, which would have allowed us to get on with things. Instead, people have chosen to make further accusations, which will be put to the witnesses, I'm pretty sure.

That is why I maintain that we must adopt the amendment to remove the last line, which reads as follows:

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

Mr. Chair, I'll leave it at that, but I think my colleague wants to add something as well.

I also note something that is very important: The people who moved the motion and revived the debate are no longer here. For our part, we stayed during all of the exchanges. We could have been replaced, but we chose to stay to take part in the debate.

The Conservatives have changed their trio several times, but we will keep the same trio right until the end. We will continue to defend the interests of Canadians, obviously.

• (2155)

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

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Once again, going back to—

**The Chair:** Go ahead on the amendment, Mr. Fergus.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Yes, I'll speak to the amendment, Mr. Chair.

I want to pick up on what my colleague Mr. Sari said when he asked whether anyone would justify keeping that sentence at the end of the motion. I have already explained the reasoning behind this position, and I stand by what I said.

Looking at what has happened in the past, as my colleague Mr. Sari said—and I want to stress this—there are a number of examples where, instead of getting to the bottom of things, the committee went on what looked like a witch hunt.

Mr. Chair, I would like my colleague, who seems disappointed by my remarks, to consider one fact. I had the privilege of serving as Speaker of the House of Commons in the last Parliament. I would like him to explain to me how the 70 or so days of debates we had in the House on a motion, and on numerous subamendments related to a question of privilege—

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, you have the floor on a point of order.

• (2200)

**Luc Thériault:** It's late, Mr. Chair. Could you call Mr. Fergus to order? He doesn't seem to have digested some of the things that happened in the House of Commons in another Parliament. However, that's not what we're talking about today.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Is this really a point of order, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Thériault, but that's not a point of order. That said, I appreciate what you said.

**Luc Thériault:** It may not be a point of order, but it requires your patience as to the relevance of what he said. This is not the first time he has spoken. If this was his first time speaking—

**The Chair:** I'm very patient, indeed.

**Luc Thériault:** If this was the first time he went off topic, it wouldn't be the same thing. However, I don't think that's relevant.

Moreover, I would just like to point out that Mr. Sari said that the Conservatives were not here until the end. Meanwhile, Mr. Fergus just made a statement about committee business, although this is the first time I've seen him at a committee meeting.

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

Mr. Fergus, you have the floor.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much for your indulgence, Mr. Chair.

For the record, I have been at this committee before. This is the second time I've been here. Fortunately, we have access to the transcripts of committee proceedings, and I often consult the minutes of the various committees. That has always been the case.

Let's get back to the matter at hand, which is the debate on the amendment before us.

If we want to get to the bottom of things, we have to start somewhere. The first thing a member of this committee did was write to the Ethics Commissioner. That's great. I hope he will provide the response to the committee, but I assume he hasn't received a response yet. Otherwise, I bet he would have shared it with his colleagues and the media by now. That is not the case at the moment.

If we want to duplicate the work of the Ethics Commissioner, we can invite him to appear before the committee and allow members to ask him questions about the advice he gave the minister. If we want to go further, we can also invite the minister. He can come and explain all the steps he has taken to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest.

Despite my colleague's answer—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Fergus, I'm going to have to interrupt you there. We have run out of resources. I do appreciate the fact that the interpreters have been here tonight, as well as our analysts, our clerk and our staff. I will advise you, Mr. Fergus, that you will have the floor when this meeting resumes tomorrow at 11 a.m. in room 425 of the Wellington.

The meeting is suspended to the call of the chair.

[*The meeting was suspended at 10:05 p.m., Monday, April 13*]

[*The meeting resumed at 11:06 a.m., Tuesday, April 14*]

• (3505)

**The Chair:** We are resuming from the suspension of the ethics committee meeting that happened last night at 10.05.

As a reminder, for the sake of all members, we are on a motion proposed by Mr. Barrett. The motion reads:

That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto, and the Minister's claims that he has recused himself from decisions his government made related to Alto; that, for the purpose of this study, the committee invite the following witnesses to appear by May 8, 2026:

1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for two hours;
2. Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours; and
3. the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, for two hours;

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

We did have an amendment proposed by Mr. Sari to eliminate the line "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study".

In light of the Prime Minister's comments this morning, I'm looking forward to a substantive debate on the issue, not a performative debate. I hope that members will oblige what the Prime Minister said this morning. I thought we got a little off the rails last night, if you will, on some of the comments that were made.

I have Mr. Fergus on the list on the amendment

Mr. Fergus, are you ceding your time to Mr. Sari?

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** No, Mr. Chair, I just want to clarify something.

We've been working together for eight months, Mr. Chair. My name is pronounced Sari, not Sarai. The amendment was tabled by Mr. Sari. Mr. Sarai, on the other hand, is a minister in our government. I wanted to say that because, since yesterday, I have heard Mr. Sarai and have been wondering who that is, because it's not me. My name is Sari. It's easy.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I got it. You'd think that after a year I would have got it and I thought I did.

Mr. Fergus, you are on the amendment.

Please go ahead, sir.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Good morning, Mr. Chair and esteemed colleagues.

Where were we, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chair, you referred to comments made by the Prime Minister. My home committee is the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. This morning, I attended an in camera meeting and I didn't have access to my phone. So I am unfortunately not aware of what the Prime Minister said, but that's neither here nor there. It is important for the people who are joining us this morning or who are watching us on television to understand our procedures. As you said, we are dealing with a motion that was—

[*English*]

**Gurbux Saini (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** The interpretation is not coming through for me.

**The Chair:** The interpretation is working now, from what I can tell. The only issue was making sure that the microphone was a little bit higher, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I would like to salute our esteemed interpreters, Mr. Chair. They provide outstanding service to the House of Commons. This is an essential service so that everyone can understand what's going on, in both of Canada's official languages.

As I was saying, we're considering an amendment to the motion. The reason we're looking at this amendment is that it proposes "that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study". That sentence might seem very innocuous, but all parliamentarians around the table and everyone in the House of Commons know

very well that it can open the door to very long, probably unsuccessful, discussions in the House of Commons.

Normally, when a committee like the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics examines a matter, it is completely normal for it to present its report to the House of Commons, through you, Mr. Chair. There can be a discussion, and we can demand that the government respond to our report within a certain time frame. That's quite normal, so there's no need to specify that. However, when it is specified, it opens up the possibility of triggering various parliamentary procedures that, frankly, will lead to nothing except wasting the House's time.

I know there were members who felt that removing that sentence would not respect the right of all members to participate in a debate. It's true that the 343 members can have a discussion, but we know how the system works. The reason standing committees were created is precisely to make Parliament more efficient: committees do their work, study a subject in depth and present a report to the House of Commons. From there, the House can do whatever it wants with that report.

If we really want to find a consensus that suits everyone, I think the least we can do is remove that sentence. That's why my colleague Mrs. Church proposed an amendment last night. We hope there will be support for this amendment. That will allow us to move on to something else.

• (3510)

I want to be very clear: What we want is to look into the situation. The reason is that newspaper articles reported that the Minister of Finance had recused himself and had put in place a mechanism to ensure that he not only complied with the obligations and requirements of the Conflict of Interest Act, but in fact went well beyond what was required.

The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner confirmed that there was indeed no conflict of interest. Despite that, the Minister of Finance went even further to eliminate any doubt, hint or indication that may have violated the spirit or letter of the law. He went way beyond that.

For some reason that I don't understand, my colleagues across the way want to engage in a witch hunt. It makes no sense. It's as though they want to punish someone for doing the right thing. It doesn't make sense and it doesn't add up, in my opinion. There are other options. First of all, we can write to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and ask for his perspective. I think that's the first step.

As we know, a member of this committee has already written to the commissioner, who is an officer of Parliament, to ask him to report on this situation. The letter that was sent to the commissioner has been made public, and, to my knowledge, we have not received a reply as of yet. If we don't want to wait for the reply, we can at least invite the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to testify before the committee in order to ask him some questions. So in that regard, I think the first point in Mr. Barrett's motion is entirely reasonable.

Instead of sticking to that, though, other things were added. It's not clear why that was done. For example, it is proposed that Mr. Imbleau and Alto executives be invited to testify before the committee. Once again, we wonder why. How could Mr. Imbleau or Alto executives explain to us the obligations under the Conflict of Interest Act? They're not responsible for that; it's the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner who is. So it seems very odd to me to include that in the motion.

Unfortunately, I've seen this committee invite people from outside Parliament in the past. Frankly, I have to say that I'm not convinced that we're going to derive much benefit from that. Various people even think that, in some cases, we exceed our privileges as members of Parliament by summoning citizens who are not parliamentarians to discuss a matter that originally stems from a political disagreement. It doesn't make sense, and I hope we don't go in that direction.

• (3515)

I think that, if we want to amend the motion, this is another area where improvements can be made.

Finally, it is proposed that the Minister of Finance and National Revenue be invited to appear. In my opinion, that's entirely legitimate since he's a minister. Parliamentarians always have the right—

• (3520)

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

I'm on the French channel, but I'm getting the English interpretation. Obviously, I want to hear all of the arguments that Mr. Fergus is making—I don't remember what he said yesterday, but he's repeating everything. I don't understand why this is happening, but I can hear the English interpretation. I don't need to listen to the English interpretation though.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Mr. Chair, has the problem been corrected?

**The Chair:** Have we resolved the problem on the French channel, Mr. Thériault?

**Luc Thériault:** I don't hear the English interpreter any more.

**The Chair:** Okay, that's good then.

**Luc Thériault:** It should be.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

What's that? Oh, you just have to raise your hand.

Mr. Fergus, continue, please.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, it is quite normal to invite another parliamentarian or minister to appear before a parliamentary committee. That is someone who is essentially responsible for policy. They must be ready, at any time, to answer questions from parliamentarians, from their colleagues, to defend how they are doing their work and to reassure us that everything was done in accordance with the rules and all the laws that applied to them. To my mind, that's normal.

That said, there are two things that really concern me. The first pertains specifically to the second part of the motion, that is, the need to remove the amendment that was added to it. That is in fact why we want to remove it.

I listened carefully to my colleagues Mr. Thériault yesterday and Mr. Hardy as they tried to justify parts of the motion. However, I want to stress the following: Their justifications do not stand up, especially considering all the information and the measures taken by the main stakeholders.

As I said earlier, in this situation, the Minister of Finance and National Revenue proactively approached the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, an officer of Parliament, for advice. He received that advice, which the commissioner subsequently confirmed publicly. That advice was given to the minister in writing. Despite that, the minister went even further.

Canadians who are following this matter are wondering what we're doing. It's not like he was trying to hide something. He proactively sought advice. Despite the opinion he received that there was no problem, he went far beyond that.

In this case, where is the fire? Where is the smoke? I am eagerly waiting for someone to answer that question.

• (3525)

[*English*]

without shading the truth or the actions that were taken, or making false equivalences to justify an outcome.

[*Translation*]

If we look at the situation honestly and clearly, the conclusion is obvious. That is why I strongly support the adoption of this amendment, which seeks to remove the words “that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study”.

That way, we can move forward and hopefully get to other business.

Second, last night I received an email from a Canadian, one of my constituents, who wanted to contact me. He thought I would be available for a Zoom call. He told me that he had been following the committee live. When we suspended to go in camera, he did not expect us to resume our discussions because he thought that, according to the schedule, the meeting was supposed to end at 5:30 p.m. yesterday.

To his surprise, after receiving my message that I would not be available, he went back and checked and found that we were continuing our work. He then wondered what was going on, especially since the matter had already been discussed before and a motion to adjourn debate had been adopted to go in camera and consider other matters. As I explained, Mr. Chair, your ruling was entirely in order, but it was quite a surprise to people who are not familiar with the inner workings of procedural debates in the House of Commons.

I would point out to the people here that the reason the debate has dragged on is that we want to avoid continuing to play political games and adding things to the motion, since they could lead to other political games.

In my opinion, we need to put an end to these political games and get back to the basics: invite the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and, if necessary, the Minister of Finance, while removing the parts that add nothing to the discussion on members' and ministers' responsibilities to Parliament for complying with the provisions of the Conflict of Interest Act.

Second, we must not add procedural elements that could lead to an unnecessary waste of time in the House of Commons. I don't want to say it's unusual, since it has come up a number of times in the past, but just because it was done in the past doesn't mean that it was a good thing.

Indeed, adopting this part of the motion could lead to hours and hours of debate that would be as unhelpful as other pointless debates we've had in the House of Commons.

• (3530)

I know this may offend some of my colleagues, who will say that, as I was Speaker of the House of Commons, it is my duty to defend the rights of all members of Parliament at all times. To that, I say, yes, absolutely. However, members of Parliament have an obligation to be reasonable. We must behave responsibly. Having power does not mean we must exercise it at all times. We have an obligation to act with dignity, responsibility and discernment. We must not hesitate to ask pointed questions to get to the bottom of things, but there are ways to do so that respect the noblest traditions of the Canadian Parliament.

Mr. Chair, I hope my colleagues will support the motion that has just been moved.

I will now give the floor to another speaker and listen to my colleagues' responses. I would like my name to be added to the list of speakers so that I may respond to my colleagues' comments.

[*English*]

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

On the amendment, we are now going to Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

[*Translation*]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The amendment concerns the issue of reporting to the House. I would like us to take a step back. I know I was not with you yesterday, but my colleagues have fully informed me of the lengthy and substantive discussions that continued late into the evening.

I would therefore like to offer a few points for consideration. Before determining whether to report to the House and before we consider the amendment, I would like to take a fresh look at the motion and share some thoughts with you.

When we talk about high-speed rail, we are talking about a project that is central to our government's commitments over the past year: strengthening the Canadian economy, supporting nation-building projects that will use our products, creating jobs for our workers, and increasing GDP. This represents a tangible economic impact, benefiting our communities and our citizens.

I believe the public has entrusted us with a strong mandate in this regard. Moreover, the results of three by-elections last night showed us that voters have reaffirmed this trust so that we may continue our work to build a stronger and more resilient Canadian economy. This requires nation-building projects such as high-speed rail. That is our priority.

On our side of the table, we are focusing our efforts on implementing such projects. It is not about throwing a spanner in the works, engaging in partisanship or conducting witch hunts. Rather, it is about building faster and more efficiently in Canada, putting our fellow citizens to work, and using our resources to stimulate the economy. What motivates us and what we think about when we get up in the morning is fulfilling our commitments.

However, when I look at what is happening on the opposition side, I wonder. Why engage in a witch hunt? Why play petty politics over a project that has the potential to generate significant economic benefits for our country?

To meet the challenges of our time and seize new opportunities, we must make intergenerational investments that will protect and transform our industries, strengthen our economy and empower Canadians. That is what we are doing, notably through the 2025 budget and the legislative measures we have implemented since then.

I would like to see more co-operation from my colleagues in the opposition. Building and strengthening the Canadian economy and implementing major nation-building projects should be a shared priority that motivates us all. We should set partisanship aside and avoid throwing a spanner in the works of these major projects.

For my part, I have a hard time understanding the purpose of this motion and what it actually does for the average citizen. When I return to my riding, Madawaska—Restigouche, in northwestern New Brunswick, and people ask me what I've accomplished in Parliament, I talk about legislative reforms and our work to strengthen the Canadian economy and generate benefits for workers in my region.

What constituents don't ask me is how much time I've spent debating opposition motions aimed at conducting witch hunts. That doesn't interest the people in my riding, and that's not why I was elected to Parliament.

This preamble, to which I will return later, brings me to the substance of the bill. If we are to determine whether to report to the House, we must understand the scope of the motion and its potential implications.

This is a bill with considerable economic benefits, particularly in terms of stimulating the economy. We are talking specifically about job creation: it is estimated that more than 51,000 jobs could be created, whether in construction, engineering, operations, maintenance or infrastructure upgrades. This represents thousands of jobs spanning several generations. Furthermore, these jobs have multiplier effects, since every dollar invested will generate indirect benefits. I am thinking of the many small and medium-sized businesses that will benefit, as well as suppliers of goods and services.

It is estimated that this project could contribute more than \$35 billion to GDP, particularly through investments in steel manufacturing, concrete production, electrical systems, digital technologies and skilled trades. In and of itself, this represents a major economic boost for our country. We do not have time for partisanship or political games here. In my view, we need to get to work and carry out this project as soon as possible. Yet here, in committee, we are wasting our time—

- (3535)

- (3540)

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Jansen has a point of order.

**Tamara Jansen:** I'm wondering about relevance. The amendment isn't about the merits of high-speed rail.

**The Chair:** Yes, I agree with you on that.

I'm going to ask the member to deal specifically with what the amendment is, and that's to strike the last line "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study." I've been listening intently, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, and it sounds like you are completely contrary to the Prime Minister's advice this morning. You're more performative than substantive or relevant to the debate, so I'm going to ask you to get back on track.

Please speak to the amendment.

[Translation]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** I am a bit surprised by your comments, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Don't be surprised by it, because we sat here for seven hours last night with Liberal members talking about the merits of the Alto program when we're talking about the motion here, so don't be surprised by my proposal here.

Get back to the motion, please.

[Translation]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Actually, I thought that, as a member of the committee, I had the right to express my opinion. I wasn't aware that the chair could prevent me from expressing my surprise at certain remarks.

If I want to say that I'm surprised by something I hear, I believe that's an opinion I have the right to express as a member of this committee. I didn't know that limitations could be—

[English]

**The Chair:** Speak to the amendment, please, the amendment.

[Translation]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** I wanted to respond to you, Mr. Chair, because I did not realize that my impressions concerning my colleagues might be limited. I reiterate this, and I believe I have the right to express my surprise.

As for the amendment, the issue is whether or not we report to the House. However, before making such a decision, we must first fully understand what is at stake.

The motion specifically concerns the Alto project and the appearance of its executives, including the CEO, for two hours, as set out in the main motion.

My remarks are part of a broader discussion: What do we wish to report to the House? What might the content of such a report be? In my view, the points and benefits I am presenting are directly related to the amendment, since the issue is whether we want to bring these points to the attention of the House and, if so, in what form.

Our colleagues' time is precious. There are 343 of us in Parliament, and we all have busy schedules. The House's time is limited, and several legislative priorities are currently under consideration. Other committees are also presenting reports. I therefore do not wish to unnecessarily burden my colleagues or provide them with information that is not relevant.

At this stage, I have not yet decided whether we need to report to the House, as this requires further consideration. What types of information could we present to the House? What points would be worth sharing with our parliamentary colleagues? Since the motion concerns high-speed rail, it is entirely relevant to address this in my remarks, and I consider this to be directly related to the amendment.

If I may, I will continue. There are other points to address in this report. In particular, we can examine the economic impacts and the benefits for the Canadian economy. As I mentioned, in a motion of this type, we could also consider the productivity gains that could—

[English]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Lawton, on your point of order.

**Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I haven't heard the entire remarks of the member, and I don't feel I've been missing much, but I'm not sure what the economic benefits are of whether to report something to the House or not, which is what I understood we were supposed to be debating right now.

**The Chair:** Yes, we are debating an amendment to the motion to remove “And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study”. I’ve made this point several times today. I also made this point several times—many times—last night, that we are sticking to the amendment to the motion. We are not discussing the merits of the Alto program. If you want to do that, go to the transportation committee. That’s not what we’re discussing here.

Get back to the amendment, please. Be a little more substantive and relevant to the debate, please, as the Prime Minister stated this morning.

[*Translation*]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** I will repeat what I said earlier, because my colleague indicated he missed some points. I don’t want him to miss any information, so I will repeat what I said.

As I mentioned, every member of the House of Commons has a busy schedule. As a committee member, I believe it is our responsibility to ensure that we send the most relevant documents possible to the House of Commons.

The amendment we are considering concerns whether we report to the House. When reading the main motion, it specifically mentions inviting the CEO of Alto, which ties into the high-speed rail project.

I am therefore considering the types of information that might be included in a report to the House, and the types of information that might be mentioned by witnesses. Before deciding whether to vote in favour of reporting to the House, I believe it is our duty, as members of the committee, to consider the relevance of the points that might emerge from the discussion.

I just mentioned economic benefits, but I’d also like to talk about environmental benefits, improved mobility, social benefits and benefits for the country. There are several other aspects to consider. That was just my first example. There are several categories of information to consider that could be included in a report to the House. Once we have carefully considered what could be included in a report, we will be able to make an informed decision as to whether we wish to report to the House. I hope this brief feedback will help my colleague better understand my perspective and why I would like to think a little more deeply about whether we should report to the House on this matter.

There are still relevant factors to consider when discussing productivity gains. I’m bringing this up to give an example of the kind of discussion we might have when talking about economic benefits. The productivity gains that these faster trips between major cities could generate are real. Consider the trip from Montreal to Toronto or from Montreal to Quebec City. It is said that the trip between Montreal and Quebec City will take about 90 minutes. This will be a game changer for our workers and our businesses. In fact, according to a study by the C.D. Howe Institute, a high-speed train would increase productivity across the country. I agree with these conclusions.

Let’s imagine highly specialized professionals. In Canada, we have an extremely specialized and highly skilled workforce. If we have an expert in a cutting-edge field in Toronto, Montreal or Quebec City, that person could take the high-speed train in the morning

and return home in the evening, travelling through the corridor of the cities served. These are factors to consider in terms of productivity gains and workforce mobility, and how this can benefit our various businesses across the country.

We’re talking about strengthening the Canadian economy, but also about facilitating interprovincial trade. We’re talking about better connecting major economic hubs across the country, such as Quebec City, Montreal, Toronto or Ottawa. This will bring people closer together, bring workers closer together and create new opportunities for our businesses.

Better opportunities for our businesses also mean greater investment appeal. It becomes attractive for businesses to invest in these various cities along the corridor, because we know that workforce mobility—

● (3545)

**Luc Thériault:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault on a point of order.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, I think you have been extremely patient.

You have called the member to order two or three times now, as he does not seem to understand the motion and the amendment to the motion, which have been the subject of discussion for at least seven hours, not to mention the hours and minutes we are devoting to them today.

Could you explain the motion and the amendment to him once again, so that he can, once and for all, stay on topic rather than acting like a know-it-all?

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, thank you for this point of order.

[*English*]

You’re right. I am being very patient with this. For seven hours last night, I made it very clear what we were dealing with, that this is the ethics committee of Parliament and we’re dealing with a motion related to ethics. We’re not dealing with a motion related to the value or the virtue of the Alto system. There have been several occasions where I’ve suggested that if members want to argue that, they can go to the transportation committee.

We are dealing with a motion:

That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto, and the Minister’s claims that he has recused himself from decisions his government made related to Alto; that, for the purpose of this study, the committee invite the following witnesses to appear by May 8, 2026:

1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for two hours;
2. Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours; and
3. the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, for two hours;

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study

The amendment that's on the floor is to strike the last line of this motion, and that is "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking the study".

That is the amendment proposed by Mr. Sari.

I am going to ask that all members follow the advice of the Prime Minister this morning. He said that we were going to not be performative, that we were going to be substantive, that there was going to be less showboating and more substance. I'm not seeing much of that. I am seeing a lot of showboating and a lot less substance to the motion and the amendment that we are dealing with.

You're right, Mr. Thériault. I have been patient, but as I explained last night, late last night, after seven hours of this filibuster, I have no procedural tools to stop what is happening. The only thing I can do is to try to bring this back on track and get to the amendment. I've been doing my best to do that, Mr. Thériault, and I appreciate your patience as well.

Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, you have the floor. I would like you to get back to the amendment please.

• (3550)

[*Translation*]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Some rather unkind remarks have been made about me. Before returning to the amendment, I would therefore like to ask my colleagues to treat one another with respect during our discussions.

To insinuate that a member is incapable of understanding the content of a motion seems a bit distasteful. Making similar remarks, suggesting that the member wants to act like a know-it-all is irrelevant to the debate. I believe we should focus on the arguments rather than resorting to personal attacks. I find this somewhat regrettable on the part of my colleague, whom I otherwise hold in high regard.

To respond to your remarks, Mr. Chair, if you allow me to finish my comment, perhaps everyone will better understand what I am trying to say.

I will reiterate it, since people don't seem to understand: We are discussing the amendment and trying to determine whether we should report to the House.

In the House, we are all busy parliamentarians; we all have full schedules. Before deciding whether to send information to the House or to report to the House, I believe it is our responsibility to ensure that what we intend to report is relevant.

That is what we are discussing. The main motion concerns the high-speed rail project, and when we talk about withdrawing the report from the House, it is directly related to this motion, since the report would pertain to it.

In my remarks, I am considering the type of content that might result from the main motion. Then we can make an informed decision as to whether we wish to report to the House.

Yes, I am able to read the motion, understand it and understand the subamendment. With your permission, Mr. Chair, I'd like to address the issue of—

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

Since the member doesn't seem to understand the motion, could you remind him of it?

The motion states that we'll report to the House that we're undertaking this study. That's what it says.

Yet my colleague speaks as if we must now determine what should be in the report. However, we'll be reporting that we're undertaking the study.

For members of Parliament, who are supposed to be legislators, this means that the executive doesn't like having an imposed agenda. Yet this morning, they're serving the executive power and not the legislative power.

When you haven't sat through a seven-hour debate, you don't pretend—if you're respectful—to act as if you know everything. You respect the debate.

I would like to ask my colleague to respect the debate. He can be for or against the amendment. It's simple.

We all have busy schedules, as he said. We don't have time to waste on all this rambling about whether the Alto project is a good idea.

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

[*English*]

I don't think I need to add to what you said. Short of repeating it, I think it was well said. Hopefully the intention was received of what you said.

[*Translation*]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree that we have no time to waste. That's exactly why, when it comes to a project such as high-speed rail, we mustn't waste any time. This project has the potential to strengthen the Canadian economy. It will have a major impact on all the regions along the route, and indeed on the entire country.

I think that the motion before us today amounts to a witch hunt and partisanship. This is the very thing that causes us to waste time on proposals of this nature.

Remember that our role as legislators is to serve the people whom we represent. We were elected with the mandate to build and strengthen the Canadian economy. Yesterday evening, voters in three constituencies renewed their confidence in us to continue carrying out this mandate. This includes constituencies located near the route proposed by Alto.

I believe that, as legislators, we must be able to address the concerns while also highlighting the benefits. Surveys show that most Canadians, and even most Quebeckers, support the project. It will be worth asking the various members of Parliament, including the members elected yesterday evening, to talk about what they have heard on the ground about the Alto project.

I'll get back to the time issue. When it comes to this motion, I think that we need to avoid wasting time on witch hunts and political games. We need to focus on what Canadians elected us to do, which is to take action.

I'll get back to the motion. It states as follows:

That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto, and the Minister's claims that he has recused himself from decisions....

It also talks about inviting the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

So we're talking about inviting different witnesses. At the end, it states that "the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study."

I personally attend meetings of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. You can see this in the minutes. My colleagues are asking me what we'll be doing with this study, whether we've given the project any thought, what we'll be discussing and what the benefits will be. I want to be able to give a clear answer. That's why I think that we need to look at the big picture.

When I talk about the benefits of the high-speed rail project, I'm doing just that. I'm looking at the big picture of this motion. If we don't take this picture into account, we run the risk of adopting a motion without fully understanding its ramifications or the project in question.

Mr. Chair, I'm only on the first page of my notes and I still have several points to make. I'm still not on the second page.

In terms of economic benefits, we can talk about investment attractiveness and regional development. This project could boost economic activity in the cities along the corridor.

It could also boost tourism by improving access to major cities and regions. This is a key factor in Canada. We want Canadians to be able to visit their country from coast to coast. For example, this summer, we're introducing the Canada strong pass to encourage people to visit national parks and other sites. My constituency is home to a botanical garden, among other things. We want Canadians to be able to discover their country.

A high-speed train is a key component of a tourism strategy, since it makes travelling easier. Before becoming a member of Parliament, I had the opportunity to travel in various parts of the world. In Japan, I saw just how fast a high-speed train could get you from city to city. It gave me the opportunity to visit a number of cities in Japan, to discover the cultural richness and to see the tourist sites. If there hadn't been a high-speed train, I would have had to make choices. It gave me the chance to discover—

• (3555)

[English]

**Tamara Jansen:** I have a point of order.

Are we now talking about Japan? This is not the amendment.

**The Chair:** Ms. Jansen, again, I am going to agree with you and suggest that we get back on the amendment to the motion that has been proposed.

The amendment, again, is to remove "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study".

To be frank, the showboating and lack of substance here on this amendment is really getting frustrating. I would suggest that members get back to what the amendment is.

• (3600)

**Andrew Lawton:** May I speak to the same point of order?

**The Chair:** On the same point of order, Mr. Lawton, go ahead.

**Andrew Lawton:** I think you're doing a bang-up job, given the circumstances, Mr. Chair, but I do believe you have it in your discretion, when there is a repeated refusal to stick to the topic at hand, as has been the case, even in the short time I've been here, to move—

**The Chair:** It can be deemed as disruptive, and I understand that. I could not allow the member to have the floor.

**Andrew Lawton:** That is correct.

**The Chair:** I am not at that point right now, but if it does become increasingly disruptive and we're not relevant to the point of the motion and the amendment that we're discussing, I may actually invoke that power.

Thank you.

[Translation]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Thank you for the question and the clarification.

Why did I bring up Japan? Of course, the motion concerns high-speed rail in Canada. I'm keenly aware of this. I wanted to show how Japan's tourism industry benefits from high-speed rail and how this could also be implemented here.

I drew this example from my past experience of travelling to various countries with high-speed trains. I saw the opportunities, particularly for the tourism industry and for the economy of the countries that I was fortunate enough to visit.

The point wasn't to discuss high-speed trains in Japan per se, but rather to demonstrate how a high-speed train can be an asset to a country's tourism industry and economy. I mentioned Japan simply to provide a concrete example.

When we look at the high-speed rail project and the matter of reporting to the House, I want to emphasize the need to fully understand the big picture of this motion. There are economic benefits, of course. However, we must also consider the environmental benefits.

We have ambitious goals for protecting the climate and fighting against climate change. The introduction of a high-speed train could contribute to these efforts. One key benefit is the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The high-speed train is a much greener option than flying or driving, especially for medium-distance travel.

From an energy transition perspective, it's a concrete example of how we can boost the Canadian economy, support various economic sectors, use our steel, provide jobs for Canadian workers, make travel easier and improve people's quality of life, all while helping to achieve our climate goals.

We can also think of road congestion. A high-speed train means less road congestion. This makes it easier to travel from city to city. People can choose between using their vehicle or a reliable and fast service to get from city to city.

As I said earlier, the trip from Quebec City to Montreal would take 90 minutes. If a fast and reliable travel option is available, many people will choose the train over the car. This will help improve traffic flow and make an impact on the environment. We can also consider the reduction of noise pollution and the better use of land. This contributes to both national and international climate goals.

Canada isn't the only country committed to the fight against climate change. We're part of a group and we have commitments with our international partners. I believe that we need to show leadership, particularly through large-scale projects of this nature.

I also talked about the impact on mobility for Canadians. This project would have a significant impact on mobility across the country, in part by greatly reducing travel times. People could travel from Montreal to Toronto or from Quebec City to Toronto in just a few hours. This would bring about a major change, both for the tourism industry and for workers and businesses.

I would like to share another example from my own life. When I was a student, I had the opportunity to spend a semester in France, where the TGV connected the island where—

[*English*]

**Tamara Jansen:** I have a point of order.

We now seem to be talking about the member's time in France. I wonder if we could get back to the amendment.

• (3605)

**The Chair:** I'm going to accept that as a point of order.

Deal with the amendment, or else I will invoke my authority under section 20.110 in chapter 20 regarding the rules and procedures in committees.

Stick to the amendment, please.

[*Translation*]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** The connection with the amendment stems from the ability to link different educational institutions.

When it comes to improving mobility, a high-speed train makes travelling easier. I also spoke about the tourism industry and the workers, but we can also think of two universities—

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

Mr. Chair, despite your multiple warnings to the member of Parliament, he clearly isn't complying with your instructions and advice.

I understand that you're quite patient. You said three times that you would invoke your authority. I think that we've reached this point. Clearly, the member of Parliament showed up with his notes to demonstrate that the Alto project is the ninth wonder of the world. Yet we aren't talking about this here. He spoke of a witch hunt without explaining how the motion and amendment fit into this concept.

I think that he's going too far and that he's putting your authority to the test. I think that it's time to invoke your authority.

[*English*]

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

At this point, I'm not prepared to do that. If the relevance of this issue is not brought to where it needs to be, and there is more non-substantive debate on what we actually are debating, which is the amendment, and this continues, then I am considering it.

I'm not prepared to do that at this point, Mr. Thériault.

I appreciate your intervention on that.

If this disruption continues, then I'm going to have to make a decision.

Carry on, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

[*Translation*]

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Thank you.

I would just like to respond to a point raised by my colleague. I have notes because I prepared myself for the debate. I'm interested in the topics studied in committee and I want to be well prepared. Yes, I have notes, and yes, I have sheets of paper. I want to be able to stay on track with my argument and my ideas and to have information on hand. The goal is to do my job properly, to come prepared and to have content to refer to as needed.

Mr. Chair, regarding the motion, I think that we really need to look at whether we want to let the House know that we'll be undertaking a study that's seen as a witch hunt—to say the least—and that wastes our time. We should be focusing on building the Canadian economy and carrying out major projects of national interest such as this one. I think that this is the crux of the motion.

In my opinion, we should be focusing on how to get this project up and running as quickly as possible, rather than on debating this type of motion in committee today.

Mr. Chair, I know that my colleagues have other points to make. I don't want to encroach on anyone's speaking time. I'll let you give the floor to the next speaker. However, I would like my name added to the list of speakers. I have a few other points to make later on in the discussion.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault. I'll add your name to the list again.

Mr. Sari, you can now speak about the amendment.

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The power seems to be out on this side of the room. If we're going to stay in this room, could we have some sort of solution? Is there any solution in place for us, for our devices and whatnot?

**The Chair:** I'm glad you brought that to my attention. It's the first time I've heard about it. Did somebody trip a breaker or something?

Before we start with Mr. Sari, I'm going to suspend for a minute until we fix this.

• (3610) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (3620)

**The Chair:** There was a small technical issue with some of the power in the room, but it has been resolved.

We're moving into hour eight of debate on a motion, and I'm going to read it again to remind members:

That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto, and the Minister's claims that he has recused himself from decisions his government made related to Alto; that, for the purpose of this study, the committee invite the following witnesses to appear by May 8, 2026:

1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for two hours;
2. Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours; and
3. the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, for two hours;

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

We are on an amendment proposed by Mr. Sari to remove the last line of the motion "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study".

I'm hoping that this can be resolved soon and that, as the Prime Minister said this morning, the committee work can be substantive and relevant to the debate. He also said that we are going to have less showboating and more substance. I would like to see less showboating and more substance on the amendment.

Mr. Sari, you are starting hour number eight on this.

Go ahead, sir.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This did get me thinking about the amendment, yesterday evening. I was asked what led me to move it in this manner. It falls squarely in line with our Prime Minister's call for us to be co-operative.

I read the motion. Yesterday, I took the time to speak quite explicitly and to outline the benefits of the project. Canadians aren't happy with how things are understood and handled on the other side of the room. This came across clearly in yesterday evening's results. As a result, the priorities aren't clear.

My colleagues—Ms. Lapointe, Mr. Fergus, Mrs. Church and, today, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault—have really tried to better explain this project and its benefits. However, it seems that the other side doesn't want to hear what Canadians have understood and retained.

I won't go into the details of the project because I'll focus on the amendment. That said, it's a good project. For such a major project, which places our country at the cutting edge, with, of course, a certain amount of risk-taking and an international positioning—

[*English*]

**Andrew Lawton:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Lawton, on your point of order.

**Andrew Lawton:** We are supposed to be speaking about the finance minister and his profound conflict of interest lapses and ethics lapses here at the ethics committee. Unless that is the project Mr. Sari is referring to, I don't see how this has any bearing on the motion or the amendment.

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

Again, we're trying to deal with substance here and something that's relevant to the debate. I'm trying to keep it on track. It's clear that some members aren't prepared to discuss that. I'm asking again, and this is probably the, I don't know, 50th time that I've asked in the last eight hours of debate that we stay on the amendment to the motion, and that is to remove the last line. That's what I'm asking.

Continue, please.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that my colleague on the other side of the room wasn't here yesterday. So he doesn't know exactly what happened.

As Mr. Fergus said earlier, yesterday a number of colleagues and people believed that the debate on this motion was suspended. They thought that the debate would resume later, on Thursday or at another time, perhaps. They wanted to continue tuning in to the discussions. They called me in the evening, but I couldn't take their call since I was still in committee. They were surprised, as were a number of people who had been following the proceedings.

My colleague, Mr. Lawton, may not know this. The debate was suspended following a request from Mr. Barrett. It was then unexpectedly resumed following a request from Mr. Hardy. This is a crucial detail, because we're here to debate the motion. This major project will serve the interests of the public, the economy, tourism and universities. At one point, we said that we would stop talking about this and move on to another matter in camera. People left, members of Parliament disconnected and a number of them stopped following the proceedings. Then, at some point, the debate unexpectedly resumed.

I'm not questioning your decision yesterday, Mr. Chair. You acted as you saw fit, even though I disagreed with you. You had every right to do so. However, once again, some people lost the opportunity to keep up with the debates. For them, a suspension means that the debate will be resumed at another meeting. This was their understanding, and it didn't align with yours.

I think that it's vital to point this out to the people here this morning. They didn't sit through the seven hours of debate that we had together.

The Prime Minister spoke yesterday about co-operation. In my amendment—

• (3625)

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, you have the floor for a point of order.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, I just want to avoid any confusion. I've been sitting here since the debates began, at 3:30 yesterday afternoon, without being replaced.

The parliamentarian is implying that colleagues didn't understand a problem because they weren't here yesterday, but that doesn't apply to me. However, I would like to point out that it could apply to his colleague Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

It might be a good idea to get back to the topic at hand, the motion. In the House, you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. On several occasions, my Liberal colleagues have said that they don't question your decision, yet they continue to discuss it and imply that it is questionable. There was only one thing to do: challenge it and try to overturn it.

It's a delaying tactic, it's a filibuster and it's pathetic.

**The Chair:** I understand. You're right.

[*English*]

I'm just going to remind members, the other thing the Prime Minister said this morning is to have respectful debate. If one member calls into question another member's capacity to understand what's going on, I would determine that's not respectful and constitutes a little bit of showboating.

I do agree with Mr. Thériault on this, and I would ask that Mr. Sari get back to the amendment to the motion. I'm not sure if he needs me to read it to him again, but I think he understands clearly where we're at here.

Mr. Sari, continue, please.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, I will continue while being respectful of the debate. Respect must go both ways. I feel that my colleague Mr. Deschênes-Thériault and I should be respected, since we have the same status as the others on the committee. Seniority does not confer any advantage or superiority in how to address another MP elected by their constituents.

On the amendment itself, to go back to the Prime Minister's comments, I have been co-operative. Yesterday, when I went point by point, I made it clear that I did not agree with the following three elements: inviting the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, inviting the Alto executives and inviting the Minister of Finance and National Revenue. Despite that, I indicated that we could be open, that we could be co-operative. It's in that spirit that I'm talking about the amendment.

I would add that Mr. Barrett, who moved the motion, rightly wrote to the Ethics Commissioner in the meantime. He thought it was appropriate, and I recognize that it's appropriate to go to the person who has the expertise and the most skills and knowledge in this area.

However, since his and his colleagues' objective, as opposed to ours, is to get sound bites, he thought it appropriate to table a motion instead of waiting for the commissioner's response. In my opinion, he could have waited. My colleague disagrees. He could have waited to hear back from the commissioner. Unless he has already received an answer that we don't know about. What the public knows is that he wrote to the Ethics Commissioner. However, we don't know whether the commissioner answered him.

Wouldn't it have been appropriate to at least wait for a response from the commissioner responsible for conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest before judging the elements to be put forward? The comments made by my colleagues Mr. Barrett, Mr. Hardy and Mr. Thériault are based on hypotheticals. Since I've been a member of the committee, I've found the debates worthwhile and relevant. However, the objective is not the same on both sides.

The intended objective on both sides of the room is not the same. On one side, some people just seem to want to get sound bites. On our side, we want to strengthen Canadians' trust in institutions.

Canadians understand that there are procedures to be followed. They understand that there is an Ethics Commissioner who looks into these matters. The experts who appeared before the committee clearly stated that our system for ethics, conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts of interest is among the strongest in the world. Despite that, the member doesn't wait for the commissioner's response and chooses to table a motion. Why? It's because he wants to get sound bites.

Mr. Chair, so far, the motion and the amendment have highlighted two approaches and two types of members. On one side, members want to co-operate. We accepted elements we did not agree with. We proposed removing a provision that we consider to impede efficiency in the work of the committee and the House. There is co-operation. The Prime Minister talked about the importance of co-operation. Nevertheless, when we try to debate the issue and provide explanations, we are cut off and told that we don't understand.

• (3630)

The people who understand it best are the voters. Last night, they clearly reiterated that the way things are done on this side of the room is the most appropriate. The Liberals have not represented the Terrebonne riding since the 1980s. The people of Terrebonne, where the project route will go, thought it appropriate to have the team on this side of the room, because our goal is not to produce sound bites. Our objectives are clear, structured and worthwhile.

Canadians want projects. They want leadership. They want people who are able to manage well and take risks. They say no to sound bites and yes to transparency.

• (3635)

[*English*]

**Andrew Lawton:** Point of order.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Lawton, go ahead on a point of order.

**Andrew Lawton:** Mr. Chair, Mr. Sari and Mr. Deschênes-Thériault don't seem to be very interested in the subject of the debate before us. The debate is about a very simple issue. The question is whether or not Mr. Barrett's motion should be brought to the floor of the House. I don't know how you could be any clearer than you've already been.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lawton, I've said time and again that we have to talk about the amendment. Time and again, we've drifted off-topic. I want us to talk about the amendment.

Mr. Sari, go ahead on the amendment.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Let's get back to the amendment. Our dispute is about reporting to the House that we're undertaking this study. I don't agree with that, and neither does my team. I'll explain why. I'm explaining why I want to remove this part of the motion and why I proposed the amendment.

We want to advance projects that we deem relevant and that the public deems relevant. Canadians placed their trust in us and reaffirmed that trust. The House has a number of projects to move forward, and it has to do so at a steadier pace. In fact, the committee's purpose is to help us make better use of members' time and enable the House of Commons to move forward on bills, not to debate the elements we've been debating since this morning.

My amendment is valid. Even though I didn't agree with the three points in the motion, I still accepted them. Why did I not agree? Mr. Lawton wasn't here and neither was Mr. Dean, but the other members were. When witnesses came and we asked them questions, I was uncomfortable. In a number of cases, not all, fortunately, but in the majority of cases, I was uncomfortable with the

way they were asked questions in order to extract comments that were not theirs.

Again, what was the objective? It was to get sound bites. That's why I'm not comfortable—

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, you have the floor for a point of order.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, Mr. Sari is implying that we heard from witnesses in relation to the motion and the amendment to the motion. We didn't, in fact. I don't know what he's talking about.

Could you call him to order and ask him to talk about the amendment and the motion?

We haven't heard any testimony. I don't know what he's referring to.

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

Personally, what I understand is that Mr. Sari is talking about the witnesses who came to testify at previous meetings, which were not about this motion.

Mr. Sari, I'll ask you to talk about the amendment.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, I might have been unclear. I was talking about the other meetings I was at. I saw how some witnesses were treated. It made me uncomfortable. As I said, it didn't happen at all meetings, but there were a number of meetings where I was uncomfortable. That is why I hope that, when we hear from Alto's executives or other witnesses, it will not happen again.

Now I'll go back to the conflict of interest commissioner. We are in the process of inviting him to testify. We sent him an email, but we've yet to receive a response. That's why I'm uncomfortable with the invitation.

As for inviting the Minister of Finance and National Revenue for two hours, I'd like to explain why I'm uncomfortable with the idea. We heard that the minister had recused himself. Yesterday, Mr. Hardy explained what a recusal was, but he didn't explain why the minister recused himself.

The minister did not recuse himself because the commissioner asked him to, as was insinuated. It was actually the minister who decided to recuse himself. The commissioner did not ask him to. That's important. The minister went beyond what he was asked to do.

I explained to you why I am uncomfortable, but despite that, I showed openness. I'm prepared to accept those three points, but we have to let the House of Commons do its work effectively. We need to focus on the work for which the committee was created. My amendment is not trying to hide anything. It's to make sure that we do the work that we've been appointed to do, which I'm proud of. Why add additional elements, other than to produce sound bites? That's the difference between the two sides of the room. Sound bites are not what motivates me to be a member of Parliament.

What motivates me is building trust in our institutions among the people of all ages listening to us. Yes, there are always things to improve in our system on an ongoing basis. Yes, we have to constantly review our procedures. However, people who have come here from abroad and from several Canadian provinces have recognized that our system is one of the strongest in the world. People come here to learn how we work. When I travel around the world, I am proud to say that I am a member of the Canadian Parliament, because our system for conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts of interest is one of the most relevant in the world.

Right now, what we're doing is insinuating things and sowing doubt. As we know, many young people are leaving politics and institutions, unfortunately, for lack of trust in them. Are we helping by trying to produce sound bites along the way? No, we're sowing doubt. We are undermining the trust of our young people. I find that really deplorable, even more so when it comes from people who have experience in politics.

My colleagues have been playing these games for years. We saw the concrete results yesterday.

I repeat that, in a riding where the Alto project is to be routed, the citizens reaffirmed their trust in the way the members on this side of the room do things. They don't trust the members on the other side of the room, who are looking to produce sound bites. You can have incredible experience and be proud of it, but you can also lose the public's trust. That's what happened in Terrebonne yesterday.

• (3640)

I was talking about the motion. I was talking about two ways of working. On one side, they want to produce sound bites, and on the other, we want to collaborate and move forward on the projects for which Mr. Deschênes-Thériault, Mrs. Church, Mr. Fergus and Ms. Lapointe made arguments. Yesterday, I talked about the project, because I'm proud to be part of it. These two ways of doing things are completely different. Are we talking about co-operation? I myself co-operated by introducing my amendment.

I hope there will be some co-operation from the other side of the room as well. I'm co-operating on things that I have reservations about. I accepted those elements, but at some point, co-operation has to be reciprocal. All of these concepts—communication, collaboration and co-operation—go both ways. There has to be co-operation among all parties.

We earn the trust of Canadians because they understand that we show openness and are very willing to collaborate. That's also why some members choose to change sides. They see that there is co-operation.

Mr. Chair, thank you for listening.

• (3645)

[English]

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

Ms. Church, I have you next on the list.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleagues for helping us have a very thorough consideration of this motion and of the amendment in particular.

This committee has been at this for some time. Since we first met yesterday, we have covered quite a bit of ground both on this motion and on other motions that we've brought forward, and some in camera work, as well. I do know that this has a tendency to test the patience of the committee, but I think it's important that we get this right. I think it's important that we have a full airing of the various factors that determine how we look at this motion and how we proceed and its implications that it might have.

When I initially spoke to this motion yesterday evening, I talked about the considerations on what would be relevant and pertinent for us to think about if this committee were to report to the House. With that as the subject of the amendment right now, as my colleagues have mentioned, we propose striking that final sentence from Mr. Barrett's motion, "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study".

It may feel like we are dedicating a lot of time to that amendment here, but I think we have to look at that in the context of the work the House is doing as well. It's been a major concern of mine, first of all, as a committee we aren't pulled off in a new direction when we have such an important agenda ahead of us at this committee. We have motions right now, committee studies that we have lined up on important topics, from privacy, to a lobbying review, to algorithmic pricing, and continuing on our study of artificial intelligence. We have much work to do and the use of time in this regard is particularly important.

When I think about the House, I think about the—if I'm not mistaken—over 150 bills that are in Parliament this session, 25 of which are government bills. All of these bills are making their way through both houses, requiring a certain amount of precious parliamentary time in committee, in the House and in the Senate. A part of our responsibility as parliamentarians, but particularly as members of a committee, is to allocate our use of time in a way that respects Parliament's function and our democratic traditions, and ensures that we are truly advancing the agenda that Canadians would want to see us advance.

When I think about this particular amendment that calls on this committee to report to the House that it is merely undertaking this study, it's a suggestion that raises concerns in my mind. I have concerns about the misuse of time, concerns about whether the House is actually better served not by a study that would merely inform the House that this committee was undertaking a study, but a report that would actually come at the end of a study on Alto, that the House would actually be better served by a thorough report—

[*Translation*]

**Luc Thériault:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. There's a technical issue.

● (3650)

**The Chair:** What's the issue, Mr. Thériault?

**Luc Thériault:** The interpreter tells me that a telephone is vibrating, which prevents them from doing their job properly.

**The Chair:** Can it be heard in the interpretation booth?

[*English*]

Is it somewhere here?

Whose phone is vibrating?

Just make sure your phones are on silent mode, please. It must be close to the microphone; otherwise, they wouldn't be hearing it. Make sure the phones are on silent mode.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, my main concern is about the use of time and whether or not the House would be better served by a thorough report on Alto, by a “substantive report on Alto”, to quote the Prime Minister's word of the moment, rather than a report that would simply seek to inform the House that it is undertaking this study. This is a study that I'm concerned about as a distraction when it comes to the progress of a major nation-building project like the Alto high-speed rail.

If we were to report to the House, typically we would require witness testimony. We would require a discussion around which witnesses the committee would hear, and we would have time allocated for consideration of that testimony before we reported. Typically, in our Westminster parliamentary tradition, when a committee reports, it follows a period where a committee creates recommendations. These are recommendations that the House can then consider, that the government can then respond to. It follows a period of deliberation on the path forward, in this case with high-speed rail, and how would this project proceed? What would the role of the Major Projects Office be? How do we get this project from the idea of high-speed rail where we're at today to a transit system that is effective for countless Canadians on this corridor?

There are many considerations when we think about how this project can go from the planning phase it's in today to an actual operational train that is meeting what Canadians expect and want from a high-speed rail service.

However, without those recommendations, we really have a naked report. We have a report that is simply misusing House time, at a time when the House should be considering a whole host of other legislation that is important, that's been put forward in gov-

ernment and private members' bills, that are at a stage deserving of debate. I worry about that.

A report must also typically be relevant. When we know what the context of the study is, when we know what the outcomes of a study are, when we have the recommendation, that helps us to determine whether there is relevancy to the question of whether a committee reports to the House. I certainly don't believe we have fulfilled that precondition here. We don't have agreement on the scope of a study. In fact, on this side of the table, we would wholeheartedly disagree with the pursuit of this particular study that my colleagues across the table have proposed here.

In the absence of a study that we agree on, in the absence of a study where we have done our due diligence of having an evidentiary record, of having witnesses that both sides have contributed to and agreed to and heard out, before we have that substantive work in place, it is inappropriate for us to be considering asking this committee to report to the House merely that it is undertaking a study.

Reports presented when a committee has completed a study or after reviewing a bill are far more common in our parliamentary process. When we wish as parliamentarians to make recommendations on a subject that the House can consider or that the government can respond to, this particular phase of discussion around this motion feels much more like an administrative update, a notice to the House that we are considering pursuing a study that has yet to materialize or to have a full scope or mandate around.

Typically, committees don't report administrative proceedings back to the House, so it seems unusual to me that we would be so divided in terms of our approach to this particular sentence in Mr. Barrett's motion. I say that knowing full well that when a committee reports, it is at the discretion of the committee. It is discretionary by nature.

● (3655)

I think that makes it all that much more incumbent on us to consider whether this is a good use of the committee's discretion, to pursue a meaningless report at an inopportune time to gum up the proceedings of the House and Parliament. That does not seem to me to be a good use of this committee's discretion, and not one that I think I or my colleagues would support, which is why you're hearing today the concerns that we continue to raise.

Mr. Chair, you and other members have raised this. When I think about the Prime Minister's comments this morning, that we need to be getting back to substantive debate, he said there's a difference between real testimony, real substance, getting to issues, debating aspects of law and showboating. That's the substance that the Prime Minister is talking about: real testimony, real substance, getting to issues, debating aspects of law. None of that has been fulfilled at this stage of consideration of this motion.

I would go further to say that Mr. Barrett's motion on the whole, with or without this amendment, fails to live up to that test of offering Canadians a chance to get at the issues or to debate aspects of law of real substance. If it were, we would be looking much more closely at the progress of high-speed rail and the progress of Alto and debating its economic benefits, debating the process to build it, debating how Canada should invest in major infrastructure projects like Alto at a time when we are trying to ensure that we have a strong economy, resiliency, sovereignty and are demonstrating to Canadians that we can build again.

**Andrew Lawton:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Lawton, with your point of order.

**Andrew Lawton:** I appreciate where Ms. Church is coming from on some of this. In the spirit of collaboration, what she's saying about the reporting element is that you can't report without hearing more witnesses. I would be open, as would our colleagues, to an amendment—

**Iqra Khalid:** I don't think that's a point of order.

**Andrew Lawton:** —if she would like to hear witnesses on Liberal corruption and cronyism, if that's what she's saying we need to hear witness testimony on.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lawton. That's not a point of order.

Ms. Church, continue speaking to the amendment, please.

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, I think my colleague has proven, to the Prime Minister's point earlier today, the difference between real testimony, real substance and getting to issues and debating aspects of law. That is certainly the preference of this side of the table and always is.

We'd like to move forward on these issues and talk about how to get things done and move forward constructively. Not everything needs to be a partisan debate. Not everything needs to be filled with nasty barbs and name-calling across the aisle.

In reality, I think what Canadians are showing time and again is that they want a Parliament that can get on with it. They want members to work together with the resources of Parliament. They want their members, who represent 343 ridings from coast to coast, to come together and figure out the best path forward for Canadians, particularly when it's on a project that stretches across provincial boundaries, through communities and through some of our largest cities. This could have such an enormous economic impact, boosting our GDP by \$35 billion and creating more than 51,000 jobs over the next decade. That's the type of project that I think Canadians want us to be talking about.

Maybe we don't all agree. Maybe we don't all agree on how it gets done, where it gets built or how it takes shape over time, but hopefully what we can actually agree on is that, as Canadians, we should be able to have serious and constructive debates. The fact that we haven't had these debates and that we haven't had major nation-building projects like this—or it's been rare in our history—speaks to one of the reasons it's so important that we have these debates today.

Coming back to the amendment, we owe it to the full operation of Parliament to only be using House time when we have some-

thing serious to say about Alto, and given where we are on this motion, it clearly isn't now. While we are putting our time and energy into this particular session of our committee, the greater cause at stake is time in the House, where 25 government bills and 125 private members' motions and bills are waiting for the attention of parliamentarians.

To gum up Parliament with a motion that does little to shine light on an important subject, a subject which the Conflict of Interest Commissioner has been crystal clear on to this point, doesn't make sense and does a disservice to Canadians, who would probably prefer that my colleague and I could come together in a collegial....

I'm not even going to call it a debate; I'm going to call it an exchange of ideas. Should we have high-speed rail? If we do, how should it be built? What are the parameters on which that rail system should be built? Should we be enforcing "buy Canadian"? Should we be building that rail with Canadian steel? Where should the path of that rail system go?

This isn't even a discussion that's limited to Ontario and Quebec communities. High-speed rail has been a topic that has been discussed in other provinces as well. As my colleagues said previously, countries around the world have adopted high-speed rail. They have shown the willingness of people to take it. They have shown how much it cuts down on travel time, how it has environmental and economic benefits.

This is about setting up our transportation infrastructure for generations to come. When I think back on things like the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Trans-Canada Highway, these were hard projects and big projects, but we got them done. We got them done in an era when we could get them done.

• (3700)

[*Translation*]

**Gabriel Hardy:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hardy, go ahead on a point of order.

**Gabriel Hardy:** Mr. Chair, I had to leave the room for a few seconds, and I'm wondering if we're still talking about the motion to remove the sentence at the end or if we're looking at all of Canada's major projects? I just want to make sure.

**The Chair:** That's true, Mr. Hardy.

[*English*]

We are on the amendment.

I've tried to bring this back to the amendment about 60 times now, and I'm going to ask that Ms. Church do that.

I want to welcome you into hour number 10 of this, Ms. Church, so please stay on the amendment.

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, I welcome the interventions from my colleagues. I'm sorry that you missed some of my argument today. I hope I was making a compelling case about why we should vote in favour of striking the final sentence from this motion.

If my colleagues opposite are interested, and if they are convinced that we should consider this motion without this final sentence of Mr. Barrett's motion, I'd be very happy to work collaboratively. My colleagues and I certainly would like to come to a solution with our colleagues around the table.

If the members across are willing to accept this amendment, we'd certainly like to move forward and get back to the main question of addressing the motion overall.

Mr. Chair, I'd be willing to call for a vote on this, provided that I could be added to the speaking list on the main motion following the vote. I'm not sure how your speakers list is shaping up. I think if the members opposite wish to progress on this, and if they have given some thought about this motion, and whether or not they'd be willing to accept ensuring that we pass this amendment and do not report this to the House at this time, I think that on this side, you'd see agreement to move to a vote on that amendment.

● (3705)

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way, Ms. Church. I still have a speakers list. It's not until the speakers list has been exhausted that we would move to the vote, but I still have speakers on the list.

If you're ceding your time, I will move on then to Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** I'm okay.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Next I have Ms. Khalid.

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm good.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Are there any other comments on the amendment by Mr. Sari?

**Andrew Lawton:** Could we have a brief suspension, please, Chair?

Never mind, no suspension is needed.

**The Chair:** If we have no more discussion, I'm going to call for the vote on the amendment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, I'm sorry, I didn't see your hand up. Did you want to make a comment?

**Luc Thériault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's quite astounding to see that it took nearly nine hours for the government to recognize that it's possible to stop talking about a major project and get back to the substance of the motion. We're now being told that people want to discuss the substance of the motion after the vote on the amendment. It's quite astounding and shocking that it took nine hours to get to this point. However, peo-

ple have the nerve to say that there's no time to waste, that time is limited and that Canadians expect responsible behaviour.

What my government colleagues have never mentioned is that we sit on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. We don't sit on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities; the Standing Committee on Finance; the Standing Committee on Public Accounts or the Standing Committee on the Environment. In those committees, we could debate the various aspects that such a project may involve. Here, we're on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. The motion before us stems from the fact that \$3.9 billion was given to a consortium to determine the stations, the route and the timeline for the Alto project. I'm talking about public funds here. However, the Minister of Finance and National Revenue's spouse was suddenly hired by Alto.

The minister obviously felt some unease, because he consulted with the commissioner. That's precisely what we're looking to establish. He consulted, wrote to the Prime Minister and indicated that he would put a screen in place. What we don't know is whether this is a nepotism situation. What does this have to do with the minister's ability to intervene in the future?

The issue I have been raising since yesterday is that Mr. Champagne has been the "driving force"—no pun intended—of this project, Bill C-15. This bill gives Alto broad powers, including expropriation powers, that weren't provided for in the Expropriation Act. These new powers reduce the rights of people targeted by expropriations. These people include agricultural producers, particularly in Mirabel, who have already experienced the consequences of the Mirabel airport fiasco and don't want to relive it.

In this context, our committee wants to hear from the commissioner. I would point out that the commissioner himself recommended to the committee that we include the concept of the appearance of a conflict of interest in our review of the act. We followed that recommendation. It seems to me that we have an apparent conflict of interest here. It's so apparent that even the minister felt uncomfortable—

● (3710)

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, I would remind you that some discussions took place in camera.

[*English*]

Just be mindful of the fact that we did discuss some things in camera that cannot be discussed out of camera at this point. I just want to put that in front of you, particularly on recommendations perhaps that were made, etc. I just want to make sure you're guarded on that. I say that because you were speaking about some recommendations made.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Luc Thériault:** The commissioner's recommendation was made at a public meeting, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** I just want to make sure that you're guarded on any other discussions we had with respect to the Conflict of Interest Act. That's all I'm asking.

[Translation]

Mr. Thériault, I'm sorry, you have the floor, but Mr. Sari has a point of order.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, I agree with you. The reason I'm raising a point of order is that not only did he talk about a recommendation, but he also talked about the report. Everything in the report so far has been discussed in camera. Mr. Thériault has experience, but he really needs to show some restraint before he starts talking about what was said in camera, what will or will not be in the report.

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, keep in mind my previous comment.

The floor is yours.

**Luc Thériault:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

We asked the commissioner to come and enlighten us on the process that has been put in place, on his decision and on aspects that we'd like to raise with him. This seems entirely reasonable to me.

The motion then calls on Alto's executives, including the CEO, to explain the connection between Alto and the Minister of Finance. The minister introduced exceptional powers in Bill C-15, and he did not recuse himself from the votes. He went through the process; he sponsored the bill until the end, under the pretext that he felt his conscience was clear. However, we want to understand why he felt that way. I think he should have recused himself from the votes. We want to understand the links between the hiring of the minister's spouse and the fact that he didn't think it best, as a precaution, to recuse himself from the votes on Bill C-15. That raises questions.

The Minister of Finance is an honourable man. I'm sure he wants to come here and explain himself. It's the ethics committee's job to ask questions and to warn the House, as the line goes, that we're taking up this matter. That way, all parliamentarians are informed and can express themselves on the potential conflict of interest or the appearance of conflict of interest.

After nine hours of debate, I hear my Liberal colleagues saying that they're prepared to compromise if the last sentence is removed. That could have been done in 15 minutes. The most important thing in all of this is that we could have this discussion only because the government is in a minority. Can you imagine how it would react if it were in a majority?

For the past nine hours, there have been attempts to impose the government's will and interests on us as legislators, under the suggestion that it would be a waste of time for the House of Commons to be informed that the committee is undertaking this study. The House of Commons is the very location of parliamentary democracy, and it's where accountability is carried out. However, some people think that this high-speed rail project is so wonderful that this kind of question shouldn't be asked.

When \$3.9 billion in public funds are being committed, I think that people have the right to ask for explanations, regardless of the project's merits and benefits. The benefits are still very hypothetical, very theoretical. Even Alto isn't in a position to specify the costs or the benefits. A budget of \$30 billion has been set; it's said that the cost will be between \$60 billion and \$90 billion.

Mr. Chair, for all these reasons, I think we have come to the end of the debate. I hope so. I'm ready to vote, but I have been ready since the first hour of the meeting.

• (3715)

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

I have a list of those who want to speak to the amendment. Some members raised their hands after your remarks.

[English]

I had Ms. Khalid on the list, but she's not in the room so I'll go to Mr. Lawton.

Go ahead, Mr. Lawton, please, on the amendment.

**Andrew Lawton:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Building off of Ms. Church's point on being able to move to a vote, I would be happy to go to a vote right now. However, I would like assurances from the Liberals that the amended motion would pass without further amendment and that they're not just going to do another nine-hour filibuster on the main motion.

If we could get clarity on that, I think it's perfectly reasonable to go to the vote. It's the Liberals who have been holding this up for the last nine hours.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

I'm not sure procedurally how we get to that point where that guarantee is made, given the process that's in place.

[Translation]

Mr. Sari is the next speaker, but Mr. Deschênes-Thériault would like to speak.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** Actually, Mr. Chair, I would like my name to be added to the end of the list. I also want to give my speaking time to my colleague Mr. Sari, because I think he had important points to share with the committee.

I would like my name to be added to the end of the list.

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

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to respond to what my colleague Mr. Lawton was saying.

When it comes to discussing a vote, it's important to be very careful not to impose conditions. I don't think that's part of the procedures. It's still important to be cautious. I don't really understand his comments.

Does that comply with procedure?

• (3720)

**The Chair:** Comments should be addressed through the chair.

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, this is a procedural question, so I can ask it here. Right now, we're debating an amendment. We're voting on this amendment; we can decide whether or not to accept it. It's a very simple matter.

Introducing some form of conditional voting—I have never seen that before.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Sari, we vote on an amendment when there are no more speakers on the list to the amendment. If the amendment passes, we move to the main motion as amended. If it fails, then we move back to the main motion. Even on the main motion, any part of that main motion is subject to further amendments.

To Mr. Lawton's point, he'd prefer not to get to that point, but there's nothing that I can do to stop that. That's just part of the process of the rules of procedure.

I hope that explains things. I hope everybody understands that aspect of it.

We're still on the amendment. I still have a list.

Ms. Church is next on the list.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's disappointing that we can't find common ground on at least moving forward on what is a very discrete part of Mr. Barrett's motion. I would hope as committee members we would understand the value of moving forward in our deliberations on this motion as a whole. I come back to the fact that this is a first debate for us to have about whether or not we are reporting to the House. The issues that are involved in this are discrete. They are about the use of our committee time and the use of House time. Once we're able to come to some sort of decision, if not consensus, on those issues, then we can look back, Mr. Chair, as you've advised us here throughout this debate, on the motion as a whole, which is broader in scope and which, I think it's fair to say, we do have concerns with.

If we're going to advance on this as a committee, we're going to have to do it one step at a time. As we consider the different amendments that are on the table, they are going to raise particular issues with respect to what we're debating.

Mr. Chair, you've asked us to stay as focused as possible on the amendment that we're debating right now, and that's reasonable and fair. However, once we get back to the main motion, there are going to be other issues that the committee's going to want to consider around the broader scope that's on the table. I know that's where I will come from in terms of my consideration of this. I do hope, though, that we can make some progress. Any time that we undertake debate on a motion like this, we tend to debate it in stages and in view of whichever amendments and subamendments are on the floor at a given point in time.

On this particular amendment, I think the case is clear that this is a poor use of the committee's discretionary authority to report to the House. If we look at the overall scope of the motion and the work that ought to be done around Alto, not strictly focused on the con-

siderations that Mr. Barrett's motion has raised, I think we'd see that there's actually a broader committee study at play.

I take your point, Mr. Chair, that there are other committees as well, whether it's transport or public accounts, that may also have a stake in this project. However, I think that Canadians are going to look at this project holistically. The work that we do here as a committee, if focused strictly within the boundaries of Mr. Barrett's motion, could have a very harmful and deleterious effect on the progress of a project that I think we are invested in, take seriously and want to see advance in the best possible way.

Now, I recognize that we are a committee of ethics, of access to information and privacy, and the range of issues that are in front of us right now across this topic and many others speak to the breadth of our mandate. However, I do worry about a motion like this one that not only proposes a poor use of the House's time in terms of suggesting that we undertake a report at this stage, but also one that would seek to create concerns around the progress and operations of this project and the support that the government has announced for it. As for the amendment, while it's important that we resolve the issue of whether or not this committee will report back to the House, there's going to have to be consideration of the remainder of the motion.

• (3725)

The reporting is only one aspect of this. The other is how we advance on the particular witnesses to address the issues that Mr. Barrett's motion raises, as well as with the overall scope.

I leave room to be convinced and persuaded otherwise on this. At this particular moment, it's best that we continue to focus on our consideration of the suggestion that we have a report, what our parliamentary precedents would be and what our obligations are as parliamentarians in considering this. It's to reflect very closely on whether or not this motion and our deliberations as a committee place us at a stage where we can confidently feel that we are fulfilling our obligations as parliamentarians in providing a substantive report back to the House and not one that would simply misuse the time of the chamber, precious time for consideration of a whole range of other parliamentary bills, laws and work.

On that front, I come back to what some of the precedents are in terms of when a committee like ours should report to the House. It typically should report when we have completed substantive work.

We should talk about the witnesses who would be prepared to be part of a study on Alto. Mr. Barrett's motion proposes the executives of Alto. That may be too narrow of a view. There may be other groups and communities with a concern for the project, and ones that we want to hear from. It would be worthy for us—

[*Translation*]

**Gabriel Hardy:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hardy, go ahead on a point of order.

**Gabriel Hardy:** Mr. Chair, from what I'm hearing, it's as if people want to study the Alto project. Mrs. Church is talking about inviting witnesses, about it being broader. However, that's not what this is about at all.

This is the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. The goal isn't to reanalyze the project. The idea is to invite three entities—Alto, the minister and the Ethics Commissioner—to determine what the minister's ethical issue was. That's the idea.

**The Chair:** You're right.

We're speaking to the amendment now. What I said to Mrs. Church was that she had to speak to the amendment, not to the motion that wasn't adopted.

[*English*]

**Andrew Lawton:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Is it another point of order or on the same point of order?

**Andrew Lawton:** It's another point of order.

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

**Andrew Lawton:** If I could have your indulgence for a moment, Chair, I think there's a way through the impasse, building off of what Ms. Church said.

We would be prepared to support the amendment. To expedite this, we would seek unanimous consent to pass the motion as amended with the amendment at hand.

• (3730)

**The Chair:** If I understand you correctly—

**Andrew Lawton:** We are seeking unanimous consent to support the amendment and the motion.

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** He did it on a point of order.

**The Chair:** He's seeking unanimous consent, so...

**Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault:** He did it on a point of order. It was not his speaking turn.

**The Chair:** That's the other thing. He didn't have—

**Andrew Lawton:** You can always seek unanimous consent.

I'm seeing if the Liberals are interested in collaborating here, as they say they are.

**The Chair:** Let me clarify that, please.

I'm going to wait until you get the floor, Mr. Lawton, to do that.

A point of order deals with issues that are substantive to rules and regulations. You can't move a motion, or a unanimous consent motion in this case, if you don't have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your remarks, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

[*English*]

Ms. Church, go ahead, please.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to respond to Mr. Hardy's point of order, because I think he misunderstands my purpose. When I'm talking about the witnesses that we might be interested in, it's to illustrate what a substantive report would look like. Contrast that with the proposal on the table of a naked or bare report that is being proposed by the mo-

tion currently. When I talk about our committee's obligations and the traditions we have in our parliamentary process, it's because there is a tradition that we would report back to the House when we have completed our study, when we have completed witness testimony, when we have recommendations to offer. In this case, my point was simply that.

There are important organizations like Ottawa Tourism, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal and the United Steelworkers that have weighed in. They have a perspective to offer on high-speed rail that I think would be valuable to the committee's work, but more importantly, to the House, if we were reporting back following hearing from their testimony and synthesizing the different perspectives that we were hearing.

My point was simply to say that there is a very rich environment here for us to develop a thoughtful and comprehensive report on the matter of Alto and on the government's dealings with Alto in order to ensure that the progress advances. However, right now we are not in any position to offer that sort of concrete advice or perspective to the House because we haven't done that work. We haven't tapped into that community of people and organizations and other elected officials at other levels of government who all have an interest or a stake in the future of this high-speed rail project.

In the absence of that work, it's not an opportune time to proceed with a report. Although we may have the discretion as a committee to advance a report at any time, that discretion is always intended to be exercised with consideration. Discretion alone is not sufficient. It must be exercised with a sense of how are we going to be contributing to the debate on this topic in the House. How is this helping to illustrate to Canadians when it's public, the thoughtfulness that should go into a public report from our parliamentary committee.

That's what I'm looking at when I'm thinking about whether or not to support this amendment. It's about the quality of the work that this committee is doing and to what extent that will be reflected in a report. I'm just saying that from the point of view of Mr. Barrett's motion to the extent that it touches on the process by which high-speed rail is coming into fruition, the dealings the government has in setting out the legislative and financial frameworks that it's going to be operating within, the place that it holds in legislation like C-15 or in our budget documents, those are important things for us to look at and to consider if we are providing a report back that would suggest whether or not there could be improvements or not to how the government is advancing this process.

It does rest with not only the Minister of Transport and the parliamentary committee on transport and the parliamentary committee on public accounts and FINA and no doubt a number of different ministers and departments, including the new Major Projects Office, all of whom have a role in advancing this process.

For us to be considering reporting at this stage seems premature. It seems to be something that we should be willing to do as a committee, but only after we've really had a chance to fully explore and flesh out the broader issues that Mr. Barrett's motion brings to the fore and which Mr. Barrett himself, when he introduced the motion, took some time to speak about to the committee.

• (3735)

He spoke about his own perspectives on high-speed rail, the economic benefits, the value of doing it, or, in his case, what he perceived as the lack thereof or the concerns that he had. We should be able to fully explore that, but that begins with understanding our role as a committee, understanding our role of reporting back to the House and ensuring that we are only doing that at a moment when we are fully seized with the full range of issues as they pertain to this project.

That's certainly my goal here. I hope that we will be able to find a path forward that is constructive in looking at this issue, because I would like to see us move into a consideration of this project that goes into some of the deeper issues that are both captured within Mr. Barrett's motion and are perhaps adjacent to it, and ones that I know members on our side of the table would be interested in raising.

Mr. Chair, with that, I look forward to listening to my colleagues, but I'll ask to be added to the speakers list once more.

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

We are now going to Mr. Hardy.

[*Translation*]

**Gabriel Hardy:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad it's my turn to speak because, after several hours, I think it's important to provide a constructive perspective.

We have been here for over 10 hours. A very simple motion was put forward. It invites three specific witnesses to testify on a topic that has been in the news, that isn't hypothetical and that is in the newspapers.

Over those 10 hours, we have heard about Highway 50, the St. Lawrence River, the Trans-Canada Highway and wild turkeys, among other things. However, we have a motion before us to invite a minister who recused himself. Even the definition of recusal was given. An amendment was then proposed by the Liberals. Members have been avoiding a vote on this amendment for five hours, while explaining to us just how important the issue is.

For our part, we're ready to co-operate. The goal is to move forward and avoid wasting taxpayers' time and money debating wild turkeys. I'm glad that Mrs. Church said that the main issue on the Liberal side seems to be the last sentence of the motion, which the amendment proposes to remove.

For that reason, Mr. Chair, I would like to move—I'm asking for unanimous consent—that the committee adopt the amendment as Mr. Sari proposed, then adopt the motion as amended.

We have been debating for 10 hours. An amendment has been proposed. We're in favour of it, but we haven't been able to express that, since they spoke non-stop for five hours. I'm now clearly setting out the motion. My colleague proposed something, as a result, but was told that technicalities, commas and periods in the legislation are preventing things from moving forward. However, according to the rules, I can make this proposal. I'm happy.

I therefore ask for unanimous consent to adopt the amendment, followed by the motion as amended. That way, we remove what seems to be bothering the Liberals, and we can finally move forward. After 10 hours, nine of which were spent on uninterrupted Liberal interventions, we could make progress.

That's my proposal.

• (3740)

**The Chair:** Could you repeat your proposal?

**Gabriel Hardy:** I seek the committee's unanimous consent to Mr. Sari's amendment, and I then ask the committee to approve the motion as amended. It's simple and efficient.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Hardy is proposing a unanimous consent motion.

To be clear, the UC motion is to adopt the amendment by Mr. Sari, and then to adopt the motion as amended. That's the proposal from Mr. Hardy.

Do we have unanimous consent on that?

**Some hon. members:** No.

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

I'm going to the next speaker on the list.

Mr. Saini, please go ahead.

**Gurbux Saini:** Mr. Chair, members opposite, first of all, I want to congratulate you. After last night, I'm hearing how the Prime Minister wants to co-operate, but I haven't seen that co-operation in the last 10 months that I've been part of this committee.

Mr. Layton, I've seen him on another committee. He talks about filibustering.

You are the guy who talks about cats and dogs on those committees.

**Andrew Lawton:** I have a point of privilege.

**The Chair:** Go ahead on your point of privilege, Mr. Lawton.

**Andrew Lawton:** Starting with getting my name wrong, the member is misrepresenting on the official record, in an incredibly disingenuous way, comments made at another committee.

I think he should either brush up on what actually happened or withdraw and apologize.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that, Mr. Lawton.

Mr. Saini, in the spirit of what the Prime Minister also said, which is to treat members with respect, I expect that of this committee. We have, for the most part, had a large amount of respect at this table. There's been disagreement, but I don't want anybody implying anything on anyone at this committee. I'm going to ask you to respect that.

If you wish to withdraw those comments and apologize to Mr. Lawton, I'll give you that opportunity now.

**Gurbux Saini:** I'm going to carry on with my work.

**The Chair:** Just be respectful, please.

**Gurbux Saini:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will keep my remarks brief, as several colleagues have already spoken.

I think it would be useful at this stage to take a step back and keep in mind the broader context of what we are discussing. At the end of the day, this conversation is happening alongside a major infrastructure project that has been in discussion in Canada for a very long time, high-speed rail. The reality is that the need for improved transportation between our major urban centres—

[*Translation*]

**Gabriel Hardy:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**Gurbux Saini:** —has only increased our sense—

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Hardy, you have the floor on a point of order.

**Gabriel Hardy:** I'm really sorry, but I'm going to repeat the same thing: We aren't talking about that. We aren't talking about studying a major Canadian project. This is the ethics committee. We really have to talk about the amendment.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Saini, this is just a reminder that we are on the amendment to the motion.

The amendment, just so that we're clear, is to strike the last part of the motion. The motion calls for the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for two hours; executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours; and the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, for two hours. The part that we are debating is the proposal by Mr. Sari to strike the last part of the motion, “And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study”. That is what we are on.

For the last 10 hours, there have been significant attempts to talk about the values and the virtue of the Alto system. That's not what we're discussing here because we're not the transportation committee and we're not the finance committee. We are the ethics committee and the motion proposed is to study that the minister has claimed to recuse himself from decisions his government made related to Alto.

That is the substantive issue of this motion. The amendment is what we're discussing, so please continue on the amendment.

**Gurbux Saini:** Mr. Chair, the reality is that there is a need to improve transportation between our major centres. It has only increased over time. We are seeing continued population growth, greater demand for efficient intercity travel and increasing pressure on existing transportation system. There are clear and practical challenges in front of us.

• (3745)

**Colin Reynolds (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Reynolds, go ahead on a point of order.

**Colin Reynolds:** I believe that two seconds after your lengthy comments to my colleague across the way about staying on point, he's not doing that.

**The Chair:** We've been at this for almost 10 hours now.

Mr. Saini, I can't stress enough that I would really like you to discuss the amendment, not the values or the virtue of Alto. This is the ethics committee of Parliament. We are discussing a motion dealing with ethics.

Please stay on topic and speak to the amendment, which I just stated two minutes ago.

**Gurbux Saini:** The Alto high-speed rail project is one response to that challenge. It proposes a network of close to 1,000 kilometres between Toronto and Quebec City, with trains reaching speeds of up to 300 kilometres per hour.

**Andrew Lawton:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead on your point of order.

**Andrew Lawton:** I cannot stress enough that he is literally reading from the same page that you've already determined, Mr. Chair, is not relevant to the discussion. I don't know if the next page might have something that is on topic, but he is disregarding the purpose of this committee and the issue at hand.

**The Chair:** Three times I've brought this up, Mr. Saini, that we're not discussing the value or the virtue of the Alto system. I've sat here for 10 hours and I've listened to argument after argument coming from that side about the high-speed rail system. That is not what we are here to discuss. We are here to discuss the motion in front of us and the amendment on the floor. This is the ethics committee. I say again that this is not the transportation committee; it's not the finance committee, and it's not the industry committee. It's the ethics committee, access to information and privacy, and we are on the minister's claims that he has recused himself. That is what the motion is about.

I'm going to ask you to stay on the amendment that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking the study to remove that line from this motion.

Unless you have things to say about that, if you keep repeating this, I may move on to another speaker, Mr. Saini. I'm sorry, we're at that point now. Okay?

Continue and please stay on the amendment.

**Gurbux Saini:** Let's start with ethics.

The minister was told by the ethics office that there was nothing wrong, and my fellow MPs on the other side have refused to accept that. We have the best ethics laws in this country. The world looks at us as leaders. The world looks to learn from us. My colleagues on the other side have absolutely no respect for that legislation. They will say, “No, we want to continue.”

I'm going to continue with my speech.

Job creation during construction is very important. Increased economic activity across multiple sectors and strong connections between regional economies is the kind of investment that can have long-term structural impacts. It also reflects something we see internationally. High-speed rail has become a standard feature.

**The Chair:** Mr. Saini, I'm going to take that as a direct challenge to the direction that I've given. I've asked you not to speak about that. I'm going to move on to the next speaker.

Mr. Lawton, you're next.

**Andrew Lawton:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm a newish member of Parliament. I'm coming up on the first anniversary of being elected. I'm trying to get a sense of how this Liberal government operates from where we are. This has now been 10 hours of debating an amendment to a Conservative motion, an amendment put forward by a Liberal member of Parliament, and then subsequently filibustered by Liberal members of Parliament for several hours.

We had a glimmer of hope maybe half an hour ago when one member, Ms. Church, indicated that they were going to move to a vote. Then every Liberal decided to go onto the speaking list again, so this vote on their own amendment that they asked for could not happen.

In the interest of collaboration, a few moments ago, Mr. Hardy offered what I thought was an incredible support of goodwill from the Conservatives to the Liberals that we approve their amendment, which, in principle, we disagree with because we do think this is important enough that it needs to be reported to the House, and support the motion itself.

This was a great opportunity for the Liberals to prove that they actually were concerned about this technicality on reporting to the House, but that wasn't the case because they denied unanimous consent to that. Anyone who listens will hear Liberal members saying no to Mr Hardy's request for unanimous consent. They said no, so their issue is not actually reporting this to the House, their issue is with having the Minister of Finance testify about his clear conflict of interest on the Alto file. That's what we're dealing with.

We were prepared to support the Liberal amendment, dispense with this ridiculous 10-hour filibuster by the Liberals, remove the reporting to the House, but allow the ethics committee to do the work of studying the minister's claims that he has recused himself from decisions the government has made related to Alto and invite the minister to appear for two hours, invite executives from Alto, including the CEO, Martin Imbleau, for two hours and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, Konrad von Finckenstein, for two hours as well. That was what we were supporting.

I find it interesting that the Liberals claim their issue is with reporting to the House. Ms. Church went on at length about how the real issue the Liberals had was that of taking up valuable House time.

• (3750)

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Once again, I find my colleague's comments interesting, but are they related to the amendment?

Mr. Lawton, I invite you to speak to the amendment to remove the following:

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

**The Chair:** Personally, I hear Mr. Lawton talking about the reactions to his speech in the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Lawton, you're going to stay on the amendment, I'm sure.

**Andrew Lawton:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Keep going, please.

**Andrew Lawton:** I appreciate very much, Mr. Chair, my colleague's new-found appreciation for relevance in committee interventions right now, absolutely. I'm speaking about the amendment and actually a Conservative desire to support the amendment and to get on with passing the motion itself. I was hoping we could all, as colleagues here, in keeping with the spirit of the Prime Minister this morning, do this.

The interesting thing is that even though we were prepared and actually eagerly trying to get to a vote on this amendment, it was the Liberals who stopped us from doing it.

I asked in my previous intervention if the Liberals would agree to support the motion as amended if we were to pass this amendment. I'm speaking to Mr. Sari's point, specifically, about the amendment at hand here, his amendment. They didn't give an answer to that, so Monsieur Hardy offered what I thought was a tremendously important olive branch, which was to do it all in one fell swoop.

Let's get back to real work. I know that question period is approaching in a few moments. The Liberals keep adding themselves to the speaking list, claiming that their issue is the removal of this line, that their issue is about whether or not the committee report this to the House, when in actuality, their concern is that they do not want the minister to testify. They do not want the minister to actually have to answer questions, questions from Canadians, regardless of whether they are reported to the House.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Again, it's necessary to be careful and correct Mr. Lawton's comments. Personally, I said that even though I was uncomfortable with the three items, I accepted them. I don't want members to twist my words.

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

Mr. Lawton, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

**Andrew Lawton:** Thank you.

Whether or not we remove this particular line that the Liberals claim to take issue with does not seem to assuage concerns. As we discuss and debate an amendment, we have to debate it in the context of the motion we actually have before us. The context here is incredibly crucial, because what we are trying to do is allow key players in what could end up being a quite significant ethical scandal that the Liberal government has to wear. They're trying to prevent key officials, including the finance minister, from having to testify.

Our preparation to support this amendment still stands. In exchange, we need to know that the Liberals are not going to go on for another 10 hours to block us from getting to the amendment at hand.

When I suggested this earlier, I was not proposing a conditional amendment. I wasn't proposing a subamendment. I was simply saying that in good faith, as parliamentarians doing this work, we need to be able to have these conversations and figure out the objective we're trying to go towards.

The Liberals have been dining out for 10 hours on deleting one line of what appears to be an eight-line motion. It's possible that we could eventually get to a vote on this and then, all of a sudden, a Liberal takes the floor and introduces another amendment to remove line 7, and they take another 10 hours on that, and we realize that we've never actually engaged with the issue that the ethics committee is here to do.

• (3755)

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** Mr. Chair, once again, I have a point of order.

There's talk of very hypothetical scenarios, just as the motion was related to hypothetical matters. I hope my colleague is going to speak to the amendment and not get into matters that he assumes—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Lawton.

**Andrew Lawton:** Thank you.

I could, in keeping with the precedent set by my Liberal colleagues, speak about the virtues of rail travel, but I am actually dealing with the issue we have at hand here.

The reason we believe it is important—and we believed in our initial amendment to report this to the House, and why I think our initial instinct, and certainly my initial instinct, is to oppose this amendment—is that there needs to be, in the House of Commons, transparency and accountability.

We see this day in and day out in question period. People raise very legitimate concerns about the finances of the country. The Minister of Finance will get up and tell us that there's all good news, supposedly. In the end, all we are dealing with is a \$78-billion deficit and a minister who has given very conflicting information about the conflict, or lack thereof, he feels is at issue in Alto.

In reporting this to the House, we actually give committee members, and more importantly, all parliamentarians as well as Canadi-

ans, an additional tool of accountability, where all members of Parliament—again, it's an option available—can engage in a discussion and debate, concurring or not with an amendment passed in committee. It's about understanding the value and the importance of these issues.

I cannot stress enough the problems the Liberal government has faced in the past on ethics lapses. You can go through the laundry list, going back to the Gomery inquiry and SNC-Lavalin. That's why we need to report—

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We have a point of order.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Abdelhaq Sari:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Earlier, a point of order was raised because members were discussing the Alto project. My colleague is now going over the history of the Liberal Party and the government. In my opinion, Mr. Lawton, you're straying far from the amendment.

Mr. Chair, I would ask you to intervene, as you have done for my colleagues on this side of the room. We're straying from the amendment, which is still very simple and aims to delete a single sentence.

[*English*]

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

I did give a lot of latitude over the last 10 hours to this side.

I'm going to ask Mr. Lawton to come back to the amendment, please.

**Andrew Lawton:** I will apologize to Mr. Sari. To mention the Liberal government and ethics in the same breath, I realize, doesn't actually quite fit, so his point is perhaps well taken.

**The Chair:** Let's just try to keep it on a professional level, please.

**Andrew Lawton:** We are dealing with reporting what I think will be a very revealing study that this committee is seeking to undertake to the House. That is valuable because I believe all members of the House of Commons, including those like me who are not regular members of this committee, would have a great deal of interest in the findings of this committee after it has heard from Mr. von Finckenstein, Monsieur Imbleau and Minister Champagne.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but I have to interrupt you.

We are out of resources at two o'clock. We are going to be back in this room at 3:30 to continue this debate.

The meeting is suspended.

• (3800) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (3935)

**The Chair:** Welcome back to the ethics committee. When we last left our superheroes, we were dealing with a motion and a proposed amendment. I'm going to read out the motion again just so that everybody's aware of it:

That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto, and the Minister's claims that he has recused himself from decisions his government made related to Alto; that, for the purpose of this study, the committee invite the following witnesses to appear by May 8, 2026:

1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for two hours;
2. Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours; and
3. the Minister of Finance and National Revenue, for two hours;

And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.

An amendment was proposed to remove "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study".

We are now in our—I've lost track—11th hour of debating the removal of that line. We are still on the amendment.

I had Mr. Lawton when the meeting was suspended, but he's no longer here. I had Mr. Deschênes-Thériault. He's no longer here, which defaults now to Ms. Church.

Ms. Church, go ahead on the amendment, and again, we want to be relevant to the amendment.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's notable that while we've been in here debating today, there was apparently a fairly seismic earthquake that rumbled through Parliament Hill. No such luck here in this committee room, but it was certainly felt in other parts of the grounds.

**The Chair:** I think the aftershocks will be felt for at least three years.

**Leslie Church:** They sure might.

Mr. Chair, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to this amendment again, because I do think that it is a matter of importance for the committee. I know my colleagues will feel very much the same, that this is core to our roles as parliamentarians in thinking about how we allocate our time and our resources, more importantly, the resources of our colleagues and all parliamentarians in the House of Commons.

What this motion as originally drafted was asking us to do was to have the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study. Core to our concern about the motion has been the fact that this committee has done no work so far in investigating Alto, no work in terms of calling witnesses and no work in terms of hearing testimony to support our views and perspectives on this project. This would be a study devoid of content and substance and would be a drain on the House's time. It would be a failure from our perspective as committee members to do the hard work that's required to create a report of substance.

We've had some conversation in the course of this debate on the amendment about what a more fulsome report could look like and

the kind of reports that, certainly, committee members on this side of the table would be interested in presenting on a project as substantive and important to Canada and Canadians as high-speed rail. There is no question in our minds that the government has a role to play in advancing this project, in setting the terms of engagement between departments and ministers, both Houses of Parliament and the progress of this project, as well as probably several different parliamentary committees. This engagement must be guided by a holistic view of the project itself and certainly not taking up the House's time with a report to the House at this nascent stage.

On this side, we believe it's the committee's responsibility, if we're going to pursue a study of Alto and the government's role in engaging with this process and with the Crown corporation that is Alto, to make sure that we're doing so with a scope that matches the true concerns of Canadians about it, and not the one that we're seeing reflected here in Mr. Barrett's motion, which he took some time to set out yesterday when he introduced it.

It was telling when he introduced this motion to the committee to hear him talk about his own concerns about Alto. He talked about how he was not in favour of this project. I think that belies where this motion is coming from, and one of the reasons my colleagues and I are as distressed about it as we are. That the opposition members here may wish to try to construe this as a narrow and—

• (3940)

[*Translation*]

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, you have the floor for a point of order.

**Luc Thériault:** I don't understand how it's possible to say that the Alto project is at the heart of the motion when this is about ethical reflection and oversight.

You should call Mrs. Church to order, because she has been repeating what she's saying for a number of hours now. I thought my Liberal colleagues wanted to co-operate. At this point, there's no need to repeat the same arguments.

We should go to a vote then move on.

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

[*English*]

I'm going to remind members that we are not discussing the value or the virtue of the Alto system, whether it's good for southern Ontario or Quebec. We are discussing a motion in front of us that involves the ethics screen, or lack thereof, with respect to the finance minister and his participation in decisions after he indicated that he had issued an ethics screen.

We've been at this for 11 hours. I agree with Mr. Thériault on the relevance of the argument. This is not about Alto. This is not about driving a spike into rail or where it's going and all of that stuff. This is about ethics, plain and simple. That's what the motion is about. The amendment that is on the floor is to remove the last line, "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study".

I'm going to ask Ms. Church to be laser-focused on the amendment, please.

Ms. Church.

• (3945)

**Leslie Church:** Well, Mr. Chair, I thought I was actually quite on point in terms of talking about the proposed amendment.

I would also draw my colleague's attention to the very first line of Mr. Barrett's motion, "That the committee undertake a study into the connection between the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and Alto". That's about as general and wide open as it gets.

Look, I don't dispute that what Mr. Barrett is trying to do here is go on a fishing expedition on a matter that the Conflict of Interest Commissioner has effectively said is case closed and has provided his guidance on, to which the Minister of Finance was in total compliance.

Mr. Thériault, to your point, I think you're actually reiterating the very basis for my concern about why committee members are putting forward this motion in the form that it is, and frankly, our concern on this side of the table that it does a disservice to the project to leave the motion as is. One of those concerns pertains to the direction to have the committee report to the House, but that is truly only one of the concerns that we have—

[Translation]

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, you have the floor for a point of order.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, it isn't a question of whether or not the motion serves the Alto project. It's about shedding light on the issues related to how the Minister of Finance shepherded Bill C-15 and voted on it. That's what this is about.

On the subject of relevance, I would say this: Just because we repeat the same things for several hours doesn't make them relevant.

**The Chair:** I agree with you.

[English]

Ms. Church, I'm going to ask you to come back to the amendment, please, and not on the value or virtue of the Alto system, what it means to Canadians and the investment. That debate can happen elsewhere, but not in this committee. My expectation is that this debate on this motion will happen, but the debate on the amendment is what we're on right now. I would ask you to go there, please.

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, my remarks at that time were not focused, actually, on the economic benefits of Alto.

Mr. Thériault, with the greatest of respect, I would point you back to the very first line of the motion that talks about the connec-

tion between the Minister of Finance and Alto. I would also point you to the fact that the motion calls for executives from Alto to appear, which is, as we know, in terms of the operation of parliamentary committees, quite a broad—

[Translation]

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, you have the floor for a point of order.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, Mrs. Church knows very well that the connection between Alto and the Minister of Finance is his spouse.

**The Chair:** That's not a point of order, Mr. Thériault, but I understand what you're saying.

[English]

Ms. Church, please continue.

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, I appreciate that that's not a point of order. That is a point of debate, Mr. Thériault, because actually the connection that exists between the Minister of Finance and Alto, as we are talking about right now and have shown, may manifest itself in different ways. I mean, I'm looking at the budget for example and a paragraph which deals with Alto high-speed rail. The government as a whole has ways of engaging with Alto, and obviously we are supportive and working to advance this project on multiple pathways because it is such a large expansive and complex project for us to deliver and to cut the time of approvals in half from what was previously envisioned in order to make sure that we're getting this train up and running for Canadians.

Again, that is beside the point that I wanted to make, which was focused on the amendment itself and the notion of reporting back to the House. When I think about doing a report that meets the test of what should be a report from a committee, that includes a substantive report and direction back to the House, that includes recommendations, that includes witness testimony, that includes perhaps a path forward in terms of parliamentary engagement on the matter.

These are all different aspects of an appropriate report back to the House from committee. I think if we cast our minds to the scope and size of this project, we quickly can realize that there are ample issues for us to explore as a parliamentary committee that deal with access to information, privacy and ethics. I think about, for example, our artificial intelligence study. I think about studies that we're doing on pieces of legislation. There are other ways that I'm sure Alto can actually be a part of the work of this committee.

Mr. Barrett, bringing this forward as he did, explaining how he disagrees with the concept and doesn't support it, was pretty clear as to why he is choosing to bring forward this motion now as it is, calling for a study that attempts to create an issue where none exists, in an attempt to discredit the project in a way that is unhelpful, that stalls the work of the government, stalls the work of the Crown corporation, that distracts from the issues at hand that would be more likely to touch Canadians themselves. Frankly, I think it represents a tactic to undermine a major nation-building project that this government and so many Canadians are supportive of.

If we take all that into consideration, we can envision a path forward where this committee does produce a quality, substantive report on the connection and the engagement between this government and Alto, but this isn't it, as we read it today. This motion is not it. Certainly, the idea of bringing this forward to the House at this time with these bare facts is absolutely a dereliction of duty by the members of this committee who would have us waste precious time in the House to have a report that isn't ready, that has no substance.

That leads me to ask, why? Why do the members of the opposition want to have a report to the House that has no substance? What are they planning to do with this? What are they trying to do in the House of Commons that they can't do here? What information are they trying to get that they can't get here? All of these questions come up when I consider how this motion was dropped on this committee here yesterday and with the way that is worded today.

We sought consensus and support from the room before the break earlier this afternoon. We extended an opportunity to find a path forward on this particular amendment, but I don't think that we have that in the room. That's certainly not the sense that I have. As such, I feel pretty compelled that we continue to find the right arguments to try to help the members opposite, who I so enjoy working with and spending time with in this committee, that we try to find a path forward together on this.

• (3950)

We can all have a debate about Alto at this committee that reflects the different perspectives in the room, but with open minds to the idea that perhaps high-speed rail is going to be an excellent project for the millions of Canadians who want to take a train, reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, get to Ottawa, Montreal or Quebec City faster than they can today.

**The Chair:** I'm going to interrupt you, Ms. Church.

Again, we're not talking about Alto. We're not talking about high-speed rail. We're not talking about the benefits to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We are talking about the finance minister and his claims that he recused himself from decisions that the government made related to Alto. There have been published reports that indicate that he hasn't. That's what this motion is about. We are on the amendment to remove "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study".

I would really like it if you stayed focused on what the amendment is and not repeat yourself on this issue of whether or not Alto is a benefit to Canadians. That's a debate that doesn't happen at this

point. At this point, we're studying the amendment to the motion, so please, go ahead.

**Leslie Church:** In the interest of hearing from some of my colleagues on both sides, I'm willing to wrap up my remarks there, but I'd appreciate being put at the end of the speakers list in case I have further thoughts on this.

• (3955)

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

Mr. Saini, I have you on the list. Go ahead, sir, on the amendment, please.

**Gurbux Saini:** I wasn't here yesterday, but I understand Mr. Barrett spoke quite extensively on why Alto should not be built. For the same reason, I think I, as a member, have the opportunity to speak about the same proposal. It is part of the motion, and I don't find it very good that there are different rules when it comes to members from one group to the other side of the House.

My remarks today are about how our government is contributing to building a Canadian economic—

**The Chair:** Mr. Saini, I was in the room when Mr. Barrett moved his motion, and it's been referred to several times that, yes, he doesn't support it, but he didn't drone on about it. What he did was talk about the motion and why we need to do this. He didn't spend hours talking about his opposition. He made it very clear at the top of the meeting that he was opposed to it and then he spoke to the relevance of the motion. That's what I'm asking members to do today.

I understand that you support it. I understand Ms. Church, Mr. Watchorn, Ms. Lapointe—I know that you support Alto and that's fine. You can support it, but in the context of this motion, I am asking members to deal with what we're on, which is the amendment to the motion, and I'll repeat it, to remove from the main motion "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study".

That's what I'm going to ask you. Look, I know you support it. You don't need to repeat that. That's all I'm saying.

I'm telling everybody on this side that none of this needs to be repeated. Okay?

Go ahead, sir.

**Gurbux Saini:** The fact that national revenue and Alto is part of the motion, I don't think we should be excluded to talk about it, about the motion that strictly talked about the same issues.

**The Chair:** To be clear, it's in connection with the finance minister's claiming that he has recused himself. That's the connection between all of this. It's not about the value or virtue, as I've said many times, of Alto. It's about the connection with the finance minister.

That's, I believe, why the Alto executives are part of this motion. If you don't want the Alto executives to be part of this motion, then we can deal with the amendment, vote on it, whatever way that goes, and then you're quite welcome to move an amendment to the main motion to remove the Alto executives. Then we can have a debate on that, but I don't want to continue this debate. I don't want to do this, on the value and virtue of Alto. Look, you support it, and that's fine. I may not support it, and that's fine too, but that's not what we're discussing today.

I really would like, no pun intended, to get back on track on the amendment, please.

**Gurbux Saini:** Mr. Chair, when we were dealing with the ethics committee, the report that was going to the House had all kinds of debate and all kinds of comments from the people who are going to be witnesses. It had all kinds of comments from the members of that committee. You are now telling me that I don't have the same privilege of presenting my point of view, because on ethics, you folks were able to do that. You are now telling me—

**The Chair:** You do absolutely have the right to speak to the amendment but it has to be relevant. I'm going to say there have been 50 or 60 points of order that have been raised by members of this committee on all sides about relevance. I've been equally amenable to ruling about the fact that we have to stay on board, so I'm just asking you to stay on board.

The relevance in this is that we're not dealing with whether we agree with Alto, whether we support it or not or what it's going to mean to this nation. What we're debating here is the amendment to the motion, and the motion is to call these three witnesses to this committee in relation to the apparent conflict of interest of the finance minister and the ethics screen.

I'm not sure I can be any clearer than that. Certainly, for the last 11 hours I've been very clear.

Please go ahead on the amendment, Mr. Saini. I'm not taking away your privilege. I'm just asking that you speak to the relevance of the amendment. I'm asking all members to do that and not just you.

Thank you.

• (4000)

**Gurbux Saini:** Mr. Speaker, I'm going to finish here, but I'm going to put my name back on the list so that I can come up with some different....

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

Mr. Watchorn, you are next. I'm going to ask you to speak to the amendment. I'm going to remind you that the amendment is to remove the last line, "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study".

Mr. Watchorn, I would really like you to be laser-focused on that amendment, because if you do stray, I will interrupt you.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this discussion. I find all of this very interesting. I sit on the Standing Committee on National Defence, where I've asked questions on this subject. I find it interesting to be able to speak today on the amendment before us.

I'd like to begin by reminding everyone of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's decision. His conclusion was very clear: There is no risk of conflict of interest and there is no need for a conflict of interest verification between Mr. Champagne and Alto.

I think this is clearly a waste of the committee's time and resources, and we know how under-resourced other committees are. We're borrowing resources from other committees. We know the interpreters' time is precious, the clerks' time is very precious and resources are limited. I think this exercise is completely unnecessary; it's a distraction designed to undermine the credibility of a project everyone finds very interesting.

I had the opportunity to meet with many of the elected officials whose ridings are affected by the Alto project, and I can say the interest and enthusiasm for this project is palpable. I believe any procedure designed to undermine that is completely pointless and a waste of time and resources.

That's why I find this amendment unnecessary. It doesn't help the project move forward or contribute anything to the Alto debate. I am an engineer by training and I was the mayor of a small town, and I'd be very happy if a major project were to be carried out in my region. I find it ridiculous to be wasting time debating such an amendment.

I believe the ethics committee's role is to carry out proper analysis and offer recommendations. However, what we are seeing right now is not helping to advance the debate.

[*English*]

This, in my humble opinion, Mr. Chair, is a distraction. It's a fishing expedition.

Like it was said before, there is no risk of a conflict of interest. The Ethics Commissioner has confirmed that. There's no risk of a conflict of interest and there is no screen required. On top of that, the minister imposed a screen on himself. He's going above and beyond what is required in terms of ethics for the Alto project.

The Alto project is too important a project. It's a nation-building project because we want people to get from Montreal to Quebec City in an hour and a half. We want people to get from Montreal to Toronto in three hours. Wasting committee time on something like this is beneath us. We can do better. If we want to look at other ethics questions, that's fine, but this one is just a full-blown fishing expedition and you're not going to catch anything.

It's completely not in the interest of the public, in the interest of this committee or in the interest of the House to push this any further. Wasting hours of committee time, of resource time and members' time on something like this makes absolutely no sense to me.

• (4005)

[*Translation*]

You have an objective when you conceive an engineering project. You have to make the best use of your resources. However, I don't consider the amendment in its current form to be the best use of our resources. When you have an objective, you have a plan. I don't see a plan behind this amendment, other than trying to sling mud and see what sticks.

Conspiracy theories don't help move the debate or the project forward. I'm sure there are many other things our committees could be spending their time on.

You need a timeline for engineering projects like Alto. We're at the beginning of the public consultation. I think what my colleagues across are trying to do is make a connection between the budget bill and Alto. We're only at the consultation phase of the project. I had a chance to sit in on discussions with mayors and representatives from Alto about next steps. Again, I don't see how the amendment or the removal of the last sentence of the amendment would help move the project forward. It's important to make good use of the resources of the House, the committee and all stakeholders.

The importance of the Alto project is such that it must be viewed pragmatically, from an engineering standpoint, not a partisan one. A few years ago, even the people across thought high-speed rail projects were worthwhile. However, since the Liberal government proposed this project, the opposition parties decided to oppose it, even though it's a very good project.

I think Canadians really need this project. Again, I don't see how the amendment will help move the debate on this project forward. I don't understand what we're looking for exactly, and I don't understand the purpose of today's debate.

[*English*]

I think we have to be pragmatic in how we look at this. I think we have to focus our resources on moving things forward and making sure the project advances.

The proposed modification to the motion does nothing to move this forward. It does nothing to help the project go forward. It is a fishing expedition, but there are no fish. I see absolutely no use in moving this forward at all. It's something that we have to think through again. We don't need this amendment at all.

The train project is too important to throw stuff at the wall, start fishing and try to discredit people when there is absolutely nothing there. It's very important to stay focused and make sure we're looking at what has to happen to make the project work.

Is this amendment and this debate any good at making the project move ahead? The answer is no. I don't see how this amendment to the motion would do anything to move the project forward.

We have to rethink this. We have to try and do a better job to make sure that the time of the committee is better used.

Mr. Chair, I'll wrap up for now, but I'd like to put my name back on the list, please.

• (4010)

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

On the amendment, Ms. Church.

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, could you just confirm with me who is on the speaking list?

**The Chair:** I have Ms. Church, Mr. Saini, Mr. Hardy, Madam Lapointe, Mr. Thériault, Mr. Sari and Mr. Watchorn.

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, we've heard a fair amount about this amendment, and I'm hoping with a couple of my colleagues getting set to speak that maybe we're making some progress on our approach to this report.

As my colleague Mr. Watchorn discussed, in addition to the considerations around what constitutes a good report from a parliamentary committee, there are some additional matters that we need to think about in considering this amendment.

I am quite concerned about the idea of reporting back to the House on the motion that Mr. Barrett has put on the table, in part because I think that it gives a faulty impression to the House and to Canadians.

I know from the many months of work that we've been doing on this committee how seriously my colleagues on both sides of this table have valued the ethics of this committee and the necessity of providing fulsome and correct information when anything is being reported out of this committee to the House.

We should take a moment and think about the nature of the motion Mr. Barrett put forward, and about Mr. Thériault's points, which I have been reflecting on as well. If Mr. Barrett's intention was to probe the nature of a personal link and allegations of conflict between the Minister of Finance and Alto, that worries me. It worries me because I think we have found ourselves there before in providing motions to the House that were ill-informed and incorrect. We are the ethics committee. There's no question of that. We have heard from the commissioner on several occasions.

It is important for us to consider that on this issue, the commissioner has weighed in and has ruled that there was "no risk of a conflict of interest and that a conflict of interest screen was not required". Also, this motion and the amendment have been the result of speculation, conjecture and a twisting of facts about the commissioner, his rulings and the actions of the minister, who is acting above and beyond any of the guidelines that were provided to him.

We do have a responsibility as parliamentarians to make sure that we aren't pursuing a frivolous path, that we aren't undermining the work of government members, or ministers, or opposition members, for that matter, when it comes to the very serious accusations related to the operation of the Conflict of Interest Act and the code of conduct which all members are a party to.

I think in this case, again, the problem that the amendment raises is that a bare report, a report without any type of testimony or facts behind it, without any type of investigation, simply reinforces the misinformation, the conjecture that I think underpins a better part of this motion.

Mr. Chair, when I first heard of this issue and saw some of the media reports around it, I was pleased to see that the news reports had all reported on how the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner said that the matter at issue here does not constitute a conflict of interest.

● (4015)

In the excerpts that the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has provided, the commissioner has stated, “As minister of finance, you have no decision-making authority over matters of human resources at Alto, you do not have the opportunity to further the interest of any specific Alto employee”. These are the commissioner's words, the commissioner's guidance. However, yesterday and today we have been subjected to an unending debate about how the House of Commons should take time out of its precious and limited schedule of days to focus not on the 150-odd bills that are before Parliament right now, but on a report with no basis in fact.

We keep coming back to this idea of the time that we're taking to discuss this particular amendment, but I feel it is our duty as parliamentarians, as members of this committee. It is our judgment about what is ready and what is ripe to go to the House of Commons as a report. This isn't it.

Earlier today, we heard the Prime Minister calling for substance. Mr. Chair, I think you echoed the Prime Minister's comments in calling on all of us to offer substance in what we do. He explained how that included real testimony—

**The Chair:** Relevance, as well.

**Leslie Church:** —getting to issues, relevance and debating aspects of the law. None of which have happened today in any meaningful way on this issue.

I'm very happy to debate, when we get back to it, the main motion and why it falls short of the standards of what this committee should be looking at. While we are focused on the amendment itself and the removal of this requirement to undertake a study, I think it just becomes all the more transparent how this motion is made in bad faith and how the tactic here to waste the time of the House with a report that hasn't been written, with a report that has no evidentiary foundation, is a problem.

[*Translation*]

**Luc Thériault:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault, you have the floor on a point of order.

**Luc Thériault:** Mr. Chair, did I miss anything? I'm participating via Zoom, but you're in the room, so I think I may have missed something.

Didn't the Conservatives move to strike the sentence the amendment relates to when we left this morning? Didn't we agree to accept the Liberals' amendment so we could debate the main motion?

Now we're starting the debate over as if nothing happened. Have the Conservatives withdrawn their proposal to accept the amendment? I have to say I don't quite understand. We've been talking only about the amendment for over an hour, even though a proposal had been made.

Did the Conservatives withdraw that proposal? Have they now taken a different position after 11 hours of debate?

I think you'll agree we've spent more time trying to waste time. We've wasted 11 hours. That's more than the time we need to hear from the three witnesses. It should have taken six hours, but we've been debating this issue now for more than 11 hours.

What happened? Did I miss something?

● (4020)

**The Chair:** You're right, Mr. Thériault.

[*English*]

Just to explain what you had said, I believe it was Mr. Hardy who proposed a unanimous consent motion to accept the amendment and accept the main motion. It would have effectively removed the last line of the motion which, based on the last 11 hours, is precisely what the Liberals have been looking for. The process, as I explained at the onset of this—or there was a question that was raised earlier in the hour—that if we were to accept the amendment by Mr. Sari, that would mean we would then move to the main motion. We would be debating the main motion. If there were any concerns within the main motion, or amendments to be had, then any one of the members around this table who are locked in could certainly propose that. I believe you are quite right that there was a proposal from the Conservatives to eliminate that and accept the main motion as is, but unfortunately, there wasn't unanimous consent given to it, so we are in the position of still debating the amendment.

If the amendment went to a vote, it would be either accepted or rejected. I think the Conservatives have indicated through their unanimous consent motion that they'd be willing to support the amendment by removing that last line. We would then move on to the main motion as amended, which again would leave it open to other amendments as well.

Mr. Thériault, you're not missing anything. You've seen clearly what's going on here, and I hope that explains it to you, sir.

I will return to Ms. Church on the amendment, I suppose.

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and just to be crystal clear, especially for Mr. Thériault, the issue wasn't simply that we could move to a vote and back to the motion. The consent was sought as I understood it—

**The Chair:** I explained that, yes, on removing the last line and adopting the motion as unamended. I think I was crystal clear as well.

**Leslie Church:** Mr. Chair, many of us are new to the House in the past year and have only so much experience dealing with reports back to the House, but I certainly recall how one of the challenges that I know, when we report back to the House, results in other opportunities for the opposition members to make other orders of the House, to order production...it sometimes resulted in millions of dollars spent, hundreds of hours wasted, ultimately leading to nothing or very little.

Mr. Chair, when I talk about our responsibilities as members of this committee in protecting the House from the tactics that we have seen in the past, it's motivated in part by that, by making sure that when this committee does work, it does good work. It does work that is substantiated and that when it goes to the House, there can be a thoughtful and real debate, as opposed to simply a licence for games and more partisanship, which is what we are trying to avoid in the way that our government seeks to operate today, with the posture that we have struck and that the Prime Minister has struck.

We are interested in finding a way forward on this. I thank the members opposite for at least a first attempt at moving us along. There needs to be a broader recognition that a frivolous and vexatious motion, along with a frivolous and vexatious attempt to report that the committee is undertaking the study to the House cannot and should not proceed and should not be tolerated by the members of this committee.

There is a way to examine the government's engagement with Alto. There is a way to examine the work of the Minister of Finance and others on this project, but this is not it. That's why we're going to continue to stand in opposition to the motion and propose the amendment that we are debating today.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask you a question in terms of the committee's timing and resources. How long do you envision we're going to be sitting this evening?

• (4025)

**The Chair:** That's a wonderful question, Ms. Church.

We will be sitting until 4:37 this evening.

**Leslie Church:** In that case, I would like to ensure that other colleagues around the table have a chance to speak in the next 10 or so minutes, but please add my name to the bottom of the speaking order.

**The Chair:** Here's what I'm going to do. Rather than start that right now and have the unenviable task of cutting somebody off, I am going to suspend this meeting to the call of the chair and advise committee members that we do have resources tomorrow evening from 6:30 potentially until 10:30.

I'm going to suspend this meeting to the call of the chair.

The room hasn't been determined yet, but once it is, I will let everybody know.

The meeting is suspended.

[*The meeting was suspended at 4:27 p.m., Tuesday, April 14*]

[*The meeting resumed at 6:35 p.m., Wednesday, April 15* ]

• (6635)

**The Chair:** As I've been starting off a lot lately, when we last left our superheroes, the meeting had been suspended to be resumed today.

Before we begin, I do want to make a couple of comments.

We're coming into our 12th hour of debating a motion. Many of you have seen the motion. There's an amendment on the floor right now that we have been debating for the better part of 12 hours. I want us to start this meeting with clear heads.

We're on the amendment to remove the last line of the motion. Throughout the course of what's been going on, Conservative members have indicated that they will support this and with the numbers, the amendment will pass, so there's no need to filibuster that part of the motion. I sense as well that there is concern about the part of the motion particularly with respect to the executives—I got that sense throughout the course of the debate over the last 12 hours—and that it may, in fact, include the minister's wife.

I think Mr. Barrett the other day made it very clear that there is no intention to invite the minister's wife to this committee. The motion talks about Mr. Imbleau and executives from Alto. I'm going to let you in on a little secret. When this motion was first drafted, and I think Mr. Barrett referred to this the other day, or may not have, it did include the minister's wife. I know that Mr. Barrett pushed back on that and did not see the need to have the minister's wife there, so that's why it's not in the motion. I believe that at some point, when we get there, we can remove the part that refers to the executives with an amendment when we get to the main motion. That may solve the issue, even before it's discussed. It may.

Given the fact that the Conservatives have already indicated, and the numbers are there, that they will support the amendment, and given the fact that the Liberals have expressed concern about that part of what I referred to as the executives, and that could in fact be removed when we get to the main motion, I am going to leave this to the parties to discuss and find a solution to end this 12-hour filibuster impasse. If one is not found, then we will continue, so I'm looking for some good faith here.

What I'm going to do is suspend this meeting. I'm going to ask the parties to talk this out, and if there's no resolution to be found, then you can come back to me and say so, and then we'll be here until however long we have resources.

The meeting is suspended.

• (6635)

(Pause)

• (6720)

**The Chair:** Thank you for your patience everyone.

We're on the amendment. I'm going to ask if we have unanimous consent to remove the last line, "And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study". Do we have unanimous consent to remove that?

Mr. Saini, is that a yes?

**Gurbux Saini:** I believe we have come to a consensus on the amendment. We can come to a vote on that.

**The Chair:** We don't have to come to a vote if we have consensus. Unless you want a vote, sir. Do you want a vote on that?

**Gurbux Saini:** I would prefer that we vote on that.

**The Chair:** We're going to call a—

**Gurbux Saini:** I would also like to add my name to the list after the amendment is taken care of.

**The Chair:** Okay.

We have Mr. Hardy, then Mr. Barrett.

We're on the amendment. We've asked for a vote.

I see Mr. Thériault, too.

Madam Clerk, on the amendment. I'll remind everybody that the amendment is that the sentence, "And that the committee report to the House that its undertaking of the study" be removed from the motion. That line would be stricken.

(Amendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** We are back on the main motion.

Mr. Saini, you are on for the main motion.

I have a list. I have MPs Hardy, Barrett, Thériault, Goodridge, Church, Lapointe and Ramsay.

• (6725)

**Michael Barrett:** There's Mr. St-Pierre, as well.

**The Chair:** I have Mr. St-Pierre, too. We have quite the list on the main motion.

Mr. Saini, go ahead on the main motion, please.

**Gurbux Saini:** I would like to move that we delete item number two from the main motion.

**The Chair:** Okay.

To delete item number two from the main motion. That's fine, Mr. Saini.

The amendment is to remove line number two. Line number two says, "Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours".

It's to delete that in its entirety, sir. Is that correct?

Do you have anything to say about that?

**Gurbux Saini:** Yes. I want to begin my remarks by grounding the discussion in the facts, because as much as the Conservatives wish what they hear to be true, facts do matter. Facts matter to Canadians.

After hours of debate in the committee, Canadians deserve clarity. They don't want the Conservative Party to take them down the road of another witch hunt over a conflict of interest, one that the Ethics Commissioner himself has confirmed does not exist.

How much time did the Conservatives waste in Parliament last year? Why is the Conservatives' only plan for Canadians to delay

and stop the government's aim to make life better and more affordable for all Canadians?

The entire motion before us hinges on the suggestion of a potential conflict of interest involving the minister on Alto's high-speed rail project, but the central fact, confirmed by the Ethics Commissioner independently, is that the Ethics Commissioner has already reviewed the situation and has found that there is no risk of a conflict of interest.

According to the reporting on CTV by news journalist Judy Trinh, the Ethics Commissioner's office examined the relationship in question and determined that a conflict, or even in a potential conflict, in the exercise of his duty as the Minister of Finance has not taken place. Those findings matter. It should be disposed.

Because of our system of Parliament, the Ethics Commissioner is not a partisan actor. Conservative members and Bloc members of this committee know this. The commissioner is an independent officer of Parliament tasked precisely with making these decisions so that parliamentarians can rely on impartial guidance, not speculation, and with no political narrative, but an evidence-based conclusion. The conclusion here is clear and resolute. There is no conflict.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

The amendment is on the floor, again, to remove item number two.

I have Mr. Barrett first, on the—

**Gurbux Saini:** Mr. Chair, I also want to make sure that my name is on the speaking list.

**The Chair:** Okay. As it stands right now, on the amendment, not on the main motion, I have Mr. Barrett, Mr. Hardy, Mr. Thériault and Ms. Goodridge. Those are the names that I have, so I'll put you on that list, Mr. Saini, on the motion as amended, okay?

**Linda Lapointe:** Is my name on the list?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. It's the amendment.

Madam, do you want on the list?

**Linda Lapointe:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Jacques Ramsay (La Prairie—Atateken, Lib.):** Can you add my name, please?

**The Chair:** Okay. This is on the amendment. I have Mr. Barrett, Mr. Hardy, Madam Goodridge, Mr. Saini, Ms. Lapointe, Mr. St-Pierre and Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Thériault is number three. Did I not say that?

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett, on the amendment, please.

• (6730)

**Michael Barrett:** It's been 12 hours of discussion on the motion that I moved on Monday afternoon, and it's Wednesday night, and the motion is very straightforward. Free from a long preamble, we have a request for the Minister of Finance to appear for two hours, for the chief executive officer of Alto to appear for two hours, and for the Conflict of Interest Commissioner to appear for two hours.

The reason those witnesses are important to have before this committee is that Alto is a \$90-billion project, the most expensive infrastructure project in history. Last year, the minister wrote in a letter to the Prime Minister that he believed, based on a personal relationship he has with a vice-president at Alto, that he would be in a conflict of interest and that he needed to recuse himself. Following that letter, the minister participated in discussions and debates and voted on matters specifically related to Alto.

Conservative and Bloc Québécois members voted to remove the creation of the high speed rail network act from the budget implementation act. The minister voted to keep it in the act and then voted for the budget, a budget that he included a transport item in.

I won't list all of the questions we need to ask, because we'd like to ask those of the minister, the Ethics Commissioner and the CEO of Alto, but one of the many questions is about this conflict of interest that the minister said he would be in if he were to participate in those discussions and debates and in voting on Alto. We also have to believe that he participated in decision-making, because there are no recusals published online with respect to cabinet decisions on the budget implementation act, Bill C-15.

The role of members of Parliament who don't sit inside government—and that's not people who are part of the governing party but rather people who don't sit in government and who aren't parliamentary secretaries or ministers—is to hold the government to account. This is an opportunity for us to do that. It's very narrow in terms of the scope. It requires a limited amount of time. In fact, the amount of time that Liberal members have spent filibustering a vote on this motion is more than double the amount of time the entire committee study would have taken.

We're very clear about what our intentions are. We're being very transparent. We're not pursuing an interest in reporting it to the House. I've been crystal clear, from my initial comments when we moved the motion, on the only three witnesses we are interested in having appear. It's about accountability for Canadians on a massive project.

If the minister has since come to the decision that the conflict no longer exists, this is the forum for him to resolve that in. If he has time to spend on TV to talk about it, and if the Ethics Commissioner has time to write letters to everyone except to the committee about it, then they can answer questions here and put the matter to rest. It's about restoring, protecting and preserving Canadians' confidence in democratic institutions and in decision-makers.

I think we probably have things we could move on to as a Parliament and discuss in these important times, such as affordability issues and issues dealing with our sovereignty and our trade relationship with our largest trading partner. Instead, these questions have come up, and it's not because we fabricated a connection between

these two individuals. It was of such a concern to the Minister of Finance that he wrote a letter to the head of government that he believed he would be in a conflict of interest if he did things that we have since seen that he's done. That's voted on, discussed, debated and decided on matters that deal with Alto, and he believed there was a conflict because a vice-president there is his partner.

• (6735)

We're looking to get to the bottom of that without another 12 hours of filibuster. We think that it's a very reasonable request. It provides transparency. It's well within the mandate of this committee, and it's limited in scope. We could resolve it over a series of meetings in two days, which I'd like to remind everyone is less than the total amount of time that Liberals have spent filibustering this ask, this basic function of accountability that should be exercised by parliamentarians. I would implore colleagues to afford Canadians that level of accountability that we're looking to get for them.

Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hardy, go ahead on the amendment.

**Gabriel Hardy:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There is an extremely specific sentence that often comes up: Ethics is more demanding than law. I think it was my colleague Mr. Thériault who said that a number of times, and I totally agree with him.

The goal of Mr. Barrett's motion is quite simple, and it focuses only on those involved in the potential conflict of interest the minister wanted to impose on himself. I reminded Parliament today of the precise definition of recusal. Usually, to recuse yourself, you need to understand what it means. Recusing oneself means to withdraw because of conflict of interest or incompetence. That's the definition. What we want to know is why the minister recused himself. We'd like for three very specific people to come and explain to Canadians what happened. The motion is very simple and very effective.

We've been here for 12 hours. I hope those following the committee's business understand that hearing about wild turkeys for 12 hours is a waste of time and is quite unusual. We've heard monologues, not debate. For 12 hours, the same Liberal colleagues have taken the floor time and time again to share how they feel and say how important this bill is, but nothing about the motion. The speeches were as varied as they were off topic.

Mr. Saini, I would like to propose a subamendment to your amendment. Rather than completely removing the second line, I propose to change it with my subamendment. Specifically, I would propose that, instead of removing the second line in its entirety, it be modified to read, "Alto CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours." In other words, rather than completely withdrawing the text, my subamendment seeks to clarify what seems to have been bothering my colleagues for 12 hours. It appears they're losing sleep over it. We were here Monday afternoon. It's now Wednesday evening, and we've heard 12 hours of passionate speeches.

Therefore, as a subamendment to Mr. Saini's original amendment, I propose the following subamendment: Instead of withdrawing the text, we replace it with "Alto CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours." That's my proposition. It's important for us to agree if we want things to move forward. Canadians expect things to move forward. The Prime Minister said at a press conference that wasting time in committee was over, and yet, that's what's going on here.

Yesterday, for the second time, I moved for a unanimous consent. My colleagues spoke for dozens of hours, but they refused. We have to find a way to move things forward, so I'm proposing another solution. Canadians have a right to hear the explanations of the three people named in the motion. I therefore move this subamendment, and I hope it'll be adopted.

**The Chair:** Could you repeat your subamendment?

**Gabriel Hardy:** In his amendment, Mr. Saini proposes to remove the second item completely.

I propose instead to replace it with the following: "Alto CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours." The second item would therefore become excessively precise, which is what the members across have been asking for, for 12 hours. This is the second time I've proposed a solution to move things forward and find a solution.

• (6740)

**The Chair:** Okay.

[*English*]

I'm going to suspend for a minute.

• (6740)

(Pause)

• (6745)

**The Chair:** We're back.

When we left, Mr. Hardy had proposed a subamendment. I'm going to rule the subamendment in order. Do you have anything to say, Mr. Hardy?

[*Translation*]

**Gabriel Hardy:** No, I think I was pretty clear.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

I have Mr. Barrett next on the list on the subamendment, followed by Ms. Goodridge and Mr. Thériault.

Mr. Barrett, are you good?

Ms. Goodridge, go ahead, please.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** This is on the subamendment.

**Laila Goodridge:** It's on the subamendment. I think it is eminently reasonable. The Liberals have been filibustering for 12 hours. For 12 hours they have been doing everything in their power because they do not want to have this conversation about having the Minister of Finance come, the executive, the CEO from Alto.

I believe that the subamendment is very reasonable and makes it very clear that we are asking for the CEO. I know Liberal members have made comments that they were scared that the finance minister's partner would be called. The subamendment makes it exceptionally clear.

I don't know what more the Liberals want, and whether they're going to continue with this filibuster, but Canadians deserve to have the truth. They deserve to have this study. If there was nothing wrong with the Liberals' claim, then why are they so afraid? Why are they afraid to bring this out?

My grandma always said that in the time before there was bleach, you used sunshine as the best disinfectant. This is about bringing some light to this. This is about bringing a little bit of sunshine, and if there is nothing wrong, then there is nothing wrong.

Let's bring this to the light.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Do I have any more speakers to the subamendment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, the floor is yours on the subamendment.

**Luc Thériault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm very disappointed that the Liberal Party's main objective is to impute motives to the opposition, saying it would act maliciously to play political games. They don't want to ask questions about a situation involving three parties, including Alto, who will receive \$3.9 billion over five years to determine the route, where the stations will be and the project schedule. Moreover, the Minister of Finance consulted his ethics adviser as soon as his wife was offered a job at Alto. This suggests he spontaneously perceived an appearance of conflict of interest.

Later, we learned he apparently wrote to his leader and put himself in a conflict of interest screen managed by his chief of staff and the deputy minister of finance. However, we don't know the nature of this screen, how it was applied or when. This allowed him to continue leading the project and introduce a provision in Bill C-15, budget 2025 implementation act, no. 1 which suspends important powers. These powers were put in place after the Mirabel scandal or fiasco involving the power to expropriate. We're hearing tonight that the Ethics Commissioner has settled this issue. However, I have questions for the commissioner.

I remind everyone that during a public meeting, the Ethics Commissioner said the concept of appearance of conflict of interest absolutely had to be introduced into the act. I want to ask him about that. This is the ethics committee. We have questions about ethics and we want to shed light on a situation in good faith and in a caring way. I repeat: He himself thought the Crown corporation's hiring of his spouse could place him in a conflict of interest. It's therefore normal for us to ask questions of the Ethics Commissioner.

The commissioner is an independent body. That's why he can come and enlighten us. I'm sure he'd be happy to do so. I'm not sure I can take what the Liberals are saying for granted. How does his decision ensure there won't be any conflict of interest? I also want to discuss with him the issue of the appearance of conflict of interest and how such a situation could be managed afterwards, once our ongoing review is complete.

If every time a member of the ethics committee asks a question both sides see this as a partisan, political stunt, then why do we even have an ethics committee? What's the point of having such a committee if, when both sides change the participants, we end up in the dynamic we've been experiencing for 12 hours? No one's replaced me in the last 12 hours. The same goes for you, Mr. Chair.

● (6750)

However, some of my colleagues, rather than sticking to the subject of the discussion—the amendment that everyone agreed to remove at least six hours ago—are now talking about something else. The amendment would remove “And that the committee report to the House that it is undertaking this study.” We were prepared to remove that. We even suspended work on that. Mrs. Church seemed to be in agreement. At one point, we had to go to the House of Commons, and the meeting was adjourned. I thought we were going to pick up where we left off, but that didn't happen.

When the Liberals came back, they made it clear that they wanted to start the debate over. It's like Groundhog Day. I think this shows a lack of consideration for the institution that the standing committee on ethics represents. We can't agree on a study that was supposed to last a mere six hours; people filibustered for 12 hours.

Now that the government has a majority, it can ignore the 60% of the population that didn't vote for it when it comes to amendments to bills and motions in every committee. Now that it has a majority, it won't want to listen to what we have to say. As a result, opposition members will have to try to explain things. When we do that, we'll be accused of filibustering. And people wonder why folks are cynical about democratic institutions.

What I've experienced over the last 12 years is troubling. This is sophistry. I'm appealing to authority, but that's not my main argument or my only argument, so it's not sophistry. Sophistry is when you make your argument the only possible one.

I taught ethics for 30 years. Now, here I am at the Standing Committee on Ethics, and the government is saying that everything is settled and there's no need to ask any questions. There's no interest in using this committee to shine a light and be transparent. I see this as obstruction to transparency.

Personally, I was elected by citizens who expect me to represent their interests in every political action I take. Three years from now, they will judge my work. The Liberals talk about regular folks, the average person and ordinary citizens. I think that's wrong: there are citizens, period. It's not about being regular or average or ordinary. No person is more or less ordinary than the rest. They are all citizens who tasked us with representing them in Parliament.

I'm a believer in parliamentary democracy. I believe in it despite the cynicism and despite the events we just experienced. I still believe in it. The rules of procedure exist; they're all in a great big book. Their purpose is to civilize exchanges between parties, because parties are, by definition, partisan.

I used to be a member of another legislature, and when there was a parliamentary committee, partisanship wasn't in the picture, which resulted in some truly uplifting exchanges in Quebec. There was a committee on end-of-life care that started its work in 2010 and finished it in 2014. It was all done across party lines, and everyone agreed on things. I would add that the government changed hands during that time. The point is, it's possible to transcend partisan agendas.

● (6755)

However, what I've been hearing for the past 12 hours is people on the government side reducing the opposition to partisan actors. Then, when the opposition gains power, it reduces the new opposition to partisan actors. We're never going to get past this if we can't rise above it, especially at the ethics committee.

Anyone unfamiliar with Parliament would quite naturally find the situation shocking. Apparently the minister wanted to recuse himself, but he was also the driving force behind a provision that raises a potential conflict of interest.

We have to be able to ask questions. We need the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to come here and explain his position. We need to be able to talk about how to improve things and express our views. The Office of the Ethics Commissioner exists to enforce the act; that's all. The problem we have here is that, in places like the United Kingdom and Quebec, the things we call laws are actually broad principles that regulate all behaviours. People here sometimes seem to think that anything not prohibited by law is ethically acceptable, but that's not the case. Just because something is legal doesn't necessarily mean it's ethical. As I've often said, what's legal isn't necessarily ethical, and ethics is more demanding than law. That's why I think it's entirely reasonable to ask—

Mr. Chair, I'm hearing the English interpretation in my earpiece.

• (6800)

**The Chair:** I think the problem has already been solved, Mr. Thériault.

**Luc Thériault:** Okay, thank you.

It would have been reasonable to expect that, after a little more than 12 hours, we might get past imputing motives and accusing people of malicious intent. Six hours should have been enough time to hear from the witnesses, deal with the issue and enable people to make up their minds. If there has indeed been inappropriate behaviour or clear lack of good faith, people will be able to see what's going on. I trust them.

The problem is that they don't want to let us, as representatives of the people, ask questions of three people: the Ethics Commissioner—this is about the Conflict of Interest Act, after all; the CEO of Alto; and the minister. It never occurred to me to invite the minister's partner. This issue is about the minister and the organization that gave the minister's partner a job.

Mr. Chair, you began the meeting by suggesting that 12 hours might be enough time for everyone to think the matter through. Sometimes, someone will say something controversial or treat another person with hostility. Eventually, the voice of reason is no longer in the room.

You proposed a compromise, Mr. Chair: Remove the last sentence so the minister's partner would not have to testify, as proposed in Mr. Hardy's subamendment. To be honest, I thought it was reasonable on the part of the Liberal representatives, who are, first and foremost, representatives of the people, not the executive branch.

I think party lines are one of the main reasons people are cynical and disaffected. I had the opportunity to travel across Quebec, and also across Canada, when I was working on democratic reform in my first term. I heard from citizens across the country. From coast to coast, despite having different voting systems, everyone had had it up to here with party lines. People want elected officials who can be free and informed as they exercise their legislative power. That issue came up over and over again.

I expected that, especially from new MPs. I would imagine that, because they're new, they embrace the highest standards for our noble role as representatives of the people. I haven't seen that in this debate, however. That's why I'm so disappointed this evening. After two interruptions, there's been no progress.

The lawmakers here aren't free and informed. They're government representatives who are not speaking on behalf of their con-

stituents about a situation that demands clarity. If everything is fine, okay, we'll move on to something else, and if there are things to improve, at least we'll know why. That's our job as members of the standing committee on ethics: to make things better.

• (6805)

They serve solely as representatives of the executive branch's party line. That is a disappointment to me and the people I represent.

We're at an impasse. We've tried everything, and Mr. Hardy made some progress. I would note that Mr. Fergus expressed reservations about the second point, about inviting Alto executives, including CEO Martin Imbleau, to testify. He also raised the possibility of inviting the minister's partner. In one of my speeches, I said that I myself had never thought of that. If that was the problem, we proposed a solution here this evening. We tried to allay those fears.

I'm wondering what the Liberal Party of Canada, with its majority government, is afraid of. Since the beginning of the debate, we've been told repeatedly that there's nothing to worry about. If there's nothing to worry about, why not make it public and settle the matter once and for all? That way, we could move on.

The worst part is that we were told House resources were being wasted. It could have taken five minutes to adopt the motion—sometimes a motion is adopted unanimously. However, we spent more than 12 hours talking about it. Our side hardly had any speaking time at all. This study was supposed to take six hours.

For these reasons, I ask that you adjourn the meeting, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Thériault moved that the meeting be adjourned, and the motion is not debatable.

Madam Clerk, you may proceed with the recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 3)

• (6810)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Before I adjourn, I will say that tomorrow we have a meeting on the review of the Lobbying Act. The B.C. lobbying commissioner is coming in. We also have three representatives from the OECD.

The analysts have prepared a briefing note for that, which will be sent out immediately following this meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.





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