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Chair: John Brassard



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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• (0815)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 37 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 on the Zoom application.

We are resuming debate on the motion moved by Mr. Barrett on Monday, April 13, 2026, as amended:

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 8th, 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.

We are on the amendment which was moved by Mr. Saini, that the motion as amended be further amended by deleting the words: "2. Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours;"

There was a subamendment moved by Mr. Hardy to that amendment to delete the words "including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours". This subamendment by Mr. Hardy, just so that everybody is clear, would have the effect of confirming that executives from Alto will not be invited to appear, but that the CEO, Martin Imbleau, will be invited to appear.

That is where we are right now. We are on Mr. Hardy's subamendment. If you are to support Mr. Hardy's subamendment, it would, in effect, delete the executives and just have Mr. Imbleau, the CEO of Alto, come. If you are not in support of that, it would return to Mr. Saini's amendment, which is the complete deletion of line 2: "Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours".

We are on Mr. Hardy's subamendment to delete the executives but not delete CEO Mr. Martin Imbleau.

I have a list—I really went back through the list as best possible—and I have Madam Lapointe as first on the list on the subamendment.

I see your hand, Ms. Church.

Madam Lapointe, you may continue on the subamendment. As I mentioned, it would effectively return Mr. Imbleau back as a witness, but would delete the executives.

[Translation]

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

Good morning, everyone.

[English]

Leslie Church (Toronto—St. Paul's, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead on the point of order.

Leslie Church: Apologies to my colleague but, Mr. Chair, we have called this meeting despite the committee agreeing at the start of the session of a minimum of 48 hours' notice for a meeting. Are we suspending that practice? I am just wondering how we are going to approach that given the agreement we had for 48 hours' notice.

The Chair: I called the meeting at the discretion of the chair, Ms. Church, so that's where we are this morning.

As I mentioned last night, we have from 8:15 until midnight tonight to deal with this issue, so we're going to continue. It's at the discretion of the chair.

Go ahead, Mr. Sari.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'd like to speak to the point of order.

When the committee began its work, the members agreed on a number of things. In light of what happened yesterday, am I to understand that there may be other things we agreed on in September that will not be adhered to? That said, I fully respect your decision.

I would remind you that, at the first meeting, we agreed on certain things, including the fact that all meetings had to be subject to a 48-hour notice.

Could there be other things that are within your purview—I understand that you're within your rights—that are going to change at your discretion, like what happened last night?

• (0820)

[English]

The Chair: Just for clarification, the 48 hours is, in fact, intended for the election of the chair. This is what we dealt with at the beginning of the process of this committee being formed. Forty-eight hours is also the process for notice of motions as well.

The chair has the authority and discretion to call a meeting. I decided to call the meeting last night so we're here today, and this meeting will continue. It's duly constituted and it's within my power and purview to do this, so we're going to continue on with the meeting.

if you want to keep going—

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: What you said is interesting, and I fully respect your decision.

Calling a meeting is one of your prerogatives, and I respect that. You called us to an emergency meeting, but I would like to know one thing. What emergency justifies calling us last night for a meeting taking place this morning? The discussion we're going to have today is very important, but I'd like to know why it was urgent that we hold a meeting today.

[English]

The Chair: I'll answer your question as simply as I can.

This is an issue that we've now been at for 14 hours, by last count. I'm of the opinion that we need to continue this. I think this is an important issue. I think the committee, clearly by its actions of 14 hours of debating this particular motion, sees it as important and that's why.... Maybe some members don't, but, in my opinion and discretion as chair, I believe that it's an important issue for this committee to be seized with, and that's why I called this meeting.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

Linda Lapointe: Good morning to all of you on this slightly less grey than usual day. We're getting a bit of sun.

If I understand where we're at, we're talking about the original motion that was put forward by Mr. Barrett, for which the notice of motion was given on April 10. The motion read 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;

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

If I understand correctly, someone said earlier that Mr. Saini had proposed an amendment to remove—

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

Linda Lapointe: I'm not done.

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

Gabriel Hardy: I think it's important for people to listen when you speak, Mr. Chair, because what the member is doing right now is repeating exactly what was said in the first few minutes of the meeting.

Instead of wasting time repeating what has already been said, it would be best for everyone to listen and, when the debate begins, to debate rather than repeat your earlier remarks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardy.

[English]

My expectation today is that we're going to have a substantive and relevant debate continue. It's been 14 hours of a fairly robust and substantive debate.

We are on Mr. Hardy's subamendment right now, which is to have Mr. Imbleau, the CEO of Alto, come before committee. That's it.

I do appreciate the review here, Madam Lapointe. Everybody is fully aware of what the motion is. On the subamendment by Mr. Hardy, I'm going to give you back the floor and we can either vote on it after this or we can continue extending the hours that we've already been at it.

Madam Lapointe, go ahead, please.

• (0825)

[Translation]

Linda Lapointe: I was summarizing things to make sure we were all on the same page. Thank you, Mr. Hardy, but I just wanted to make sure we were all talking about the same thing.

Mr. Saini proposed to remove, "Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours". Then, Mr. Hardy proposed to specify the second item of the motion to invite only Alto CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours. Also, the last line of the motion is no longer in the version we're debating.

Now, allow me to come back to the fact that the Minister of Finance went to the conflict of interest commissioner. When you're sworn in, you meet many advisers to get up to speed, and one of the things they explain to you is the importance of being in good standing with the conflict of interest commissioner. All my colleagues here know full well that we're also explained what constitutes a conflict of interest. Over and above receiving this training when they became MPs and were sworn in, the members of this committee had the opportunity to meet with the commissioner on a number of occasions. He came to answer all of our questions.

The Minister of Finance and National Revenue is aware of this, since he's been sworn in many times and is a minister. We're told that, when in doubt, we must consult the people at our disposal who can answer our questions about conflicts of interest, and not to wait for a problem to arise. That's what the minister did: He went to check if the fact that his spouse is vice-president of the environment at Alto was an issue, and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner found that there was no problem. Moreover, a member of the Conservative Party, Mr. Barrett, also checked with the commissioner and got the same answer: there's no issue and everything's fine. I don't understand the relentlessness around this issue. When in doubt, verify, and that's what happened.

Now, we have a motion to debate. It's true we've been debating for some time, but that's okay. The situation needs to be clarified.

During his last turn, Mr. Thériault made reference to Mirabel. He talked about all the expropriations in Mirabel. My riding is just south of the Mirabel riding and includes Deux-Montagnes, Saint-Eustache, Boisbriand and Rosemère. I can speak to the 1970s expropriations. I was a little girl at the time, and I remember the impact expropriations had on people. I want to point out those who were expropriated in Mirabel moved south, particularly in Saint-Eustache, and some are still traumatized.

That said, practices have changed a lot since the 1960s and 1970s. Today, major projects are subject to clear and rigorous requirements. There are public consultations from the get-go, fair and transparent compensation, mandatory notifications, waiting periods and mechanisms to challenge decisions. That wasn't the case in the 1970s. I find it quite unfair that some people are scaring citizens by telling them a project like Alto could be a repeat of Mirabel. The rules have changed; it's different now.

All of this is based on well-established principles in Canadian expropriation laws, including the duty to consult, social acceptability and respect for the affected communities.

The high-speed rail act totally fits into this modern framework. It mandates consultation through impact assessments, provides for upstream collaboration with landowners and establishes a—

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but the interpreters are telling me that the sound is cutting in and out.

Could you adjust your microphone?

● (0830)

Linda Lapointe: Should I lower it?

The Chair: I think it's fine now.

[*English*]

Maybe take the plug out and plug it back in for me, please.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Can you hear me better?

The Chair: I can hear you clearly, but the interpreters cannot.

Linda Lapointe: I can speak more slowly.

The Chair: Yes, you could speak more slowly.

Ms. Lapointe, you have the floor.

Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The law requires consultations under the Impact Assessment Act; provides for early collaboration with landowners; and establishes a clear, transparent, and rigorous process, governed by the laws of Quebec and Ontario.

I will give a few examples.

Previously, there was no notice period. Today, formal notices and mandatory deadlines are required before any expropriation. In the past, the federal government acted without coordinating with Quebec. Now, projects are carried out in collaboration with provincial governments, in accordance with their laws. In the past, the rights of indigenous peoples were not recognized in these processes. Today, consulting with indigenous peoples is a duty, a legal obligation.

Let's be very clear—

Gabriel Hardy: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Hardy on a point of order.

Gabriel Hardy: We're discussing the subamendment, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Lapointe, we are on the subamendment and the subamendment is very clear, and that is to add just Mr. Imbleau, the CEO of Alto, to appear before the committee. It's very clear.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Actually, I'm talking about Alto, and I'm talking about the Alto train. That's exactly what I'm doing. When we have the floor, we make references to certain things. Everything I'm saying is directly related to the subject at hand.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Lapointe, I would like to reiterate that we're talking again about inviting the CEO of Alto to appear before the committee in relation to the motion which, again, refers to the finance minister imposing an ethics screen on himself, yet participating in discussions, votes and other things related to Alto.

This is not about the value or the virtue of Alto. If you want to discuss that, or issues of expropriation or other issues, there are other committees in which to do that, and I would invite you to do that. We are dealing with the ethics issue here.

If you continue to do this, I'm going to go to Ms. Church, who is next on the list. Please speak to the amendment.

[Translation]

Linda Lapointe: Mr. Chair, thank you for the clarification.

If I understand correctly, we're still discussing the motion and Mr. Hardy's proposed amendments. Personally, I'd like to revisit a point Mr. Thériault raised regarding expropriations, since it ties into the broader debate we have been having for several hours.

We're talking here about a high-speed rail project. Some have raised the possibility of a conflict of interest, even though the conflict of interest commissioner concluded that the Minister of Finance's actions were in compliance with the rules. Everything was done by the book. When you become an MP—

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, I apologize for interrupting you.

Linda Lapointe: —you meet with representatives of the Ethics Commissioner.

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me, Madam Lapointe. I'm going to stop you. It's not for the reason that I stated about relevance, but we are having problems with your video and your sound. I just heard again from the interpreter.

I am going to go to Ms. Church, and then I'm going to come back to you. I'm going to have the technicians work on fixing this problem, because it is a problem for the interpreters. Okay?

[Translation]

Linda Lapointe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Church, go ahead, please.

Leslie Church: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone. Welcome back to our wonderful committee, on a Friday.

I'm delighted to weigh in on this subamendment. Mr. Chair, I was very glad to hear you recognize that although we have been at this for probably close to 14 hours this week, it is in fact a robust and substantive debate. I do think that's important, recognizing going forward that on issues like this sometimes we do need to have a thorough airing of all the issues.

On this subamendment, there are a few directions in which I want to take my comments. First of all, I want to talk about the substantive disagreement we have about calling these witnesses, including any executives but including the CEO of Alto, to this particular inquiry. Over the course of the past few days we have set out our general concerns about calling witnesses and using the committee's time and also the witnesses' time on a matter that is improper for this committee to explore. It's improper because it is an issue that has already been addressed by the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, quite clearly, and although I don't believe—

• (0835)

[Translation]

Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

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

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, you have mentioned several times that we are now in the 14th hour of debate on this motion. Mrs. Church is now suggesting this debate is taking too long and we're wasting the time of staff and parliamentarians. If we had adopted the motion 14 hours ago, the study itself would have only taken six hours.

It seems to me that, at this stage, out of respect for these proceedings and the committee, we should at least avoid such remarks and set the record straight.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

[English]

Once again, we're on the subamendment. It's very clear what the subamendment is, and that is to remove the executives from Alto from appearing, which I think addresses at least some of the stated concerns of members of the Liberal Party, and to just have the CEO, Martin Imbleau, appear before committee. That's what we're dealing with.

I'm going to forewarn everyone here about getting beyond this subamendment and talking about issues that aren't relevant to the subamendment. For the last 14 hours I've heard a lot of discussion about the value and virtue of Alto. That's not what we're discussing here. From an ethical standpoint, the motion is very clear, and I'll say it again, the minister's claims that he recused himself from decisions his government made related to Alto. That's, quite frankly, what we're studying here. I'm not going to be seeking any more interventions on points of order. I'm going to make it very clear right now, if I determine that what we're discussing is not relevant or germane to this issue, I will be moving on to the next speaker. You can put yourself back on the list if you like, but I'm not going to sit here and take this for another 15 hours.

Ms. Church, I'm going back to you on the subamendment. I'll remind you that the subamendment is to have the CEO, Martin Imbleau, appear for two hours before committee. That's it. Go ahead, please.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, I have to say, I was less than a minute into my remarks and I have not spoken to the subamendment or the amendment to date—

• (0840)

The Chair: That's why you have a chance.

Go ahead, please.

Leslie Church: Mr. Thériault, I appreciate, maybe, your frustration with how the week has transpired, but I do have the ability to speak to the motion and I certainly intend to do so.

We're at a point—

The Chair: We're on the subamendment, not the motion.

Leslie Church: On the subamendment, my apologies for that.

I am speaking directly about the subamendment and the question of having Alto executives, specifically the CEO, appear, and I'm going to continue to do that. We are in a meeting right now, without notice, and where resources have been requested for 16 hours today. I think it is fair to say that I'm within my domain and my speaking time to canvass the reasons we oppose the subamendment on this side of the table.

I was speaking about the substantive disagreement we have about calling Alto employees—any of them, or any Alto executives—to the committee to reflect on this particular topic. That includes Mr. Imbleau. The reason is that, as I was describing, the inquiry here itself has been brought before the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. The commissioner, independently, as that office is designed to do, has already weighed in on this topic and actually confirmed that Minister Champagne is not in a position of conflict, that he has respected the rules that have been set out for ministers, and that as Minister of Finance he has no decision-making authority over matters of human resources at Alto and therefore does not have the opportunity to further the interest of any specific Alto employee.

When we're talking about bringing the CEO of Alto to committee, the real question here is, why? Why are we taking up the time of the CEO of Alto to weigh in on a matter that is properly within the scope of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, and a topic which the commissioner has already made comment on to say there isn't an issue here and that the Minister of Finance has no decision-making authority. Now the fact that the minister went above and beyond the guidance of the Ethics Commissioner to establish a screen within his ministry is a reflection of the seriousness to which our government takes the conflict of interest regime. It doesn't change the fact that the Ethics Commissioner has said there is no conflict here.

When I take a look at Mr. Imbleau, he is an executive who brings to Alto a wealth of experience from other organizations. Before joining Alto, he was the CEO of the Montreal Port Authority. He's been at Hydro-Québec as vice-president of corporate strategy and business development for Canada and the United States. He has worked for Énergir as a vice-president in several roles. He holds a master's in law from the Université de Montréal and a bachelor's in law from the Université du Québec à Montréal. He has been a member of the Quebec Bar Association since 1997. He is chair of the board of directors of the Université du Québec at Montréal's Raoul-Dandurand Chair of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies.

This is someone who has the experience to guide a project like Alto, but bringing an executive like Mr. Imbleau to this committee to testify on this matter seems to be nothing more than a dressed-up fishing expedition. Not only do we have that substantive disagreement, that it is improper to call Alto executives to this inquiry because the inquiry itself is improper, but, Mr. Chair, to your very specific point, we also have a procedural disagreement with this which is if the interest in having Mr. Imbleau here is to actually talk about Alto, then that is probably better referred to the Standing Committee on Transport.

What we'd be expecting to hear from Mr. Imbleau, if he appeared at this committee, would be about the project itself, its progress, its advancement, its community consultations, its timelines for build-

ing the route, items that are probably specifically and properly within the scope of the CEO's role.

• (0845)

I ask my colleagues opposite, with their intention to call a very senior executive from Alto, what is their purpose in having Mr. Imbleau testify?

[*Translation*]

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

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

Luc Thériault: During the 14 hours of debate, during which Mrs. Church spoke for half the time—I'm exaggerating a bit, but she spoke far more than I did—the discussion centred on the fact that we wanted to raise ethical questions.

Today, she claims that if Mr. Imbleau, the CEO of Alto, testifies, he will come to discuss the project. I want to be clear: Mr. Imbleau will have to answer the ethical questions we're raising in the context of this motion. He won't be coming to discuss the Alto project.

Mr. Chair, during the 14 hours of debate, you called members of the government to order when they strayed from the motion and promoted the project instead. I want to make this clear to the people listening to us, and to Mr. Imbleau himself: Our concerns are strictly ethical and have nothing to do with the Department of Transport.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Thériault.

I don't know how many times I've said it, but this is not the transportation committee; it's not the industry committee; it's not the finance committee. It is the access to information, privacy and ethics committee. Mr. Thériault is quite right, we are dealing with the question related to the finance minister's claim. That's what the motion is all about.

My expectation is that Mr. Imbleau, if he does appear—and we get to a point hopefully before midnight that we are able to come to an agreement on this motion that we've now been deliberating for 14-plus hours—he won't talk about the value and the virtue, as I've said many times, of the Alto rail system. That is not in question here. It is in relation to precisely what the motion says, and that's the finance minister's ethics screen and the impact it's had on him, or perhaps not. That will be up to Mr. Imbleau to determine through questioning that it is impactful with respect to the system. What we're deliberating and dealing with here is the ethics issue.

Ms. Church, I trust that you'll take Mr. Thériault's intervention with the sincerity in which it was intended. I expect that we're going to get back on the subamendment, which is to have Mr. Imbleau appear before the committee for two hours. In my opinion, I think you're on it, but I want you to continue to stay focused on it, please.

Leslie Church: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think I'm being very clear, actually, in terms of my views on this subamendment.

Mr. Thériault, I hear you. However, I would ask us, having called witnesses before in other matters, to also hear our concern that, based on what we know of the situation right now, Mr. Imbleau is not proposed to be here to contribute to a discussion of the Minister of Finance's conflict of interest screen that the minister established inside the Ministry of Finance. There is a deeper proposition here, a deeper expedition, that stems from, frankly, a concern on the other side of the table about this project as a whole.

To bring Mr. Imbleau here, to take him away from what we think is a very important role, driving this project forward, to participate in a fishing expedition, is not a good use of his time at a time when we are trying to cut this project's approval time in half. That requires the attention of the CEO. We want him to be doing the work of actually getting high-speed rail on track and advancing at high speed, so to speak.

• (0850)

The Chair: Ms. Church, can I intervene for a second?

Again, like all of us, I've sat here for 14 hours. My expectation as chair is that we are not inviting Mr. Imbleau to specifically talk about the merits of the Alto system. As I've mentioned a couple of times, there are varying opinions on that around this table. Some members clearly support it, and some members clearly do not. I think the fundamental issue that we're dealing with here is the finance minister's claims that he did create an ethics screen.

In my opinion, and I think I'm hearing this from other members, the value that Mr. Imbleau can provide is whether, in fact, notwithstanding this ethics screen that was applied, there were discussions between the finance minister and perhaps Mr. Imbleau as it related to the screen, as it related to decisions with respect to Alto, funding, financing and all of this stuff. Everything that the finance minister has said he recused himself from, in my opinion, Mr. Imbleau has some value to add to that discussion of what this motion is calling for.

I want to make it clear that this is not about Alto and the value and the merits of the system for having Mr. Imbleau here. I think he has a lot to add to this discussion. I just wanted to intervene to make that point, Ms. Church. At least from the perspective that I have been sitting here for 14 hours listening intently to all of the arguments that are being made. I think both the Conservatives and the Bloc have indicated that this has nothing to do with the system itself. They may not agree with it, and that's fine. This is all about the finance minister and the ethics screen and how it was applied or wasn't applied.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, I hear what you are saying; however, I don't think that the Ethics Commissioner could have been clearer. When you raise the spectre of what conversations have there been, what interaction has there been, the Ethics Commissioner has been crystal clear in saying, "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". If that is the language and the decision of the Ethics Commissioner, then that is what we, as parliamentarians, as an ethics committee, should be relying on.

We have tasked the Ethics Commissioner. We have built, as parliamentarians a regime on ethics that allows the type of inquiry that you are suggesting, Mr. Chair, to be invested in an Ethics Commissioner, someone who is independent and above the wonderful partisanship that the rest of us all live within, to be able to objectively look at these types of situations and to provide guidance that should be accepted by parliamentarians.

The Minister of Finance acted on the basis of the advice provided by the Ethics Commissioner, end of story, *point final*. We could call Mr. Imbleau to committee here. We could go on an expedition to find out what discussions he has with the federal government as a CEO of a Crown corporation on a major nation-building project where, of course, there are conversations with the government about how to proceed on high-speed rail, but that is actually beside the point. If we're being honest with ourselves, what is happening here with this motion is an attempt to bring individuals who are adjacent to this committee to make it into a circus. This committee is saying they reject they advice of the Ethics Commissioner. That is not an appropriate way—

• (0855)

[*Translation*]

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

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

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, I don't think it's turning it into a circus to invite the commissioner here to provide us with an explanation based on information he possesses—namely, legislation the committee is currently reviewing.

With all due respect, I have questions for the commissioner, not only regarding what is, but also regarding what should be. This situation is anything but a circus. With all due respect to the people speaking here, this is an ethics committee, and with the tools at our disposal, our goal is to shed light on a situation and better understand it. That's the purpose of this motion.

I have questions for the Ethics Commissioner; perhaps Mrs. Church does not. I also have questions for Mr. Imbleau, particularly regarding Bill C-15 and the extraordinary power that Bill C-15 grants Alto concerning expropriation and those affected by it. It's not a circus when you're someone whose property has been expropriated and you no longer enjoy the protections currently afforded by the Expropriation Act. You will understand that being treated like a circus animal is almost a question of privilege.

The Liberals are filibustering. They oppose the principle that an ethics committee can summon three parties in connection with, at the very least, a perceived conflict of interest, which was even confirmed by the minister's actions. Can we have a slightly more respectful tone? If the Liberals want to continue filibustering because they don't want this committee to have better tools to manage such situations in the future, or to better understand them in the future, I don't know what we're doing here.

The Liberals are currently calling into question the very principle of an ethics committee. What do they have to lose? If everything had been done by the book, they would have demonstrated in under six hours that everything was in order.

The Chair: Mr. Thériault, I gave you the time to explain.

[*English*]

We've all been very patient throughout the course of these now 15 hours that we're heading into. In my humble opinion, it's clear to some what this motion is intended for; however, it may not be as clear to others. I don't disagree on the relevance of this.

Again, Ms. Church, I'm going to ask that you take what Mr. Thériault said with respect and the purpose for which it's intended. That is, we need to stick to what is in front of us, which is the motion to add Mr. Imbleau.

Mr. Thériault has claimed, and I believe others have, that this is relevant to this motion with respect to Bill C-15 and the powers that were given to him by the finance minister. The finance minister actually voted on Bill C-15, despite the fact that he claimed he had an ethics screen that was to protect him from involving himself for a conflict that he, himself, had declared.

Again, this motion is in front of us.

I'm going to ask, Ms. Church, on the subamendment by Mr. Hardy that we invite Mr. Imbleau, if you don't agree with the subamendment, call the vote and vote against it. Then we can move on to the main motion.

Go ahead, please, Ms. Church.

• (0900)

Leslie Church: I do hear you, Mr. Thériault. I wish we didn't have to devote this kind of time to this kind of motion. I hear your concerns around ensuring that we are taking questions of the ethical conduct of parliamentarians seriously. I think it's our position that we would gladly invite the Ethics Commissioner to the committee to discuss this.

Mr. Chair, if it would move our discussions forward, I would gladly seek unanimous consent to move a motion that I would put on the table right now.

That motion could be, "Given that the Minister of Finance and National Revenue proactively wrote to the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to declare his relationship with the newly hired executive at Alto high-speed rail; that the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner determined that there was no risk of a conflict and no screen was required; that the Minister of Finance and National Revenue nonetheless opted to re-cuse himself from the project via a self-imposed conflict of interest screen; that the committee: (a) invite the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to testify for two hours to discuss the Conflict of Interest Act, its application to cabinet deliberations and parliamentary votes, and whether any conflict of interest took place in this instance; (b) would reserve the right, following the appearance of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, to invite both the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and the CEO from Alto high-speed rail to answer any outstanding questions."

Mr. Chair, I'm happy to move that motion and seek unanimous consent to do that. This would bring the Ethics Commissioner to the committee on this topic, so we can hear directly from him about it and it would reserve the right to have both the Minister of Finance and the CEO here subsequently.

The Chair: That was a fairly substantive way—

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, on a point of order.

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

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, the text of this motion includes what the study's conclusion should be. I find it a bit ironic that, after 15 hours, the motion being proposed sets out the study's conclusion.

The Chair: Mr. Thériault, I'm sorry, but Mrs. Church is seeking unanimous consent for this motion. There's no debate on this. I must ask all members whether there is unanimous consent.

Do we have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: It is not agreed.

[*English*]

Ms. Church, continue please.

We're not on the unanimous consent motion. We're on the subamendment. Any comments related to that are not relevant to the discussion.

We are on the subamendment regarding Mr. Imbleau.

Go ahead, please.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, to me, the issue here is whether or not this committee is open to hearing from the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. As for any of the executives at Alto or Mr. Imbleau himself, it is the Conflict of Interest Commissioner who would have, by far, the most relevance to the type of inquiry that Mr. Thériault and other members of this committee are speaking about. That is why from the outset we've been very clear that we are open to having the Ethics Commissioner speak to this committee about this topic.

Calling in the appropriate witnesses to offer testimony on this matter is exactly what this committee should be focused on. The reality is that it's the Ethics Commissioner who has the purview over this, who has the all of the facts of the case, who has provided public comment on it, who has provided guidance to the Minister of Finance and who would be the best person for this committee, in fact, for all parliamentarians in the public to hear from.

It is disappointing that we can't find consensus to start with the Ethics Commissioner and govern ourselves accordingly on the basis of his appreciation of this issue. Certainly, compared against the subamendment that we have here, the Ethics Commissioner is far better positioned to speak to these issues.

Mr. Imbleau, as the CEO of Alto—

• (0905)

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, on a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Thériault, you have the floor.

Luc Thériault: I don't know whether it's because I'm tired, but I do not understand Mrs. Church's remarks at all. I just want to clarify things, because we need to be able to focus our comments.

I understand from her remarks that the motion and the subamendment to the main motion would mean we would not want to hear from the Ethics Commissioner, even though, from the outset, he has been one of the three parties we want to hear from. This is just a subamendment intended to clarify the second point. Rather than deleting this point entirely, as Mr. Saini wanted, and rather than retaining the wording of the second point of the original motion, which provided for the appearance of Alto executives and the CEO, Mr. Hardy's subamendment aimed to clarify the second point so that only the CEO would be invited to appear. Thus, no other Alto representative would be called to testify. The bill cannot therefore be delayed by our remarks.

I don't understand where Mrs. Church is going with this. I don't understand how she can claim we're opposed to hearing from the Ethics Commissioner.

I wonder if, deep down, she's debating the motion that was rejected without any mention of the subamendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériault. I'm still wondering whether this is a point of order.

I understand you are asking a question, but a point of order is not subject to a debate.

[*English*]

Ms. Church, you have the floor.

I actually erred in procedure there, and I'll admit this to the committee. Once a motion is moved, we move on to the next speaker. I didn't do that. I gave you the floor, but go ahead, Ms. Church. Please consider Mr. Thériault's comments as well, because I'm in agreement with them.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, I think I've been clear in my opposition to the subamendment and clear in the opposition to needlessly calling executives from Alto or Mr. Imbleau to this committee, particularly prior to hearing from the Ethics Commissioner. If the committee is interested in hearing from the Ethics Commissioner, that is entirely appropriate. We have a sense from his ruling that there is "no risk of a conflict of interest and that a conflict of interest screen is not required". We can hear from him about his considerations, how he arrived at that conclusion. That is obviously the most relevant testimony to the inquiry that's being sought here by the overall motion, but on the subamendment, I've been clear that we do not agree with it on the basis of substantive concerns about the propriety of calling Alto to an inquiry on this as a whole. Also, if the interest is in calling Alto's senior executives or Mr. Imbleau, by its very nature we would anticipate that not only would this committee want to explore ethics questions, but also questions relating to Alto as a project itself, which would properly reside elsewhere, as we've discussed.

Mr. Chair, I think I've been clear, but I will end my remarks. I'll ask to be returned to the speakers list, and I look forward to hearing from other colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Church.

I had Madam Lapointe, but she's no longer with us, so I'm going to move to Mr. Hardy.

Mr. Lavoie, I'm going to put you below Ms. Church.

• (0910)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hardy, you have the floor.

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We are now in the 15th hour of debate, which is supposed to be the very definition of what we do here, but which, for 14 hours and 30 minutes out of a total of 15 hours, has been more of a Liberal monologue.

The first question asked today was this: Why are we here with so little time to prepare? I think this is a perfect demonstration of the Liberal government's attitude: It creates a problem, and then wonders why it finds itself in this situation, and blames the opposition for putting it there.

We're discussing a simple motion. We want to call three individuals to appear before the committee for two hours each, for a total of six hours. The debate has now been going on for 15 hours, which is disrupting everyone's schedule, as I understand it, and costing taxpayers a fortune. We have heard about everything except what we need to discuss, and then we are accused of wasting the committee's time. This is serious.

Furthermore, we have repeatedly proposed ways to resolve this. We accepted an amendment to remove the obligation to report to Parliament, even though I believe that is the basis of our work here. What we're doing here should be presented to parliamentarians and to Parliament. We agreed not to do so to save time.

We also agreed to clarify that we did not wish to call the minister's spouse to testify. That seemed to be a concern. That's fine; we did so. We didn't want it to be too broad for Alto's leadership, and we agreed to that as well.

My subamendment aims to clarify that we wish to call three individuals who work for the government to testify. Let's stop being told that they don't have time or that they have other things to do. They work for the people; they are paid by the public. We want these individuals to come and testify. They are paid by taxpayers, and they have nothing better to do than come and answer our questions. They are paid by the people, who have questions.

We are the opposition. We hear the questions being asked. People are telling us that a minister recused himself and that, on 16 occasions, he voted, participated in the debate, defended the bill and answered questions. Why can't we have him appear here to answer legitimate questions before an ethics committee?

Earlier, Mrs. Church said that this matter might need to be considered by the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure, and Communities. In fact, the view that has been presented is that we want to reopen the debate on the high-speed rail project. That is not at all what we want to do. We want to ask questions of people who are potentially involved in an ethical conflict. This is the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics. So, over the past 15 hours, we were right to say that what was happening here was irrelevant, because people were talking about the possibility of reinventing the wheel and revisiting the Alto project. That is not the subject of today's debate or the monologue we are engaging in.

So, after 15 hours of debate at great expense to taxpayers, can we return to my subamendment, which is clear and effective?

[English]

Leslie Church: Point of order.

The Chair: On a point of order, Ms. Church, go ahead.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, only because there were several points of order brought up during my testimony speaking to the subamendment, I would ask Mr. Hardy to stay focused on the subamendment.

The Chair: Stay focused on the subamendment.

[Translation]

Gabriel Hardy: Mr. Chair, I'll repeat my last sentence exactly: Can we stay focused on the subamendment?

Once again, we've just experienced something unusual, because I'm asking the committee to focus on my subamendment, and Mrs. Church is asking me to focus on the subamendment. It would be nice if people listened when we speak. That would be incredible. It would save us time.

I would like to understand what is expected of us. Are we expected not to ask questions? What is the point of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics if we are not allowed to call people from Parliament who may have a conflict of interest to testify? That is the focus of our committee.

I'll wrap up here, because I've made it quite clear that things aren't going the way they should. In my view, we should be here to work for the people. What is being proposed? We want to bring in a minister, and that's okay. We want to bring in the Ethics Commissioner, and that's okay. However, talking to Alto is not okay. Is that right? If that's the case, are they moving a motion to say that the minister and the Ethics Commissioner are invited? Let them put forward a motion removing Alto, and we'll see what happens. After that, however, we need to ensure that we stop wasting time and we move forward.

This is already the third time we've agreed to the Liberals' requests to move things forward and respect citizens and taxpayers. Can we move forward and propose something so we can wrap this up? Can we stop the monologues about how we don't want the minister to come and answer questions and how we don't want citizens to get clear answers?

Thank you.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardy.

Mr. Thériault, I see your hand is raised.

Here are the names on my list: Mr. Sari, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Saini, Mrs. Church, Mr. Lavoie and Mr. Thériault.

Mr. Sari on the subamendment.

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Chair, I would indeed like to speak about the subamendment.

Once again, as I've said a number of times, I'm delighted to be a member of this committee. I'm honoured to be part of this committee. I'm also honoured to be taking part in this debate. I wouldn't go so far as to call it a monologue. I do think that it shows the attitude of each party in this room. We can see two attitudes. I would like to start my analysis of the subamendment from this perspective.

What brought us to this point? What's the process? What happened? What's this all about? It's about an initiative by Mr. Barrett, to whom I extend my greetings. He did an excellent job and he asked the commissioner questions. I found this quite useful and he brought up some points. As Mr. Hardy said earlier, our role as members of Parliament is to take this type of approach. The opposition's role is to call into question the actions of any government. Mr. Barrett did what he needed to do. He did indeed write to the commissioner. That's good.

I thought that he took a good approach, as did the Minister of Finance. He too, with his valuable experience in the House of Commons and as a minister, took the right approach. At this time, we can see two quite good developments. The commissioner responded to the minister, and the Minister of Finance felt that he had to go even further. He showed this and he did so. I commend this work.

However, I don't know whether the commissioner responded to Mr. Barrett. As a member of Parliament, Mr. Barrett is entitled to write and ask questions. However, he's also a committee member. I don't know whether he received a response. Let's look at both cases. If he received a response, would it be worth sharing the response with us? That would give us an idea of whether we should invite the commissioner to appear here and to explain how we should act as a committee.

I also agree with Mr. Thériault's comments. We're also in the process of reviewing our regulations and our policies on conflicts of interest. We're at a crossroads, where we're reviewing our methods. We wrote to the commissioner. Should we wait for his response or invite him now? I wonder.

I'll get back to the subamendment. I think that it's vital to provide explanations. I think that the people tuning in are a bit lost. They don't know whether we're sitting or whether we'll be talking about a topic. I fully agree with Mr. Hardy when he says that people have the right to know. However, the people tuning in also have the right to know whether we're sitting. They have the right to know whether the discussion on Mr. Barrett's motion was adjourned. Remember that Mr. Barrett himself, when he moved the motion, decided to suspend the discussion a few hours later. Mr. Hardy then resumed the discussion on this topic, somewhat belatedly, and people didn't necessarily tune in.

That's why we need to explain the situation. We're accused of monologuing, but there has been some back and forth. Last night, we learned something.

I'm delighted to be here this morning. I'm really ready to listen. I'm hearing some good things from all sides. We have a wealth of experience, expertise and useful knowledge in this room. Even when I disagree, I'm listening with interest.

● (0920)

When it comes to the subamendment and Mrs. Church's proposal, we've been asked to come up with something. We're looking at the logical reasoning. Let's bring the commissioner back since we don't have the response given to Mr. Barrett and we don't know whether Mr. Barrett received a response. Let's talk to the commissioner and decide then. That's the right thing to do.

At some point, if we really want to show people transparency, let's start by showing them how we think as a government or as the opposition. The Conservative Party seems to have been acting this way from the start. The Conservative Party was against the project, then it was for the project, then it was against the project again, while all Canadians seem to support the project. I won't go into this any further, or there may be another point of order.

I'm still talking about the subamendment. In terms of the three points, I'm questioning the approach taken. I'm calling for a sensible approach. Yesterday, we heard from OECD officials. They said that we received a good rating on the lobbying issue. We have a good image abroad, but the public is giving us a 49% rating for trust.

The issues being raised today aren't sensible. We'll erode the trust that we're building as a committee. I'm sitting here, and I'm proud to be here, because we can instill greater confidence among people and assure them that our institutions are functioning as effectively as possible. However, when we talk about perception or hypothetical cases, or when we aren't sure about the purpose of a motion, it can be quite a problem.

I'll get back to the approach that we should take. The sensible approach to building public confidence would be to ask for independent expertise. Do our institutions have this type of expertise? The answer is yes. The commissioner is an independent officer of Parliament. Could anyone here say that the commissioner isn't independent? He's in a good position to give us a basis for discussions—a neutral basis—before we embark on the next step.

Before going any further, before talking to Alto, before summoning the minister here, before bringing up potentially hypothetical issues for people to consider, before starting to sow doubt, let's use the independent resources at our disposal. Let's call on this officer of Parliament, whom I hope we all trust. He's in a good position and he'll give us a neutral basis for discussions, as I just said, before we do anything else.

Perhaps it's still too early to talk to Alto. I would like to acknowledge Alto's work and say that I have some good things in common with Mr. Imbleau. We both studied at the Université du Québec à Montréal. I'm proud to be part of that university. I was even on the faculty.

I know that person. If he comes here, he won't be talking about ethics. He's now in charge of a project. He'll certainly be talking about transportation. I think that it would be more appropriate to invite him to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to see whether the project is being carried out properly, whether the stages are properly identified, whether the resources are available—including financial resources—and so on. Are there benchmarks? Are there any issues? Is there a real consultation? We can ask these questions.

However, we're proposing to invite him here to address an issue that has already been brought to the commissioner's attention and to which we haven't even received a response yet. Even the public will want to know the commissioner's opinion. No one can say this. The only opinion available to us is the one provided to the Minister of Finance. I would tell Mr. Thériault that there isn't any conflict of interest. The commissioner gave us this response. Is there an appearance of a conflict of interest? Let's invite the commissioner so we can ask him that question.

● (0925)

We can then discuss the matter together. After all, we're members of Parliament here. I would like to acknowledge some of the members. Even on the other side of the room, there are people with expertise and experience. I can hear Mr. Chair, Mr. Barrett, Mr. Cooper and Mr. Hardy speaking. They have experience, but we'll debate these issues later. Of course, I would like to acknowledge Mr. Thériault's tremendous expertise.

Again, let's hear from the commissioner first, and then talk. When we have the response that may or may not have been sent to Mr. Barrett, we can determine whether it's appropriate to invite Alto. Perhaps even when we hear from the commissioner, we can ask him about the basis for his response to the minister. We'll be open and we'll have two hours to ask him questions.

I don't support the motion. I don't agree with Mr. Barrett on this motion at all. However, he did his job and I respect his work. That's why he was elected and why his constituents chose him. He chose to be part of the opposition. He's doing his job as the opposition. I think that, when you start a job in a respectful manner, you must continue it. We should have access to the response sent or not sent to Mr. Barrett.

I also want to make it clear that we aren't here to protect anyone. That's not the point. I heard that argument, but I didn't want to raise a point of order. I'll say it again. I didn't receive an order from anyone. The only orders that I can receive come from my constituency, from my constituents, around 63% of whom voted for me to represent them. They have that right, and they're listening to us.

Since I agreed to be a member of this committee, I have a role to play. I hope to contribute, if only in a small way, to strengthening overall public trust in our municipal, provincial and federal institutions. My role isn't to undermine that trust. Quite the contrary. We must be extremely careful about this.

I'm not here to protect anyone. I want to make sure that our committee—the Conservatives, the Bloc and the Liberals—proceeds in a well-established and logical order. I want us to work based on normal logic. First, let's invite the commissioner, who can give us some direction. Do we have to agree with him? Good question. I like it when we disagree sometimes. However, remember that we're in the process of drawing up a report to revise the ethics regulations.

I find this relevant. It's worth noting. We're doing this exercise today. People say the debate has been going on for 14, 15 or 16 hours. However, this isn't about the number of hours. It's about acknowledging that we ourselves must work in an ethical manner. We must be very representative and we must take responsibility for the duties that we have been given. I think that we should avoid making assumptions.

In the remarks coming from the other side of the room, there's one point that I disagree with completely. We must avoid assuming, even before the commissioner's first testimony, that multiple appearances are automatic and necessary. That isn't for us to judge. What did we use as a basis? Was it newspaper articles? I hope not. Was it hearsay? I hope not. That isn't the committee's role. What did we use as a basis?

• (0930)

I'll come back to Mr. Barrett's initiative, which is quite relevant. He wrote to the commissioner. It's a good approach. It's an excellent approach. However, I don't have the response. I wish that I had it. In place of this debate, I wish that Mr. Brassard had also written to the commissioner. That wasn't done. What do we want? Do we want to make clips? Do we want to put on a show? Whether it lasts 14 hours or 24 hours, it will last as long as it lasts. We're all here and we all have our points of view. Personally, as long as I'm confident in my point of view, I'll debate it at midnight today, this weekend, Monday or Tuesday. We're ready. I'm ready.

I want people to trust this institution. My role isn't to erode that trust in the government, in the House, in the committee and in a project where we're lagging far behind other countries. We're quite far behind. It just doesn't make sense.

Again, we're sowing doubt with hypothetical issues. If the commissioner raised the flag himself, it would be a different matter. No, we're in the process of raising the flag following a question asked and not answered and following a response that runs counter to the motion, meaning the response given to the Minister of Finance.

The commissioner can also help us do a job. I'm still talking about the subamendment. At least people can't say that I'm monologuing, that I'm talking about wild turkeys or highway 50. I'm talking about the committee and the work that we're doing. At least I'm being thanked.

Even before we decide whether to invite witnesses, the commissioner will help and guide us, given his independent expertise, his knowledge and his experience. He can tell us which individuals or groups to invite and which study to conduct. He can also tell us what documents we really need. Perhaps a mistake has been made in one area and we'll need to make adjustments.

We're in the review process and the report hasn't yet been published. So we have an opportunity. However, what do we want to do? We want to bring in the minister and all the Alto employees, when Alto is doing an excellent job on an excellent project that exemplifies Canada. The commissioner can also give us guidance for our discussions.

I'm not calling into question or determining the direction for questions. Far from it. I said it before and I'll say it again. I identified the people here who are the real committee members. These members are Mr. Barrett, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Hardy and Mr. Thériault. They have knowledge, but again we have an independent body, an independent commissioner. I think that our potential discussions with him could be quite useful. This will help us to better focus on our objectives, to get a better sense of direction and to receive better guidance for what comes next.

Instead of putting on a show—

• (0935)

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

The Chair: Mr. Thériault has a point of order.

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, part of Mr. Sari's speech was respectful of the work we've been doing for the last 15 hours. However, he is now repeating—perhaps because he has run out of arguments—that we are putting on a show.

To hear him tell it, the Ethics Commissioner alone could single-handedly resolve all ethical issues that Parliament might raise. However, the Ethics Commissioner was appointed by elected officials, who did not put on a show. Our responsibility, as parliamentarians, is to make laws and amend the law that the commissioner will enforce. Yes, we are currently conducting a review.

That said, Mr. Chair, could you call the meeting to order? Right now, we're not discussing the possibility of hearing from the commissioner.

The commissioner is already listed as the first item in the original motion. We are discussing a subamendment. We let the member speak because he hadn't spoken in a long time.

The Chair: Yes.

Luc Thériault: We are discussing hearing from the CEO, Mr. Imbleau.

The Chair: Yes.

Luc Thériault: The commissioner has made a decision, and we can challenge it based on what should be done going forward.

So I don't know what the Liberals are afraid of.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériault. You're right.

Mr. Sari, we are debating the subamendment, and it intended to summon Mr. Imbleau, not the commissioner. If you have something to say about that, we can discuss it when we debate the motion. Right now, the debate is not about the motion. The debate is about the subamendment concerning Mr. Imbleau.

If you continue, I'm going to have to intervene.

[*English*]

Relevance is important here and I will exercise my authority. If you do repeat yourself, I will move on to the next speaker.

Go ahead, Mr. Sari.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Thériault.

Perhaps I'm not expressing myself clearly, but I'm referring to the summons that we want to send to Alto and Mr. Imbleau, and also to the minister. I'm just speaking about the order of proceedings. I'm not straying from the subject. I am expressing my disagreement with the subamendment and providing arguments. I tried to avoid remarks that might not be well received on the other side of the room, but I see that, at times, on the other side, people feel comfortable making such remarks.

That's okay. We're here on this Friday morning. Some of you may be tired. Personally, I am not, and I haven't run out of arguments, far from it. This is just the beginning.

What I am saying, quite simply, is that we have a very interesting resource at our disposal, which may confirm what I am saying—namely, which is that it would not be appropriate to summon Alto's executives, as proposed by Mr. Hardy's subamendment, to which I am currently speaking.

Let's proceed in order. Let's first use the resources at our disposal. Let's start by hearing from the person—

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

Mr. Sari says that the opposition is making hypothetical arguments, and yet he's still talking about the commissioner and saying that the commissioner will tell us it is not appropriate to have Mr. Imbleau appear. That is hypothetical.

Above all, he's indirectly doing what he can't do directly, which is to say he's trying to convince us that we need to hear from the commissioner. That's the first item in the motion. The motion calls, in order, for the commissioner, Alto and its CEO, and the Minister of Finance to appear. That's how the motion is worded.

The issue concerns summoning Mr. Imbleau. That's what we must discuss. We must not speak indirectly about the fact that the

commissioner might tell us that it's not necessary to have him appear.

• (0940)

The Chair: I understand, Mr. Thériault.

Luc Thériault: The commissioner is not going to tell parliamentarians what to do.

The Chair: Mr. Sari, we're talking about summoning Mr. Imbleau. If you talk about the commissioner again, if you repeat the same thing or if you say something that's irrelevant, I will have to go to Mr. Cooper, who is next on the list.

Mr. Sari, go ahead on the subamendment.

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Chair, I don't really understand. Am I not being clear? What I'm saying is that—

[*English*]

The Chair: I think—

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think the issue is you are speaking to things that are not relevant. The subamendment speaks to Mr. Imbleau being invited. I also think there's a lot of repetition going on. I'm going to give you one more opportunity, if you want to go, go. If not, then I'll move on to Mr. Cooper.

Go ahead, Mr. Sari.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: There are a number of points I want to make as to why it wouldn't be appropriate to call Alto to testify right now.

The first is that we haven't yet drawn on the knowledge and expertise of the commissioner, who could advise us on whether or not it's appropriate to proceed in this manner.

Is that clear? There's nothing hypothetical about that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Again, we're not on whether the commissioner is coming to committee. That is part of the main motion. We're on a subamendment specifically related to Mr. Imbleau. You can talk about the commissioner, but it's not relevant to this subamendment, quite frankly. The argument you should be making is whether Mr. Imbleau should be coming to committee, not whether the commissioner comes, not whether the finance minister comes. That's what this subamendment is about. It's about inviting Mr. Imbleau to this committee. You either agree with that or you don't.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: I disagree with calling Mr. Imbleau to appear here.

In fact, I will explain why I disagree with including him in the motion as subamended by Mr. Hardy.

I'm in—

[English]

The Chair: That's precisely what I'm saying.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: May I explain why I disagree?

[English]

The Chair: If you're against it, then there's really no need to repeat it. You made that point already.

I'm going to let you go, and then I'll make a determination on relevance and repetition in a very short period of time. If you stray, then I will move on to Mr. Cooper.

Go ahead, sir.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank Mr. Thériault.

I'm just trying to explain why it wouldn't be appropriate to move immediately to the other two items, as proposed in Mr. Hardy's sub-amendment. I have already presented a first argument, which focused on the importance of first utilizing using the commissioner's independent resources.

Now, let's talk about Martin Imbleau and why it wouldn't be appropriate to invite him to appear here. What is this about? You have to read the wording of the motion. I put myself in the shoes of the head of a large company like Alto, who would come here to answer questions about an appearance of conflict of interest or an actual conflict of interest. I don't see what questions I can ask him if I don't really have the necessary documentation, given that an independent resource has already indicated that there was no conflict of interest.

Mr. Imbleau has some very interesting leadership and project management skills, especially when it comes to carrying out infrastructure projects. I invite my colleagues to read his biography. He's a pretty interesting guy, but where does he fit in here? How would it be appropriate to include him in a discussion about a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest? What might be interesting to do one day is to see how Alto conducts its consultations, because exceptional work is being done with indigenous communities. I would find it fascinating to ask him questions about that.

As far as the motion tabled by Mr. Barrett is concerned, I don't see how a person who has served as CEO of the Port of Montreal could help us with ethics. He's someone who is managing a major project today. I don't see how he could help us with an ethical issue or how he could guide us. He's also someone who worked at Hydro-Québec. I don't see the relevance. That said, I might be wrong.

Which individual can tell us whether or not it's a good idea to call him to testify here? Unfortunately, we skipped the step of consulting the person who could guide us and tell us who to summon. Here's what I'm saying, quite simply. There may be some who aren't listening to what I'm saying. Let's not forget that I was a teacher for many years. I was a teacher in Quebec for over 18 years. I was taught that repetition is sometimes a good way to

teach students. Some things need to be reiterated. It works for some people.

In closing, I'd like to say something very important. My goal is to ensure that the Canadians listening to us—even if we pause the discussion, resume it and start it again on Friday morning—will always have faith in our institutions. I think some people are interested. I hope we're not contributing to eroding their trust in our institutions. I hope we are not introducing motions to publish excerpts. The goal is simply to summon the commissioner, as Mrs. Church rightly said, and I hope that my remarks will be taken into consideration and accepted. I would like us to summon the commissioner first, as provided for in the first item, and then reserve the right to summon any individuals it would be appropriate to summon. I therefore reiterate Mrs. Church's request.

I hope that, with everything I have said, we will this time be able to capture the attention of our colleagues on the other side of the room, for whom I have a great deal of respect. Lastly, for the Canadians listening to us, I want to say that, on the government side, we want this project to move forward. Canadians deserve it. We need it. Countries like Japan, France or Morocco are no better than Canada. Canada has the right to have its own high-speed rail.

We don't need this kind of obstruction or disruption. On the contrary, we need the trust of the people, the trust they placed in us when they went to the polls in Terrebonne. Thank you.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sari.

[English]

There was a lot of latitude given there. I am going to refer members to section 20.110 under "Committees and Questions of Procedure and Privilege". It speaks to the issue of disorder of conduct. In 10 minutes, we will head into the 16th hour of this debate. I think I quoted this section the other day. I want to point out to the committee specifically what it says about the authority of the chair:

In addition, the Chair may, at their discretion, interrupt a member whose observations and questions are repetitive or are unrelated to the matter before the committee. If the member in question persists in making repetitive or off-topic comments, the Chair can give the floor to another member.

This is something that I don't exercise, or don't want to exercise lightly. As members of this committee have been part of this committee for a while, I understand that—

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Chair—

[English]

The Chair: Hang on. I'm not finished.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: I just want to tell you that there's a fire alarm in the building we're in right now.

Then I'm going to come back to what you said.

[English]

The Chair: It's something that I don't exercise. I try to use my discretion on it, but I will tell you....

What's that?

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: There is a fire alarm. I don't know if we can ignore it. I repeat, there is a fire alarm.

[English]

The Chair: Is there a fire alarm in this building?

Abdelhaq Sari: Yes, in this building.

The Chair: Sorry, I was on a roll there and I didn't see it. I am going to suspend for a couple of minutes.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: We have to suspend the meeting until the fire alarm is done. Those are the rules. The committee does not supersede these rules.

[English]

The Chair: I am going to suspend until this is dealt with by the fire services and PPS.

• (0945) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1000)

The Chair: We're resuming the meeting after suspending for a fire alarm.

As I was saying, I referred members to the procedure book under "Committees and Questions of Procedure and Privilege". I'm going to repeat myself. We're 16 hours into this now. Section 20.110 states:

In addition, the Chair may, at their discretion, interrupt a member whose observations and questions are repetitive or are unrelated to the matter before the committee. If the member in question persists in making repetitive or off-topic comments, the Chair can give the floor to another member.

Given the length of this debate and what I deem as some repetitive comments, I'm going to be exercising that authority. Again, as I said earlier, I try to give a lot of latitude no matter what we're doing because I believe fundamentally that the member's time is the member's time, but when a member drones on and carries on into repetition, that becomes a problem for me.

Anybody who's been part of this committee for as long as I've been chair knows that whether it's a discussion on any study that we're doing, debate or questioning, I give a lot of latitude, but I'm going to narrow that latitude quite a bit as we move forward.

Next on the list on the subamendment which involves Mr. Imbleau coming to committee, not the executives, not the finance minister's wife, nobody but Mr. Imbleau coming before this committee on the issue of the finance minister's ethics screen, is Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead, please.

• (1005)

[Translation]

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

[English]

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

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Chair, first of all, thank you for your demeanour, your words and your reminder.

That said, I would like to raise a point of order. The following is provided for in Standing Order 116(2)(a):

Unless a time limit has been adopted by the committee or by the House, the Chair of a standing, special or legislative committee may not bring a debate to an end while there are members present who still wish to participate. A decision of the Chair in this regard may not be subject to an appeal to the committee.

That's the first point I want to make on this point of order.

The second point, Mr. Chair, is that you raised the issue of relevance and being able to stop certain interventions when they're not relevant. You have outstanding experience and I greatly appreciate your work. However, I wonder if this allows the chair to rule that what a member is saying, whether it's me or another member, like Mr. Cooper, for example, is irrelevant or repetitive.

I say that in a very respectful and friendly way, and I thank you.

I am raising this point of order under Standing Order 116(2)(a). I would very much like us to maintain the level of work and co-operation we have always had. This is a friendly point of order, and I thank you.

[English]

The Chair: To answer your questions, Mr. Sari, the chair has no authority to end the debate as long as there are still speakers on the list. I understand that but as I said earlier, the specific reference in the book on procedures of the committee that I was referring to refers to the issues of repetition and relevance, and that the chair does have the discretion to move on to the next speaker.

If I exercise that authority, every member is well within their right to add their name back on the list, but their comments are irrelevant, off-topic or repetitive, then I can exercise that authority again.

As I said, I generally give a lot of latitude. You guys know that because you've been with this committee for a year, whether it's, as I said earlier, with studies, whether it's on this issue, I do that. However, we are getting into 16 hours, in my opinion, of repetition and irrelevance on what was first an agreement among the parties to remove something and yet the debate continued, and now we are on the removal of the executives of Alto and including just Mr. Imbleau to appear before the committee.

I happen to think that we can move on and deal with this, but I have no authority as long as there are members who are still on the list, but I do have authority under the issue of relevance and repetition and I will exercise that authority.

With that being said, I have Mr. Sari's name added again behind Mr. Thériault.

Mr. Cooper, you are charged with commencing the 16th hour of this issue being debated. I'm going to you now, sir, on the subamendment.

• (1010)

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

On the subamendment, I have listened carefully to the arguments put forward by Liberal MPs opposite, including Mr. Sari who last spoke. I want to respond to some of the arguments that he put forward in terms of his position that for some reason the CEO of Alto, Mr. Imbleau, is not a relevant witness. Mr. Sari concluded his comments by suggesting that somehow hearing from the CEO of Alto, demanding the CEO of Alto come before this committee and the process to get answers that we are dealing with, with this motion, is somehow undermining the trust of Canadians.

I'll tell Mr. Sari what is undermining the trust of Canadians. It is when a minister of the crown, the Minister of Finance, has a hand in directing billions of taxpayer dollars to a company, Alto, in which his partner is a vice-president.

I'll tell Mr. Sari what also is undermining the trust and confidence of Canadians. That is this 16-hour spectacle we have seen from members opposite, who have wasted time, who have filibustered—

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. If we could go back to Mr. Hardy's subamendment, it would be very relevant.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Michael Cooper: There they go, running interference yet again and wasting more time.

You know, I have seen this movie before. It was in the last Parliament at this committee during the dying days of the Trudeau government when the rot, and I mean the absolute rot, of that government had sunk in. The more things change, the more they stay the same, because here we have a minister of the Crown caught in a conflict of interest.

Leslie Church: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Church.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, as my colleague across the way knows full well, the Ethics Commissioner said exactly the opposite. At least let's debate the facts.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

Michael Cooper: Well, if Ms. Church wants to talk about facts, let me tell her a few facts about the Ethics Commissioner.

First of all, he hasn't responded to Mr. Barrett's letter. There were some very specific points that were raised, some specific allegations, specific references to sections of the Conflict of Interest Act. There has been no response from the Ethics Commissioner, and yet members opposite have suggested that. In fact, I think Mr. Sari, in his comments, opened by saying that Mr. Barrett had done such a great job doing his due diligence, sending a letter to the Ethics Commissioner, and that the Ethics Commissioner has responded. Well, no, Mr. Sari, the Ethics Commissioner has not responded to Mr. Barrett. In fact, the Ethics Commissioner hasn't, to my knowledge, made a statement regarding what appears to be a conflict of interest involving the Minister of Finance.

What I saw was a statement quoted in a CTV news story by someone in the Ethics Commissioner's office that is less than satisfactory in the face of the very serious issues and serious questions about the minister's involvement in handing out billions of dollars to Alto. By the way, if everything is so clear and obvious with the Ethics Commissioner, why is it that when the Minister of Finance has been asked to provide documentation, proof, that everything is on the up and up, he can't do that? He can't do that and won't do that and won't answer questions and is in hiding.

With respect to some of the arguments, if you can call them arguments, put forward by Mr. Sari as to why the CEO of Alto shouldn't appear, he said, first of all, that we don't need to hear from the CEO of Alto because the Ethics Commissioner is coming to committee. That is a circular argument. Of course the Ethics Commissioner is coming to committee. We need to hear from the Ethics Commissioner. No one is debating that. That doesn't provide any answer as to whether we need to also hear from the CEO of Alto.

Mr. Sari went on to say that the CEO of Alto is a CEO involved in a high-speed rail project and that he couldn't provide any relevant information on matters of ethics. In fact, Mr. Sari said he had no idea what questions he could possibly pose to the CEO of Alto. Give me a break. Respectfully, Mr. Chair, give me a break. We're not asking the CEO of Alto to come as some sort of expert on ethics. We're not asking him to come before this committee to provide his interpretation of various sections of the Conflict of Interest Act. Mr. Sari characterized him as coming in that capacity, to speak on matters of ethics. What is he talking about? What planet is he living on? What planet are those members living on? That's not why we want to hear from the CEO of Alto.

I want to hear from the CEO of Alto for a few reasons. The first is that the Minister of Finance has declared a conflict in respect of Alto and quite appropriately so, given that his partner is a vice-president. The Minister of Finance claimed that he set up an ethics screen, that he acted proactively, yet for a minister who set up an ethics screen, who was being so proactive, it was all very secret. No one had heard of this ethics screen. He never spoke about this ethics screen. He never spoke about this conflict until he got caught, and then all of a sudden, there was an ethics screen, and then he said he acted proactively.

• (1015)

[Translation]

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

No one caught out the finance minister. I would ask that Mr. Cooper withdraw the comments he just made. That's how the Ethics Commissioner responded.

With all due respect, I would ask him to withdraw his remarks. Out of respect for the people listening to us, it's important to provide them with accurate information that is consistent with what the Ethics Commissioner said.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that intervention, Mr. Sari.

I'm listening intently to Mr. Cooper, and I find that he's speaking specifically to the subamendment and what questions he actually wants to ask Mr. Imbleau. I find this to be very relevant to this discussion, and I'm going to ask him to continue.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Then the finance minister said that there's this ethics screen. No one had heard about it before. Then the minister's spokesman said, according to a National Post article dated April 6, 2026, "The minister fully respects the screen, meaning he is neither implicated in nor party to any discussions, decisions, or votes related to Alto."

The problem with that statement from the minister's spokesperson is that not one part of that, other than that there is an ethics screen in place, is accurate. The minister has repeatedly involved himself on matters pertaining to handing billions of dollars to Alto. He has introduced legislation. He has spoken to and defended that legislation. He has voted on that legislation. He included it in the budget. He even incorporated into the budget bill legislation the high-speed rail network act that was specific to Alto, that was to advance the Alto project.

The minister went before the Senate finance committee, and when he was challenged by Senator Carignan about the Alto project, he bragged about how he personally delivered the goods in relation to the Alto high-speed rail project, a company, of course, which his partner is a VP of, and of course, a company that he admits he has a conflict with in light of his partner's position at Alto.

Therefore, contrary to his assertion, or his spokesperson's assertion, he did have discussions. He did involve himself in decisions. He did involve himself in votes related to Alto. Based upon the statement of his spokesperson, respecting the screen means you don't have discussions, you don't have decisions, and you don't have votes related to Alto, but he did. Therefore, by the words of his spokesperson, he violated the ethics screen that supposedly was in place, but no one had ever heard about until he got caught.

Mr. Chair, why have—

• (1020)

[Translation]

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

The Minister of Finance has never been caught out. Let's not make inaccurate statements. Mr. Chair, I would ask that you make sure that what is being said is accurate. I repeat: It's important for the people listening to us that the facts presented be accurate.

[English]

Michael Cooper: Facts.

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Just because something is written on paper, that doesn't make it true. Just because it's posted on X or in a video doesn't make it true. The facts are the facts that were established by the commissioner.

There you have it.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, well, I appreciate that. I think we're trying to get to the facts here, Monsieur Sari.

Mr. Cooper, on the subamendment, I would appreciate that you return to Mr. Imbleau's presence as proposed in the subamendment, please.

Michael Cooper: This is what I'm getting to. What I just said goes to the very heart of why we need to hear from Mr. Imbleau. Mr. Sari says something about getting back to the facts. Well, I just quoted the minister's spokesperson. Is he saying that the minister's spokesperson didn't say that with respect to the ethics screen? Is that what he's saying? I'm just quoting him.

I don't know what he's talking about other than I guess he just decided he wants to delay things further, run interference yet again. It's all part of the game, all part of the charade, all to cover for the minister. That's what this is about. That's what the Liberals are doing over there. They have no interest in getting answers, none whatsoever.

Now, going to the subamendment—

[Translation]

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

We're not here to defend anybody. I've said this a number of times: I respect my colleagues opposite. I'm not here to defend anyone; I'm here to defend ethics.

He quoted the Minister of Finance's spokesperson, but he interpreted it in his own way. He said that the minister was caught in the act, which is not true.

I'm not saying that his comments are off topic.

The Chair: I understand.

Abdelhaq Sari: What I'm saying is that he's putting forward facts that aren't true.

There you go.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sari.

[English]

Points of order are not necessarily because you don't like what somebody is saying. I get that. It has to be relevant to the issue.

I am going to ask Mr. Cooper to deal with the subamendment.

• (1025)

Michael Cooper: Mr. Chair, going back to the ethics screen and the statement by the minister's spokesperson and what we know to be the minister's actions, including his involvement in various discussions and decisions, this speaks to the need to hear from the CEO of Alto.

We need to know what discussions, if any, the minister had with the CEO of Alto because that does go to the heart of whether there was a conflict. If there wasn't a technical conflict, at best, I think there are ethical questions at play in terms of the appropriateness of the Minister of Finance being involved in such discussions around advancing billions of dollars to the Alto project, given the role of his spouse.

At the end of the day, billions of tax dollars are at stake. This is a \$90-billion project, after all, and Canadians deserve to know—

[Translation]

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

Can we go back to the subamendment, which seeks to invite Mr. Imbleau?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Sari, I'm going to be frank here.

Mr. Cooper is talking about what he believes to be very relevant and specific questions that need to be asked of Mr. Imbleau. He's mentioned that several times. If he wasn't on that topic, I would tell him. I'm listening intently to what he's saying, and there are specific questions related to this that he feels he needs to ask Mr. Imbleau.

The subamendment that we're dealing with is having Mr. Imbleau come to committee and answer those questions. Mr. Cooper, in my opinion, is very on topic right now on that subamendment.

I would appreciate, unless it's an egregious issue that Mr. Cooper is talking about, no further interruptions.

Please continue, Mr. Cooper.

Michael Cooper: To your point, I'm speaking very specifically to the subamendment and why we need to hear from him to understand exactly what discussions the minister had, if any, relating to money that was directed towards Alto to advance the high-speed rail project because, as I said before Mr. Sari ran interference yet again, is that when billions and billions of tax dollars are at stake, Canadians deserve to know that personal relationships such as having a partner serve as VP at the company that is benefiting from those billions of dollars are not influencing those decisions.

When it comes to the CEO of Alto, let's be clear what the government and what the finance minister... He delivered the goods, as he bragged about doing. He delivered for Alto \$597 million for the 2025-26 preconstruction work, such as design, environmental work and consultations. Alto was also allocated \$3.9 billion over the next

six years for the project's co-development phase and \$125 million over the next few years for the project to get over various hurdles related to approvals and coordination.

The notion that the CEO of Alto was completely in the dark, had no idea, had no role, had no discussions, no involvement with billions of dollars coming to Alto is inconceivable. It speaks to why we need to hear from him, why he's a relevant witness.

There was another argument put forward, I don't think by Mr. Sari but by Ms. Church, as to why we shouldn't hear from him, despite what I would submit are very good reasons to hear from him. The argument was that as he's the CEO of Alto, he's so busy getting a high-speed rail project built at speed, so to speak, as Ms. Church put it, that it would be a big waste of his time.

Well, I mean, really? We have a potential conflict of interest. At best, there are serious questions about the minister's judgment in his involvement in this matter and a CEO of a taxpayer-funded company, a \$90-billion project paid for by taxpayers, and he's too busy to come before this committee and answer questions? Well, I'll tell you, the CEO of this company that is receiving billions and billions of tax dollars can damn well spend an hour or two before this committee to answer questions. He damn well better come before this committee, because we need to hear from him.

I would just say, it being hour 16, that the Liberals should, if there's nothing to see, if everything was above board, if the minister is in the clear, then what better way? What better way to hear from the Ethics Commissioner, to hear from the minister, and to hear from the CEO, who is obviously very much involved in the billions of dollars that Alto is receiving from this Liberal government?

With that I will leave it there.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Saini, on the subamendment about Mr. Imbleau appearing before committee, go ahead please.

Gurbux Saini (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Is it common when there's an ethics screen that it has to be announced publicly? Mr. Cooper keeps bringing up that this is a mandatory thing. I think as long as the Ethics Commissioner is aware of it and a member presides by that ruling, that's the most relevant thing.

The other thing I am having difficulty with, similar to Mr. Sari, is when we keep saying that the minister got caught. There is no such information that was public to say that the minister was caught. The minister voluntarily went to the Ethics Commissioner, stated the facts and moved on. This discussion is not going anywhere.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to move that we adjourn this meeting.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saini.

Mr. Saini has moved a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Do we have unanimous consent to adjourn the meeting?

An hon. member: We would like a recorded vote.

The Chair: There's a tie. I will vote no.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 4)

The Chair: Mr. Lavoie, I will remind you that we've been at this for 16 hours plus. I made it very clear that we are on the subamendment dealing with Mr. Imbleau. As I mentioned earlier, I'm not going to discuss the relevance, value or virtue of the Alto system. This is a subamendment that we're dealing with and I expect that you will stay on topic or else I will move to the next speaker.

Mr. Saini, you want to be put back on the list, so you are back on the list.

Mr. Lavoie, go ahead.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm happy to be here to replace my colleague Ms. Lapointe.

I'm happy to speak because it brings me back to something I used to love. In the past, I worked in the banking sector for more than 20 years. When we think of banks, we must also think of conflict-of-interest management and ethical issues. After all these years, I think I've become an expert on conflicts of interest and ethics. Every year, we had to sign a statement and ensure there were no conflicts of interest. I find it very meaningful to be here today to discuss this, both personally and for the broader debate.

I must say that I was a bit surprised by what I heard earlier. I'll start with the motion. When I read it, I note that at the time, that is, last September, the minister had recused himself. He followed the rules. The established rules were developed, debated and implemented by our predecessors. He decided to recuse himself. Today, we're debating a motion to reconsider this decision, and that surprises me.

As I was saying, I worked in the banking sector for a long time, and we know the Canadian banking system to be among the best in the world. That's the context in which I was trained. When there are rules, and they're respected, we don't go back on them. When commitments are made, we don't change the rules along the way thinking we'll revisit them later, just because there seems to be an issue. The rules were followed. So this process comes as a surprise to me.

Something else also surprised me. I'm referring to the relevance of remarks made during the debate. When I hear my colleague and riding neighbour Mr. Hardy, whom I appreciate, say that the high-speed rail train isn't relevant to this discussion, I take issue with that. I do think it's relevant to the discussion, and I'll tell you why. Everything is connected, and there is a cause-and-effect relationship.

I'm from the lower St. Lawrence region, and I grew up on a dairy farm. Here's how I'd put it: It's like talking about milk quality without talking about what the cow is eating, the stress it's under, or whether milking schedules are respected. We're only talking about the quality of the milk, but everything is connected.

We're dealing with the same thing here. As I joined the meeting this morning, I heard that a subamendment was being discussed, and that Mr. Imbleau, whom I know, is involved. I met him in my previous professional life, at the chamber of commerce. I had invited him as a speaker and interviewed him. Does that mean I should recuse myself today? Where does it end?

I was surprised when my colleague Mr. Hardy said that we were not talking about high-speed rail. Of course it's part of the discussion. His leader openly said he was against the high-speed rail project. I think it's part of the conversation. As I said, everything is connected.

I do understand that we need to talk about the subamendment. However, what I've heard since I got here is that it's irrelevant. I take some issue with that, especially when there's a conflict of interest.

As I mentioned, in the banking sector, when we analyze a situation, we look at everything. We turn over every stone. That's probably what the Ethics Commissioner did. It's also what those who came before us did in establishing these rules.

• (1040)

Today, we think that following the rules isn't enough. We're going to do this for everyone.

My spouse works for a company that receives provincial, federal and municipal funding. Should I recuse myself as an MP? Colleagues at the table might have a neighbour who works for a company that receives government funding. Should they also recuse themselves? At some point, we have to know where it starts and where it ends.

That's exactly why rules were established. In the past, very competent and experienced people sat around a table and decided to establish rules, because at some point, you have to know where it all starts and where it ends. The minister respected the rules and recused himself. However, today we want to put that back on the table.

We're talking about a subamendment, a single point, without looking at the overall context. This is what surprises me about the substance of the discussions. I'm very surprised.

I've taken some other notes—

The Chair: Mr. Lavoie, I'm sorry to interrupt you. I simply want to clarify something:

[English]

we are dealing with the subamendment. If the subamendment is approved, then we will move to the main motion to deal with the discussion on the rest of the motion as it relates to the conflict of interest screen and who we are inviting.

I invite you, sir, to stick to the subamendment. The subamendment is to have Mr. Imbleau, the CEO of Alto, appear before this committee in relation to what we're discussing.

Go ahead, sir.

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: Thank you for your comments, Mr. Chair.

I was just about to bring up the motion.

• (1045)

The Chair: You mean you were going to bring up the subamendment, right?

Steeve Lavoie: Yes, I'm going to talk about the subamendment, Mr. Chair. Thank you for reminding me.

The reason for my preamble is that, when I heard that we should not be talking about high-speed rail in the context of this subamendment, I took issue with that. The issue of the high-speed rail project is relevant insofar as Alto was mandated to carry out this project. It's like talking about a tree's leaves without talking about the tree. If there's no high-speed rail, there's no motion, no subamendment, none of it.

So yes, I'll talk about the subamendment, but I'll also talk about high-speed rail, because it's directly related to Alto. High-speed rail is a topic I'm very familiar with. I was president of the Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Québec, and we did surveys, carried out interviews and met with stakeholders. I gave speeches on the subject and conducted research on its impact on both the country and the Quebec City region. All of this is directly related to Alto. I take issue with the idea that it has nothing to do with the subamendment.

I'm going to continue to talk about the subamendment and about Alto, and I'll talk about high-speed rail. I have my notes here, because I worked at the Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Québec for four years.

On April 18, 2023, leaders from the Quebec City region, myself included, along with 15 signatories, wrote a letter about high-speed rail. It stated, among other things, that the distance between Quebec City and Montreal could be covered in under an hour.

The Chair: Mr. Lavoie, we're not talking about Alto's history. We're at the ethics committee. We're talking about the subamendment before us, which calls for Mr. Imbleau to appear before the committee.

[English]

I don't want to hear about the history of Alto.

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, but I can't hear the interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: If you want to do that, you can go to the transport or industry committee. The committee is not interested in hearing about the history. We've sat here for 16 hours and 45 minutes. I've allowed a lot of latitude. I've also spoken about the relevance and the repetition.

If you continue with this, I will move on to the next speaker. I'm telling you right now.

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: All right.

The subamendment concerns Mr. Imbleau, the head of Alto, but we do not want to talk about Alto, even though it is at the heart of the high-speed rail project. Yet we cannot talk about the high-speed rail project. That is what I have been saying from the outset.

I worked in the banking sector for 20 years, and everything is connected. We cannot isolate one element and set aside all the others, saying we should only talk about that element and not the rest. Yes, but the reason we want Mr. Imbleau—

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

I know that you just joined us this morning, so I'm going to provide some clarity on this, Mr. Lavoie.

The motion in front of us is on the finance minister's ethics screen as it relates to his participation in decisions, discussions, his vote on the budget and other things related to Alto. It's not related to the merits or the values of Alto. Mr. Barrett put Mr. Imbleau in the motion, and we've amended it again so that Mr. Imbleau has something to add to the merits of the motion in relation to the ethics screen.

We're not talking about the project. We're not talking about what it means for the Quebec-Canada corridor. The industry or transport committee can discuss that. We are talking about the finance minister's ethics screen and his participation in those discussions.

It is the opinion of Mr. Barrett and perhaps others that Mr. Imbleau has some value to add to the ethics screen discussion and discussions among others. I'll remind you that the finance minister did say that he had not participated in any of those discussions. The evidence contrary is that perhaps he has. What we're trying to do is get to the bottom of it, so please don't discuss the value or the virtue of the train system again, if you don't mind.

I will ask you to speak to the subamendment.

• (1050)

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: Mr. Chair, I move that the meeting be adjourned.

[English]

The Chair: Do you want to adjourn the debate or adjourn the meeting? I'm not clear on that, Mr. Lavoie, whether you're moving to adjourn debate or—

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: I cannot hear the interpretation clearly, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: That's okay. We've already had a motion to adjourn the meeting which was defeated by members of the committee. The only option you have at this point since you have the floor is to move to adjourn debate. We've already dealt with this once. You have the floor. Are you moving to adjourn debate?

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: All right.

[English]

The Chair: I just need clarification. What's your motion? You moved a motion. What is the motion you moved?

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: I will continue—

[English]

The Chair: You're—

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: I withdraw my motion, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: You made a motion to adjourn. The only option you have right now is to move to adjourn debate.

You made the motion. I'll accept the motion to adjourn debate.

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: All right.

[English]

The Chair: I know that we're not going to have consensus on this one. I'm going to call for the vote. Do we have consensus on it?

An hon. member: No.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

I'm going to ask the clerk to call the vote on the motion to adjourn debate.

There's a tie. I will vote no.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you for your comments, Mr. Lavoie.

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor regarding the subamendment.

Luc Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This has been going on for nearly 16 hours now, if not a little longer. This is not a criticism, but you and I have followed this debate from start to finish, without being replaced.

I understand that new speakers may provide further details to help clarify where we stand, but, since the start of my contributions, I have avoided mentioning the questions I wish to put to the Ethics Commissioner, Mr. Imbleau and the minister. These questions will

be asked during the scheduled meetings; the six hours of meetings will be spread over two or three sessions, if the motion is adopted.

I repeat, for those who have just joined us and are wondering why we have been debating for 16 hours: the government's argument is that the opposition is trying to go fishing, to discredit democratic institutions and to erode public confidence, given that the Ethics Commissioner has already given his opinion.

The fact that the commissioner has examined the situation does not prevent us from summoning him to ask him questions, particularly given that we are currently reviewing the Conflict of Interest Act.

In the matter before us, there are three parties. Firstly, there is the commissioner, as an independent resource, who, I repeat, suggested to us, as part of the review of the act, that we introduce the concept of the appearance of a conflict of interest. This is the source of the motion, amongst other things.

In fact, my understanding is that, from the moment Alto offered a job to the partner of the Minister of Finance, while the latter was spearheading Bill C-15, which would grant Alto significant powers regarding expropriation and reduce those of the expropriated parties, we are entitled to ask questions of Alto's CEO.

• (1055)

The Chair: Mr. Thériault, the oral question period and members' statements will begin in three minutes. Members need time to make their way to the chamber.

[English]

I am going to suspend this meeting to the call of the chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Thériault, you will have the floor when we return.

[English]

[The meeting was suspended at 10:57 a.m., Friday, April 17]

[The meeting resumed at 3:33 p.m., Monday, April 20]

• (8730)

[Translation]

The Chair: I welcome you to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

We are resuming meeting number 37—

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, please excuse me for interrupting, but there is a problem with the interpretation; I can hear the English interpretation.

The Chair: I see.

Luc Thériault: However, I chose the French channel.

The Chair: I see.

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, the interpreter has made the change.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

We are resuming meeting number 37 and the debate suspended on Friday, April 17.

Today's meeting is being held in a hybrid format. In accordance with the Standing Orders, members may participate in person or via the Zoom application.

[*English*]

When we last left our superheros, we were on committee business and we are resuming debate on a motion moved by Mr. Barrett on Monday, April 13, 2026:

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.

An amendment was moved by Mr. Saini that the motion as amended be further amended by deleting the words "Executives from Alto, including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours". The subamendment moved by Mr. Hardy was that the amendment be amended by deleting the words "including CEO Martin Imbleau, for two hours".

The subamendment by Mr. Hardy would have the effect of confirming that the executives from Alto would not be invited to appear, but that the CEO, Martin Imbleau, would be invited to appear. That is where we are today, and that is what we are resuming debate on this evening.

We are on the subamendment moved by Mr. Hardy.

● (8735)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, at the end of the last meeting, you had the floor regarding the subamendment. You therefore have the floor.

Luc Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for that clarification and summary.

We are beginning hour number 17 of the debate. In fact, I hardly dare call it a debate, as it resembles more of a monologue on the part of the government representatives.

Firstly, all these amendments and all these attempts to water down the original motion are based on an accusation of ulterior motives. When Mr. Hardy tabled his subamendment, which modified Mr. Saini's amendment, we heard on several occasions that what we were doing through this motion and this subamendment amounted to a fishing expedition, or even a witch hunt. This was repeated ad nauseam for 17 hours.

We are clearly not on the same wavelength. To suggest that the ethics committee is engaging in a witch hunt by wishing to hear

from the Ethics Commissioner, the CEO of Alto, Mr. Martin Imbleau, and the minister concerned, is rather disappointing. Essentially, this amounts to saying that we must not do this and that it is better to drag out the debate until we are all exhausted, on the pretext that the opposition's intentions are malicious. It is therefore assumed that opposition MPs have malicious intentions, for example by proposing a subamendment to Mr. Saini's amendment.

Mr. Saini's amendment simply sought to remove an element from the second point of the motion, namely the part concerning the witnesses we wished to hear. I would remind you that, prior to Mr. Hardy's subamendment—which sought to retain at least the appearance of Alto's CEO—the Liberals were already asking us to withdraw the part concerning Alto's executives.

This is what the Liberals do: they take the floor, but once they have finished their speech, they ask the chair to put their name back on the list of speakers. This amounts to filibustering. The result is that it is difficult to add one's name to the list of speakers, to join the discussion and put forward counterproposals.

Mr. Chair, let us recall that, during those 17 hours, you even suspended the sitting to allow for discussions aimed at finding compromises. We did reach a few compromises. Before Mr. Hardy tabled his subamendment, we had already reached a third compromise. Initially, Mr. Fergus told us that the final sentence of the motion, which sought to have the committee report to the House that it was undertaking this study, would waste the House's time. To that, I replied that it is the legislative branch and the elected representatives who must debate in the House. A debate on ethics is never a waste of time. We agreed to remove the final sentence, agreeing to limit the study to the committee. We were then told that we should not invite Alto's executives to testify, for fear that our intention was to invite the minister's partner to testify. We agreed to remove this element.

● (8740)

When we agreed to remove this element, Mr. Saini proposed deleting point 2 entirely. We then responded with a subamendment. Mr. Hardy proposed maintaining a balance, noting that there are three parties involved and that it is impossible to shed light on the situation if one of the parties is excluded.

In this case, this subamendment is important. We are told that the Ethics Commissioner has already ruled on part of the matter, stating that human resources issues fall under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Transport, not the Minister of Finance. However, this does not address the broader issue of the appearance of a conflict of interest. When a company receives \$3.9 billion and offers a position to the partner of the Minister of Finance, who is spearheading Bill C-15, which will amend the Expropriation Act and reduce the rights of those being expropriated, it is legitimate to want to understand Alto's role in this situation.

Is this a brilliant idea on the minister's part, or not? What is the rationale behind this decision, given the public statements made by Mr. Imbleau? He says he wants to do things right and respect people. So why, then, was this provision introduced into Bill C-15? It effectively waters down the Expropriation Act, which was passed following the events related to the Mirabel expropriations that many still remember.

We are therefore faced with an attempt to remove one of the parties. In other words, we should not be hearing from Alto to explain this apparent conflict of interest. Furthermore, we were told that the matter had been settled, that the case was closed, and that the committee would not have to rule on it or hear witnesses, since the commissioner had resolved the issue.

However, it would be useful to hear from the commissioner on how he interprets the concept of the appearance of a conflict of interest. He had, in fact, suggested that we incorporate this concept into the next version of the Conflict of Interest Act, which we are currently revising.

I am somewhat disappointed to see that a government which is still in a minority position—for the next few weeks, days, or even hours—is acting as if it were in the majority. Let there be no mistake: there would not have been a 17-hour debate. The Liberal members of the committee would have called for a vote, and we would have moved on.

I am absolutely committed to this subamendment. It aims to prevent one of the parties from being sidelined without a clear understanding of what happened. Inviting the Minister of Finance to testify is essential. I wouldn't want to find myself asking him questions only to be told that it's Alto's responsibility or for the commissioner to respond that it's not his place to answer the question. That is precisely why it is important to hear from all three parties. We need to be able to shed full light on the situation.

● (8745)

Citizens have a right to this transparency and to a minimum level of trust in democratic institutions. If they do not trust the democratic institution represented by the ethics committee in Parliament—whose primary function is precisely to analyze what is against what should be—and if the truth cannot be brought to light regarding a situation that may involve a lack of judgment or the appearance of a conflict of interest, then I wonder what purpose this committee serves. I sincerely hope to convince the members on the other side. I hope to hear today something other than an argument based on a trial of intent, suggesting that the opposition is acting maliciously or seeking to grandstand.

I am not conducting a witch hunt. I am not trying to launch a fishing expedition. I am simply trying to shed light on a situation that, at the very least, raises questions about a lack of judgment and the appearance of a conflict of interest. To determine whether this is more than a conflict of interest, we must establish, among other things, whether the minister actually recused himself. There are many who doubt this.

It is not certain that, following the vote on the subamendment, other amendments will not be introduced to further narrow the

scope of the motion, which would already have been significantly reduced had this subamendment not been proposed.

What I want is to shed light on the situation. I want to be able to question all the stakeholders in this matter. We will do so with decorum and with all the rigour and respect that such a situation demands. The manner in which we proceed will also be judged by those listening to us.

It is true that, given the limited time we have to question witnesses, we may sometimes have to intervene, or even interrupt witnesses, when their answers do not directly address the question asked. However, I make a commitment to my colleagues across the floor: If they accept this subamendment, we will conduct ourselves impeccably toward the witnesses. If they answer the questions directly, without beating around the bush, we will let them answer.

It is very important that we at least be able to hear from the Ethics Commissioner. At one point, I had the impression that hearing from him was considered less relevant. Mr. Imbleau must also come and explain to us how his organization operates. I don't quite understand why Alto offered a position to the minister's partner. Not that she isn't entitled to it per se, but the minister steered Bill C-15 through to its passage, participated in the debate, and voted. When one recuses oneself, one must at least abstain from voting if one truly wishes to avoid any doubt, whether it involves an actual or apparent conflict of interest.

● (8750)

With that, I invite all my colleagues to consider the merits of this motion as subamended, and, as much as possible, to avoid filibustering, or at the very least to acknowledge that some wish to get to the bottom of this unfortunate situation in which the minister has placed himself.

Some will say that he has set higher standards for himself than those required by the Ethics Commissioner. However, these additional standards were not strictly adhered to, since he voted on Bill C-15.

I therefore call for co-operation today. We are in hour number 17 of the debate. Some may feel that my remarks are long, but they remain modest compared to the speaking time used by the Liberals over the course of these 17 hours.

In closing, I would like to point out that if, from the very first hour of debate, we had agreed to adopt this motion, after removing the part relating to the report to the House, we would have saved a great deal of time. This is a six-hour study. Six hours is not much. We have now reached 17 hours of discussion. We could have conducted this study three times over; we would have had the full picture after those six hours. People could have formed an opinion on the validity of the concerns raised, rather than seeing my colleagues across the way acting as judges and concluding, from their position of being able to obstruct, that this process is unnecessary, that it is a bad motion, a fishing expedition, or a witch hunt.

I urge everyone to resolve the subamendment quickly. I hope we can proceed to a vote promptly and hear from the three parties we wish to hear from, as they are necessary to shed full light on this situation.

The Chair: Mr. Thériault, thank you for your comments on the subamendment.

[*English*]

I have a list on the subamendment.

Monsieur Sari.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: I'll pass my turn, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Saini.

Gurbux Saini: Can you repeat the question?

• (8755)

The Chair: Sir, I have a list, and you're on it, on the subamendment. If you want to speak to it, I invite you to do that now.

Gurbux Saini: I'll pass my turn.

The Chair: Okay.

The next I have on the list is Ms. Church on the subamendment.

Leslie Church: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Reflecting on Mr. Thériault's comments and the duration of the debate we've had over the past week, I hope, if you seek it, we may have unanimous consent for the following 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:

1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner for one hour;
2. The Minister of Finance and National Revenue for one hour

We are aiming for the week of May 25.

The Chair: Okay.

That was going to be my comment, actually, because the previous motion that was proposed by Mr. Barrett talked about by May 8. You want to do this in the week of May 25. Is that correct?

Leslie Church: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. It's not indicated in the motion, but I'm going to accept that as a reasonable proposal in the week of May 25.

Ms. Church is seeking unanimous consent on this motion. I am seeking it.

[*Translation*]

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, may I see that motion?

The Chair: The clerk can send you the motion, Mr. Thériault.

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes to give you a chance to read it.

• (1555)

(Pause)

• (1600)

• (8800)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to call the meeting back to order.

We are dealing with a unanimous consent motion that's been proposed by Ms. Church:

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 in the week of May 25, 2026:

1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for one hour;
2. The Minister of Finance and National Revenue for one hour.

I do understand as well that there is an issue with the French language version of this that the clerk will correct if it is the intention of the committee to adopt this unanimous consent motion.

There's no debate on this. Do I have the consent of the committee to adopt the motion presented by Ms. Church?

I see yes on this side.

Monsieur Thériault? No?

Unanimous consent has not been granted.

We are still on the subamendment. I don't have any more speakers on the subamendment, so if there is an intention to get on the list, tell me now.

[*Translation*]

I see that Mr. Thériault wishes to speak.

You have the floor regarding the subamendment, Mr. Thériault.

Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, I understand that we will soon be considering Mrs. Church's motion. I also understand that when a motion is introduced with the expectation of obtaining unanimous consent from the members, it is because there have been prior consultations with members on the other side. I do not know when these discussions took place, but it was certainly not a minute before the start of the meeting.

I probably would have spoken less at length about the need to invite Alto's CEO if I had known from the outset that there was a consensus. When the chair asked if he had the unanimous consent of the committee, I was the only one who did not give my consent.

After 17 hours of debate, I am very surprised that we agreed to exclude one of the parties. I think the time had come to stop making compromises. For my part, I would like to hear from Alto, the Minister of Finance and the Ethics Commissioner.

I understand that the Conservatives accepted this compromise, but I would have liked us to discuss it further. I also understand that I was the only one who did not give my consent.

I just wanted to say that I find it very disappointing that we are giving up after 17 hours of debate.

• (8805)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

[English]

We're on the subamendment as proposed by Mr. Hardy.

Mr. Barrett, did you have a comment on the subamendment?

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): I have a question.

Chair, having heard Mr. Thériault's comments, I'm just wondering how Mr. Thériault would like to proceed. I appreciate his well-articulated position, but instead of proceeding through a series of subamendments and amendments, there is a compromise that's been proposed by Ms. Church. I'm just wondering if there's a mechanism for us to advance Ms. Church's proposal, even if it would include giving Mr. Thériault the obviously unanimous consent not on its first attempt, but if there would be a way to do that even with Mr. Thériault having the opportunity, if he wishes, to formally register a dissenting vote, or if he is satisfied having expressed very clearly that he doesn't support the removal of the third witness, which I respect and appreciate.

If he has obviously expressed an intention not to do what we just saw for the last week, which is to have a filibuster, I'm just wondering if there's a way to get to a resolution, while respecting that he doesn't agree per se with the unanimous adoption of the proposal by Mr. Church.

The Chair: I appreciate that, Mr. Barrett.

Since UC wasn't granted, we are going to have to go through a series of processes.

Frankly, it's not up to anybody on the committee to determine that. We're going to have to deal with the subamendment first. If there's no other discussion, then we can vote on it. A member of the committee can vote for or against that. We're going to have to deal with the amendment immediately after that.

I see some hands going up to speak to the subamendment.

Michael Barrett: May I reply, Chair?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Michael Barrett: I'm wondering if we could adjourn.

It's difficult, because I'm not looking to blindside Mr. Thériault.

I'm wondering if it would get us to the outcome that everyone is looking to have, which is the conclusion of debate, although we don't all unanimously agree on what that outcome would look like.

I'm wondering if we could adjourn debate on this motion and then hear Ms. Church move her motion.

Mr. Thériault has not had the opportunity to be part of the conversation in person. Would he prefer that we move forward with subamendments and amendments to the motion?

• (8810)

The Chair: My preference is to deal with it in a manner that's procedurally accurate, and that is to—

Michael Barrett: —adjourn the debate.

The Chair: Well, you can move to adjourn the debate if you like.

The question then becomes if the motion that Ms. Church proposes is actually in order.

I understand that we're in committee business at that point.

That's something I'd have to clarify with the clerk. I'm prepared to do that right now.

Why don't you give me a minute to deal with this, and then we'll come back.

Is that fair enough?

Okay.

We are suspended.

• (1610)

(Pause)

• (1615)

• (8815)

The Chair: We're back from the suspension.

We are still on the subamendment.

Mr. Hardy, I saw your hand up.

[Translation]

You have the floor.

Gabriel Hardy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've been here now for more than 17 hours, with the Liberals engaging in a monologue aimed at preventing the adoption of my subamendment. I said it last week, and I'll say it again today: This is costing taxpayers a fortune. What we are witnessing here is a lack of respect for those who pay taxes.

I believe Canadians have a right to know. They expect the opposition to play its role, to ask questions and to hold the government accountable for its decisions. They also expect us to be their voice in Parliament. Not everyone thinks the same way. In my view, it is extremely important that what we do here be clear and transparent, and that our goal be to properly inform the public.

It is clear that the Liberals do not want the motion as proposed by Mr. Barrett to proceed. However, we've already made three compromises. We agreed not to report to the House that we are conducting this study, to remove the reference to the minister's wife, and to limit the appearance to Alto's chief executive officer alone. I believe our good faith has been evident from the outset. That said, it seems that this is still not enough for the Liberals. They appear to have a very specific objective.

It has to stop at some point. We must stop wasting the House's time and taxpayers' money.

I therefore seek unanimous consent to withdraw my subamendment, in order to allow the committee to move forward in everyone's interest and, at the very least, to have the opportunity to hear from the minister and the Ethics Commissioner.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hardy.

[*English*]

The proposal, by unanimous consent, is to withdraw Mr. Hardy's subamendment.

Do I have unanimous consent to withdraw Mr. Hardy's subamendment?

I have it on this side. I have it on this side.

Mr. Thériault? No? Okay.

[*Translation*]

As there is no one else who wishes to speak to the subamendment, we'll go to a vote on Mr. Hardy's subamendment.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 4; yeas 0)

The Chair: We will now go to a vote on the amendment proposed by Mr. Saini.

• (8820)

[*English*]

Just for clarification purposes, I would mention that the amendment would have the same effect as what Ms. Church had proposed in her motion and that is to delete line 2, which would be the executives and Mr. Imbleau from Alto.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas, 4; nays, 1)

The Chair: We are now back to the main motion as amended.

Ms. Church, I see your hand up.

Go ahead, please.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move an amendment to the motion.

First, I would like to strike "to appear by May 8, 2026". Then, where it reads "1. Konrad von Finckenstein, Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner", I'd like to strike "two hours" and make that "one hour". Where it says "The Minister of Finance and National Revenue", I'd like to strike "two hours" and make that "one hour" and that the committee hear these witnesses the week of May 25.

The Chair: The amendment to the motion is striking "by May 8, 2026", changing the amount of time for the commissioner to one hour, the amount of time for the minister to one hour in the week of May 25. That is very similar with the exception of "by May 8" to

what was circulated to the members of the committee before I suspended.

We're on the amendment proposed by Ms. Church.

Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Seeing none, do we have unanimous consent on the amendment?

No, Mr. Thériault?

Okay. I'm going to ask the clerk to call the vote on the amendment proposed by Ms. Church.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 4; nays 1)

The Chair: We're now back on the main motion as amended.

Is there any other discussion?

I'm going to call the vote on the main motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 7; nays 0)

The Chair: I don't see any other business.

Madam Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Linda Lapointe: I would like to go back to last Thursday's meeting. At that time, I had raised a point of order regarding Mr. Majumdar. Mr. Barrett then intervened and interrupted me. You hadn't given him the floor; I had the floor. Moreover, his tone was aggressive. He interrupted me and did not respect the interpreters.

After the training we have received on Parliament Hill, particularly on harassment and intimidation, I cannot accept such a situation. It's not respectful to me or to the interpreters.

I will never accept being interrupted in that way or having someone raise their voice to intimidate me.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

[*English*]

When that intervention took place, the microphones weren't actually applied because we were listening to the witnesses, and I did try to control it as best I could, if you recall. I was actually threatening to suspend the meeting because of the disruption that was going on. Okay? It was coming from both sides, just to be clear.

I don't have any other business.

This meeting is adjourned.

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