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Chair: John Brassard



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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• (1545)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 42 of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. I see that we have Ms. Church on Zoom today.

We're going to be dealing with some committee business today. I have a couple of items to discuss. For the first item, members will recall that on Monday, April 20, the committee adopted 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; and that, for the purpose of this study, the committee invite the following witnesses to appear during the week of May 25, 2026:

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

Both the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the minister were invited to appear this week. While the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the minister were invited, the Ethics Commissioner did confirm his appearance for this Thursday. Over several interactions with the minister, we have a response that he can appear only on June 11. That is contrary to the motion that was passed by the committee, which was that both appear during the week of May 25.

I need to understand from the committee what direction you want us to take—when I say “us”, I mean the clerk and me—in terms of where we're going to go with this.

The question I put before the committee is this: Despite the motion that was passed, shall we accept June 11 for the minister, and shall the Ethics Commissioner be rescheduled for June 11?

It was my understanding that it was the intent of the committee to have both the minister and the Ethics Commissioner appear during the same two-hour period—one for one hour and the other for the other hour.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead, and then we'll have Mr. Cooper.

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): The date we arrived at to have the minister appear wasn't conjured up. The date was chosen on the advice of Liberal members, and the committee passed the motion inviting the minister to come. As for an alternative to accepting that the minister is not coming this week, there is no alternative. The committee can't make the minister come before committee.

The committee did pass that motion. It's a very unfortunate choice that the minister made to create the expectation with members of his party that he would be here and then to inform the committee that he would not honour the obligation he has.

Is it an imperative? Should there be consequences should he not appear? No, that's not a power that committees have with respect to ministers. However, I think it is not a good sign.

We have a motion passed by the committee to deal with a matter about a conflict of interest. We had designed a single meeting. The date was all but prescribed by Liberal members, presumably on advice from the minister's office. The integrity of that plan should be retained as much as possible. The date that was included in the motion passed by committee is not going to be honoured. The intent to have a single meeting, of course, should be respected. We should put this together for a single meeting, when it does occur.

This was a matter that generated an incredible amount of public interest, which is how it found itself in front of the committee for consideration. Members of the committee agreed to this, including Liberal members, who had the ability via the minister's office to offer a date much farther into the future than the original motion intended. That was a compromise at the time. We're now being asked to compromise on our compromise.

It just cannot pass by us without mention. It's a silent shrug that we hear often. We heard often in the week before the House adjourned, three weeks ago, the government House leader and many ministers say that they respect committees, that committees are important, that committees are powerful and that committees set their agenda.

Well, here we have a standing committee that said the minister must appear, but the minister is not appearing. It's an affront to what we do. We don't have the teeth as committees to do more than ask the minister to appear and then, once the motion passes, to ask that he come on another day.

This is not how this place is supposed to work. I don't think it is consistent with what Canadians expect from their government and ministers of the Crown that when a standing committee asks that a minister appear and the committee asks members of that party to arrange for a date that works for them, they let other circumstances dictate a different set of actions beyond what the committee has agreed to. This shouldn't continue. The minister ought to know, and I believe he does know, that this is contrary to what his government has said, and it's contrary to the committee motion that was passed.

• (1550)

I'll say one more time that the motion was for them to appear at the same time on one-hour panels, so unless we're blowing this whole motion up—to answer your second question—should the commissioner appear this week or next, the intention was for them to come together. We really shouldn't be redesigning the motion in its entirety at this point.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

To address several of your points, obviously the obligation on our part—on my part and the clerk's part—was to advise the minister's office, which was done on several occasions, that the motion had indeed passed. We were under an indication that he would make himself available the week of May 25.

The question before us is about June 11. Do we reschedule? Should we reschedule? Should the clerk and I reschedule June 11 as a time for the minister? He's indicated that he's available that day, and I think that all indications are that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is available that day too. That's the question before us.

Mr. Cooper, what are your comments on that? Then I will go to Ms. Church.

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

I have to say that I'm extremely disappointed, but to some extent hardly surprised, that we see the minister bailing out on coming to committee. There are serious questions about a conflict of interest surrounding the minister in terms of his role in directing billions of tax dollars to the Alto project, notwithstanding that his partner is a vice-president at Alto.

For 17 hours, Liberal MPs across the way filibustered a motion to bring the minister to committee to answer questions about this apparent conflict of interest. For 17 hours, they blocked and obstructed the work of this committee. They ran interference for the minister.

That motion provided that the minister appear on May 5. After 17 hours of obstruction from the Liberals, they finally said that he could come on May 25. When the Liberals said, after 17 hours of obstruction, that the minister could come the week of May 25, we took them at face value that they had confirmed with the minister that he was indeed available during the week of May 25. Now it's the week of May 25, and we suddenly find out that the minister can't appear. Is he too busy to come before a parliamentary committee to answer questions about an apparent conflict of interest involving billions of taxpayer dollars?

He'll come on June 11. How do we know he's going to come on June 11? What is to say the minister won't come up with another excuse to say that he's too busy to come to committee?

This is part of a game by these Liberals, a game to obstruct committees and to shut down accountability. This is what they did, of course, when they filibustered. This is what they did when they brought forward their undemocratic motion to stack committees. This was part of the Prime Minister's strategy as he picked off certain MPs to cross the floor in undemocratic floor crossings. We have one of those floor crossers on this committee, who I guess is AWOL yet again. What a surprise.

• (1555)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: I have missed serving alongside Mr. Cooper on committee, so I'm glad that we are back together again. He knows my enthusiasm.

I believe that House rules would be echoed in committee, and we don't really talk about the absence or presence of members.

Michael Barrett: Who's not here?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Whoever he was referring to or who he's concerned about.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chagger. I've taken your point.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

Michael Cooper: Mr. Chair, this is unacceptable. It's part of a pattern of delay. That's all it is.

Let's not minimize the seriousness of the issue at hand, which is that the minister has an apparent conflict in respect of Alto. It's not me who is asserting that he has a conflict, although I certainly assert that. The minister himself conceded that after he got caught being involved in decisions related to Alto and said that, well, he had set up an ethics screen. He then said that he acted "proactively" in setting up the ethics screen.

Of course, he had never announced anything about the ethics screen. He never said anything about the ethics screen. No one knew about the ethics screen, but he said there was an ethics screen. Why was there an ethics screen? It's because he said there was a conflict. No wonder there was a conflict, because there is a conflict when you have a partner—his partner—who is a vice-president at Alto.

The minister's spokesperson said in the *National Post* on 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." That's except for the fact that we know this isn't true, because the minister introduced legislation related to Alto. He spoke to that legislation. He voted on that legislation. He included provisions for funding for Alto in the budget, and he advanced the Alto project through a budget bill.

Contrary to the minister's spokesperson's statement, the minister did in fact participate in discussions, decisions and votes, all related to Alto, in which the minister has an apparent conflict of interest. It underscores why we need to hear from him.

He has put this committee in a very difficult position. I guess, to some degree, what choice do we have, Mr. Chair, other than to take the minister at his word that, yes, he will finally appear on June 11? It shouldn't have come to this. We should be hearing from the minister this week, but if he's not available, then, being practical, what solution is there?

I just wish to underscore that it shouldn't have come to this. It's unacceptable that it has come to this, and it does appear to be part of a pattern by the government to avoid accountability.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

The question before us—and the direction that the clerk and I need—is, are we going to direct the Ethics Commissioner to appear on the same day on which the finance minister, Mr. Champagne, has said he can appear before the committee, notwithstanding the motion that said he was to appear the week of May 25?

Ms. Church, go ahead, please.

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

Welcome back to all my colleagues around the table after the two-week parliamentary break. It's a pleasure to be back at the ethics committee.

Far be it from me to try to get in the way of some of the theatrical outrage we're seeing on the other side at the moment. Where I wanted to come from was just to remind the table, and come back to the fact that, when we debated this motion, we did so in good faith. It's entirely reasonable, and Canadians understand, that from time to time there are businesses—businesses of state and international affairs—that come into play, particularly with ministers of cabinet.

It's important for the committee's record and for anyone watching that we also make sure it's known widely that the Minister of Finance in this case is actually going to be appearing for four hours tomorrow night at committee of the whole in the House of Commons. A four-hour appearance is very significant.

We know that between now and June 11, he is appearing at three other committees, including at the finance committee for a Conservative motion on June 4. I raise this only to say that the minister is making every effort to be as accountable, transparent and available

as one would expect a minister of finance to be, while balancing, of course, the immense responsibilities that come with that role.

This is not intended to be an affront to anyone. This is not intended to thwart the good work of this committee. It is simply a recognition that from time to time, as the weeks and months pass, there are scheduling changes that we have to be able to deal with. Although we believed we had a date set out ahead of time, and all offices had worked very effectively to land on that date, there are important matters of business and of state arising that we need to adjust to.

I anticipate that all the members on this committee are going to be very active tomorrow in the committee of the whole with the finance minister. We look forward to having him at the committee here in a couple of weeks to finish out the motion on Alto.

From my perspective, certainly, I'm not averse to having both appear together.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Ms. Church.

I'm sensing from the interventions I've heard so far that there is a desire and direction on the part of the committee to ask the Ethics Commissioner to appear on June 11, along with the finance minister, because he's already indicated that he can.

I'm sensing that, but if I'm wrong, tell me.

A couple of more people want to discuss this, and we'll allow their opinions to be heard.

Ms. Chagger, I'm trying to focus here. I hear some chatter on that side. Keep it down, please.

• (1605)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Gourde, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister is proposing a date of June 11. The government would need to guarantee that the House will still be sitting on that date. There are rumours that the session could be cut short on June 10.

Would the committee still meet if the government ended the session on June 10? We can continue to meet over the summer, after the end of the session. You never know. There have been instances where the government has ended the session earlier than expected. If the session ended on June 10, the minister would be off the hook until the fall.

Would the meeting with the minister and the commissioner still take place on June 11 if the government were to end the session on June 10?

[*English*]

The Chair: It's highly speculative at this point. My understanding is that the House is scheduled to rise on June 18.

Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): It could be the 19th.

The Chair: It's highly speculative. I am going to proceed on the basis that the House will rise on the 19th. Everything we do from this point forward will be on that basis. If a decision is made among the parties to adjourn early, it's nothing I can affect, so I'm going to proceed on that basis.

[Translation]

Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know that you are powerless when it comes to the government's decision to end the session, but committees don't have to stop meeting over the summer. If the session ends early, will the committee still be able to hold a meeting on June 11 to hear from the minister and the Ethics Commissioner, so that the committee's work can move forward? Everyone will be in Ottawa anyway. We're not going to bring people back if the House rises.

I just want to make sure that, if we agree to have the minister come on June 11, the meeting will take place. It's already unfortunate that he delayed his appearance, but it's all the more unusual that he chose that date, given all the rumours. We are in what feels like a week of rumours in Ottawa, and one of them is that the business of the House will end on June 10.

The Chair: According to the Standing Orders, the committee has the power to sit even when the House is adjourned. We can do that. However, I believe, as I've already said, that the House will adjourn on June 19. If its proceedings finish before June 19—you mentioned June 10—the committee still has the authority to hold a meeting, provided that it decides today that the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner will appear on June 11.

Jacques Gourde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Al Soud, you have the floor. Go ahead. Again, the question is on the Ethics Commissioner.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I have a quick note.

I've had the privilege of subbing in on many committees so far, and I'm a permanent member of three. Anyone who's seen him in action knows the minister has never been shy to testify or appear at committee in the past. As Ms. Church said perfectly, the minister is going to be appearing on three committees in the span of 10 days, including a committee of the whole for four hours, so there's clearly no attempt to escape accountability here.

I'll also make a point the members know well: Things happen and life comes at us all, and from a variety of directions. I've been a member of this committee for slightly over a month now, and it feels like I've heard more rants turned into clips than anything, rather than having the privilege of partaking in actual business. There is nothing here that stops us from hearing from the witness who was initially planned, then hearing from the minister when he's available. Frankly, I think of it in that context. That is what makes the most sense.

I put that out there. I hope the committee will agree on that front.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

Again, I'm getting the sense that it's okay with members of the committee to have both the Ethics Commissioner and the finance minister come to committee on June 11, notwithstanding that the motion said it should be the week of the 25th.

Do I have that right?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: That's not what he said.

Fares Al Soud: No.

The Chair: I'm sorry. What are you saying?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Can I add myself to the list, Chair?

The Chair: I'm just clarifying. The idea is to have the Ethics Commissioner—

Fares Al Soud: He'd be here for one hour, and then we'd find something else to do for the other hour.

My understanding is that we have two draft reports. We have a variety of studies we could otherwise do. I propose that we make use of the time we have. This is important, valuable time, and we have work to do.

The Chair: For clarity, if the decision of the committee is to include this on the 11th, we can have the lobbying study done on Thursday as well.

Fares Al Soud: I hear you.

The Chair: The two hours on Thursday will be filled.

The original intent of the committee, from what I understand, was to have the Ethics Commissioner and the finance minister appear at the same time. That's what we're trying to accommodate. I think we can reasonably do that on June 11. At least, the commissioner indicated that he is available. The finance minister said he's available on June 11.

We will have a full agenda on Thursday. I promise you that.

Fares Al Soud: Okay.

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

Hon. Bardish Chagger: That was the first time I heard clarification from the chair that the Ethics Commissioner has confirmed he is available on June 11.

I would just echo the thought that we should maximize the time of this committee. I am also a new member and have not seen a lot of action on this committee. I would just like to get some stuff done because I know it is a valuable committee.

I know there's a lot of experience on the committee. I think we should be productive. We should be effective regardless of what the structure of the House is. Committee members are masters of our own domain. Let's just get some work done. Let's serve our constituents, let's serve Canadians and let's be productive.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Ms. Chagger.

I just want to clarify again that the Ethics Commissioner has said he can make himself available June 11 if it is the will of the committee to have him come on the June 11. I'm sensing that that's the will of the committee. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Fortin, the floor is yours.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We agree with the June 11 proposal. Our concern is to make sure that both the commissioner and the minister appear at the same time. Otherwise, it creates problems from a scheduling perspective.

The Chair: We can't make sure that the minister appears on June 11; we have no control over that. However, that's what he and his office told the committee.

[*English*]

That's what we're counting on.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I was told you had all the powers, Mr. Chair. I was counting on you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Do you want to say something, Mike?

Michael Barrett: Yes.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Michael Barrett: We should be clear on something. Members opposite said that we haven't gotten a lot of work done and they've been here for a month. There have been extensive Liberal filibusters in that period of time, closing in on 20 hours. Let's not be ahistorical in our comments. That's what happened, to the point that the consideration of draft reports did not happen because of filibusters. That's why we found ourselves in the position of not checking a bunch of things off the list in that period of time.

I think one of the other comments was that not everyone is coming to get work done. I guess it depends on what our definition of that is.

On committees being the masters of our own domain, that is true insofar as committees are respected by ministers. We can order people to appear, but we can't make a minister appear. That's why that was agreed to in good faith. We're proceeding with that, but we can't go without remarking on it that the powers of committee are being diminished when we're ignored.

The final thing I'll say, to the idea that in that month there was not a lot of work and there were a lot of clips, is that I would encourage you to review my social media often—@MikeBarrettON. You can take a look at the clips that I've generated since your time on this committee and how many include what's gone on here during that period of time. Follow, share and like for more, but you're

not going to find anything in that period of time alleging that my interventions had been for that purpose.

We wanted the finance minister to come to talk about a matter of public interest. The minister agreed that he would come for this week, and he's now said that he's going to come a different week. We will accept that we cannot control that. The minister said he would be here this week. We expected he would. He's not. The minister says he'll be here on the date that's been prescribed, and we expect that he will.

• (1615)

The Chair: I'm going to end the discussion on that note.

We have agreement from everyone that this will happen on June 11. Both the Ethics Commissioner and the finance minister will appear. We'll make sure of that.

The second item I have under committee business is how we left off.... I forget the date, but we were dealing with a motion moved by Mr. Barrett on Thursday, April 23, 2026. It was May 4, as the clerk just reminded me.

I'm not going to read the entirety of the motion, but we were dealing with the wording of the subamendment that was moved by Mr. Barrett. Once the clerk clarified the subamendment, there was to be a discussion among the parties. I think the point people on this were Ms. Church and Mr. Barrett. I think the Bloc was involved in that as well.

It is:

That the amendment be amended by replacing the words:

"2. By deleting, in point (a), the words ' , pursuant to the assessment tool on the application of the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen, including assessments originating in the PCO or any department, from the previous month; these reports must include (i) a summary of each instance where an assessment was triggered; (ii) the record of the outcome of each analysis; (iii) any records of discussions or considerations that are in the possession of the PCO or any department related to each analysis, including notes and meeting minutes; and (iv) any correspondence related to each analysis, including emails, text messages, instant messages and other records of conversations; and the first report, which shall be provided to the committee by no later than June 15, 2026, shall include the complete set of information for each assessment since the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen came into effect'; and"

with the following:

"2. By deleting, in point (a), the words '(iii) any records of discussions or considerations that are in the possession of the PCO or any department related to each analysis, including notes and meeting minutes; and (iv) any correspondence related to each analysis, including emails, text messages, instant messages and other records of conversations; and the first report, which shall be provided to the committee by no later than June 15, 2026, shall include the complete set of information for each assessment since the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen came into effect'; and"

That is where we are resuming debate today. We're on the subamendment moved by Mr. Barrett.

As I said earlier, the clerk did clarify the language. That language was to be discussed. I'm assuming that it was, so that's where we are today.

Is there anything on the subamendment? I don't hear any discussion, so I'll call for the vote.

(Subamendment negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

The Chair: I'm just going to pause for a second. I have to ask the clerk something.

We are now on the amendment moved by Ms. Church. If anybody needs me to read it, I will, but it's been in everybody's possession for almost a month now.

Is there any discussion on the amendment by Ms. Church?

Mr. Al Soud, go ahead.

• (1620)

Fares Al Soud: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to move a subamendment. I move that the amendment be amended by replacing the following:

an assessment was undertaken relating to the application of the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen, pursuant to the assessment tool on the application of the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen, including assessments originating in the PCO or any department, from the previous month; these reports must include (i) a summary of each instance where an assessment was triggered; (ii) the record of the outcome of each analysis; (iii) any records of discussions or considerations that are in the possession of the PCO or any department related to each analysis, including notes and meeting minutes; and (iv) any correspondence related to each analysis, including emails, text messages, instant messages and other records of conversations; and the first report, which shall be provided to the committee by no later than June 15, 2026, shall include the complete set of information

I retract my statement, Chair, and I move instead that we delete number 2.

The Chair: Just so I'm clear, you're moving an amendment—

Fares Al Soud: It's a subamendment to delete number 2.

The Chair: Is that paragraph number 2—the entirety of the paragraph? Is that what you're looking to delete?

Fares Al Soud: It's part 2 of the amendment, Chair.

The Chair: You're looking to delete the amendment, effectively. Is that correct?

Fares Al Soud: It's part 2.

The Chair: We just need some clarification, Mr. Al Soud. I'm going to walk you through this, if you don't mind.

Ms. Church has an amendment. You're proposing a subamendment that would include number 2, but anything past point number (ii) is what you're proposing to delete. Is that correct?

Fares Al Soud: We are proposing to remove the second part of the amendment—part 2 within the amendment.

The Chair: You mean point (ii).

Fares Al Soud: Yes, that's correct.

The Chair: Then point (i) will remain.

Just so that everybody is clear, with your subamendment, you're going to keep this in:

By deleting, in point (a), the words “, pursuant to the assessment tool on the application of the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen, including assessments originating in the PCO or any department, from the previous month; these reports must include (i) a summary of each instance where an assessment was triggered

We don't even need part (i) there.

Am I understanding that correctly? In your subamendment, the entirety of point (ii) is to be deleted. Is that correct?

Fares Al Soud: That's correct.

The Chair: Okay. We're keeping point number 3. Is that correct?

Fares Al Soud: That's correct.

The Chair: Are members of the committee clear on where Mr. Al Soud has proposed a subamendment? It is in order. It's to remove everything after point (ii) of paragraph 2, starting at “the record” and ending at “came into effect”?

Is everybody clear on that?

Michael Barrett: No.

The Chair: I'm going to suspend for a couple of minutes so everybody has some clarity here.

• (1620)

(Pause)

• (1700)

The Chair: We're back.

We were on the subamendment of Mr. Al Soud. After much discussion, I think everybody is of the understanding that the subamendment would actually change Ms. Church's amendment by deleting section 2. It would not change line 1, line 3 and line 4 of the motion.

The Clerk of the Committee (Nancy Vohl): As a matter of fact, I said 4, but (b) is a new point.

The Chair: Okay. It wasn't point 4. It was the new (b) and the new (c). I'm sorry. The clerk and I were discussing that.

Anyway, is there any discussion on the subamendment of Mr. Al Soud? That's where we are.

Monsieur Fortin.

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Chair, is it possible to read the motion again with the proposed changes? I just want to make sure I understand where we are.

The Chair: Okay.

I think the clerk has the text of the motion in both languages.

The Clerk: Do you want it in English or in French?

The Chair: In French.

The Clerk: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would ask you to wait for just a moment, please, Mr. Fortin.

The clerk will read the motion in French to clarify things.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Church's amendment to Mr. Barrett's motion proposes replacing "the fifteenth day of each month" with "a quarterly basis". I will read the motion with the proposed amendment:

That the committee:

(a) require the Privy Council Office (PCO) to provide the committee, on a quarterly basis, with a report detailing each time an assessment was undertaken relating to the application of the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen, pursuant to the Assessment Tool on the Application of the Prime Minister's Conflict of Interest Screen, including assessments originating in the PCO or any department, from the previous month; that these reports include: (i) a summary of each instance where an assessment was triggered; (ii) the record of the outcome of each analysis; (iii) any records of discussions or considerations that are in the possession of the PCO or any department related to each analysis, including notes and meeting minutes; and (iv) any correspondence related to each analysis, including emails, text messages, instant messages, and other records of conversations; and that the first report shall be provided to the committee by no later than June 15, 2026, and shall include the complete set of information for each assessment since the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen came into effect;

Mrs. Church then proposes adding two new items to Mr. Barrett's motion after item (a). The proposed wording is as follows:

(b) post the reports publicly on the committee's website; and

(c) invite the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner every quarter, to discuss the contents of the most recent quarterly report from PCO.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin and Madam Clerk.

[English]

Are we all clear on the subamendment proposed by Mr. Al Soud?

I am going to ask for a vote on the subamendment.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 9; nays 0 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

• (1705)

The Chair: We are now on the amendment to the motion.

Do I see somebody's hand? No.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: We can vote on that.

The Chair: Okay.

(Amendment as amended agreed to: yeas 9; nays 0 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

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

Ms. Chagger.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Chair, I've sent this around. Can you please share it with all members to make sure they have it in their preferred language? Then we can all read from the same thing.

The Chair: I appreciate that being sent prior to the intervention. It has been sent by the clerk in both official languages.

I expect that you're moving an amendment, then.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Yes.

The Chair: This is an amendment to the main motion.

Go ahead, Ms. Chagger.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: This is an amendment to the main motion as amended.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin, have you received it?

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Did you just send us a new amendment?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Yes.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I received it, thank you.

[English]

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Chair, I move:

That the motion be amended by:

1. by replacing the words:

"an assessment was undertaken relating to the application of the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen, pursuant to the assessment tool on the application of the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen, including assessments originating in the PCO or any department, from the previous month; these reports must include (i) a summary of each instance where an assessment was triggered; (ii) the record of the outcome of each analysis; (iii) any records of discussions or considerations that are in the possession of the PCO or any department related to each analysis, including notes and meeting minutes; and (iv) any correspondence related to each analysis, including emails, text messages, instant messages and other records of conversations; and the first report, which shall be provided to the committee by no later than June 15, 2026, shall include the complete set of information for each assessment since the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen came into effect; and"

with the words:

"the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen has been applied. Given that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has advised the Prime Minister against learning of when his screen has been applied until a decision has been finalized and made public, such decisions shall be shared after this point, subject to any limitations or privileges that may apply such as national security or cabinet confidence"; and

2. by adding the following:

"(b) require the Privy Council Office (PCO) to provide the committee, as necessary, any updates to the assessment process for applying the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen;"

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chagger.

We have an amendment to the main motion. Everybody has a copy of it.

There is some discussion. Mr. Barrett has put his name on the list.

Go ahead, Mr. Barrett, please, on the amendment proposed by Ms. Chagger.

Michael Barrett: The Clerk of the Privy Council came to committee. He provided us with the assessment tool. It's entitled "Prime Minister's Conflict of Interest Screen". It's a maximum of two pages of analysis.

There's an overview that it prescribes. The summary is only one sentence. The position on whether the screen should apply is only one sentence. Why the screen applies is only one sentence. As to the facts that are to be included, that's not, in and of itself, information that ought to rise to the level of national security or non-public information.

I appreciate that whatever we adopt here should not create conditions where we would expect the PCO to release non-public information. That would render the screen useless—publishing information they're looking to screen from the subject of the screen, who, in this case, is the Prime Minister. I get that. We're not looking to work around the screen. We're not looking for information to be made public when it could still be acted on or traded on, or when decisions could be taken because of it.

It says:

Explain the Prime Minister's involvement?

Does the decision or discussion involve direct engagement between any of the Companies listed in Annex A [of the Prime Minister's screen] and the Government of Canada?

Are the interests of one of the Companies involved in the decision or discussion, and if so, in what way?

It goes on. The second page of this tool.... I won't read each one into the record.

There's a decision page at the back. The decision page says:

Do you concur that this issue [engages/does not engage] the application of the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen?

Your decision is sought by Click or tap to enter a date.

For positive recommendations, we have applied the screen on a precautionary basis, pending decision.

Yes

No

I need more information.

Then there are two signature blocks, one for Mr. Sabia and one for Monsieur Blanchard, with “Yes”, “No” or “I need more information”.

We're looking for the two pages that the Clerk of the Privy Council—one of two people responsible for the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen—furnished to the committee. That's what we're looking for. He was the one who made their existence known to us, and they're relevant. That's why he told us. It's because they're relevant. What we've received since then is a letter from the deputy secretary to the cabinet. It details some of the circumstances and some of the information, but it doesn't provide the level of granularity that would be of interest to the public. It's also important to know when the screen has not been applied.

We've pursued this issue and will continue to pursue this issue in a spirit of collaboration—truly. I think this process has the potential to provide transparency to Canadians on an issue in the public interest.

There is a ton of media coverage and tons of online discussions about the appearance of conflicts of interest. Why did a meeting between the Prime Minister and this organization or that individual not trigger the screen? How did this action not trigger the screen?

This is a time when we have an opportunity to enhance public confidence in public office holders and our democratic institutions in order to set us apart from other countries. We hear people saying, “Canada has some of the strictest laws” all the time. That doesn't mean that you can't improve on them, and I think that we have the opportunity to do that. It's not an indictment of anyone; it's transparency. I think that it would be beneficial in a lot of ways.

• (1710)

We talk about access to information here. I won't get into a long departure from my core remarks; I'd like to conclude them, but we can do a lot better. I think everyone would agree, all members would agree, that access to information is a very frustrating process even for parliamentarians and definitely for members of the public, including the media.

We need to do better. We can improve on the systems, and this is an opportunity to do that. Is what the motion has better than nothing? Yes, it is, but let's do better than that.

I wonder if the reason we're not seeing some of these things is that there's a reticence on the part of the PCO to provide that information to the committee. I have no interest in just talking in circles around it, and I don't think other members do either.

I wonder if there would be an openness to having the individuals officially responsible for the administration of the screen, the chief of staff to the Prime Minister and the Clerk of the Privy Council, come to talk about it again at this point. Perhaps we could have some folks from PCO come for an hour to tell us what we should be looking for. They could directly inform the committee's work in a very helpful and positive way. They could say, “Well, that's really interesting what you said, Mr. Barrett; however, in 100% of the instances, points two, three and four would have to be redacted for the very same reason every time. Point one is the same every time. In fact, the letter that we're providing to you could only be augmented by providing this piece of information. If the committee wishes, we'd be happy to do that.”

I imagine that if we asked them to come before us in advance, they would undertake to put forward the most information they're prepared to offer. We understand the makeup of the committee. The Liberal members have a majority; I get that, but I also think that well-intentioned members around the table could look to build something that is durable and will survive.

We've heard the reason that Mr. Carney has this screen in place is that he brings with him an experience that has created the conditions necessary for this. Certainly, Liberal members have said those are exactly the kinds of conditions from which a prime minister should come. Well, then I would expect that we would want this tool or mechanism to be durable to survive after this Parliament.

One great thing about this country is that we have elections, and people choose to run in them and not to run in them, but if you look historically, no one is around forever. We've had more than a couple of prime ministers. We'll have another one after Mr. Carney.

This tool, this reporting mechanism, should survive the next election and the election after that, and it should only seek to create more transparency for the public and reduce the number of questions that members of the public have about how they can go on and have that meeting.

It's for the same reason that we have the regime with the Ethics Commissioner with our disclosures and for the same reason that we have the Lobbying Act. Those weren't only necessary under the government in which they were created. In fact, they continued thereafter, but we haven't improved on them in a meaningful way. That's why we're reviewing the Lobbying Act. That's why we reviewed the Conflict of Interest Act. We are the drafters of this new tool, and we have the opportunity to do our best to get it right.

Who better to inform us on that, instead of any or all of us getting it second-hand, than to have not the Clerk of the Privy Council himself come back, but someone from his team who is an expert on this and who could articulate why some things would make sense and why they wouldn't make sense. Then the committee could undertake to do that.

• (1715)

For members' consideration, I offer that. That concludes my remarks.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, I have you next, followed by Ms. Church. Go ahead on the amendment.

• (1720)

Michael Cooper: I speak in opposition to the amendment, because quite frankly, what it does is gut accountability and transparency. We have the most conflicted Prime Minister in Canadian history. There have been more than 500 conflicts, with 103 conflicts related to Brookfield, in which the Prime Minister has stock options. He stands to make tens of millions of dollars from these options, and from future bonus pay, he stands, again, to make tens of millions of dollars.

We had, in the fall, the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Prime Minister's chief of staff come before this committee when we had questions about how the so-called ethics screen would hold up. The Prime Minister holds this up as the gold standard to say that with this ethics screen in place, in the face of 500 conflicts of interest, including 103 related to Brookfield, all is well. Decisions that relate to Brookfield are not being put in front of him, on his desk, and he is recusing himself, because of this so-called robust screen.

The Clerk of the Privy Council, in order to demonstrate the supposed robustness and, frankly, to suggest that there was some level of transparency involving how the screen was applied in terms of documentation, came to us and said they have an assessment tool. Any time there's something flagged wherein the Prime Minister might have a potential conflict of interest, there's an assessment process. Very specific questions are considered.

Once the process is triggered, there is a maximum two-page analysis that documents the issue that had been flagged and the analysis that had been undertaken in respect of the flag in relation to a potential conflict involving the Prime Minister. Then there's a

final sign-off by the two persons responsible for administering the ethics screen—the Prime Minister's chief of staff and the Clerk of the Privy Council. They tick off “yes” to say the screen should be applied; “no” to say the screen shouldn't be applied; or the third option, which is that they need more information and need to go back to the drawing board. That is what the clerk and the Prime Minister's chief of staff have told us is being documented every time a potential issue or conflict is flagged.

With this amendment, which I said guts transparency and accountability, we will only learn of the times that the screen has been invoked. As Mr. Barrett said, that's better than nothing; we'd like to know when the ethics screen has been invoked, but equally relevant is to know the times in which that screen has not been invoked when a question of a potential conflict of interest involving the Prime Minister has been flagged. That is critical in order to understand if the screen is working as it should be, and if in fact decisions involving potential conflicts of interest are being properly captured so that they are not put on the Prime Minister's desk. He's not privy to them.

From the standpoint of transparency, when the Prime Minister's Office says, “Rest assured that we're documenting these instances; there are records”, what good are records if no one can see them? What is being offered with this amendment is that we only see some of the records. We don't see other records that arguably are as material if not more material.

• (1725)

Any time that an issue has been flagged—therefore invoking the process—I'd like to know why ultimately the decision was made as to the screen not being invoked. We need to see both. With this amendment, we only see the positive decisions, not the decisions where the green light is actually given to the Prime Minister to be involved on matters that could relate to Brookfield or could relate to other interests that he has. On that basis, this amendment is problematic.

At the very least, I'd like some better understanding as to what the basis is, what the rationale is, for not including records when a potential conflict has been flagged but a decision has been made to not invoke the screen. What is problematic about presenting that information to this committee? Why is the Prime Minister's Office hiding those outcomes from Canadians? What is it they don't want to show? At the very least, I'd like some explanation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Next on the amendment, I have Ms. Church.

Go ahead, Ms. Church.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, I'll be brief, because I take my colleagues' comments to heart and under consideration.

The amendment that we're proposing does meet some of the tests that my colleagues across the way have set out. The process we have in place right now—the letters we've received from the deputy secretary to the cabinet, the quarterly letters we are receiving that detail the situations where a screen is applied, and the following up, in the course of those letters, with additional information as it is able to be disclosed about decisions that are being made in government at an appropriate time—is an exercise in transparency and accountability that I think we haven't seen before. This is a move in the right direction.

I am heartened that, during the parliamentary break, we received the latest of the letters from the deputy secretary to the cabinet detailing situations that have arisen since February, outlining details around two of those situations where those details can be made public at this time and noting, importantly, that there are additional situations still under consideration that are not yet public, on which we will presumably be provided with details in due course. The letter finishes by setting out that the next quarterly report will be given by August 15.

The process we've set out here is actually a good one for keeping this committee informed on an ongoing basis, and particularly with the portion of the amendment that requires the Privy Council Office to provide the committee, as necessary, any updates to the assessment process for applying the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen. That was actually a nod to what my colleagues across the table are suggesting: that we ensure this committee is informed on a continual basis of the process, both through PCO and by requiring the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to be invited to committee every quarter following one of these reports. It gives an opportunity for this committee to quite transparently consider some of the situations that committee members might be interested in.

I won't belabour this, but what we've come to here is actually a very good development in terms of the conversation we've been having on this for some time now—since last fall—about the process that's under way. There's a good rhythm and now a good sense of the time frames in which we can expect new information. We have a PCO that has been responsive in giving us information according to the schedule that we've set out to date.

This amendment goes one step further in suggesting that we can engage PCO as needed, that we are going to post reports publicly on the committee's website and that we are going to invite the commissioner as needed following these reports. This is a good development, and we'd like to see it move forward.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Church.

I'm going back to Mr. Barrett on the amendment.

Michael Barrett: Is it the amendment or the motion as amended?

The Chair: We're currently on the amendment proposed by Ms. Chagger.

Michael Barrett: That's the emailed version.

I'd like to move a subamendment, then. In paragraph 1, following the words “has been applied”, I'd like to add “or not applied following an assessment”.

The Chair: It reads, “the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen has been applied”, and you're adding “or not applied following an assessment”. Am I hearing that right?

Michael Barrett: Yes.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Barrett has proposed a subamendment. It is in order.

With the subamendment, the amendment would read, “the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen has been applied or not applied following an assessment. Given that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner”, and it continues on beyond that.

Is that correct, Mr. Barrett?

Michael Barrett: That's correct.

The Chair: We're on the subamendment.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

Michael Barrett: I spoke to this, and I think Mr. Cooper did as well. I touched on why when the decision has been made not to apply the screen, this is of interest and is also not injurious to the government.

One of my questions for Liberal members is, why not? If the answer is that there's information in there, what kind of information is it? It's very unclear to me what information they're not prepared to release to the public.

I get the part about non-public information that could be used to take an action that would defeat the screen. That's not what we're looking for. We understand that redactions need to be made for national security and for questions of cabinet confidence. We get that, but what is it in that tool, when it isn't used...?

To be clear, the subamendment doesn't prescribe a change beyond what Ms. Chagger has proposed. It's only about the breadth of the information that they're currently prepared to provide. It's just as important to know when it wasn't used, and for the same reason I said before. When the Prime Minister took a meeting or something ended up on his desk, why did that not trigger the screen?

There are people making these decisions. The tool is being used. It's not the generation of new work. There's no new activity the PCO would need to do. Is there a practical reason? I'm asking this question of any of the Liberal members: Why not?

As I just said, there are several reasons that certain pieces of information can't and won't be released. I can see that, but help us and Canadians understand why this information can't be released to the public when the screen isn't used. Is it because in 99% of cases, it would reveal something injurious to the security of our country? I would hope that they wouldn't publish it on a website. Would it provide insight into decisions or considerations that cabinet is currently pursuing? That speaks to cabinet confidence. That's not going to be released.

If they don't have the answer, then let's invite someone who has the answer. I'm willing to put water in my wine, and I don't believe that it will end up being water at the end. As Ms. Church said, this is a new process in transparency, and I think that's good, but let's do everything we can to get it right. If there's a reason that the information can't be included, then let us know.

If the PCO doesn't have the right people to explain it to us—and I think they probably do—then say so. Let's get this right the first time and include those elements from when the screen hasn't been invoked. Let's find out why not. That would do so much for public confidence, because there are many charts, graphs and explainers about why there are conflicts and why conflicts persist. Where that's correct, that will be borne out. Where it's not correct, that will be dispelled.

• (1735)

Let's get the information. Sometimes, Canadians will be able to make their own decisions, but it gives a pretty powerful tool, even for the government, to explain to Canadians why they've avoided a conflict of interest successfully through the use of this screen.

It's to everyone's advantage. It's fair. It's four words. No, it's six words, because I said, "after the assessment has been used". It's not a math test. Let's get to yes on something that I think does what everyone is looking to have it do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

We have Mr. Cooper and Ms. Church, on the subamendment proposed by Mr. Barrett, to get us to yes.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I speak in support of the subamendment. If the ethics screen is working, as the Prime Minister and his officials claim it is and as Liberals on this committee claim it is, then show us the proof. Show us the evidence that it is working.

We know the Prime Minister has been less than transparent about his conflicts. We have a Prime Minister who has a pattern of repeatedly defying the instructions of the Ethics Commissioner to stay away from Brookfield. In light of that, I have some hesitation in just accepting the assertion that everything is above board and that everything is working well. Hence, show us. Show us the receipts. Show us the records that are relevant.

This is a Prime Minister whom we know, two days after the federal election, met with an executive from a Brookfield-owned company who was subject to the ethics screen. He didn't disclose that.

We only found out about it because the individual who met with him reported it pursuant to the Lobbying Act.

This is a Prime Minister who met with the CEO of Brookfield Infrastructure on May 6 in Washington, D.C. This is a Prime Minister who sat down alone with the chief operating officer of Brookfield in the Prime Minister's Office in October. The Prime Minister didn't say anything about that until the COO came before this committee and admitted that he met with the Prime Minister—told this committee that he met with the Prime Minister. This is a Prime Minister who's met with those connected to Brookfield in New York City and London. There are all sorts of instances where money is going out the door, benefiting Brookfield.

All of this is to say that, number one, the Prime Minister has massive conflicts; second, the Prime Minister has been less than transparent; and third, Brookfield has been a significant beneficiary of money that is going out the door from the government. All of this is to say that in the face of the most conflicted Prime Minister in Canadian history, we have 500 conflicts of interest. By the way, there are 1,900 potential conflicts involving Brookfield that he didn't disclose to the Ethics Commissioner.

One could be forgiven for not just accepting that the ethics screen is working and they'll show us the handful of times that it's been triggered but will not show us all of the other times that red flags have been raised and a decision was made not to invoke it. Who makes the decision? It's none other than the Clerk of the Privy Council, who the Prime Minister appointed, who answers to the Prime Minister and who serves at the pleasure of the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister's chief of staff, who, of course, answers to the Prime Minister. Both of them are arguably in conflicts of interest with respect to the ethics screen.

I'm going to be less generous than Mr. Barrett has been in saying that the ethics screen is hardly a model. It's hardly the gold standard of what to do, but it is the tool that the Prime Minister has put in place, and now we're simply asking for full transparency.

• (1740)

If it is in fact working as the Liberals claim that it is, then I would think they would have no hesitation in supporting this subamendment. I said at the conclusion of my previous remarks that at the very least I'd like some explanation as to the opposition of the Liberals to showing us the records when the decision was made not to trigger the ethics screen. What is problematic about providing that information? Why be transparent only when the screen has been triggered and not when it hasn't been triggered but a threshold has been met and a process is in place that requires an inquiry and analysis?

• (1745)

Michael Barrett: That's right.

Michael Cooper: Is it because the screen is being applied in a less-than-rigorous way? Is it because the Prime Minister, in fact, is involved in a lot of decisions involving these 103 companies in one way or another—103 companies that are Brookfield-related—or other companies that are captured in the ethics screen, the 500? Again, he's the most conflicted Prime Minister in Canadian history.

I'm looking for an explanation. There hasn't been an explanation. All I heard from Ms. Church's submission was that this is a step towards transparency, that this is a step in the right direction. Well, I agree that it's a step in the right direction insofar as getting some of the information, but it's incomplete. It's incomplete in a material way when it comes to understanding the degree to which the ethics screen is working.

The Prime Minister and his officials would purport it to be working in an effective way. Maybe it is. Again, I have very serious doubts, given the track record of the Prime Minister on matters of Brookfield. I'd say that I'm still waiting for some explanation as to what they don't want us to see. Why? It certainly can't be because it's unwieldy.

Back in the fall, we were told by Mr. Sabia that the screen had been triggered on 13 occasions. In seven of the 13 occasions, a decision was made not to invoke the screen, and on six occasions it was invoked. There were 13 occasions. Seven times it wasn't invoked, and six times it was invoked.

Based on the letter we recently received, it has now been triggered 17 times. Presumably, there would be—I don't know—15, 16, 17 or 20 times that it hasn't been triggered if you base that on the ratio we saw previously.

We're talking about a document that is no more than two pages—an analysis of a maximum of two pages. Why can't we see those records? I'd like to know. I'd like an answer to that. Better yet, I would invite the Liberals to back the subamendment. At the very least, I'd like them to provide some explanation as to what the holdup is here, what the problem is here, because I really can't understand what it is. What it seems to me, without any further explanation, is a way to avoid transparency, a way to avoid accountability and a way to hide instances in which the Prime Minister may be involved in decisions where he does, in fact, have a conflict of interest or what could very well be perceived to be a conflict of interest.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Go ahead, Ms. Church, on Mr. Barrett's subamendment.

Leslie Church: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not going to address Mr. Cooper's exaggerations and insinuations, but I have to call them out.

What we are risking here—and this is partly where I think our view on this amendment comes in—is that this is pushing towards a scavenger hunt. Members of this committee asked for transparency. They asked for the Privy Council to provide us with periodic reporting on when the screen was applied. We have that in our session.

With great respect to Mr. Barrett's comment that he would like to know how the Prime Minister avoided a conflict of interest, there actually isn't a conflict of interest when the screen is not applied. What members are asking for here with this subamendment is to do something that we do nowhere else in the conflict of interest regime, which is declare when there isn't a conflict arising. That doesn't mean there are no avenues for the opposition to explore where they have questions. The commissioner's office is built to handle this, but in what they are asking for—call it a fishing expedition or call it a scavenger hunt—they're asking for an unworkable arrangement. They're asking for instances of where there isn't a screen applied.

What we have is a workable solution right now: When the screen is applied, we have disclosure and we have transparency.

• (1750)

[*Translation*]

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Hang on, Ms. Church.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Chair, we can hardly hear Mrs. Church because her microphone is too high. I think it would be a good idea to suggest that she—

The Chair: Yes, her mike is next to her eyes.

[*English*]

It should be better.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

[*English*]

We were hearing you muted, Ms. Church. It should be a little better now.

Go ahead.

Leslie Church: Is that better, Mr. Chair?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Yes.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: It isn't a problem for the interpreters, but for the people in the room.

[*English*]

Just keep going, Ms. Church. If it's a problem, we'll stop you, but it sounds better.

Leslie Church: Well, look, I would just say this. We have an Ethics Commissioner's office. Those resources are available to this committee. We have asked for and PCO has delivered transparent periodic reporting on when a screen is applied, but when it is not applied, it's not that you've avoided a conflict. It's that there isn't a conflict. If any member has issues with any of that, they are welcome to engage the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner on situations. Then that person has all of the information and an ability to weigh in with any parliamentarian.

We have to be somewhat reasonable here in what we are asking for, and that requires setting an objective bar, which is the application of the screen. When the screen is applied, it is transparently reported. It is provided to this committee. This committee has a chance to review that. This committee has a chance to bring in the PCO and bring in the Ethics Commissioner to ask questions about it and to have a fulsome consideration of instances where a screen has applied. To do the reverse, which is to ask for an accounting of when the screen is not applied, doesn't make sense and is outside of what I would think is the workability of the regime as a whole and certainly the precedent of how that regime has worked to date across Parliament and across the executive.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Church.

We'll go to Mr. Cooper, followed by Mr. Barrett.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Michael Cooper: Mr. Chair, Ms. Church was going to call out insinuations that I was making. Is she denying that the Prime Minister is the most conflicted prime minister in Canadian history? Is she denying that he has 103 conflicts of interest related to Brookfield? Is she denying that the Ethics Commissioner told the Prime Minister to stay the heck away from Brookfield, and the Prime Minister proceeded to do the opposite? Is she denying the fact that Brookfield is a beneficiary of a lot of money that has been rolled out by the government? I would hope that she's not denying those very well-established facts.

With respect to what she claims is unwieldy, what is unwieldy about showing us two pages? What's so unwieldy about that? Evidently, it's not unwieldy to show us the two pages when the ethics screen has been triggered, but somehow when a decision is made by the chief of staff and the Clerk of the Privy Council not to issue the screen on a matter where there is an issue, a red flag, a potential conflict, that is immaterial.

It's not a fishing expedition. It's hardly a fishing expedition. These are decisions where enough questions are raised about a potential conflict that it requires an analysis, after which ultimately the Prime Minister's chief of staff and the Clerk of the Privy Council check off "Yes", "No" or "I need more information".

Why can we only see the times they say yes, but not the times they say no? If she wants to respond to that question, I'd be interested in what the response is. To say that, well, there's the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, and if we have questions of the Ethics Commissioner, we can find out.... Yes, we can, sure, by leaving us in the dark about decisions that are made. How can we ask questions about decisions that we don't know were made?

So much for transparency, so much for accountability and so much for saying, "No worries." He's the most conflicted Prime Minister in Canadian history, but they say, "We have the ethics screen, and by the way, we're recording it and keeping records of it, but you can't see the records; you can't see the decisions that are being made." Effectively, it's "go to hell". That's the position that Ms. Church has just asserted—go to hell when it comes to transparency.

• (1755)

Leslie Church: I have a point of privilege, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Church.

Leslie Church: Mr. Chair, I think it is quite borderline unparliamentary of my colleague across the way to be suggesting that and putting those denials on the table in that manner.

The Chair: We're having an emotional debate.

I would suggest, Mr. Cooper, that you use better language, if you don't mind, please. Thank you.

Michael Cooper: Yes. Thank you for that.

Effectively, what Ms. Church is saying is, "Forget about accountability. Forget about transparency."

I go back to my initial point. We're now well into this debate, and arguments have been put forward as to why these records are material. By any objective standard, that cannot be in dispute, but what we have not had from the Liberals, who seem to oppose this, is any explanation, other than convenient excuses, with them saying, "Well, we have an Ethics Commissioner", but what questions can you ask of the Ethics Commissioner when you don't know what decisions were made or not made with respect to the ethics screen? They say it's unwieldy, but we know there were, in October, only seven instances when the ethics screen was not invoked. How can that be unwieldy? It isn't unwieldy.

Again, in the face of what we're hearing and what we know with respect to how this process works, the inference can be drawn that the Prime Minister's Office just doesn't want Canadians to know about how the ethics screen is being applied. They want to be very selective in shedding some light, but when it is arguably even more material....

When issues have been flagged but a decision was made that the Prime Minister can be involved in decision-making even though flags were raised, that sounds pretty material. I think most Canadians would like to know when that happens, how often it happens, what it pertains to and what the rationale is for giving the Prime Minister the green light. However, Ms. Church is saying that the Liberals are going to give this committee the red light in terms of not being able to access those records.

This is critical. This subamendment is critical to the substance of this motion. If we don't have the records of when a decision is made that the ethics screen not be applied, it will be absolutely impossible to determine whether in fact it is being applied in a vigorous and consistent manner such that the Prime Minister avoids conflicts of interest. Again, this is in the face of what is an unprece-

dent situation, namely the most conflicted Prime Minister in Canadian history standing to make tens of millions of dollars from Brookfield.

• (1800)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Before I go to Mr. Barrett, I just want to advise the committee that we did receive confirmation from the Ethics Commissioner that he is definitely available on June 11, and members of his team will be here as well. The hope is that the finance minister will make himself available.

I'm going to adjourn the meeting. We will resume this debate on Thursday.

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