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Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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EVIDENCE

Wednesday, June 2, 2010

—
Chair

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Wednesday, June 2, 2010

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.)): Order.

Committee members, it is 3:30, and I would like to—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Yes, I will in a minute.

I would like to ensure—

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Madam Chair, I would like to raise a question of privilege.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, you do have a question of privilege, and you will get time.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Chair, it is my opinion that the rights and privileges of the members of this committee have been infringed upon. I would therefore like to lodge a formal complaint.

At our last committee meeting on Monday, May 31, 2010, you informed us that Mr. Nazim Gillani had sent a bundle of documents to the committee. Madam Chair, you indicated at the time that there were 725 pages of documents and that these were in one official language only. The committee discussed at length whether or not to distribute the documents until they were translated. A number of valid arguments were raised by committee members.

I'm going to wait until I have your attention, Madam Chair. Are you listening to me?

[English]

The Chair: I'm listening to you and I'm also asking for verification of the blues—

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I'll finish what I have to say and then you can inquire about that.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, I'm listening to you. Women can do multi-tasking quite well, so I'm listening to you.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Chair, the documents in question must be translated before they can be distributed to members. Mr. Nadeau, my Bloc Québécois colleague, made some excellent points. Specifically, he said this:

[...] the two official languages are French and English. That being the case, then the clerk's office has a responsibility to ensure that the documents are translated for the benefit of committee members.

I tabled a motion calling for all documents to be translated and the committee unanimously endorsed it. I'm sure all members remember my motion. I know that Mr. Martin from the NDP agreed that all members should have equal access to documents. That's why I'm very concerned, Madam Chair, and why I'd like to know if the documents that Mr. Gillani recently turned over to the committee were sent to members of the media before they were translated and before the committee members for whom they were originally intended had access to them. We know the documents were circulated to the press because mention was made of them yesterday in a Canadian Press release. Canadian Press reported that the documents had recently been turned over to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. You must certainly know, Madam Chair, that you were the only committee member to have had access to the documents. You said so yourself and, if you will excuse my pronunciation, you said, and I quote, "there are 725 pages of information that I have taken a look at". Obviously then, you were the one who circulated these documents to the media before they were translated and before members had an opportunity to see them. Therefore, Madam Chair, I would like to move the following motion, and it will be distributed in both English and French:

That the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates report to the House at the earliest opportunity that the rights and privileges of members on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates are believed to have been infringed upon; the Committee therefore requests that the Speaker of the House of Commons investigate this matter in a timely fashion and rule on whether the rights and privileges of members have been infringed upon; and that in the interim the member from Don Valley East should recuse herself temporarily and immediately of all duties as the Chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

You have made an accusation. I had no access to the documents that were in the clerk's possession. He advised me that it was irrelevant—that there were a lot of documents that were irrelevant—and that it was in English. So we brought it to the committee's attention. And whoever has released it to the media...it could be Mr. Gillani; I have no idea who has released it to the media.

The clerk informs me that your motion is out of order, because you cannot instruct the Speaker to do anything.

With that, I'd like to ensure....

Yes, Monsieur Guimond.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): I will wait until you have finished responding, Madam Chair. My point of order concerns an entirely different matter.

[English]

The Chair: I have actually responded to it, because, one, the gentleman in question is being ungentlemanly and making accusations that he cannot back, and two, the clerk advises me that his motion is out of order. So we proceed.

Mr. Guimond.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: I have a point of order.

Madam Chair—

[English]

An hon. member: Madam Chair—

The Chair: He's on a point of order.

An hon member: Okay, I'll wait until later.

The Chair: You cannot interrupt his point of order. Let him finish.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Chair, I see that our witnesses are present, namely Mr. Doug Maley, Assistant Deputy Minister, Alberta Region, and Mr. André C. Morin, Valuation and Payments in Lieu of Taxes Programs. However, I would like to know why the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, the Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario) and the Minister of Natural Resources are here today, given that they were not invited to testify.

Madam Chair, committees are an extension and a creation of the House of Commons. The rules that govern the proceedings of the House of Commons also apply to committee operations. However, our Standing Orders are more explicit when it comes to witnesses in committee because, as you know, witnesses are not permitted on the floor of the House of Commons. In committee, however, witnesses are generally present for reports and studies. The generally accepted principle is that committees are master of their own proceedings. As such, the committee decides who it would like to call as a witness. At this time, I would like to read from page 1063 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* where the following is noted:

Witness selection may be carried out in a number of different ways. Generally, witnesses are proposed by individual committee members. The committee may also invite potential witnesses to indicate their interest in appearing. The selection is often delegated to the subcommittee on procedure and agenda, subject to the ratification by the main committee. [...] It is the committee's responsibility to determine which witnesses it will hear. Practical considerations, such as the length of time allocated for a study, may limit the number of witnesses the committee will be able to accommodate.

Madam Chair, it is not up to the witnesses to decide when they will appear before the committee, much less to appear in place of other witnesses who have been called to testify. Through their actions, the Conservatives, and in particular the three ministers that have come here today, are displaying arrogance and contempt for the committee, which was democratically constituted pursuant to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. They are showing contempt for the democratic process. Once again, the Conservatives are behaving as if they are above the rules. They are demonstrating their utter lack of respect for our democratic institutions like the House of Commons and its committees. They are showing their true colours by exhibiting their utter contempt for Parliament. Their actions prove, Madam Chair, that they are incapable of living with democracy, as this committee is a by-product of democratic will. The best proof we have of this is the composition of this committee. Government members are in the minority on this committee, just as the Conservatives form a minority Parliament, further to the exercise of the democratic will of the people of Quebec and of Canada. By coming here today, these ministers are displaying their arrogance.

Last May 25, Mr. Hill, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, attempted to bring in a new set of rules governing the appearance of witnesses. He announced that political staffers would no longer be permitted to testify before committees.

● (1540)

Mr. Hill decided unilaterally to rewrite the Standing Orders. Since he wasn't happy with the old ones, he decided to rewrite them to suit himself. I'm sorry, but we won't be a party to this charade. It has gone on long enough. You must respect democracy, regardless of what the government leader might think. He can try and strong-arm us all he wants, but there are rules in place here.

Ministerial staffers have been called to testify and they must do so, in accordance with the Standing Orders. They will be subpoenaed. If they chose to ignore the subpoena, we will present a motion to the House of Commons, one that will subsequently be debated. These individuals will be found in contempt of Parliament. When you receive an invitation, sirs, then you can come here and testify.

In fact, the committee invited Mr. Paradis, the Minister of Natural Resources to come and testify on May 4 last, but he declined. And now, he shows up here today, even though he was not invited. When the committee needs to draw on his expertise for a study, then it will invite him back.

Today, Madam Chair, I am asking you to let these uninvited ministers know that they are not welcome here and that we will press ahead with our plans to hear from political staffers who were responsible for decisions that were made. They are the ones we want to hear from. We will invite the ministers back at another time, if that is what the majority of committee members decide.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Guimond.

I have two people who want to speak to your point of order—Madam Coady and Mr. Holder—and then I will give my decision. Oh, and Mr. Cullen wants to speak.

If I could have each party give their input, then I will render my decision.

Instead of Mr. Holder, you want to be speaking?

An hon. member: No, I'll go after.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Coady.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you for that very impassioned presentation. I support you in that the Conservatives do seem to think they're above the rules. They've shut down everything that we've tried to do. They've not answered questions in the House of Commons. They have not been open and transparent in what they've been doing. Practically every step of the way we've had to really squeeze them to give us the information that we require.

I, like you, think our rights and privileges have been really put to the test here under this. We've asked a number of ministers to come before us in previous times and they haven't shown up. We were sitting there with empty chairs. And now they decide they are going to grace us with their presence.

Having said that, we've been asking question after question in the House. We've been asking for answers to the many very serious questions that we have. It's the height of hypocrisy, I think, that in previous times Conservatives demanded staff to come before committee, who always obliged. And now, when they are in the hot seat, they will not allow it to happen—yet they hold their staff accountable for the many things that they do when there are problems.

I think, personally, we have the “Jaffer three” before us today, and I think it is important that we have answers to some of the questions that we have. I do ask, though, that we reserve the right, if we don't get the answers we require from the Jaffer three—the shadow cabinet of Mr. Jaffer—to actually call the staff to show before us at another time.

But I do think that while we have the ministers here today, we should press forward, we should ask the questions. They have been disrespectful to this committee, they have been disrespectful to the people of Canada. And I would like to make sure that we reserve that right to call the staff when and if required.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Holder.

• (1545)

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm quite disturbed by the tenor of members opposite.

Mr. Guimond, when he spoke, could speak in a normal voice and we would hear him just as well; I didn't realize I didn't need a microphone or an earpiece to hear him clearly.

I say this with respect—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Holder: I think it's my point of order, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: The member has no business commenting on my tone of voice.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Holder: Madam Chair, this is my point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: If I'm speaking too loudly for him, then he should turn the volume down completely, just as most of the anglophones on the other side have done. They are not listening to the simultaneous interpretation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Order.

Monsieur Guimond—

Mr. Ed Holder: Madam Chair, may I please continue?

The Chair: Mr. Holder, one second. You made a point that you didn't think you needed to have—

Mr. Ed Holder: The earpiece.

The Chair: Yes. And that's what he was responding to in your point of order.

Now I'll let you continue.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you, Madam Chair, because that's very much the point. When our guests come, whether they be earlier staffers or members of Parliament—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Ed Holder: Madam Chair, am I allowed to speak to my point?

The Chair: You're allowed to speak, and I'll—

Mr. Ed Holder: Then will you please rule them out of order so that I can speak?

The Chair: Mr. Holder, I have to quote from page 976 of O'Brien and Bosc.

Mr. Ed Holder: Yes, please.

The Chair: Can I read it for you so that you understand where they are coming from?

It says:

There is no specific rule governing voluntary appearances by Members of the House of Commons before parliamentary committees. They may appear before a committee if they wish and have been invited.

That's the specific issue. If you call them “guests”, they are voluntary guests. They are voluntary MPs who have come.

So if you continue on with your point of order, then nobody will interrupt you. Okay? Thanks.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My reference to “guests” versus “witnesses” is only to show a bit of a tenor that is not always equally displayed by some members around this committee table. That has just been the courtesy that I have typically tried to show with people who have come to this table voluntarily or otherwise. I think that's a courtesy and a terminology that I use.

I respect the point, but it does come to the point of the individuals who come to this table when they're treated with a great volume of what ultimately becomes rhetoric, what becomes, frankly, intimidating behaviour.

When my colleague opposite, who I have great regard for, refers to them as the “Jaffer three”, that is so, so disrespectful. I have great regard for that member, but I see that and I think that's thin, I think that's poor form. I would say it's absolutely unparliamentary, and it really gets to the heart of why, frankly, in some respects when our witnesses come here and they feel badgered by some members around this table, I don't blame them for not wanting them to come, just from the standpoint of the tenor of the language, the tone, the volume—all of those things, Madam Chair.

That speaks, firstly, to the point as to why I think ultimately we need to show respect to our witnesses, so that... Frankly, this, even by its own tone, can be a fairly intimidating process. Perhaps it isn't to some of our hardened, grizzled cabinet members—I'm not sure about that—but I would say that all of them deserve the respect of members opposite.

The other point I would make is this. Rather than members opposite playing politics with this parliamentary committee...and I think this has been shameful. I even reflect back to what happened when we had Mr. Derek Lee here before our committee at our request. We found out at that meeting, and Mr. Martin was the one who brought this forward...ultimately determined by his own right, which is his right, not to come as a witness but to come and sit on the same side as him. Then ultimately it got absolutely filibustered by a couple of members who aren't even the regular members of this committee. I would rather have had them there because they understand the flow of it, but conveniently, two other members of that party were present. I think that was absolutely distasteful.

Madam Chair, coming back to this whole issue of our members here, I'm going to take you back, if I might, to our meeting of Wednesday, May 5, and what was agreed. It was agreed that on Wednesday, June 2, regarding the study on renewable energy projects funded by the government, the committee invite Doug Maley, Sébastien Togneri, Andrew House, Scott Wenger, Kimberley Michelutti, André Morin, and Sandy White to appear.

Here's what's rather interesting. We have here now Minister Paradis on behalf of Mr. Togneri. We have Minister Paradis on behalf of Sandy White, who I would point out is no longer a staffer. Minister Goodyear is here on behalf of Andrew House. We have Minister Baird here on behalf of Kimberley Michelutti.

I'll take you back, if I may, to the statement that was made by the government House leader on May 25, where he said that in Canada the constitutional principle is all about ministerial responsibility. He made a statement regarding that ministerial accountability to Parliament.

I won't read all those details. I'll just make a few quick points, if I might.

He said that ministers are ultimately accountable and answerable to Parliament, and ministers' staff members will not appear when called before parliamentary committees; instead, ministers will appear before committee when required to account for a staff member's action.

Further, what they said was that all departmental activity is carried out in the name of the minister—I think we all know that—and ultimately that accountability must lie with our cabinet ministers; and that the government fully recognizes the authority of parliamentary committees to call for persons or papers as they carry out their work. However, ministers are accountable and answerable to Parliament for government policies, decisions, or operations. Ministerial staff are ultimately accountable through the minister they serve. Ministers ran for office and they accepted those roles and those responsibilities of being a minister, including being accountable and answering questions in Parliament.

Again, ministerial staff are ultimately accountable through their ministers and through their ministry. When they accepted their position to support their ministers, their staff did not sign on to be humiliated or intimidated by members of Parliament at this or any other committee. Ministerial staff who have appeared before committee have been denied the accompanying support of their own ministers. That has happened in a different committee from this. They've been denied the opportunity to give opening statements normally granted to committee witnesses, and they've been threatened by opposition MPs with contempt of Parliament through the media.

Even during the largest political scandal in history, Liberals frankly demanded ministerial accountability. And, frankly, from our standpoint, what we are suggesting and making very clear is that what we have here is ministerial accountability. I've been at this table with members opposite when they have said that we need to have the ministers here, that we need to be able to speak to ministers directly.

Well, we have the ministers right here. Frankly, ministerial accountability stops with ministers.

Madam Chair, I respectfully submit that they are here on behalf of those who were requested, and I look forward to their testimony as they give it today.

Thank you.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Holder.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

We've truly entered the theatre of the absurd. When ministers are called to committees, they don't show up, and when you don't call them, they bang down the door looking to testify.

There are serious allegations in front of this committee that the public has a right to get answers to—serious allegations of corruption, of money changing hands in inappropriate ways.

The concern I have, Madam Chair, is that the precedent the government is attempting to create today is a dangerous path that the government walks down. We've seen it in many examples around the House of Commons and at committees. Whether it's through prorogation, shutting down debate, firing officers of Parliament, or cutting funding to groups that have the audacity to actually criticize the government, this is more than just the concern of the political machinations of the Conservative Party. These are the foundations on which this place is based, the foundations of fair and open transparency—democracy, for heaven's sake, which this party apparently ran on to get elected. What we are seeing here today is undermining the power, role, and in fact responsibility of this committee.

The point is that under the guise—we've heard this protestation from ministers before—of protecting staff, under this guise, under this false premise, ministers are appearing when they are not called. They are refusing to allow their staff to appear.

This is the same government that, when a minister is in trouble, finds no problem throwing various staff under the bus. We saw this with Minister Guergis, we saw this with Minister Raitt, and we saw this with Minister Ambrose. When something got into the press, when something went wrong, the first person to walk the plank was the staff. The ministers weren't demoted. They weren't fired. They weren't called to account. They simply sought out the staff person most likely associated with the problem and got rid of them. Now we see the reverse.

Clearly the argument being made, and I'm sure it will be made by the ministers here today, is that they want to protect staff from some sort of attack by the opposition. What we are looking for is answers—i.e., who knew what, and when? Who signed off on which projects with regard to Rahim Jaffer and Helena Guergis? That's what the committee is looking for. We're looking for it from the people who actually made those decisions. That may or may not be these ministers.

We'll call you when we're good and ready. The people we called here were the staff who actually made those decisions, who are implicated, who are drawn in; we've heard from testimony that these staff made these decisions. It seems incumbent upon them and incumbent upon this government to allow the truth out.

The best disinfectant is sunlight, and we're allowing the sun to shine on this case. That's what this committee is attempting to do.

Now, my mom always considered it rude to show up to a party you weren't invited to.

Some hon. members: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Clearly, today this committee has sought out—

• (1555)

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Cullen, you have the floor.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Clearly, today the committee has sought, in its wisdom, to call forward the people most directly implicated in—

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities): We're here to give you the truth. You can't handle the truth.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Chair....

An hon. member: Call the security.

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Baird, don't interrupt.

Yes, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I find the minister has more affectations for Hollywood than he does Parliament.

He should know that in this place, the power of parliamentary committees rules over considerations of any partisan interests. It is the power of this committee to call witnesses forward to find the truth of the matter. This is what the opposition has attempted to do.

In all earnestness and respect to the government, they must abide by it. Otherwise, they threaten the very foundations on which this House of Commons is built; they threaten through their tactics of prorogation, intimidation of officers of Parliament, and cutting of funding to programs that have the audacity to criticize the government's policies. These are all dangerous paths that the government is on right now. It must reverse course and allow witnesses forward who can actually bring testimony, actual evidence, to allow Canadians to understand what happened in this affair. It is incumbent upon the government to do it.

I thank you for the committee's time, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I've heard from all sides, and I'd like to make a ruling.

I am disappointed, as everybody is, that witnesses who were invited today have not shown up. But we have two witnesses who have shown up—Mr. Maley and Mr. Morin—and we are continuing our study.

So I would request that the committee focus their questions—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: —on Mr. Maley and Mr. Morin, and if you have—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

• (1600)

The Chair: I'll have to throw you out of this committee, Mr. Baird, because you can't—

Hon. John Baird: I'm a member of Parliament.

The Chair: —have a point of order here.

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: Could you turn off his mike?

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: So to the committee, I could ask you—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: —if you want to ask a question—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: —of the ministers, you can—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: —but we can, if we want to—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: —continue, only focusing on all, or only the two.

Hon. John Baird: I'm a member of Parliament and I'd like to speak.

The Chair: So my ruling is that the two witnesses we have—

Hon. John Baird: Madam Chair, a point of order.

The Chair: Order.

You have no point of order, Mr. Baird.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. John Baird: I'm a member of Parliament.

The Chair: I am giving my ruling.

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

An hon. member: Point of order.

Hon. John Baird: Point of order, Madam Chair.

An hon. member: Point of order.

The Chair: Can we call in security to throw these guys out?

An hon. member: Yes, maybe...*[Inaudible—Editor]*.

The Chair: I am in the middle of a ruling—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order, Madam Chair. Point of order.

An hon. member: Point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin, I am giving my ruling and then you can challenge the ruling. You can't challenge it—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: —when I'm in the middle of giving a ruling.

Hon. John Baird: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: My ruling is that those two—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: —can be witnesses.

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: If you do not want the ministers to be—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: —answering questions, you have the opportunity. That is my ruling.

Now, Mr. Warkentin, you have a point of order.

An hon. member: Motion to challenge the chair.

Hon. John Baird: Madam Chair, a point of order.

The Chair: You have not been sworn in—

An hon. member: Motion to challenge the chair.

The Chair: —as a member of this committee—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: —so you don't...I'm sorry.

Hon. John Baird: Point of order, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I have a point of order. I am a member of Parliament and I'm entitled to speak.

The Chair: The committee is suspended for 30 seconds.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-

The Chair: Order.

Monsieur Guimond...

Do you think we are all calm enough to continue, with the ruling that I have given?

An hon. member: *[Inaudible—Editor]*

The Chair: Then you challenge my ruling, and if you want to sustain my ruling you will vote—

An hon. member: Motion to challenge the chair.

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

An hon. member: *J'invoque le Règlement.*

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: I am sorry, the media will have to leave. You will have to leave.

Hon. John Baird: I have a point of order.

An hon. member: Let the members speak.

The Chair: You are not sworn in as a member. You do not have—

Hon. John Baird: I am not a member of the committee, but I'm a member of Parliament. Could I have a point of order?

Listen to the clerk...*[Inaudible—Editor]*.

The Chair: The clerk...

Order!

Ladies and gentlemen—

Hon. John Baird: Point of order.

The Chair: Minister, could you just calm down? I will tell you exactly what the clerk told me.

Could the media please leave?

Hon. John Baird: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The media have left.

Hon. John Baird: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Baird—

Hon. John Baird: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: —you have to decide whether you have come as a witness or not. Are you a witness or not?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Committee members....

Okay, Mr. Baird, you may give your point of order.

Hon. John Baird: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. As—

Mr. Michel Guimond: *J'invoque le Règlement.*

The Chair: No, no—

Hon. John Baird: I have the House of Commons—

The Chair: Wait.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

I want to know if the Conservative Party presented a list of substitute witnesses to the committee clerk so that members—

Hon. John Baird: I have a copy of the Standing Orders with me.

[*English*]

The Chair: Wait, Mr. Guimond, you can't have a point of order on the point of order.

Mr. Baird, the floor is yours.

Hon. John Baird: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I would refer you to....

I'm a former government House leader. I'm a former opposition House leader. I'm a former parliamentary secretary to the government House leader. I'm a former chief government whip. I've actually read the rules, so I understand them.

Under the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, 2009, on page 1018, "Status of Members, Associate Members and Non-members", it clearly states that any member of Parliament, any one of the 308 members of Parliament, is entitled to come to committee. They're entitled to be heard.

Madam Chair, while I cannot vote, I am an elected member of Parliament, and I am here to be heard. And I appreciate that it only took me, you know, 50 times to be able to ask to be heard, because you don't know the rules, and it is an absolute disgrace.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. John Baird: I am here as a member of Parliament, and I have every right to be heard.

The Chair: Mr. Baird, you are sitting as a witness, so decide what you want. You can't have it both ways. You can't eat your cake. Either you're a witness or you sit here.

Hon. John Baird: I never said I was a witness.

The Chair: Good. Bye.

Okay, Madam Coady—

Hon. John Baird: What about my point of order? I haven't finished my point of order.

The Chair: I thought you had.

Hon. John Baird: No, you interrupted me.

• (1605)

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Baird, you have the floor.

Hon. John Baird: Here's how points of order work: members of Parliament get to raise them and the chair has to listen to them. I'm sorry if that's an inconvenience to you, Madam Chair.

Let me tell you this: I am also a minister of the government and I am here to take personal responsibility. Ministerial responsibility is one of the essences of our parliamentary democracy. If anyone has any questions with respect to employees in my office, I am here, I am prepared to be accountable, and I will answer each and every question.

I've heard members of the New Democratic Party say that when we're asked to come, we don't come. Though you haven't asked me to come, I am here—to answer any and all questions of people who work in my political office. If you have any questions, I am prepared to be accountable, I am prepared to respond to them, and I am prepared to participate in this discussion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Baird—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Order! Committee members, order.

Mr. Baird, I'm going to read your letter:

Pursuant to the statement made by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons on May 25, and the motion passed by the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates on May 5, 2010 requesting the appearance of Kim Michelutti, this letter is to inform the Committee that I have instructed Ms. Michelutti that I will be appearing in her place.

It clearly states that you came here as a witness. It's the committee's prerogative—

An hon. member: Point of order.

The Chair: —to say whether you are a witness or not. So whether you are a witness or not, you have to decide. You came in here as a witness. You didn't come as a minister of the crown. You came as a witness.

Yes, Mr. Brown, go ahead on your point of order.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Thank you....

Siobhan, I've been waiting since 3:30 to speak, so I'm pleased that the chair finally recognized me.

First of all, on the printed agenda for today, these three ministers are not down as witnesses, so to say that you all of a sudden recognize them as witnesses is the height of hypocrisy.

Hon. John Baird: It's the rules, Yasmin; you should try to read them. Every chair should read them.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Unfortunately, I think the circus today—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. John Baird: No, I just expected intelligent conversation.

The Chair: Order.

Let Mr. Brown speak.

Mr. Patrick Brown: I think unfortunately the circus today is because of these disingenuous rulings. It started today at 3:30, when you said that you hadn't seen these documents that were supposedly transmitted, without the permission of the committee, to the media, in an untranslated form. We all agreed they were going to be bilingual.

You said at the beginning of the meeting, Madam Chair, that you hadn't seen them. Well, I've got the blues from the last meeting, where you said: "I will just clarify what I said."

The Chair: That's not a point of order. If you have a point of order—

Mr. Patrick Brown: You said, "There are 725 pages of information that I have taken a look at, and some of it is not relevant to us at all."

The Chair: No, it's not a point of order, it's debate....

Turn it off.

Is there anybody else?

Ladies and gentlemen, committee members, do you want to proceed with those two as witnesses?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: No, you do not wish to....? Okay.

Ms. Coady has....

Mr. Martin was first.

You have the floor, Mr. Martin. You had put your name down.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): I'll pass, thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Ms. Coady.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Siobhan Coady: I was hoping to speak.

First of all, I've been around a long time. I've been on lots of boards of directors—

Hon. John Baird: Eighteen months: that's a long time, Siobhan.

The Chair: Mr. Baird, don't interrupt.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Look, bullies in the schoolyard should never be listened to. My mother taught me that, Minister Baird. This intimidation tactic....

Mr. Holder came here today and said—

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Baird, could you behave yourself?

Ms. Siobhan Coady: —that one of the reasons why the ministers have to go before us is because this committee intimidates witnesses? I beg to differ. You are trying to intimidate not just the chair but this entire committee.

Now, look, I have been in business for a very long time. I have been on lots of boards of directors. This is ridiculous. When we were talking about things earlier, the Conservatives are the ones who started it with questioning the chair and going around....

We had a good round and a good discussion about whether or not we wanted to hear from witnesses. I said I wouldn't mind hearing from witnesses; we've been trying to ask them for several months now the questions that we need answered. But I want to reserve the right that we should call, and be able to call, the staff if we don't get the answers that we want.

The chair was ruling on that, and then it disintegrated into this—

Hon. John Baird: Are you going to...[*Inaudible—Editor*]?

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Are you trying to intimidate me, Minister Baird? Because I'll put myself up against you any day on intimidation factors. Don't try to intimidate me—ever.

An hon. member: Bravo.

The Chair: Order.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: If I may finish, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: I think, if we can get back to some semblance of order in this committee, these are serious issues. This is a committee of Parliament, and Parliament is a committee formed by the people of Canada.

Please, have some respect for the people of Canada. We have questions that are legitimate, that have very serious implications for the people of this country. Well, please, let's allow the chair to rule and we may be able to do that. And stop trying to intimidate us.

Thank you.

An hon. member: Hear, hear.

• (1610)

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, my ruling that we have to take a vote....

Sorry...when you get your turn....

Mr. Brown....

Let's not make it into a school of grade 5s playing across from each other.

I made a ruling saying that committee members could ask the two witnesses questions. If they wish to propose questions to the ministers, they can do so.

Is my ruling sustained, or do I have a challenge to the chair?

Mr. Patrick Brown: I want to challenge the chair.

The Chair: Okay, fine; challenge the chair.

All those who wish to have the ministers not questioned....

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. John Baird: Read the rules.

The Chair: Order.

Just so that you know what the ruling was, and then nobody can tell me they didn't know what the ruling was, the ruling was this: you have the opportunity to question those two witnesses, and, if you wish to question the ministers, do so.

Oui.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Let's make one thing clear, Madam Chair. Mr. Baird insisted that as a member of Parliament, he had certain rights, even though he is not a member of the committee and even though he is a government member. How can we—

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Guimond, sorry, that is debate.

I made a ruling, and I think—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: How can we question a minister? I cannot question Mr. Warkentin or Mr. Gourde. I cannot put questions to them, as they are not witnesses. Questions must be directed to witnesses.

We will not be asking the ministers any questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Order.

Monsieur Guimond, Mr. Brown challenged the ruling of the chair, so I had to repeat the ruling. I would like to get a vote.

Shall the chair's ruling be sustained?

Hon. John Baird: What was the ruling?

The Chair: The ruling was that the ministers can be questioned.

Some hon. members: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: They can be questioned.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Madam Chair, I'd be happy to withdraw my challenge.

The Chair: Okay.

Ministers, can you now take back your seats? We can proceed....

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: No. I asked, "Can they be questioned?", and then the ruling was, "Is the chair challenged?", because Mr. Brown has withdrawn his challenge.

So let's take a vote....

Are you challenging my ruling, Monsieur Guimond?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: No.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay: no challenge.

Mr. Maley, you have an opening statement, and Mr. Morin, you have an opening statement. Please keep it brief; we said two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Doug Maley (Assistant Deputy Minister, Alberta Region, Western Economic Diversification): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

As assistant deputy minister for Western Economic Diversification Canada in the Alberta region, I support our department's mandate in developing and diversifying the western Canadian economy.

Our department delivers programs that improve innovation, business development, and community economic development throughout the four western provinces. This includes initiatives that are delivered directly by Western Diversification as well as the western portion of a number of national programs and initiatives.

WD uses grants and contribution programs and funding is provided to not-for-profit organizations such as industry associations, economic development organizations, research institutes, or universities.

[*Translation*]

WD doesn't normally provide funding to businesses.

[*English*]

The department designs, delivers, monitors, and evaluates projects in a way that is consistent with best practices and that meets the federal due diligence standards.

Project proposals may be received at various levels in our department. Regardless of how an application is received, the due diligence process remains the same. Some steps include ensuring the proposal meets program criteria, reviewing the financial market and economic viability of the project, and confirming funding from other stakeholders and partners.

Other steps in the due diligence process are related to specific federal obligations—for example, completion of appropriate consultative processes, including with the first nations, and ensuring that projects meet regulatory and environmental requirements. This due diligence process must be completed before federal funding can be provided to any project.

At times it may be determined upon preliminary review of an application that the project did not meet the programming criteria. In these cases, a project may be declined immediately, and options to more appropriate sources of funding may be provided to the applicant.

I was contacted by Mr. Jaffer concerning a proposal for a project supporting a technology development plan and testing. The project was reviewed by departmental officials and me, and determined to fall outside WD's program criteria, as the primary beneficiaries were for-profit companies. No funding was provided.

To conclude, WD ensures that the investment of federal funds is supported by a strong and feasible business case and that funding is delivered within a framework that ensures appropriate stewardship and accountability for public funds.

Merci.

• (1615)

The Chair: *Merci.*

We'll go to Monsieur Morin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Morin (Director, Valuation and Payments in lieu of taxes (PILT) Programs, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you.

I am currently a director with the Valuation and Payments in Lieu of Taxes Program within the Real Property Branch of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

I have been a public servant for about 10 years. I worked from 1986 to 1999 as a real estate expert/consultant and appraiser in the private sector. I am certified by the Ordre des évaluateurs agréés du Québec and I have been a member of that organization since 1989. Also, since 1992, I hold the AACI designation, which stands for real estate accredited appraiser from the Appraisal Institute of Canada.

[*English*]

For a period of 16 months, from January 2009 to April 2010, I accepted an assignment in the office of the deputy minister as a strategic adviser. In the position of strategic adviser, I was reporting directly to the chief of staff, and some of my duties were, for example, the coordination of information, briefing materials, and written reports. Also, I was reviewing, evaluating, and analyzing certain files, giving advice and support to senior executives if necessary.

One of my numerous duties was to serve as the liaison between mainly real property branch, the deputy minister's office, and the office of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. I was representing the deputy minister's office to the minister's office, and I had to describe the priorities and requests of the minister's office on different files so that PWGSC staff could provide appropriate and timely responses. In this job, therefore, I regularly communicated with staff in the minister's office. This was part of my normal duties.

When requests are received for a meeting, we follow a normal process to seek advice and prepare for meetings. Part of my responsibilities while I was working in the deputy minister's office was to facilitate the response to invitations to meet and prepare for meetings if requested.

The values of the Department of Public Works and Government Services are respect, integrity, excellence, and leadership. I have always worked to uphold these values in my years of public service.

This concludes my opening statement. I will be happy to answer all your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Coady, you have eight minutes.

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario)): Am I allowed an opening statement?

The Chair: No.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: I'm not allowed an opening statement as a witness?

The Chair: No, you are not our witness.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Oh, my goodness.

The Chair: You were not invited as a witness.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Did you not just have a motion that made us witnesses?

The Chair: I never did say that you were witnesses. What I said was that if committee members wished to question you—

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Well, I would like to be heard.

The Chair: I'm sorry, it's Ms. Coady....

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Oh, my goodness.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Brown.

Mr. Patrick Brown: On a point of order, Madam Chair, obviously we misrepresented...what your ruling was. Your ruling was that we have them and we hear from them. Now, to hear from them without giving them the opportunity to speak is a little bit difficult.

In that context, I'd like to remind you that on page 139 of Justice John Gomery's report, he said, "Ministers need to understand clearly that they are accountable, responsible and answerable for all the actions of their exempt staff." And that's what they're doing here today.

The Chair: It's not a point of order, Mr. Brown, it's debate.

Mr. Patrick Brown: You may like to ignore Judge Gomery, since the Liberal Party has, but it's very relevant to today's hearing.

An hon. member: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Brown, you love to twist people's words. If we could have the translation fast, we would get it, but the bottom line is that I said you could question the ministers if you wished to.

If you wish to question the ministers, you can. I'm not saying they're witnesses. If they become witnesses, they can go and sit there later.

Ms. Coady....

Did you have a point of order?

• (1620)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Yes, Madam Chair.

I think for the benefit of the committee, I would just move a motion that the ministers would sit as witnesses for the remainder of the committee and be given the same opportunity to provide an introduction as our other witnesses have.

Hon. John Baird: I don't need an opening statement. I'll just take all your questions.

The Chair: There is a motion on the floor...

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: I'm not afraid of opening statements. We were giving two minutes to everyone.

An hon. member: We've wasted so much time.

The Chair: Yes, we have.

He has a motion.

A voice: It's debatable.

Mr. Michel Guimond: I would like to speak to it.

The Chair: Monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: We are debating the motion. As I said earlier, I will try not to speak too loudly, so as not to offend Mr. Holder. As I said before, the committee is master of its own proceedings. It has undertaken a serious study to find out more about the actions of Rahim Jaffer, the former chair of the national Conservative caucus, who fraudulently used his former business card. These actions ultimately led to the demotion or firing of his spouse, Helena Guergis. We are still in the dark as to the exact reasons for her demotion. Even she does not know the reasons. In essence, the committee wants to know the extent of Mr. Jaffer and Ms. Guergis' involvement in this whole affair. To that end, it launched a study and decided to invite a number of witnesses. This was discussed in the course of our in-camera meetings on future business. At such times, we decide which witnesses we wish to invite and when we would like to invite them.

The three ministers have come here and are trying to turn these proceedings into a circus. We have always been able to get along. I just want you to know, Madam Chair, that the ministers were not invited here and that they should not be allowed to testify. I intend to vote against my Conservative colleague's motion. In due time, the committee will decide whether or not to invite the three ministers to come back, as it is fully free to do. For that reason, I will be voting against the Conservatives' motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to take a vote on Mr. Warkentin's motion, so that when they come back, we have them.

All those in favour of Mr. Warkentin's motion, please put up your hand.

All those opposed?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The motion is carried.

When you return, you'll have two minutes each to speak.

Thank you.

The bells are ringing. By unanimous consent, we can take a few minutes to listen to the ministers and then come back, because I think it's a 30-minute bell.

There's no unanimous consent?

Okay, then, we will suspend.

Be back here after the votes.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (1705)

The Chair: Order, please.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have lost enough time.

Can we please get the media to leave the room?

Minister Baird, did you say you had a two-minute statement, or are you bypassing this?

Hon. John Baird: I'll waive my statement and just go right to questions.

The Chair: Okay. Fair enough.

Minister Goodyear, did you say you had a two-minute statement that you would like to present?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: I would like to make a statement.

The Chair: Sure. Let's hear from you....

Oui, monsieur Guimond.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Chair, in keeping with the powers of the committee, I ask that the new witnesses be sworn in.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is it the will of the committee to have the ministers sworn in?

Mr. Ed Holder: On a point of order, Madam Chair—

The Chair: You can't have a point of order on a point of order. I have to get this resolved.

I need a majority vote. All those in favour...

Now, listen carefully; don't say you couldn't understand my ruling.

All those who wish to have the ministers sworn in, please raise your hand.

All those opposed, please signify.

A voice: There's a tie.

The Chair: There is a tie vote. Okay, let's do it: I'll vote in favour.

Let's just get it done with quickly.

Mr. Holder, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Ed Holder: You know, I find that a rather bizarre request from the member opposite. Here we have a member who was actually volunteering to make a statement, and in fact prior to our vote was quite insistent that he make a statement. I think the member opposite, by doing so....

It feels to me that this is just a subtle or not-so-subtle form of intimidation. I find it very bizarre, when you have someone who absolutely voluntarily looks to do that, Madam Chair—

The Chair: That's not a point of order, that's debate.

Let's get the oaths done with.

Mr. Ed Holder: It's an issue of justice, Madam Chair, and doing the right thing.

The Chair: Let's get the oaths done, and then we can start.

• (1710)

Hon. John Baird: I, John Baird, do swear that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me God.

I've been sworn in, sworn at, sworn out more than once.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: I, Gary Goodyear, do solemnly swear, sincerely and truly affirm and declare the taking of...

Is that the one?

My apologies.

I'm still Gary Goodyear, and I still swear that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me God.

Let's hope that we're allowed to give the whole truth.

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources): I, Christian Paradis, do solemnly swear that the testimony I am about to give will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

[English]

The Chair: We can extend time, if you want.

Mr. Ed Holder: Why don't we divide by four, in the spirit of fairness.

The Chair: Can we do the first round of five to six minutes?

An hon. member: Five minutes.

The Chair: Is it the agreement of the—

Ms. Siobhan Coady: I would....[Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: I'm sorry, I have to get the agreement.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Then let me make a point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: If we're concerned about running out of time because of votes, because of all these points of order, points of privilege, points of whatever, I would suggest that we go beyond our 5:30 p.m. time, perhaps to 6 p.m. or 6:30 p.m.—whatever is required.

The Chair: Can we go to a quarter to six?

I'll have to give eight minutes, because that's the rule of the committee anyway.

Mr. Ed Holder: Madam Chair, I was asking for something like five minutes simply because we all have various commitments that we try to do.

I will not agree to an extension.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Mr. Goodyear, you have two minutes, then Mr. Paradis has two minutes, and then we will start the rounds.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Thank you, Madam Chair.

On May 25 the government House leader, the Honourable Jay Hill, spoke in the House of Commons about the principle of individual ministerial accountability, why ministers must be accountable to Canadians through Parliament for the actions of their departments and their staff.

This is one of the cornerstones of responsible government in Canada. Ministers are given authority by the crown to make decisions on the policies, programs, and services of government. Their staff and public servants support the minister as they exercise this authority.

These employees provide advice to and carry out the direction of their ministers. They are accountable to the ministers for the exercise of their duties. However, office staff and public servants have no constitutional responsibility to Parliament. Our Canadian democracies hold ministers responsible for everything that is done under their authority. Ministers must answer to Parliament for their decisions and actions, but also for the actions of their department and staff.

Voters elected me as a member of Parliament. They did not elect my staff. Therefore, it is I who must be accountable to voters through Parliament for all actions taken under my authority. It is for this reason that I am here before you today to answer your questions on a meeting that took place between my staff and Mr. Patrick Glémaud last year.

Last November, Ms. Anjali Varma, managing partner of Sustainable Ventures Inc., contacted my office to schedule a meeting in order to learn more about the new southern Ontario development program, a program administered by the new Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

Later that month, the meeting was held between Ms. Varma, Mr. Patrick Glémaud of Green Power Generation, and two members of my staff. During the meeting, Mr. Glémaud asked about funding eligibility for the new southern Ontario development program.

As well, during the meeting Ms. Varma described the current and prospective businesses—

The Chair: Mr. Goodyear, you'll have to wrap up.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: I'm trying to wrap up, Madam Chair. We're hoping for the whole truth here. That's what I swore to.

The Chair: Okay. You will get it in the questions.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Ms. Varma described the current prospective business activities of three companies, Spartan Bioscience Inc., Exova Group Limited, and Climate Check Corporation.

When I learned of the public questions regarding the activities of some lobbyists, I asked my staff to look into the meetings we had had, and we found two meetings wherein it appeared that three individuals might not have properly registered those meetings. These individuals included Ms. Varma, Monsieur Glémaud, and, as I mentioned earlier, a Mr. Gordon Shields, a registered lobbyist and president of the Liberal riding association for Nepean-Carleton.

•(1715)

The Chair: Thank you. That's it—

Hon. Gary Goodyear: We obviously informed the commissioner

The Chair: —your time is up.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: —of these probable meetings and we shared all relevant documentations with her.

The Chair: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Paradis, do you have any opening statements?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: None of the companies received any—

The Chair: No, I'm sorry. Your time is up.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Do you want the whole truth or just part of it?

The Chair: Mr. Paradis, would you like to make any statement?

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes, Madam Chair. I am here precisely to testify in my capacity of minister.

I'd like to read an excerpt from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. O'Brien and Bosc state the following, and I quote:

In terms of ministerial responsibility, Ministers have both individual and collective responsibilities to Parliament. [...] The principle of individual ministerial responsibility holds that Ministers are accountable not only for their own actions as department heads, but also for the actions of their subordinates; individual ministerial responsibility provides the basis for accountability throughout the system. Virtually all departmental activity is carried out in the name of a Minister who, in turn, is responsible to Parliament for those acts. Ministers exercise power and are constitutionally responsible for the provision and conduct of government; Parliament holds them personally responsible for it.

It's true, Madam Chair, that I declined an invitation to appear before this committee on May 4 last. I had been invited to testify in my capacity of Minister, as had my predecessor at Natural Resources Canada. I provided all of the necessary documents to the committee. I also forwarded the same documents to the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada. All of the documents were duly turned over to the committee.

Further to an access to information request, on May 10 of this year, I also confirmed that Natural Resources Canada had no record of any activities that might have been carried out by Mr. Glémaud or Mr. Jaffer in connection with their company, Green Power Generation.

Finally, Madam Chair, since Sébastien Togneri, a member of my staff, was called to testify before this committee, I am here to answer questions as the responsible minister.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go with the rules of the committee: eight minutes, first to Ms. Coady.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Thank you very much.

Thank you to Mr. Morin and Mr. Maley for both being here this afternoon and for having the patience to deal with this.

Thank you, ministers. I have very serious questions to ask.

The time is late because we didn't get started on time, so I'd appreciate yes-or-no answers to all my questions—very simple questions, because we need to get to the bottom of this. Thank you.

First of all, to the three ministers—I'd like to go one by one, if I could, please—does every Canadian have the same privileged access that Mr. Jaffer had and his company had in your departments to review their proposals, to fast-track their proposals? Just a yes or no would suffice, thank you.

Hon. John Baird: Every Canadian has access to government programs.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: That wasn't the question. I asked it to your department. As you know, your department actually moved forward very quickly on the proposal.

Yes or no: can they actually call your office and have your parliamentary secretary and his staff actually review their proposals?

Hon. John Baird: Every Canadian has equal access to government programs.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Great. Well, we'll make sure that...because this is being televised. I'm sure that every Canadian will call your office and make sure that in terms of their proposals, the same benefits are accrued to them.

Minister Goodyear?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Every applicant that was submitted to our office does go through the department. None of the applicants from the meetings that you're concerned about received any funding from FedDev.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: I didn't ask about funding. I asked about privileged access—the fact that Mr. Jaffer's companies actually were fast-tracked.

Mr. Paradis...?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Actually, that's not true, Madam Chair.

The fact is that Gordon Shields was able to get into our—

Ms. Siobhan Coady: That's irrelevant. I did not ask about Mr. Shields.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: I know you don't want to hear that. I know you don't want to hear that.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: I'd like to ask Minister Paradis the question.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Three days it took to get Mr. Shields in. It was almost two weeks to get the other client—

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Madam Chair, I asked a simple yes or no question.

The Chair: Mr. Goodyear, you have no time.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Minister Paradis?

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis: I was always happy to see innovative ideas presented when I was at Public Works and Government Services Canada. I ensured that non-partisan public servants kept the department duly informed. Part of the 2010 Estimates targets innovative ideas. PWGSC is responsible for this area.

So then, there is access to the department, absolutely.

[English]

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Thank you. I guess that's a yes, Mr. Paradis. I have another question. Thank you for your answer.

Mr. Paradis, on August 27, Rahim Jaffer wrote to your staff, the director of parliamentary affairs, Sébastien Togneri—who was supposed to appear today—and this was in the e-mail: “I just spoke with Christian and we are going to try and get together for beers next week”, and “He also suggested that I coordinate with you the chance to find someone like the deputy minister to speak with” about a proposal.

Did you personally order that his proposal be fast-tracked? Just a simple yes or no.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Jaffer did in fact call me to say that he had an innovative idea about solar panels or some such thing. I told him to contact my office to set up a meeting with officials to see if his ideas held any interest, making it clear that—

[English]

Ms. Siobhan Coady: So I guess your answer is yes.

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis: —if anything came of the meeting, there would be a competitive process, or a call for bids. That was made clear from the outset.

[English]

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Thank you. In the interests of time, I have to move forward. I take it your answer was yes.

After Mr. Togneri ordered officials to review the proposal, he complained to André Morin—and I quote—“The sector has had this for weeks. What's the hold-up?”

Mr. Morin is here today.

Later, another member of the minister's office staff, Sandy White, wrote—and I quote—“our department is being...hard headed about setting up a meeting”. Your office clearly fast-tracked this proposal to make sure that it was moved forward.

So I'm going to turn to Mr. Morin, who is a former strategic adviser to the Deputy Minister of Public Works. Regarding the same proposal, you wrote, on October 16, that the deputy minister “is concerned about this type of request and by the fact that it can contravene and disrupt our daily operational or program requirements”.

Was this request unusual? Just a simple yes or no.

Mr. André Morin: No.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Do ministers often ask you to fast-track proposals for their friends?

Mr. André Morin: Can you repeat your question?

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Do ministers often ask you to fast-track proposals? Because clearly you were asking for that to be fast-tracked.

Mr. André Morin: Nobody asked at the minister's office to fast-track anything.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Thank you.

To Mr. Baird, last year Kimberley Michelutti, who is the parliamentary assistant to Brian Jean, was given the authority to receive and review funding applications to the \$1 billion green infrastructure fund. Would a member of the public know to submit applications to Madam Michelutti? Just a yes or no.

Hon. John Baird: She has no authority on that.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: So she shouldn't have received those applications?

Hon. John Baird: Well, when someone mails something or sends an electronic e-mail, they're received—from any Canadian.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Any Canadian; do members of the public know where to submit these applications?

Hon. John Baird: They can submit them to anyone in the department.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: So to anyone in the department, including the minister's or the parliamentary secretary's office, and you'll take care of it.

Hon. John Baird: The only authority to make decisions with respect to grants and contributions in my department is me; that's it, no one else.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: A particular \$290-million project submitted by Mr. Jaffer was marked “From Rahim, submit to department”, and signed with the letter “K”. I assume it's Kimberley Michelutti.

Clearly she—

Hon. John Baird: I can confirm, for the record, that is true.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: You can confirm. Thank you.

Clearly she wanted to let you know, or your department, that it was from a friend.

Hon. John Baird: No, not me. It was never submitted to me.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: You just said that you take ultimate responsibility. So it was never submitted to you....

I'm confused. Either you take the responsibility or you do not.

She sent it to—

Hon. John Baird: What I said was that—this is important—I am the only one who can authorize the approval of a project, under grants and contributions, submitted to the department, much like I would—

Ms. Siobhan Coady: So the writing on the top, “From Rahim”, which we know came from Kimberley Michelutti—that was a fast-tracking of the application, kind of making an indication of where it came from, that this was important. Yes or no?

Hon. John Baird: In fact there was no application received.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: There was no application received. So the information that was submitted to the department, that came by way of your office, that was no application, yet was moved to the department with a note “From Rahim”.

Why was that fast-tracked? I mean, it's unbelievable.

Hon. John Baird: If I could, I disagree with the term “fast-tracked”. As I understand what Kimberley does, she writes a reference note at the top right hand of the form about where it was obtained from and then she forwards it on to the department.

I would regularly, whether it's from members of Parliament or from any number of people—

Ms. Siobhan Coady: So anyone can do that?

Hon. John Baird: Yes.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: If John Smith wanted to come into your office, you'd casually write “From John”, send it to the department, get a full review of a non-proposal, and give back results?

You have to remember, of course—

Hon. John Baird: I never said that I would write “From John” at the top; I said that's how Kimberley does it.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Well, “From Rahim” was written at the top of this one.

What's very interesting is that of course we heard testimony before this committee that if they had received any indication that there would have been approval by this, or quasi-approval, then there might have been a finder's fee. We heard that from testimony earlier.

But in the interest of time, I want to turn to Mr. Maley, the ADM for Western Economic Diversification.

In April 2009, Scott Wenger, who's the senior staff to Minister Prentice, met with Rahim Jaffer in an office assigned to Helena Guergis to discuss a proposal on behalf of RLP Energy. We know that Mr. Wenger instructed you to evaluate the proposal and you asked officials to review it “on a priority basis, as you need to get back to Rahim”.

Was there any pressure exerted by the minister's office that required your need to “get back to Rahim”?

• (1725)

Mr. Doug Maley: I had a conversation with Mr. Jaffer, where he stated that he had spoken with Mr. Prentice's office. I didn't have any contact with Minister Prentice's office until it was later in June, when we were talking about another subject. I brought up to him that we had looked at the RLP Energy proposal, the proposal was assessed in the department, we found that it didn't fit, and no funds were provided to that project. That's what I told Mr. Wenger from Minister Prentice's office, that it did not fit, and there was no further follow-up.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: So why were you looking for a priority basis—

The Chair: Ms. Coady, that's it.

I have to be very strict with the time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guimond, for eight minutes.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I want to make it clear that I do not sanction the circus atmosphere that the three Conservative ministers have created by coming here today, even though they were not invited. I am a democrat and I will bow to the democratic will of the committee and go along with the vote on Mr. Warkentin's motion that we allow them to testify, even though they were not invited to appear.

Since I do not wish to sanction the strong-arm tactics of these three ministers, I will refrain from asking them any questions. It will be up to the committee, Madam Chair, when it discusses future business in camera, to decide who it will invite for future meetings. If we need to have these three ministers shed light on the issue, we will invite them back and I'm sure they will be delighted to accept our invitation.

I might also add that even though the three ministerial staffers declined to attend, I hope the committee will issue another invitation and, if necessary, summon them to appear before the committee to explain their actions.

That said, I would like to turn the floor over to my colleague Mr. Nadeau, the Member for Gatineau, who will question the two witnesses who were formally invited and agreed to come here, including Mr. Morin, an official with PWGSC. I am confident that there will be some good questions for him. I congratulate them for being polite and for accepting the committee's invitation to testify.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Gentlemen, I apologize for what happened earlier. Such things do happen, albeit rarely. It's unfortunate, but that's the way it is.

That said, you do understand that the committee is looking into whether Mr. Jaffer and Mr. Glémaud engaged in lobbying activities, even though they were not registered anywhere as lobbyists.

Mr. Morin, I've read and examined the documents provided to us. Your name appears from time to time. I would like to know what transpired prior to the October 28 meeting. I'm not asking you to speculate. If you know for certain what happened, then please enlighten us. However, if you don't know, then just say so.

If I understand correctly, Mr. Glémaud was there on October 28, as Mr. Jaffer and Mr. Glémaud were working together. Beginning in August of 2009, did they, as lobbyists, seek to benefit from your expertise or, at the very minimum, to find out more about the installation of solar panels on the roofs of federal government buildings? Did they introduce themselves as lobbyists?

• (1730)

Mr. André Morin: As far as I know, they requested a meeting to promote their product, and nothing more.

In answer to that question, I would like to mention that the guide for doing business with the Government of Canada sets out a five-step approach for small and medium enterprises. This guide makes it very clear that all Canadians have access to the government. Service providers can promote themselves and are encouraged to do so. The guide tells suppliers who they should talk to, namely the responsible officials in government agencies, branches and divisions that need your goods and services. The guide is quite clear about this.

All I know is that the gentleman was there to promote his company.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: And that gentleman would be?

Mr. André Morin: I'm referring to Mr. Glémaud.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: So then, they followed the standard procedures set out in the guide to doing business with the Government of Canada? Is that correct?

Mr. André Morin: That is correct.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Good. It's important to be as clear as possible about this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, it's 5:30, and I will need a majority vote to....

Yes.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): If I may, Madam Chair, considering that Minister Goodyear has made it clear that he wants more time, I would expect the members from the Conservative Party to support a motion to extend the time to a quarter to six.

The Chair: Okay.

All those in favour of extending the time?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: It's defeated. We are not extending the time.

Your time is up. It's 5:30.

Thank you very much. I thank the witnesses for being here, and hope you will never have to face this again.

There is one very important thing the committee has to look at....

Excusez-moi. We need to finish.

Order.

Members, we have to switch to in camera. The content of the report that you have in front of you is for an in camera discussion.

Thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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