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—
Chair

The Honourable John McKay

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• (0830)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen.

[Translation]

First of all, welcome, Minister Paradis—

[English]

to the government operations committee.

I note that two out of the three people who are to be defenestrated are here on this committee, which means that by next Thursday this committee will be much lighter and their spouses will now recognize them as spouses.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): We hope they'll do more than recognize us, Mr. Chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I want to note that colleagues, when they're asking questions, tend to ignore the chair. We now have a new timer—this is particularly for Mr. Lemay—and a little chime will sound to let people know their time is up. It will be a musical occasion.

Minister Paradis, welcome to the committee. As you know, you have 10 minutes in which to make an opening statement, as you wish, and then members will ask questions in sequence.

Minister Paradis, please make your statement.

I'll ask the media to leave the room as well, please. Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would also like to thank committee members for this opportunity to meet with you today. I am very grateful to finally have the chance to present the facts and set the record straight regarding allegations made about me in recent weeks.

For almost five years now, it has been my honour and privilege, as a federal member of Parliament, to represent the people living in the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable, people who are humble, proud and honest, honourable people, starting with my grandfather who was a police officer and my father who is a lawyer — two men who taught me that integrity is a value that has no price, that cannot be bought or

negotiated, a value that is taught and that I, in turn, am trying to instill in my three young children.

Since 2008, I have also had the honour and privilege of serving in the federal Cabinet, first as Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada and currently as Minister of Natural Resources. These are responsibilities that I have always taken, and continue to take, very seriously.

If we are together today, it is to look at the awarding of contracts for the renovation of the Parliament buildings by Public Works and Government Services Canada. It is to ascertain whether, yes or no, anyone who participated in a cocktail party fundraiser benefited personally from my presence there. It is to determine whether, yes or no, there was political interference in the awarding of federal contracts when I was Minister of Public Works and Government Services. To all these questions, I have been and continue to be absolutely categorical: the answer is no. No one benefited personally from my presence or their presence at a cocktail party fundraiser. No firm benefited from my presence or their presence, through a representative, at a cocktail party fundraiser. And, at no time did I exert any political pressure with respect to the awarding of government contracts, period.

• (0835)

[English]

Let me be perfectly clear: at no time whatsoever did I benefit from the fundraiser. At no time did any individual or firm who attended benefit from my presence or their presence at the fundraiser.

What I did do, as the Minister of Public Works, was to ensure that the procurement of contracts was done in a fair and transparent manner. It's a record that the non-partisan officials I worked with at the Department of Public Works have repeatedly confirmed before this committee, and it's a record that I'm proud of.

[Translation]

Let's take the example of renovation work on the West Block, on Parliament Hill: the chronology of events speaks for itself.

In 2007, Public Works and Government Services Canada launched a call for tenders for repairs to be made to the North Tower of the West Block. In May, 2008, one of the bidding companies, LM Sauvé, was awarded the contract. On June 25, 2008, I was appointed Minister of Public Works and Government Services. In April, 2009, when I was still the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, LM Sauvé lost its contract.

In other words, LM Sauvé was awarded the contract before I became Minister and lost it while I was Minister. It is as simple and clear as that. Never did I take advantage of my role as Minister of Public Works and Government Services to direct the process in a way that would benefit Mr. Sauvé's company.

Credible key witnesses who appeared before me could not have been clearer. Mr. Pierre-Marc Mongeau, Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for the Parliamentary Precinct Branch at the Department of Public Works and Government Services, made the following statement in front of this committee on October 26: "There was no political interference from the minister's office for the entire duration of the project."

Mr. Tom Ring, Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for the Acquisitions Branch at the Department of Public Works and Government Services said the following: "There has not been any indication that anyone tried to influence the pre-qualification criteria or the process itself."

Mr. Jacques Leclerc, Senior Director, Real Property Contracting Directorate, Department of Public Works and Government Services, added this: "You have to understand that, for very big contracts, even the minister does not have the authority to make the decision. He has to ask Treasury Board. There is an administrative structure that allows the authority delegated to our department also to be further delegated to other levels of activity."

The facts are clear. As Minister of Public Works and Government Services, I always made a point of ensuring that the bidding process was carried out in a fair, open and transparent manner. That is a record that has been confirmed by impartial departmental officials I have been lucky enough to work with, and it is a record that I am proud of.

[English]

I look forward to taking your questions and discussing this matter with you today. I wish to thank you for giving me the chance to appear before you to do so.

[Translation]

I would be happy to take questions now.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Coderre, you have eight minutes.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, thank you for being with us today. My first question is very simple. Do you think that Paul Sauvé is a liar?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Paul Sauvé has made all kinds of allegations.

Like everyone else, I read an article in *Le Devoir* where Mr. Sauvé said he had been awarded this contract without political interference; he himself said that. Now he has stated in front of this committee that there was political interference.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I will repeat my question. Do you think that Paul Sauvé is a liar, yes or no? He put his hand on the bible and made his remarks under oath.

Hon. Christian Paradis: I believe the facts themselves show that Mr. Sauvé lied.

When Mr. Sauvé was awarded this contract in 2008, he himself stated publicly, in an article that appeared in *Le Devoir*, that there had been no political intervention in the awarding of that contract.

I'm wondering about something else as well. Mr. Sauvé got in touch with you, Mr. Coderre, as political lieutenant, to enquire about running. What version did you believe back then? Did you believe there had been political intervention or not? That's what he said at the time.

● (0840)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Minister, did you meet with Mr. Bernard Côté or did you have any contact with him in 2008 and 2009 with respect to LM Sauvé?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, never.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did you meet with Bernard Côté?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I met him when he was a staff member for my predecessor, Mr. Michael Fortier. He was part of his staff and that's why I know him.

Hon. Denis Coderre: You never talked about renovation contracts with him?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Never.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did you participate in any political activities with Mr. Côté?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Was Mr. Côté not official agent for a riding?

Hon. Christian Paradis: He may have been, but I didn't have any direct contact with him. As I mentioned, I met Mr. Côté when I was a member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and Mr. Côté was a member of Mr. Fortier's staff. That is where I first made his acquaintance.

Hon. Denis Coderre: As political minister, do you go anywhere you're told to go without checking to see who will be attending these cocktail parties?

Hon. Christian Paradis: First of all, Mr. Coderre, when I was appointed political lieutenant—and that is public knowledge—I said, at the Winnipeg convention, that I would try to restructure our organization in Quebec. That is what I was in the process of doing. I announced a new organizational structure in late May, 2009. In the meantime—

Hon. Denis Coderre: That was not my question.

Hon. Christian Paradis: I'm answering your question.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I was also a political minister, and before I attended cocktail party fundraisers, I checked to see who was going to be there.

When you attended this particular cocktail party fundraiser, were you told who would be there?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Coderre, we are here to talk about alleged political interference in the awarding of contracts for the West Block. I understood that was the purpose of the motion.

However, if you want to question my political judgment as lieutenant, because you were once one, that is a whole other debate. In the case which is before us today, while I was in the process of carrying out that restructuring, in May, I was approached by the Bourassa riding association with respect to fundraising. I had no reason not to trust the then president, Mr. Gilles Prud'Homme. So, I accepted the invitation in good faith to attend a cocktail party fundraiser where I expected to meet Conservative supporters.

Hon. Denis Coderre: That is very much part of the motion. The fact is that if you meet people at a cocktail party fundraiser, these same people are eventually awarded contracts and you spend 40 minutes talking to them, according to Mr. Sauvé—

Hon. Christian Paradis: That, too, is untrue.

Hon. Denis Coderre: If you say so.

It seems Mr. Gilles Prud'homme is in hiding these days, but I hope he is going to be subpoenaed.

Personally, before attending a benefit event where I know certain people could be in attendance, I would first find out if they might be there and why.

But you didn't do that?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Well, that's great if you did that; it's very much to your credit. I am just saying that a riding president asked me to attend a cocktail party fundraiser which I attended in good faith, expecting to meet Conservative supporters.

So, now—

Hon. Denis Coderre: You didn't know who was going to be there?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Now, if someone talks to me about contracts or things like that, well, I don't talk about contracts, and I abided by that rule at this particular event. So, at no time did I discuss contracts with him at that event.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did your aide, Marc Carrière, report back on what happened during that cocktail party?

Hon. Christian Paradis: First of all, Marc Carrière is not my aide. My chief of staff is Marc Vallières. I find it a little strange, since you know him personally, that you would make the same slip as Mr. Sauvé. Mr. Vallières did not attend that event.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Which aide did attend?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Philippe Mailhot, my regional director at the Montreal office.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did he make any contacts and did he report back to you on what people had discussed with him at this cocktail party?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Mailhot was by my side for the duration of the cocktail party, the whole idea being to keep a certain distance between me and people who insisted on talking about contracts.

Personally, I referred them to officials and, if necessary, Mr. Mailhot would give them business cards or follow-up, if necessary, and direct them to the right people, who are departmental officials.

Hon. Denis Coderre: So, for the duration of the cocktail party, Mr. Mailhot was by your side.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Practically, yes.

Hon. Denis Coderre: He didn't speak to anyone else.

Hon. Christian Paradis: That wasn't why we were there.

When I attend a cocktail party fundraiser, for me it's a lobby-free zone. That's why I always have a member of my political staff accompany me. That way I can ensure that everything is done properly and that the information is passed on correctly.

• (0845)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did Mr. Sauvé speak to Mr. Mailhot about his contract?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Sauvé did not discuss the contract per se with me, but he did mention that he had been awarded a contract for the West Block and I congratulated him. In fact, that is the reason why I always have said that I don't discuss contracts. Just because someone mentions that he was awarded a contract and I congratulate him doesn't mean that the discussion then turns to contracts. I think it's important to call a spade a spade.

Hon. Denis Coderre: You've changed your story three times.

Hon. Christian Paradis: I haven't changed my story, Mr. Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre: You said you hadn't talked—

Hon. Christian Paradis: There have to be two people to discuss a contract on any given subject. But the fact is that I never discussed the details of any contract.

The question is whether there was political interference or not. Now if such a discussion did take place, as you maintain, the second question is whether or not there was political interference. The answer is no, just as departmental officials told you right from the beginning.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Mailhot never told you that Mr. Sauvé had reported to him—

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Mailhot was by my side for almost the entire evening, and there was no discussion about a contract. That was not why we were there.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did you discuss contracts with Mr. Broccolini? How long did your discussion with Mr. Broccolini last?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I talked to Mr. Broccolini for about 10 minutes.

Once again, I am stunned to hear that Mr. Sauvé claims that I was in attendance for only about 40 minutes, when I actually stayed for about an hour and three quarters. So, it makes no sense that I would have spent 40 minutes talking with one person in particular, and I am convinced that it only lasted about 10 minutes.

Hon. Denis Coderre: You didn't have your coat stolen here?

Hon. Christian Paradis: My coat was stolen at that event.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Not today?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, I left it in my car.

Thank you for showing concern for my personal welfare. And you actually seem to be sincere.

Hon. Denis Coderre: I am, on occasion.

Which member of your office staff asked for a refund?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Philippe Mailhot.

Hon. Denis Coderre: How many times?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I couldn't say. First of all—

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me, Minister.

Mr. Holder.

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Chair, with great respect for my colleague Mr. Coderre, when we start to talk about coats here and there, I just have to ask the question of relevance.

The Chair: There's probably none whatsoever.

Mr. Coderre, you have 40 seconds.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre: One person says that he was called to ask that a refund be provided for a coat worth \$5,400. The minister says that the coat only cost \$800. I think it's important to know who is telling the truth, because there is a difference of \$4,600.

Hon. Christian Paradis: That's ridiculous. At my request, Mr. Mailhot went in to report this to police, since I was unable to go myself. I waited a few days before realizing that it had in fact been stolen. We looked for it. I also looked for the coat. The declared value was \$900, which was the value of the coat plus indirect damages.

It is completely ridiculous to make these kinds of allegations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coderre.

Ms. Bourgeois, you have eight minutes.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, good morning. Thank you for being here this morning.

I want to be sure I understand the answers you gave my colleague. Did you know Mr. Prud'homme before the infamous cocktail party?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I had run into Mr. Prud'homme once or twice. I became the political minister following the election in October, 2008.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Please just give me a yes or no answer.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes, I'm telling you that is when I made his acquaintance. I met him at a meeting and probably ran into him at an event in December, just before.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Did you know that he was an organizer or president of the Bourassa riding association? Did you know that the Bourassa riding association had financial problems?

Hon. Christian Paradis: The whole idea was to help out the riding through this fundraising activity. That's what I was told. I dealt with Mr. Prud'homme through my office for these events, given the circumstances I just explained to Mr. Coderre.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Did you know Mr. Padulo?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I met him at a political event in December of 2009 regarding demonstrations for or against the coalition. That is where I saw Mr. Padulo—at a grassroots event in December of 2008.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I want to be sure I understand. You were the minister. You were invited to a cocktail party fundraiser. You knew that it was a fundraiser. Ordinarily, you should have been given the names of the people in attendance and been told what they were doing at the cocktail party. Was that done?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, I don't agree with that.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: No?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, my riding president told me that he was organizing a cocktail party fundraiser. In fact, he sent me an e-mail saying that things were going well and that he had about 30 guests. I wasn't about to start investigating everyone who was going to be in attendance. I was expecting to see Conservative supporters there.

If some people had another motive—to do some lobbying, in other words—that is not acceptable. In those cases, given that I was with Public Works and Government Services, I did not discuss contracts.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: So, you had no idea that the people attending the cocktail party had been awarded government contracts?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, I didn't know that. Even if I had known, that would not necessarily have meant they were not eligible to receive these contracts. As minister, what was important to me was preserving the institution, and when people start lobbying, I make sure that there isn't any lobbying. So, I did not discuss contracts.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: But when you were at the cocktail party, Minister, and Mr. Broccolini was introduced to you, were you told that he was a construction contractor from wherever?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Were you told that Mr. Sauvé was a contractor from wherever?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Sauvé introduced himself, as I said earlier, and told me that he had been awarded the contract for the West Block. So I congratulated him and moved on to something else. But he doesn't seem to be very happy about that.

● (0850)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: No, that's right.

Hon. Christian Paradis: When Mr. Broccolini started complaining about a bidding process—

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You wouldn't listen to him.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No. I referred him to officials. I'm not authorized to discuss those things. There is a process in place which is managed by officials. It is not up to me, as minister, to sit down with contractors at a cocktail party to discuss these things.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I understand. Yet a spokesperson from your department—someone close to you—told us that, that evening, you listened to a business man complain about the government's bidding process. We were told that you spent 40 minutes with Mr. Broccolini.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, that's not true. I'm telling you, that isn't true.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: That isn't true?

Hon. Christian Paradis: We had a general conversation that lasted about 10 minutes. Right at the beginning, he talked about the fact that he had had problems with a bidding process. I had to listen to some of what he was saying initially, in order to see what it was about. However, when I realized that he wanted to talk about a contract, I refused to do so and referred him to officials.

There was no discussion about that process. After that, the discussion turned to more general matters and lasted, at most, about 10 minutes.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Fine. I would also like to come back to what I might call your naïveté. You were the Minister of Public Works—

Hon. Christian Paradis: You can describe it any way you like.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You were the Minister of Public Works—

Hon. Christian Paradis: We are here to ascertain whether or not there was political interference in the awarding of contracts.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Exactly, Minister..., please.

Hon. Christian Paradis: If you are questioning my political judgment, I'm not sure that is the reason for my being here this morning.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I am not questioning your political judgment.

Hon. Christian Paradis: That is another debate. That is a whole other debate.

[English]

The Chair: Madame Bourgeois, Minister, it's very difficult for the translators to keep up when both of you are talking at the same time.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I would simply like to talk about your naïveté. You were the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, you were attending a fundraising event on behalf of the Conservative Party. You must have known that there would be people in the room who were eyeing certain government contracts, correct?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I trusted the riding president, who asked me to help him out with a fundraiser. I turned up at the event in good faith, expecting to meet with Conservative sympathizers.

If some people had other motivations, such as lobbying and, in that case, talking about contracts, well, I avoid that. I don't talk about contracts, and that evening, I did not discuss contracts.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Did you attend any other cocktail party fundraiser where there were people in attendance who had been awarded government contracts?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Which one?

Hon. Christian Paradis: The one you referred to. It was in June, and Mr. Villeneuve, from Multivesco, was in attendance; I admit that. But there was no discussion of contracts in that case either.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You were in the same restaurant where the first cocktail party was organized—Mr. Padulo's restaurant.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, not at all.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Were you in a restaurant in your riding?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No. I was in Montreal, somewhere else.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You were not at Mr. Padulo's restaurant?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, I was not at Mr. Padulo's restaurant.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Is it normal for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services to be attending cocktail party fundraisers where there are people from the construction industry in attendance?

Hon. Christian Paradis: It is normal for a political lieutenant to organize cocktail party fundraisers all across Quebec. I attend these events in good faith, and I'm always proud to do so to help out the ridings. I expect to see Conservative sympathizers there. If some people go there to lobby and, in this case, to talk about contracts, well, I don't discuss those things. That doesn't prevent people from raising the subject. If they do, I refer them to departmental officials. That is what I have always done.

The question is whether there was political interference in the awarding of government contracts. That is what you want to know, and it is the purpose of the motion. The answer is no. Right from the beginning, officials told you that, and it has never been contradicted. That is at the centre of this debate.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Would you not agree that filling the coffers of the Conservative Party when you are the person who awards the most contracts in Canada does cause a some, even considerable confusion in terms of influence peddling?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Perhaps in your mind it does, but not when you're strict and refuse to talk about contracts, as I always have. There were never any discussions about these contracts. The important thing is to preserve the institution. In my case, I expect to see Conservative sympathizers at these cocktail parties.

Maybe I could turn the question around. If you had a list and a potential supplier to the Department of Public Works and Government Services were going to be in attendance, would that make him ineligible? Are we going to start to draw up a black list? More than 40,000 contracts a year are awarded by Public Works and Government Services Canada. It seems to me we need to be pragmatic.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Minister, all the people in attendance that evening at the Padulo restaurant were not Conservative sympathizers.

Hon. Christian Paradis: That's what you say. Personally, I was expecting to see Conservative sympathizers

● (0855)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Those people testified in front of this committee and said they were not necessarily Conservatives.

Hon. Christian Paradis: They were guests. My riding president told me he was organizing a cocktail party fundraiser. I expected to see Conservative sympathizers there. However, even if some people had something else in mind, there was no discussion of contracts.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Minister, all of these people were connected to the construction industry. Theoretically, they might have had, or might previously have been awarded government contracts. You must admit that it's a little strange. It does raise questions.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Well, ask yourself the question.

The real issue is: was there political interference? Officials gave you the answer to that question at the committee's first meeting. And the clear and simple answer to that question is no.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bourgeois.

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Gourde and Mr. Holder, you have eight minutes.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To begin with, I would like to thank the minister for taking the time to meet with us. We know that ministers all have very heavy schedules and that they have to make a huge effort to find some time. So, the committee appreciates your being here. I also want to thank the members opposite for agreeing to start 15 minutes earlier.

You mentioned that the committee's goal was to examine the awarding of government contracts by Public Works and Government Services Canada for the renovation of the West Block. I think people would do well to remember that, because, unfortunately, some of our colleagues seem to have forgotten. We are at the point where we are using the committee's time and resources to talk about a stolen coat. It seems to me that things are going off the rails in this committee.

Minister, what was your role in the awarding of contracts to renovate the West Block?

Hon. Christian Paradis: First of all, the awarding of contracts falls within the purview of officials. It is a process which is purely administrative, and is also fair and transparent. In terms of the policy, there is a long-term plan to renovate the parliamentary precinct. Cabinet issues the directives in five-year blocks and the budgets are approved on that basis. Once that has happened, the operational process of awarding contracts begins. Officials are responsible for awarding contracts. Their job is to ensure that we get the best value for money for taxpayers. These are very large contracts. We are currently renovating buildings that are part of our heritage, but at the same time, we want to be sure that we get the best possible value for money. Officials administer the entire process.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Minister, what happened with this contract when you were minister?

Hon. Christian Paradis: The contract that has been alluded to was awarded before I became minister. As I said in my opening statement, it was awarded in May, 2008, but I was appointed to cabinet on June 25, 2008. In about April, 2009, officials from my department briefed me, telling me that there were delays, that there were problems and that, given the terms of the contract, they could, and should, terminate that contract. And that is what happened.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Was there political interference in that contract?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Absolutely not, and I was made aware of the situation by officials from my department. Those are normal briefings. The minister has to know what is going on in these cases, but the decision always rests with officials.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: The officials who appeared before us said they had made the decision to award that contract. Is that your position as well?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes, that's true. As I already stated, I was not the Minister of Public Works and Government Services when the contract was awarded. With all contracts, the process is administered by officials. My job is to ensure that that is done in a fair, open and transparent manner. There are tools at that level. For some contracts, an equity supervisor may be appointed to oversee the process from beginning to end. More often than not, officials are in charge of just about everything. When the time comes to report to the minister by means of briefings, such as in the example I just gave, an entire file has been prepared, so that all the information is there.

My job was to ensure that, in terms of the policy, the basic directives were there. As I said, departmental officials handled everything at the operational level per se.

● (0900)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: At this committee, Minister, we have heard a number of names: Broccolini, Sauv , C t , Prud'Homme, and Varin. Are there any personal friends among the people I've named?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, none.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Do you know at least one of these individuals?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I know them, as I explained earlier to Mr. Goddard. I became acquainted with Mr. C t  when he worked in Mr. Fortier's office, when I was a member of Parliament. He was part of his political staff. I saw Mr. Varin once, at the cocktail party fundraiser on January 19. That is the only discussion I had with him that I can recall. The only discussion I had with Mr. Sauv  also took place on that occasion. What was the other name you mentioned?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I mentioned Mr. Prud'Homme.

Hon. Christian Paradis: I saw Mr. Prud'Homme, as I said earlier, maybe twice before the cocktail party. The last time I saw him was at that cocktail party.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: The difference between you and Mr. Coderre is striking. After all, Mr. Varin testified under oath, right here in this room, that he and Mr. Coderre were friends who had "a good time together".

Minister, as a minister of the Crown, you say that there was no political interference on your part. All the credible witnesses who appeared here before you—

Hon. Denis Coderre: On a point of order.

I would just add that he didn't agree with me. Thank you.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: No one here—

A voice: But he did contribute to your fund.

[English]

The Chair: Please take note, Mr. Gourde, that...

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: A point of order here.

Monsieur Coderre?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Denis Coderre: My pleasure.

The Chair: I would just note that Mr. Coderre is not a witness this morning, Monsieur Gourde.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Please continue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I just want to point out that Mr. Coderre had no reason to raise a point of order, something which wastes the committee's time.

Just to continue, no one has provided evidence of any irregularities on your part. Furthermore, all of the individuals that some people have been trying to connect to you for several weeks now, are individuals—as regards the ones you have closer ties to—whom you ran into at political events, or people that you never ran into. Is that correct?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: So, the only conclusion that can be drawn from all of this is that what we're doing here is just wasting our time and attempting to clarify the coat incident. There is nothing else.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Listen, this has been going on for two months.

The question is whether there was political interference in the awarding of contracts. The answer is no. I have been saying that from the beginning. I am happy to finally be here today, in front of the committee. Right from the beginning, I was prepared to come. Officials also said the same thing, at the first meeting. Nothing has changed. Those are the facts. That is the reality.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I have one final comment. The people whose names are mentioned in the report prepared following the cocktail party you attended showed that the donations were perfectly legal. There are people here who are trying to sully the reputation of honest Canadians who donate money to political parties, and hundreds of thousands of Canadians who donate money to political parties, when in fact, this is perfectly legal.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Absolutely.

That's why our government has tightened up the legislation regarding the disclosure of political donations and caps on such donations. Everything is transparent. We have confidence in our institutions.

As I already said, what is important for me is ensuring that, when I attend this kind of cocktail party, there is no lobbying going on. And that is in fact the case.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you, Minister.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Holder, you have less than 45 seconds.

Mr. Ed Holder: Thank you.

It's too bad; perhaps we should have Mr. Coderre and ask him questions. But let's continue with Monsieur Paradis.

For the record, when was Monsieur Sauvé awarded the contract for the building?

Hon. Christian Paradis: It was in May 2008.

Mr. Ed Holder: And for the record, when were you appointed Minister of Public Works?

Hon. Christian Paradis: It was June 25, 2008.

Mr. Ed Holder: That's absolutely clear to me. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Holder.

We'll go to Mr. Martin for eight minutes, please.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Minister, let me start with the cocktail party again. The guest list was specifically put together of people who had benefited recently from contracts, as a shakedown for those contracts, so that those grateful contractors could show their thanks to the Conservative Party by benefiting you.

Do you not see that as a kickback?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, absolutely not.

Mr. Martin, it is ridiculous to try and make a connection between \$400 or \$500 political donations and contracts worth millions of dollars. That is completely far-fetched.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: But you see, we don't really know how much money was raised, because shortly thereafter, the Conservative riding association of Bourassa was deregistered by Elections Canada for failing to report income and revenue. So we have no idea. We know that they donated \$500 or \$1,000 up front, but we don't know what kind of shakedown went on, because this thing was organized by a guy who was a shakedown expert.

This Gilles Varin, this small-time hood Gilles Varin, is a serial shakedown artist. He has been charged, tried, and convicted of just that modus operandi: shaking down contractors. If you want the largesse, you know, the benefits of government contracts, you're going to kick back, and that's how it's done.

That's how Mr. Sauvé says he got his name. Mr. Sauvé testified, under oath, on a stack of Bibles, that he got that contract because he paid the right people, and he assumed that the money Mr. Varin was getting from him was used to bribe people in Public Works to get him on that list.

•(0905)

Hon. Christian Paradis: Well, you know, the relationship between Mr. Sauvé and Mr. Varin is something else I cannot comment on. If there were any criminal wrongdoings, I understand there is an investigation by the RCMP.

But let me tell you that when I was asked to attend that fundraiser, it was from the EDA president, and as I stated in French, I didn't have any reason to doubt it. I went there in good faith. When I saw that there were contractors there, what I had to do was make sure that it was a lobby-free zone, which indeed it was.

I can see now that Mr. Sauvé is pissed off about that.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Broccolini testified earlier, sitting in that very chair, that he went to that event so that he could speak to you about his gripes and his grievances over the tendering process. Do you think that's an appropriate time to be talking business with a contractor who's doing business with the Government of Canada under your watch?

Hon. Christian Paradis: It's not appropriate, and this is why I referred him directly to bureaucrats, to the officials. I said, sir, I cannot comment on that, it's not my role here tonight; it's a lobby-free zone, so deal with the officials.

And that's what happened.

Mr. Pat Martin: I'm not calling you a liar.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, but this is what happened.

Mr. Pat Martin: I'm just saying that we have contradictory testimony. We'll leave it at that.

Hon. Christian Paradis: There's no contradictory testimony.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, yes, because we have one person who testified—

Hon. Christian Paradis: You will see that Mr. Broccolini said that I didn't want to talk about it, and this was the case. I didn't want to talk about it and I did not talk about it.

Mr. Pat Martin: We have other testimony that says you were speaking with him for up to 40 minutes.

Hon. Christian Paradis: That is not true.

Mr. Pat Martin: That's what I'm saying, that we have contradictory testimony.

Hon. Christian Paradis: It was for 10 minutes that I sat down with Mr. Broccolini, and that topic was raised for not even a couple of minutes. The rest of the discussion was about the political landscape in Quebec in general—that's it.

Mr. Pat Martin: You also began your testimony by calling Mr. Sauvé a liar. You should review your testimony when it comes out in the Hansard, Minister, because you said that Mr. Sauvé is a liar because...and he said in 2008 that there was no political interference.

Hon. Christian Paradis: He did. He did that, in the newspaper.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, I'm inclined to agree with you. And I believe that was a lie; that's certainly the way your testimony reads.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, he lied somewhere, because he has now two different versions. He went out publicly, in 2008, saying he

had a contract free of political interference. He came back here, under oath, saying there was interference.

So what's the point here? It's not credible.

Mr. Pat Martin: But you can see what our point is here: on behalf of the taxpayer, we're trying to investigate a story that reeks of influence peddling, bribery, corruption, shoddy workmanship, and exploding fees to renovate these beautiful buildings.

If you were still the Minister of Public Works, my question to you would be this: why does it cost 10 times as much to build anything on Parliament Hill as it costs to build in the real world? That's what's frustrating us. We're starting to get an idea of how these costs get jacked up: by interference.

Hon. Christian Paradis: I think the question is—with all due respect, Mr. Martin—was there any political interference here? This is the question. This is why we're here.

Mr. Pat Martin: That's more the criminal side of things.

Hon. Christian Paradis: I went to a cocktail and then you said there might have been interference.

Was there interference? The response is no. And if you ask the officials, their response is no.

The process is led by the officials. The minister has nothing to do with this.

Mr. Pat Martin: How do you explain this Hubert Pichet?

And who is Hubert Pichet? Remind us again.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Hubert Pichet works for Senator Pierre Claude Nolin.

Mr. Pat Martin: All right.

How do you explain this? They arranged this lunch meeting. Pichet appears out of nowhere. All of a sudden they're moved to a separate table where they say, oh, yeah, you want this job; you're going to get this job.

All of a sudden—bingo, bango, bongo—a guy who should never even have been on the pre-qualified list not only pre-qualifies but wins the contract, beating out the best contractors in North America by a huge factor.

I mean, it just stinks to high heaven, from any commercial point of view.

You pay this guy \$140,000. He sets up meetings with well-connected, high-ranking political operators, and all of a sudden you get the job. That's what he understood had to happen, so he paid the price and he got it. As soon as he stops paying the guy, his project starts getting sabotaged—so he testifies under oath: eight weeks to get electrical hookup so he could start, and 10 to 15 different nuisance things start happening to him. He says he couldn't do the job reasonably because he stopped paying this.... Instead of paying the 3%, he only paid half of that; they cut him off halfway through.

Somebody's getting paid off in your department, under your watch, to get access to these jobs.

• (0910)

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, no.

Mr. Pat Martin: What else are we to conclude? If you connect all the dots, any reasonable person would come to this: the empirical evidence is that you pay, you play, and if you don't pay, you don't play.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Look, if you have any questions for these guys, you should ask these guys.

Mr. Pat Martin: We are. We're asking all of them.

Hon. Christian Paradis: What I'm telling you is that the officials came here to say there was no political interference. What I'm telling you also is that the officials came to me in April 2009 to tell me there were problems with the LM Sauvé contract. There were a lot of delays. There were a lot of things that could justify the cancellation of it. I was briefed on that, and it indeed occurred under my watch.

After that, what you see is Mr. Sauvé coming here and saying he only talked to the minister for about 90 seconds or whatever. Then he seems to be pissed off about that.

That story is always changing, one side or the other, but I think the main line is that there was no political interference. This is what the officials said.

Mr. Pat Martin: The final allegation of shakedowns, the final allegation of asking these guys to pay their tithe to the Conservative Party for getting the contract, is that he got a phone call from your assistant asking for \$5,400 for the coat.

Hon. Christian Paradis: This is not true, sir, not true.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, again we have contradictory testimony. He swears on a Bible that it is true. He even said the coat was from Holt Renfrew. Now you're trying to ask us to believe you got it at Giant Tiger or Value Village or someplace.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Christian Paradis: You are insulting a good manufacturer in my riding.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pat Martin: No, no—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin. Unfortunately, your time is over.

As I turn the matter over to Mr. Regan, I'll just caution all members on the use of parliamentary language.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I know we're all proud of manufacturers in our own ridings, of course.

Mr. Minister, how did your team in your office decide where to send you in terms of different events? In other words, how would your team have made the decision about where to send you?

Hon. Christian Paradis: About that cocktail, as I have told you, I was approached by the EDA president at the time, Mr. Prud'Homme, and I accepted to go and help in good faith.

Hon. Geoff Regan: This wasn't your staff; this wasn't a case of him calling your office and talking to Mr. Mailhot or another assistant. He talked to you directly, you say.

Hon. Christian Paradis: I myself was on the ground at a political event, in December 2008, and I was asked by members from Bourassa riding to help at a fundraiser. I decided to attend in good faith.

As I just told Mr. Coderre, we were restructuring the entire political organization in Quebec at the time, so in the meantime I dealt with the EDA directly.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Now I'm a little confused. First you said Mr. Prud'Homme asked you, and then a moment ago you said you were asked by people from the riding association.

Hon. Christian Paradis: It was Mr. Prud'Homme.

Hon. Geoff Regan: It was Prud'Homme. All right.

How did you know Prud'Homme, and how well did you know him?

Hon. Christian Paradis: As I just said, I met him a couple of times. I saw him at the Winnipeg convention that we held in November 2008, right before the last election. I also saw him at a political event in December 2008. I was asked to attend a fundraiser that occurred a few weeks after that, in January.

Hon. Geoff Regan: You knew him reasonably well.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, I don't know him very well. I saw him a couple of times before the event.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Now, you say that you met Mr. Varin once, but in fact he testified here in this committee that he had met you several times at cocktails. You're telling us you only met him once. Which do we believe?

Hon. Christian Paradis: What I just said is that the discussion I had with him that I recall well was at that cocktail in January. This is where I saw him. After that, maybe I saw him somewhere else, but I don't recall.

Hon. Geoff Regan: So it is possible you met him more than once.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes, but it doesn't mean I know him very well. I don't have any *souvenir* about that.

Hon. Geoff Regan: That's fine. I just want to nail this down; I'm sorry.

Now, you knew that Sauvé organized this fundraiser.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, I didn't know that.

Hon. Geoff Regan: You didn't know that?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No.

Hon. Geoff Regan: When did you learn that?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I learned that when I saw it in the paper recently. What happened there, what he was told, I don't know. The only thing is that I was told...and I even received an e-mail from Mr. Prud'Homme a few days before the event saying things are going well and we have about 30 guests and it's still going on. And I showed up.

• (0915)

Hon. Geoff Regan: You've testified here this morning that you only spent 10 minutes talking to Mr. Broccolini, and you indicated that it's only Mr. Sauvé who says it was longer than that.

In fact, when we had Mr. Glouberman and Ms. Gersovitz here, they actually testified, or one of them did, that you spent a fair part of the evening with Mr. Broccolini.

That sounds like more than 10 minutes to me.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No. No, it doesn't make sense.

Hon. Geoff Regan: But whether it was 10 minutes or 40 minutes, you said you didn't talk about contracts, so what did you talk about? What did you have in common to talk about there?

Hon. Christian Paradis: The first couple of minutes, or not even, he raised some grievance about the bidding process or tendering process, whatever. I just said, look, it's not appropriate to talk about it here. I referred him directly to the officials. Then after that, the discussion turned to general topic matters. I spoke about how my wife and I had a trip to Italy for our honeymoon, how I like Italian food, general stuff like that—

Hon. Geoff Regan: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, but you asked me the question, so I'm going to tell you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I thought you were near the end. Sorry.

Hon. Christian Paradis: We spoke about the political landscape in general, Conservatives, the breakthrough, the hopes, what we could do. It was a very general high-level discussion.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

Let's turn to the coat, because your relationship with the person who has a contract with your department actually is relevant to these discussions, and therefore the coat comes into this—although it shouldn't have, right? There shouldn't be a connection between your coat and a contractor who happened to organize this.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Absolutely not.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Why would you not have sought to be paid by your insurance company for your lost coat and for your loss?

Hon. Christian Paradis: First of all, I found it very strange; it was an event with not even 40 people there. The restaurant was closed for that private event. I could not believe my coat was stolen.

I waited some days, and I asked to have a coat...through my staff. After that, when I saw there was nothing, I said, look, if that kind of thing happened in my riding...

[*Translation*]

I will continue in French.

If something like that had occurred in my riding, I would have been so embarrassed that I would have arranged to provide compensation to the minister. Where I'm from, we are proud people and it's embarrassing when things like that happen.

At the same time, I also wanted to pressure the organizers to get moving on this. I had my coat stolen, and yet no one was doing anything about it. When I saw that it wasn't working and that we were just going in circles, I decided to turn the page and forget about the coat.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC)): Excuse me, Mr. Regan, your time is up.

Madame Bourgeois, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: It's Mr. Lemay.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Chris Warkentin): Mr. Lemay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Good morning, Mr. Paradis.

I'd like to try and understand a number of things.

You were appointed Minister of Public Works in June, 2008.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes, in June, 2008.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I believe you replaced Mr. Fortier.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Fortier had been defeated in the election.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, he ran in October, 2008.

Mr. Marc Lemay: So you replaced Mr. Fortier as minister.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: In politics, it's all about optics. I decided to have some fun preparing a little summary. Since everything is available to the public, I took a look at contributions in your riding.

However, before going any further, I'd you to tell me whether the second cocktail party which took place in Montreal was for your riding of Mégantic—L'Érable.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes, it was.

Mr. Marc Lemay: So, you organized a cocktail party in Montreal to raise funds for your riding of Mégantic—L'Érable, which is located in the Chaudière—Appalaches region. That is my understanding.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: All right.

I come back to what I said earlier. It's all about perceptions.

In 2007, you had 49 donors, including two who contributed \$1,000.

Hon. Christian Paradis: That's possible.

Mr. Marc Lemay: You can trust me on this; I'm not trying to set a trap for you. I trust the CEO at Elections Canada.

Hon. Christian Paradis: No problem. That's the reason why we make those records available to the public. It's about transparency. It's the same for all the parties.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Excellent.

In 2008, you had 17 donors, including three who contributed \$1,000. It wasn't a very good year. Then suddenly, in 2009, you became Minister of Public Works. You were the Minister until January 19, 2010, were you not?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: In 2009, you were the Minister of Public Works, and there were 92 donors, including 15 who each contributed \$1,000. Is that normal?

• (0920)

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes. Well, when I say yes, I'm actually relying on what you just told me. I don't have the document in front of me.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I guarantee you that I'm not going to try anything. I am a lawyer by profession.

Hon. Christian Paradis: That's fine.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I'm working with documents. I won't try to trap you.

Does the name Bernard Lamarre mean anything to you?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: He is with SNC-Lavalin.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: He contributed \$1,000. Does that ring a bell?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: All right.

Who is Bernard Raymond? Do you know him?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I know the name. I found out later that he is a contractor, but I can't tell you any more than that. I don't know him personally.

Mr. Marc Lemay: He is a construction contractor?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I see.

And Bruce Winchester? He can't be the one that makes Winchester rifles. That isn't possible. Who is he?

Hon. Christian Paradis: He is my employee. He works at my department.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I see.

And Camille Villeneuve?

Hon. Christian Paradis: He is the contractor that was mentioned.

Mr. Marc Lemay: He is another contractor who contributed \$1,000. Is he with Multivesco?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I see.

David Cowan?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I don't know him personally.

Mr. Marc Lemay: You don't know him. He donated \$1,000.

Diane Cowan?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Well, actually, I did meet him. However, as I told you, I don't know all of them. It was set up with Senator Rivard, whom I know well. It was to give him a hand, since I have certain responsibilities as political lieutenant. I travel all over Quebec.

Now I'm just trying to understand where you're going with this. The question is whether there was political interference in the awarding of contracts. You have strayed a long way from the motion, Mr. Lemay. It's a pleasure for me to come here. However, if you want to talk about the clothes I wear, what colour they are and my lifestyle—

Mr. Marc Lemay: Just a minute. That's not it. I don't intend to talk about fur coats. I won't raise that. What I'm interested in is the fact that, in politics, it's all about perceptions.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Or so you say. Continue and we'll see where you're going with this.

Mr. Marc Lemay: In 2009, you had 92 donors.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes, and they're all listed. There is nothing to hide. It's transparent.

Mr. Marc Lemay: I know. All the same, it's odd that of those 15 donors, 12 were construction contractors.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Christian Paradis: I always expect donations to come from Conservative supporters.

You ask me a question, but you won't let me answer.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Surely you're not telling me that Bernard Lamarre is a Conservative supporter.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Chairman, can I answer the question? There are all kinds of accusations flying here.

[English]

The Chair: *Excusez-moi.*

On a point of order, Monsieur Gourde.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I would really like to know where my colleague is going with this, because he is talking about donations which are all perfectly legal. Of all the individuals who have been named here in front of the committee, not one has anything to do with the committee's work. I would like Mr. Lemay to get straight to the point, please.

[English]

The Chair: That's not a point of order, but I do caution the witness and the member to try not to talk over each other. It's very difficult for those of us trying to follow the translation.

[Translation]

Mr. Lemay, you have less than one minute left.

Mr. Marc Lemay: What I'm trying to say, and what your colleague opposite does not understand, is that it's all about perceptions. The surprising thing is that you were the Minister of Public Works in 2009.

Do you agree that, in politics, it's all about perceptions?

Hon. Christian Paradis: I do agree that our government strengthened the financing rules, that it set the contribution limit at \$1,100 and that all the information was listed on the Elections Canada site, out of a desire for openness and transparency.

In terms of whether there was political interference in the awarding of contracts by Public Works when I was minister, the answer is no.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Minister, how many cocktail parties did you attend in 2009?

Hon. Christian Paradis: If memory serves me, I would say that there were only those two.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Thank you.

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

Hon. Christian Paradis: Just a minute. It's possible I helped out other riding associations. I would have to check that. That is in fact what we're talking about and regarding which you are attempting to make certain allegations.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen.

[English]

Mr. Warkentin, for five minutes.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here. We appreciate your testimony this morning.

Today, it's another day, and it's a day that has characterized the general trend that we've seen in this committee. That's where the opposition, where they haven't been able to bring any facts to the table, go on these fishing expeditions and make all kinds of allegations, of which there is no general proof or any facts that would indicate that there are any problems within your purview or the conduct that you've undertaken.

Mr. Martin brought forward all kinds of allegations. He repeated a number of allegations that Mr. Sauvé had brought to this committee, but I think it's important that we recall the testimony of Mr. Sauvé, that in fact he said that there was no proof. He had made several allegations, but in his allegations there was absolutely no proof of those, and he couldn't provide any documents that would prove any of the allegations that he brought forward.

What we did learn was that in fact Mr. Sauvé was a bad general manager. He talked about his overruns, in terms of the cost of the

St. James church. He talked about being let go from the Montreal city hall project. He also talked about not being able to get power hooked up at the West Block facility, as well as not managing to get latrines put up at the West Block project.

So I think, Minister, it's clear that Mr. Sauvé was not in a position to undertake the work that he had been given. Obviously his company's reputation preceded him, and when he took over, things started to fall apart. Unfortunately for him, things haven't turned out so well.

Minister, I do want to speak to the fact that the contract was taken away from LM Sauvé. I'm wondering what your involvement was in the removal of that contract. Obviously, we've heard why it was removed, but now I'm wondering if you could describe your involvement in the removal of that contract.

• (0925)

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes. As I said earlier, sometime in April 2009 I was briefed by the officials. The officials explained that there were serious concerns about delays and other problems with this contract. The way that the contract was shaped, they now had reason to simply cancel it, and this is exactly what happened. The file was quite complete and the contract was cancelled at that time.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Leading up to that removal of the contract, at that point in time, of course, the opposition would have us believe that you were fully aware that Mr. Sauvé had planned this fundraiser in Montreal.

Were you aware at that point...as these discussions of if or not the contract should be removed, that he had planned that benefit?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No. When I saw him, he told me that he had a contract at the fundraiser, and I told him, "Good for you". The discussion was quite short.

He seems now to be not happy about that. This is what I heard from the last testimony.

This is funny, because at the beginning here, the supposition here is that there was... Now people ask if there was a kickback or whatever. Mr. Sauvé said publicly, at the beginning, when he had this contract, that it was free of political interference.

He came here, under oath, saying that now there was political interference.

Then after that, with that coat story, he said he was almost being extorted.

That thing is just nonsense. It's nonsense.

The question here, I think, is this: was there any political interference? And from the very beginning in all of those stories, all of the facts demonstrate that there was no political interference in any contracts.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Going back to the fundraiser, it's important that what we've heard at this committee is testimony that people who went there had no intention to talk about contracts. As a matter of fact, we heard from one of the architects who said they were there because they supported the government's position on Israel.

So you can see that there was a divergent group of people. Obviously, the opposition can make all kinds of allegations as to what the intentions of those people were, but we have heard testimony that contradicts what the opposition has been up to.

I do appreciate it, Minister.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Warkentin.

We have about two minutes left, two minutes for Mr. Coderre.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, did you discuss this case with the police?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Yes, I have a police report that was filed

Hon. Denis Coderre: Was your—

Hon. Christian Paradis: —by my employee, for the reasons I mentioned earlier. I was not available. Mr. Mailhot filed it on January 22.

Hon. Denis Coderre: That's fine, but I'm not talking about the coat.

Hon. Christian Paradis: I thought you were talking about my coat.

Hon. Denis Coderre: No, I'm talking about the renovation contract.

Hon. Christian Paradis: As regards the renovation contract, as I already said, my officials informed me that there were serious delays in April. As a result, the contract was cancelled.

Hon. Denis Coderre: That is not my question. Did people from your office talk to the RCMP after those problems arose? Were you contacted?

Hon. Christian Paradis: What problems are you referring to?

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did the RCMP contact you about the problems relating to LM Sauvé and the renovation contracts?

Hon. Christian Paradis: They didn't call me, nor did they call my office.

● (0930)

Hon. Denis Coderre: You were never contacted?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No, nor did I have a briefing with my officials in that respect either. The briefing occurred when the time came to cancel the contract in April of 2009, for the reasons I've already cited.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did Bernard Côté call you when Mr. Sauvé started having problems with his contract?

Hon. Christian Paradis: No. Mr. Côté never discussed that contract with me nor did he discuss any other contracts on which he might have worked. There was no connection between the two. As I say, my relationship with him went no further than what happened when I first met him. At the time, I was a member of Parliament and he was a member of Mr. Fortier's staff.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Did you organize a fundraiser event for your riding at Magnan's in June, 2009?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Where?

Hon. Denis Coderre: At Magnan's.

Hon. Christian Paradis: I did it for the party, but not for my riding.

Hon. Denis Coderre: So there was an event at Magnan's.

Hon. Christian Paradis: It may not have been in June, but there was an event at Magnan's.

A little earlier, Mr. Lemay asked me a question. He said he wasn't trying to trap me, but I was not prepared to provide an overview of all the events connected to my nomination or political fundraising. If I'd known, I would have prepared.

The question is whether there was political interference regarding contracts that were awarded for the West Block. The answer is no. I want that on the record, Mr. Chairman. I don't want people trying and catch me out on that.

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Chairman, I have one last question since this is the end.

Mr. Paradis, if you knew that LM Sauvé was the name of a contractor and that he organized the benefit event, why did you ask your assistant to call to request that you be refunded for the loss of your coat?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Prud'Homme told him to call Mr. Sauvé, and Mr. Mailhot thought that Mr. Sauvé was a member of the board of directors of the Bourassa riding association. The conversation lasted 15 seconds and the issue was referred to Mr. Prud'Homme. After that, we continued to go back and forth with Mr. Prud'Homme. It's as simple as that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Paradis. Thank you, colleagues.

It's now 9:30. I'm going to suspend for a couple of minutes.

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

The Chair: I'm going to suspend first. We'll go in camera, and then we'll deal with your point of order.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

[*Public proceedings resume*]

● (1015)

The Chair: We're now in public.

The subject matter that is in public is the motion of Siobhan Coady.

For the purposes of the record, Ms. Coady, would you state your motion, please?

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): It has already been moved.

The Chair: It was moved in camera.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Okay.

It's that the committee order the Ontario Provincial Police to provide it with a copy of the report dealing with the final breakdown of costs incurred by the OPP that it is providing to Public Safety Canada; and that this report be provided to this committee at the same time that it is provided to Public Safety Canada on December 1, 2010.

This is the one I had tabled at the last meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, let me speak to the merits of this motion, Mr. Chairman.

We've been trying to get the information about the actual costs of the OPP in the G-8 and G-20 summit meetings for weeks and weeks—in fact, months. I think there was an effort made to keep those figures secret until such time as the byelection was held in Vaughan. I don't think anybody has to mince any words over this.

Now our fear—and I think it's valid—is that those numbers may be made available to the government, but there's no obligation or duty on the part of the government to release them to the general public. They might sit on that report for weeks, months, years.

The public has a right to know, and it should be within the context of the present study we have under way; therefore, I think we should deal with this smartly and quickly and get those figures by December 1, so that we can deal with them before the Christmas break.

The Chair: Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I stated on a number of occasions, both in committee and outside of committee, it strikes me that what the opposition are doing and have continuously done is try to label the Ontario Provincial Police as a corrupt force, somehow colluding with the government or with a former member of Parliament, Mr. Bevilacqua, and a whole host of other people to try to mislead the Parliament of Canada. That's obviously something the premise of which I could never support. I think the OPP are a spectacular force who do extraordinary work.

I know that on occasion the opposition members will come here and try to wrap themselves in the cloak of saying, no, this is not what they're saying at all, but then their actions are different. I noticed in I don't know which paper on the weekend that the member across said: "I'm concerned about what they're still hiding", in reference to some of the release of information by the OPP.

That strikes me as additional evidence that the opposition here is simply trying to say that the Ontario Provincial Police are more a political force than they are a force of policing across the province of Ontario who have done extraordinarily good work.

I think they're also trying to tie in the fact that, somehow, the former Ontario Liberal Minister of Public Safety and Security is also somehow a part of this alleged big conspiracy effort, which includes, of course, the OPP and the former Liberal member of Parliament for Vaughan.

The entire premise of all of this, the direction the opposition is going in, is an insult to the people of Ontario, an insult to the Ontario Provincial Police, an insult to the former Liberal member of Parliament for Vaughan. It has more to do with perhaps Liberal infighting than it has with good work here at the committee.

But I suspect that's one of the reasons they don't have the courage to have a GTA member or an Ontario member come to ask for this information: they know that what they're doing is basically slinging mud at an incredible force. By virtue of that, a person who recently has been a....

Of course, I send my congratulations to the new member-elect for Vaughan. He is a 40-year veteran of policing across Ontario, with the Toronto police force, my force in York Region, and the OPP.

If that's what they want to do, why don't they just be honest about it?

Say what you say in the media: that you think the Ontario Provincial Police is corrupt; that you think the Liberal Minister of Public Safety was corrupt; and that you think that somehow the former Liberal member of Parliament was involved in a massive conspiracy to help win a byelection that undoubtedly you're upset about, because you held the seat for 22 years under massive majorities and we were able to win that one, and I know that's disappointing to the Liberal Party.

Why don't you be honest about what you're trying to do?

• (1020)

The Chair: I think Mr. Regan was first.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've heard a lot of nonsense from Mr. Calandra about what conspiracy theories people might infer from the fact that we want to move a motion that has to do with what the government will receive tomorrow—the government, not the OPP. The government tomorrow will receive the report we're talking about, and the real question is, will the government sit on it for five months? If not, then why are the Conservatives here so opposed to this committee and the public seeing this document?

Mr. Chairman, I think Mr. Martin made the point very well that the government could sit on this information for the next five months without our seeing it. It seems reasonable to me that we are seeking to have that information at the same time as the government gets it.

What would be so wrong with that? What is it that the Conservatives are so afraid of?

The Chair: Madam Coady.

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Thank you very much.

I think it's regrettable that we have such inflammatory remarks at this committee. There's no discussion of anyone's being corrupt; there's no insult to the people of Ontario. We are merely asking for our fiduciary responsibility for information with regard to spending on the G-8 and G-20, of which we've received information from other departments and other divisions, such as the Toronto police department.

There have been some challenges with getting information from the Ontario police department for whatever reasons—perhaps legitimate, or not so much; I don't know. All we are continuing to ask, for this committee, is for more information, so that we can make informed discussions during a period of study into the spending of the G-8 and G-20. It's nothing more than that: to ask for legitimate information that the government will have as of tomorrow and that should be in the hands of this committee so that we can ask the proper questions.

This is a tremendous amount of spending, and I think we have a responsibility. We have a fiduciary responsibility to the people of Canada. I find my colleague's remarks somewhat inappropriate in that there's no more intent than to ask for information that we legitimately require to have in order to do a proper job.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we're asking for and trying to compel information that I'm not sure is within our purview to do. We're asking for the OPP and possibly the provincial Government of Ontario to provide us with information that they've agreed to supply to the Government of Canada. But I'm not sure we have the authority to compel a third party to provide confidential information, if they so deem, to our committee.

I'd ask that this be considered as well.

The Chair: Is there any other comment?

Mr. Calandra.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I'll sum it up this way.

Again what you see is the opposition saying one thing here and then another thing when they get out in public.

I'll quote:

Thursday, Regan said through a spokesperson: "It's still not good enough. I'm concerned about what they are still hiding..."

That, to me, is indicative of somebody who's suggesting that the Ontario Provincial Police are trying to hide something. Of course, as somebody who's extraordinarily proud of my force, a force that was deemed to have information prepared by December 1, I would never support a motion the basis of which is trying to suggest that one of the most credible and professional forces in the country is somehow corrupt.

Again, if the opposition would simply be honest with what it is they're trying to allege, that would be one thing. But it's quite clear that what they're trying to say here is that the OPP is trying to hide something and that in so doing they are a corrupt force.

It's a shame that the Liberal Party can't, just once, stand with our men and women in law enforcement. They have to continuously try to score extraordinarily cheap political points by accusing the force of corruption simply because they lost a byelection in Vaughan, which they had held for 22 years.

It's a pretty sad day when a police force is brought into a political fight.

• (1025)

The Chair: Is there any other commentary?

Those in favour of the motion?

Those opposed?

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I rule in favour of the motion. It's well within the committee's authority to ask for this document, independent of whether it has to be filed with the government, independent of any other arrangements.

Having the motion passed, I will instruct the clerk to seek to get the information tomorrow.

Thank you.

Next.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We heard, during testimony previously, from Mr. Glouberman. He said that he, and I guess Ms. Gersovitz, prepared "a list of our concerns on that bid". He was referring to the Sauvé bid.

Mr. Glouberman, by the way, also said, talking about the nature of the cocktail that he went to, the following:

...I also saw it as an opportunity to meet with the minister and impress upon him the importance of the project and that the project remains a priority within the government.

So he was there also to talk about business and about contracts and so forth, as we see from his testimony.

But the key point for me is this. I move that we ask the Department of Public Works to provide us with the list that was prepared by Mr. Glouberman and his associate, which he referred to in testimony: his list of concerns in relation to the bid of Mr. Sauvé.

The Chair: Have you done this up in a formal motion?

Hon. Geoff Regan: No. The matter was before us today, so I—

The Chair: But is it...matters that are arising out of the business that we were dealing with?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Yes.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. Geoff Regan: No, the first part of the meeting was all about business.

The Chair: I think it is, actually; we actually dealt with....

I'm satisfied that the motion is properly before the committee.

Is there any debate or discussion?

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Oh, boy, we're down to two minutes to talk about all of the hard work our analyst, Édison Roy-César, has done. This was on the study with respect to budget freezes.

I don't really expect that we'll get into any substantive discussion, colleagues, but the analyst and the clerk and your chair do need some guidance as to how we're going to proceed.

I suppose we should go back in camera; I appreciate that.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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