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Tuesday, March 6, 2012

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Chair

Ms. Jean Crowder

Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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•(1145)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP)): Order. We are in public session.

I believe Mr. Del Mastro has a motion.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): I do, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, is that a point of order? Mr. Del Mastro has the floor to move his motion.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): I want to make a notice of motion that I put on the order paper today.

The Chair: It has been sent. That's not a point of order. We'll put you on the speakers list.

Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

As I indicated at the last meeting, I've brought forward a motion that I'd like to move at this meeting and present to the members for their consideration.

I would move that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics call Mr. Adam Carroll, former Liberal Research Bureau employee, for one meeting to examine his use of House of Commons resources in order to conceal his anonymous public attacks on a member of Parliament, and that this meeting take place by Thursday, March 8, 2012.

I think it's important that we examine this. The use of House resources to specifically attack and conceal a bad attack on another member in good standing of the House of Commons is something that all parties should in fact deplore, and something all parties should in fact want to get to the bottom of.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Del Mastro.

I am going to make a ruling on the admissibility of the motion. I thank the honourable member for having moved his motion; however, I am of the opinion that, as moved, the motion is inadmissible for the following reasons.

I should note that although I recognize that decisions taken in a different iteration of a same committee are not binding to a current committee, I would be remiss if I didn't restate, for the benefit of the current members of the committee, a decision made in a similar case in the last Parliament, on March 7, 2011, by the first vice-chair, as I

feel it answers many questions surrounding the admissibility of the motion now before us.

First of all, I believe the motion goes beyond the mandate of the committee specifically with regard to Standing Order 108.(3)(h)(vi), which states:

...the proposing, promoting, monitoring and assessing of initiatives which relate to access to information and privacy across all sectors of Canadian society and to ethical standards relating to public office holders; and any other matter which the House shall from time to time refer to the Standing Committee.

It is important to understand the definition of "public office holders" with regard to the mandate of the committee. This standing order refers to the definition as described in the Conflict of Interest Act, 2006, which was cited in a previous ruling in this Parliament by my predecessor, Mr. Cullen, on September 27, 2011. Most importantly, however, the Parliament of Canada Act in section 52.6(1) states that:

The Board has the exclusive authority to determine whether any previous, current or proposed use by a member of the House of Commons of any funds, goods, services or premises made available to that member for the carrying out of parliamentary functions is or was proper, given the discharge of the parliamentary functions of members of the House of Commons, including whether any such use is or was proper having regard to the intent and purpose of the by-laws made under subsection 52.5(1).

This is further emphasized on page 238 of the second edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, O'Brien and Bosc, which goes on to say:

The Board determines the terms and conditions of managing and accounting for the funds by Members and has exclusive authority to determine whether their use is or was proper. Other By-laws set out the terms governing Members' use of their budgets and other benefits provided by the House, including travel points, printing privileges, staff, and the purchase of goods.

As members of Parliament, the proper use of parliamentary resources is something that concerns all of us. However, I believe, for the reasons stated above, that this committee is not the proper forum in which to have this discussion.

I assume you're challenging the ruling of the chair, Mr. Butt.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): I am. As much as I have great respect for the chair, I just don't agree with the ruling. I think it's very important that this committee look into this issue and determine the extent of it. I think it's an appropriate place for this committee to spend a little bit of time looking into this. Therefore, I will challenge the ruling of the chair.

The Chair: That motion is not debatable.

Point of order.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): I would like a recorded division.

[*English*]

The Chair: You would like a recorded vote. Thank you.

Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: On a point of clarification, Madam Chair, are we voting in support of the motion to challenge the chair, or voting in support of the chair?

The Chair: Because it's a recorded vote, the clerk will restate the question.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Chad Mariage): The question is: shall the ruling be sustained?

(Chair's ruling overturned: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: The ruling of the chair is overturned.

We will now proceed to debate on the motion as presented by Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Andrews, I had you first on the list here.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Certainly, Madam Speaker, I think it's rather interesting that we have this motion before us here today and then your motion being overturned because the Conservative Party didn't get their own way in a committee. Once again they use their parliamentary will and their numbers to overturn the chair just when they don't get their own way.

Today it was very interesting that the Speaker of the House of Commons made a ruling on this very issue. I would argue that now that the Speaker has ruled on this issue, the committee should not be debating it at all—unless members of the Conservative Party would like to overturn and challenge the ruling of their own member in this very matter.

So I think it's important that we look at the ruling of the Speaker with the—

An hon. member: The Speaker's not a member of our caucus.

The Chair: Excuse me.

Mr. Andrews has the floor, Mr. Butt, unless you're raising a point of order.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, with the greatest of respect, it is quite clear in the common practices of the House of Commons, and thereby extending out to any of the committees that are created as a matter of the Standing Orders from the House of Commons, that any reference to impugn the integrity of the chair of the House of Commons is simply beyond reproach.

I would encourage the member opposite to make very clear that he wasn't intending to impugn the reputation by the political affiliation of the Speaker of the House of Commons—

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Point of order.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: —who was elected by all members of the House of Commons.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Point of order.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

I'm going to go back to Mr. Andrews, but first, Mr. Angus, you have a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I was listening to the honourable colleague, and I think they're trying to twist the words and turn this into a political debate. So I don't think that's a legitimate point of order, and I think we should allow the speaker to continue.

The Chair: I'm going to go back to Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Andrews, continue, please.

Mr. Scott Andrews: I was in no way impugning or disagreeing with the Speaker over the ruling. I was simply pointing out that the Speaker has made a ruling and it seems that the members of this committee would like to challenge the ruling of the Speaker. That's what I'm hearing, and that's what I'm seeing the Conservative members of this committee do, to challenge the ruling of the chair.

Less than an hour ago, the Speaker made a ruling on a question of privilege, raised on February 27, 2012, by the minister of their own party, the Minister of Public Safety, Mr. Toews, regarding cyber-campaigns, following the minister's tabling of Bill C-30, an act to enact the Investigating and Preventing Criminal Electronic Communications Act and to amend the Criminal Code and other acts.

The Speaker, in his ruling, said:

I am now pleased to rule on the question of privilege raised on February 27 by the Minister of Public Safety regarding cyber-campaigns following the introduction in the House by him of Bill C-30....

I would like to thank the minister for having raised these matters, as well as the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the House Leader of the Official Opposition, the member for Toronto Centre, the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, and the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie for their interventions.

The Speaker went on to say:

In raising his question of privilege, the minister raised three issues, each of which he believed to be a contempt of the House.

The first concerned the use of the House resources for the so-called vikleaks30 account on Twitter, which he claimed was used to attack him personally, thereby degrading his reputation and obstructing him from carrying out his duties as a member of Parliament.

The interim leader of the Liberal Party then rose to inform the House that he himself had intended to rise on a question of privilege, having been informed on February 26 that it was an employee of the Liberal research bureau who had been responsible for the vikleaks30 site. The interim leader offered his unequivocal apology and that of the Liberal Party to the minister.

In view of this unconditional apology made personally by the member and on behalf of his party as a whole, and in keeping with what has been done in similar circumstances in the past, I am prepared to consider this particular aspect of the question of privilege closed.

I also wish to inform the House that the House of Commons policy on acceptable use of information technology resources was applied in this case, given that an unacceptable use of House IT resources occurred.

The minister also raised the matter of an apparent campaign to inundate his office with calls, emails and faxes. This, he contended, hindered him and his staff from serving his constituents, and prevented constituents with legitimate needs from contacting their member of Parliament in a timely fashion.

As the member for Windsor—Tecumseh reminded the House, my predecessor, Speaker Milliken, was faced with a similar situation in 2005 in a matter raised by the former member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

In his ruling on June 8, 2005, Speaker Milliken concluded that, while the member had a legitimate grievance that the normal functioning of parliamentary offices had been affected, the members involved and their constituents had still maintained the ability to communicate through several means. Thus, he could not find that it was a prima facie case of privilege, as the members were not impeded in their ability to perform their parliamentary duties.

Having reviewed the facts in the current case, I must draw the same conclusion on the second aspect of the question of privilege.

This brings us to the third and what I consider to be the most troubling issue raised in the question of privilege, that of the videos posted on the website YouTube by the so-called Anonymous on February 18, 22 and 25. These videos contained various allegations about the minister's private life and made specific and disturbing threats.

The minister has stated that he accepts that coping with vigorous debate and sometimes overheated rhetoric are part of the job of a politician but argued that these online attacks directed to both him and his family had crossed the line into threatening behaviour that was unacceptable. He contended that the threatened actions contained in these videos constituted a deliberate attempt to intimidate him with respect to proceedings in Parliament.

In *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, it states:

It is impossible to codify all incidents which might be interpreted as matters of obstruction, interference, molestation or intimidation and as such constitute prima facie cases of privilege. However, some matters found to be prima facie include the damaging of a Member's reputation, the usurpation of the title of Member of Parliament, the intimidation of Members and their staff and of witnesses before committees, and the provision of misleading information.

● (1155)

In spite of the able arguments advanced by the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie, the Chair is in no doubt that the House has full jurisdiction to decide the matter.

As is noted at page 108 of O'Brien and Bosc:

Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to the services of its Members free from intimidation, obstruction and interference. Speaker Lamoureux stated in a 1973 ruling that he had "no hesitation in reaffirming the principle that parliamentary privilege includes the right of a member to discharge his responsibilities as a member of the House free from threats or attempts at intimidation."

Those who enter political life fully expect to be able to be held accountable for their actions to their constituents and to those who have concerns with the issues and initiatives they may advocate.

In a healthy democracy, vigorous debate on issues is encouraged. In fact, the rules and procedures of this House are drafted to allow for proponents and opponents to discuss, in a respectful manner, even the most difficult and sensitive of matters.

However, when duly elected members are personally threatened for their work in Parliament, whether introducing a bill, making a statement or casting a vote, this House must take [this]...very seriously.

As noted by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House...threats or attempts to influence a member's actions are considered to be breaches of privilege.

I have carefully reviewed the online videos in which the language does indeed constitute a direct threat to the minister in particular, as well as other members. These threats demonstrate a flagrant disregard of our traditions and a subversive attack on the most fundamental privileges of this House.

As your Speaker and the guardian of those privileges, I have concluded that this aspect, the videos posted on the Internet by anonymous, therefore constitutes a prima facie question...and I invite the minister to move his motion.

The minister did move a motion to refer the matter to the proper committee, the procedure and House affairs committee.

So obviously the Speaker has ruled on three aspects of this privilege: one, two, and this third one. In his ruling—and I respect the Speaker's ruling—he is referring it to the House affairs committee to look at the third aspect. But what we're debating here today is a motion by Mr. Del Mastro to go into the first one, which has already been ruled on by our Speaker. I find it very disturbing that a committee would try to take on something like that.

As I said, the Speaker has ruled on this. The committee has no authority to be looking into this matter any further. The leader of the Liberal Party has apologized unequivocally for the actions of a staff person.

As a former staff person, I know what it's like to be on the staff of a political minister. Sometimes you push the envelope and you step outside your bounds, and this is what happened here. This particular staff person has done this and we have apologized for that. It was a heartfelt apology. I would like to quote the apology by the member for Toronto Centre, who said:

I do not share many things with the Minister of Public Safety all the time but one thing I do share with him is a sense of longevity. One of the things that makes public life difficult is when political attacks become personal. I have tried, but have not always succeeded, in my political life to make it very clear that matters of personal and private conduct are not to be the subject of political attack or political reference.

I concurred with the leader of the Liberal Party when he said that. Life is very difficult in this place when you try to do your job and the political becomes personal.

Getting back to the House of Commons Standing Orders, categorically on this issue, this matter has been ruled on, and this matter has been dealt with. Standing Order 10 states:

The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum, and shall decide questions of order. In deciding a point of order or practice, the Speaker shall state the Standing Order or other authority applicable to the case.

● (1200)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, I have a point of order.

Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, as this member would well know and as the chair knows, committees are in fact the masters of their own destiny. I don't see any relevance of a ruling by the Speaker of the House of Commons in the House of Commons related to House of Commons functions. Committees are the masters of their own destiny.

Perhaps you could relay that to the member. These are not relevant to the motion at hand.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm going to allow Mr. Andrews to continue. I think he's attempting to lay a case for their position around why this shouldn't be considered.

I'm going to allow him to continue.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, we'll get to that. We know the rules regarding committees. You like to select which ones you like to use, so I'll get to that in a minute.

The House of Commons Standing Orders are categorical on this issue. Standing Order 10 states:

The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum, and shall decide questions of order. In deciding a point of order or practice, the Speaker shall state the Standing Order or other authority applicable to the case. No debate shall be permitted on any such decision, and no such decision shall be subject to an appeal to the House.

Furthermore, O'Brien and Bosc state the following on pages 1046 to 1047:

The Speaker of the House is regularly asked to rule on the procedural admissibility of matters before the House. Rulings from the Speaker constitute precedents for future Speakers of the House. The matter before the House may pertain to the proceedings of one or more committees. If the Speaker rules on a matter of that nature, the committees affected will be required to comply with any provisos in the ruling.

So we've just read the ruling out and it's out of respect for the ruling of the Speaker that this question of privilege is now closed. The issue could be no clearer. The Speaker has ruled. We must comply. Anything else would be contrary to the standing order and a challenge to the ruling of the Speaker.

O'Brien and Bosc are clear that committees derive their authority from the House itself. On page 973, they say:

The House delegates certain powers to the committees it creates in order that they can carry out their duties and fulfill their mandates. Committees have no powers other than those delegated to them in this way, and cannot assume other powers on their own initiative....[C]ommittees can invoke these powers only within and for the purposes of the mandate that the House (and the Senate, in the case of joint committees) has entrusted to them.

Page 1044 states the following:

Committee procedure includes all of the rules and practices governing the proceedings of parliamentary committees. The primary sources are the Constitution and Acts of Parliament; orders of reference, instructions and Standing Orders of the House of Commons; rulings by the Speaker of the House and committee Chairs; and, finally, practice.

For the sake of emphasis, I'd like to repeat that the primary sources are the Constitution and acts of Parliament, orders of reference, instructions and Standing Orders of the House of Commons, and rulings by the Speaker.

O'Brien and Bosc also state the following on pages 1047 to 1048:

The idea that committees are "masters of their proceedings" or "masters of their procedures" is frequently evoked in committee debates or the House.

As the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister just mentioned, "The concept refers to the freedom committees normally have—"

• (1205)

The Chair: Could you read a little more slowly? I don't believe the interpreters have a copy of this, and they're having trouble keeping up.

Mr. Scott Andrews: O'Brien and Bosc also says the following on pages 1047 and 1048:

The idea that committees are 'masters of their proceedings' or 'masters of their procedures' is frequently evoked in committee debates or the House. The concept refers to the freedom committees normally have to organize their work as they see

fit and the option they have of defining, on their own, certain rules of procedure that facilitate their proceedings.

This is common with most committees and we've done this regularly here.

These freedoms are not, however, total or absolute. First, it is useful to bear in mind that committees are creatures of the House. This means that they have no independent existence and are not permitted to take action unless they have been authorized/empowered to do so by the House.

The freedom committees have is, in fact, a freedom limited on two levels. First, committees are free to organize their proceedings as they see fit provided that their studies and the motions and reports that they adopt comply with the orders of reference and instructions issued by the House. Second, committees may adopt procedural rules to govern their proceedings, but only to the extent the House does not prescribe anything specific. At all times, directives from procedural sources higher than parliamentary committees (Constitution; statutes; order of reference, instructions and Standing Orders of the House; and rulings by the Speaker) take precedence over any rules a committee may adopt.

This committee is specifically mandated by the House of Commons. This is clear in Standing Order 108. The mandate involves the Access to Information Act, the Privacy Act, the Conflict of Interest Act. None of those acts apply to members of the House of Commons or their staff. An examination of a former House of Commons employee is beyond the scope or the authority of this committee given to it by the House of Commons.

In light of all this, I would ask the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister a very important question. In light of the Speaker's ruling, is he still going to pursue this motion? If the answer to this question is yes, then Mr. Del Mastro is voting non-confidence in our Speaker. The parliamentary secretary—

The Chair: I need to intervene on that. I'm not sure you can drag the Speaker into this in that way. The Speaker is neutral, selected by all members of the House, and a decision by the committee doesn't relate to the Speaker's role. So please proceed without drawing that inference.

• (1210)

Mr. Scott Andrews: Madam Chair, I think I just laid out the case for directives from procedural sources higher than parliamentary committees. We've already dealt with that; I've laid that out. I'm just trying to come full circle on this, Madam Chair.

The Chair: My understanding is that the Speaker rules on a prima facie case and is not into the substance of the case itself. He's made a ruling on the prima facie aspect of it, but it is now, I understand, if the motion passes tonight, being referred to the procedure and House affairs committee for further investigation on the anonymous piece.

I think in terms of getting into talking about non-confidence or confidence in the Speaker, that's not relevant. So continue with your argument.

Mr. Scott Andrews: With due respect, Madam Chair, not this aspect of the ruling. The Speaker made the ruling on the aspect of the very motion the parliamentary secretary was putting forward.

The Chair: There's a point of order from Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: The Speaker made a ruling on a question of privilege. The Speaker did not make a ruling on the motion before the committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: As you know, I made a ruling on the mandate of this committee. It has been overturned by a majority of the members. The committee has decided, with a majority of the members, to proceed with the motion before us. The committee has made a decision about the study it's choosing to undertake, and that's the matter that's before us at this point, not what the Speaker ruled or did not rule on.

Please continue.

Mr. Scott Andrews: It's hard to separate the weeds on this. This is pretty specific. The motion relates directly to the Speaker's ruling. The parliamentary secretary wants to ignore the ruling of the Speaker. This is just another attempt by the Conservative Party to draw attention away from the issue of electoral fraud that is ongoing right now in the House of Commons and the public domain. Now they're trying to attack Parliament and the Speaker himself.

The parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister is saying the rules do not apply to him or the Conservative Party. They're bringing shame on themselves and throughout Parliament. I think the apology was made. The apology was accepted by your own party. Why can't you leave it at that, Mr. Del Mastro? Why do you have to go dragging before the committee a staff person of the Liberal Party, who is sorry for his actions? The matter has been dealt with. This is just an attempt to discredit this particular individual. He has lost his job, and that's hard enough on a family.

I don't think we live in a place here in Parliament that deals with this kind of stuff. We're dealing with people's lives and families. The very matter that at heart we apologized for dealt with that. So there's really no need to carry that on. I'm saddened that the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister would continue in this vein.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Andrews.

Mrs. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

First of all, I would like to ask a clarification from the clerk, and then I'd like to propose a friendly amendment.

If this motion proceeds and passes, will it be treated under the rules of the routine proceedings? Will there be a ten-minute presentation and then a set rotation for questions?

The Chair: It's a study the committee would be undertaking—

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Okay, so it would fall under the same rules.

The Chair: That's right.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thanks very much for that clarification.

I'd like to propose a friendly amendment deleting the last words, "Thursday, March 8", and replacing them with "Tuesday, March 13".

The Chair: We have an amendment.

The mover accepts the motion; the amendment is accepted.

Are you done, Mrs. Davidson?

• (1215)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Yes, I am, thank you.

The Chair: Monsieur Dusseault.

Mr. Andrews: Madam Chair, point of order.

The Chair: Point of order, Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Are we now debating the amendment?

The Chair: No. It has been accepted. The mover of the motion agreed to the amendment proposed by Mrs. Davidson.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Whether you are in favour of this motion or not, this is not the appropriate committee to debate the matter. We have known this for several days already. You said so, Madam Chair, immediately after the motion was introduced by Mr. Del Mastro. Unfortunately, as we all saw, the Conservatives opposed your position.

My colleague spoke at length about the decision of the Speaker of the House of Commons. It is also important to mention, I believe, that the Member for Provencher and Minister of Public Safety, Vic Toews, tabled a motion after the Speaker handed down his decision. This motion is going to be voted on a bit later, as the vote was deferred. The motion reads as follows:

[*English*]

"That the matter of the threats to interference with an attempted intimidation of the honourable member for Provencher be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs".

[*Translation*]

This motion was tabled by the Minister of Public Safety, the Member for Provencher himself, who refers to threats, obstacles and attempts at intimidation. I am of course referring to the videos that were put online by Anonymous, but also to what was said on Wikileaks. I think that that would be considered part of the intimidation attempt targeting the honourable member for Provencher.

In my opinion the motion that is before us at this time, tabled by the Conservatives, runs directly counter to the motion which was tabled in the House this morning by one of their colleagues. I find it somewhat strange to see them going forward with that. I think that they may not have spoken to their colleague the member for Provencher before they introduced this motion. He himself admits that the motion has to be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, commonly known as PROC.

I think that if they had followed up on that and spoken to their colleague, they would have accepted that fact and would probably not have tabled this motion this morning. Their colleague himself thinks that this is not the proper committee.

I of course support your position asking that this motion not be debated here because this is not the right committee. I find today's goings on strange. Of course, I am going to oppose anything that could interfere with the work of committees. I am in favour of things being discussed in the proper committees. That is my position.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dusseault.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I find it very distasteful that we see our committee being once again misused in this manner and that your ruling as a chair is once again being overturned by the majority in the Conservative Party.

The ethics committee has a very specific and important function in the House of Commons. It is to look into and ensure for the Canadian public that the government is meeting its standards and obligations, that the crown corporations are meeting their standards and obligations, and that those under the ethics act, under the privacy issue, and under lobbying are meeting their obligations. That's what committees are called upon to do.

What we've seen over this last session of Parliament, under the leadership of the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, is an attempt to turn this committee into some manner of kangaroo court where the majority uses its power to investigate its political enemies. There are many jurisdictions in the world where the power of the majority is used to investigate and go after political enemies, but in the Westminster tradition, we are not one of them.

• (1220)

The Chair: Point of order, Mr. Del Mastro.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I think the member would be well aware of and well advised to research the history of this committee in the 39th and 40th Parliaments. He would see that there is plenty of precedent, as set by the opposition majority at that time, for a study of this type.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Again, I don't think that was a point of order at all. I think it actually underlines my case, which is that the role of the ethics committee is to hold government to account, not to hold former staffers in the third party and drag them here to trash their reputation. That is an over-reach of this committee. We've seen already a number of incidents where they've tried to turn this committee into a kangaroo court and they've ended up looking rather ridiculous because they haven't thought this through.

For example, my honourable colleague wrote demanding an investigation into the New Democratic Party convention and then made all kinds of allegations about thousands of dollars of illegal money changing hands, which I don't know if he said he saw or not. The poor Ethics Commissioner was brought before us and the Lobbying Commissioner brought and there was no evidence. This was just a complete smear. I hear him over there still demanding that he had evidence, but he didn't present it.

You can make these accusations sitting around the table. You can trash people if you're the government. But then they never come through with any evidence.

It's like yesterday in the House, where they're now accusing the Liberal Party of suppressing their own vote. I think we saw the issue with the interference in the Federal Court, where he tried to bring a judge before our committee, completely ignoring the standard limitations of parliamentary convention between the role of the courts and the role of Parliament. He said it didn't matter because he was the master of his own house. But of course that's not true.

We saw them attempt to again overturn the Speaker and demand unredacted documents that were at the heart of a court case, a Federal Court case, a direct interference in the court case. Then they used the line that they were the masters of their own house, so that they could abuse whatever privilege they were given under the limited mandate of this committee.

We saw the excellent legal review from Robert Walsh, who sent a real warning shot about the abuse of this committee by the Conservative Party and the attempt to undermine the long-standing sub-judicial convention, the long-standing limitations on the role of parliamentary committees to investigate but not interfere with the courts. But when it suited them, they felt that this was perfectly okay to be able to undermine the parliamentary tradition of this country to score a cheap political point. That's a staggering thing to do when you're in government.

What we do here in Parliament is we establish precedent very much like the court. So when you see a parliamentary secretary come in with whatever the latest hot-button government issue is, their willingness to subvert the long-standing Westminster traditions that don't just affect Canada but actually have repercussions within the parliamentary traditions around the world, you see their willingness to actually shake the credibility and the foundations of how we carry our work out in Parliament, for whatever cheap political purpose of the day.

Today, of course, the real issue is the issue of widespread electoral fraud that is rocking the country, and the Conservative Party is certainly scrambling to blame everybody else. I think they're now blaming Elections Canada for this electoral fraud scheme. So they need a game-changer and they've set upon a former staffer in the Liberal Party as an example they will make. They will drag him before the committee and they will usurp the work of our committee in order to change the station on probably the most serious issue of electoral fraud in memory. It's at least as serious as the recent in-and-out electoral fraud we saw, which the senior heads of the Conservative Party had to cop pleas on because they were busted: they were fully guilty, and they knew it.

They're trying to divert our attention now on this issue of the so-called VikiLeaks. I'm astounded. I sometimes give my colleagues more credit than they seem to be due, but I would have thought that in light of the Speaker's ruling this morning, which I thought was—

Mr. Scott Andrews: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm just wondering why the member is now looking at apparently leaving the committee on his very own motion that he's discussing. He decides that this not an appropriate time to share with us at committee his thoughts and dealings with this particular motion.

• (1225)

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, I'm not sure that's a point of order.

I'm going to come back to Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

I think the issue we are dealing with here is the complete contempt they've shown for the Speaker's ruling this morning. The Speaker's ruling is relevant.

As much as Mr. Del Mastro thinks this is his own personal court and he can bring in whatever witnesses and hang them however high he wants, we are subject to and creatures of Parliament. The highest order in our Parliament is our Speaker, and I've had enormous respect for the work Mr. Scheer has done in this Parliament in setting a tone.

I think we really need to go through the ruling this morning carefully.

I think it's very interesting. The issue of Mr. Toews' claim that his right as a parliamentarian was interfered with because he had to put up with people calling him strikes me as the underlying contempt we see from the Conservatives for democracy. The minister didn't like the fact that people were upset with a bill that intruded on the lives of average Canadians. This is where this all stems from.

This was Mr. Toews' personal bill to bring forward legislation that would spy on average Canadians. It caused a huge and justifiable storm of response from people, who said, "Are you telling me you think you have the right to create these ad hoc inspectors to go in and demand documents from buildings without any warrant? Are you telling me in the bill the minister has a right to put on whatever listening device he wants to listen in on telecommunications?"

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, we're drifting away from the motion and the topic and falling into another personal attack against the minister.

We're trying to find out whether this was unethical behaviour of not only the person or the party.... If the honourable member would just stick to the motion, I think that would be acceptable.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, if you could remain relevant—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I think it's very important, though, because we are talking about what was ethical and what happened in the behaviour, and I'm going to get to that.

In the Speaker's ruling this morning he said that this claim of having to listen to outraged constituents was somehow a breach of parliamentary privilege. Of course that was absurd, so he took that aside. Then there was the issue of the so-called Vikileaks, and I have to admit I've never read a single one of these Vikileaks. I will get to Vikileaks in a moment.

It seemed that he took the standard parliamentary response, which is that there was this gentlemen's agreement. In the old days they would have called us gentlemen; now, fortunately, we have many more women involved, and it's made us a better place. There was a gentlemen's agreement that when you apologize for your actions this was sufficient. The Speaker said the Liberal leader had apologized for the action of one of his staffers, so he felt the issue should be dropped. Of course that doesn't fit the Conservative frame where they're trying to divert attention from electoral fraud, so they want to beat this into the ground.

The third part of his ruling, which he handed over to the procedure and House affairs committee, was on the issue of the anonymous posting. I think this is very interesting. What makes the anonymous video worthy of investigation is the issue of threat: you either change what you're doing or we will embarrass you or we will reveal documents about you. That is a direct interference with the right of a parliamentarian. And that is a serious interference, because since

Parliament began we've seen the issue of protecting the privilege of the members of Parliament to carry out their work.

In terms of Twitter and Vikileaks, we're moving into all kinds of uncharted territories. There are perhaps dangerous precedents the Conservatives may be attempting to intervene with in order to change the channel on the electoral fraud. In the world of Twitter, everything's anonymous. I receive messages all day. Some of them are ugly; some of them are hateful. When I speak up for first nations I regularly receive hate mail from anonymous people. I guess I could find out who they were if I looked hard enough, but they tell me they hate me. They think I'm a liar. They think first nations people should freeze to death in the cold. I've received those.

That's Twitter; it's a different world. Now, if someone called me at home and said that, I might consider calling the police, because I'm being interfered with. But in the world of Twitter, anonymity is part of it. But what we're seeing here is the issue of treating Twitter feeds the same as the anonymous leaks, which is different. The anonymous threat is a direct threat: you change this or we will punish you. Whereas in Twitter, people can write to me and say they hate me. They can twist my words. They can take what I said in the House and they can mix it all up. I guess if I were thin-skinned, I could go after them. Or they can actually say things that are true, and that's another issue.

I have not looked at the Twitter feed at all on Vikileaks. I'm not interested in the personal affairs of Mr. Toews. But the issue of ethical behaviour then becomes a question that I feel our committee is going to have to determine. Were these claims true or false? Because this is a different issue. If Twitter is being used to libel someone, if Twitter's making things up about someone's personal life, then that is certainly an abuse of privilege.

As we go forward, the last thing I want to do is spend my weekend getting caught up on the Vikileaks feed. I think the Conservatives need to understand that if we're talking about what is ethical in Twitter and what's not, the fundamental question is whether or not it's true. Was this staffer making up these allegations? Is there validation in court documents? Is this something that will be verifiable? Because I certainly expect that if we're going to start charging people on Twitter who make fun of us, we're creating a dangerous precedent. I'm certainly more than willing to take my lumps from whatever Twitterati are out there who can say whatever they want about me. But if they're saying something libellous, well, that's a different story.

So on the question of the Vikileaks question, I think it's very distasteful that we're being asked to adjudicate on this. But we are going to be needing to ascertain whether this Vikileaks feed is truthful or whether it was made up, whether it's verifiable or whether it wasn't. If it's verifiable, then it's a whole different issue from whether this was some allegation or smear. I think the Conservatives are desperate to change the issue of electoral fraud.

●(1230)

I don't think it's fair that they put one of their own ministers out in the limelight like this and turned the light back on them, saying that we are now going to look at the Wikileaks, we're going to find out what was in it, and we're going to find out what was said. I think that exposes all manner of people to a more degraded system, but that seems to be where they're willing to use our committee. Rather than our addressing ethics issues, or much of the stuff we could be updating on privacy, we're now going to be focusing on someone with a BlackBerry with apparently a court document, retyping it out into the public realm. What does that mean for Parliament?

I don't think we're going to be able to ascertain that someone who has a copy of a court document who releases it publicly has committed a crime, but it's certainly embarrassing, and it's certainly difficult. Part of what we face as parliamentarians is that sometimes what's personal and what's private does get out there. It is distasteful. We've seen parliamentarians use it in past attempts to embarrass elected ministers because of their personal lives. I would think our committee is not one where we should be going there, but obviously this is a government that thinks very differently from me.

I'm concerned that this government is also setting up two really cynical standards. We go back to the issue of the role of the committee to hold government accountable. When we see political staffers interfering in the work of ministries, when we see political staffers trying to deep-six information that citizens have a right to obtain, that is within the purview of our committee because that is interfering with the work of government. That's where our committee has a right to ask and to find out.

The Conservative Party told us that all their staffers are protected, that it was unacceptable that their staffers would be brought forward to explain their actions in interfering with the public's right to know, or their monkeywrenching with the public service. They have shielded their staffers within a cloak, so that the political staffers within the various departments may be able to do anything, and yet the ethics committee would not be able to ask them a single question. They said they'll send in Minister John Baird, who said "The buck stops with me".

Now, when it comes to a former member of the Liberal caucus staff who sends out some Twitter messages, the Conservative Party is taking a completely different point of view, which is that they are going to use the power of their majority to go after a staffer in the third party on something that has absolutely nothing to do with the workings of government.

●(1235)

Mr. Brad Butt: Point of order.

Madam Chairman, I don't think the member has read the motion. This motion is about the use of House of Commons resources, that's what the motion is for the committee to investigate, not all this other wild, crazy stuff. It is one meeting, one individual, where we're asking him to come forward to talk about his use of House of Commons resources in this issue. It is very clear what it is. I wish the member would speak to this motion, and not all the theatrics of all the other nonsense he's been spewing.

The Chair: Mr. Butt, I assume your point of order was on relevance.

Mr. Angus, if you would speak to the motion, it is about the use of House of Commons resources.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes.

I'm going to reiterate, because my friend perhaps didn't understand, and I don't want to him to leave this room not fully understanding, that when the Conservative political staffers were interfering with the work of the civil service, it was an interference in the work of government. Yet the Conservative Party took the position that their staffers were protected; that it was completely unacceptable for members of Parliament to investigate any staffers working in a minister's office who might or might not have interfered with the workings of the civil service and the rights of Canadians to ensure that government is accountable.

They have created this firewall around their own political staffers, and yet they want to know: did the Liberal staffer use a BlackBerry or did he use a computer on the Hill to come out with the Wikileaks? What I'm saying is that there's a complete double standard here.

The member may be interested in whether it was a House of Commons computer or BlackBerry. If this is going to go forward, the issue for me is the attempt of this committee to go after people on Twitter because they don't like them; it's whether or not this government is going to be interfering with people who embarrass them on Twitter.

So if the government wants to bring forward this motion, then I am going to find out whether what was said on Wikileaks was true or was false. Is it verifiable? Is there data to back it up? This is the fundamental issue here: that the government can start deciding to find out who in the House of Commons has a Twitter account and go after them.

What is disturbing about Wikileaks is that it was all about the personal life of a minister. Again, I've never read it. But if the government decides that they're going down this route, then it is perfectly fair within the work of this committee to ascertain whether those statements were true or false—not whether it was done on a House of Commons computer or done at home.

The issue is the role of a Twitter account. I don't want him to come out of here confused. There's a difference between Twitter and comments on Twitter—and sarcastic comments, and twisting words on Twitter—and what happened with Anonymous.

This is why I think the Speaker made a fundamentally just ruling. The issue with Anonymous was the "you will withdraw this bill or else"; "You will change your course as a member of Parliament, or else we will embarrass you." That is an interference in the rights of a parliamentarian; that is interference in the work of this House of Commons.

We can never be intimidated when we go in to vote. This goes back to Laurier almost being kicked out of the church. They could not interfere with his right to represent his constituents.

That is different from what we're talking about with Twitter, and whether or not people on Twitter are making comments, whether they're misrepresenting, or whether they're telling the truth.

So if the government is going to go after a Twitter account because it's from someone they don't politically like, then the issue for me is what was said on that Twitter account. Is it true? Is it verifiable? If it's false, then it's actionable. But if it's true, then that's just the unfortunate reality of a world in the anonymous and Twitter age.

I think that as parliamentarians we have to be very circumspect indeed about going down a road whereby we will decide to start investigating people who have Twitter accounts in the House of Commons.

So to reiterate, Madam Chair, because I'm still not sure that my colleagues fully get the implications of what they've just asked for, they want to go after the former Liberal staffer, who has lost his job. This is quite a punishment for someone who thought, perhaps, that he was just engaging in the political discourse of the day: that he'll be brought before this committee and investigated for the fact that he used a computer.

I find this absolutely bizarre. I find this a disrespect to our work as parliamentarians. It's a disrespect to the minister, who, even though he had a rather thin skin when it came to the fact that he didn't like hearing from constituents who didn't like his bill and thought that was a point of privilege.... At least the Speaker ruled carefully.

But, Madam Chair, you ruled very carefully and judiciously this morning, and they ignored it. I think what we're seeing is that the role of Parliament has to respect certain conventions. If it doesn't respect those conventions, then it turns into the law of the jungle, and that seems to be what this committee has been doing again and again under the parliamentary secretary.

●(1240)

When or if the government brings this forward, we are going to have to look at the veracity of the Twitter feed and what was said and whether it was true, and determine what kinds of documents back up the claims that were made on Vikileaks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Madam Chair, I'd like to propose a little friendly amendment to the motion so that it would read:

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics call Mr. Adam Carroll, former Liberal Research Bureau employee, for one meeting to examine his use of House resources in order to conceal his anonymous public attacks on a member of Parliament, and that the committee examine all government resources used on Twitter accounts, and that this meeting take place by Thursday, March 8, 2012.

I think that's a little friendly amendment.

The Chair: In the absence of the mover of the original motion, I will say that the motion would not likely be accepted by the mover, so it will be on the floor for debate.

We are now debating your proposed amendment, Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Madam Chair, the mover of the motion isn't here. I think you—

The Chair: So I have to assume that...

Mr. Calkins has a point of order.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Chair, I take a little bit of umbrage with the fact that you've made a decision on behalf of a member, present or otherwise.

The reality is that in the Standing Orders and the rules and procedures of this place, there is no such thing as a friendly amendment. If the honourable member across the floor wishes to propose an amendment to the motion, then he should be proposing an amendment. He is simply playing games, and they're childish games. We've seen these kinds of things from time to time, but the reality is that he either means his amendment and wants to propose it and debate it and discuss it before this committee, or he doesn't.

Madam Chair, I would be remiss in my duty as a member of Parliament to think that should I, as a regular member, not be at this committee some day and somebody were here in my stead, you would take a decision on my behalf when I wasn't here. I'm a little bit concerned with your comment.

The Chair: Mr. Calkins, I wasn't taking a decision on behalf of the member. But in the absence of the member, this motion will now be debated, because there is no ability for the member to provide consent for the amendment. I actually require—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You would need unanimous consent.

The Chair: I would require unanimous consent to accept that motion.

Do I have unanimous consent to agree to Mr. Andrews' motion?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, continue with debate.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Madam Chair, I would argue that we probably should suspend the committee until the mover of the motion returns to see whether this is friendly or not.

To Mr. Calkins' point of order, I'd just like to refresh his memory from about 25 minutes ago, when we had a friendly amendment from Mrs.—

●(1245)

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, let me interrupt.

I erred on that. I should have sought unanimous consent from the committee to agree to that change. Actually, Mr. Calkins is quite correct: there is no such thing as a "friendly amendment". I apologize. The clerk has informed me that the decision could have gone to debate concerning the date, but we have moved beyond that.

So there is no such thing as a friendly amendment. Proceed on your motion to amend.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Since we didn't have an opportunity to debate Ms. Davidson's motion on pushing this out until March 16, I'd like to come back to it. We didn't have an opportunity to even debate that, because we just thought it was a friendly amendment and that one could do friendly amendments to motions and carry on.

So I'm a little bit confused here, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, given that nobody challenged my acceptance of that amendment, it has now been decided.

I now have on the floor your motion to amend the amended motion of Mr. Del Mastro, so we can debate your amendment, which is before us.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay. I'll come back to the amendment by Ms. Davidson afterwards.

It gets to the point of what government resources are being used for Twitter. These are not just House of Commons resources that are being used for government business. We have government members over there on their BlackBerrys as we speak, putting out tweets. Tweets are being used all over the place for government business, as such.

The Chair: We have a point of order from Mr. Dreeshen.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): On a point of order, I'm just curious. I see no one over here who is putting out tweets, and I think a comment like that is completely unnecessary.

An hon. member: Unsubstantiated, just like everything else coming out—

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, would you continue with your motion, and perhaps don't make any references...

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay. Often when I'm in the House of Commons during question period I see the Minister of Industry using his BlackBerry to tweet unsubstantiated claims and rhetoric, and he's using government resources at that particular time to put out tweets.

Mr. Mayes, I don't find this very silly at all. What I find silly—

The Chair: Order.

Gentlemen, I have a speakers list. If you wish to be on the list, please signal your wish to the clerk.

Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: It's funny how some things are regarded as silly, but when they put motions like this they are not very silly, so we'll take this very seriously.

We're talking about government resources, House of Commons resources. If you want to go down this road, let's talk about all government resources.

Quite often ministers' parliamentary staff, ministers' executive staff, are using tweets on an ongoing basis to promote their minister, and often they take on attacks on members of Parliament as well. Just recently I was attacked by a member of a minister's staff on Twitter, and I don't see myself getting my knickers all in a knot in regard to what he was saying. I found it quite interesting, though, and so did a lot of other people on Twitter, that he was doing it anonymously. He had not disclosed himself as a ministerial staffer out there contradicting and challenging a member of Parliament on Twitter.

When someone uses Twitter anonymously, as the motion says, we need to look at the broader problem and the broader scope, and why ministers' offices, often on directive, have guys sitting down at computers all day long putting out tweets on their minister and then turning their resources to attacking a member of Parliament over this.

If the government members want to go down this very serious road, we need to look in depth at how rampant this particular issue is.

Getting back to the amendment made by Mrs. Davidson a little while ago, to push this out another week—

The Chair: On a point of order, Mrs. Davidson.

• (1250)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I believe we're debating another amendment. We're not debating an amendment that was accepted and has been over with for quite some time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Davidson.

Could you stick to the amendment before the committee, Mr. Andrews?

Mr. Scott Andrews: Maybe we could talk about this. When I read out my amendment, I think I used both dates, March 8 and March 16. I wonder if the clerk could clarify which one I actually said, since we now want to talk about the date of the appearance.

The Chair: The date in the motion is the 13th, Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay, that was the amended motion?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay, since we're talking about the amended motion, I'd like to talk about this date as well.

The Chair: We're talking about your amendment, and your amendment used the date of March 13. If you could, proceed with your amendment to the motion.

Mr. Scott Andrews: That date was put forward by Mrs. Davidson.

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you.

That date now.... Instead of taking this week to deal with this, they want to push this out to next week. Obviously they're trying to get as many legs under this story as possible.

The Chair: On a point of order, Mrs. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Madam Chair, with all due respect, he is not debating the amendment that he has on the table, and I would request that you ask him to go back to his own amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Davidson.

Mr. Andrews, the date has been dealt with. Could you come back to your proposed amendment?

Mr. Scott Andrews: The date in my amendment...?

The Chair: The clerk is pointing out that your motion added those additional words around the government resources being used. I don't have the exact wording right in front of me, but it was not about the date. Your motion was about the additional resources that the government was using on these accounts.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Fair enough. I'll park that and come back to that when we get back to debating the motion as a whole.

I'll turn to Twitter—Twitterati, as one of the commentators back home calls them. Quite often he says in his preamble to his talk show, as host, that the Twitterati out there quite often refer to different matters of public discourse and public commentary.

So is it acceptable for any government employee to use Twitter, to use this resource to attack a member of Parliament or someone else? This is something we should look at. Quite often in business places they block the use of social media, so their employees can't use those means of communication. I'm kind of curious now whether we should broaden the scope here and really look into how we use Twitter.

I'll go back to that employee I mentioned a little earlier using government resources to challenge a member of Parliament. His name is Cory Hann, and he's the press secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council. He's got a nice picture of himself there on Twitter looking at his government desk. I can see the Parliament of Canada calendar in the background. He has not only one BlackBerry but two BlackBerrys to use his Twitter account.

I had made a comment on Twitter myself during a debate in the House of Commons when I saw the minister responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador pat the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans on the back as he was sitting down in the House of Commons for what a great answer he gave regarding the death of a boy in Labrador and the use of government resources that didn't help save that young person's life. I put out a tweet that I couldn't believe that the minister for Newfoundland and Labrador would do such a thing on Twitter, and it gained a lot of attention.

The Chair: Point of order, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: You're making an unsubstantiated claim. Could you read that Twitter line out so I know if I've read it or not?

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay.

I happen to have the whole dialogue here that I had that particular day, Madam Chair. Let me just go back here and see what I said. Oh, yes, I said "Wow, a minister of the crown is patting—"

•(1255)

The Chair: Point of order, Mrs. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Yes, could we please have the amendment reread? I'm not sure he's even debating his own amendment, and we don't have the wording.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Davidson.

Mr. Andrews, at the request of a committee member, could you reread your amendment?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Don't lose the Twitter feed though.

Mr. Scott Andrews: I'm going to come back to that.

I thought the clerk had my amendment, Madam Chair.

The Clerk: I didn't get it all down.

The Chair: We know it didn't include the date, Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: I know it actually included two dates. I'm pretty sure I read out both dates when I was asked to read this.

The Chair: Just read the amendment part. You don't need to read the whole motion, just the amendment part.

Mr. Scott Andrews: I'm trying to be thorough here.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead, Mr. Andrews.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Okay.

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics call Mr. Adam Carroll, former Liberal Research Bureau employee, for one meeting to examine his use of House of Commons resources in order to conceal his anonymous public attack on a member of Parliament, and that the committee examine all government resources used on Twitter accounts, and that this meeting take place...

And this is where there's been some debate, because I think I said March 8 and then I said Tuesday, March 16, and I don't even think March 16 is a Tuesday; it's actually the 14th. So we'll go along with whatever the date was that Mrs. Davidson proposed for now.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Andrews.

Mrs. Davidson, you raised a point of order about whether Mr. Andrews was actually debating his amendment.

Mr. Andrews, if you're going to make that link around all government resources in your current line of debate, that would be helpful.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Pardon me, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Make the link in your current line of reasoning to your amended motion.

Mrs. Davidson, was that a point of order?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I just have a clarification on that amendment, if I might.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I believe when Mr. Andrews read it out, he said, "for one meeting to examine the use of House of Commons resources", and our motion reads "his" use.

Is that word changed as well?

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, were you changing "his" to "the"?

An hon. member: Is that a friendly amendment?

The Chair: There's no such thing as a friendly amendment, Mr. Calkins.

I have a speaker who is clarifying with Mr. Andrews on the motion.

Mr. Scott Andrews: It says "for the meeting to examine his use".

The Chair: So you were not changing "his" to "the."

Mr. Scott Andrews: I was just reading it out.

The Chair: Okay. So it is "his" use.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Then if the motion in fact refers to "his" use of House of Commons resources, I would suggest that we need to continue to make sure we're staying on track with the amendment.

The Chair: My understanding is that it's adding a completely different element to the motion.

Mr. Andrews, could you just read out your amendment—not the whole thing, just your amendment?

The Clerk: I can reread it.

The Chair: Okay.

I'll get the clerk to reread it.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Great. Thank you.

The Clerk: The amendment, as it would appear in the minutes, would read as follows: That the motion be amended by adding, after “member of Parliament”, the following: “the committee examine all government resources used on Twitter accounts”.

The Chair: Based on that amendment, Mrs. Davidson, I'm going to allow the member to continue, because I believe he was making a link with some named staffer for one of the ministers.

Mr. Andrews, continue.

Mr. Scott Andrews: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was making a reference to how government resources are being used on Twitter. The staffer I named works for the minister responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador.

My tweet that day happened on February 9—to the question from one of my colleagues here—at 3:09 p.m. I tweeted in the House, after one of the last questions in question period:

Wow! Min Peter Penashue pats Min Ashfield on the back after a Question on the Death of a boy from his Riding and the lack of SAR in NL....

“SAR” stands for search and rescue.

● (1300)

The Chair: Mr. Andrews, I'm going to interrupt at this point. We have run out of time.

We will maintain the speakers list as we have it before us. On Thursday we will continue with the amendment on the floor by Mr. Andrews. We also have another notice of motion.

The meeting is adjourned.

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