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Chair: Mr. Tom Lukiwski





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• (1055)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC)):** Colleagues, I think I will call the meeting to order now. We do have quorum. We will have some other witnesses joining us in just a few moments.

To let everyone know, we have two sessions again today. The first session will be with our Information Commissioner, Madam Caroline Maynard. That session I will be conducting hopefully in no more than 45 minutes, because in the second session we have three witnesses, all of whom have opening statements. To allow them enough time and to allow committee members enough time, I'd like to schedule 75 minutes for the second session.

That's how we'll conduct ourselves.

The first session, then, will be five minutes during the first round of interventions, followed by an intervention round of four minutes each, followed by the third and final intervention of two minutes each.

Before we begin I also want to make mention that we have submitted some proposed meeting times for our July and August meetings. We have not had official confirmation from our whips yet, but the proposed dates are Thursday, July 23, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. eastern time for the July meeting, and Thursday, August 27, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. eastern time for our August meeting. The whips have that in their control now. Once they confirm those dates we will be sending a notice out to all members.

Lastly, Madam Maynard, are you on the line and do you have your opening statement ready?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard (Information Commissioner of Canada, Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada):** I am and I do.

**The Chair:** In that case, colleagues, I will call this meeting to order once again, and ask Madam Maynard to give her opening statement, hopefully, in five minutes or less.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss accountability and access to information. Canadians have a right to request information from government through access to information requests to federal institutions. This is a quasi-constitutional right.

The right of access and the need for transparency have not been suspended during the pandemic. On the contrary, in this current ex-

traordinary context, transparency and the well-being of the access system are more important than ever.

Major decisions with huge budget implications are being taken every day. New measures and programs related to the economy, public health and safety are being implemented on an almost daily basis. Canadians require information about how issues, policies and programs are being managed and developed in order to hold their government accountable.

Given that the Office of the Information Commissioner operates within the federal public service, I am very aware of the operational challenges the pandemic poses to federal institutions. Nevertheless, because transparency is the foundation of trust and because the access system is a pillar of government accountability, Canada's leaders must take all necessary measures to ensure they are mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on the right of access. This includes ensuring a properly functioning access to information regime where decisions are being properly documented, information is well managed and access requests continue to be processed. I would like to outline for you just some of the factors that are creating barriers to the functioning of the system during the pandemic.

Most public servants have been working from home since the middle of March, not always by choice, and many have limited access to the networks or tools they normally have to do their jobs.

Providing access to information is not treated as an essential service to Canadians in almost all of the institutions' business continuity plans. In this situation, it can be challenging to manage information, capturing it and storing it in government repositories, especially when access to the network is limited for non-essential staff.

In many institutions, the transfer of information is outdated. Documents are still being sent by mail, CD-ROM and other mainly paper-based processes, which require access to scanners and photocopiers.

While some ATIP units are now fully operational, others have suspended operations completely. Most units are positioned somewhere between these two extremes. Such limited operations fundamentally restrict the government's capacity to respond to access requests and to respect their new legislative obligation to proactively disclose some information.

There are other factors at play, but these are the major limitations that cannot be ignored, as they significantly affect transparency and delay, compromise and ultimately erode the government's accountability to Canadians.

Although the pandemic has brought many new challenges, it has also created a window of opportunity to bring essential changes to the operating model of government and the culture that underlies it. I will continue to press the government for tangible action and results on this front.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that openness and transparency in government have never been more important than they are during the pandemic. The government needs to commit to proper resources and innovative solutions to ensure the right of access for all Canadians

Let's not forget that access delayed is access denied.

Those are my opening remarks. I will be happy to respond to your questions now.

Thank you.

• (1100)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now start our five-minute round of questions with Mr. McCauley.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)** Madam, thank you for joining us today. I appreciate all the work you're doing on behalf of Canadians and transparency.

On April 28, you wrote to the TBS president, warning that we were at a breaking point for federal transparency. How did he respond? Did he respond with any actual actions or just mere words?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** So far, I've had a couple of conversations with Monsieur Duclos and his team. They've been promising to.... They were saying they were taking this very seriously. They understand that this is a serious matter.

I've noticed that Monsieur Duclos has sent a letter to all institutions reminding them of their responsibilities and the need for openness and transparency in government. I am optimistic, but I am still waiting for actual, real, concrete actions.

As I said in my opening statement, some institutions have since reopened their business, so I think the message is getting through slowly but—

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** As of June 16, I got a copy of the institutions that have started. Funnily enough, Treasury Board, which is responsible for this, is not one of the ones actively doing their ATIPs, which is mind-boggling.

Last week we asked the chief information officer at TBS, who is nominally in charge of the ATIP process throughout the government. He was not even aware there was a problem. It's very disconcerting that we're just getting words.

What kinds of actions, besides expressions of concern, do we need from Minister Duclos and the government?

• (1105)

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** We definitely need more resources in this area.

One of the problems is that working remotely has demonstrated other challenges, which I don't think people were aware of, with the types of systems they're using, the networks that are not secured. If you're dealing with highly secret or protected information and you're working from home, often our network is not secure enough to do that. It has brought up many challenges that, again, working from the office, were not something that people were aware of.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Right, but this is not a new problem. We've been a heavy user of ATIPs, and we actually have an ATIP going back three years now that was only asking about specific information regarding one person advising PSPC. My colleague Tom Kmiec has 50 outstanding ATIPs, some going back three years. I laugh that one of my ATIPs will soon qualify for the MPs' pension, it's been so long.

This is not a recent occurrence. What do we need to do to light a fire under people, to make them understand that it is a basic right for Canadians and members of Parliament to access this?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** I think access has to be seen not as a suboperation activity of government. It has to be part of every public servant's commitment to Canadians.

We need more training and more resources. The number of access requests has increased by 225% in the last six years. The resources have not followed through. Information management has not been changed. We need to have better systems. There are so many little things that can be done that would have a huge impact.

I think the major thing is that the workload has increased, but when I talk to the community, they tell me they have the same number of analysts dealing with this. They just can't respond to all the demand.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** It sounds like the resources have stayed the same, and the "hide everything" attitude of the government has stayed the same.

Do we need to change your position so that your reporting structure reports to the Speaker, much like the Parliamentary Budget Officer does, so that there are completely autonomous actions from your department?

**The Chair:** You only have a few seconds for a response, Madam Maynard.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** I am completely independent of government. I report directly to Parliament, so I am reporting to you as an independent agent.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Do you not report through the Treasury Board, through the minister?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** No. I don't report to any minister.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Okay, I am mistaken.

Thank you for your time.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to a five-minute round.

Mr. Jowhari, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madam Maynard. As this week is National Public Service Week, I want to acknowledge the great work that all of our public servants are doing, as well as the great work that you and your team are doing.

I have three questions. I'll try to make them short and stay within my five minutes.

In the OIC 2020-21 departmental plan, there is discussion about a five-year strategic plan, which came into effect April 1, 2020. Can you quickly highlight the key components of the five-year strategic plan?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Yes. We decided to separate our strategic plan into three pillars.

We're spending a lot of effort on making sure that my office is the best place to work and is a good environment for our employees, with retention policies and a harassment-free environment, so there is an HR component and a resource component.

There's also an innovative component, because we, as with any other institution, have been struggling in making sure we are up to date on all of our software and in our processes.

The last pillar is transparency and credibility. I want to make sure, when I issue recommendations, decisions or orders, that people ultimately trust we are doing this on an unbiased basis and that our investigations are faster than they've ever been. As I said earlier, access delayed is access denied. The information is relevant now. If my investigations take years to be completed, there will be no trust in my own agency. I want to make sure that we're up to date on everything so that Canadians trust my work too.

• (1110)

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** When you talked about the second pillar, which was the innovative component, you talked about the systems. On April 28, you published a letter to the TBS minister, within which you specifically said, "the access to information system...is currently in a critical phase and may soon be beyond repair".

Can you expand on what systems they are? What are we going to do if these systems fail, especially with the extra stress that's going to be on the systems during COVID?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** To give you an example, many institutions are still exchanging documents within the same department, from sector to sector, through mail, using paper, or if they send documents by email to, let's say, the analysts at the ATIP shop, they have to print those and scan them back into their software to start

doing the redaction. There's a lot of wasted time transferring documents, which are electronic to start with, making them paper-based and then turning them back into an electronic version—

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Transferring information, on top of resources and remote work is—

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** That's just one example.

We send information to requesters by mail or CD-ROM, and a lot of our requesters have been complaining about it for years now. Who has a CD-ROM reader anymore in their office?

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Okay. I'll quickly switch topics.

Can you give me an idea of the number of ATIP requests you received prior to and after COVID-19, and what kind of responses you've had?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Do you mean requests or complaints?

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I mean complaints.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Okay, because I'm dealing with the complaints too at TBS.

This year we've seen a small increase in complaints. With respect to COVID itself, strangely enough we haven't seen that many, but I think in most cases when there's a crisis, the complaints and requests come after everybody is coming down. It was the same thing with Lac-Mégantic. We saw a huge surge of requests and complaints after the crisis, so that's what I'm expecting. That's one of the things I highlighted for Mr. Duclos. We can't wait because there's going to be a surge of requests and complaints coming from the—

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I have about 15 seconds left.

If you were going to make one recommendation, aside from resources and system updates, what would it be?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** It would be a change of culture.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go, for five minutes, to Madam Vignola.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for joining us today, Ms. Maynard.

You said earlier that little things should be done to improve the situation and do more. Can you give two or three examples of those simple little things to be done?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** The authorities should look into the way information is shared and the way it is managed.

First, people now use email a lot. When we receive an information access request on a specific topic, we can end up with 500 pages of text exchanged by email that has nothing to do with the decision or the policy as such. Since everything is done by email, the analyst in charge of revising the document must go over all the emails that were not saved properly or were not eliminated. Eight people can receive the same email, and they will respond to the same access request. What is really needed is better information management within government.

Another issue is that the systems are completely obsolete. A huge number of information transfers happens on paper. In 2020, people could definitely use systems such as Postel to transfer the information to the applicant instead of sending it by mail.

• (1115)

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** You were saying earlier that the number of requests has gone up by 225%. I assume that you expect the number of requests to explode again once the COVID-19 crisis is over.

I don't know whether it is possible to determine this, but, in absolute numbers, how many additional employees would the commission need to operate properly?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Right now, the commission has 62 investigators. I have asked the government to add at least 20 to 25 investigators to keep us afloat.

Even if we had those additional resources, we would still have to negotiate with institutions that also have limited resources. People from those institutions must respond to Canadians' access requests, but also to the access request of my investigators for our investigations. They often have to choose between the two. That is a huge source of issues, as well.

I need additional resources, but the institutions surely also need them to meet the demand of Canadians and that of my office.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** You said that a cultural change was necessary. In a few words, what kind of a change would you make to the culture?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** The Access to Information Act states that Canadians have the right to access information, with very few exceptions. When an organization receives my access to information requests, it wonders what information it cannot provide instead of wondering what information it can provide.

When I talk to ministers and deputy ministers, I see that they really want to develop a culture of transparency, but it is as if it was automatic. It would seem that because of the exceptions and exclusions provided under the act, they feel obligated to censor the documents they transmit.

In training for officials, it would be useful to show them that everything they do in their work is accessible to Canadians. That would help a cultural change occur. The emphasis should not be placed on what we don't want to give to Canadians, but on what we

want to transmit to them. Officials' work is important. It would be amazing if that kind of a cultural change could be achieved.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** You were talking about departments that also have limited resources. I am engaged in brainstorming with you today. Would it be a good idea to have investigators from the commission in every department?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** To maintain the commission's independence, there must be separation among operations.

It would be interesting for the Treasury Board to have a team of specialists that could be deployed in various departments during a crisis such as COVID-19. If an agency provided training across government—

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, I appreciate it.

Mr. Green, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We've certainly heard, at least in my opinion, some pretty damning findings about the state of our federal government in its access to information. We've heard about still using paper copies, scanners, photocopies and CDs. I did a check on my computer here to see if I had a CD-ROM. I can't seem to find one, so here we are.

I'm taken aback, but at the same time, after hearing the testimonies of other people in this committee, I'm not all that surprised. You may recall that we had some departments report that they were still using DOS in their computer operating systems. I think what stuck out most was the idea that access delayed is access denied.

I have a question, and I'm unsure if the commissioner is able to answer this. How often do your ATIP requests bump up against the redacted clauses around cabinet confidentiality?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** It's not very often. It's a small percentage of our complaints. The problem with cabinet confidence is that we're not allowed to see the document to be confident that it is cabinet confidence, because according to the act, it's not within my jurisdiction to see those. This is one thing I will actually be recommending to change for the next legislative review, because there's not an independent review of the documents. If the department says that it's cabinet confidence, we have to take them at their word.

• (1120)

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Is it just a small percentage, though? It doesn't happen often.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Yes, it's a small percentage. I think most Canadians know that they're not entitled to see cabinet confidence documents, so they rarely complain about that specific exclusion unless it's part of a package. Most of the time, it's because it's not just the cabinet confidence but other documents being redacted that are part of the complaint.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** I know that in trying to pass a previous motion, that clause was put in. I anticipate that the clause will probably see itself revisited, today perhaps. I'm just curious around that. I'd like it if maybe at a future date we could have a study on that and figure out what the balance is between solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidentiality versus parliamentary privilege and access to information, but I'll set that aside for the moment.

You had stated—or I think I heard you state at least—that not every department had in its departmental or operational plan a focus on access to information. Is that correct?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Yes.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** What role would the Minister of Digital Government have in that? In reviewing the mandate letter, I feel like she's supposed to work with departments to develop solutions and use new tools. All the language in the mandate letter for the Minister of Digital Government suggests that this should be a horizontal priority across all departments. Would you care to comment on that?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** I agree with you. It's part of the mandate letters. Openness and transparency are also part of the mandate letters of all the ministers, which I was pleased to see. However, there is a difference between the talk and the action. As you may know, government is very slow at making changes because we have so many steps to go through for security purposes, and we don't want to have breaches. Sometimes, though, I think government needs to make bold decisions, take a little bit of risk, and in access, transparency and innovation, I think it's the right time to do this.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Forgive me for oversimplifying this, but what struck me in moving a previous motion was that it was suggested to me that perhaps the information might be in a box in a warehouse somewhere in a paper copy. At least with my very basic understanding of technology, I can't help but think that if I'm typing something up in a digital document that becomes paper, that digital document should have—in systems, in principle—a perpetuity that would allow it to have a digital access after it's completion.

Is it a matter of there just not being systems in place where...? I know we have our own government files that we can access, but how is it that we have a digital origin of a file, and then an analog paper finish of the file? It doesn't make any sense to me at all.

**The Chair:** Madam Commissioner, only because we're out of time, I would ask that you give a response to Mr. Green's question as quickly as possible in writing and submit that answer to the clerk of this committee, who will then distribute that answer to all committee members. I would appreciate it if you could concur with that request.

We'll now go to our next round of questions, which will be four minutes in duration, starting with Mr. McCauley.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Great. Thanks, again.

I have this vision of our ATIP process being like the end of *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*, when they put the ark of the covenant in this great, massive warehouse never to be seen again.

Have you started any investigations into departments that are skirting ATIP obligations?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Yes.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Who are they?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** We actually started one investigation. I initiated an investigation with Canadian Heritage because there was a complaint with respect to their response to an access request, which said that the ATIP office was closed during the pandemic.

I've been keeping an eye on other institutions that are struggling to start. We were saying that now most institutions are fully operational or partially operational. However, some operations are basically somebody answering the phone and talking to requesters, because they don't have access to anything.

• (1125)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Yes. I've done a count and 46 are operational, almost all of them the smallest of the departments. Then 165 are almost all the major departments, and again, surprisingly enough, the Treasury Board is not at capacity.

How far behind do you think we are? Do you think departments are going to use COVID as a further excuse not to comply and not to release information?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** We definitely have seen COVID being used as a reason not to respond to some of my investigations. We've seen COVID used to ask for extensions.

That's part of our investigation right now: What is going to be the impact? It's going to be difficult at this point to know the full impact. Definitely there will be some delays and augmentation of complaints and, unfortunately, delays in people getting their information.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Yes, I would say that on 90% of the ATIPs we've done in the last five years, we get an automatic response asking for an extension, even on the simplest of things. You're right. It is a cultural thing.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** It's resources.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** With three years for the simplest stuff, I think it's a lot more than resources. I think resources...but it can be a cultural denial of transparency.

There was a comment made by the acting chief information officer that, when we come out of COVID, there's going to be a backlog of activities like ATIPs that will have to be addressed on a priority basis. It concerns me greatly that someone is going to be deciding which ATIPs are a priority and which are not.

How do we get past that, where we have some arbitrary person deciding that this ATIP takes priority?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** I don't know what to say to that.

I believe that every department should have their ATIP access units as part of their essential services, especially when they're dealing with information related to a crisis like this. Either it should be through ATIP or it should be proactively disclosed. When I talk about proactive disclosure, it's really providing information without having to wait for it to be requested.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I agree with you 100%.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thank you again for everything you're doing. It's not easy tilting against the windmill, but those of us on the transparency fighting front appreciate everything you do.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Now we'll go to Mr. Kusmierczyk for four minutes, please.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you very much, Commissioner, for fielding these questions and for your forthright and very comprehensive responses as well.

As a city councillor in Windsor, I was proud of the fact that I was the first and only city councillor to publish my entire voting record online. I feel that transparency and accountability are absolutely cornerstones even when they are not required. It's something that we should be very open and very proactive about.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak with you here today.

My question is this. You had stressed in your appearance in front of the House of Commons standing committee on access to information, on March 11, that additional resources are required across the access to information systems. You stressed that the resources available to federal institutions are insufficient. How do you measure whether there are sufficient resources or not? How do you measure that in terms of where the resources need to be? What do you look at? What metrics, performance metrics, do you look at?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** For my own agency, we've had the same budget with the same number of employees for the last six years, and our complaints have increased by 25% every year. If you're not able to respond to the demand, I guess that's one way to look at it.

Normally, my office receives 2,400 complaints a year. In the last three years, we've had about 2,400 complaints each year. Last year, I received 6,000 complaints, mainly about delays and extensions,

and a lot of them were related to one institution, which is IRCC. You may not be aware of this, but IRCC—Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada—is receiving approximately 100,000 requests a year. These are requests from people asking for the status of their immigration or refugee files.

We've started a systemic investigation with respect to that particular institution because we've realized there is definitely a problem that is more than just a one on one. It's definitely a systemic problem, but to start a systemic investigation also requires a lot of resources. It's a long-term thing. My operational budget has not followed through with the demand, the requests and the complaints that we're receiving. We have been receiving temporary funding for the last three years. This year, I've asked for that funding to at least be permanent so that I can hire people, train them and retain them for the long term.

• (1130)

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I appreciate, Commissioner, that the number of complaints has increased, but do you measure, for example, your office's response time? Are you able to provide metrics in terms of how long it takes you to close a file or what the backlog is, something that gives us a sense, again, that there aren't enough resources to keep up with the demand? Are there metrics that your office maintains and that you can share with us, in terms of your own performance? I'm just curious.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Yes. Like any other institution in government, we have a department plan and a department report. Every year, we provide how we did, what our priorities were and how we successfully closed files. We have some metrics on timelines. Luckily, we've been very good at reducing our timelines, even with the smaller resources. We've been making changes in the last two years, and last year was a record year: We closed 5,500 complaints, whereas in previous years it was around 1,600 to 1,800.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** That's incredible.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** We've done very, very well with our own changes, as I said earlier, making innovative changes too, but at some point there is only so much we can do. At some point, we need more bodies to do the work.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I understand completely. I know, Commissioner, for example, that between February and May there were 31,000 online access to information requests. As you mentioned, about two-thirds of those went to IRCC. Do you have in your mind—

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, I'm sorry, but we're out of time. For some reason, I couldn't get my mute button to unmute, so I should not complain about anybody else.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** No problem. Thank you.

**The Chair:** I'm sure it would have been a great question.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** It was earth-shattering.



**The Chair:** We're now going to Mr. Aboultaif, for four minutes.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Maynard. It is wonderful to hear what you have to say. You mentioned a change of culture. I'm going to go back to that a bit. I guess my question is twofold.

The first thing is that you need more resources and you need more bodies, basically. You've requested that 20 to 25 people be added to your department. On the other side, we have technology and digitizing, which are supposed to help you to access information and get through it faster than you could if you had to search manually. How do you envision the structure of your department in the next little while to be able to achieve what you need to in order to satisfy all the ATIP requests as needed?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Speaking for my own institution, where we're dealing with complaints about access requests, I can say that we've been working really hard to have a better innovative system. We are now scanning every document so that every file we receive is accessible electronically. This is one of the reasons that my entire office, 110 people, is working from home remotely during COVID, and we haven't stopped working remotely since March 13.

We've been able to continue our work. Clearly, I'm in a very privileged situation because my office is small. I'm sure my colleagues who have thousands of employees have more challenges than I do.

As you say, we need to look at the management of information, where the information is stored, and, if it's stored electronically as I think Mr. McCauley said earlier, why it has to become paper to be back in the system for the access software. Let's give ATIP analysts software with which they can digitally transfer and access this information without having to resort to paper and scanning and photocopiers.

This seems to be an easy solution, but unfortunately, in the government these things take time.

There's also another issue we just became aware of during COVID. A lot of the software for access redaction is put on the secret servers of the institution because once in a while you have a document that is secret. Because it's on the secret server, it's completely inaccessible remotely. They should really remove that and put it on a protected server so it would be accessible remotely. The one in 100 files that are secret could have a separate system.

Those are the kinds of little things that have come up because we have had to work remotely. I'm hoping the institutions will react to that, because there are some solutions that are easy to implement.

• (1135)

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Thank you very much for the answer.

We are way behind with digitizing our system compared with what similar economies and countries similar to ours in size, population and so forth have done. A government is like a very large ship, and it's very hard to turn on an angle or change direction.

For you, the challenge is that you're trying to prepare the infrastructure by basically scanning everything and having everything accessible electronically so you can easily get to the information.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mr. Aboultaif, we are completely out of time. I know there was probably a question in there somewhere, but we didn't quite get it out in time.

We will move on to Mr. MacKinnon for four minutes.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.):** Actually, I'm giving my time to Mr. Drouin, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Drouin, go ahead for four minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Maynard, thank you very much for joining us today.

In answering a question, you said that the number of access to information requests had increased by 225% over the past six years.

Have you noticed the same trend with regard to complaints submitted to your office? Have they increased by 225%?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** No. Only 1% of all annual requests are related to a complaint. The tangent is the same every year. We have seen an increase of about 25% annually, in addition to normal complaints. So the 1% becomes 1.25%, then 1.5%. It is a gradual increase. It is always going up.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Okay.

Before I became a member, I was working in trade. Sometimes, different services would send me a note related to an access to information requests. I would be asked whether we could divulge certain information or not. I was personally dealing with other clients. So, it was not down to me to respond to them, but that was part of the emails.

Do you have advice from third parties? Do you think that those that deal with the government should have access to that information, which should be completely open and available to the public? Should we perhaps rather keep certain reserves in terms of what should be accessible to Canadians?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Consultations with third parties create tremendous delays, as do consultations among departments. There currently seems to be a trend toward adding a provision to contracts with third parties to specify that all information will be divulged or accessible. Of course, there are certain exceptions, including when information could cause irreparable harm to businesses, such as trade secrets.

There is still room for exceptions and exclusions, but we can limit them. The new legislative review will undoubtedly open the door to those types of recommendations.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** In procurement, for example, talking to one department or another creates trade difficulties, as there could be divulgence to a competitor from the market where the client is trying to sell their product. Those issues are always there.

I think that I misunderstood one of your comments because of the interpretation. When it comes to the so-called secret documents, you talked about putting them on the Protected B server. Should secret documents be put on that server or only once they have been censored?

• (1140)

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** No, that's not what I was trying to say.

The access to information software that enables us to work on documents is often part of the secret network. Since it is on the secret network, people who work from home right now have no access to their main work tool. If the software was on the Protected B network, people could have access to the majority of their tools and documents from home.

That creates a new problem that we did not predict when we were working at the office. Working from home is one of the issues.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

We will continue with Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two minutes, please.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Maynard, thank you for being with us today. We are very happy about it. Your presence was highly anticipated, and we would even like to hear from you more often.

I don't have a lot of time, but I have an important question for you.

This is my second term as a member of Parliament. I must tell you that I have had some rather painful experiences related to the Access to Information Act.

In terms of the requests I submitted during my first term, I would say that I obtained a response to about half of them. That was a few years ago, after all.

As for those I have submitted during my current term, I have received no response. The only times we obtain responses quickly is

when the request is refused. In those cases, we obtain responses within 24 or 48 hours. We are told that the act does not allow that information to be provided. But when it isn't a refusal, it takes forever.

Are you worried by this long and cumbersome process?

Do you have statistics on the waiting time by department?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** If you look at the annual report for each year, you will see that we have statistics for different departments. The delays are absolutely worrisome. As I was saying earlier, the number of complaints received last year relative to delays and extensions has increased tremendously.

I don't think people realize that an institution cannot decide not to respond. That is what we have been trying to show since the beginning of the pandemic. The act provides for a 30-day time frame. If people do not obtain a response during that time frame, the institution must advise them before the 30th day that it will request an extension. If people do not get that kind of a response from an institution, the institution is already not meeting its obligations under the act.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Our final two-minute intervention will come from Mr. Green.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Thank you very much.

I think there are some pretty extensive expectations and standards that are rolled out in the "Open and Accountable Government" document, 2015, specifically annex C, which relates to "Access to Information and Administrative Matters", Ms. Maynard. This states that "Ministers have direct administrative responsibilities flowing from their ministerial duties" on access to information.

Would you care to comment on whether our government is actively living up to this in relation to its culture?

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** It's difficult to tell. Every department is very different. I've been having great success collaborating with some leaders, and others less so. I find that the analysts, the coordinators, the people working in access believe in transparency and really want to provide information. The top leaders are often saying the right things too. I think there is an issue between the two. Middle management, I think, is often the one protecting the information or worried about the information coming out. There is also still a problem of fear of being embarrassed by the information, and embarrassment is not an exclusion under the act.

I think we need to really connect the two extremes and make sure that people know that it is fine, it is good to provide the information. This is how we get trust from Canadians that our decisions are being made properly, fiscally responsibly. Yes, we still have some issues in some departments, and some are better than others, that's for sure.

• (1145)

**Mr. Matthew Green:** I really appreciate your candour and your openness to answer this stuff. I certainly look forward to having you back before this committee for future studies.

**Ms. Caroline Maynard:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Madame Maynard, on behalf of our entire committee, I want to thank you for your appearance here today. I concur with the comments from most of my colleagues. Your presentation has been extremely informative and I wish you nothing but the best of luck. Thank you for being an exemplary public servant, and hopefully things will improve in your office over time. I'll leave it at that, and you are excused.

Colleagues, I will just suspend for a few moments while we set up for our second panel.

• (1145)

(Pause)

• (1145)

**The Chair:** We are resuming. I do call this meeting to order once again.

Mr. Dagg, the floor is yours for five minutes.

**Mr. Michael A. Dagg (As an Individual):** The committee members should know that I've been involved with access to information for most of my career. I'm basically a professional user of the Access to Information Act. It's with that in mind that I've had a lot of experience in all kinds of things, including in one case, in which I took the government to the Supreme Court of Canada. There were also other court cases in which I was involved, which gave me a sense of the need to push the government once in a while.

Since I've provided the clerk with a summary of my presentation, I'll simply say that access is an important right, but a lot of people haven't necessarily gotten around to learning the ropes of how to put a request in writing and word it properly. I've taken years to learn the details.

In my experience, access does work and it is important as a right for citizens, but there are a lot of problems. COVID certainly created the biggest problem, which is uncertainty, and I have made some requests that God knows when I will get an answer to.

I've given examples from four cases in my presentation. One is dealing with \$500 million to \$1 billion in unpaid taxes. I've been working on this one for several years, and I've had all kinds of hassles about this one. The American whistle-blower who brought it to my attention is available to give testimony if people want it. I spoke with him recently.

The other one is Project Anecdote. This is an RCMP investigation that took 10 years, from 1993 to 2003. They spent lots of resources, but at the very end they didn't charge anybody. Now, apparently, according to the information I had, there was corruption and money laundering, yet they found nothing. That's why I'm using access as my right as a citizen to find out why they don't want to collect maybe a billion dollars. I feel I'm entitled to an explanation as to why they chose not to do it. If there's a reason, let's see it, but so far nobody has any records. This ties into the problems with this one, because they told me initially that I might have to wait 800

years to get the answer. Then they said, oh, we'll revise it to 2098. The point is, that's still well beyond my lifetime.

There's a complaint to the commissioner about this, but I haven't heard back on it.

This specific request is particularly problematic because the stuff that goes to the archives is normally public, and the 20-year rule should have applied for the RCMP stuff up to the year 2000. That should have all been disclosable, but it's not, so what's going on? I provided the members of the committee with a letter that a third party had received saying that this information could have been provided with 30 days of work by four people. Now they tell me 30 days, 80 years, or 800 years. Which is it? I don't know.

The other thing the committee should know is that in the case of Project Anecdote, the court ordered the archivist of Canada to show up in court in Gatineau, Quebec, in 2015. The archivist defied a court order and didn't provide the information as required by law, so there's something sensitive about this particular file.

The final thing I would say is about the third case I had. I was surprised that the Canadian citizen—he had kids who were born in the States but he and his wife were born in Canada—was denied access to records to which he was entitled by virtue of a court order, which the Department of Immigration didn't want to accept. Eventually, when the commissioner intervened, the problem was resolved. The thing is, he's still having delays caused by whatever because he has four children, but he only applied for the first child. So we have to sit and watch what's happening.

• (1150)

As a result of this delay, he was forced to leave Canada. People should know that.

The final thing in my four points here—

**The Chair:** Please finish very quickly if you could, sir.

**Mr. Michael A. Dagg:** Okay.

There are contracting irregularities. I have made some requests, but they're all giving delays.

Go ahead for questions. I can answer questions in French as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will now go to a five-minute opening statement from Mr. Cutler.

Mr. Cutler, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Allan Cutler (President, Anti-Corruption and Accountability Canada):** Like Mr. Dagg, I'd like to thank you for inviting me to testify. Mr. Dagg and I are both members of Anti-Corruption and Accountability Canada, which is an organization that aids whistle-blowers in exposing wrongdoing and encourages accountability and openness in government. You're going to hear from Sean Holman. Sean and I are both members of the COVID-19 Accountability Group, a coalition of experts to recommend reforms to the whistle-blowing.

Before I start, I'd like to thank Madame Maynard for having testified. I understand her problems and the stresses of her job better than I did before.

I'm going to give a few examples of access to information problems. I realize that's the focus. They started before COVID but they still go on. It's a general summary, and I've given a more specific summary. First off, let's just say that departments are not worried about ATIP legislation. When I talk to them—and Mr. Dagg may confirm this—bluntly in a conversation they simply say that a complaint to the OIC just gives them more time. In fact, in at least a couple of cases, I have been told that my request is behind all the complaints to the OIC, so I'm going to have to just wait. In other words, I'll have to complain to the OIC if I want to get my situation resolved.

ATIP officers know they can delay ATIPs. Why? Because they can simply keep asking you questions and demanding clarifications and saying they don't understand the question. As a specific example, I had a question that said, "Tell me why you did not take any action for six years." I used the two dates. They came back to me and said they didn't understand the question. Finally I put a complaint in to the OIC because they didn't understand a simple question.

Departments can do whatever they want. They end up making exceptions under the law, which have no pertinence, as the commissioner would testify. Once something goes to OIC, they suddenly say it doesn't apply, so they can release the data.

Legally I understand that they are required to help the person who's the applicant, but their interest is in the department. They don't want to help the applicant.

As Mr. McCauley mentioned, extension beyond the 30-day statutory limit is the norm. In fact, 90 days is the norm. That's 120 days or a four-month delay. That is the norm for the request.

I'm going to finish by stating that I've given you examples of two very specific access requests. One is on the concealment of the asbestos problem at Kent Institution in B.C. We know the documents are there, but they have been denying the documents.

The other one is the Department of Justice concealing records they've had in their possession for 12 years. How much time do I still have?

• (1155)

**The Chair:** You have about 40 seconds.

**Mr. Allan Cutler:** Okay. I'll just say that Mr. Brad Birkenfeld gave them documents in 2008. From 2008 to 2014, Justice concealed those documents.

When Mr. Dagg and I asked for information on those documents, suddenly they had information that they had to deal with that was sensitive. If you sit on a file for six years, it cannot have sensitive information.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Our last five-minute opening statement will come from Mr. Holman.

Mr. Holman, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Sean Holman (Member and Associate Professor of Journalism, Mount Royal University, Canadian COVID-19 Accountability Group):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would also like to thank the committee for inviting me here to testify on this most important of issues.

As mentioned, I'm a journalism professor at Mount Royal University in Calgary, where my research focuses on why we value information in democracies and the history of our country's freedom of information laws.

I am also, along with Mr. Cutler, a member of the Canadian COVID-19 Accountability Group, an ad hoc coalition of experts who joined together earlier this spring to recommend reforms to Canada's whistle-blowing and freedom of information laws within the context of the pandemic.

It's from these two places that I will be speaking today.

I would like to begin by briefly discussing the crucial importance of information to Canadians at this moment in history. Generally speaking, we value information for two reasons—control and certainty. With information, we are able to make better decisions about the world around us, whether it's in the voting booth or the check-out line, thereby controlling public and private institutions. That information can also make us feel more certain about the world because it allows us to better understand it.

During an emergency, the need for information accelerates because Canadians want to make the best possible decisions to keep themselves safe. They also want to ensure that governments and corporations are doing the same thing on their behalf, especially when it involves a significant expenditure of taxpayer dollars.

The costs of not providing this information are severe in the post-truth era we find ourselves living in. That's because if there is an information gap, there's a substantial risk it will be filled with misinformation and disinformation.

The Government of Canada has in some ways tried to provide such information, but in other ways there are numerous documented instances of it failing to do so. Because of our broken access to information system, there is no easy or quick means for Canadians to challenge these refusals and obtain records or data the government won't voluntarily disclose, which was the entire point behind the Access to Information Act in the first place.

That's why the Canadian COVID-19 Accountability Group has recommended the government be legally required to proactively release a number of broad categories of unredacted records within 15 days of their being prepared, including health and safety inspection reports, public health research and government contracts.

We are also recommending major reforms to Canada's whistleblower law as this committee has done in the past. Last month we saw how it took Canadian soldiers to blow the whistle on deplorable conditions in Ontario nursing homes. At the time, Premier Ford said that was because you find cracks in the system by living the system around the clock every single day. In making that statement, he has eloquently articulated why we need to better protect public and private employees who see wrongdoing in their workplaces.

We recognize that such reforms, which should include financial protection for whistle-blowers, will take time, and that's why we're calling on the government to publicly declare that it will protect anyone who reports public and private sector wrongdoing related to the crisis. We further recommend the creation of a COVID-19 ombudsperson who can provide advice and support for these whistle-blowers.

Canada's Access to Information Act currently ranks 57th compared to 127 other similar laws around the world. Its Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act has been criticized for being in violation of international best practices. It shouldn't take the COVID-19 crisis to change this. However, if it does, such reforms will help preserve evidence-based democratic decision-making at a time when it is under threat.

I would urge the members of this committee to take immediate action on this very important issue.

Thank you.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we will now have six-minute rounds followed by five-minute rounds followed by two-and-a-half-minute rounds starting with Mr. McCauley.

Go ahead for six minutes.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Gentlemen, welcome.

Mr. Cutler, welcome back. It's good to see you. I want to say thanks for all the great work you did on the whistle-blower report we did, which unfortunately has not been acted upon. We've had four different Treasury Board presidents since then, and not one of them has taken up the cause, but I appreciate that you're still fighting for it.

Mr. Holman, it's good to see you again.

Mr. Dagg, thanks for your contribution.

I'll ask this to the three of you: What kind of teeth do we need to add to our laws so that these ATIPs can be put out in a timely fashion?

We heard Mr. Cutler comment about the delaying tactics of these ATIP bureaucrats. I actually saw the email that came out saying there would be an 800-year wait for the Operation Anecdote information.

What do we need to do to change the culture or to penalize people who are violating the access-to-information regime we have, which is meant to protect Canadians?

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Mr. McCauley, do you want to direct your question to one of the panellists so we can start?

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Sure. I'll start with Mr. Holman.

**Mr. Sean Holman:** That's a really good question.

I think one of the first things we need to do is to take away the government's teeth.

What the government has demonstrated over time is that it cannot be trusted with the existing exemptions and exclusions in the Access to Information Act. I think there is an urgent need to review those exemptions and exclusions, and also to establish a legal requirement that certain broad classes of information be released without going through the access to information process, because really, those exemptions and exclusions are being used as a shield against accountability.

Another thing I would recommend, which the COVID-19 Accountability Group has recommended, is that the performance pay for the heads of public bodies or their unelected designates be tied to releasing information and following through on our freedom of information laws that exist.

I think those two things really help significantly improve the situation when it comes to freedom of information in Canada and truly create an open-by-default government.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** That's great.

Only 46 of 211 government agencies are actually currently fulfilling the ATIP rules. One that is missing from the list of those doing ATIPs is the Treasury Board, which is responsible for ATIPs.

What kind of message is it sending to all of our departments when the chief information officer of the Treasury Board appeared in front of our committee and didn't even know it was an issue, and his own department is not even fulfilling the ATIP responsibilities?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** It sends a very poor message, obviously.

This has been the history of governments in Canada. Opposition parties promise that when they come into power they will be more open and accountable than their predecessors. When they actually get into power, what we have seen is that the seduction of secrecy is too much to resist.

We need to stop treating this as a partisan issue. We need to treat this as an issue of democracy that should unify us all so that we can better serve the public and make better decisions as a country about some of the most pressing problems of our time.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I agree with you, and it's been an issue with past governments as well.

I was hoping our whistle-blower report would actually be taken up because it would handcuff the current government but future governments as well. Whether it be a Conservative or an NDP government, everyone would be locked in to respecting whistle-blowers.

**Mr. Sean Holman:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** What provinces are doing a good job right now with ATIPs?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** I would say that very few provinces are doing a good job when it comes to ATIPs. This is a problem that exists across Canada. It is not exclusive to the federal government.

Part of the reason is that all our laws come from essentially the same primal pool from the late seventies and early eighties. It's well past time that we actually change that.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I agree.

I just want to go back a bit to Operation Anecdote, Mr. Cutler and Mr. Dagg.

Have you ever seen an ATIP come back that said it would take 800 years to find some papers?

Mr. Cutler.

**Mr. Allan Cutler:** No, I've never seen one for 800 years. The second that Michael got it, he sent it to everybody he knew. It has to be one of the greatest jokes about the typical reaction of a federal government: If you want an answer, wait for your ancestors to come around. Eventually you'll get it, but it might take two or three generations.

• (1210)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Those would be very long-lived generations, Mr. Cutler, to cover 800 years.

**Mr. Allan Cutler:** I intend to outlast them all.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Weiler, for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining our committee today and talking about issues that are very important right now.

According to the Canadian COVID-19 Accountability Group white paper, the federal government should “educate employees about how to report wrongdoing concerning the expenditure of public funds related to this crisis, as well as the non-disclosure or manipulation of information about COVID-19.”

Mr. Dagg, how do you think the federal organizations and the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner of Canada should improve their education and training initiatives on the disclosure of wrongdoing?

**Mr. Michael A. Dagg:** Well, there are lots of things that could be done. The problem is that bureaucrats are good at finding ways around anything you do. There has to be a lot more public awareness because it's public awareness and using the law that make

changes. If they can present to people that this is not very useful, then people won't use it.

I think the law is useful because, for example, the 800 years is really.... What about the law that says everything is public after 20 years? Nobody talked to me about that. I'm sure everything will be public after 800 years, but it won't be useful now, and that's part of the problem.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** What about training and education initiatives on the disclosure of wrongdoing?

**Mr. Michael A. Dagg:** Part of the problem there is that public servants know that their jobs are on the line. You have to change the bureaucratic culture to give public servants some kind of protection and reward so that they will feel free to do it. I've talked to Mr. Cutler. What happened to him when he spoke up? He was basically sidelined in his career and punished pension-wise.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** I'm going to switch gears a bit. This question is for Mr. Holman.

Obviously, the pandemic has caused a big change in the working conditions of our public service. During a pandemic, which factors make it difficult for teleworking employees to complete access to information requests?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** I think the Information Commissioner did an excellent job of outlining those factors. Given the fact that employees are working from home, they perhaps do not have ready access to some records and documents or perhaps the networks that they're accessing those records and documents through are not secure. This all impacts the ability of public employees to actually fulfill their obligations under the Access to Information Act.

That being said, I think this also points to a problem that has long existed with the access to information system, which is the need for better record-keeping in government. When the Access to Information Act was introduced and, indeed, when freedom of information was being discussed between 1965 and the time that the Access to Information Act was passed, there was a substantive discussion and debate about the need for better record-keeping, for more disclosure about the kinds of records the government had at its disposal and for ready access to those records. Unfortunately, those recommendations were never adhered to. Here we are, living in a digital age, and we still have the same problem.

I really encourage this committee to study the issue of record-keeping in government. It's not sexy, but it does go to Canadians' fundamental right to know and allowing them to exercise that.

• (1215)

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Mr. Holman, according to your white paper, the federal government should “implement broad, urgently needed public and private sector whistleblower protections, helping those who serve the public interest by reporting wrongdoing.” How should PSDPA be amended to appropriately protect whistle-blowers?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** That's a very good question. This committee has actually assembled, as one of your members just mentioned, an extensive list of recommendations on how Canada's whistle-blower law can be improved. The government should act on those recommendations. This isn't rocket science. In many ways it has the same problems as the Access to Information Act. We know what needs to be done. We know what changes need to take place. We just need to act on those changes.

As an example, broadening the definition of what constitutes a reportable wrongdoing would dramatically help improve our whistle-blower law, because at the present moment a lot of the complaints we're seeing don't cross that threshold. That's a problem. We also need to expand the definition of who constitutes a whistle-blower so that it includes retired employees, former employees and private contractors.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Vignola, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Cutler, as you were saying in your presentation, having listened to Ms. Maynard has made you understand certain factors. She mentioned needs in human and material resources.

What are your suggestions to make the system work better? Are Ms. Maynard's requests in line with yours? Are they realistic?

[English]

**Mr. Allan Cutler:** One thing that Madam Maynard said really struck home. Towards the end of her statement, she said that the people who work in the office want to give out the information and that the people at the top say the same thing. This sounds like the whistle-blowing dilemma or the information dilemma: The people at the top say it, but they don't do it. They don't live it and don't believe it, but they can say the right words. We have too much of what I call political correctness at the top, and the people down below know that if they do what they want to do, somebody is going to criticize them.

There's a real fear in the thing. The biggest change would be to pass legislation and protect them. Protect them against retaliation.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Okay.

In French, we have an expression to the effect that the talk is not being walked.

**Mr. Allan Cutler:** It's the same thing in English.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** There is a lot of talk, but little action. You just said safeguards would be needed. Does the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act not provide those safeguards to employees who would like to do their job properly?

What improvements could you suggest?

[English]

**Mr. Allan Cutler:** The first thing I would do, as far as whistle-blowing or anything like this goes, is to put the onus on management, the people up above, to prove that they have not retaliated

against a whistle-blower. Whistle-blowers come forward and then experience retaliation. When they say they've seen retaliation, what it is.... Who controls the records? Who controls all of the job situations? It's the people above them. They don't have access to the proof of what's been going on. The onus has to be reversed. You have to prove you did not do it, from a higher level. That's the most important item of all the items, in my opinion.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much, Mr. Cutler.

Mr. Holman, among your suggestions were performance-based pay and disclosures to make information transparent. I understand that may encourage people to disclose actions, but would there not be a higher risk of false reports? How could false reports be avoided?

• (1220)

[English]

**Mr. Sean Holman:** That's a really good question. I think at the present moment in time we don't know the answer, because we haven't implemented such a system.

We do know that financial protections for whistle-blowers, financial incentives for whistle-blowers, have worked in other jurisdictions, including in the United States. There's been a lot of talk in this country about the fact that first responders are brave; first responders are our heroes. Whistle-blowers are another form of first responders. They are alerting us to problems within public sector and private sector institutions, and yet we are doing very little to actually protect them. Part of that protection is financial incentives for whistle-blowing. In a lot of cases, there can be very severe career repercussions for whistle-blowers when they do make that act of disclosure.

I'm sure everyone in this room has seen, for example, the movie *The Insider*. It's about the famous whistle-blower who came forward about the risks of smoking and cigarettes. That's not just a movie; that's reality for most whistle-blowers. We should be attuned to that reality and protect the bravery of first responders—first responders who disclose to the public the information that they need to know.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Dagg, concerning requests, you said that there was already a backlog. It may have been naive of me, but I thought the legislation was clear on maximum time frames for responses to be provided.

Given the situation surrounding COVID-19, what kind of delays do you expect when it comes to requests? How could those delays be minimized?

[English]

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, Mr. Dagg, we're completely out of time. I would like to hear your answer, but we have time constraints. I would ask you to please provide that answer in writing as soon as possible to the clerk of this committee for dissemination to all our committee members. That would be much appreciated.

We will now go to Mr. Green for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Respecting the fact that we are getting into the second half of this meeting and that I'm fourth in the order, I'm going to go ahead and table my motion at this time.

**The Chair:** Please go ahead, Mr. Green. I will stop the time.

If possible, give a quick summary of your motion. If that's not possible, I do know that you have distributed it to all members of the committee. It is in order, it is admissible, it is amendable and it is debatable. If you want to give the summary, go ahead. If not, you can just go into the motion itself and the reasons for presenting it.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Just out of courtesy to my committee, I'll read out the motion. Then I will relinquish my time so that members have the ability to question the witnesses who have signed on today.

The motion is as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee send for documents from Public Service and Procurement Canada (PSPC) containing the following disaggregated data related to businesses owned by under-represented groups (Black, indigenous, women, and persons with disabilities) who have engaged with PSPC with regard to the federal government's response to COVID-19: (a) (i) how many companies from underrepresented groups have secured contracts with PSPC, (ii) the value of these contracts, (iii) the number of businesses from under represented groups screened and approved as credited vendors, (iv) number and value of set aside contracts for these businesses, (v) the number of sub-contracts entered into; (b), the committee requests from Employment and Social Development Canada ("ESDC") the production of all papers and records, in unredacted form, relating to the Federal Contractors Program, and in particular: (i) all current, signed Agreements to Implement Employment Equity ("Agreements"); (ii) the most current list of contractors covered by said Agreements; (iii) the most current compliance documentation furnished by each contractor covered by an Agreement, including the goal-setting report, achievement table, workforce analysis, revised goals for remaining gaps in representation, and any explanatory material; (iv) the most current documentation of ESDC's compliance assessment for each contractor covered by an Agreement; (v) the most recent Limited Eligibility to Bid List; (vi) all documentation filed in an appeal of a finding of non-compliance by a contractor to the Minister; (vii) all documentation connected to an independent review of an appeal; (viii) any documentation internal to ESDC assessing or evaluating the Federal Contractors Program; and that the committee receive these documents, papers and records no later than Monday, August 31, 2020.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Green.

Colleagues, those of you who wish to speak to this motion can do so by indicating to me and/or Paul either by raising your hand virtually or giving a quick intervention.

Did you have a hand up, Mr. Drouin?

[Translation]

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

I would like to put a question to my colleague. It has to do with the fourth line of his motion.

[English]

I'll read it in English, so that it's easier for my colleague. When you're saying, "who have engaged with PSPC", we would wonder if you just want the information on COVID-19 or broader than COVID-19 and all previous information, because I think it would be valuable for us as a committee to have that.

As with all other motions that have been presented, we would like to present a friendly amendment right at the end, after "and that the committee receive these documents".

I propose to add "and that the departments tasked with gathering and releasing the following documents do their assessment and vetting as would be done through the access to information process".

I would like to thank Kelly Block for those words, because they are her words. I'm just quoting them from a previous motion.

**The Chair:** Do we have further speakers to the motion? I'm seeing none.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** Mr. Chair, on the comments, am I able to reply to that?

**The Chair:** Absolutely, Mr. Green. I'll certainly let you say your piece. All I was going to suggest is that if we have no speakers after you, my question is whether Mr. Drouin actually would be moving that amendment, but go ahead, Mr. Green.

**Mr. Matthew Green:** As we've heard before, particularly in the first segment, my concern is that if I make it overly broad, it's going to get lost in the ether. As it relates to COVID and the tremendous amount of procurement dollars that have gone out the door, particularly under the guise of GBA+, I suggest that we keep this report interim to COVID, because it's a very short period of time and I expect the turnaround to be the same, notwithstanding that in a few weeks, based on the testimony of the witnesses, I might get a report or a response back that they're going to need 800 years or something like that. We'll go ahead and keep it for this time period, and then my hope is that with this committee we can begin to dig into a fulsome response on how this rolls out more generally.

As it relates to the amendment, I'll also just put that out of the way to say that I support the amendment with caution, because I do think that as a committee we need to have a deeper conversation around the balance between client confidentiality as it relates to cabinet privilege versus that of parliamentary privilege and our ability to access information. I'm always very wary about that, but for the purpose of this motion, I'll concede that point on the amendment and hope that at a future date we can bring back witnesses as we have today, and experts on constitutional jurisprudence, to really dig down into what could be considered cabinet confidentiality.

Mr. Chair, as you know, one tactic could be just to run every report on an agenda by cabinet and claim that it has solicitor privilege, and it would just be lost in the ether forever. Accepting that, I look forward to moving forward with this motion.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Thank you.



Again, just for clarification, I want to go back to Mr. Drouin and ask if he is moving the amendment that he has read.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Yes, Mr. Chair. I will forgo the suggestion that I made with regard to COVID-19.

I did send the text to the clerk, who now has it, so yes, I would move an amendment related to the vetting of documents.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Are there any other speakers to the amendment? We are now on the amendment.

All right, seeing no other speakers, Paul, I'll turn it over to you to do a vote by roll call for the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0)

Thank you.

I thank Mr. Green for ceding the rest of his speaking time so we can continue with our examination of the witnesses before us.

We will now go to a five-minute round of questioning, starting with Mr. McCauley.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Thanks.

Mr. Holman, has the government responded in any way to your proposal?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** Other than through the statement that was made by the Treasury Board president, it hasn't. However, this has been, in a lot of ways, the history of freedom of information in this country. As an example, when the Canadian Bar Association was advocating for freedom of information in the seventies, they received very little communication from the government. I think there needs to be more communication from the government and a more inclusive process through which we can derive more information from them, ironically.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I agree. It's funny. We sit here, we talk to bureaucrats, we ask them stuff and it's, like, "We'll get back to you on whether or not we'll get back to you."

You mentioned we were 57th out of 127 countries in the world for access to information. Where are we on whistle-blower protection?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** That's a good question. I'm not sure if there is actually a comparable measurement for whistle-blowing legislation. My colleague Allan Cutler would be better positioned to answer that question. What I do know is that there has been a substantive criticism of how out of step we are with international norms. There's actually a list of essentially 20 requirements that whistle-blowing laws internationally should hit, and we're not hitting those requirements.

• (1235)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I was at a whistle-blower conference down in the States, and it's remarkable. They are light years ahead of us. I think their whistle-blower protection goes back to the Revolutionary War. They were very, very critical of their own. I feel like

we're back in the Stone Age on protecting whistle-blowers in our country.

**Mr. Sean Holman:** It's very true. That speaks to the built-in secrecy that is inherent in our system of government. When you have government's primary decision-making body's, cabinet's, business being conducted under a shroud of confidentiality, that has an effect on the overall culture of government. It's really important that this committee, as some of you have suggested, take a look into that issue, because it was a very live discussion when freedom of information was being discussed in the 1970s. In fact, it actually came up when the Privy Council Office conducted a study of that very issue by D.F. Wall.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** That's interesting. You mentioned our whistle-blower report that we put through. We actually had a motion to invite Scott Brison, before he fled under the Irving cloud, to come back. He actually refused to come back. Hopefully, we can get Minister Duclos to come back, and we can jump-start the process.

I'm at about the three-minute mark, and I have a motion I'd like to introduce. If we can suspend for a moment, I'll introduce my motion.

**The Chair:** You can go ahead with your motion as we speak, Mr. McCauley.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Great. When we talk about openness, I'm seeking information from the Treasury Board regarding the 699 line. I don't have the motion written in front of me, but it has been distributed. I'm fine to go right to discussion or a vote on it.

**The Chair:** I believe all committee members, as Mr. McCauley said, have received his motion. Mr. Drouin would like to speak to it.

Mr. Drouin, please go ahead.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I have just a few questions for Mr. McCauley. I know he's asked for that particular information in the past. I think he's asked twice. Once was to the PBO, probably a few weeks ago. He asked to produce that information, and it is on the record that the PBO, yes, he would provide that particular information. I'm trying to get a sense of the rationale of his motion, given that the PBO has already committed to providing that information.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** In the first meeting, we asked about its existence, what it was. At the last meeting, when we asked Mr. Purves if he would provide the information, he committed to only getting back to us. He refused to actually commit to tabling the information. I'm asking the PBO to provide it to us.

There are a couple of great points in this tabulation. It will really show that we are lacking a short-term disability plan for our public servants. Because it's also across the country, it might provide us a greater insight into how the lack of affordable child care affects the broader workplace.

There is a lot of great information that would be available. We could not get the commitment from Treasury Board, when it was here, to actually present the information.

**The Chair:** Ms. Vignola.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** As a new member, I am not familiar with all the terms. Can you tell me what exactly “code 699 data set” means?

[English]

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** It's a payroll line. It's posted on the Treasury Board website. There are five different areas for COVID-related absences for the public service. If you're sick because of COVID, it goes here. If you are unable to work, because there are no computers, it goes here. It's just a different tracking of COVID-related absences.

• (1240)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you, I now remember having read it.

[English]

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Mr. McCauley, you mentioned that Treasury Board had not committed to providing that information, but I know that on May 8, when the President of the Treasury Board was here, he did ask one of his ADMs to provide that information and there was a commitment to provide that information.

I know you asked, “Would you provide that to our committee when you have it?”

I believe it was Ms. Nancy Chahwan, “Pardon me?”

You asked the question again, and she said, “Absolutely.”

Again, I don't see the reason to move forward with this motion, when there already is a commitment to provide that particular information.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I think it's because, when we followed up with the deputy minister, or Mr. Purves, he danced around whether he'd actually provide it for us. This one actually has a timeline of getting back to committee for it.

Again, this is in light of Mr. Purves's refusal to commit to providing us with it. It was an “I'll get back to you on whether I'll get back to you” type of thing. This just provides certainty that we actually receive it.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kusmierczyk, you wanted to speak to this as well.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Yes. Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm trying to understand this a little bit. Again, I'm new to this too. I know that line 699 deals with leave with pay. I just want to get an understanding of what that information might provide and what insights my colleague is looking for. I'm trying to understand the purpose, I guess, of that request and to understand a little bit better what insights he's attempting to glean from that information.

**The Chair:** Mr. McCauley, did you want to respond to that?

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Yes.

I find it quite ironic, on a day when we're talking about access to information.... I'm sure this is not the intent of the question, but this is the push-back we get from the bureaucrats: Why do you want this information? For what purpose do you want this information? I'm not quite sure why someone would want to hide it. I think it

provides a lot of great information on COVID that can be extrapolated across the entire country—for sick day benefits that the NDP were requesting, for access to day care, for access to work from home. There are a billion things.

I think it's ironic that on the day we're talking about access to information and how difficult it is to get access to information, we're having a debate on something that's a Treasury Board directive.

**The Chair:** I would also point out, colleagues, that the motion is to ask for information from the PBO, not the Treasury Board. I offer that as clarification, since Mr. Purves had made some commitment, as had some of his officials. Mr. McCauley's motion is asking for information from the PBO.

Paul, could you please read that motion? It's a fairly brief one. Could you read it again for the benefit of all of our colleagues?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegna):** Yes, Mr. Chair.

The motion moved by Mr. McCauley reads as follows:

That, in the context of the committee's study on the government's response to COVID-19 pandemic, the committee request the Parliamentary Budget Officer to provide the code 699 data set that was provided to it by the government, and that the information be provided to the committee by Monday, June 29, 2020.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Are there any other speakers to this motion?

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Thank you very much.

Again, with utmost respect to my colleague, there's no push-back from my end. I know that the Treasury Board, and I believe the PBO, committed to providing that information. I'm just trying to understand the thought process behind the motion and understand how that information might yield important insights. I'm trying to understand what my colleague is hoping they might provide some important insights on or better understanding of.

Again, I hope my colleague is not misconstruing my intention.

• (1245)

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Oh, no, not at all.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I simply want to better understand this. I look at the motion and I see “code 699 data”. For me, I love learning new things, I guess you could say. I just want to get a better understanding and better line of sight in terms of this information and how it might be used, or how you're hoping it might be used.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** Join the geek side.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Yes, exactly; I'm already there.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** There's a lot of stuff that can be extrapolated over the general population that we won't have direct information for, regarding the NDP's push for sick days or child care access. I think it can provide a treasure trove of stuff that we can look at as a broader society. We'll have this directly from a large dataset of 300,000 people.

**The Chair:** I would also point out, colleagues—

**The Chair:** —in response to Mr. Kusmierczyk's and Mr. Drouin's questioning, Mr. McCauley's motion does have a deadline on it. The commitments made by others who have appeared were not subject to any kind of a deadline.

I think one critical point is that Mr. McCauley has June 29 as a response date.

Mr. Drouin, I see your hand up again.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** I'm taking up a lot of time. Sorry.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I'll make one last comment, and I would hope that the information Mr. McCauley is asking for on National Public Service Week will not be used to point the finger at our hard-working public servants. At the end of the day, I hope that's not the intent of the reasoning of code 699.

**Mr. Kelly McCauley:** No, we'll have a great dataset right in front of us. I'm sure we can extrapolate across the entire society right now to give us a great idea of what percentage don't have child care. With a dataset of 300,000, I think it's a great way to have a broader look at sick-day needs, day care needs and work-at-home needs.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, I see no other hands raised, so we'll have the vote.

(Motion negatived: 6 nays; 4 yeas)

**The Chair:** We will go back to questioning of our witnesses.

Mr. Drouin, I have you up for five minutes.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will ask my questions to Mr. Holman.

Do you have conversations with folks who specialize in security software? The reason I ask is that the Information Commissioner was before us—I'm sure you listened to the testimony—and she said that the access to information software is on a secure network. I don't know. I'm not a specialist in that, but would there be a reason as to why, in your opinion, the government would put ATIP software on a secure network? Is there a potential for a lot of hacks?

The Government of Canada sure has had its fair share of hacks over the past 10 or 20 years. Is that a concern that you've heard out there in speaking with others?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** It's certainly not a concern I've heard. I speak mostly with the journalistic community, being a former investigative journalist. That said, I can definitely see the concern. If sensitive information is being requested, information that, for example, falls under the national security exemption or exclusion, then there's a real reason why those records should be kept on a secure network.

However, I think this also points to the fact that there is a real need for the proactive disclosure of more records, more broad categories of records, so that we don't create this kind of congestion, so that we say all these kinds of information should be available to Canadians as a matter of course.

• (1250)

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** In my previous life, I used to be a third party, but I often got access to.... I've asked the same questions. How do you treat third parties in access to information? Should they get a signal? Often, and Ms. Maynard referenced this, the timeline is that consultation that happens with third parties who are subject to the ATIP requests. What's your advice on that?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** I think we're too sensitive to the needs of third parties when it comes to access to information requests. In most cases, we're talking about government information that the public has a right to know about to a greater or lesser extent. I think we're often too obsessed with privacy in this country. We talk a lot about the costs and the potential risks of disclosure, but we don't talk a lot about the risks of non-disclosure.

The risk of non-disclosure is that Canadians do not have the information necessary to make good decisions in their public and private lives. That is a huge downside to privacy, to secrecy. We need to be more cognizant of it as a country, and I think government needs to be more cognizant of it as well.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** You would be prone to be more on the side of, for instance, if it's commercial sensitivity, "You're doing business with the government, so too bad, so sad, your information is going to be published"?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** Absolutely. I couldn't have put it better myself.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Okay.

You've also touched on cabinet confidentiality. Are you saying that cabinet discussions should be wide open or that there should be some level of confidentiality when cabinet discussions are happening?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** I think we need to have a real substantive discussion about cabinet confidentiality in this country, which we didn't really have when the Access to Information Act was being debated, at least not in a fulsome way. What we're essentially saying is that Canadians have no right to know what goes on in the principal decision-making body in government. That seems to me to be anathema to democracy. I would be in favour of opening those discussions and of opening the information that comes into cabinet much more than it is now.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I know there's been some jurisprudence expressed there. I know that for the Supreme Court of Canada, I think in the Babcock v. Canada case, the Supreme Court Justice said that for ministers to be able to express themselves freely, they've recognized that there has to be that level of confidentiality. Would you say that you're going against that or you don't support that necessarily, or let's have that conversation and figure out where we put these limits?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** I would say let's have that conversation, but I would also say that in a lot of cases we're simply talking about embarrassment here. It's funny. The reason for secrecy is actually the same reason as the need for information. Because if people have information, then they have control over you. If they have information, then you might not have as much certainty.

I think that's what government is trying to protect: its own control and its own certainty. There needs to be a much better balance than we have in this country when it comes to the accessibility of information, particularly the accessibility of the information about what's going on at the pinnacle of power in Canada.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** I'll end it there. Thank you for your testimony. I appreciate it.

**Mr. Sean Holman:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Colleagues, because of the extended discussion we had on the previous motion, our last intervention is coming up, and it goes to Mr. Aboultaif, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Thank you, Chair.

In the spirit of the transparency discussion around today's session, I was hoping that the government members would have supported the motion of my colleague Mr. McCauley when it comes to getting some reports from the PBO. It's too bad.

Speaking of which, my question is for Mr. Cutler on anti-corruption and accountability in Canada. Would you be able to shed light on corruption in Canada, please, on the status quo, how much we've fallen compared to the past and where we're heading?

• (1255)

**Mr. Allan Cutler:** There are no actual statistics, but I can give you a personal opinion. We're going downhill, and we're going downhill fast. The anti-corruption perception index done by Transparency International Canada has seen us dropping positions, but nobody who talks about it considers white-collar crime corruption. In Canada, for white-collar crime, you get a slap on your wrist and it's "go back and don't do it anymore, please". It is really sad.

Brad Birkenfeld, who is the one who tried to expose \$1 billion in unpaid offshore taxes in 2008—and we're still trying to get that looked at—literally has stated that Canada is the most corrupt economy he knows of. He goes around the world. This is a person who goes into every country. He is in Italy. Malta is where he lives now. He goes into Asia. The one country he will not go into is Canada. When asked, he said it was because he felt that if he went across the Canadian border they'd find a reason to charge him for something. That gives you an attitude of an outsider who is an international expert in what goes on in the whistle-blowing community and the corruption that goes around.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** I would welcome some comments from Mr. Holman on this, if possible.

**Mr. Sean Holman:** I think Mr. Cutler is absolutely right. We need to have a broader conversation about the issue of corruption in this country. We need to have a broader conversation about the issue of accountability in this country. We need to protect those who are best-positioned to blow the whistle on these kinds of problems.

As I said before, we often talk, and have often talked during the pandemic, about the need to recognize the bravery of first responders. A first responder who provides information about something that is going wrong in society, in our public or private institutions, should be respected.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** As you focus mostly on the public sector, who does pay attention in the private sector to corruption?

**Mr. Sean Holman:** That's actually a really good question.

No one, really. I think that's a crying need in this country—it's a crying need. I think if we had more information about what was going on in the private sector by the public sector that would help too.

One of the things that I would encourage this committee to look at is the absence of information about a whole bunch of issues in Canada, simply because government isn't keeping records or looking into the issue anymore. Canada is a graveyard of information compared with the United States. If we don't have good information about what's going on in this country, whether or not it's concerning corruption or any other issue, we can't make good decisions about it.

Everyone in this room, I think, would agree that there is a need for smart government, regardless of whether or not it's big or large. I think we can be united on that issue and call for greater disclosure and greater monitoring, so that we know what's going on in society.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** That's very good.

Corruption in the private sector does reflect a lot of the overall image of the country and the nation. If the government is also going through similar experiences, then who is going to be accountable for whom, and who is going to be looking after whom?

Therefore, we look to organizations such as yours. Maybe we need tougher legislation to really be able to push that through and make sure we keep an eye on corruption, because it does damage Canada's position on trade as well as on the investment side.

• (1300)

**Mr. Sean Holman:** Absolutely. Actually, I would encourage this committee to also look at a study that was done in the seventies on the issue of corporate concentration in Canada. There were some very good recommendations in that study about the need for greater disclosure on the part of corporations in this country. A lot of those recommendations were never acted on.

I think, in keeping with your concern, that it would be vital for this committee to take a look into that issue as well.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I will yield the rest of my time to Ms. Vignola for a motion.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Thank you very much.

So I will read the motion, which is the following:

That the Committee request that the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer undertake a costing analysis of building the Canadian Surface Combatants and building the FREMM and the Type 31 and that the report containing this analysis be presented to the Chair of the Committee by Thursday, October 22, 2020.

This is the first version you received.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Colleagues, I will point out just a couple of things.

Although we have a motion in front of us, we're under a very tight timeline. As all committee members know, we have to finish. We normally end our committees on the hour because our technicians need additional time to set up for the next meeting. I'm somewhat disappointed that we have to deal with this now, because it's cutting into our technicians' time for the next committee.

• (1305)

The motion in front of us is in order. It can be debated and amended. I'm looking to see if anyone wants to speak to it.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Mr. Chair, technically it should have been ruled out of order, but it's feel-good Friday so I'll be voting in favour of it.

**The Chair:** I'm seeing no debate, so I am going to ask Paul to do the roll call, please.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Since this is, as Mr. Drouin pointed out, feel-good Friday, I feel the love. I feel the love from all of you.

Colleagues, that will conclude our meeting for today. I remind you that we will have two more meetings throughout the summer, if the whips approve the dates. The first one will be on Thursday, July 23, at 2 p.m. eastern time. The following one will be on Thursday, August 27, at 11 a.m. eastern time. You will be getting a notification from our clerk to confirm those meeting times when we have confirmation from our whips.

With that, I wish you all a great summer. I hope you all stay healthy and safe. I also hope you have opportunities to spend time with your loved ones, your families and friends. These last three months have been quite an experience for all of us, and I appreciate what all of you have done to make this committee a working success, in my humble opinion. We'll see you back here in July.

The meeting is adjourned.

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