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# Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry





## Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Friday, March 10, 2023

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 69 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*English*]

As you know, this is going to be a hybrid meeting. It's taking place pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022.

While public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy no longer require mask-wearing indoors or on the precinct, masks and respirators are excellent tools to prevent the spread of COVID and other respiratory diseases. Of course, the World Health Organization says that we are still in a COVID pandemic.

I want to take this opportunity to remind all participants of this meeting that taking screenshots or taking photos is not allowed. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. If you want to know, you can go there to find out.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 28, 2023, the committee is meeting to begin its study of the activities of Google in reaction to Bill C-18.

Today we have witnesses from Google Canada. They are Sabrina Geremia, vice-president and country manager; and Jason Kee, public policy manager. Both are here by video conference.

We will begin with the opening remarks from Google.

You have five minutes to make your remarks. That means not each, but for Google, so you can decide how you're going to do that.

I will give you a shout-out when you have 30 seconds left, so that you can wrap up.

Thank you very much.

Please begin, Google, for five minutes.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia (Vice President and Country Manager, Google Canada):** Good morning.

My name is Sabrina Geremia. I am joined today by Jason Kee, who is a subject matter expert on search, news and ads. This committee's work is important. We have made it a priority to be here to answer your questions.

Google has been in Canada for over 20 years, and we are proud of the many ways that we support and partner with Canadian newsrooms. Last year, we linked to Canadian news publishers over 3.6 billion times, helping them make money with ads and subscriptions. This free traffic drove an estimated \$250 million in value to publishers.

Through the Google news showcase, we've signed agreements that support over 150 Canadian publications by paying for curated content and access to articles that would otherwise have been behind paywalls. The Google news initiative provides tools, training and funding to help Canadian news organizations innovate and build stronger, more sustainable business models in the digital age.

We have been transparent about our concerns with Bill C-18. We have worked constructively with parliamentarians and offered reasonable and balanced solutions. Unfortunately, Bill C-18 has some very serious problems.

Bill C-18 puts a price on free links to web pages, setting a dangerous precedent that threatens the foundation of the open web and the free flow of information. It incentivizes clickbait content over quality journalism.

Bill C-18 is intended to encourage voluntary agreements with news publishers, but the exemption and eligibility criteria have shifted so significantly that it would require subsidies to media companies, even if they don't produce news and are not online and we do not link to their content.

There is no clearly defined commitment to a code of ethics for eligibility in the bill, which threatens the standard of journalism in Canada.

Unreasonable timelines and unfair arbitration provisions would ensure that any reasonable offer from platforms would be rejected, creating a framework for bad-faith bargaining.

Bill C-18 would subsidize large legacy organizations and broadcasters and could hurt emerging and innovative players that are providing quality local news in communities across Canada.

This bill is no longer about supporting journalism.

Under Bill C-18, platforms would be subject to an uncapped financial liability merely for providing free links to the news that Canadians are searching for. Canadians should be concerned about the potential negative impacts on how they find and share news online.

As the bill has worsened at each step of the process, we've had to consider what product changes it may require. Potential product changes need to be tested.

My colleague, Jason Kee, will now share more about the tests.

**Mr. Jason Kee (Public Policy Manager, Google Canada):** Companies frequently use hypothesis-driven tests, also known as A/B testing, on a small percentage of real users to collect data about new features or changes before deciding whether to launch them at scale.

Google runs over 11,500 tests each year to assess potential changes to search, and only a small fraction of these end up launching.

The news tests in Canada were designed to assess the potential impacts of Bill C-18 on how news is linked to in certain products. They affect less than four per cent of Canadian users.

Bill C-18 would radically change the legal framework under which we provide free links to news for Canadians, but those are moving targets and we don't know if we will continue to be able to link to news as we do today, so we are testing a range of possible responses. Specifically, due to the vagueness and uncertainty surrounding Bill C-18, we are testing the impact of featuring varying amounts of links to news in our search results based on the scope of the bill. I want to underline that these are just tests: No decisions have been made about product change. We are simply doing our due diligence in the most responsible way possible.

Canadians can still access news sites at any time in a variety of ways, as they always do, including directly through their web browser, dedicated apps, social media or other means. We want to include news in our products. However, Bill C-18 puts a price on free links to news sites, provides no clarity or certainty as to what that price might be, and requires payment to an extremely broad range of outlets and organizations even if they don't produce news. This creates maximum uncertainty, disincentivizes voluntary agreements and moves us further from the shared goal of supporting news in Canada.

We remain committed to working constructively with the government on reasonable and balanced solutions that would fix Bill C-18 and contribute to a healthy, innovative and diverse news ecosystem for the digital age.

We welcome your questions.

**The Chair:** That was excellent. You had four seconds to go. Thank you.

Now we're going into the question and answer segment. The first round of questions is a six-minute round. As that includes questions and answers, I again urge everyone to be as succinct in your questions and answers as possible.

We begin with the Conservatives for six minutes, and Marilyn Gladu.

• (1310)

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

You've concisely described the concerns you have with Bill C-18. Did you make these concerns known to either the Minister of Canadian Heritage or perhaps government members on this committee?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

I want to start by saying that we share the goal of promoting a healthy news ecosystem for the digital age that's innovative and diverse, and we have been transparent and collaborative throughout the process.

We've offered different types of solutions that could perhaps get to this objective in different ways, and throughout the process—as the eligibility has broadened and as many of the provisions have changed—we have made our input and our feedback very clear.

I can pass it to Jason for more input on that.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** Thank you.

Yes, we have engaged extensively with the minister's office and a number of others with respect to our key concerns. As Sabrina indicated, we've been quite transparent and certainly in our view have offered a range of potential solutions to find a reasonable solve for some of these concerns that would actually maintain the objectives of the bill.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** In fact, you provided or suggested amendments to the government that would address your concerns. Did the government bring any of those amendments forward?

**Mr. Jason Kee:** No, at least during the course of the legislative review period of the bill, none of the amendments that we proposed to resolve our core concerns—again predominantly around making the availability of news very broad, including linking, and with respect to concerns about the eligibility criteria and the application of codes of ethics, etc.—were raised during the course of the committee hearings.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Yes, indeed the Conservatives brought some of the amendments forward because we agreed with some of the concerns about putting a price on links and some of the provisions that might cause misinformation or clickbait to be more prominent on the web.

Now I warned the committee at the time that in other jurisdictions, some of the larger streamers have taken action to block content. We saw that happen in Australia with Meta, and there have been several other jurisdictions. Has Google ever blocked content in other jurisdictions?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I just want to make it clear that news is available. If you think about how you access news today, this morning on the way to work you probably watched some TV, listened to the radio, went to your app and visited a social media site, and so on. News is available, and it is available through browsers, including the Google browser, etc.

In terms of the differences between the tests—and I want to reiterate that this is a test, not a product decision—versus Australia, my colleague, Jason, is an expert in search, ads and news, and I'd like to pass it to him.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** Thank you.

As Sabrina indicated—and this is important to constantly reiterate—this is just a test. There has been no decision made with respect to the outcome of the test. We are literally in a process of trying to gather information to ascertain what the potential impacts of Bill C-18 will be.

We routinely conduct these kinds of tests. We make, again, 11,500 tests per year on search. Not surprisingly, some of these kinds of tests have an impact on news. Many of them are actually intended to elevate authoritative content, which would include news content. We have conducted these kinds of tests in a variety of jurisdictions. It's normal course for us to conduct these kinds of tests, especially if there's also legislation being introduced into a marketplace that may have an impact on our products.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Yes, absolutely.

I certainly share your concerns with the bill. I have been saying all along that it's not going to help small and local media stations in Canada. Even the Parliamentary Budget Officer says that CBC, Rogers and Bell Media will make off with 75% of the money should this go forward. The alternative suggested was that organizations would provide funding for small and local media outlets as a group fund that they could sort out among themselves.

Now I understand Google has offered to do some sort of funding in Taiwan. Could you tell me how that came about and describe how that works?

**Mr. Jason Kee:** Certainly. I would be happy to.

This is actually a news innovation fund we've launched in collaboration and in partnership with the Taiwanese government. It is essentially a product of extensive engagement and conversations with respect to the government, which also, like the Canadian government, was looking to see further investment from Google and other similar platforms with respect to the news industry. It is specifically also focused on news innovation. We want to ensure that various

news publishers are properly transitioning to the digital age and building sustainable business models to ensure that they can continue to survive.

We actually engaged in extensive conversations and worked with the Taiwanese government on building this. Then there is an independent third party—the Taiwanese digital prosperity organization, I believe it is called—that is essentially going to administer the fund. Google and other digital platforms will contribute to that fund. This independent agency will then administer those funds.

• (1315)

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** If the Canadian government were willing to consider a similar type of arrangement, would Google be willing to have those discussions?

**Mr. Jason Kee:** Absolutely. Again, this is actually an innovative model that we welcome, that we encourage other jurisdictions to consider and adopt. We have consistently supported the concept of a fund, certainly throughout the Bill C-18 process. In our view, it is a way of resolving some of the core issues that Bill C-18 presents in terms of its structure. However, it still ensures that large platforms like Google are contributing into a fund that is supporting the news ecosystem, that this money is being focused on developing sustainable business models, and also, frankly, that it's supporting local and regional publications and resolving the issue of news deserts that everyone shares a concern about.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Ms. Gladu, your time is up.

We now go to the Liberals and Anthony Housefather for six minutes.

Go ahead, Anthony.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to remind everybody why we're here today. Google has had ample opportunity, including before this committee, to talk about its views on Bill C-18.

Today, we're talking about a situation in which we have over 30 million Internet users in Canada, and Google has a dominant, 92% share of the search engine market. Google applied a test to block news from its search engine to approximately 4% of users, according to its public statements. That suggests that approximately 1.2 million Canadians were affected. That's why we're here today.

Ms. Geremia, my questions are for you. I would appreciate a yes-or-no answer unless I ask you to expand upon it.

As part of this scheme, did you use individual user data to block users from accessing news sources, yes or no?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I would just like to disagree with the premise of this question.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Yes, but I asked you a question.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** News is available—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Ms. Geremia, it's my time.

My question to you is this: Did you use individual user data to block users from accessing news sources, yes or no?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Given the technicality of this question, I think Jason, who is an expert in ads and news, is the best person to answer that.

**The Chair:** Mr. Kee.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Ms. Geremia, I asked you a question. You are the person here who is the head of Google in Canada. I asked you a question.

Yes or no?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Could you repeat the question, please?

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** As part of this scheme, did you use individual user data to block users from accessing news sources?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I think we will need to get back to you on that. I'm also here with a subject matter expert on the test, who can answer questions regarding the test.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Ms. Geremia, is Sundar Pichai here today?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** With all due respect, Madam Chair, I'm here. I'm here on short notice, and I'm the head of Google in Canada. I'm accompanied by Jason Kee, who is an expert in search, news and ads. We're here to talk about Canadian legislation—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Ms. Geremia, I'm going to ask the chair to order you to answer the question. I asked you a very clear question: Is Sundar Pichai here today? You know he was summoned by this committee. Is he here?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** With respect, we've had a very short time to prepare. I'm here for the second time this week, and—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Ms. Geremia, I think you were asked to say yes or no to the question.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** The answer is no.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Is Kent Walker here today?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** No.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Is Richard Gingras here today?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** No.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** All three of them were summoned by this committee. Are you aware as to whether Mr. Walker and Mr. Gingras have visited Canada in recent months to lobby on Bill C-18? Are you aware that Mr. Walker and Mr. Gingras have been here to lobby parliamentarians on Bill C-18?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Yes, I am aware.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** They're willing to lobby against the bill privately, but not willing to come to the committee to speak publicly.

Google has sent documents to the committee, which we've recently received. My understanding is that all of the documents

Google provided to the committee are publicly available documents on Google's website. Google was asked to provide:

all internal or external communications (including but not limited to emails, texts or other forms of messages) related to actions it planned to take or options it considered in relation to Canada's Bill C-18, including but not limited to those in relation to the testing of the blocking of news sites in Canada;

and

the list of all news organizations blocked by Google, in Canada

It seems we got none of that information, but rather were thrown a bunch of publicly available information.

Ms. Geremia, did you ever write any email or send any text that related to your plans related to Bill C-18?

● (1320)

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Respectfully, Madam Chair, I have been focused on preparing for this testimony. I'm here for the second time this week, and I'm here to answer questions. This is about product tests in Canada.

There is another team that is working on the request for documentation. I am aware that they are working on it, but I am not close to the details. They have provided documentation to you, but I am not close to the details.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I asked a different question, Ms. Geremia. I asked if you personally have ever written an email or sent a text related to this scheme to block news content from the search engine or how Google should react to Bill C-18.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I would like to disagree with the premise. News is available in Canada, and this is a product test. I have—

**The Chair:** Ms. Geremia, I think that it is Mr. Housefather's time, and he's asking questions. He is very clear that he wants a yes or no answer, so can you please answer his questions? Thank you.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I am here to collaborate. In terms of Bill C-18, we've been very transparent with our concerns. We've been publishing this, etc., and we're here to answer questions.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Ms. Geremia, with due respect, the question is whether or not you ever wrote an email or sent a text that would be covered by the subject matter the committee summoned. You can answer that with a yes or no, because you have personal knowledge of that.

You're refusing thus far to answer, and the chair has asked you to answer. Is it a yes or is it a no?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** The request was very broad; it was very broad and it was on very short notice. I am aware that I am here to collaborate, and I have been very transparent about our concerns. I don't know exactly what you're looking for; I'm not really clear on what you're asking.

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

You have five seconds left. I think your time is up.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I think Canadians will think what I asked was very clear.

Thank you very much.

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

I go to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux.

Martin, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Geremia, I am going to follow up on my colleague Mr. Housefather's comments. The motion that was passed by this committee directs "Alphabet Inc. and all of its subsidiaries, including Google, to provide: (a) any and all internal or external communications (including, but not limited to, emails, texts or other forms of messages) related to actions it planned to take [...] in relation to Canada's Bill C-18 [...]"

To your knowledge, has there been any communication internally regarding Bill C-18 at Alphabet Inc., Google or any of the divisions?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I am not close to the details on the document request. I am aware that there have been documents provided—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I'm going to interrupt you, Ms. Geremia.

The question is not whether you know what the documents are, but whether there were internal communications or not. You are a multinational company. Are you trying to tell the committee members that there were no internal communications?

You've never mentioned them. You come before the committee to testify on Bill C-18, in response to which you are doing pseudotests, and you tell me that there were no internal communications.

My question is extremely simple: were there internal communications, yes or no?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Madam Chair, in the course of normal business, product experts, legal experts and, in some cases, leadership are made aware of product tests.

You can also speak to my expert, Jason, who is here. He is an expert in search, ads and news.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Ms. Geremia, we'll move on. Obviously, this question makes you uncomfortable.

We will expect Google to comply with this committee's request and eventually, and as quickly as possible, provide the documents that have been requested, because they are documents that are relevant to Quebecers and Canadians. Your current manoeuvres have repercussions and are of concern to many people.

In your opening remarks, you said that one of your criticisms of Bill C-18 is that it would encourage the creation of cheap clickbait traps at the expense of quality journalism. You also said that there is no clear commitment to a code of ethics for qualifying companies, which threatens the standards of journalism in Canada.

Ms. Geremia, are you familiar with Bill C-18?

• (1325)

[*English*]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Excuse me, Madam Chair. The translation has both the English and the French at the same level.

Is it possible to repeat the question? I feel like I'm hearing both at the same time, and I'm struggling to hear the question.

**The Chair:** I'll suspend your time, Martin, while we check what is going on here.

Thank you for flagging that, Ms. Geremia.

We should try it again. It should be good now.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Do you still hear the interpretation at the same time as the French?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I am hearing you in French right now.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Are you sure you're on the English channel?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I apologize, Madam Chair. I'm on the English channel. I've confirmed that. I'm hearing French, but I'm not hearing the translation now.

**The Chair:** We will suspend again until we find the reason for this.

• (1325)

(Pause)

• (1330)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

Thank you very much. We will continue with the timing.

Mr. Champoux, you got yourself some good time here. We suspended everything, so you can start again, but not from scratch.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Geremia, before we recessed, I was asking you if you were familiar with Bill C-18.

The premise of my question was that Google accuses Bill C-18 of endangering quality journalism by not specifying journalistic ethics criteria for determining corporate eligibility.

So I'm asking you again, are you familiar with Bill C-18 and do you know it well?

[English]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I have read the bill.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** That's fine.

In that case, if you have read the bill, you should know that there are eligibility criteria in clause 27, specifically in subparagraph 27(1)(b)(iv), resulting from an amendment that the Bloc Québécois had added and which was unanimously and enthusiastically adopted. According to this subparagraph, a news business is designated as eligible if it:

is either a member of a recognized journalistic association and follows the code of ethics of a recognized journalistic association, or has its own code of ethics whose standards of professional conduct require adherence to the recognized processes and principles of the journalism profession, including fairness, independence and rigour in reporting news and handling sources;

Tell me, Ms. Geremia, what more does it take for an eligible company to be considered a respectable journalistic enterprise?

[English]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** It's an important question.

I think the answer is in the nuance. There are different standards of ethics for different classes. There's QCJO and there are others.

I'd like to pass it to Jason, who is a real expert in this area and can shed more light on the differences.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** Thank you.

Certainly, Mr. Champoux, the introduction of the new code of ethics requirements was appreciated, but, as Ms. Geremia acknowledged, the challenge is that it does not apply evenly to all the different classes of all the news businesses that were being developed.

We have QCJO, which obviously is already in its own class and has undertaken a review, but also we have the addition of community and campus broadcasters, for example. They're not going to be subject to code of ethics requirements. In fact, technically speaking, they are not even required to produce news to be eligible for a broadcast licence, but they're automatically an eligible news business by virtue of having a broadcast licence, so the challenge that we find is that the code of ethics requirements do not apply equally to all of them, nor was there any criteria or process around how those codes of ethics will be evaluated as they're developed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I think you are giving this clause a very broad interpretation, Mr. Kee.

Ms. Geremia, you said earlier that the news was still available, that people could still find it. Do you realize that Google occupies an overarching space in people's lives, not only in the lives of citizens in general, but also in the lives of journalists, who use your search engine to do their work?

Do you realize that by blocking access for these people, you yourself are jeopardizing the quality of information, because you are preventing professional journalists from doing their job by blocking their content? That's a fact, and we know of some cases.

Do you agree that these manoeuvres, disguised as tests, are in fact unfair pressure tactics and that you should back down, stop these tests immediately and comply with the legislation that will be put in place? Do you not agree?

[English]

**The Chair:** We are now 17 seconds over time for this, so perhaps, Ms. Geremia, you may want to respond to that in another question later on.

I will now go to Ms. Mathysen for the New Democrats for six minutes, please.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

To build on what was covered before, Ms. Geremia, you said that the request for information that was made by this committee was very, very broad and that you weren't given a lot of time.

Because the committee is clearly not satisfied with the information that has been given, when do you intend to provide this committee with all the information it has requested?

• (1335)

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** My understanding is that we have provided background documents on the issue of interest to the committee.

Our experts and teams are going to continue to evaluate this document request. I know they're being collaborative. They are working with you, and they are taking the next steps with this.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** As the head of this company, I imagine that you could set deadlines for your teams to provide that information. Would you be willing today to ensure that this committee gets the information, say, in another week? We're on a constituency week next week, so we would have it by the time this committee returns.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Respectfully, Madam Chair, the team is evaluating your requests. These things take time. They're being collaborative. They are working with your side. I can't speak to their deadlines.



**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** As the CEO, I would imagine that you can speak to many of your team's deadlines. Isn't that true?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Respectfully, Madam Chair, I think I've already answered the member's question.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** There seems to be some disagreement about that in the room, Madam Chair.

In terms of the information that has been requested, can you tell this committee how you were prepped for this meeting and how you prepared?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Respectfully, Madam Chair, we were here to talk about the product tests. I have prepared with my colleague Jason Kee to discuss these product tests and the potential impact of Canadian legislation on our users in Canada.

The important thing is that we're committed to a path forward. We support the goal of this mission. We are contributors to news in Canada. We contribute in really valuable and meaningful ways. We drive 3.6 billion visits. These are free visits. Canadians get to news sites when they click on a link. It's worth about \$250 million of value to them. We have licensing agreements in place with over 150 publications coast to coast. This is called Google news showcase. It gives newsrooms the ability to—

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I believe you covered that in your introduction. I appreciate that. I'm going to move along with my time. Thank you.

Google claims that the censorship decision was made in response to the oncoming Bill C-18. However, that bill isn't law yet, nor is it a censorship bill.

This seems extremely troubling in view of the fact that now Google is voluntarily engaging in the censorship of news content. Is it normal for Google to censor news?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Madam Chair, I have to disagree with the premise. News is available to Canadians. Canadians consume news in so many different ways. It's available through browsers. Many people actually subscribe. That's an important part of the news ecosystem. They go to social media. They do other things.

The tests are in response to the great uncertainty that we described in the earlier remarks. Bill C-18 will radically change the legal landscape for linking in Canada. This is the foundation of how the Internet works. It's how we share our links. We share information and the free flow of information online. We can't assume that we're going to be able to link in the same way that we have in the past.

Due to this uncertainty, tests were conducted. These are tests. They are not product decisions. They are tests, because there is just so much uncertainty right now with this legislation. We just need to understand that.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Right, but you yourself have said that you have incredible access to Canadians. I believe Mr. Housefather said 1.2 million Canadians are potentially impacted. This absolutely does have an impact, whether it's a test or not, and that's being voluntarily done by Google at this point.

I hope I have time, Madam Chair, to squeeze something else in.

**The Chair:** You have a little less than a minute.

• (1340)

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

One of the concerns you have raised is that ultimately this will hurt smaller news sources—that it won't allow for those news sources to come forward. However, in response to the bill, some of the changes that my colleague Peter Julian, part of the New Democratic team, made have been highlighted by specific indigenous news media sources and by the spokesperson for Independent Online News Publishers of Canada.

How is it that those people in the trenches find this a positive move, yet Google does not?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Innovation, diversity and having different voices in news is really important to us. We do a lot of work on that on the Google news initiative. We've trained 1,500 journalists. We're on the way to training 5,000. We support newsrooms with tools. We've actually done a series of start-ups and boot camps for emerging voices in news from coast to coast across the country.

The question is a very good one on just this notion of the broadened eligibility versus how the bill is constructed and who it would benefit.

I'd like to pass it to Jason Kee, who's an expert in this area.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** Thank you.

Essentially, the core concern of the structure of this bill versus, say, the adoption of a fund or a similar model is that using links as the basis for payment actually has the potential to incentivize click-bait journalism. Also, it will nationally benefit the larger legacy publishers or broadcasters that have more content to link to, rather than smaller players that are not necessarily producing content of that same kind of volume.

Given that we're actually looking to incentivize long-form investigative journalism that's thoughtful versus short-form, low-quality journalism, the entire structure is going to necessarily lean towards supporting larger players—

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I'm sorry, Mr. Kee. Are you suggesting that Google is the source on what is low-quality journalism entirely?

**Mr. Jason Kee:** No, not remotely.

**The Chair:** We're going to have to go back to this answer, Mr. Kee.

You're well over time, Ms. Mathysen. I'm sorry.

I will go to the next list. It's a five-minute round.

We begin with the Conservatives. I think we have Mr. Shields up for questioning.

Sorry, Martin, it's not that I forgot you, but there you are.

You have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC):** It would be a disaster to be forgotten.

Thank you.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Martin Shields:** I have been involved in negotiations at different levels. The blocking you've done is a problem for me. The unintended consequences of what you've done, I think, are a mistake.

When I look at the compensation you're looking at.... There are weekly papers in my riding. On both sides of it, I think we've missed the local papers on this one. This committee has known my opinion on that for some time, regarding the 13 or 14 weekly papers I have in my riding. I think you have missed it. I think we have missed it in this legislation.

Your attempt at blocking.... There could have been another mechanism, in my belief, that you could have attempted to use to resolve this issue with the ministry, with the minister, instead of playing games like we saw in the negotiations that happened with Australia.

I don't think this is the way to resolve this particular issue.

I think you were proactive with Taiwan.

I don't know what you thought of the amendments that came out of the Senate. Many were accepted; some weren't. We are probably on the side on some of the ones that weren't. We would support them. We proposed them.

You have legal problems in the U.K. You have legal problems in the U.S. They're coming at it in two different ways.

Blocking is something that irritates the local, grassroots people. I don't think the unintended consequences of this move are a way to negotiate. I think it's a mistake on your part.

What is your reaction?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** The part about local news is very important. There are some really innovative stories about local news in Canada.

There's a story about Village Media. In 2016 they had a handful of employees, and now they have 145 people, 90 of whom are journalists. They're supporting 20 Canadian communities. We partnered with them through the GNI. That's one example of many. It is really important.

In terms of the premise of the question, these are product tests in response to a legal landscape for linking in Canada that has radically changed.

This is, again, the foundation of the open web. We can't assume that we're going to be able to link in the same way that we have in the past.

I really hope—

• (1345)

**Mr. Martin Shields:** I need to interrupt you, because what you say in technological terms is not how it is seen. You can call it whatever you want, but it's not interpreted that way by the end user.

You can call it a test, you can call it a number of different things, but that's not how we perceive it. That's not how consumers will perceive it.

It's tactical negotiation. You've seen this story before. We've seen it with Australia.

When I talk about weekly newspapers, I'm talking about one mom and pop.... It's not going to grow to 15 or 20. It's going to stay at one.

I have communities that depend on the local papers. You're negotiating with guys who don't need this money compared to my weekly papers. They're not going to get the money. They're not going to get what you're offering. It's not going to go to them. They're at risk in my communities. This legislation and you are not going to fix it. I'm sorry.

You can call it a test all you want, but there are unintended consequences of what you're doing, and they're going to hurt.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** You know, local news and innovative news and diverse news are important, which is why we recommended a fund. It's why we recommended solutions around that, starting with that, throughout this process. The Taiwanese example is one of more broadened thinking around this that excites me as well. I really believe in this objective and would love nothing more than a solution in this area.

I'd like to pass this to Jason, who is closer to the Taiwanese example, because I think it's an important example to discuss.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** As Sabrina indicated, the Taiwanese example is precisely the approach that we would like to adopt. It's precisely the approach to ensure that we are providing funding to, again, local and regional papers, the small players, and maybe also to those who are doing really interesting and innovative work. Those are the approaches that we've adopted.

I did want to make a quick mention that, to be clear, these are product tests. Product tests are actually a normal course of business when you're considering any range of product changes. This is actually very ordinary. I appreciate the observation with respect to how it's being perceived. It's certainly not the intent. It's also, again, us responding rapidly to a radically changing landscape, so that we can responsibly understand what the impact of those changes would be.

It's also worth noting that Bill C-18 is very different in structure from Australia's legislation. In Australia there were concerns that were basically raised.... We interacted with the government, and the government criticism—

**Mr. Martin Shields:** My time is running out. The last comment I'll make is that perception is reality. Perception is reality, and you missed it.

Thanks.

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

Now I will go to the Liberals and Lisa Hefner.

Lisa, you have five minutes please.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I would like to express how concerned and disturbed I am by this so-called test by Google here in Canada. As a former member of the media in Hamilton, I know from my constituents—they tell me regularly—how important it is for them to have access to good local news and news coverage. We know that these days, a lot of people go through a Google search to find certain stories. I'm incredibly concerned by this. I think it shows that Google is abusing its dominance in the marketplace in order to try to strong-arm the Canadian government.

I would like to remind the committee that this type of legislation actually worked really well in Australia for both big players and small local media outlets.

Madam Chair, I think we as committee members have noted that at this point, we are not getting fulsome answers from these witnesses. I move that we put these witnesses under oath.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Does anyone on the committee object to the suggestion that we put the witnesses under oath?

I see no objection, so we'll move to do that. Thank you.

Go ahead, Clerk.

• (1350)

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson):** I'll begin with Ms. Geremia.

Would you prefer a religious oath or a solemn affirmation?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** A solemn affirmation, please.

**The Clerk:** Okay. This shouldn't take too long. I'll just get you to repeat the following after me:

I—state your name—do solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare the taking of any oath is according to my religious belief unlawful. I do also solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I, Sabrina Geremia, do solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare the taking of any oath is according to my religious belief unlawful. I do also solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

**The Clerk:** That's it.

We'll move on to Mr. Kee.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** I'd like to do the solemn affirmation, please.

**The Clerk:** Thank you.

I—state your name—do solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare the taking of any oath is, according to my religious belief, unlawful. I do also solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** I, Jason Kee, do solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare the taking of any oath is, according to my religious belief, unlawful. I do also solemnly, sincerely and truly affirm and declare that the evidence I shall give on this examination shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Kee.

The witnesses have been duly sworn in, committee, so we can now proceed with Ms. Hefner's questions.

Before we go to Ms. Hefner, I would just like to suggest, first, that it's very clear what this committee wanted to meet about, and it was not only to discuss tests. It is very clear that this committee was asked for the activities of Google in reaction to Bill C-18, not limited to the decision to test the blocking of news sites. This is not a limited committee hearing.

Second, the committee asked for any internal or external communications, including but not limited to emails, texts or other forms of messages related to actions it planned to take or options it considered in relation to Canada's Bill C-18, including but not limited to those in relation to the testing of the blocking of news items. Once again, it's not limited to testing.

The committee asked for the list of all news organizations blocked by Google in Canada. There was a time to deliver this. An extra week was given to Google because of technological difficulties on Monday, so I am just putting that on the table for those listening and for Google to understand that it was very clear what was required of you, and so that in answering, since you've taken an oath, you will really consider the questions the committee has raised pertaining to your appearance here.

Thank you.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Geremia, please tell us which Canadians specifically were targeted for this so-called test and why those Canadians were targeted.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** This is a technical question that is not in my area of expertise. I'm not trying to be evasive here. I have a subject matter expert—Jason.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** It's a pretty simple question, Ms. Geremia. Do you not know which Canadians were specifically targeted in this test?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** There were no.... This was not a targeted test. When tests are done, they are done with random samples, but again, I have a subject matter expert.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** Okay, that was an answer. Thank you.

I'm asking because surveys by journalism organizations like the Canadian Association of Journalists and Unifor Media Council have suggested in the last couple of weeks that these tests were disproportionately impacting media workers, so journalists in particular, it seems, were targeted by these tests.

Is that true, Ms. Geremia?

• (1355)

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** That is categorically incorrect.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** For the purposes of this test, you needed to determine that what you were blocking was indeed a news source or news content, so how did you decide what was a news source when you were coming up with this test?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Madam Chair, I am the country manager for Google in Canada. I was aware of these tests but I was not close to the detail, and I have brought with me a subject matter expert who is in a better position to answer some of these more nuanced questions. I'd like to ask Jason—

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** Thank you.

Mr. Kee, please tell us how you decided in this Google test what was a news source?

**Mr. Jason Kee:** As part of the normal course, product teams, legal teams and other experts, including, where appropriate, leadership, will conduct assessments with respect to what the potential impacts of legislative initiatives like Bill C-18 might be.

In the case of Bill C-18—

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** I'm sorry, but we're not talking about Bill C-18 here, sir. I asked you specifically how Google is deciding what's news and what's not news for the purpose of this arbitrary test.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** In the case of Bill C-18, the effort was to utilize that bill—

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** I'm not sure why you keep referring to the legislation, sir. I'm asking about the Google test and how Google decided what was news when it decided to block news from Canadians' Google feed.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** It was effectively an effort, utilizing our experience and partnerships teams, to identify what would constitute Canadian news organizations and Canadian news domains—

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** Thank you. Did Google block users from being able to see content from the specific Canadian news organizations that already have secret deals with Google?

**Mr. Jason Kee:** The Google news showcase commercial arrangements had no bearing on the application of the test. Again, those are not secret, nor is the test.

The specific definitions of eligible news business and the application of Bill C-18 were the basis on which the tests were being undertaken, because it was really to understand what the impact would be on both the product and the users in the event that we were no longer able to serve links.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** Okay, that's interesting. Am I out?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Ms. Hefner. Yes, you're out of time.

Thank you very much.

The next person to speak will be Martin Champoux for the Bloc.

You have two and a half minutes, please, Martin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Geremia, I found it very interesting to hear you deny that these measures are having a disproportionate impact on information workers, contrary to what most respectable organizations, including Unifor, one of the largest unions in the communications sector, are saying. You have repeatedly responded that the questions you were asked were outside your area of expertise, but this one you really did answer with a confidence that bowled me over.

On what basis are you deciding at this point in your testing that your measures do not impact the work of the information workers represented by Unifor and these other organizations? What criteria are you able to rely on with such confidence at this point in time, when your tests are not even finished?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Testing is really part of what technology companies do, what Google does, and it's very clear that the samples in A/B tests, etc., need to be appropriately thought through and they are not—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Ms. Geremia, on what basis do you say that this has no impact? Have you received the results of your tests? Are you able to say that the quality of information and the work of information professionals is indeed not affected in any way by these measures? Have you received reports, results of your tests that confirm that you are right, while the workers say that it is quite the opposite?

• (1400)

[*English*]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** It's just not something that we do in testing. I'd like to pass to Jason to elaborate more. He's an expert in this area.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** There is no need, Ms. Geremia. I'll leave my question hanging, because I won't get the answer. I think you are telling us absolutely nothing about this. You can't contradict the people who are being tested now.

At every meeting this committee has held to study this issue, Google representatives have always said that they do not agree with the bill, but that they will comply with the legislation, as they do in every country where they do business.

Ms. Geremia, Bill C-18 is going to pass, whether you like it or not. Since Google claims to act as a good corporate citizen in every country it does business in, will it comply with the legislation, yes or no?

[English]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** There, thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** I now go to the New Democratic Party, Ms. Mathysen, for two and a half minutes, please.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Was the decision to censor the media through this test made by Google Canada Corporation or the parent company?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Madam Chair, I want to just disagree with the premise of the member's question. News is available. This was a test in response to legislation that fundamentally changes the legal landscape for linking in Canada. This is the foundation on which people share links across the open web, and we cannot assume that we can link in the same way that we've linked before.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** You have disagreed before; however, was the decision to run this test that of Google Canada Corporation or your parent company?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** It's the normal course of business that product teams are going to work with legal teams. There are going to be other experts, and, when appropriate, our leadership is informed to help understand potential tests and decisions.

Again, these are product tests. No product decisions have been made.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Was the conduct of this product test a decision that was made by Google corporate in Canada, or was it made by the parent company?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** In the normal course of business, product teams, legal teams and leadership are all involved in understanding this and the impact of legislation on our products.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Madam Chair...

**The Chair:** I would like to suggest that it was a pretty clear question, and I would like you to answer it, please, Ms. Geremia.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I think I've been clear that, when appropriate, leadership is involved in understanding a product's impacts and understanding testing that involves legislation.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Is it normal for senior leadership to propose these A/B tests?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** A/B testing is a normal course of business. It is a normal course of business across everything we do. There are thousands of tests that we do every year.

This is legislation that has broadened and has broadened so much wider—

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** This isn't a question about the legislation. I'm sorry; this is about the tests.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Can you repeat the question, please?

**The Chair:** I am sorry. The time is up.

I think that, as chair, I have to say that I am having a difficult time when questions are pretty clear. They're clear to me—I think they're very clear in the way they're being asked—and they are not being answered. I want to put on the record that I am noting this.

Your time is now up, Ms. Mathysen, and I am sorry that you did not get your answers.

We will move to Mr. Kevin Waugh for five minutes for the Conservatives.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I agree with you; we're not getting a lot of answers, and we're very disappointed in your testimony today, Ms. Geremia. You continue to deflect a lot of the questions, and that's not what Canadians are looking for.

There were 1.2 million Canadians who were shut out, 4% of the population who use Google, and you never told people that you were blocking them out. You just arbitrarily did it, which is another issue I have with your search engines.

How many have been affected? It was 1.2 million. Why didn't you disclose this in advance to people at home who would be searching particular sites and all of a sudden found nothing? They think it's their phone or their iPad, when in fact it's you playing with them. Why didn't you tell us in advance?

● (1405)

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I think that with product testing, there are nuances on tests, and it's the normal course of business that we don't disclose tests.

Jason is our—

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I don't want to hear from Jason.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** I'm sorry. I'm done.

We're talking to you. My questions are for you.

In the course of less than an hour, we have found out that you've now tested 11,500 times in this country. We don't know what you're testing, but you have confirmed 11,500 test results. You're going through product tests. I don't know what you're testing. You don't tell Canadians what you're testing.

It's the first time Canadians have even heard of product testing up until a week ago, so how long are you going to continue with 4% of the population—1.2 million serious Canadians, I might add—on whom you're going to continue this product testing on what you're looking for? In fact, what are you looking for?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Product testing is really a normal part of any technology company in Canada and beyond. A lot of product tests might be to improve user experience. It might be to help understand, for example, where drop-off rates are and how things can work better. It is an A/B test. One of the reasons it is done is that you want the results to be thoughtful on this.

There are tests going on all the time on trying to understand, and it's really a core part of improving user experience and improving user outcomes in technology. It is a very common practice for almost any technology company in Canada.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Could you give the committee the list of product tests you have done in this country in 2023? I'm going to narrow it down for you. After this committee, can you give us a list of the product testing you have done in this country from January 1, 2023 until today, in March? We have no idea.

I say that because, in the last two weeks...Beijing interference in this country. I say it's Google interference now. I don't know what you're testing for. Canadians don't know what you're testing for. We have no idea. Guess what? You're going to give us the list, because I'm going to demand it from Google Canada. Give us a list of what you're product testing on Canadians.

Today we find out that 1.2 million—4% of the population—happen to.... Their democratic right has been put to the side, wouldn't you say? I don't know. You might have Google-tested me. I might be one of the 1.2 million who.... All of a sudden, I can't get the Google search. Is that fair to me—not knowing you're doing this to me or other Canadians?

I don't think that's fair. You're a \$1.2- to \$1.3-trillion company. I think you exceeded your boundaries. I think Canadians would also say, today, that Google has exceeded its boundaries. I know you're upset about Bill C-18 and want product testing and all of that, but that's not what we're here for. I think Google has overstepped its boundaries in this country in deciding what the product testing is all about. We have no idea.

I would like to assure this committee that you will give us a list of what Google, in this country, has done for product testing in the last two and a half months. That will give Mr. Kee something to do, because I don't really want to hear from him. That will give him something to do when we leave committee today.

Thank you.

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

We'll go to the Liberal Party of Canada and Chris Bittle.

You have five minutes, Chris.

**Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

What we've seen here today is truly disgusting. In my seven years, I have never seen a witness sworn in mid-testimony. The members of this committee don't think you're being truthful, Ms. Geremia. It's as straightforward as that. You've been evasive to every single member of this committee. Each of us was democratically elected to represent our constituents. You pretend to not know anything. If it's truthful....

I think your shareholders would be appalled. I think you're being evasive. You owe it to the Canadian people to answer these questions. You do billions of dollars' worth of business here. Canadians expect answers. We are here to ask them. I expect answers.

These will be very clear questions.

Here's the first one: You're currently being investigated in multiple jurisdictions—the EU, the U.K. and the United States—for abusing market power. If there were a Canadian news story confirming you are being sued by the United States Department of Justice and eight states, including California, over your company's dominance in ad tech, Canadians would be unable to access it through a normal Google news search.

Is that correct? Answer yes or no.

• (1410)

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question, please?

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** You're being sued in the United States by the Department of Justice for your monopolistic tendencies. If there were a Canadian news story on that, would it be blocked to users in Canada, yes or no?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Respectfully, I can't comment on U.S. legislation.

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** It's yes or no. Would that story be blocked? Don't comment on the legislation. Would the story be blocked?

You're under oath, Ms. Geremia.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I don't understand the question.

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** I don't think you understand the gravity of this—a charge of perjury.

Would that be blocked for users in this country? If there were a Canadian news story about you being sued by the United States Department of Justice, would it be blocked, yes or no?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** If there was a story that was—

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** A Canadian news story. This is clear.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Ms. Geremia, but the question is clear to me. Can you answer, please?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** If it was a Canadian story within the ambit of the test, and the arm of the test was related to that, then the stories regarding that could [*Inaudible—Editor*].

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** I will take that as a yes. It would be blocked.

I'll even drill down a bit. Before I came up to Ottawa, I bought a car seat for my daughter. I used your product. I used Google to google the car seat. If there were a Canadian news story about the safety and efficacy of that car seat, it could be blocked under this test.

Isn't that true?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** If this were available to Canadians within the test, that is a yes.

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** Yes. Thank you.

Merrick Garland, the United States attorney general, has stated that “for 15 years, Google has pursued a course of anti-competitive conduct that has allowed it to halt the rise of rival technologies, manipulate [ad] auction mechanics to insulate itself from competition, and force advertisers and publishers to use its tools.”

If there were a Canadian news story about that, it would be blocked under this test. Is that correct?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** We're talking about news within the test, with very specific examples. It's not clear to me if you want me to just reply to that, or if you would like me to reply to—

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** It's just a very specific example. If there were a Canadian news story about that, would it be blocked?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** If there is a Canadian news story within something within the ambit of that test, it could conceivably not appear on Google, but it is not blocked. It is still available through other sources.

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** Then you would potentially block safety advocacy and thus put children at risk.

I will ask you another one. I was doing some research the other day. We're also studying violence in sport. There was a coach who was charged with sexual crimes. I used Google to search his name. It didn't come up. I used Bing using the same search terms and his name came up.

Therefore, the identities of sexual predators could also be blocked if there were a Canadian news story about them, as I found when using your product versus Microsoft's product.

Is that true under the ambit of this test?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Under the ambit of this test, if the news organization were included, that would be possible.

**Mr. Chris Bittle:** It's pretty clear that you looked at what Facebook did in Australia and said, “This is a pretty good idea; we're going to test this.”

Your conduct here today has shown limited regard for this democracy, for this Parliament, for the representatives here. I would ask that you expedite your document review so that we can compare it with your testimony.

We may need to speak to the law clerk about further actions involving Google, because this has been wholly unacceptable, Madam Chair.

Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bittle.

I now go to the third round, which is another five-minute round.

We begin with Bob Zimmer for the Conservative Party.

Go ahead for five minutes, please.

• (1415)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Thanks, Madam Chair.

I just have a simple question: Where is your CEO, Mr. Pichai, today?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I'm here to represent.... I'm here for the second time this week. I can't comment on—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Can I just follow up on that? Seeing all of the accounts of this C-18 legislation in reference to your company and the precedent it's supposed to set globally for you, I would have thought that at least you would send your CEO to speak to a country that represents 38 million people—or to the House of Commons that represents 38 million people.

I will move on to my next comment or question. I just spoke two days ago in the House of Commons about Bill C-27 and its implications for Canadians' privacy. Google once attempted to build a smart city in Toronto that would have collected massive amounts of personal and very private information for money. The basis of your business is surveillance, and you make a lot of money doing it.

We now see you as a company threatening Canadians that you will be censoring, or you have censored, 4% of the news content in Canada.

I have a simple question. Yes or no, do you think it's okay to block any news content to Canadians?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** News is available through browsers, through apps, through websites. We're talking about product tests.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** The question I asked you was a simple one. I will repeat the question: Do you think it's okay to block any news content to Canadians? It's a yes-or-no question.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Respectfully, Madam Chair, we want to provide news to Canada. We provide significant value and news to Canada. This is—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I have to move on, because my time is very short.

I take that as a yes, because you are doing it. We had a previous member speak up and ask you a simple question about blocking news on a car seat, and you agreed that it was happening.

I will move on, though, from us on this side in opposition. We don't trust Justin Trudeau either, frankly, or the legislation put forward by his government. Remember, this is the same government.... We talk about online monitoring and the digital public square and the threats that Bill C-11 poses to it, along with C-18. I think a lot of Canadians are fearful of what the Prime Minister can decide in terms of whether or not somebody will see a particular news item or cannot see it, or in terms of deplatforming a certain user or boosting another. Then we have what's before the House right now, the issue of foreign interference in our elections—and also the demonizing of peaceful protesters not that long ago.

I'm going to ask you a question about your concerns around Bill C-18. We have heard a lot of concerns about the Internet tax and the possible threat to freedom of information for Canadians.

What is the risk to freedom of information if Bill C-18 passes?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** The important thing is that Canadians want us to work together on a healthy news ecosystem. There are many ways to do this that don't actually have a cost on the free links in search. On the path forward... We've talked about funds in Taiwan. We've talked about other ways to do this.

As you can understand from this conversation, it gets very complicated really quickly. Putting a price on links is unprecedented. We haven't talked about the difference from Australia. I know that's come up many times. In Australia, no platform was designated under the bill, so the provisions of the bill remain untested. That is the difference here.

The whole point here is what the path forward is in order to make healthy news and to continue to support a healthy news ecosystem in Canada. The amendments we provided, which Jason can speak to, offer some very specific areas on how to amend the language so it's not about free links but rather about how to actually make this about news.

Again, thank you for the provisions that were made on journalistic standards. I think there's more to go, in that—

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** I know my time is probably close to up. I would make a final comment.

Frankly, from my experience previously with Google's invasion of privacy and surveillance, Canadians can't trust Google. I'd say, for most Canadians now watching, about foreign interference, we can't trust Justin Trudeau or the Liberal Party either.

Thank you.

• (1420)

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

Now I go to the Liberals.

Anthony Housefather, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to clarify this. When somebody goes to the Google search engine and expects to see news when they put in a keyword search, they will not know that news isn't there. The idea that they can just go and find that news somewhere else when they're used to using Google, doing a keyword search and expecting that all the news related to that keyword would be there, yet you didn't disclose this testing to Canadians beforehand, as Mr. Waugh said, is completely contrary to what you're saying. You're saying that they can just go find the news somewhere else. People felt that they could rely on a product in the way they always had, and they were suddenly deprived of that.

I also want to put in context the fact that Google earned \$279 billion in the last fiscal year. Google's CEO, Mr. Pichai earned approximately \$280 million in compensation in 2019, mostly through stock awards. The entire amount paid to Australian news organiza-

tions in the first fiscal year after Australia passed a news bargaining code was \$150 million. That's the context of the amounts that Google is so threatened by here.

**Ms. Geremia,** I'm going to come back. Who was the highest-ranking executive at Google who was aware of this testing before it occurred?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Mr. Housefather, it is a common practice....

Do I have an echo?

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I just want a name. Was Mr. Walker aware of the testing before it occurred?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** It is common practice for senior leadership to be aware—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Answer yes or no. You're under oath.

Was Mr. Walker aware of the testing before it occurred, yes or no? You are under oath.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** It is common practice for leadership to be aware.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Madam Chair, I would ask you to please order the witness to answer the question.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** It is common practice for senior leaders to be aware.

**The Chair:** Ms. Geremia, could you please answer the question? Thank you.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Yes, they were aware.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Yes, Mr. Walker was aware.

Was Mr. Pichai aware?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** It's common practice for leaders to be aware of product testing.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** There are thousands of tests that you have advised this committee that you do, and you're telling me that the chief legal officer and the CEO of Google would be aware of them. All over the world, Google does this testing, yet you're saying that these two individuals would be aware of this multiplicity of thousands of tests.

Answer yes or no: Was this test done in an unusual way? Were more senior executives at Google aware of this testing than of other standard tests at Google?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Because of the nature of this test, yes, senior leadership is aware.

It's normal practice for business for senior leadership to be aware.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you.



I come from the tech world. It would not be normal practice for senior leadership to be aware of normal testing. It would be if it was an unusual test of this type of scope.

Did you attempt to hide from Canadians the fact that you were doing this testing, or did you intend that Canadians would become aware of it?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Respectfully, Madam Chair, it's very difficult to do a test and to give notice of the test. Tests are not done across search and other products with acknowledgement. That's just standard course for most tech companies in the business.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Ms. Geremia, you were aware that this is a very unusual type of test.

My question is whether you believed Canadians would eventually become aware of this testing. Answer yes or no.

Remember that in Australia, you did this and people became aware of it because news organizations caught you.

Did you believe that Canadians would become aware of this test when you authorized it?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** In relation to the test—which, again, is a test; it's not a product decision—there is a chance that we were aware that folks would understand this and would see this, as you mentioned—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I think that you were aware, and I think you wanted us to be aware. You wanted the House of Commons and the Senate, particularly, which will now vote on Bill C-18, to be aware of this threat.

I think that you intentionally intended to make Canadians aware of it, so that we would be afraid to pass Bill C-18 in the Senate because of the threat that you would block news content.

Was that not the real reason you did this test, and did it with this timing?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** With respect, Madam Chair, the timing of it was because the committee process broadens the eligibility of news so significantly that there's so much detail that we don't understand. It is pretty normal to do tests. I understand—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** What did you—

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** —the gravity of what you're saying, but—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Right, so my question again is.... You knew that Canadians would become aware and what the end result would be. This was an attempt to pressure parliamentarians to do the amendments in the Senate that Google wanted for Bill C-18, and that seems to me to be the end result of what you actually intended to do.

I have one other question.

• (1425)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Your five minutes are up, Anthony.

Now I'm going to go to Mr. Champoux and the Bloc.

Martin, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Geremia, earlier my colleagues, Mr. Bittle and Mr. Housefather, gave you some examples. Mr. Bittle talked about some of the impacts that your measures could have on the lives of Quebecers and Canadians. These impacts are very important. As you know, the Google search engine is so widely used and so dominant in the market that it has become a verb: when you want to know something, you go and google it. It's the same in English, and it's probably the same in other languages.

When you occupy such a prominent position in an industry that affects the lives of all the citizens of a country, it comes with responsibilities, which I don't think you understand, if I am to believe the beginning of your testimony. However, I'm going to give you a chance to look good, because it hasn't been a very good afternoon for you so far.

The Google code of conduct ends like this:

[*English*]

“don't be evil, and if you see something that you think isn't right—speak up!”

[*Translation*]

Earlier, you were given examples of situations that could seriously endanger the lives of Quebecers and Canadians, very specific situations, but still very possible.

Unbeknownst to Canadians, you have conducted tests that may have significant implications. Will you now commit to stopping these tests that we all agree are unjustifiable? Will you commit to notifying each and every one of the approximately 1.2 million Canadians affected that they are the subject of these tests, so that if necessary they can turn to other means of information rather than thinking that the information is simply not available? Will you commit, in the future, to informing Quebecers and Canadians that they will be the subject of such tests by your company, if any?

These are questions that require a quick answer and a sincere commitment. What we have heard today, Ms. Geremia, is not very satisfactory.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds to answer the question.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** These are product tests. They have a duration and—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** They have repercussions too, Ms. Geremia.

I'm asking you a very simple question: will you commit to notifying people who are affected by your tests now and in the future, yes or no? You still have five seconds to answer me.

[English]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I will need to take that back to the team and get back to you. They will need to get back to you. I don't have the answer to that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** I expect a commitment from Google on this, Ms. Geremia.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you. We will expect that response to be sent to the clerk of this committee.

Now we go to Ms. Mathysen for the NDP for two and a half minutes, please.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Thank you.

I asked earlier about the preparation that you underwent, Ms. Geremia, for this meeting, understanding what was at stake here. Can you tell me, when you were preparing for this, did you meet with your government relations lobbyist team?

Did you discuss the impact of this testing and censorship with your government relations team?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** News is available in Canada, and I think I've mentioned that before. Yes, I've had discussions with the government relations team in response to the request to appear at this committee.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Did you discuss what, ultimately, Mr. Housefather was trying to get at in terms of the timing of this committee, the timing of your testing and the timing of the Senate's passage of Bill C-18?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** With respect, Madam Chair, we're conducting tests to understand product impacts on legislation that's not finished. The committee phase broadened it. It just became so vague and so unclear, with so many details sent to a second phase.

There's never really a good time for testing. We did the testing to try to understand potential impact. We are aware that the bill is not finalized yet.

• (1430)

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Under oath, you're saying specifically that the tests and the timing of these tests have absolutely nothing to do with the passage of Bill C-18.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Well, the fact that the committee process broadened it and it has not passed is why the tests were conducted. We're trying to understand one solution of many. We hope that there are other solutions to work through, because we share the objective of what this bill is trying to do.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Okay.

I have another question, and it actually follows along the line of Mr. Bittle's questioning in terms of all the things that have been censored, in terms of what information people were able to get.

Do you happen to know if any members of Parliament were part of that test?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Again, I want to make it really, really clear that these are random tests. The line of questioning just con-

fuses me in terms of A/B testing in technology that tech companies across the world and Canada do. That's not the way tests are run. I want to be super clear on that, although I'm not the expert on it. That is, really, how tests are run. It is a no.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** In terms of that randomization—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Irene....

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Irene. Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Oh, I'm sorry, Lindsay. I'm sorry for invoking your mom.

Now we go to Mr. Deltell for the Conservatives.

You have five minutes, Mr. Deltell.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC):** Madam Chair, I am very happy to see you. This is the first time I have had the privilege of serving on this committee, which you chair so well. I am here today replacing the member for Lethbridge, Ms. Thomas.

As permitted and required by Standing Order 108(2), I am tabling the motion of which Ms. Thomas gave notice over a month ago. I will read it:

[English]

That, given that

(a) the Senate made substantial amendments to Bill C-11, the Online Streaming Act and has returned the Bill to the House, and

(b) the Government will be preparing their response to those amendments imminently,

the committee immediately undertake a study of the subject matter of the Senate amendments to Bill C-11 and report their recommendations to the House.

[Translation]

We are tabling this motion because we are well aware that Bill C-11, which is under the purview of this parliamentary committee, has been hotly debated for a very long time. Let's remember that in other times, a few years ago, this bill was number C-10. The current government decided at that time to call an election, which we all remember cost \$620 million, to achieve a result that was pretty much exactly the same as before. At the end of the day, we lost months and months of work.

The fact remains that this is the reality and we have to deal with it. This bill, as we know, is a major one. It is about the Broadcasting Act and it is about refreshing a long-standing piece of legislation and dealing with the challenges of the 21st century, the year 2023 in particular, and other years.

This major bill therefore deserves major work. That is why the Senate has debated it and been concerned about it. As we know, our political party has no control over what happens in the Senate. However, the senators, true to their reputation and obligations, have done a studious job and decided to table several amendments, which of course must be examined. As expected, our job as parliamentarians will be to determine what is good and what is not in these amendments. This is not a minor matter.

[English]

What we are talking about is the future of Internet and the future of *radiodiffusion* in this country. This is why we have to be very serious in our study. The senators have done their job directly and well. Sometimes we agree and sometimes we disagree, but they have done what they are supposed to do, and they have done it well. If we want to be serious on this bill, we have to hear what they have to say and look at what they have adopted.

[Translation]

We have also given notice of this motion, which allows some latitude, as you will have noticed.

In the last few weeks something has happened that is not trivial. I'm a Quebec fellow and I'm the member of Parliament for Louis-Saint-Laurent. Of course, what happens under provincial authority in the capital of Quebec has an impact on us. Since we are concerned, we feel that it is the duty of the 78 members from Quebec and the 338 members of the House of Commons to take note of the fact that a provincial assembly is taking a position on a bill debated in the House of Commons and the Senate, the two houses of the Canadian Parliament.

Thus, on February 4, the Honourable Minister of Culture and Communications of the Government of Quebec requested that the federal government take into account and acknowledge Quebec's wish to express its views on this: the possible ability that the government has given itself in clause 7 of the bill to directly guide the choices of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. The Government of Quebec wishes to speak out on this matter.

We believe that when a provincial executive takes a step in this direction, it is our duty as parliamentarians to take it seriously. Let us recall that, a few days after this letter was sent, the 125 members of the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously adopted a motion asking for exactly the same thing: that the will of Quebec be respected and that Quebec have a say in this matter, since, as we know, Quebec is the home of the French fact in America.

In view of the fact that the provincial executive, that is to say the government, and the provincial legislature have asked with one voice that Quebec be allowed to have a say in this bill, it is quite clear that this request is legitimate. I would remind several of my co-workers that my colleague, the member for Charlesbourg-Haute-Saint-Charles, on more than one occasion, offered the Minister of Canadian Heritage the opportunity to give his point of view on this issue and on the request made by Quebec. We didn't ask for it just once, we asked for it twenty times.

That is why we want this motion to be adopted.

• (1435)

I would have much more to say, but my time is up.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have a motion on the floor.

Is there any discussion on the motion?

Mr. Waugh.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Madam Chair, I'll be very quick.

I would like this to come to committee. We have seen the concerns out of Quebec. I've been with Bill C-10 and Bill C-11 for over two years. I would love one more shot at coming back here to look at the eight amendments that were turned down by the Liberals in the Senate. I would like to have one last look at it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

Is there anyone else wishing to speak to this?

Ms. Gladu.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you, Chair.

I would like to have this talked about at committee, this motion, because I missed the joy of studying Bill C-11 when it came by the first time. I'm very concerned that one of the Senate amendments that would protect...would exclude individual user content was rejected by the government.

Definitely, we need to have this back for that discussion and to hear some testimony about it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Seeing no other hands up to discuss this, I will call the question on the motion.

(Motion negated: nays 7; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** We will go back to the order of the day. I think we have 15 minutes left.

We have Mr. Housefather next up, for the Liberals, to question our witnesses.

• (1440)

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Mr. Coteau is going to take the time.

**The Chair:** Mr. Coteau, for five minutes.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I guess my first question is for the CEO of Google.

How much revenue does Google Canada make per year?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I am the country manager of Google Canada.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** The country manager. I'm sorry.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Thank you.

We're a global company, and we report our revenues globally—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** You can just tell me the amount—how much—if that's okay.

I'm sorry. I have only five minutes. I don't mean to be disrespectful.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

We're a global company, and we report our revenue globally. We don't report out country by country, but we do have an impact of \$37 billion of economic impact in Canada, and this is the 1.9 million businesses that work with us that actually use our products.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Thank you so much. Again, I have only a few minutes.

From my research, I know that digital advertising is about \$15 billion in this country. I think Google is responsible for about half of that across the country. It's a relationship that works well between Canadians and Google Canada. Obviously, there's a service that's provided and they benefit mutually. I understand that.

This relationship on Google's side comes with a lot of responsibility. You're the distributor of news, of content, and I believe that blocking news from people intentionally is a breach of this responsibility, of this trust that should exist between the citizens of this country and an international organization like yours.

Back in the late 1700s, the postal offices in the United States had control of all distribution of news. They didn't create the news, but they distributed the news, like Google does. There were certain news agencies that were being blocked, and legislation was passed to say that the postal office couldn't interfere with the distribution of content in mass media like that. To me, it seems like this is happening. Even if you say it's a 4% testing piece, it's still happening. You're actually blocking news and content from Canadians, and there's a huge responsibility you have as an organization to allow the news to be accessed freely.

I have a question for you. Who do you report to?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I report to the president of the Americas.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** From a governance perspective, board-wise, do you report to a chairman, a chairperson, a chairwoman of a board in Canada, or is it directly to the CEO of the Americas?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I do not report to the board.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Who is this person you report to, by name?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Sean Downey.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Did you have a conversation with Sean about this intentional blocking of news?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** This is a test. News is available to Canadians, good news—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** No. I'm asking you a very simple question. Did you have a conversation with Sean, yes or no?

I would assume, if you report to Sean, that you would actually say that you're about to go testify at Parliament about this issue and, by the way, it's the issue around news being blocked.

Did you not have that conversation?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Madam Chair, the leadership was aware. I think I've answered that—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Did Sean know?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Sean was aware, yes.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Did you have a conversation with him?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** We have had a conversation about—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Did you have a conversation with Sean, yes or no, about this issue of news being blocked?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Sean is aware. The leadership is aware in the normal course of business in Canada.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Your boss, you and the folks you report to were all aware that Canadians, who rely on the news and who rely on good content, were intentionally being targeted—4% of them—with some algorithm that I'm sure you won't share with us, and they were intentionally being blocked from certain content.

What does the term “don't be evil” mean to you as a Google employee?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** You're right to point out the importance of our role as Google employees in Canada—

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** What does that term “don't be evil” mean? Where does that come from? As a Google employee, do you know the history of that term?

• (1445)

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** The history of that term was in our founder's letter, and we have an impact in Canada of \$37 billion. We work with 1.9 million businesses.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I wasn't asking for that.

“Don't be evil” came from one of your founders. The reason they actually put that out there—it was one of the founding mottos, and it was a bit of a jab to their competitors—was that they thought their competitors were exploiting users.

I would say that—

**The Chair:** Please wrap up, Mr. Coteau. You are running out of time.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** If you, as an organization, actually intentionally block Canadians from getting good news content, that is not aligned with that original model—those guiding principles the company was founded on.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

I think we are looking at 10 minutes left. I would like to get a sense. How much time do we have left for this room?

Three p.m. is the deadline. We have 10 minutes.

Can I do a quick round with everybody? You could each do, maybe, three minutes.

Is that good? That will take us to maybe five minutes after.

The next person on would be from the Conservatives.

Do you have anybody who wants to go?

Kevin, I'm sure you would.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Yes.

I'm going to start it, and then I'm going to share with Ms. Gladu, and then she is going to share with Mr. Zimmer, each of us for one minute.

When is this product testing going to end in Canada for the 4% who have been affected in the last two weeks or so? Of course, that's the 1.2 million Canadians.

Ms. Geremia, when will the product testing end for this round?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Jason is the expert on the tests and can answer that.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** The test is scheduled to end on March 16.

**Mr. Kevin Waugh:** Thank you.

I'll switch to Ms. Gladu now.

**The Chair:** Marilyn, go ahead.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you, Chair.

My question is a technical one for Mr. Kee.

In terms of choosing the random Canadians who were involved in this specific test, how were they randomized? Was it by IP address? Was it according to news consumption habits? What were the criteria?

**Mr. Jason Kee:** They were identified as Canadians predominantly by their IP address. Other than that, it's completely randomized, using basic technological systems to do so.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Very good. Thank you.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Zimmer.

**The Chair:** Mr. Zimmer, go ahead.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Since we have Google here, as we know, the issue of smart cities has been coming up recently amongst many concerned citizens. You've admitted you're testing limiting news sources to Canadians. That brings the whole smart city question back up again, along with concerns about your being honest with users of your platform.

Then again, we don't trust the Prime Minister either. The CRTC is an arm of the government, and the threat to freedom of speech is a concern there as well. I'd say that today you have not reassured us in any way, shape or form that Canadians are okay with what you're doing.

I will just finish by saying that you couldn't answer certain questions from members here today, and I think it's a shame that your CEO, Mr. Pichai, wouldn't show up to answer our questions this morning.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Zimmer.

Now I go to the Liberals and Anthony Housefather.

You have three minutes, Anthony.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you.

Ms. Geremia, did your company consult with outside counsel before running these tests?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I am not aware. I'd need to take that back to the team and get back to you.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Okay. In preparation for these hearings, did you have any meeting at all with the other three witnesses who were summoned by the committee but who didn't appear today?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I did not have a meeting with the three of them, no.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Okay. Theoretically, they seem to have sent you here in their name, and you obviously do not, since you didn't meet with them, have access to their personal knowledge, which this committee wanted to get. I think we're going to need to hear from them and we're going to need to make sure they come.

Let me go to another question.

Google claimed that Bill C-18 could help spread misinformation and propaganda in Canada. However, in response to legislation, Google ran similar tests in Australia in January 2021. At that time, it blocked access to fact-based news sources and, in their place, as was shown, promoted sources of questionable quality—like The Epoch Times, for example—that were known for spreading a certain side of the story.

Did you do this when you did these tests in Canada, or did you take steps to make sure the errors you acknowledged having made in Australia were not made in these tests?

• (1450)

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** Madam Chair, I'd like to pass it to the expert in this area, who is Jason—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** No. I asked you, Ms. Geremia. You are the witness we invited today, not him.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I do not have the answers to those questions. I'm not able to answer that.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** That's fair. I totally understand if you can't answer that question.

Ms. Geremia, one other question that I have is this. I know the Government of Canada advertises on Google. Do you think as a result the Government of Canada should cancel all of its advertising on Google, given the way you handled this test?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** These are product tests. These are not product decisions. I can't speak to the decision of the government—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** My last question, Ms. Geremia, is this. On a scale of one to 10, with one being the worst testing idea in the world and 10 being the absolute best, how would you rank this test, in your estimation, now having these facts in front of you as to how Canadians have reacted? That is one, worst; 10, best.

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I don't have an opinion on a ranking of these tests. I know this is in response to a bill that's going to change the landscape of linking in Canada. These are—

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** At this point, is Google embarrassed, in any way, about the way it conducted these tests? Does it wish it hadn't?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** It's a normal course of business to do testing. We want a path forward. We want to support a news ecosystem in Canada that's healthy and diverse. We have brought ideas to the table. This is not Australia. This is something very different, and I think Canadians would like us to find a path forward.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Google is listened to, and Google is not the Parliament of Canada. In the end, the Parliament of Canada makes decisions on Canadian laws, and not Google.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I now go to the Bloc.

Martin, you have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Geremia, let me come back to the issue of quality journalism. Another of the reasons I am shocked is that Google said that the new law would have a negative effect on the quality of online journalism. I wonder what makes Google an expert in this area. What makes Google any more reliable in determining what is quality journalism and what is poorer quality journalism? That's a comment, not a question.

Your manoeuvring—you call it “testing”, but we'll call it manoeuvring—leads me without hesitation to believe that you don't value quality journalism. You said earlier that Google, as a company, supports the fundamentals of an open web and the free flow of information.

I'm asking you a simple question: do you feel that these “tests” support that statement?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** I'm sorry, but there was a bit of a jumble between the English and the French at the same time. Can you repeat the question, please?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** Is conducting such tests, which block access to journalistic content and information, consistent with the company's claims that it supports a free and open Internet and the free flow of information, yes or no?

This is an easy question, actually. The answer doesn't suit you, but I think it's clear, Ms. Geremia. What is it?

[*English*]

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** We want to support journalism in Canada. We want to support open access to information—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Champoux:** All right, that's fine, Ms. Geremia. We've only got three minutes, and now we're being told stories again.

The answer, which common sense would dictate, is that if you promote the free flow of information, but you block access to that information, you are countering your own statements. It's that simple.

I have a few seconds left, so I'm going to go back over some points.

This committee has asked you to provide documents, which we have not received. All we have received are documents that are publicly available on the Google website. I expect, as do the rest of my colleagues on the committee, to receive all of the documents we have requested as soon as possible.

In addition, I asked you earlier to commit to notifying people who are the target of your random or targeted tests, present and future, to avoid situations that could become very unfortunate. I hope you don't wait for something dramatic to happen before you take action on the way you conduct your tests.

Finally, I hope you will take note of the questions, comments and reaction of Quebeckers and Canadians to what I consider to be an absolutely disloyal and not even subtle manoeuvre as a response to a bill prepared and studied by the elected representatives of this country. It is truly a very sad attitude, and I hope you will correct it without delay.

• (1455)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

Finally, we'll have Ms. Mathysen for three minutes.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** I just want to re-emphasize the difference here in the fact that Bill C-18 is not law, yet Google Canada has gone forward and, as Mr. Bittle clearly pointed out, limited specific information to specific people based on this random test.

It's been discussed, of course, before, by you, Ms. Geremia, that Google has quite a significant impact and quite a significant share in terms of how Canadians find out information and how they access news. Censorship of the specific news that people see cannot be minimized. Every single member of this committee has specifically said that.

As Mr. Champoux mentioned as well, it's very important that you take that back and that we see some changes in terms of how that testing is implicated.

I also never really got a response in terms of this randomization of your so-called testing. I find it very dangerous to try to call it that, because it's ultimately a minimization of what you're doing, but it could have implications for someone like a member of Parliament, and the limiting of a member of Parliament's access to information, as was somewhat seen here today, is a violation of their parliamentary privilege.

In terms of that testing, have you and your legal team entirely considered the implications of what you have done in terms of Canadian safety and in terms of that legal side of limiting information?

**Ms. Sabrina Geremia:** These are randomized tests, and Jason can speak to the detail.

**Mr. Jason Kee:** With respect to your specific question, as Sabrina has indicated, these are A/B tests whereby we're basically trying to ascertain what the product impact is. To be clear, this is our attempt to be responsible. This is why companies do A/B testing. They want to understand fully what the implications are before they deploy anything at scale.

With respect to your specific question, I'm not aware of whether or not there were specific considerations undertaken with respect to MPs' parliamentary privileges.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** In terms of the danger of limiting specific information on safety, on legal precedent, on what have you,

do you not recognize the danger of the limiting of that information to specific people and trying to pass it off as a test?

**Mr. Jason Kee:** Again, the important element to raise here is that product tests simply no longer service links to websites per se. Again, all of this information is still accessible by any other means, and this is normal course. This is generally how technology companies will test potential product implications, but certainly the seriousness with which this has been communicated to us is well taken, and we will definitely be taking that message back internally.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** That's excellent news, I think, for the end of this.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Mathysen.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I think you have been asked to produce certain things. Please remember that you need to send them to the clerk of the committee, and they will be distributed to the members so that we can receive the information we asked for.

Thank you for coming.

I now call this meeting adjourned.

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