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Chair: Mr. John Brassard



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC)):
Good morning, everyone.

[Translation]

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 122 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, May 7, the committee is commencing its study of compliance of a minister to the Conflict of Interest Act.

Before I begin, I want to remind everyone again about the earpieces. Make sure that when they're not in use, they are on the stickers that are on the table, so that we don't have feedback for the interpreters as well.

I want to thank everyone for their co-operation.

I also want to state that all of the interventions are to go through the chair this morning. I want to make sure there is enough time for answers and questions.

I don't want any interactions where we have two people speaking at the same time. I'm going to give an equal amount of time to the questioners and to the minister to respond. I don't want people jumping in. We have to be mindful of interpretation, not the least of which is the fact that the right information is getting interpreted, but also, again, to further protect our interpreters from any potential injury.

With that being said, I want to welcome the Honourable Randy Boissonnault, minister, who is appearing for the first hour.

Mr. Boissonnault, you have up to five minutes to address the committee.

Please go ahead, sir.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I have a quick question.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order.

Mr. Parm Bains: Before we begin, I have a quick question regarding the question of privilege motion that was being debated last meeting.

Page 154 in the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* clearly outlines the process by which a question of privilege is dealt with at committee. In the interest of time, we'll forgo a recap of everything that transpired up to this point. I'll also not read the entire passage, but I want to highlight one line, which is, "The motion is debatable and amendable, and will have priority of consideration in the committee."

In my opinion, debate on that motion should have superseded the agenda today. However, out of respect for our witness and other committee members, I will abide by the agenda as published.

My question for you, sir, is this: Will you provide the opportunity for debate to continue on the question of privilege motion at Thursday's meeting?

The Chair: Why don't we get through this and then I can answer that at the end of today's meeting. I'll leave a little bit of time with the minister and I'll let you know what the plan is.

Is that fair enough?

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you.

The Chair: Minister Boissonnault, you have up to five minutes to address the committee.

Go ahead, sir.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm happy to be here at committee to address the innuendo and misinformation that has been spread by the opposition over the last few weeks.

Mr. Chair, it's the nature of partisan politics that we have vigorous and even fiery debates. It's the job of the opposition to hold the government to account. I understand this dynamic and I respect it. However, even the rhetoric of a hyperpartisan Conservative Party needs to at least take into account the actual facts of a situation.

Let's begin with an essential fact. Canada has one of the strictest ethics regimes in the world for elected officials and that is exactly what Canadians expect. I have always conducted myself in an ethical manner that follows the spirit and the letter of those rules.

On that note, I am grateful to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner for reviewing the claims made by Mr. Barrett and the media, and for the commissioner's conclusion that there is no need for his office to look into this matter further. The impartial, independent and non-partisan body in charge of the rules has made its decision. That should be respected.

• (1105)

[Translation]

On that note, I am grateful to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner for reviewing the claims made by Mr. Barrett and the media, and for his conclusion that there is no need for his office to look into this matter further. The impartial, independent and non-partisan body in charge of the rules has made its decision and that should be respected.

I have always fulfilled my obligations under the Conflict of Interest Act, and I have worked with the Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner. When I was elected in 2021 and appointed to cabinet, I began the process of organizing my professional affairs in accordance with the Conflict of Interest Act.

[English]

Working with the commissioner's office, I placed my company, Xennex, and a numbered company that holds investments, under the management of a third party, as required by the act.

To act as the third party, I chose Ms. Kirsten Poon, who, in addition to being a former employee, has also been a friend of mine for more than a decade and was a person I trusted to manage things. My past business and personal relationship with Ms. Poon was, and continues to be, reported to the Ethics Commissioner's office, as required by the act.

I would also note that since my election, Xennex has ceased day-to-day operations and Ms. Poon acts, effectively, as an administrator for the companies to ensure that needed tax filing and other paperwork are filed.

Despite innuendo to the contrary, I am not a lobbyist. I have never been a lobbyist and I have never had any interest in being a lobbyist.

[Translation]

In fall 2021, as part of the finalization of my affairs as a private citizen, my lawyer informed Global Health Imports Corporation, or GHI, that I was leaving my position as a director. As stated in the Global News articles, it is the responsibility of a company to update the relevant federal and provincial trade records in the event of a change in director. However, since this was not done in a timely manner, my lawyer submitted the necessary update to ensure that the situation has been resolved, which is reflected in both registries. Since being elected, I have had no role in the operations of GHI. I have no idea of the financial or operational situation of this company or any of Mr. Anderson's ongoing commercial ventures.

[English]

I would now like to turn to the misinformation that some Conservatives have been trying to spread regarding these circumstances.

First, there has been much innuendo about the fact that Edmonton International Airport, which was a former client, had meetings with staff in other ministers' offices and also received grants from the Department of Transportation and PrairiesCan since I took office.

I want to be clear. I in no way facilitated such meetings. I would also note that the Edmonton International Airport is the fifth-largest airport in the country as well as a major hub for the movement of goods and people.

[Translation]

Second, it was noted that over the past two years, I had received revenue from Navis Group, owned by Kirsten Poon. Mr. Chair, I must say that this is already known, because I disclosed these revenues to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and then in my public statement, in accordance with the rules.

I also clarified that the revenues I received and disclosed were all for work I did between 2019 and 2021 as a private citizen. None of that revenue comes from work done since I took office, and none of it is related to the lobbying work done by Ms. Poon's company.

[English]

It comes as no surprise to me, Mr. Chair, that the Conservatives have tried to double down on innuendo and misdirection to try to distract from all of these facts. It appears, unfortunately, to be a deliberate attempt to mislead Canadians by portraying what has been fully disclosed to the Ethics Commissioner as scandalous, when no such scandal exists. For them, following the rules, being open and transparent, meeting all the obligations and having the Ethics Commissioner see no need to evaluate my business affairs are simply inconvenient obstacles that can get in the way of a social media clip.

Let's move on to questions, Mr. Chair, after which I'll get straight back to work serving Edmontonians, Albertans and all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault.

Before I go to Mr. Barrett, I'm going to remind you, sir, that you are here today because of a motion that was passed by a majority of members on this committee.

Mr. Barrett, you have six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Minister, there's fraud and there's another Randy in a "partner call" at your company. What is the other Randy's last name?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Barrett, I do not know the name of that person, as I stated in my opening statements before at committee. I have no operational role with GHI. I do not know that person in question. That person is not me.

• (1110)

Mr. Michael Barrett: What is your percentage stake in the company?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: As has been disclosed in my disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner, a 50% stake in GHI is held by my holding company.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Who are the partners of the company?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I do not know.

Mr. Anderson, to my knowledge, is the only administrator of that company.

I have no connection other than holding the shares to that company, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You're holding half of the shares.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Half of the shares are in my numbered company, as disclosed to the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Do you know who holds the balance of the shares?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: When I was involved, the last time I looked, it was Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It's your understanding that you, Randy Boissonnault, and Mr. Anderson are fifty-fifty partners in the company.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That is not correct.

The shares are held by 2256956 Alberta Ltd.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Who owns that numbered company?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I do.

Mr. Michael Barrett: That's cute.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: It's not cute, Mr. Barrett. It is—

Mr. Michael Barrett: There's a question about this other Randy that's been reported.

I know the contention, sir, is that you'd like for this to be something that the opposition has created, but this has been reported in the media. The media has uncovered a number of things, including text message exchanges with someone who's named by one of your partners as a partner, and who they refer to as "Randy". No last name of that Randy is available. The only Randy we know who's involved with the company is a minister in the Trudeau government.

Who were the partners in that company in 2022?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I do not have that information, Mr. Barrett.

Let me correct the record, Mr. Chair, on the question. I'll go through you, Mr. Chair.

I am not the person in those texts. Mr. Anderson confirmed that it's not me.

I have a quote from the article that you're talking about, Mr. Barrett, which is from the Ghaoui Group. It reads, "We have had no direct communication with Mr. Boissonnault at any point in our dealings with Stephen and the companies," because I have had no active role in GHI since I was elected in 2021.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay. You said publicly you didn't have anything to do with Stephen Anderson's business deals on behalf of your PPE company, Global Health Imports. Is that right?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I have had no active role in GHI since I was elected, and, Mr. Barrett, you said yourself in your question this morning—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Related to deals that—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, may I answer?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, I gave—

The Chair: Hang on a second. Let's stop the clock.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay.

The Chair: I'm going to ask Mr. Barrett to continue. He has another question.

Minister, prepare for an answer.

Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: On the way the meeting is going to run, I gave Mr. Boissonnault more than twice the amount of time to respond to both of my previous questions than I spent asking the questions. If I have a short question and the minister wants to run the clock, that's obviously not going to demonstrate fairness in the proceedings.

The Chair: I think I made it pretty clear at the top of the meeting, Mr. Barrett, that my expectation today is that as members ask questions, an equal amount of time is going to be given for those responses.

Minister, I ask that all members respect that.

I'm not going to be the timekeeper here, other than the six minutes, but if I see that a member is going a little bit off in terms of time, then I will intervene.

Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have three minutes and 16 seconds.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Related to deals with the Ghaoui Group, you didn't have anything to do with the alleged wire fraud?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Barrett, I have been very clear that I have had no operational dealings with GHI since I was elected, and you, sir, indicated at the start that the "Randy" in the article was not me.

Mr. Michael Barrett: That company alleges that you were involved. Are they telling the truth?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: They're not correct, because I've had no correspondence from them. Mr. Anderson indicates very clearly in this morning's article that that "Randy" is not me.

Mr. Michael Barrett: We have text messages implicating you, sir, in this wire fraud, and it was carried out by your business partner to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

One of them reads, “What is going on? I just received this from Randy. It’s 13:14 MST and 15:14 EST. It literally takes 10 seconds to complete a transfer. I’m telling you we are not allocating like this. Please reach out and see what the reason is now. You assured me this was done this morning first thing and allowed you to hold this stock today. It’s mid-day and nothing is completed. I’m calling Felix to discuss. Be available for a partner call in 15 minutes.”

Sir, it seems like you’re trying to conceal your involvement in a matter of fraud. Why?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, that is completely beyond the pale. It’s completely false, and it’s not true.

The article states very clearly that the Ghaoui Group had no contact with me, which is true, and Mr. Anderson indicated this is a different Randy.

Mr. Barrett, your first name is Michael. Mr. Cooper’s first name is Michael. Are we to confuse your two identities here at committee when you ask questions of me that are spurious in nature?

Mr. Michael Barrett: I look forward—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: There’s more than one Randy here and no lawsuits—

• (1115)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, I look forward to Mr. Boissonnault being in opposition—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I didn’t have time to finish my answer.

Mr. Michael Barrett: —and having the opportunity to—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: He asked a very long question, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Michael Barrett: —and having the opportunity—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: He asked a very long question. I have more seconds.

The Chair: I realize that, Minister.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There are other—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I have time on the clock to answer that question.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There are other texts as well that outline how quickly you wanted this wire transfer to go through, and—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Barrett, that is not me, and you cannot state that for the record. It is simply not true, Mr. Chair. That is not true, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just hang on a second.

Look, I thought I made my expectation very clear at the beginning that questions will be asked and time will be given to respond.

I am going to Mr. Barrett.

Minister, please don’t intervene. I’m going to ask the same of the questioners as well.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead. You have a minute and 12 seconds, sir.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Like the lack of respect for procedure at committee, we’ve seen the same lack of adherence to ethics rules. The minister talked about Canada’s stringent ethics rules. His government, of course, including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, has twice been found guilty of breaking those laws. That’s why we have questions about alleged law breaking by our witness, by the minister.

The company has been trying to get the money back, the company that was defrauded of \$500,000 from your business. Where did the money from the—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, it is—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): I have a point of order, Chair.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: He is not stating facts and I cannot let falsehoods go, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: He didn’t finish his question. You’re going to have ample opportunity to answer.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thirty seconds was the length of my question.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I know you’re protecting his clips, Mr. Chair, but he is stating falsehoods.

The Chair: No, I’m not. I’m not actually, Mr. Boissonnault. I’m actually—

Mr. Michael Barrett: We have a corrupt minister from a corrupt government.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That’s not true.

The Chair: Ask your question.

Mr. Larry Brock: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That is simply beyond the pale. Mr. Chair, that is outrageous behaviour by that member.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett—

Mr. Larry Brock: Can I have my time? I’ve asked for two points of order.

The Chair: I’m going to you on your point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: I have never in my almost three years of public service seen such disrespect of a minister—

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): I have a point of order.

Mr. Larry Brock: —for the procedures here at committee.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have a point of order.

Mr. Larry Brock: He’s constantly talking over the witness, and now he’s talking over the chair.

The Chair: I have a point of order.

Mr. Larry Brock: It is conduct unbecoming.

The Chair: I have your point of order, Mr. Brock. I appreciate that.

Mr. Barrett, you were at 34 seconds in your intervention, so I'm going to ask you to ask your question and—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have a point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Housefather, on your point of order.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chair, referring to someone as corrupt is unparliamentary. I would ask that you order it be withdrawn.

The Chair: I'm sorry. You'd ask that I order it what?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I would ask that you ask Mr. Barrett to withdraw those comments. It is unparliamentary to refer to someone as corrupt.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, I am going to ask that you withdraw those comments, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Alleged corruption by a corrupt government.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That was not a withdrawal, Mr. Chair. That was a doubling down.

The Chair: We have a point of order from Monsieur Villemure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

All members of the committee agreed to hear from Mr. Boissonnault so that he could explain the situation. However, for the moment, I can't understand what's being said because everyone is talking at the same time.

The Chair: That's what I said earlier.

[*English*]

I don't want this to descend into a point where everybody's talking over each other. I'm going to enforce that. I have been enforcing it, but I'm going to enforce it from this point forward. Otherwise, we'll be wasting our time here and we won't be able to ask the questions we want.

Mr. Barrett, you have 34 seconds. Do you have a question for Mr. Boissonnault? I want to give him an equal amount of time.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Through you, Chair, we'll give the minister an opportunity for transparency, for a first.

Minister, will you provide this committee a copy of the letter notifying in writing that you wanted to be removed as a director from this company? Further, will you provide any financial records related to this company?

Will you provide them to the committee?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, there is a well-established practice done by the Ethics Commissioner that every single member around this table has to go through. The standards are higher for parliamentary secretaries and ministers. I have followed that pro-

cess to the letter. All of those documents were provided to the commissioner of ethics.

Mr. Chair, the Ethics Commissioner sent me and Mr. Barrett a letter indicating that there was no need. He took the decision that there was no need to look into my business affairs and no need to evaluate them. I have followed the rule to the letter.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault and Mr. Barrett.

Ms. Damoff, you have six minutes. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Before I start, I have a point of order.

Mr. Cooper has just called me disgusting. I would ask that he please remove that. It's not appropriate.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I was dealing with other issues.

Mr. Larry Brock: I have a point of order.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): I have a point of order as well.

The Chair: I didn't hear it, Ms. Damoff. I'm sorry.

Ms. Pam Damoff: He's done it twice, Chair.

The Chair: I didn't hear it. I apologize.

Mr. Larry Brock: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, those who live in glass houses should be very careful about throwing stones.

• (1120)

The Chair: That's not a point of order, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: It is, because Ms. Damoff used the very same language towards my colleague Mr. Cooper. I heard it very clearly on more than one occasion, Chair.

The Chair: The chair did not hear it, because I was obviously busy dealing with some other issues.

Ms. Damoff, I will ask that you continue for six minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have a point of order, Chair, before Ms. Damoff starts so that I don't interrupt her time.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It's a practice at other committees, and this one in the past, that when a request for documents is made, there's confirmation by the clerk to the witness that the information's been requested.

Is the committee to understand that the witness will provide the documents that were requested to the committee or not?

The Chair: Mr. Boissonnault, will you provide those documents that have been requested by Mr. Barrett?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I was very clear in my answer. Any documents related to my affairs as a private citizen before becoming a public office holder have been provided to the Ethics Commissioner and his team. They have looked at those documents. The Ethics Commissioner has concluded that there is no need to evaluate my business affairs.

[*Translation*]

Full stop.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

If the committee feels compelled to request those documents, you can do so when you have the floor, Mr. Barrett.

Go ahead, please, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

On May 7, CSIS reported that disinformation is the biggest threat to Canadians, and more than 84% of Canadians are somewhat concerned with this issue. I'm really disheartened that the Conservatives would prefer to go on a witch hunt against a minister of the Crown versus continuing and finishing our study on misinformation and disinformation.

Mr. Boissonnault, when you become a minister, is the procedure involved with documentation the same as it is for a member of Parliament? I would note that none of the opposition members have ever had to complete the documentation. As a parliamentary secretary, I have. I know that it's quite extensive.

Could you maybe discuss that?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Absolutely, Ms. Damoff.

When you become a public office holder, as you have experienced, there's a much different approach from just sending in your annual report as a member of Parliament. There are financial documents. Your partner, your spouse, your significant other, your common-law partner—they get scoped into the process. It is an intense process so that you comply by the 120-day mark.

In my case, we had to figure out what to do with one holding company, one active business. I got advice from the commissioner of ethics that I needed to have a third party. I went all through that.

I think the other thing that's really important, Ms. Damoff, is that it's my financials. It's investments. It's everything related to my personal life. It's the personal finances of my life and my partner's life that the commissioner gets to see. I don't think any of us would want to be poking our noses in other people's personal financial business. We have a different system. We have one of the strictest ethics regimes in the world.

The other thing I'll say, before you get to your next question, is that it's not just a one-time thing. It's a continual process. I have to constantly decide and make sure that we're complying with the act. I recuse myself from nominations and appointments all the time so that I stay on the right side of the act.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You have to file the reports annually. In addition, as part of the conditions when you file those reports, you can't have any knowledge of what's going on. I recall that I couldn't even

hold shares. I had to move any stocks I owned into a blind trust or—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Absolutely.

Ms. Pam Damoff: —have mutual funds, and this needs to be filed annually.

To imply that you are somehow still involved would indicate that you've contravened the act, yet the commissioner has gone through your documents and has vetted them and said no, that you didn't. Is that not correct?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That is absolutely correct. The commissioner has said there is no need to evaluate my business affairs.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I want to ask you a personal question, Minister Boissonnault.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Sure.

Ms. Pam Damoff: When the Conservatives go on these witch hunts and say things like “you're corrupt”, call you “disgusting” or say that you're “part of a corrupt government”, what impact does that have on you and your family?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I can tell you that we've had people parked outside of my house for six weeks with a threatening vehicle that switches out every three to four days to comply with by-laws. Then, whatever Pierre Poilievre says in the House of Commons gets written all over those windows. My partner didn't sign up for that and neither did anybody on my block. It comes directly from the anger and the fear that the Conservative Party is spreading in this country.

I can tell you, Ms. Damoff, that it breaks my heart that you have made the choice that you have made to no longer serve your community and our country, because you are a phenomenal parliamentarian and an amazing parliamentary secretary.

When truth, reason and facts leave this place, it damages democracy. The decisions made by people around this table have life-altering consequences for people who do not put their name on a ballot.

I do not think that everybody around this table treats Canadians with the respect and care that they should when they become a member of Parliament.

• (1125)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do you think Canadians expect more of members of Parliament? There are only 338 of us here. I consider it a great privilege to be serving the constituents of Oakville North—Burlington, and when colleagues start accusing others of lying, which is in essence what happened during the previous testimony and when, despite your answers, you were being contradicted by Mr. Barrett, do you think that it behooves us to behave in a more respectful way to one another?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I think at another time and another place with a different Conservative Party, a letter from the Ethics Commissioner clearing a member of Parliament, regardless of party, would have been enough to move on to committee business.

I don't know what's happened at this committee that it is embroiled in partisan attacks and can't get to its own business, but it is a sad day when that's the case.

I can tell you, Pam, what people say to me at their doors. They say, "Whether you're a member of Parliament, a member of the legislative assembly, a councillor or a school trustee, we elect you all to get along and to get stuff done for us, and game playing and name-calling are not what we want to see." I was at doors last weekend, and I heard it again.

We can all hold ourselves to a higher standard, and I hope that we get there in this committee and across government.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I will say that, in the past, I used to find that committees were the one place where collaboration would take place and where we were able to accomplish, I would say, really great things. We have a study on misinformation and disinformation that I think could be helpful for Canadians. Instead, this committee regularly gets deadlocked on the latest gotcha moment, and it's unfortunate that we're stuck in the mud because of accusations.

I thank you for being here today, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for being with us today.

My constituents in Trois-Rivières are familiar with my background as an ethicist and often ask me questions about this committee's work. Some of them were interested in your being here today. They were troubled. They asked me to tell them what was going on and to give them some clarification.

Take two of my six minutes and tell me that story. What brings us here today?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That's a very good question, Mr. Villemure.

I think part of it has to do with what Ms. Damoff said, which is that some Conservatives want to make clips for social media.

I was elected in Edmonton Centre in 2015. Then, in 2019, I didn't win the election, but I got my seat back in 2021. During my two years as a private citizen, I relaunched the company I founded in 1999 to earn a living. In fact, it was in the middle of a pandemic. I was alone in my office, and I rebuilt my network to work with people on various projects. In particular, I worked in Bolivia for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, to help that country rebuild its democratic institutions properly. I also worked with an organization in Thailand that wanted to help LGBTQ+ people have more space in civil society.

I also founded the Global Equality Caucus. This is of profound importance to me, because as a gay man and a gay parliamentarian, when I went to international events, I sought to meet with people like me to have discussions about how to move projects forward for

our community, but there were no international fairs, so with a member of the House of Lords and a senator from Colombia, we created this international network.

In short, when I regained my seat, since I had agreements and clients, the Ethics Commissioner and his team said that I had to shelter this and that I had to entrust the management of my affairs to a third party. I appointed that third party, and I was always up front with the commissioner about the fact that Ms. Poon was registered as a lobbyist. I had known her for 10 or 12 years, so I had a great deal of confidence in her. That's why I appointed her the director of my businesses, which means that she sends documents to the Canada Revenue Agency every year. I submitted all the information to the Ethics Commissioner, who said there was no reason to look into my affairs.

The question is, why are we here today? In my opinion, it's because the Conservatives are trying to pick a fight and want my seat. They're here to try to belittle me, but I'll participate in the next election campaign, and I'll keep my seat because I serve my constituents with integrity as a responsible member of Parliament.

• (1130)

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you very much.

You've just touched on the subject of my second question, which is why we're here this morning, but I'll add something.

I heard my colleague's questions earlier, which were quite vitriolic. Why are you here this morning, and why is there so much hate?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I think the Conservative Party today feels threatened by all the changes we're seeing here in Canada and elsewhere in the world. The Conservatives can't control these changes, and they're angry. That creates a certain rage within that party and a certain desire to diminish institutions and do harm to our country.

The Conservative Party Leader said that the charter's notwithstanding clause could apply to human rights. Is it my rights that are going to be circumvented? Will it be your rights as a francophone? Will it be the rights of trans people or the rights of indigenous people? What does he want to apply the notwithstanding clause to?

It boggles my mind that the Conservative Party today is so enraged by things it can't control, such as climate change, which it denies exists. Instead of looking for solutions to problems that we can see, such as forest fires, it wants to deny the reality and return to a country that no longer exists.

For all these reasons, I think the Conservatives are going to use every means at their disposal to win seats, and I'm going to prevent them from doing so in Edmonton Centre.

Mr. René Villemure: At least it's clear.

I have two last questions for you, in closing.

First, what am I going to say to my constituents in Trois-Rivières to summarize our exchange with you in one sentence?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: You can tell them that I followed all the rules.

Mr. René Villemure: It's as simple as that, okay.

From your point of view, is there anything that could be improved on the Ethics Commissioner's side of things, to avoid this kind of situation, apart from the aspect that was mentioned earlier?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Villemure, you have a doctorate in ethics, if I'm not mistaken. You're one of the people who suggest studies to this committee. We have one of the best systems in the world, although it can always be improved.

I think we have to explain our system to Quebeckers and Canadians so that they can understand the level of scrutiny with which the Ethics Commissioner examines our personal files. I think it would go a long way to reassuring Canadians that we have a robust system here in Canada.

Mr. René Villemure: In your opinion, then, the system has worked well.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I reacted according to the current system, and it's up to the committee to determine whether it wants to suggest other changes to our system.

I can tell you that I've always followed the rules. I worked closely with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and his team.

That's why I was able to answer your question, which was very clear, that Minister Boissonnault followed all the rules.

Mr. René Villemure: You followed the letter and the spirit of the rule.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Absolutely. If we want to encourage people to get involved in democracy, I think it's important that they know there are systems in place to separate privacy from public affairs. I make sure every day that I'm on the right side of the law.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you very much, Mr. Boissonnault.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault and Mr. Villemure.

The next speaker will be Mr. Green.

You have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you.

Minister Boissonnault, the time between your last elected position and your most recent election was how long?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I was elected in 2015. I lost the 2019 election, and I won the 2021 election.

Mr. Matthew Green: In two years, you created a company that was essentially a consultancy. Is that correct?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: No. I had a consultancy from about 1999 until the time that I was first elected in 2015, when I made sure that the company—

Mr. Matthew Green: In your two years, what was the nature of the business that you created here?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I didn't create a new business, Mr. Green. I simply restarted my business, Xennex, which is a manage-

ment consultancy. As I indicated to Mr. Villemure, I had many clients, and my forte, if you can use that—

Mr. Matthew Green: What experience did you have in procurement and PPE?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: With respect to that company, which I have no more work to do with, we were at the time of a pandemic, and we were at the time of a great call—

Mr. Matthew Green: What experience did you have prior to this procurement that involved PPE and procurement?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: With 15 years in business, Mr. Green, I was able to make sure that we had products supplied to my community. I had 15 years in business. This was a decision to start a business. There were tens of thousands of businesses that started up during the pandemic to help our country and our community, and this business was one of them.

• (1135)

Mr. Matthew Green: You got into procurement to take advantage of the opportunities that were presented in COVID and perhaps your relationship with the Liberal government.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I wouldn't say that.

Mr. Larry Brock: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Boissonnault, Mr. Green was in the middle of his intervention asking a question.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm going to ask that you let him finish, and you'll be given an equal amount of time to respond.

Mr. Green, go ahead. I did stop your clock.

Mr. Matthew Green: In your earlier testimony, you stated that the Ghaoui Group had no contact.

The article states in reference to the text that they mention a Randy. It is stated in this article that has been referenced, to refute the Conservatives' claims, that it was "Ghaoui's understanding that Anderson was referring to Boissonnault, whom Anderson had told her was a partner at GHI and a public official, a representative of Ghaoui Group wrote in a statement."

There's an obvious contradiction here that is public. While it is true that you may want to appear before this committee and act as though this is simply a Conservative witch hunt, I would tell you that from my perspective as a New Democrat, this doesn't pass the sniff test. Please explain this very obvious contradiction between your testimony and what is being stated here.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Thanks, Mr. Green.

Mr. Chair, through you to Mr. Green, there are some baseless comments in your intervention. Let me just be really clear. I had nothing to do with the Ghaoui Group. I have no ongoing role in this company, and I haven't since I was elected.

The article itself, and I'll repeat, says, "We have had no direct communication with Mr. Boissonnault at any point in our dealings with Stephen and the companies." That's from the Ghaoui Group. Mr. Anderson confirmed in the article that I am not the Randy in question.

I would also say that, you know, you put words in my mouth and said “take advantage”. I never said that, nor did I say the W-word, because I’m very careful to use that word. I am here to answer questions, as the ethics committee has asked me to.

Mr. Matthew Green: Sir, listen. That’s all great, but you’re providing contradictory testimony. The nature of your dealings with a business model that you have no previous experience with, given the size and the scope of the procurement, raises questions for the average Canadian. It raises questions for an objective person looking at this deal when, in your own testimony, you’re stating that you’re not even aware of who the owner is. Who is the other Randy?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Green, I stated this earlier to Mr. Barrett. I do not know the name of this person. I have no operational role in that company. I do not have any line of sight into who operates the company, and I would not be able to because of the very strict rules in ethics. I will state very clearly that I had 15 years of business experience with the clients—

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay. I’ll state very clearly, sir, that you decided—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: —and I was able to translate that into something to help the community.

Mr. Matthew Green: —to list Kirsten Poon’s company as 2050877 Alberta Ltd. on your disclosure forms and not include the trade name of the Navis Group. That, to me, sir, no matter how much you want to obfuscate, looks like an omission that is intentional.

Would you agree that receiving direct payments from a registered lobbyist would appear to show a conflict of interest?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Green, there are two things there.

When I was a private citizen, I worked with a numbered company that, after I was elected, changed its trade name to the Navis Group. Moreover, I was required to use the legal name of the company in my ethics disclosure forms; that was a directive issued by the commissioner’s team. When I first did my disclosure with the Ethics Commissioner, as I explained to Ms. Damoff, the company that I was aware of was still the numbered company. I wasn’t aware of the name change.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Boissonnault, I’ve operated a business myself, sir, and in these types of disclosures, you would put an “operating as” to give disclosure about the nature of the company so it could be cross-referenced against procurement.

Why then have a deferred payment arrangement made? How long will you be receiving payments from the Navis Group?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Green, just to be clear, it was stated in a response to Global News by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner that they required me to use the numbered company, not the operating name. When I worked with that numbered company, it did not have an “operating as”; it was simply a numbered company.

• (1140)

Mr. Matthew Green: I filled out those sheets too. You could put in the section “operating as”. It’s just a matter of whether you want to be forthcoming or not.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I think I’ve answered this question, and it was a requirement—

The Chair: Give a very quick response.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: —to use the numbered company.

I have provided all information regarding my financial affairs and my business affairs to the Ethics Commissioner, who has said there’s no need to look into my affairs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Green.

That completes round one.

We’re going to go to the five-minute rounds and then two and a half and two and a half.

Just as a reminder, there will be equal time for the question and for the answer. I don’t want people interrupting each other. Wait until the question is asked and wait until the answer is given. If I have to intervene I will in order to move things along.

Mr. Cooper, you have five minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister Boissonnault, you held the title of partner at GHI before you were elected. Is that correct?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I actually can’t remember that, but partner was the title I used while I was operating the company.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for confirming that.

GHI is not exactly a big operation. There was you, there was Anderson, and there were a few employees. Is that correct?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That is correct.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Then who was the other Randy?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I do not know who the other Randy was. They were somebody who was hired after I was, but I do not know—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you.

You claimed—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I do not know who that person is, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It was four seconds and four seconds.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You have a 50% stake in the company. There are only a handful of people there. You presently have a 50% stake in GHI, and you mean to tell me you have no idea, out of a handful of people, if it is not you, who the other Randy is. Are you serious?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds. Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I have had no operational involvement in this company since I was elected. The company has hired and probably let go of people since I was there. I am not allowed to know about the operation of this company, Mr. Cooper, because it is not permitted by the Ethics Commissioner, and so I followed all the rules.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Minister, thank you for that.

Minister, that is nonsense, and you know it.

I'm going to go to the text—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: It's not nonsense, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, that is not a fair statement. It's not nonsense. It is the truth.

The Chair: Let him finish, please, Mr. Boissonnault.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Minister, your answer simply doesn't add up. There's more to it than that, because if it's some other Randy, then why did the Ghaoui Group believe that the Randy referenced in the text messages was you? Why?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, it would be inappropriate for me to have anything to do with operational matters. I stepped away from the company in the fall of 2022. Of course I don't know who the employees are. In the article today, it says that I am not—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Why is it, Minister—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: —that Randy.

Mr. Michael Cooper: It doesn't add up. It doesn't.

The Chair: He has three seconds.

Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I am not the Randy in this article, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: It doesn't add up, Minister. If it's not you, how is it that Global News couldn't verify who the Randy was? Anderson said there was some other Randy in charge of logistics, but when Global News looked into it, they found that the guy who held himself out as responsible for logistics is one Edward Anderson, not a Randy.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Cooper, I have no operational relationship to that company, and so the matters of staff are not in my purview.

Let me state again, for the record, from this morning's article, from the Ghaoui Group, "We have had no direct communication with Mr. Boissonnault at any point in our dealings with Stephen and the companies," and Mr. Anderson has said that that Randy is not me.

I have not received any communication from—

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Through you, Mr. Chair, Minister, in looking at the text message from Randy to Anderson, it states it's

15:14 eastern standard time. This is a text to someone who is in Alberta in a text message about a client in California.

What is 15:14 eastern time? Well, it happens to be the time zone of Ottawa. Is that just another coincidence, Randy?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I have no idea, because I did not receive those texts, and I have no operational relationship to this company. It's a time zone—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Would he be available for—

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, just let him respond, please.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: It's a time zone in a text that I have nothing to do with. Mr. Anderson has said that's not me. Mr. Ghaoui—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Well, it's another piece that doesn't add up.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I am now being interrupted.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, he has eight seconds. Let him respond, please.

Go ahead, Mr. Boissonnault.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am not the Randy in question. Mr. Anderson has indicated that I'm not the Randy in question, and the Ghaoui Group has said they've had no communication with me.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Not only is it eastern time, Ottawa, but it also says to "be available in 15 for a partner call."

You said you had previously been a partner. Is it just another coincidence? Is it just another Randy?

• (1145)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: The operational word in your statement, Mr. Cooper, is "previously". I ceased to be an officer and a director of GHI in October 2021, full stop.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, go ahead. You have 25 seconds.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Minister, Ghaoui Group thinks it's you. Global News can't track down who the other Randy is. The Randy who's texting happens to be referencing eastern time. You happen to be a member of Parliament serving a lot of your time in Ottawa. You said you were a partner. The text message references a partner. This is a small operation. You have a 50% stake, and the fact that you can't identify who the other Randy is doesn't pass the smell test. If there isn't another Randy—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: —then you, sir, broke the law.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: May I respond, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: It's the end of the time. You can respond in the next round.

Mr. Fisher, go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Can I start with a point of order?

You're out of order, Mr. Cooper. You can't make comments like that.

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

Mr. Fisher, you have five minutes.

Go ahead, please. Start your intervention.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

All MPs—backbench MPs, opposition MPs, parliamentary secretaries and ministers—have forms that they need to fill out for the Ethics Commissioner. Can you talk about what is required of a minister? You've been a PS as well. Talk about the strict requirements of a minister.

You talked, in your opening statement, of taking the necessary steps under the Conflict of Interest Act. You talked about some of those steps. I tried really hard to pay attention and follow, but there were so many interruptions. I'm going to ask you if you could outline.... I've never been a minister, and probably never will be a minister, but I'd like to know a little bit about that higher level of scrutiny you undergo, which, perhaps I and other members of this committee don't.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I appreciate that, Mr. Fisher. The scrutiny is intense. You have 120 days to comply from the start, and if as a minister you have stocks, you have to sell them. If your life partner has stocks, you have to sell them. You can only hold mutual funds, and you have to make sure that there's no operational connection between you and any businesses or non-profit associations that you would have operated at some point.

In my case, it was not just to make sure that everything was compliant with the act in the first 120 days. When you're a minister, compliance isn't an end point; it's a fluid process. What's important to note is that I have made the decision, rightly, to recuse myself on appointments and nominations. I've always been very careful to make sure that I respect the rules that are set up by the Ethics Commissioner, and he himself has said that I followed the rules, and there's no need to look into my business affairs.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you, Minister, and I appreciate the clarity that you've provided through that statement.

You've probably heard of the news about Conservative MP Branden Leslie crafting and circulating a fake-news video online. You're an interruption today into our misinformation, disinformation, mal-information study, which I had found as a new member of this committee to be absolutely super interesting. Notwithstanding the fact that—

The Chair: Mr. Fisher, I've stopped your clock there.

I'm going to remind you that a majority of the committee voted to have Mr. Boissonnault here as part of this study, so it's not an interruption of anything. This was a decision of the committee. He is here, as the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner will be, because a motion was passed by this committee.

I just wanted to clarify that for you.

Thank you.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you for the clarification, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Boissonnault, in my remaining time, is there anything else you would like to put on the record?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I'll restate that I'm not a lobbyist. I've never been a lobbyist. I never registered as a lobbyist, because I never wanted to be a lobbyist.

To your other question, Mr. Fisher, I hope the committee will be able to get back to the business at hand. I'm happy to appear here so people understand the Ethics Commissioner asked me for information; I provided that information and the Ethics Commissioner said there was no need to look into my business affairs.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, with respect to calling relevance on me in this particular instance when there has been very little call for relevance for many members of this committee recently, I take some umbrage with that.

• (1150)

The Chair: You can. I was clearly explaining and reminding you that it was a matter of relevance. It is a matter of fact that a motion was passed by this committee.

You still have a minute and 38 seconds.

Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Boissonnault.

I've been listening to the questions for some time. The Ethics Commissioner told you that there was no problem with your statements and that there was no need to investigate further. That's what you told us. However, have you had discussions with the Commissioner of Lobbying?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: To the first question, the answer is yes. It is confirmed. The Ethics Commissioner has indicated that he doesn't need to look into my personal affairs.

As far as the Commissioner of Lobbying is concerned, I haven't received any communication from her because I'm following the rules.

I was a parliamentary secretary during my first term, so my five-year period isn't over.

I never wanted to be a lobbyist, I never registered as a lobbyist, and I never have been one. I haven't received anything from the lobbying commissioner.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I understand and accept your statement that you never wanted to be a lobbyist. However, that doesn't prove that you've never contravened lobbying rules, even if unintentionally, so my question is whether you made a request to the Commissioner of Lobbying to check, given the activities you've carried out between your two mandates, whether your situation posed a problem.

Have you done any more digging on that with the lobbying commissioner?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Since I was parliamentary secretary, I always followed the rules that applied to me. There was no need to confirm that I had followed the rules, since I had followed them.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I believe Ms. Poon is registered as a lobbyist.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Correct.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Did she discuss with you whether or not your activities could contravene any of the provisions of the Lobbying Act?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I always made it clear to her and to any other client that I would never arrange a meeting with a member of the government or assist anyone in holding a meeting with a federal agent or representative.

Therefore, I never did.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Your company was involved in discussions around the Calgary airport, I believe. Correct me if I'm wrong.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: It was the one in Edmonton.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Were you personally involved in those activities? Did you take any steps?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I never attended any meetings between representatives of the Edmonton International Airport and the federal government.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I never set up a meeting with the federal government about this airport—

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: —because it would have been a breach of my responsibilities—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boissonnault.

[English]

Mr. Green, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Minister, when was the last time you had a conversation with Kirsten Poon?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: It was earlier this week. We are friends. We've known each other for 15 years.

Mr. Matthew Green: You chat. How frequently would you suggest you are in communication with Ms. Poon?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Depending on the time of year or what's going on in our friend circle, we would communicate a couple of times a month, perhaps, if not more.

Mr. Matthew Green: Ms. Poon is a registered lobbyist.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: She is no longer a registered lobbyist. My understanding is that she ceased to be a lobbyist in June 2022.

Mr. Matthew Green: You received payments from her prior to that.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That is not true. What happened is that, for work that I did while I was a private citizen, we made sure that all of the dealings that I had as a private citizen were provided to the Ethics Commissioner—

Mr. Matthew Green: When was the last payment you received from Ms. Poon?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Green, you know there's a process for that, and that information is with the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner indicated—

Mr. Matthew Green: Are you refusing to answer a basic question, Randy, that would help provide some light on this topic?

When was the last time you received money from her?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: No monies were received by any company that I'm responsible for from Ms. Poon in 2024.

• (1155)

Mr. Matthew Green: That wasn't the question I asked. When was the last time you received money? Was it 2023 or 2022? When was it?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Green, that matter is with the conflict of interest commission. I provided everything to them, and the Ethics Commissioner has said that there's no need to look into my affairs.

Mr. Matthew Green: Well, that's great. We'll talk to him next and certainly look at the loopholes that are in that.

Why did you decide to have a deferred payment arrangement?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Green, that is a relationship that was done while I was a private citizen. I shared all of that information with the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner has made it very clear that I have not—

Mr. Matthew Green: Did you not receive money while you were a private citizen?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: —that there's no need to look into my business affairs.

Mr. Matthew Green: Did you not receive payment while you were a private citizen?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I received income as a private citizen while I was making a living as a business person, yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: At some point you decided on a deferral agreement. When did you make that decision?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Green, that information has been provided to the Ethics Commissioner. The Ethics Commissioner has looked at my business affairs and said there's no need to look into them.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have a point of order, Chair.

Mr. Matthew Green: Has the CRA?

The Chair: Hold on, Mr. Green. I've stopped the clock.

I have a point of order from Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Does the procedure committee not require that a witness answer a question?

Not knowing the answer to a question or providing an answer that isn't satisfactory to the member asking are not open to debate; however, refusing to answer a question of a parliamentarian at committee is and has been found to be a contempt of the right of the parliamentarian who has put the question.

Therefore, Chair, on a refusal to answer a question, it is a fact that this is not permissible. I put to you, Chair, that the minister is refusing to answer a member's question—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I am not refusing to answer any question.

Mr. Michael Barrett: —and that's not acceptable.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Barrett, we dealt with this with Mr. Wernick. When he was here, I clearly stated that the expectation of the committee is that the witnesses will provide answers to the questions.

I'm going to leave it to Mr. Green, in the very short period that he has left, to conclude this round, and then we're going to go to other rounds here.

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): On the same point of order, Chair—

The Chair: The expectation is that the minister will answer, and then it'll be up to the committee to decide. If they're not satisfied with those answers, then they can take action, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: I'd like to speak on the same point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Green. We have another point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. McKinnon.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Mr. Chair, I would like to comment that the minister has not refused to answer any questions. He's given answers—

The Chair: That's debate, Mr. McKinnon.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: I'm responding to the point of order. The allegation is false. He's given answers. They just don't like the answers.

The Chair: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr. Matthew Green: On the point of order, sir...

The Chair: Mr. Green, go ahead on the point of order.

Mr. Matthew Green: Given that I'm part of the topic of the point of order, I reserve the right to also submit to you, sir, that he

has refused to provide answers to this committee. He's done it on multiple occasions in two minutes and 23 seconds. I would like to say that this is what I would consider to be a breach of the powers of this committee.

I would suggest to you that nobody, whether a parliamentary secretary or a cabinet minister, is above the procedures of a standing committee. That is why he's here before us, Mr. Chair.

I would ask, through you, on this point of order that the member provide in writing—and he can refer to the Hansard for the subject of the questions that I've asked him—a response, sir, and failing to do so puts him in breach, in my opinion, of the Standing Orders and powers of this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

On that, I am going to ask the clerk on your behalf, sir, to review the Hansard and to submit the questions that have been asked of Mr. Boissonnault and have him respond to the committee.

Madam Clerk, just make a note of the time on that.

Mr. Matthew Green: How much time do I have left in my round?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds by my clock, but—

Mr. Matthew Green: Okay. I'll take the 15 seconds.

The Chair: I ask that you continue, sir. Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: With my 15 seconds left I will say that, in the opening remarks, the minister suggested that this is somehow a Conservative witch hunt. I share with you that, as a New Democrat and someone responsible for—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I said no such thing.

Mr. Matthew Green: As a person on this ethics committee and a proud New Democrat, I share that this is not the case, and I just say, Randy, that your testimony today has not helped you out.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

I am going to limit it to three-minute interventions at this point, and I apologize to the committee for that. We're going to Mr. Brock, followed by Mr. Housefather, and that will conclude the time we have. That will take us to 12:06, which is roughly the time...we started, not taking into account many of the interruptions we had.

Mr. Brock, I give you three minutes. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Larry Brock: Thank you, Chair.

With respect, Minister, I share MP Green's latter comments that your testimony has not been helpful. In fact, not only are you disrespectful, you are exhibiting traits that, in my old career, I would classify as a lying witness. You've been evasive—

• (1200)

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That's not appropriate, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Larry Brock: Well, it is.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That's not parliamentary language.

The Chair: I suggest, Mr. Brock, that you not use that language.

Mr. Larry Brock: You have the inability to tell the straight facts and to tell the straight goods, Minister. There lacks the ring of truth in what you have to say.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. McKinnon.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Mr. Brock's language is definitely unparliamentary. He needs to withdraw it, and he needs to apologize.

Mr. Larry Brock: I'm not withdrawing, Chair.

The Chair: He used a different context. I'm going to allow him to do it and ask him to continue.

You have a couple of minutes, Mr. Brock. Go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm sorry, but on the same point of order—

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Damoff, on the same point of order.

Ms. Pam Damoff: —I've heard in the House, many times, the Speaker say that you can't say indirectly what you can't say directly, and that is exactly what Mr. Brock just did. We cannot call each other liars or...providing untruths to Parliament.

The Chair: I appreciate that. I think Mr. Brock understands your point of order.

I ask him to continue for the next couple of minutes.

Mr. Larry Brock: Canadians are watching. They pay particular attention every time a minister appears at committee. What you've done, sir, is just displayed a complete lack of respect for policies and procedures at this committee, leaving aside the evasiveness of your responses and, clearly, the lack of ring of truth, as I've indicated.

On the issue of what was reported this morning on Global News, did you take it upon yourself to reach out to your former partner and ask for clarification as to who this other Randy was?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Brock, on that particular point, I have no operational role—

Mr. Larry Brock: Yes or no, sir, did you reach out?

I have three minutes.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I have seconds to respond to your—

Mr. Larry Brock: Sir, I have three minutes—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I believe—

Mr. Darren Fisher: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Brock, just allow the minister to respond to the question. I know we're on short timelines here, but please allow Mr. Boissonnault to respond to that.

Go ahead.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I have no operational role in that company. I am not the Randy in the article today.

Let me give you an example, Mr. Chair. I don't know why Mr. Brock received income from the Province of Ontario while he's been serving as an MP, but I assume he cleared that with the Ethics Commissioner in the same way that I cleared my—

The Chair: Mr. Boissonnault....

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: —business dealings with the Ethics Commissioner, and no investigation or evaluation of my business affairs will take place.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Brock, go ahead.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The question that Mr. Brock asked was well over a minute, and the response was 25 to 30 seconds—

Mr. Larry Brock: No, there was a preamble. It was a yes or no question.

The Chair: Well, I think he concluded.

Go ahead, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: I ask again, Minister. You're laughing at the whole process, but Canadians are not laughing and they're not siding with you. Did you reach out to Mr. Anderson this morning after you read the Global News report, yes or no?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I am not the Randy in that report. The article—

Mr. Larry Brock: Did you call Mr. Anderson?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: No. Why would I call Mr. Anderson? I would not. No. Under the ethics—

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have a point of order, Chair.

Mr. Larry Brock: Clearly Mr. Anderson didn't want to provide the surname of Randy.

The Chair: Mr. Brock, the answer—

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I gave the answer.

The Chair: Mr. Brock, he said no.

Do you have a point of order, Ms. Damoff?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes, I do, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Out of respect for our interpreters, people are interrupting and it keeps happening—

The Chair: I agree.

Ms. Pam Damoff: —and it's so unfair to the people who work so hard for us.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Could we please just knock it off?

The Chair: Yes, and I've made that very clear.

Go ahead, Mr. Brock. You have literally 20 seconds, sir.

Mr. Larry Brock: Minister, will you provide to this committee details of your text messages for all of the phones that were in operation on September 22, 2022, so that this committee can determine if you are in fact the Randy the text messages are referring to, the Randy who the other partner wants to communicate with?

Will you reach out to your service provider and provide us with details of your text messages on that day from all of your devices? Answer yes or no.

The Chair: Minister, give a quick response, please.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I have no operational role in this company. I do not know who this Randy is. It is not me, and it's clear in the article that it's not me.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

I'm going to take that as a request from Mr. Brock. Again, I'm going to ask the clerk to follow up on that request.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: On a point of order, I would like to observe that a request from a member is not the same as a request from the committee.

The Chair: We can follow up and ask. If Mr. Boissonnault decides to submit to the request from Mr. Brock, he's capable of doing that. If he doesn't, it's up to the committee to determine which direction it's going to go on this, and that could include moving a motion on the matter. We can make the request. It's up to Mr. Boissonnault to submit to the request or not.

Mr. Housefather, you have three minutes. Go ahead, sir.

• (1205)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister Boissonnault, do you know what the 28th most popular boy's name was in 1956?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I do not.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Randy. Do you know how many Randys were born that year?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: I do not.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: There were 28,000.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That's a lot of Randys.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It is a lot of Randys.

Can I ask a question about your business? You were a businessman at a time when you were not in politics. When you earn income, does it always come all at once?

For example, let's say you set up a client and enter into a contract with a client. They buy goods, and they've committed to buy goods over a period of two years.

Would it not be normal that a salesperson or anybody who negotiated that agreement is paid over that extended period, whether or

not they remained with the company, given that they were part of that initial agreement?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: That would be reasonable.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: All of these bombshells we've heard today about how there was a text message from somebody named Randy in Canada.... It's shocking. The idea that somebody could be paid deferred income because they were part of a company—they negotiated a deal and left the company—seems shocking to me.

Is this as shocking to you as it is to me?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: After 20-some years in business, it's not shocking. It is a customary practice. The reason it's important that we have a really strong ethics regime is so that a third party neutral arbiter can look into those matters and make sure that they comply with the act.

That is exactly what I did. That is why the Ethics Commissioner said there was no need to look into my affairs.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That's understandable.

The question came up here.... I totally understand we're in pride month. Can I ask you, briefly, how it made you feel when a member of Parliament earlier this week said he would vote against gay marriage?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault: Thankfully, we're in a different time and a different place, where gay marriage is real. I can tell you that when that happened, it was one of the happiest days of my life. I ran in part because I could see the country changing, but I come from a province that still struggles with recognizing 2SLGBTQI people, and we have a long way to go.

This Conservative Party is not clear on the record as to how it would support trans people, gender non-binary people and LGBTQI people, and I have grave concerns that a future Conservative government under Pierre Poilievre would suspend my rights using the notwithstanding clause in the charter.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I yield my time.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

That concludes our first panel for today.

Minister, I want to thank you for taking the time to appear before the committee.

I'm going to suspend while we switch over and have the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner appear before us.

The meeting is suspended. Thank you.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1210)

The Chair: We're going to resume now.

Our next panel is from the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

I would like to welcome the commissioner, Konrad von Finckenstein, and also Lyne Robinson-Dalpé, director of advisory and compliance.

Commissioner, the floor is yours for up to five minutes.

Go ahead, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein (Commissioner, Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for inviting me.

With me today is my colleague Lyne Robinson-Dalpé.

As we join you today, I recognize the weight of responsibility entrusted upon our Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the work of this committee. Our democracy relies fundamentally on the integrity and transparency of its elected and appointed officials and our ability to safeguard public trust.

• (1215)

[*English*]

It is with these principles in mind that I see the twofold purpose of the regimes we administer. One is to help public officials avoid and manage their conflicts of interest and the second is to facilitate the movement of qualified people in and out of the public service.

Qualified, competent, experienced people who are called to public service may well face conflicts of interest. That's not unusual. The issue is how to avoid and manage those conflicts and to protect the integrity of officials and the institutions they serve.

[*Translation*]

Minister Boissonnault is an example of someone who has moved in and out of public service, and back again. Upon his first election as a member of Parliament in 2015, he complied with the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons. He also complied with the Conflict of Interest Act when later appointed as parliamentary secretary.

[*English*]

Between 2019 and 2021, when he was not an elected or an appointed official, he resumed work with Xennex Venture Catalysts Inc., which I'll call Xennex hereafter. It's a company that was incorporated in 2000 of which he owns 100% of the shares. It is a management consulting company that gained a contract to lobby on behalf of the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority.

The minister resigned as director of Xennex when he was re-elected and again became subject to the code as a member and subject to the act as a minister.

Kirsten Poon became the director of Xennex and continued to lobby in the Xennex name on behalf of the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority until June 21. After that day, the lobbying was done in her own company's name, 2050877 Alberta Ltd., operating under the name of Navis.

Minister Boissonnault received no remuneration from Xennex after being elected and appointed minister. However, he disclosed to us that he was owed an outstanding business income from Navis. That amount was subsequently paid by Navis to Xennex.

Minister Boissonnault has 100% interest in 2256956 Alberta Limited. It in turn owns 50% of an affiliated company called Global Health Imports. His ownership of Xennex, his ownership of 2256956 Alberta Limited and his indirect partial ownership of Global Health Imports were all disclosed to my office. There is no disclosed evidence that the ownership of these companies creates any conflict of interest. He complied with the rules under the act and the code.

[*Translation*]

Considering the information that the minister has disclosed to the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, it appears he has complied with the requirements of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons and the Conflict of Interest Act related to matters involving his companies and consequently there is no need to commence an examination.

We are in the process of the usual annual review process with the minister and will be looking at all his updated disclosures with the office.

[*English*]

Both Ms. Robinson-Dalpé and I are here to answer any questions you may have regarding the compliance process of the work and how we handled the file of Mr. Boissonnault.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

We're going to start with our first round.

Just for the benefit of committee, I did say I was going to leave a little bit of time at the end to discuss the question that was brought up at the beginning of the meeting by Mr. Bains. I am going to give us enough time to discuss it.

Mr. Barrett, you have six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: This morning there were revelations in a Global News article that Minister Randy Boissonnault may have been party to what's been described by some as wire fraud to the tune of half a million dollars as it relates to his business partner, Mr. Stephen Anderson. Text messages included in the media report detailed someone named Randy who was not pleased with the delay of this half-a-million-dollar wire transfer with a company out of California. In the text messages, Randy demands "a partner call" with Stephen Anderson.

Minister Randy Boissonnault has said today that he wholly owns a company that owns 50% of GHI. Mr. Anderson, to his knowledge, owns the other half. Minister Boissonnault contends that he is not the Randy involved in these text messages.

Having made a pronouncement, following a complaint, that you weren't going to pursue an investigation, does the emergence of new information, generally—and does the information in this article today, if you've read it—give rise to a re-examination of your decision? Finally, have you reviewed the allegations that were reported in the media this morning?

• (1220)

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Mr. Barrett, like you, I read the story this morning for the very first time. It's complete news to me. I never knew anything about it. It obviously raises some serious implications, if the story is true. You heard what the minister said.

The ruling that we made was based on the information that he disclosed to us, which was with regard to GHI, that he owned 50% through his numbered company.

Clearly, we will look into this. If our looking into it shows that there's more to it, that there is substance to it, that there may be contraventions of either the act or the policy act, then, of course, we will have to look. I have the capacity to self-initiate another inquiry and look into it.

At this point in time, I am really caught by surprise. I didn't know about it until I read it this morning. I don't know what to say. I heard the minister's testimony. I think it would be absolutely irresponsible to make a premature decision as to what we're going to do and how. All I can tell you is that we will look into it.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I think that's entirely fair, sir. It was new information. Just like you, we prepare for committee based on the information that we have. Finding that information or those allegations two hours in advance creates a challenging environment.

You expressed that the allegations in it were serious and new. Is it correct to understand that Minister Boissonnault didn't previously disclose that circumstance to you, that you will be investigating these new allegations and that, if necessary, you would self-initiate an investigation?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: As I said in my opening statement, we made our ruling on the basis of the information disclosed to us. He disclosed to us that he owned 50% of GHI through his numbered company. That's all we know about GHI.

All of this now is what GHI did, who was involved, who actually ran it, who this Randy is who is being mentioned, did he actually do..., etc. To all of this news, all I can do is say that we will look into it. I cannot make a decision on any of that because I really have nothing more than the report, which you have, too, from Global News and the testimony that you heard this morning from the minister.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I appreciate that response.

I want to ask a quick question on another subject, if I may.

The Auditor General released a report this morning. I'm not sure if your office gets those as well. In it there were 90 instances of undisclosed conflicts of interest and 96 instances of disclosed conflicts of interest. The 90 instances of undisclosed conflicts of interest are in matters of \$76 million being handed out by individuals who were appointed by the NDP-Liberal government.

Are you aware of this finding by the Auditor General?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: No, of course not. She makes her findings public today. She is under confidentiality provisions and obligations, the same as I am.

As you know, I undertook to give a ruling on the conflict of interest of Madam Verschuren and Mr. Ouimet before August 1, and I will do so. Clearly, we will deal with conflict of interest there.

I don't know what these conflicts of interest are that she refers to. I haven't read the report, either. I'm like you. This morning it came out, and I managed to read the executive summary.

I really don't want to speak any further about it, because maybe there's something in the report that will illuminate some of these points.

It's very troubling to hear that there have been that many conflicts of interest. Obviously, that's an area that concerns us primarily. She is more or less, as the Auditor General, looking at the whole operation and—

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: —the effects, the value for money, etc. There's a different focus that she has from what we have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett and Commissioner.

Mr. Housefather, I have you for six minutes. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner, thank you for being here, as always.

Do you remember anything momentous that happened on September 8, 2022, Commissioner?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: No, I'm sorry.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: It was striking to me, because I was reading this text that was ostensibly sent on September 8, 2022, from somebody named Randy. It was at 13:14 MST and 15:14 EST. We all know the rest of the text.

Something struck me that the date was very familiar. I looked back, and I remembered that was the date when Queen Elizabeth II died. Then I remembered that it was the date when there was a cabinet retreat in Vancouver, because all of the members of cabinet were wondering what they could wear and whether they had black or not in their wardrobes.

One of the things that everybody was earlier pointing out in this text was about eastern standard time. Mr. Boissonnault, on September 8, 2022, was in Vancouver on Pacific standard time and busy in a cabinet retreat. The idea that he was leaving a cabinet retreat to deal with an issue like this strikes me as even more fanciful.

Commissioner, you would acknowledge, I'm sure, that this is something, as you said, that you're going to look into. The fact that there's a text from somebody ostensibly named Randy doesn't immediately lead you to a conclusion that this Randy is Minister Boissonnault, does it?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: I deal with facts, not with allegations, assumptions or conjectures, etc.

I don't know who the author of this article is or what knowledge she has of the facts. When we look into it, we will state the facts as we find them.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Commissioner.

I think that's exactly the right way to do it rather than conducting meetings that make allegations with no basic knowledge of what happened.

You apply the ethics guidelines. I know as a parliamentary secretary that I fill out forms. I work with your office and so do ministers. You will ask questions when you believe something on our forms is not exact or is not detailed enough. You will then form your own conclusions. Is that correct?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Absolutely. As you know, each one of you gets appointed a personal counsellor who then looks at your disclosures. They ask questions and try to make sure that they're understandable, that everything is there, that nothing is left out and nothing is overlooked. They basically guide you to make a complete disclosure. It's an ongoing process.

You basically have an ongoing conversation with that person, especially since you also have the obligation to update the information should there be a change. Hopefully, through that relationship between the counsellor and the elected or appointed official, we make sure that all relevant facts are presented to the extent that the law requires it. They will be disclosed and put on the public record.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I agree.

I find that iterative conversation with the counsellor is incredibly helpful in making sure that, on both sides, there's clarity, and you avoid ever having a conflict or being perceived to have a conflict.

One of the things that's been raised is the issue of monies being allegedly paid from a company to the minister after the fact of assuming cabinet. You are, of course, familiar with the concept of closing a deal while you're with a company and thereafter obtaining money that was due under the initial contract, even though you're not working any longer for the company.

Is that something that's a process that's understood under the act, recognized and could be worked through with the counsellor?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: If there is a payment that, in effect, you earned prior to being elected and it has not been paid, that becomes an outstanding debt, which you're entitled to collect, and it's not in violation of any part of the act.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Sometimes that time is uncertain, because it's based on actual sales being made after the fact.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Maybe a certain event has to happen or a certain thing has to be achieved before the amount becomes due. Still if that amount or event happens subsequent to your

election, it still becomes, at that point in time, in effect an outstanding debt, which you're entitled to collect.

• (1230)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: There are a lot of things here. You can use words to distort the actual facts of what happened and make things look bad when actually they're perfectly normal and covered under the disclosure reforms and the ethics act. Unfortunately, I think this is one of those cases in which there's an attempt to make something look unkosher when it actually may very well be kosher. I trust you, Commissioner, to be the right person to look at that.

Thank you very much.

If you have anything else to say, that's fine. Otherwise I'll turn the time back.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Thank you.

The Chair: Commissioner, we have 40 seconds. Do you have anything you want to add to that?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: No. All I can say is that the documentation that was disclosed to us shows that there is an outstanding amount owed to Mr. Boissonnault for works that he conducted prior to being elected, and that was being paid to his company subsequent to his election.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you, Commissioner.

Again, for the benefit of members, the lights were going off. It wasn't a vote. It was a quorum call. We just checked on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Commissioner, I would like to thank you and Ms. Robinson-Dalpe for being with us today.

I heard your testimony and that of Mr. Boissonnault. So I understand that you studied his statement and that everything seemed to be in order. I also understand that you were surprised, as were all of us here, to read this morning's article.

I agree with you that it's too soon to comment on this article, and the office will have to check the facts before commenting on it, I imagine. My questions will be more general and will deal with the commissioner's work.

We, as parliamentarians, are often very demanding of the Ethics Commissioner when it comes to statements or situations related to members of the government. I think we're right to be demanding. I also think that someone who sits as a member of the government must behave and act ethically beyond a reasonable doubt. I also believe that your reputation is excellent, and that you do an impeccable job in this area.

That said, I would like to know whether you think the tools you currently have are sufficient to conduct reliable audits, or whether the Conflict of Interest Act should be improved to help you do more adequate research on the various issues submitted to you.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: I believe that the tools we have to conduct investigations, to determine the actual situation or to force the disclosure of the information that's necessary for our investigations are sufficient.

As you know, we can launch an investigation. We can ask people to come and testify. We have the power to require that it be done under oath.

Not only can we have the main witness testify under oath, but we can also demand it of the other people who are involved. I think we can really get all the facts that are needed. The act is a bit old. It's 30 years old and has been modernized very little. It has some provisions that are a bit difficult to enforce, but the powers to investigate are adequate.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Your tools are adequate, but do you think the level of reliability that we require is adequate as well? Do you sometimes get the impression that we ask you to go too far in your investigations or, on the contrary, that we should ask you to dig deeper?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: We have to start with what our goal is.

As I said before, our goal is not to find culprits. In fact, we try to facilitate interactions between the public and private domains. Anyone could have conflicts of interest. Generally speaking, people who are elected or appointed are experienced. It's likely that they've made investments and know a lot of people, and so on. Our job is to help those people find solutions to ensure that they declare what needs to be declared, or sell what they can't keep, or put it in a special system, for example.

If there are doubts, if someone raises allegations because there seems to be something hidden, then I have the power to begin an investigation, and I have the necessary tools to understand what happened. If there is a violation, I will expose it to the general public. It will be up to the Prime Minister or the Speaker of the House of Commons to act, if necessary. We only investigate when something doesn't look right. Our main activity is to help elected or appointed individuals avoid a conflict of interest.

• (1235)

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: As far as this mission is concerned, I understand that the level of reliability or research you're being asked for seems adequate to you.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: During the execution of your mandate, not only in the case of Mr. Boissonnault, but in any other case, did you at any time have the impression that you were being pressured or that certain individuals, members of the government or others, were trying to influence you in some way?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: There was no pressure put on me or my office. Generally speaking, people respect the neutrality of our office. What we do is strictly confidential and objective. To my knowledge, no one has ever tried to influence our objectivity.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. von Finckenstein, thank you for answering my questions in French. It's remarkable, and I appreciate it. It's a great sign of respect.

Thank you, Mr. von Finckenstein.

The Chair: The commissioner is indeed able to speak French. We agree with that as well, Mr. Fortin.

[English]

Mr. Green, you have six minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

Mr. Commissioner, first of all, were you able to watch the last round of questioning?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: With Mr. Boissonnault here?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Do you recall my exchange with him about the listing of companies, the numbered company versus the "operating as"?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Yes. You asked him to do that, and I understand he undertook to furnish such a list.

Mr. Matthew Green: Well, we hope he will.

When disclosures are made, what are the requirements? If a company is a numbered company, is it required to disclose who it's operating as in order to provide public disclosure?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: The disclosure is very simple. You can own a company. You can have an interest in it. That's no problem. You can't run a company if you're elected and you're appointed minister.

Mr. Matthew Green: The purpose of the disclosure, if I could, sir, is to identify to the public who the beneficial owners are of companies. It is my suggestion that numbered companies that do not actually list who they're operating as obscures the beneficial ownership, does it not?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Why is a numbered company obscuring official ownership any more than a non-numbered company? I'm sorry. I don't get your point.

Mr. Matthew Green: For instance, if there's a numbered company operating as the Navis Group, and the Navis Group is the one who's listed as the contractors, but on the disclosures it only shows the numbered company, then an average person would assume, objectively, that they couldn't make the connection between the numbered company and the operating company, the new named operating company.

• (1240)

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: The disclosure is not made for the average person, first of all. It's made for the office. Only the portions that have to be disclosed and put on the public record will be put on the public record.

Obviously, if you have a numbered company that also operates under a name, it would be appropriate to disclose both. If you don't do that.... As I mentioned before, each person appointed gets a counsellor to advise them. The counsellor will certainly ask you, "You own 3509 Limited. Does this company operate under a trade name or not?" Therefore, it would be disclosed.

Mr. Matthew Green: Is that part of the standard questions advisers provide to cabinet ministers?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: I would hope so. I have 53 people working for me. I don't know whether they all do that, but they should. Clearly, it—

Mr. Matthew Green: Could you please report back to this committee, sir, on what questions are required for cabinet minister disclosure?

I'll state this to you: It is a material non-disclosure to omit what your operating name is when it comes to procurement. The crux of a conflict of interest, as you and I have talked about many times, sir, is not just the actual conflict but also the perceived conflict. When there are instances where there is reporting that demonstrates a cabinet minister is receiving contracts through a numbered company in a deferred payment arrangement, when the actual procurement happens with an operating name other than the numbered company, to me, sir, that would erode and undermine the public trust when it comes to open and transparent procurement practices related to companies connected to ministers.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: First of all, Lyne, do you want to answer his question on what questions counsellors use regarding numbered companies?

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpe (Director, Advisory and Compliance, Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner): Essentially, when the office is informed of a private company or any other company, the requirement is to disclose the numbered company, the registered company name or the corporation's legal name, its trade name. It doesn't matter right now, at this present time, whether they report one, both or strictly the numbered company. In those cases, we will go back to the reporting public office holder and ask whether or not there is an operating name, whether the company is operating under a legal name or another name. If we have that name, we will make it public.

However, there is no requirement to disclose either the numbered company or the operating company's name. One or the other is perfectly acceptable under the act and under the code, as well.

Mr. Matthew Green: It's acceptable under the act and the code, but I think it's fair to say, in this instance, that it presents a bit of a problem in terms of public confidence related to the ability to track procurement contracts that are material in nature. We're talking about big contracts here.

Is it your recommendation that this committee recommend that all disclosures of numbered companies include the operating and trade names in order to provide greater transparency and accountability to the public and office? Quite frankly, as was identified, you can only investigate what is submitted to you. If you're submitted a numbered company and you're looking for contradictions or conflicts within the act but don't know what the operating name is,

would that not provide a significant investigative gap in terms of your ability to confirm or investigate any potential conflicts?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Mr. Green, I set the rules for what the counsellors ask to clearly establish whether there is a numbered company involved. There has to be a follow-up question as to whether it has a trade name or not. If so, that has to be disclosed. We are not trying to hide anything. I'm not trying to help anybody hide anything. It's something we can easily—

Mr. Matthew Green: No, to be clear, that's not my assertion. I am not suggesting that you—

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: No, I understand, but I want you to understand—

The Chair: We're at the end of the time.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: —that you're talking about internal procedures here, where something can very easily be achieved.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Green.

That concludes our first round. We're going to five-minute rounds.

I'm going to start with Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thanks very much, Commissioner, for coming back to the committee.

One of the challenges we have here is that there are questions about who this Randy is. You mentioned those questions. I know that was certainly the conclusion of the last round. It is still an outstanding question. It seems to me that, in this question about who Randy is, if the principals involved in this company, who exchange accordingly, thought they were in fact referring to a minister of the Crown, or even if that minister wasn't involved in it, and there was benefit derived from that, are there some ethical challenges you would have with that?

• (1245)

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: The task of the officer is to ensure there's no conflict of interest and to help people avoid conflict of interest. In the situation you mentioned, the question is: Is there a conflict of interest here somewhere? There is this exchange using the name Randy. Does that by itself create a conflict of interest? No. If the Randy is the minister, and he is actually involved in running a company, then, of course, it's a totally different issue.

Mr. Damien Kurek: If he benefited from the perception he was the one who was passing along that message, would that constitute a conflict?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: It's very difficult with all of these hypotheticals. It depends very much on the facts. Without having the total facts, I can't answer your question.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I appreciate that. I think that emphasizes the fact that we need all the facts involved here, because there are many outstanding questions.

I'm just curious, Commissioner. Did you or your office have a chance to review the deferred compensation agreement that Minister Boissonnault received as a result of work he didn't do well as a minister? Did your office have a chance to review that?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: I don't think it was a deferred compensation. It was for the amount of service he rendered for which he had not been paid.

Lyne, do you know the details of this?

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé: I can only confirm that we saw the information of what is owed from Navis to the numbered company, but we did not review an agreement per se.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Okay. I appreciate that.

Thank you, Commissioner. I know you're always willing to come before this committee, and I do appreciate that. It's appreciated. As we get more facts, I know you and your office will be hard at work looking at that information.

Mr. Chair, it's clear there is some outstanding information that is required in order for us to be able to effectively evaluate this, whether it's the question about who this Randy is or whether it's the whole series of challenges associated with what this committee has agreed to study here today. Therefore, I would like to move a motion. I hope there would be support for what even the Liberals have suggested we need, and that is to find out the facts.

Mr. Chair, I hope we can find agreement amongst this committee for the following motion:

That, in light of today's media reports and Minister Randy Boissonnault's testimony, the Committee call on Stephen Anderson, Kirsten Poon, and representatives of the Ghaoui Group to appear before the committee individually and testify forthwith for no less than one hour each on or before June 20th, and that the committee seek additional resources to facilitate these meetings if needed.

Chair, I would just make a brief comment on the motion.

The Chair: Let me just stop you there.

Have you circulated the motion to the clerk, Mr. Kurek?

Mr. Damien Kurek: It's on its way.

The Chair: Okay.

The motion is in order.

I'll give you the floor for some brief comments.

I'm going to ask the clerk to circulate it as soon as she gets it.

Go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thanks very much, Chair.

I hope there's agreement because certainly what the Liberals have suggested, while making some pretty outlandish accusations about.... Quite frankly, I've never seen a minister be so partisan before a committee as Minister Boissonnault was this morning, and certainly there's concern about that.

You'll note in this motion, Chair, we are not calling back the minister. We want to get the facts. We want to ensure that Canadians can find out exactly what happened. Certainly if there is further information that requires the minister to be recalled, I would hope we could find agreement amongst the committee. This is simply to fur-

ther ensure that Canadians are in fact getting the answers that are deserved when it comes to this matter. I know Mr. Green, as well, had mentioned there's some follow-up needed, and I know the commissioner is always very willing to work with this committee.

With that, Chair, I would simply conclude my remarks by hoping that all members of this committee would support the simple request to get to the bottom of the very clear and outstanding questions that come about as a result of the discussion we've had here today.

Thank you.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kurek.

The motion has been moved.

I do see your hand, Mr. Green, and then I have Ms. Damoff's hand.

Commissioner, I'm going to ask that you hang on for a few minutes until we deal with this.

The motion is in English only.

I am going to suspend for a few minutes while we distribute that.

[*Translation*]

We'll distribute it in both official languages, Mr. Fortin.

I'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

• (1250)

(Pause)

• (1300)

[*English*]

The Chair: We are back from suspension.

I would just advise all members that the motion has been shared

[*Translation*]

in both official languages.

[*English*]

We have a motion that has been moved.

I'm going to advise the committee members as well, because I know the question of resources came up, that we have until 1:30, and that is a hard stop.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Actually, Mr. Chair, I would ask you to suspend for five minutes so that I can discuss the motion with Mr. Villemure, who isn't here right now.

I think this is an important motion, and since we've just received it, I would like to take the time to look at it with Mr. Villemure.

The Chair: We will suspend the meeting for five minutes. Then we will begin debate on the motion.

• (1300) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair: We are going to resume, having given time to look at the motion. When we left, the motion had been moved by Mr. Kurek. Everybody has the motion at this point. We are resuming debate on the motion.

I have Mr. Green followed by Ms. Damoff.

Mr. Green, go ahead, sir.

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

You'll note that in the past, as an opposition member of this committee, I have supported deeper dives into government dealings. I certainly support a greater inspection of what has happened here and a better understanding, and a request for having these witnesses, to me, makes sense.

However, what I will tell you is that one of the biggest frustrations I've had with this committee, as has happened in the past, is where you, sir, have booked meetings without consulting the other parties, and I would reference the Bloc, the NDP or even the Liberal side when it comes to the committee work.

While I'm supportive of this motion, what I'm not supportive of is the caveat that says, "that the committee seek additional resources to facilitate these meetings if needed." To me, having learned from past mistakes, I'm going to go on the record and say that I am no longer in support of a committee structure that allows a chair or the official opposition to direct the course of our work without consultations with the other parties.

For that reason, I'm going to amend this and I'm going to move that, after it says, "forthwith for no less than", we strike from there forward and we put in "for one two-hour regularly scheduled meeting". The reason I do that is I think we can have all of the witnesses arrive, provide testimony with five-minute openings, have the ability to question, examine and cross-examine, and only use one regularly scheduled meeting so we're not in a scenario where you all are booking meetings, without consulting the other parties, at your convenience and your will.

That is the amendment that I am moving. I'm in support of pursuing this, but I'm not going to just give you the ability to do it at your own leisure or prioritization.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Green.

Just so that I'm clear, you're moving "for one two-hour regularly scheduled meeting", and I assume that you are keeping "before June 20th". Is that correct?

Mr. Matthew Green: I think, Mr. Chair, what needs to happen at this committee is we need to have a subcommittee that plans work in accordance with the courtesy of including the other parties on the

work schedule. If we have a subcommittee that plans the work, and this is prioritized by way of a regular motion that is directed by committee, then yes, it would be before that.

However, what I do not want to do is give you the ability to determine when that's going to be without consultation with us. I would state the obvious, which is that we're 25 members in our caucus without the infinite resources that both the government and the official opposition have, so we have to take our scheduling, our timing and our staffing into account when we make commitments for additional work.

This notion that when we don't concede to the whim of you as the chair that we're somehow complicit in the cover-up is a cockamamie way of impugning what our work is here as New Democrats. We even heard it today with these ridiculous references of an NDP-Liberal government. I'm not on for that. However, what I am on for is holding this government accountable, and what I am on for is using the traditional courtesy of our committee to have a planning committee that allows the committee to direct the work and not just the Conservative Party, or you, sir, as chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We do have an amendment.

Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Go ahead, Ms. Damoff, on the amendment.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

I would just say that we have the commissioner here right now. I know that it was very important to the committee that he be brought before the committee to offer testimony, and instead we've been sidetracked. He's already said that he's going to be looking into what he read in the newspaper, and so I think we should let him do his work. Therefore, I move to adjourn debate.

• (1310)

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn debate on the proposed amendment by Mr. Green. There's no discussion on adjourning the debate on this motion, so I'll ask for consensus.

Is there consensus?

An hon member: No.

The Chair: Okay. We're going to go to a recorded vote.

Madam Clerk, on the motion by Ms. Damoff to adjourn debate, go ahead, please.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Chair: The motion carries to adjourn debate, so we are adjourning debate.

We're returning to our next line of questioning.

Mr. Kurek, your time was concluded.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: What's the point of order, Mr. Kurek?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Just for clarification, does a motion to adjourn debate on the amendment to the motion adjourn the entire debate on the motion—

The Chair: That's correct, sir.

Mr. Damien Kurek: —or simply the amendment that was being debated?

The Chair: It is to adjourn debate on the entire motion, including the proposed amendment. Now, a member can resume debate at any time in a future meeting when they have the floor on this matter, and we would continue on the amendment as proposed by Mr. Green. Then, of course, the floor would be open for interventions at that point. Does that clear it up?

Okay. We're continuing again with the commissioner. I have Mr. Bains for five minutes.

Just keep in mind we have until 1:30, and I'm going to need a little bit of time here for discussion on the issue that Mr. Bains brought up at the beginning of the meeting.

Mr. Bains, go ahead.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you for your patience, Commissioner. Director, thank you for joining us today.

Can you please explain the difference between what a minister has to disclose in their disclosures versus a member of Parliament? Is there more scrutiny for either of them?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: Yes, the member of Parliament has to comply with the code that sets out what you can do and what you can't do. A big exception, which we discussed at one point in time, was sponsored travel. There's no prohibition against sponsored travel for members of Parliament; however, once you become a parliamentary secretary or minister, you have to live up to the act, and the act specifies various things that you can and cannot do.

One of them is, for instance, that you cannot operate a company, and you can't be involved in a company. You can own it, but you can't operate it. Another one is extensive prohibitions against gifts. They have controlled assets, what you may own or what you may not own or what you have to put in line of trust.

It's a very complex set of regulations that is applied to what we call reporting public office holders, i.e. ministers, secretaries of state and OIC appointments. It's much more stringent, much more limited, than for people who are elected to the House of Commons. They obviously have to avoid conflicts of interest. They have to recuse themselves, etc., but there are all sorts of outside activities as a member of Parliament you can do that you can't do as a minister.

Mr. Parm Bains: Do you believe that your office has done enough to educate the members on the differences between what rules are more stringent versus, say, an elected official?

• (1315)

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: We try to educate as much as possible.

We just developed an online tool for members of Parliament. Once you're elected, first of all, you get training from us. We are

asked to do that. Then there's an online tool that walks you through the various possible situations and issues and how to resolve them, etc. We don't have one yet for ministers or reporting officers, but we're in the process of developing that tool.

We always think that the best way for people not to get into conflict of interest is to be informed, to know what it is, etc. That's why, for every single person who falls under the code now, we appoint someone in our office. This is your contact. If you have any issues, talk to that person. That person is there to help you. You can always do more. It also depends on how much time people want to spend on it. You're all very busy people, and you have a lot of other things to do. Some of this is, frankly speaking, tedious. Some people say, "I know this." Others say it's very peculiar and very new to people. To the extent that people are willing to learn and be educated, we provide as much as we can.

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you, Commissioner.

I'm going to share the rest of my time with Ms. Damoff.

The Chair: You have a minute and 25 seconds, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's longer than I thought.

Commissioner, I wonder if you could talk briefly about how much more rigorous the requirements are for ministers and parliamentary secretaries, not just on sponsored travel, but on the actual form itself.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: The expert on the form sits beside me, so go ahead, Lyne.

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé: Essentially, I would say that the forms are pretty much identical between the MP code and the act. Why? It's because we ask for information about assets, liabilities, investments, companies and businesses. We ask about outside activities under both regimes; however, as the commissioner explained, there are more stringent rules with regard to measures that reporting public office holders, including ministers, will have to abide by versus a member of Parliament.

Ms. Pam Damoff: These are things like not owning stocks. You can own mutual funds, but you can't be actively involved in a company. You can still be a part owner, but you have to put it in a blind trust. Is that correct?

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé: That's correct. Those are measures that are required under the Conflict of Interest Act.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Right.

Ms. Lyne Robinson-Dalpé: Reporting public office holders must divest of their controlled assets. They also must step down from any business.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have only a few seconds left, so I'm going to make a personal plea to the members of the Conservative Party—

The Chair: You're out of time, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: —to not put on social media to spam my office—

The Chair: Ms. Damoff—

Ms. Pam Damoff: —because I moved to adjourn debate. It is a personal plea to my colleagues.

The Chair: You're out of time, Ms. Damoff. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The subject has already been covered, but I'm going to take the liberty of coming back to make sure.

From what I understand, Mr. Commissioner, you're going to conduct additional verifications on the alleged facts, which were presented to us this morning, concerning Mr. Boissonnault's former company. I believe it was Global News that put out that information. Is that correct?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: We'll look at those facts and determine whether or not an investigation is necessary.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Okay.

The debate on the motion that was tabled by our colleagues in the Conservative Party was adjourned. I'm not going to decide that, but I assume we'll come back to it at a future meeting. If so, we may be interested in the results of the audits you are going to conduct.

Do you have any idea how long it will take for your office to get to the bottom of this?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: It's very difficult to give a precise date, because I don't know all the facts, and there can be complications. After examining the facts, if we deem an inquiry to be necessary, a whole process must then be initiated. Notify people, give them time to prepare, and so on.

As you know, we have two ongoing investigations into two individuals from Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC, Ms. Verschuren and Mr. Ouimet. We launched those two investigations three months ago, and we'll complete them in August. Generally, an investigation of this kind takes a few months.

• (1320)

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Am I to understand, then, that it would be unrealistic to ask you to table a report before June 20?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: I don't think that's possible.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Commissioner.

I have no further questions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin and Mr. Commissioner.

[*English*]

Mr. Green, you have two and a half minutes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much.

Mr. Commissioner, pursuant to subsection 27(1) of the Conflict of Interest Act, public office holders must divest each of their con-

trolled assets within 120 days after the day on which they were appointed as a public office holder.

What does your office do to ensure this divestment has taken place?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: We are in contact with the registered public office holder. Let's assume we have identified certain issues, such as things that have to be put in blind trust. We give them the information. We tell them we will pay for the lawyer. We will pay for the blind trust, but they have up to this date to do it.

If we do not get a response in a reasonable time, we will say, "Look, you're already in day X or whatever, and there's only this much time. Get on with it. Get it done." We remind them and push them slightly. Everybody is interested in complying. Nobody wants to be offside of the requirements of the commissioner.

Mr. Matthew Green: What about the 120 days during which a public office holder is still in possession of the controlled assets? Do public office holders have to take any temporary measures to avoid conflicts of interest during that period?

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: If they are controlled assets, you have to dispose of them or put them in a blind trust. Obviously, during that period of time, you don't deal with them. It goes without saying. You have been appointed. We have identified these things. We say, "These are controlled assets that you are not entitled to hold. Get rid of them, or put them in a blind trust." You're doing it. If, in that period of time, you would be acting with them, you would be acting, essentially, in bad faith.

Mr. Matthew Green: Just for the purpose of my very short time, it's your testimony here today that, the moment somebody is appointed as a public office holder, they cease to be able to have any contact or control, despite the fact there's a 120-day window.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: No, that's not what I said at all.

What I said is that they have been appointed. We deal with them. We identify. We deal with their disclosure and identify a certain asset they are not allowed to hold.

You then have the choice of selling them or putting them in a blind trust. From the moment we tell you that, I don't think you can deal with them, because it has now been made clear. You know you can't hold these and can't deal with them. You have up to the end of 120 days to either get rid of them or put them in a blind trust. You're certainly not dealing with them in the meantime.

Mr. Matthew Green: If a deal was made during that time, would that be in contravention?

The Chair: Give a very quick response, please.

Mr. Konrad von Finckenstein: It has never happened. I don't suspect it to happen because why would you do that? You have just been told by my office that these are things you shouldn't own, to get rid of them or put them in a blind trust. If you're then dealing with them, surely you're not acting in good faith.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Commissioner and Ms. Robinson-Dalpe, on behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you for your appearance today. We appreciate the time that you've taken and we always appreciate the expertise and the work that you do. I want to say thank you to your staff as well, Mr. Commissioner.

Before we conclude, Mr. Bains brought up an issue at the beginning of the meeting regarding the question of privilege. I'm going to remind the committee that it's not up to the committee to determine whether a question of privilege happened. It's whether it touches on a question of privilege. A motion was moved to report this to the House. The motion that was presented is debatable and amendable. We were in the middle of the debate last time.

The meeting was adjourned, which therefore means that the debate of the motion was adjourned as well.

There are several options. Obviously, I'm going to seek committee guidance on this.

The first option is that a member can move a motion to continue debate when they have the floor at the next meeting, at which point the debate would resume if a majority of members decide to resume debate.

The other option.... The plan, frankly, was to try to get to this report that we have, consideration of the draft report on the data collection technological tools, because I think it was the will of the committee to have this presented before Parliament rises. We haven't even started that at this point.

We can certainly go in that direction or we can resume debate on the motion that was presented to report this to the House.

I'm seeking some feedback from committee members on where they want to go in the next meeting.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

• (1325)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, I would like to proceed with the consideration of the draft report. However, at our last two meetings where we attempted to do that, we were unsuccessful.

If the committee is going to be dealing with committee business, I would like to deal with the business that Mr. Kurek put forward today and debate was adjourned on it. I think there is interest from members to consider that matter as well.

If we're just going to be looking at what committee business we can be seized with, I think based on the bombshells that dropped today, I'd be very interested in pursuing debate on Mr. Kurek's motion.

The Chair: I'm seeking guidance. I'm going to ask for quick interventions here because we do have a 1:30 hard stop.

We'll go to Mr. Fisher and then Mr. Brock.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I certainly don't want to speak for Mr. Bains, but it was debated at length, mostly by the Conservatives. I'm sure that we could deal with it in 10 minutes and bring it to a vote. We could complete debate, bring it to a vote, and get it before the House pretty darn quickly.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Brock, go ahead.

Mr. Larry Brock: On the issue of committee business, I don't want the committee to lose sight of the fact that we still need to have a discussion on what to do with the RCMP documents and the documents received from Mr. Wernick. That's been on our agenda for a couple of weeks now and I'd like to get to that.

The Chair: All right. I appreciate the feedback.

I'm going to take it back with the clerk. We're going to provide a notice of meeting probably by the end of today. I'm just going to seek some guidance from the clerk.

That's all I have for today.

I want to wish everybody a great day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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