



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 046

Friday, October 7, 2022

Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Friday, October 7, 2022

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 46 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

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

[*English*]

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 20, 2022, the committee is meeting for a briefing session to discuss the Department of Canadian Heritage's contract with the Community Media Advocacy Centre.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to House order of Thursday, June 23. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I have a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute your mike when you are not speaking.

With regard to interpretation for those on Zoom, you have a choice at the bottom of your screen. You will see a little globe. You can press that, and you can listen in the language of your choice, English or French. For those in the room, most of you know how to use your microphones appropriately; you've been doing it for a long time now.

I will remind you that all questions should be addressed through the chair.

Appearing at today's meeting is the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion. We will have the minister for one hour.

Minister, you have five minutes to present, and then it will be open to questions and answers. What I will do is give you a 30-second heads-up when you have just 30 seconds left, so I can cut you off when I need to. Thank you.

You can begin, Minister, for five minutes, please.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion): Madam Chair and members of the committee, good afternoon. Thank you for your invitation to appear today and for this opportunity to discuss the funding granted—and subsequently terminated—to the Community Media Advocacy Centre.

I am joined today by Mala Khanna, associate deputy minister, Canadian Heritage.

[*Translation*]

I want to begin by reiterating that anti-Semitism and hatred in all its forms have no place in Canada. Our government is firmly committed to fighting racism.

[*English*]

In 2019 when our government created Canada's first ever anti-racism strategy, we did so with a clear direction to support community organizations across Canada, addressing the issues of anti-racism and multiculturalism.

Through the anti-racism action program, funding was intended to empower communities on the ground and to help address all forms of racism and discrimination.

When it comes to the selection process, we expect funded organizations to uphold the core values championed through the anti-racism strategy. That, of course, wasn't the case with one of the organizations.

The anti-Semitic, hateful and xenophobic comments made by Laith Marouf are vile and reprehensible. I have said this before and I'll say it again: I condemn them in the strongest possible terms.

The fact that the Community Media Advocacy Centre received federal funding while employing Mr. Marouf is unacceptable and should, quite frankly, never have happened. The contract with CMAC has since been terminated, and we have sought to recover all payments made to the organization.

It is clear that the vetting process failed. This individual slipped through the cracks during the review of the CMAC application. The incident reflects a failure in the system and is a slap in the face to the Jewish community, the francophone community and many other groups that he has continuously attacked with his hateful comments, and for that, I sincerely apologize.

We are determined to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again, so today I am grateful for the opportunity to be here to speak with you about the immediate actions we have taken and the work we are continuing to do to strengthen how we assess and vet projects.

[*Translation*]

I have asked Canadian Heritage to undertake a comprehensive review of the assessment of applications and to introduce enhanced training on application verification for all program officers.

[*English*]

This will include enhanced diversity and inclusion training for all program officers, including anti-racism and anti-Semitism awareness training.

I've also asked officials to introduce conditions in all of our funding agreements that will allow the federal government to take immediate action should any organization or individual be identified as having promoted or shared hate, racism, anti-Semitism or discrimination in any form.

This will help us to ensure that, moving forward, we can move quickly and decisively as soon as we are made aware. All organizations and individuals that see their funding cut in this manner will also never be eligible for future funding. These are important measures and will help us prevent hateful groups or individuals from slipping through the cracks.

These have been informed by working closely with Jewish community organizations and community leaders and groups, such as the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and B'nai Brith, as well as members of Parliament. We thank them for their advocacy in ensuring that all voices were reflected in our efforts because, as we know, racism, hate and anti-Semitism remain a reality in Canada.

● (1310)

This is why our government has been steadfast in our commitments to fight racism and anti-Semitism at every turn. From the appointment of the Honourable Irwin Cotler as Canada's Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Anti-Semitism to holding Canada's first-ever National Summit on Anti-Semitism, we've been working closely with the Jewish community to ensure that their voices are heard and reflected in our actions.

Through this year's budget alone, we're committing important supports for the construction of the new Holocaust museum, as well as for the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust education centre.

We are now going to renew and reform our anti-racism strategy, which will be informed by our conversations with members of all communities—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —who continue to face racism, hate and discrimination on every turn. This includes those communities that have been attacked by Mr. Marouf directly.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer your questions.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We are now moving to the question and answer segment. This will begin with a six-minute segment. I don't have the Conservative list with me, so I don't know who starts off for the Conservatives.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Chair, I'll start off.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for presenting today at committee.

Mr. Housefather provided the minister's office with information in July about Mr. Marouf's vile anti-Semitism. After this came to light, a statement was made only on August 22. That's at least 22 days, if Mr. Housefather told the minister's office on July 31.

I want to know what day you were made aware of Mr. Marouf's vile, anti-Semitic hate spewed everywhere, which I think a simple Google search could have turned up.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I want to make this absolutely clear: The comments made by this individual are absolutely appalling. I've said this before and I'll say it again. They are reprehensible and vile. We condemn the anti-Semitism, racism and hatred that he has spread in the strongest possible terms.

I thank MP Housefather for bringing this individual to our attention. When this issue was raised, we immediately asked the Department of Canadian Heritage to confirm the organization's project funding details and to inform us on the procedural next steps. After the review by the legal department, we followed the process in place to cut funding to the organization, as well as terminate the project.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Thank you, Minister.

I asked what day you were made aware in July. Presuming that it took at least 22 days for you to make a public statement, I just want to know why it took so long.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I want to assure the honourable member and this committee that when this was first brought to our attention, we had much less information than we do today, of course. Right away I asked my office and my team to look into the situation and provide me with options to address this quickly.

Do I wish that we were able to move the process along more quickly? Absolutely, but it was also important that we got this right to ensure accountability for this organization and this individual and for any other individual or group that may seek to apply for government funding.

That's why we're moving forward on the introduction of robust new vetting measures—enhanced measures—one of which will be to ensure that the Government of Canada can act more quickly and more immediately, as appropriate.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Minister, with all due respect, if you were told by a member of your own team in July and it took until August 22 to come up with a statement on something so serious, I would certainly ask questions about the process.

The minister initially tried to claim shock at the entire affair, calling the issue one of the CMAC—which we know is an organization of Mr. Marouf and his wife and no one else—despite the fact that the minister personally praised Mr. Marouf in a press release on April 14, saying, “Our government is proud to contribute to the initiative....”

I have a few questions. Did no one google Mr. Marouf, his wife, or the organization? I also want to know from the minister what he was ostensibly proud of.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: First of all, I want to thank the honourable member for the question.

Because the funding, with respect to the news release, was already approved in the summer of 2021 before I became the minister responsible for the file, we trusted at that time that adequate vetting had been completed. However, as we have said, this individual fell through the cracks. The vetting process failed in this case, and this is completely unacceptable.

This is why I am happy to inform the committee that we're putting in place new, enhanced, robust measures to ensure that this type of thing never ever happens again. I'm happy to go through the details of the new, enhanced vetting process—

• (1315)

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Madam Chair, I think Canadians want to know who approved the release and whether this is an omission or incompetence. Did nobody google anybody in the release? Why would the government say that it is proud of the work that was being done by the vile anti-Semitic hatred that has been spewed all over the Internet? A simple Google search by the minister's office, anybody in the minister's organization, anybody in the Department of Canadian Heritage or anybody in the Canadian government at all would have turned that up.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I agree with the honourable member. This is why your question is very important. I completely agree with you that, in this particular case, the process used to select this organization failed, and that is clearly unacceptable. That is why we did the right thing by launching a review of how this organization was vetted and approved for funding.

One of the things the review showed is that the evaluation process did not initially detect the hateful comments made by this individual of this organization.

We're taking swift action to make sure this never happens again by introducing—

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Minister, I realize that you're looking at—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, if I could just finish the answer, I'm sure the honourable member will appreciate what we're putting in place to make sure this never happens again.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Minister, I'd just like to know this: Who did you trust in the department? Are you saying that you can't trust your department going forward?

My second question, if you'll be so kind to answer it... Mr. Marouf claims that the CMAC—which is, in actual fact, Mr. Marouf and his wife and no one else, so it's not an organization, but

just somebody and his wife—was approached by Canadian Heritage—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Ms. Lantsman.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: —and was begged to develop an anti-racism proposal. I want to know if that's true. I want to know if you've asked your department, and I want to know if you can trust the answer from the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The Chair: The minister has 17 seconds to answer.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Because I only have a few seconds left, I'll say to the honourable member once again that the vetting process in this case failed. Our responsibility is to ensure that this never happens again by introducing new and enhanced robust measures. That's exactly what we're doing. Until then, no single dollar will go out. All funding has been paused to make sure that this never happens again.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

I'm going to move to the Liberals and Ms. Saks.

Ya'ara, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank Minister Hussen and the team from the department who are joining us today to address this egregious error that took place in terms of funding for the CMAC.

First, Minister, I want to thank you for reiterating our government's unwavering commitment to tackling all forms of racism and hate, including anti-Semitism, particularly since the government did adopt the IHRA definition in 2019 and made a strong commitment for a whole-of-government approach in ensuring that anti-Semitism and all forms of hate are not seen in any of our programming or in any of our departments.

I'd like to thank you as well for being here today to talk about the action you're taking to hold Laith Marouf and the CMAC accountable for the hateful, anti-Semitic and racist comments that Mr. Marouf made and to ensure that no organization like this ever—and I repeat “ever”—receives federal anti-racism funding again.

As the minister has stated, he's been working with organizations, and I can say, as a member of the community, that I'm very grateful for the time and attention that's been put, both among colleagues and with the CIJA, the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal, and B'nai Brith into working together to resolve this issue.

I understand the situation was brought to your attention by our colleague, MP Housefather, and that you and your office were to cut off the funding for the CMAC, as you mentioned in your opening statement, and to put in place new processes to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again.

Minister, I'd like you to take some time to explain the steps that are being taken to ensure that organizations like the CMAC never slip through the cracks in terms of applying for funding through the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you so much to the honourable member for her important question.

I will say once again that part of our responsibility is to make sure that we learn from the fact that, in this particular case, the vetting process failed, and we're taking swift action to make sure this never happens again. We're doing so by introducing a new vetting process that is being established by the Department of Canadian Heritage. We're enhancing the agreement between Canadian Heritage and applicants—organizations applying for funding—and introducing further penalties to successful applicants who showcase racism, hate and bigotry. We will continue to take every measure to ensure this never happens again.

We are also putting in place enhanced vetting training for program officers, ensuring that multiple officials review each and every application, and enhanced anti-racism and anti-Semitism training for all program officers. To develop this training, we will be working with the special envoy to combat anti-Semitism, the Honourable Irwin Cotler. We'll also be working with the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Jewish Public Servants' Network to develop this program. It will also include training on the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism.

We'll also implement conditions in all funding agreements to allow the government to take immediate action if any organization or individual is identified as having promoted hate and to ensure that all organizations that see their funding cut in this manner will never be eligible for future funding.

I want to assure members of the committee that not a single federal dollar will be rolling out until these measures are fully in place. We're working to ensure that these measures are in place as quickly as possible.

• (1320)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to go into that a little deeper because, as you stated in your opening remarks, we know that in this case the vetting process failed. As we move forward to ensure that this doesn't happen again.... I mentioned in my opening question about the IHRA definition being an anchor in terms of how the government approaches its understanding of anti-Semitism.

Just for clarification, in all of these measures that we're taking, especially with the work of the special envoy, Irwin Cotler, and the work that Canada has done on the international stage to ensure that it is a partner in the formation of the IHRA definition and also in its application and use not just here in Canada but internationally, there's that whole-of-government approach. You can only, of course, speak to your department, but is there an emphasis here to ensure that the IHRA definition is part of the training, is part of the vetting and is part of the lens going forward that the department understands is what we need to address here? Really, the Laith Marouf case is a litmus test of why the IHRA definition is so important and why the government adopted it.

Could you comment, please?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely, and I appreciate your emphasis on those measures going forward. I want to reiterate that our measures will include enhanced online and social media vetting training and enhanced diversity and inclusion training for all program officers, including anti-Semitism and anti-racism awareness

training, all of which will be informed by the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism. I want to assure the honourable member that we will ensure that our findings and our measures are shared with other government departments so that they learn from this incident, making sure that we can move forward in a way that ensures that these types of situations never happen again.

We're also putting all funding requests on hold—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —and not a single dollar will be rolled out before this new vetting process is in place.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, Ms. Saks, if you wish to throw in a comment or something.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: It's gone to 14 now.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Okay, well, thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Anti-Semitism is one of the oldest forms of hate and the most pernicious. Minister, I appreciate your comments and your taking a full departmental approach in applying IHRA in addressing this matter.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now, for the Bloc Québécois, we have Martin Champoux.

Martin, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, earlier, when asked by my colleague Ms. Lantsman why you took so long to respond after being alerted by our colleague Mr. Housefather to the situation and Mr. Marouf's comments on Twitter, you responded that you lacked information.

When you had already been informed as early as mid-July, what information did you lack that your reaction to these degrading and unacceptable remarks only occurred on August 22? What information did you lack that justified such a delay? Wasn't it scandalous enough for you at that point, Minister?

• (1325)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

I want to show the honourable member that I find— I've stated this before and I'll state it again—the comments made by this individual as well as this organization to be vile, reprehensible, hateful and unacceptable. The anti-Semitism, racism and hate that has been expressed—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Minister, you are not answering my question.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —has absolutely no place in this society.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I want to know what was missing—

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm getting to the answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Please go ahead, because I don't have much time and I have other questions.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Okay, thank you.

The fact of the matter is that, as soon as we were made aware of this individual and his hateful remarks, I asked my team to look into it, give me options and also deal with the Department of Canadian Heritage to find out funding details about this organization and make sure that we follow the process that was in place upon looking at the funding details.

We consulted the legal department and followed the process that was in place at that time to suspend funding, and I can update the member now that we've not only terminated funding but have demanded that this organization pay back the money that—

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Yes, that's quite normal, and we understand.

The thing that I find very surprising, Minister, is that although you were informed of this situation in mid-July by our colleague Mr. Housefather, you did not react until after social media had been informed.

So we were made aware of this situation on Twitter before your department reacted. It's a bit ironic. I get the impression that it was the pressure from social media that made you react. I'm rather concerned that your ministry didn't act more quickly and address this situation a month earlier.

Also, you said that you had held the organization in question to account and asked it to provide you with an update. What did the Community Media Advocacy Centre and Laith Marouf say to you when you asked them to provide these accounts?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: When this issue was raised, I want to assure the honourable member again that we immediately asked the Department of Canadian Heritage to confirm the organization's project funding details and to inform us on the procedural next steps.

After the review by the legal department, we followed the process in place to cut funding to the organization as well as terminate the project. We know this should not have happened. That's why I'm here today, to discuss with you the changes—

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Minister—

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —to make sure this never happens again.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Wait a minute, Minister. You said yourself that you had asked the CMAC to be accountable. So you should have expected a response from the agency.

Did the agency respond to you? If so, what did they say in response to justify the unacceptable comments that were made?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I will turn to associate deputy minister Khanna for this answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: We can talk to him in the second hour, because I have more questions for you, Minister.

You have said that you have put in place measures internally and provided training on racism to ensure that there is no racism or anti-Semitism within the organizations to which you entrust public funds.

Where do you place francophobia and hate speech towards francophones in your order of severity of hateful and disgraceful speech? I ask, because it still took until September 12 before you acknowledged that Mr. Marouf had also made hateful comments towards francophones.

Does the training you provide to your teams also address this type of hate?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: As I have said many times before, this individual's hateful comments against French-speaking Canadians are absolutely abhorrent. We condemn them in the strongest possible terms—

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Minister, you are pulling out a tape for us. That is not what I want. I want an answer to my question. This is the committee, not the House of Commons.

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm trying to answer.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Minister, you are not answering my question. I want to know if, in the training you give on anti-racism and anti-Semitism, there is a section on francophobia.

We see that this phenomenon is percolating more and more, we see it in social media. Nowhere in your program is there any mention of the hateful comments made towards francophones.

My question is simple, Minister: does the training address this problem?

• (1330)

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I have stated very clearly that the hateful comments towards francophone community members by this individual, by this organization, are reprehensible.

I said this from the very beginning, and I will repeat that. Absolutely, we will make sure that the enhanced training on anti-Semitism, anti-racism, anti-discrimination and anti-hate for all program officers includes sensitivity and fighting against hatred towards francophone community members. That is a commitment I can make to you, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Martin. That's it.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I appreciate that, Minister.

[English]

The Chair: The time is up.

Now I will go to Peter Julian for six minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

I was a little concerned about your initial comments where you talked about anti-Semitism remaining a reality. I believe you are minimizing this. The police reported hate crime latest statistics actually show a significant rise in anti-Semitism, hate-motivated crimes.

What we're dealing with is not something that remains a reality. What we're dealing with is something that is becoming a greater and greater threat to our society. Anti-Semitism and anti-Semitism hate crimes are growing in this country.

In that context, I want to come back to the comments you made initially that you believed that an adequate vetting had taken place when you became the minister. Did that adequate vetting take into consideration social media accounts that date back to 2017, which clearly show a pattern of anti-Semitic slogans and comments on social media by Mr. Marouf?

Minister.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Julian, I would have to start my response by responding to your initial comments.

I in no way meant to suggest that anti-Semitism should not be taken seriously. Quite the contrary, in many years of my adult life I have spent time fighting anti-Semitism, fighting Islamophobia, fighting racism on the ground working with community members from various communities, so I take this extremely seriously and I would encourage you to revisit my remarks on this matter on a number of occasions. I disagree with you, with respect, sir.

On the issue of the previous processes that existed before I became minister, this funding was approved in the summer of 2021, before I became the minister responsible for this file. We trusted at that time that the adequate vetting had been completed, and, as we have said, this individual fell through the cracks and that is why I'm here today, to assure members that we're putting in place significant measures to ensure this never happens again.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay, thank you.

I want to come to those significant measures, because you haven't talked about a social media screen at all. That was clearly something that was a huge and significant omission from the process that was put into place.

In terms of the social media screens, what are the social media screens that are put into place as part of your new revised policy, and going beyond anti-Semitism, which, as I've mentioned, is growing, and Islamophobia is growing, racism is growing? We've heard this week about a toxic incel group, a misogynistic group that was on the leader of the official opposition's YouTube feed, "men going their own way", MGTOW.

Does your social media screen that you're putting into place include all of those hateful signs and hashtags to ensure that this kind of thing never happens again whether we're talking about anti-Semitism or all other forms of hate?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, I'm happy to reiterate again the comprehensive vetting process and the pieces that are in it, which I've already stated, but in terms of the detailed question with respect to social media, I'll turn to associate deputy minister Khanna to provide additional content.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Minister.

I will ask this question then later on when we get another opportunity to put that into place.

Coming back to the timeline, in mid-July you become aware of these comments because of Mr. Housefather's intervention. It takes over a month, as a number of my colleagues have indicated. Is the delay in that due to the fact that this particular program is double-headed? You have to go to Canadian Heritage, another minister, Minister Rodriguez, to get the information that is important for you to make the decision about cancelling the contract. Is the very structure of how we have two ministers competing for one program part of the reason that there was such a delay?

• (1335)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely not. I am the minister on the file, and as soon as the issue was raised, I immediately asked my team to look into it and provide me with options, but we also asked the Department of Canadian Heritage to confirm the project funding details and to inform us on the procedural next steps.

After the review by the legal department, we followed the process in place to cut funding to the organization as well as terminate the project. We know this should not have happened, but that's why I'm here today to talk about how we have enhanced the process significantly to make sure this never happens again.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There's obviously a problem. We have two ministers who are compiling and working in one file. When we have one minister having to get information from another department, we have a delay. In this case, it was over a month of very virulent, toxic and anti-Semitic comments basically continuing to be funded by the federal government over that period.

I don't have reassurance from the minister right now that the kind of social media screen that is so important—whether we're talking about anti-Semitism or misogyny—has been clearly put into place to stop this from happening again. That is a matter of some concern.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I can assure the member... Do I have a few seconds to respond?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister. You can get back to that. You have an hour with us.

I would now like to move to the next round, which is a five-minute round.

We will begin with the Conservatives and Rachael Thomas.

Mrs. Thomas, you have five minutes.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Actually, Madam Chair, it's going to be me.

The Chair: Okay, John.

Mr. John Nater: Before we start, could we just confirm that we'll have the full second round of questions, Madam Chair?

The Chair: I think we will because we tend to flow these into each other. I think we will have that time.

Mr. John Nater: We'll just be sure that we do. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, thanks for joining us.

Just to clarify, on what date did Mr. Housefather inform you of these concerns about Mr. Marouf?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I thank MP Housefather for bringing this individual to our attention.

The comments made by this individual are—

Mr. John Nater: Minister, with respect, what was the date?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: When this issue was first raised, we immediately asked the department to look into it to confirm the details.

Mr. John Nater: Minister, with respect, on what date was that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, I'm trying to answer the question.

Mr. John Nater: It's a simple question. I'm just looking for the date.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It was on July 19 or 20—around there.

Mr. John Nater: July 19 or 20 was even longer than was originally.... It was full month before your department took any action.

I want to go back. You said—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I wouldn't say the department didn't take any action. I think that's an unfair characterization, but I'll let you finish your question and I can respond.

Mr. John Nater: With respect, I do have the floor, Minister.

You mentioned that this “fell through the cracks”. With respect, this fell through a canyon. This isn't something that wasn't glaring with flashing lights that couldn't have been found by Google.

Who specifically in your department has been held accountable for this failure?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I want to assure the honourable member that despite the premise of his question, there was already work under way to get the details of the funding for this organization and to establish the process to terminate both the contract and the project. That was done.

In addition to that, the vetting process that was in place at the time that this project was approved clearly did not work. Obviously, that is clear to us. Our job is to ensure that not only do we terminate this contract and demand that the money be repaid, which is what we've done, but to ensure that this never happens again by putting in place robust, enhanced measures and better training and vetting.

That's why I'm here. It's to talk about those measures and to make sure committee members—

• (1340)

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Minister.

With respect, it sounds like no one has really been held accountable within your department.

I want to move on.

According to a media report on the Arabic-language website, an-nasher.com, according to Mr. Marouf, CMAC was actually invited to submit an application. They were encouraged by Heritage Canada. It went so far as to say that Heritage Canada dumped money on them.

I'd like to know who within your department contacted Mr. Marouf and CMAC to so strongly encourage them to seek out this funding.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: At the time that this project was approved in 2021, I was not the minister on the file.

Mr. John Nater: Minister, with respect, you're the minister responsible, so I'm asking you.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely. If I can finish the answer—

Mr. John Nater: Who within the department reached out to CMAC and Mr. Marouf and encouraged them to apply for this funding?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The process used to select this organization was clearly unacceptable. I can tell you, sir, that this vetting process failed.

Mr. John Nater: Minister, again, I'm asking you a very simple question.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm trying to answer.

Mr. John Nater: No, you're not, sir.

I'm asking you who within the department sought out Mr. Marouf and CMAC and encouraged them to apply for this funding. Who was it?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I will have to get back to you on that. I'm not sure what you are referring to. You're obviously referring to a media article that you read somewhere.

I'm happy to get back to you on that. It's not something that I have come across.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chair, I would like it noted that the minister will be returning to us with the individual within the Department of Canadian Heritage who sought out CMAC to encourage them to apply for funding.

Minister, as you're aware, there's a media report that, potentially, the CRTC is still paying Mr. Marouf funding. Are you aware whether or not the CRTC is still providing funding to CMAC and/or Mr. Marouf?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: My response to your question, which is an important question, is that we are surprised and disappointed by the CRTC's decision. Funds should never go to an organization that demonstrates racism and anti-Semitism—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —and xenophobia. Canadians really expect that this principle applies to all public and private institutions.

That is my response to you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nater. That's it.

We now have 17 seconds left. I'm sorry. We're not going to let the Nater formula apply in this case, because the minister must leave at two o'clock.

Now we'll go to Martin Champoux for two and a half minutes—

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Chair, it's a Liberal round.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to say from the outset that I share the minister's strong disappointment with the CRTC's comments that were reported today. This organization, CMAC, and Mr. Marouf should not be funded by anyone or any agency at all, so I appreciate the minister's comments with respect to that.

As someone who has been involved since 2015 on this anti-Semitism issue, whether with respect to the apology about the *St. Louis*, with respect to the nomination of Irwin Cotler as our special envoy on anti-Semitism, with respect to the decision to adopt the IHRA definition and implement it across government, or with respect to the decision to criminalize Holocaust denial and supporting that—which was originally a motion from our colleague Mr. Waugh that became part of the budget implementation bill—I think we've had a very strong record as a government and across party lines in fighting anti-Semitism in this country. That is why this situation was so disappointing.

Minister, I appreciate your efforts to take responsibility and say that you're going to get this problem fixed now on the due diligence side, on the contractual side and on the training side, because those are all really important. I want to ask a couple of questions about that.

First, though, there are many members of Canada's Jewish community who feel, for whatever reason, that anti-Semitism is not treated on par with other forms of racism. Can you reassure Canadians, particularly the Jewish community, that you believe anti-Semitism is just as important as any other form of racism or phobia in this country?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely. Thank you very much for the question, MP Housefather, and thank you for your work on this really important issue, both as an individual before entering public life and now.

As the minister responsible, on behalf of the government, I can state unequivocally that combatting anti-Semitism and combatting hate against Jewish Canadians are absolutely a priority for our government. We have taken a number of steps in that regard and we will continue to be a strong champion in the fight against anti-Semitism in this country.

• (1345)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you so much, Mr. Minister. I appreciate that. I think many people don't know your past history before being elected of working with CIJA and working with the Jewish community to fight anti-Semitism. I think it's important that people know that you were fighting anti-Semitism long before you became a minister.

Let me ask a second question.

My colleague Mr. Julian talked about the vetting procedure, which is very important. Equally important is the training. I was very pleased to hear that the Jewish Public Servants' Network, which has been complaining to me quite a lot about the lack of coherence about anti-Semitism training in different departments, is going to be part of this process. We can use this as an opportunity to create the best anti-Semitism and other forms of racism training, which you can then implement not only in your department, but across departments, which is excellent.

I want to get to the question of the attestation and the contract, because one of the problems here was that the termination clause in the existing contract didn't allow you the immediate opportunity to terminate the agreement. That's what I'm getting.

Can you talk about what termination rights the minister will now have in the contracts in the event that somebody like Mr. Marouf is found to have made such statements?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely. Thank you very much, MP Housefather, for that question.

I think you point to a really important lesson in this particular issue, which is that moving forward, we will be able to move more swiftly to immediately to cut funding and make sure that we terminate contracts. That is part of the enhanced agreement. That is also part of introducing a new item with, namely, an attestation that will proactively require applicants to commit to the standards of the Canadian Human Rights Act and to the anti-racism framework.

I just want to add, with regard to MP Nater's last question, because I ran out of time, that I understand that the officials will be able to provide information to him with respect to his last question. I just want to clarify that.

In terms of powers in addition to terminating more quickly, there will be language in the agreement to enhance the ability of the government to move more quickly, and to put an attestation to applicants so they're able to proactively commit to live by the standards expected of them with respect to making sure their organization—including any consultant, employee, partner, or anybody associated with it—cannot engage in racist, anti-Semitic or hateful behaviour or comments against Black Canadians or francophone community members, and that if that happens, we can take quick action.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I'm now going to Martin Champoux.

You have two and a half minutes, Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, on September 12, you stated in an interview with the National Post that the incident involving Laith Marouf was a system failure. On that day, you announced that a host of measures would be put in place to prevent it from happening again. Reading these measures, one thinks that common sense would dictate that they should already have been in place, especially for the implementation of a program like the one you wanted to put in place at that time with Mr. Marouf's company.

What measures were in place before this incident? How was the due diligence carried out on companies that were entrusted with large sums of public money to go and provide training on such sensitive issues as anti-racism or anti-Semitism?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's a very good question. Thank you very much for this important question.

My expectation was that the measures in place at that time would have included robust vetting and due diligence measures and steps to ensure that this individual and organization would not go through the cracks.

Now we're introducing a new vetting process to ensure, for example, that there is enhanced vetting training for program officers and ensure that multiple officials review each and every application so that mistakes can be caught, and to ensure that there is enhanced anti-racism and anti-Semitism training for all program officers.

To develop this training, we're turning to the experts, people like the Honourable Irwin Cotler, the special envoy to combat anti-

Semitism, Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center, and the Jewish Public Servants' Network to develop this program.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Earlier, you spoke of your commitment to combat francophobic comments, such as those made by Mr. Marouf. In this process, do you intend to include people from the francophone community from anywhere in Canada, people who are concerned?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I take this as another commitment from you, Minister, and I am grateful.

After this incident involving the Community Media Advocacy Centre, have you reviewed all other contracts awarded to similar organizations? Have you reviewed the due diligence assessment of other organizations you have awarded contracts to?

[*English*]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, I want to thank the honourable member. That's a really important question.

When we identified the vetting process failure in this case, we followed up with the Department of Canadian Heritage to ensure there was no other case like this. I have instructed the department to put all funding requests on hold until a new enhanced vetting process is in place.

Let me be absolutely clear to the member, as well as to all the committee members, that if any other similar case comes to my attention, we will act swiftly to cut off funding and hold the organization accountable.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

I now go to Peter Julian for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, you just said that if any further cases come to your attention, but that indicates to me that you are not systematically going through the current organizations that are receiving funding to make sure—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's not what I said, sir.

Mr. Peter Julian: —there is no social media screen to ensure that—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's not what I said, sir.

Mr. Peter Julian: —there aren't these types of social media comments taking place on behalf of other organizations.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, that's not what I said, sir.

Mr. Peter Julian: You said that if it comes to your attention.... Is the department right now verifying each of the current recipients of the program?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: What I can assure you, Mr. Julian, is that we are putting in place enhanced vetting and due diligence processes, and multiple layers of checks—

Mr. Peter Julian: That's not my question.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —of different officials to make sure that hateful comments such as those made by this individual and CMAC can be caught, and that we can address this, move faster, cut funding quicker, and terminate contracts faster. I'm actually trying to answer your question, Mr. Julian.

That's the new process that will be in place in addition to more enhanced vetting and training in anti-Semitism, anti-racism, hateful behaviour, discrimination against Black Canadians, with franco-phone community members and so on—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Excuse me for interrupting, but I don't have much time. It is obvious from your answer that you have not done this check with the organizations that are already in place.

The anti-Semitism and attacks on French speakers that have taken place have gone unanswered. I have two questions about this.

Firstly, has there ever been a requirement for organizations to attest that no hate speech is made within them?

Secondly, even under the previous regime, you had the power to conduct a thorough audit of the expenditures of these organizations. Has such an audit ever been done in the case of CMAC?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Peter.

We can't answer that question. We have nine seconds left and the minister must leave at two o'clock. I think he's going to be generous and give us an extra three minutes or so because of the pauses, etc.

I will now go to Mrs. Thomas for the Conservatives for five minutes.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you.

Minister, I do appreciate your taking the time to be here today. I did make note of a few comments that were made during our time here with regard to questions that were asked by members of my party, but also other members at the table.

Namely, it wasn't until August 21 that we saw any sort of comment made by you with regard to the conduct of Mr. Marouf. So, August 21 was when we first saw you come out on this. Even then your statement was quite pat. You said you were “working to rectify this matter”. There was not even a statement of strong condemnation or making it clear as to where you stood as an individual, as a minister, or where your government stood.

Further to that, there was no statement made by Minister Rodriguez, who oversees the heritage department. There was no statement made by the Prime Minister, Mr. Trudeau himself. There was no statement made by any other member with the exception of Mr. Anthony Housefather, who brought this to your attention long before. In fact, you just told this committee that this issue was brought to your attention on July 19 or 20. That was when you first became aware of this issue. You did not make a statement until August 21.

Again, that statement had nothing to do with taking accountability or responsibility for this matter, but rather just simply saying that you would basically look into it. Then, of course, things continued to escalate from there.

Now in front of this committee you continue to refuse to take responsibility or to be held accountable. Instead, you're wanting to put the problem onto the vetting system—it's the system's problem. You're saying that the system will somehow be fixed. You haven't exactly walked us through what that's going to look like, nor do we really have time for that today, but I would welcome you to table that for the committee to take a look at. Nevertheless, you are skirting the issue once again and saying that it is the system's fault.

It is not the system's fault. It failed, yes, but today you as the minister are before this committee because it was your responsibility to act when you became aware of what was going on. Your first point of action should have been to condemn the racist and anti-Semitic actions of Mr. Marouf—

• (1355)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I did that—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —and you failed to act—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I did that.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —for a month.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I did that—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: For one month, you sat silent.

As the quote goes, all that evil needs to triumph is for men, good men—we assume that's you—to do nothing: nothing, and that is exactly what you did. You did nothing for one month. You stood on the sidelines and you blamed it on a system, when you, as an individual with a conscience, with a heart and, hopefully, with an ounce of integrity, had an opportunity to do something—

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, be careful.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —and you did nothing.

I'm not done.

Here we are—

The Chair: I would advise you to be careful with your language. Thank you.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Here we are before this committee. Our questions continue to be skirted and the blame continues to be put on the system.

The one thing that you did offer us today is that you do disagree with the funding that was given and you do believe that it should be pulled back and your department has taken that responsibility, but you've further said that the CRTC needs to do the same, because about half a million dollars has gone in that direction.

In order for that to take place, it would then be important for Mr. Rodriguez himself to come to this committee and to be able to testify, so to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. You are muted, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I'm not sure at what point I got muted, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You said that you would like Mr. Rodriguez to testify. You were muted for only about a second or two.

Thank you.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

With that, because it's been brought to our attention that the CRTC gave about half a million dollars of funding to Mr. Marouf and his wife—a.k.a. the organization—and it would then be pertinent for Mr. Rodriguez to come to appear before this committee, I would like to move a motion to that effect. I'm happy to read that into the record at this point.

● (1400)

The Chair: You have two seconds, Mrs. Thomas. I'm sorry.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, once I move a motion, I am no longer constrained by time.

I will read my motion into the—

The Chair: But you have not started the motion.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I asked for your permission to read it into the record.

The Chair: All right. Go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

In light of the shocking testimony and the discovery that CMAC received over half a million dollars from the CRTC dating back to 2016, I move: "That the Minister of Canadian Heritage be invited to appear before the committee at the earliest date possible regarding the federal funding provided to the Community Media Advocacy Centre, known as CMAC, by the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)."

Madam Chair, when it's appropriate, I wish to speak to my motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will, if you don't mind, allow the last questioner, Mr. Coteau, and then we're going to have to debate and discuss this motion that we have. If you wish to do it today, I'm letting you know that we have departmental witnesses who may not be able to testify. If you want to move this into another time, we could discuss it in a business meeting that may be coming up very soon.

What would you like to do, Mrs. Thomas?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I believe I've made it clear that my motion is so moved.

The Chair: So would you like it dealt with right now?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: My motion is so moved.

The Chair: All right. We have a motion on the floor.

Is there anyone who wishes to speak to the motion?

I see hands up.

I see Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair, but I believe—

The Chair: I just wanted to note that the minister has to leave at a set time, so he may not be here for this discussion, and he needn't be anyway.

Go ahead, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair, but I believe Mrs. Thomas still has the floor.

The Chair: She moved her motion. I was looking at people who wished to speak for or against.

Mrs. Thomas, do you wish to say more on this motion? It seemed to me to be pretty clear.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I do believe it's customary that the mover of the motion is the first to speak.

The Chair: Yes, Mrs. Thomas. Please speak.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I recognize that a motion of this nature has been entertained at this committee before; however, at that time we did not have all of the information that we now have. Based on the testimony that has been brought forward by Minister Hussen, we now know that, indeed, about half a million dollars was given to Mr. Marouf and his wife, a.k.a. the organization. That's the entire organization. That was given by the CRTC. We know, based on Mr. Hussen's testimony, that it is Minister Rodriguez who oversees the heritage department, which oversees the CRTC, which gave the funding.

It would then seem to be of interest to this committee to hear from Minister Rodriguez in terms of this funding, how that vetting process was conducted, why that funding was granted in the first place and what actions are going to be taken in order to mitigate risk going forward.

I say risk because to have someone like Mr. Marouf on Twitter and other social media platforms spewing hate of the worst kind... I don't even know that you can say that. All forms of hate are disgusting, but there is something extraordinarily vile about Mr. Marouf's approach.

Money was given to this individual when there was clear evidence showing that he is an extremely vile individual who engages in not only racist rhetoric but calls for outright violence and celebration of violence that has already been done. Given that this is the fact, it seems appropriate that the minister would be given an opportunity to answer for his department's decisions and how they might make changes going forward.

I think this whole situation is very shocking. This summer when I first became aware of Mr. Marouf's statements, I know that I, for one, was very shocked, appalled and surprised. I watched as Canadians responded. I saw their grief, frustration, outrage and pain. It was pain for many of them. There are many who are a part of the Jewish community and many who are allies with the Jewish community. They see conduct like that, and it impacts them deeply.

The truth is that I wish it impacted all of us deeply. I wish Minister Hussen had been impacted at a deeper level so that it would not have taken him a month to finally respond with any sort statement of condemnation towards the conduct of Mr. Marouf.

The point is this. There are these vile, absolutely disgusting tweets and other social media engagements that are out there. Somehow that was missed in the vetting process. Mr. Hussen has said that he's going to undertake an investigation or a review process of some kind in order to look into that and hopefully fix the vetting process.

We do not know what Mr. Rodriguez is going to do on his side with regard to the half a million dollars of funding that has been awarded by the CRTC. What about that vetting process? What did that look like? How did Mr. Marouf get missed? What's going to be done in order to rectify that situation? How are we going to ensure that Canadian tax dollars are not put towards the perpetuation of racism in the future? As this government has stated, and I hope I can take them at their word, they want to fight racism.

• (1405)

Again, I find that somewhat difficult to fully believe or give credit to when we have a minister before us who took more than a month—more than a month—just to open his mouth and say something, let alone take action. I actually would say that inaction, therefore, makes him complicit in racism. He actually lent to its perpetuation.

However, if the true desire going forward is for change, then I would suggest that we give Mr. Rodriguez the opportunity to share with us his vision for his department and the actions that he will take going forward in order to rectify this, in order to make sure that Canadians are assured—assured of their safety, assured of their well-being, assured that their tax dollars will be used wisely, assured that they are not made complicit in extending racism.

I sure don't want my tax dollars used in that way, and I don't think anyone on this committee call right now wants their tax dollars to be used in that way. So, for that reason, for the reason of accountability, for the reason of transparency—

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay, Michael. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I just want to point out that we had the minister here for one hour. I am the last person, I believe, on the list to speak. Obviously, the minister has made it very clear that he is here for an hour.

The member now has taken up 15 minutes speaking during her duration and also during her motion that she's moving. I would just say that, as a common courtesy to each member of this committee, we should at least attempt to allow people to speak and use their slots. In this case, it's clear that the minister will have to leave, and I will not be able to ask my questions. As a courtesy, I would ask the member to speed things up so we can proceed with the final round.

Thank you.

• (1410)

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, you have been requested.... You have the floor, so it is your decision.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, my point remains. Canadians—

The Chair: Am I clear that you are not ceding the floor for Mr. Coteau to ask his question?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I believe the time is mine, and I believe [*Inaudible—Editor*] point of order.

The Chair: I'm asking you a simple yes-or-no question. You will not cede it. Fine. Thank you.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Could we perhaps let the minister go, given that it looks like this is going to go on for some time?

The Chair: Yes, I was about to say that the minister may leave.

I'm sorry, Michael. Mrs. Thomas has not allowed you that question.

The minister may leave. He does not have to be here for the debate on the motion.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you for being here, Minister.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you.

The Chair: I'd like to thank the minister for appearing, and I would like to thank him for giving us his time. I know that he has many demands on his time.

Minister, you may leave.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Personally, thank you.

If we are going to have time for the second hour, I would hope that the officials would stay. Thank you.

Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Having light shed on the fact that the CMAC, which is Mr. and Mrs. Marouf, received over half a million dollars dating back to 2016 and given that that funding came through the CRTC, which Minister Rodriguez oversees, it seems incumbent upon us as the committee to ask Mr. Rodriguez to come and to testify here so that we would have opportunities to ask him questions.

Again, I don't need to remind this committee of the vile nature of Mr. Marouf's interactions on social media and the fact that he is a raging anti-Semite who was asked by this government to put in place anti-Semitic training or anti-racism training. I think that—I don't know—it baffled me—

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Madam Chair, while I appreciate the member's deep concern and what she says of being an ally to the Jewish community, as a member of the Jewish community and one who represents one of the largest Jewish communities in the country, many of my community are watching today and have very deep concerns that they would like to hear from the department about the vetting process. While I can appreciate the member's so-called "allyship" to the Jewish community on this issue, by taking up the time of this committee and not allowing all of us, including herself, time to ask these important questions in the time that was made today, it's really not allyship. It's just taking up space.

Therefore, while she has duly moved her motion, for the sake of the community that has deep questions it wants to have heard and answered today, I would ask the member to consider permitting that line of questioning with the department that has taken the time to be here to answer and be accountable to myself and to the Jewish community.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saks.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, on the same point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, I appreciate Ms. Saks' commentary. I do think there are obviously many questions this department has to be held to account for. We just heard from Minister Hussen that no one's been held to account—at least no one who's been identified as being held to account.

The Chair: Mr. Nater, please—

Mr. John Nater: I'm getting to the point of intervention.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. John Nater: Ms. Saks did make note of whether we could speed this along and return to the questions.

Using the Simms protocol that is common in other committees, my response to Ms. Saks would be whether she would agree to support this motion to bring in Minister Rodriguez. If she could respond to whether Minister Rodriguez ought to come and whether she'll be supporting the motion, then I'm sure we can move this along rather quickly, if we do have the support from Ms. Saks and other members of this committee.

• (1415)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I have no comment on the motion at this time. I'm simply asking for the time to be used as was duly appointed for today.

Mr. John Nater: Again, with respect, a motion has been duly moved and to criticize or to make it seem like this motion is out of order—

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I don't believe the vote has been called, so I have nothing to comment at this time, Madam Chair.

Mr. John Nater: Again, using the Simms protocol, if Ms. Saks and the Liberals are willing to support and vote in favour of this motion, I think we can very much move this along on the compromise basis that we've often employed.

If Ms. Saks isn't willing to compromise and work with this committee, I think that's unfortunate, but I think we want to hear answers and have people held to account.

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

The Chair: Yes, Anthony.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Chair, I just wanted to say that I think Ms. Saks answered Mr. Nater clearly.

I don't think it's fair to make those comments about Ms. Saks. She has absolutely no reason to tell him how she's going to vote on a motion that hasn't been voted on yet.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Nater had a point of order and Ms. Saks responded to it, so obviously it's up to Mrs. Thomas to decide whether she will allow for the meeting to continue as per the orders of the day or whether she will continue to speak.

I would like to urge Mrs. Thomas to also consider when she's speaking to her motion that, if she becomes repetitive, I'm going to have to ask her to give up the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Peter, go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Chair, through you to Mrs. Thomas, I have really important questions that I want to ask the ministerial officials. This is a really important issue. Fundamentally, we're seeing anti-Semitism grow.

I would ask Mrs. Thomas, through you, that she stop the filibuster and allow us to get more answers from the ministerial officials.

The Chair: Thank you.

Once again, you are hearing from many members of the committee, Mrs. Thomas.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, Martin.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, it is my turn to add my voice to those of my colleagues.

I am somewhat surprised to hear my colleague Mr. Nater tell Ms. Saks that if the other members of the committee decide to support Ms. Thomas's proposed motion, the ongoing filibuster will cease. I find that unseemly and a little embarrassing, to be quite honest.

Today we have the only opportunity to get to the bottom of this and talk about this embarrassing situation. The French-speaking community and the Jewish community stand together in this, having both been hurt by unacceptable comments.

I, too, appeal to Ms. Thomas and my Conservative colleagues. We must not be blackmailed, you must stop blocking the work of the committee by forcing us to vote for the motion.

We need to get to the bottom of this and have time to ask our questions of the department officials who are here today.

So I appeal to the common sense and reason of my colleagues, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

Again, I have to go by the rules as the chair. The floor is being held by Mrs. Thomas, and she could, in a point of goodwill, decide that she would heed what Mr. Nater said, to move this along, before he asked Ms. Saks about her vote.

You have asked, Mr. Julian has asked, Mr. Coteau has asked, quite a few people have asked that we move this along.

Again, I will ask Mrs. Thomas, who does have the floor according to the rules, if she will actually wind up what she has to say so other people may be able to get on with this, and I may be able to call a vote on her motion when possible.

Mrs. Thomas, people are asking for your goodwill.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will take the floor again.

With regard to the comment that was made concerning the Jewish community, I appreciate that Ms. Saks is here as a member of that community and wants to use her voice to speak on their behalf. I also have a voice as an elected official in this country. While I myself am not a member of the Jewish community, I do have many friends within the community.

I too have the ability to use my voice. I would ask that this does not be turned into a fight as to who can exercise their voice to the greater extent or in the right way. By asking Minister Rodriguez to this committee is one form of advocacy on the Jewish community.

Through you, Chair, Ms. Saks having an opportunity to ask the officials a question is another form of advocacy, but both are valuable.

With that, I will step back into what is proper protocol for this committee, which is to entertain motions brought forward by duly elected members of Parliament, which I am. I have brought forward a motion to ask for Minister Rodriguez to come to this committee. I am asking for that because there is half a million dollars' worth of funding given through the CRTC to—

• (1420)

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, you are being repetitive, I may point out.

Who is that? Kevin, was that your point of order?

Mr. Peter Julian: It's Peter Julian.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair—

The Chair: Peter, go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: —I would ask you to ensure it is a true point of order.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, I am running this according to the rules, so please don't tell me how to chair this meeting.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It was simply a question.

The Chair: It wasn't a question. It was a statement, Mrs. Thomas.

Mr. Julian, you have a point of order, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Chair, through you to Mrs. Thomas, there is a time to raise a motion. It's not when you sabotage the hearings by cutting off access to ministerial officials.

I would implore, through you, Madam Chair, that Mrs. Thomas simply withdraw the motion so we can actually ask the ministerial representatives the questions we need to ask today, and then we can come back to it at our next meeting.

The Chair: I originally asked that when Mrs. Thomas moved her motion, Mr. Julian, and she said she would not. She wanted to deal with it right now.

Indeed, according to the rules she has the ability to do that. I think we have asked for goodwill on this committee, and Mrs. Thomas has made her response to that question.

As the chair, I want to note that during the proceedings when questions were asked, the minister referred to some of his officials to answer those questions, because he did not have some of those answers.

Again, if we are looking for answers, we have officials in the room and they are here until the end of the second hour. When they leave we would have missed an opportunity, as everyone said.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: On a further point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, I have just realized that we are debating a motion for which I have not received the French version. I have not received anything in my emails.

I would like you to tell me what needs to be done under the circumstances.

[*English*]

The Chair: You don't need 48 hours for such a motion because it is on the current topic.

However, I would like to ask the clerk whether it should have been done orally in French when it was brought out by Mrs. Thomas.

No, there is no need for that, Mr. Champoux. I'm sorry.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aimée Belmore): I would love the text of the motion in one language. It would be very helpful.

The Chair: You have not received any text at all from Mrs. Thomas. Okay, thank you.

I'm sorry, Martin, the rules say that she could intervene in one language only, but it would be nice if everyone had the text.

Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I'm happy to clarify the motion for my colleague. I can read it slowly into the record if that's helpful. Before doing so, Madam Chair, I would love for you to give the current speaking order, please.

The Chair: I don't think we have a speaking order, Mrs. Thomas, because you have been the one speaking. People's hands are up—I can see them—but they have not been allowed to speak because you have the floor.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes, Madam Chair, thank you. I was curious as to the order. Who is to speak next?

The Chair: I think it would be Mr. Nater, and then it would be Mr. Champoux.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The moment that Mrs. Thomas moved her motion, I put my hand up in the room. I don't think the clerk saw me, but I put it up quite quickly, so I do believe that I may be first.

The Chair: Then Ms. Vandenberg would be the first person. I'm sorry. I am not in the room and I have to depend on those who are in the room to tell me.

Clerk, do you have a list?

The Clerk: Dr. Fry, Ms. Vandenberg is correct, I wasn't able to see everyone's hands while I was also trying to type out the motion. The order I do have is Mrs. Thomas, who is currently speaking, Mr. Nater, Ms. Lantsman, Mr. Waugh, Monsieur Champoux, Ms. Saks and Ms. Vandenberg.

• (1425)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Chair, I did put up my hand. I know that some others in the room did see me. I don't know if that makes a difference, but I do believe I should be further up the list than what was just read out.

The Chair: I'm afraid that I have to go by the clerk's list because she is in the room and she obviously did not see your hand, Ms. Vandenberg. I did not see Mr. Waugh's hand up earlier as well. I saw Mr. Nater, Mr. Champoux and Mr. Julian. That was how I saw the hands, but they were all in the virtual chat so I have no idea who was in the room.

If the clerk said she did not see your hand, I cannot go against that and argue that debate, unless people in the room wanted to speak up to say they saw your hand up very early.

Is there anybody in the room who wishes to say that they saw Ms. Vandenberg's hand up immediately when the motion was read?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I did, Madam Chair. Her hand certainly was up right away.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Housefather, and you are sitting next to Ms. Vandenberg.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I'm sitting next to her, which is why I saw it, yes.

The Chair: All right. I will then move to put Ms. Vandenberg further up the list. I saw Mr. Nater. I did not see Ms. Lantsman. I saw Mr. Nater and I also saw Mr. Champoux and Mr. Julian, so I will put Mr. Nater, Mr. Champoux, Mr. Julian and Ms. Vandenberg in that order.

Mr. John Nater: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. John Nater: I think we started picking names out of the air in terms of who goes where and when and how and in what order.

The Chair: I don't think I'm picking names out of the air, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, with respect, we do have a clerk who over the last six months in particular has done an impressive amount of work on behalf of this committee including, at times, working late into the evening on amendments and early in the morning on amendments. I have a great deal of respect for our clerk and I think this committee has a great deal of respect for our clerk. She has maintained a speakers list and I think it is incumbent on us—especially in a situation where we have some online, some in the room—to have respect for our clerk who has the eye of the room, but also has the eye of the screen. So my—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Again, Madam Chair—

The Chair: You've made your point.

Mr. John Nater: —my suggestion is that we maintain the list that is maintained by the clerk, and that ought to be the speaking order.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Chair.

The Chair: Is there anyone opposing this position?

Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Yes, Madam Chair, I'll withdraw, although I will note there is a large computer screen between me and the clerk. I'll withdraw, I'll put it at whatever point the clerk says.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your generosity, Ms. Vandenberg.

Obviously, Mrs. Thomas wishes to keep the floor.

Mrs. Thomas, please, I have heard now many, many times the idea of the \$500,000 that has been given by the CRTC, so I don't want to hear that again, please. Let's try not to be redundant and let's try not to be repetitive. If you have new points to make, that would be fine; otherwise, I'm going to have to say that you are filibustering.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I wish to seek clarification before continuing.

I think my honourable colleague, Mr. Nater, brought up a good point, and that is, we have a non-partisan clerk who has served this committee incredibly well for many months. I want to ensure, then, that we're going with her list.

The Chair: I agreed with Mr. Nater on that and Ms. Vandenberg very generously said that she would remove her name from the front of the list. We have all decided on that, Mrs. Thomas, so I don't think we need you to repeat it. It's been decided on, so let us move on. Do you wish to speak again?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair—

The Chair: You have the floor. Will you speak to your motion?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I wish to seek clarification. I would please ask that you treat me with a level of respect as a colleague. My ask for clarification is whether or not you plan to follow the clerk's list, because there were adjustments that you made in addition to moving Ms. Vandenberg.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: You also moved Mr. Julian as well as Mr. Champoux, so I am seeking clarification.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, you did not intervene to ask a question about clarification. You made a statement.

You wish clarification. I think everyone is agreed—and Ms. Vandenberg has removed her name—that we will go with the clerk's list. Is that clear?

Is that very clear to you now, Mrs. Thomas?

• (1430)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I will now take the floor. Thank you.

The Chair: You will now take the floor. Go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: For Mr. Champoux's benefit, I will read the motion again, and if the clerk wishes for me to do that several times or to do it—

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: At this point, it is now 2:30, and I would just like to comment on how disappointed I am with how this committee meeting is going today. I see an egregious abuse of the speaking order by Mrs. Thomas and other members, rather than getting to the heart of the matter.

I can't begin to emphasize how hurt, how profoundly hurt, the Jewish community was, and the francophone community; I stand with my colleague Monsieur Champoux on this. There are communities watching right now, watching and waiting to hear an explanation. We have a member of the department here prepared to answer these questions, and if there is a genuine desire for allyship and support for communities to get to the heart of this matter, then there wouldn't be such a gross abuse of time on something that is so sensitive and so important and that has been so painful for so many across this country.

In leadership and allyship, every voice is important—

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Madam Chair, I have a point of order—

The Chair: I'm sorry. Ms. Saks is speaking. She has the floor on a point of order.

Go ahead, Ya'ara.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: —but at this point in time—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I believe I have the floor now, Mrs. Thomas.

The Chair: There is a point of order on the floor.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, if you confer with the clerk, I think she will confirm that when a point of order is called, the most recent one has to be entertained.

The Chair: All right.

I would comment that you, Mrs. Thomas, must recall as well that I have asked you, if you wish to make a point of order, to go right ahead, and let us hear it, because obviously it has to be a point of order.

Go ahead. What is your point of order, Mrs. Thomas?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, right now, Ms. Saks, the member who is speaking, is choosing to use her point of order as an opportunity to filibuster. It is not in fact a point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mrs. Thomas. Would you like to chair this meeting?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes, happily.

The Chair: I know you would love to, but Ms. Saks put her hand up. She had a point of order and I had to listen to what she was saying to decide whether or not it was a point of order.

A point of order means that we have moved away from the order of this meeting, which was meant to be listening to witnesses. She's making a valid point of order, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Okay.

The Chair: I think maybe you need to try to be as collegial as you possibly can now and then. Thank you.

Did you have something different to make as a point of order against what Ms. Saks was bringing up as a due point of order?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I just would invite you to confer with the clerk as to whether or not Ms. Saks is raising a true point of order.

The Chair: I say that she is raising a true point of order, Ms. Thomas. Do you wish to challenge the chair?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I do.

The Chair: All right.

We're going to call a vote on the challenge of the chair. Those in the room who think that the chair is correct in suggesting that a point of order is to speak to the order of the business of the day, which is listening to witnesses....

I say that Ms. Saks's point of order is valid. I would like to hear a vote from the committee that I am correct in allowing Ms. Saks a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Chair, can we ask the clerk to tell us what specific issue we are voting on?

[*English*]

The Clerk: If I've understood correctly, I believe we're voting on—

The Chair: Well, all right, what are we...? We still have not heard from Mrs. Thomas about what we're voting on.

Clerk, were you given that in writing?

The Clerk: As I understand it, we are voting on the challenge to the chair as to whether or not Ms. Saks' point of order is a genuine point of order.

• (1435)

The Chair: Yes. That's what I thought we were voting on.

The Clerk: If everybody is comfortable with that, I'm going to proceed with a recorded division. Once the challenge to the chair has been established, it's supposed to go to an immediate recorded division.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Could we clarify whether, if we vote yea, we are supporting the chair?

The Clerk: I'm going to do that in two seconds.

The question is this: Shall the decision of the chair be sustained? If the chair's decision is to be sustained—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair—

The Clerk: —a yea vote is to agree with the chair and a nay vote is to disagree with the chair.

The Chair: Thank you. Please call the vote.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, may I...?

The Chair: We have a vote on the floor, and the clerk is now going to read the vote.

The Clerk: I'll have to pull up my substitution list, because we have a few different members from what we have usually.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We shall continue.

Ms. Saks, have you finished with your point of order?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I am about to complete it.

All I want to simply say, in an effort not to be repetitive, is that the communities are watching. They have waited to have this time with the department. This has been an egregious abuse by Mrs. Thomas and members of the Conservative Party to not allow the

Jewish community to have the answers that they want to see today—or the francophone community, for that matter.

I'm profoundly disappointed in such actions. They are selfish and they do not show leadership.

Thank you.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saks.

The Chair: Go ahead, Anthony.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: As somebody who represents the second-largest Jewish community in the country, I am horrified by what is happening. I just wanted to echo what Ms. Saks said, and since that was a valid point of order, this would be one too.

I am just so disheartened and so disappointed. I had real questions to ask on behalf of my community to those officials about their due diligence process. I am really, really disheartened.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

All right. I think we are back to obviously Mrs. Thomas having the floor.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I will note for the committee and for public record that I have held the floor in this capacity, since moving my motion, for a total of 10 minutes of speaking time. However, since I moved my motion, 38 minutes have passed, which means that 30 minutes were taken up by colleagues speaking to various points of order that they raised and then used as filibuster opportunities.

As much as my colleagues would like to blame me for taking the majority of this time, it in fact has been others around the table. I simply wish to bring my motion to the floor, to move it and to speak to its importance. I will resume doing that now.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, you were asked to actually give the clerk your motion. Can you do that please, clearly, in English or in whatever language you choose?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I move that the Minister of Canadian Heritage be invited to appear before the committee at the earliest date possible regarding the federal funding provided to the Community Media Advocacy Centre by the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

• (1440)

The Chair: Thank you. Did everyone clearly get that? Did the clerk get it, most importantly?

The Clerk: Sorry, it is slightly different from what was sent to me. I do apologize, Mrs. Thomas, for trying your patience.

Could I just get you to read it one last time so I can confirm the final version?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes, absolutely.

It is that the Minister of Canadian Heritage be invited to appear before the committee at the earliest date possible regarding the federal funding provided to the Community Media Advocacy Centre by the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

The Chair: Do you have it, Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes, thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think what we're discussing here today is, of course, the opportunity to bring the minister forward.

I share the many sentiments that were put forward by Mr. Housefather and by former MP Michael Levitt who tweeted this: "Looking back on events over the last [year] w/regards to Marouf affair, I'm utterly disheartened. Taking a stand against antisemitism should be a given and yet so few of my former Liberal colleagues have done so. This truly hurts. Jewish MPs shouldn't be left to call this out alone."

Having used his voice to bravely call for accountability, I commend that former member. I commend Mr. Housefather as well for the wise and brave words he spoke this past summer.

We have had Minister Hussen here, but Minister Rodriguez is the one that can answer to the funding that went to the CRTC.

We see here two things. We see a lack of judgment from the minister involving the funding that was given and we see a lack of accountability. Minister Rodriguez did not speak to this situation for nearly five weeks after it came to light. We have not had an opportunity to give Mr. Rodriguez the floor to give him the chance to use his voice to help us understand why that decision was made to remain silent on such an important matter.

We also have not given him the opportunity to help us understand the mechanisms in place to hold the CRTC to account with regard to where funding is allocated or to hold Mr. Marouf accountable with regard to having received funding, how it was used, and his conduct as an individual who was a recipient.

I think it has been made clear today that Minister Hussen does not take full responsibility. He very clearly has stated that. Rather, he shares it with Minister Rodriguez. For that reason again, the third, I would say there is great weight to the request to have Minister Rodriguez come here to this committee so we can ask him questions.

The motion I have before the committee is for the purpose of calling the current government to account, which is our role as opposition members. Further, it is also the role of this committee as a whole. This committee exists to put forward studies that are of interest to the Canadian public and this is certainly one of them.

For the benefit of Canadians, I believe it is worthwhile to take a few minutes of our time—60 minutes to be specific—

• (1445)

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Michael.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

About an hour ago, I requested the member speaking, MP Thomas, to be considerate in allowing me to ask the minister the final question, I believe it was, for that round.

This is not the first time the member has used this tactic to cut people off from asking questions. It's not the first time we've had officials, who are very busy people doing great work, come into a meeting to just sit there and not be asked any questions. This is not the first time it's happened.

I think it's important for people who are watching this who are really concerned about the rise of anti-Semitism and racism in this country to realize what's taking place here. We have a member of the Conservative party who has, for the last hour, held the floor for a motion, and, yes, people have intervened politely to try to ask the member to allow the motion to be voted on.

This is why people are so turned away from politics today. You know, anyone tuning in to see what's going in the House of Commons and this committee would be disgusted with the display of the tactics that are being used to not allow people, the officials, to come in and explain what went wrong in the system, how we can improve the system, and how we could work towards eliminating the spread of hate in this country. This is our opportunity as members of Parliament to put in place the right type of protocols to ensure that this doesn't happen again.

To the member, this program we have in place, a very innovative program that works with organizations across this country to look for ways to fight against hate, is an important issue. We see a constant rise in hate. In Toronto, the most hate crimes are committed against Jewish people. It's growing, and we need to make sure that our programs are working well.

Madam Chair, we only have now 12 minutes left, and it's a hard stop, I believe, at three o'clock. I'm going to ask the member again to let us vote on this motion. We understand exactly what the motion means. She's explained everything in detail. We know all the statistics, numbers and the points that she's made. The member does not have to educate us further on the meaning of the motion. We're capable at this point to make a decision based on the motion that's being put on the floor. It's very clear.

Again, through you, Madam Chair, I'd ask the member to yield the floor and allow the 12 minutes that remain for officials to answer questions that people, not only in this room but in the public, want to hear the answers to.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

Now, Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor.

Also, I've been told by the clerk that there is a hard stop at 3:03. We have no further resources, so we are going to have to end this meeting at that time.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Before I was interrupted by my colleague who wished to filibuster over top of me—

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, please do not decide that everyone does not have the right to speak in this committee, only you.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair—

The Chair: Please go ahead. You have the floor. Please speak to your motion.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I just would ask.... You've asked me to be respectful in my tone and how I appear in this committee. Words were just put in my mouth. I did not accuse my colleague.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor to speak to your motion. Will you please speak to your motion?

• (1450)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I am saying that I was just wrapping up before my colleague interrupted and decided to filibuster over top of me.

The Chair: Mrs. Thomas—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: My comments are simple: I am simply asking that the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Minister Rodriguez, come for 60 minutes of time in order to answer some very important questions that are being asked by the members of this committee and, more importantly, by Canadians.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

You are now ceding the floor, Mrs. Thomas. Thank you.

We shall go with the list that I have.

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair. Allow me to be brief.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage is responsible for his department and is accountable to Parliament. I think that to fulfill our duty as parliamentarians, it is necessary to hear from Minister Rodriguez on the accountability that he has specifically with regard to this funding that has now gone, we know, through two separate avenues: first, through the department and then, second, through the CRTC. I think it is necessary that we hear from Minister Rodriguez, and as my colleague mentioned, one hour is a reasonable length of time to hear from him, particularly as, I might also add and as I mentioned last week, we have yet to hear from the minister on his mandate letter, which was requested by this committee back in the winter.

I will leave my comments there, Madam Chair. I think it is very clear where we stand on this. It is important to hear from the minister so that we may perform our duty as parliamentarians and hold the government to account.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nater.

I understand that the next person on the list is Ms. Lantsman.

Clerk, is that still so?

The Clerk: Ms. Lantsman has left the room, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Waugh.

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

Thanks for the comment—

The Chair: Excuse me, Kevin.

John, is your hand still up, or are you going to take it down?

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, I think that's a legacy hand.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Waugh, go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Madam Chair, I had a motion that was defeated maybe a week ago on this same issue. I was concerned by the comments made by Minister Hussen today about demanding money be paid back. I assume that was the \$133,822 that he was talking about. That tells me that the money has not been paid back, and that is a concern to me.

Again, they granted this without proper vetting. The minister, as we all know, said today that the vetting process has failed, that it fell through the cracks and that he wants new enhanced vetting. However, one of the big questions I have from listening to the minister here this afternoon is about demanding that the money be repaid. It should have been repaid almost instantly, at the end of July when this came to the forefront, so I am very upset about that.

I do feel that we do need to hear from the Minister of Canadian Heritage. He has been soft-spoken since day one on this issue. As Minister Hussen said, it came forward July 19 and July 20 and then, five weeks later, we heard very little in August from the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Therefore, I would like to have him come to the committee to talk about that.

I would also offer this thought, Madam Chair. Because the CRTC provided funding to the CMAC, I think we should also hear from the chair of the CRTC, Ian Scott. I know that Mr. Scott's term is up; it's been extended until they find a new chair of the CRTC. I also wish that we include Mr. Ian Scott, the CRTC chair, because we still have a substantial amount of money up for grabs that we have—

The Chair: Are you moving an amendment, Kevin?

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I would move the amendment.

The Chair: Please move it so that we can deal with the amendment, then.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I move that we see not only the Minister of Canadian Heritage come to committee, but also the current chair of the CRTC, Mr. Ian Scott, come before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Now, the caveat is that Mr. Scott could leave anytime because his term is actually up. However, I would like to see Mr. Scott, along with the Canadian Heritage minister, Mr. Rodriguez, both come, even if Mr. Scott leaves the position of chair of the CRTC. We have a constituency week next week, so we do not know what's going to happen to that position at the CRTC. My worry is that if it gets filled in the next week or so, then Mr. Scott doesn't need to come. I would like to see him come with the minister because I believe there is a substantial amount of money on the table here since 2016, and we need to hear from Mr. Scott, who was, and currently is, the chair of the CRTC.

Therefore, I'd like to make that amendment if I could, Madam Chair.

• (1455)

The Chair: Now we have an amendment on the floor.

Does anyone in the room wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Champoux, your hand is up. I see it first, unless there's somebody on the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Yes, Madam Chair. I will speak to the amendment and the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead on the amendment, Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: This summer, we were all shocked by Mr. Marouf's comments. The Jewish community, francophones, and all those who care about respect for humans, the basic respect in our society, were all offended and shocked to hear the comments made by Mr. Marouf. Moreover, his organization was funded by the government.

We were looking forward to today's meeting, which was intended to get to the bottom of things. We had asked to meet with Minister Hussen and officials from the Department of Canadian Heritage and we had them for one meeting. What did the Conservatives decide to do? They decided to use the second hour of that meeting to table a motion demanding the appearance of Minister Rodriguez, as well as an amendment to that motion to demand the appearance of the CRTC chair.

This could have been done at another time. We could have had some basic respect for the people who tuned in to the meeting today and for the witnesses who came to testify. We could have asked questions of the department officials, who can give us the answers we were looking for about how the program works and what measures are going to be put in place. Instead, we spent an hour making the people listening to our meeting wait for answers and explanations.

There are three minutes left before the mandatory end of today's meeting. I appeal to colleagues to hurry up and vote on this motion

and amendment to get it over with as quickly as possible, because I think it is a disgrace to the Jewish and francophone communities, who have been insulted and who were waiting for explanations today. It is embarrassing.

That's all I had to say.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

I now have Mr. Julian.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Chair, like Mr. Champoux, I am sorry that this meeting, which was so important to the Jewish and francophone communities, was sabotaged by the Conservatives. I don't understand at all why they did it. There is no logic to it, it makes no sense at all. I have a lot of questions that I couldn't ask, because the Conservatives completely sabotaged the meeting.

[*English*]

It's quite striking to me, Madam Chair, that at a time when anti-Semitism is growing, and this was a crucial hearing to get answers as to why this contract was accorded, the Conservatives sabotaged the hearing, shut it down, basically filibustered it out. So I, for one—and I know other members had many questions that they were hoping to ask—can't ask those questions. Now we have to convene at taxpayers' expense another meeting with the ministerial officials so we can actually get the answers that we couldn't get today because of the Conservatives sabotaging it. It's also disrespectful—

The Chair: Peter, are you speaking to the amendment?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

The Chair: You're speaking to the amendment. Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm going to be voting against the amendment, and I'm going to be voting against the motion, because it's profoundly disrespectful to members of this committee. The Conservatives have done this twice. Twice I've said to them, let's have this first hearing, let's get the answers, and then we can come back. I've been open to the consideration.

For the Conservatives to be so disrespectful, so childish, in how they are approaching an issue that is so fundamental.... When we see a growth in hate, when we see a growth in anti-Semitism, instead of dealing with that issue seriously we have this childish temper tantrum and filibuster that does not allow the community to be reassured that we're getting the answers that are required. I'm quite frustrated, Madam Chair.

I don't know if it's because of the embarrassment that the leader of the official opposition experienced with this vile connection to this misogynistic group, and this is some kind of smoke screen. I don't know. But I find it distasteful and showing appallingly bad judgment that this hearing was sabotaged and now we will have to reconvene in two weeks to finally get the ministerial officials to answer the important questions we have. I have a ton of them, and I wasn't able to ask them today because of this childish filibuster.

I just find it extremely regrettable, and for those Canadians who are listening and those Canadians from the Jewish community and francophone Canadians who are listening in, I don't know what to say. I cannot understand the bad, poor, childish judgment of this Conservative Party under the new Conservative leader.

• (1500)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Ms. Saks, you're next. Speak to the amendment, please.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Speaking to the amendment and to this motion, I'd like to say that this has been profoundly.... On my behalf and on behalf of the Jewish community and the francophone community that desperately wanted answers today, this motion tabled at this time is a complete affront—a slap in the face, I would say—to combatting racism, xenophobia and all forms of hate in this country.

The questions that communities are asking us to ask on their behalf.... They're arguing about it right now on Twitter. As a matter of fact, CIJA thanked me and Minister Hussen for the work that we've done, and there is more to be done.

Instead of getting to that today, we saw Conservatives hide, as they do, behind hashtags and handles of misogyny and racism, and try to put up a front that has absolutely nothing to do with addressing the needs of vulnerable communities today.

I don't support the motion. I don't support the amendment. It was a waste of the time of the Jewish and francophone communities today, and many other communities.

At this point, Madam Chair, since I have the floor, I move to adjourn.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Saks.

I was about to do that myself, because we are now at three minutes after the hour and we have a hard stop, as the clerk warned us.

This meeting is now adjourned.

Thank you.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>