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Chair

The Honourable Don Boudria

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.)): Order, please.

Colleagues, the first part of the meeting this morning will be publicly broadcast. We informally agreed at the last meeting that after hearing this witness—and I don't want to rush anybody—and perhaps not too long a debate, we will set the issue aside and go back to our in camera meeting to discuss the report.

I think we also said that in any case we will try to get that started on or before 11:45 a.m. Hopefully my memory is correct in that regard. If not, I'm sure a whole bunch of people will correct me.

The witness we have before us this morning is in relation to the issue of privilege on mailings sent to various ridings. Members will know—and perhaps those who are coming to the committee today and have not been here in the last little while—that a number of colleagues have brought to our attention what they consider to be the questionable use of franking, mailing, and printing privileges—I suppose those are the three areas of the House—in a way that they argue is not proper.

This morning we have with us MP Mark Holland. We will ask him to make a brief presentation on the grievance that was brought to the attention of the House and referred to us. After that we'll begin questions.

Mr. Holland.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair and the committee, for the opportunity to be here today to address the committee on this issue.

I want to start quickly with the nature of my grievance, and particularly with the issue of privilege that I asked be investigated by the Speaker and that was subsequently referred to this committee.

Like many of you, I've had these ten percenters from other MPs mailed to my riding. On this particular occasion, the ten percenters were actually placed as inserts into my householders. This was because I guess there was a period of overlap. There was also a question of how far it went.

I was contacted by some 12 residents in different parts of my constituency who had these particular pieces put into their householders. We then phoned various people we knew, and many of them found these inserts had been stuffed in. This was an instance of one or two houses, but it seemed to be very widespread. In some instances the inserts had been stuffed into lock boxes.

Obviously that's a great concern to me, as it was to the constituents who contacted me. Members of Parliament have the opportunity to communicate to their residents in an unfettered way, and to have ten percenters from another party stuffed inside your householders is inappropriate.

Members of committee will have in front of them a letter from Canada Post that acknowledges a mistake was made, and indeed this stuffing into householders did occur. They apologized for that mistake, and obviously I'm grateful they did. But there are a couple of points I want to raise with the committee today.

One is the fact that this has happened. I've only been a member of Parliament for something less than a year, and I imagine it's happened before. It needs to be addressed to Canada Post and re-emphasized that this is not an appropriate practice and should not occur to any member of this House when they're attempting to communicate with their constituents.

Second, in my mind it raises the bigger question of the need for these mailings in general. I know the House in its wisdom some years ago made the decision that members of Parliament could send ten percenters into other ridings. I think perhaps it's time for the committee to review that practice and whether or not that practice should at least have constraints placed on it.

When you see party logos on them and party messages—without pointing to any particular party—I'm not sure what was intended at the time. On the volume that some ridings are seeing, my riding has seen a fair amount, but I know ridings near mine have seen these ten percenters going into their ridings four or five times a week. An extraordinary amount of money is being spent on this.

I don't think their purpose is to necessarily communicate a message that is non-partisan in nature. Many of these flyers have on them, "Fill out here if you think X party is horrible and we're wonderful". I suggest this information is being compiled for use when there's an election, to build databases of people who are mailing in and saying, "Yes, I'll support your party". So in my opinion, that constitutes abuse as well.

In light of these facts and the circumstance I happen to be involved in, the committee should seriously review these practices and either eliminate the practice of sending out these ten percenters or severely constrain the frequency with which they can be used and their content.

•(1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, I have just two points. One is to better understand the material that's sent as a householder. In the fold of it—presumably in the material sent by you explaining all the things one does for constituents—I gather there was a document from somebody else saying probably something like, “Your MP is not doing a good job”, or “His party is horrible”, or some such statement, inserted inside. Is that correct?

Mr. Mark Holland: That's correct, yes.

The Chair: All right. I just wanted to understand.

Now colleagues will ask questions.

Just so you understand, these decisions are decisions of the board, not of this committee. But this committee, nevertheless, is free to make recommendations to the board. The system that exists now was not established by this committee nor its predecessor committee, and of course the remedy, if there is a remedy necessary—and that's to be judged—would not be administered by this committee, although, of course, the Speaker did ask for our guidance. I just wanted to establish that.

Now we'll have the various parties.

Mr. Johnston, go ahead, please.

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witness.

Several of us actually live in Ottawa Centre, the riding of one of our colleagues here, Mr. Broadbent. Just recently we received one of his householders, and it had a Sears flyer inserted. Certainly—

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): I get commission for that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dale Johnston: I raise this just to underline that this is something Canada Post does on a regular basis. I suppose when they are sorting their mail, some of this stuff is organized without a whole lot of thought as to the content.

The other thing I'd like to ask, Mr. Chairman, is whether this letter from Canada Post has been circulated to all members of the committee.

The Chair: I understand it has. The original letter was written in English. The French translation is on the reverse side. I have a copy of it here, and hopefully all colleagues do.

It is in fact a letter of apology, if that's the correct word, on the part of Canada Post's parliamentary relations department.

Mr. Dale Johnston: I think it's worthy of note that in the letter, Lynn Caswell, commercial services person for the public sector, says she will be speaking with all letter carriers in her station to remind them of the importance of ensuring householders are kept separate. I think that's the most notable part of the....

•(1115)

The Chair: I think Mr. Johnston has a different letter from the one we have.

Mr. Dale Johnston: If that's the case, Mr. Chairman, I would ask if I could table this letter for distribution. It's in both official languages.

The Chair: Certainly.

Hon. Judi Longfield (Whitby—Oshawa, Lib.): Mr. Chair, while this is being delivered, could you tell me if it is your understanding in reading the letter that it appears Canada Post is saying it was actually a letter carrier who, in sorting his mail, determined to bundle these together?

The Chair: That's what it seems to suggest. The second letter I think better clarifies that it's not supposed to happen again.

Are there any further observations, Mr. Johnston?

Mr. Dale Johnston: That's all for me.

The Chair: For the next question, is there anyone on this side? Is there anyone in the other parties?

Mr. Lukiwski, go ahead, please.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you.

One point that has been addressed is that it would be a Canada Post error rather than anything intentional, regardless of which political party was stuffed into your householder, Mr. Holland. My question is, what are your recommendations?

You're suggesting that perhaps it's the quantity that is at times an issue with you, and that others have indicated to you that they think it's a waste of taxpayers' money.

You raised the practice of sending ten percenters into other ridings as an issue.

What are your recommendations, or do you have any, as to what you would like to see that could possibly rectify the problem as you identify it?

Mr. Mark Holland: Thank you for the question. There are a couple of recommendations I'd make for the consideration of the committee. The first would be, as a near-term solution, that the importance of allowing members of Parliament to communicate in an unfettered way should be emphasized to Canada Post. I don't think it's appropriate to have ten percenters from other parties stuffed into householders. That's not an appropriate action, and it should be communicated.

In a broader sense, I feel the committee should evaluate the practice of ten percenters being mailed into other ridings. My recommendation to the committee would be that this practice should be stopped, period. If it isn't the will of the Board of Internal Economy or this committee to make this recommendation, then at the very least there should be constraints placed on the practice. There should be a limit on the number that can be sent out into any given riding at any given time. Some people are getting four or five of these into their ridings in a week. This is aggravating to residents. They are getting bombarded with material. Also, it's an enormous cost to taxpayers.

If these ten percenters are going out, they shouldn't be able to bear party logos. They shouldn't have these forms that say, "Is our leader doing a great job? Is their leader doing a horrible job? Mail us and let us know." Clearly, the intention is to gain partisan information that can be utilized in an election. At least, that's my assessment. This to me is extremely problematic. The frank is essentially being used (a) to mail partisan material and (b) to gather information for the purposes of using it in an election, which is even more troubling. This is clearly not the purpose of the ten percenter.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Are you suggesting that your only issue is with ten percenters going into a different riding? Or would you say that every MP who sends out a ten percenter to his or her own riding should be prevented from asking partisan questions for voter identification? Do you think you should be able to do that yourself, or is it just that you don't think anybody else should go into your riding asking these questions?

Mr. Mark Holland: There are two separate issues. I don't put a party logo on any of my material. I would suggest that party logos don't belong on ten percenters or householders; that's my personal opinion. I think the questions I ask in my survey should be framed so as to get opinions on issues. I don't think they should be soliciting information for the purposes of gaining information to be used in an election. I would agree that this shouldn't be the case. Certainly, I haven't done this in my use of ten percenters and householders.

My main concern today, though, has to do with conducting this practice in other ridings, with high frequency and high volumes. I understand that last month there were record volumes coming out of the print shop at the House of Commons. They were dealing with something like three million pieces. A lot of that was not bound to members' own ridings for the purposes of communication. Rather, it was being done in preparation for an anticipated election and to gather information for that election. Clearly, there's a need to review this.

• (1120)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: With respect to party logos on ten percenters, I'm not sure it's important. In the case of Mr. Broadbent—and I'm not critical of this at all—you don't need a party logo because it says quite clearly, "NDP, NDP values", that type of thing. Any ten percenter or householder we put out is going to be quite partisan in nature. So frankly, I don't think it matters whether we remove the party logo.

The Chair: We can debate that perhaps

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Independent, objective information, I would say.

The Chair: Speaking of which, Mr. Broadbent, it's your turn to give us objective, independent information.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I know our committee can take on a subject like this, even though it's not a specific part of our mandate. I think some serious questions have been raised. I agree with the member before us. Serious issues have been raised, but I think they should be a matter for the board. Let the board deal with it and not this committee. All the parties are on the board, and I think it should be referred to them.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

I would like to clarify, Mr. Broadbent, that the Speaker has in fact asked us to look into this. We recognize that we don't have a deciding authority, but he has asked us...following two questions of privilege, and others that he ruled on. If I remember his rulings correctly, he said he was looking at recommendations on the whole thing, so the committee should look at this too—that type of thing. So that's been recommended to us.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Okay, fine. I welcome that correction. I missed that, frankly. That was how it got to our committee, and of course then we have to deal with it in some way.

In view of the serious questions that have been raised that could lead to a long discussion, I would like to suggest that we put off the discussion until after we deal with the report that's also before this committee.

The Chair: Yes, once we've finished with the questions of—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: After we do it, we should in fact deal with the matter.

The Chair:—our witness, I propose that we not start discussing how to report on this issue, for the exact reason that Mr. Broadbent said. We have an understanding that we'll deal with our other report, so maybe we can deal with only that which affects the witness.

On the Liberal side, Monsieur Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In fact, I believe this is just a symptom of a much bigger problem, and I do believe this committee has to spend some time on this.

How many times have we heard in the House lately of this kind of thing happening, as a matter of fact? And I agree with my colleague. In fact, in my information that goes out, there is not a mention of the Liberal Party, for instance.

It's paid for by the House of Commons. It should be objective. In fact, I don't think constituents should be receiving four, five, or six ten percenters per month from other parties. I think it's totally unreasonable. We're supposed to be informing our people.

I think there is really a huge issue here. It's been coming up a lot and I think we really have to look at it seriously as a committee. But this is only one example of what can happen.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I would remind you that generally speaking, questions are to be put to the witnesses, because we can discuss the other issues later.

Mr. Guimond, it is your turn.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Holland, you are familiar with the response given by the parliamentary relations officer, Mr. Hickey. Do you have it?

•(1125)

Mr. Mark Holland: Yes.

Mr. Michel Guimond: You have seen it. The last paragraph says, and I quote:

This is not indicative of the service we wish to provide our customers and we sincerely apologize for the inconvenience caused.

When he says “we”, he means Canada Post. You agree that this is a mistake made by Canada Post, correct?

Mr. Mark Holland: Yes.

Mr. Michel Guimond: You are nevertheless asking us to change the rules in place in order to ensure that such an error by a third party not re-occur. Is that the case?

Mr. Mark Holland: No, that is not true.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Perfect. Could you explain that?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Holland.

Mr. Mark Holland: To me there were two issues, and I tried to define this in the recommendations that I'm putting forward to this committee for its consideration as it deliberates over this matter.

The first is obviously to restress, not just to this particular office but also in general, the importance of keeping these two materials separate. Mr. Simard, I think quite rightfully, pointed to the fact that in my view this is symptomatic of a broader problem.

The reason I wanted to come before the committee, and the reason I'm pursuing this, is because I think the way in which these ten percenters are being used and are being sent into other ridings is not what was intended. They are partisan in nature. They're seeking electoral information and they're being used in amounts in the ridings that are inappropriate. It's leading to problems, in both annoying constituents and, as I said, there are things that are just, in my opinion, clearly partisan and need to be dealt with.

If anything, there is the issue of actual insertion into a householder and making sure that Canada Post and its letter carriers understand the importance of not mixing messages like this and allowing it to happen.

I think the bigger issue for me is the fact that there is so much volume, so many of these ten percenters going out. They're going out like the Sears flyers into Ottawa Centre. They're flying fast and furious all over the place. It's creating problems, and these have to be dealt with.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: It is not easy to stop you.

We are now dealing with whether or not it is partisan. You are asking us as members of the Committee or of the Board of internal economy, to be the censors and to define partisanship. I live in Hull and I receive flyers from Marcel Proulx, the Hull-Aylmer MP, praising the last federal budget. I am a Bloc québécois member and I voted against the federal budget. I do not like this budget, but it is all a matter of the nature of the debate. There is always partisanship here. The House of Commons is neither a bridge club nor a religious community. We are not in a seminary; we are partisan, you are partisan, I am partisan and they are partisan.

Who will be able to impose censorship? Is it for me to play censor and to decide if one sentence in the eighth paragraph is too partisan? That is an aberration, a mistake. You have a good idea of the reaction I will have when we are to discuss a report. This is an error committed by a third party and the House of Commons is in no way involved. We should not start meddling in mistakes made by third parties.

The Chair: Mr. Holland, do you wish to respond? We will then move on to other questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland: First of all, I think there's a very simple way to solve this without censoring anybody, and that is to stop the practice of sending ten percenters into other ridings, frankly. Problem solved; nobody is censoring anybody.

To the comments that were just made, I have no desire to censor what any member of Parliament has to say to their constituents. My concern arises when we have members of Parliament who are receiving, into their riding, four or five ten percenters that are partisan in nature and that try to get information on that constituency and use it against the member of Parliament in the next election. That is the nature of my concern.

The Chair: Madam Longfield.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Actually, I was going to talk about the notion of a possible motion, but you've suggested that we're not going to do that now, so I won't.

I tend to agree here. I don't really care; I get Mr. Broadbent's householder and I read it. I'm a constituent of Mr. Broadbent's—

•(1130)

Hon. Ed Broadbent: But did you vote for him?

Hon. Judi Longfield: Actually, no, Mr. Broadbent. I can cast only one vote, and I chose to cast it in another riding. I'm sure you understand why.

In terms of what a member says in a member's own riding, he or she will be judged on the nature of it by his or her own voting constituents. But I do tend to agree that whether my party is doing it or any other party is doing it, it's time to put an end to this process.

I will tell you that I've seen ten percenters from any number of parties, and some of them, quite frankly, are rather well done. While they're partisan, I don't think they're inflammatory. They do give another point of view. I talked about the one I get frequently from a member on gun control. He outlines his concerns in a very appropriate fashion, and I choose to agree or not agree. But I think what we've seen lately is a blatant misuse of this practice.

If members on the other side are saying they're not prepared to censor, then I think it's time we as a government put an end to it, because it is a colossal waste of money. For someone to say it costs only \$2,000 to send out one ten percenter, I'm going to tell you, if you send out ten in a riding, it starts to add up when you're sending them in 308 ridings.

I think it's incumbent on us, when we do this, to simply say that if we haven't been able to act appropriately—and I don't think we have acted appropriately—then it's time we lose those privileges. Householder and ten percenter mailings should be restricted to the ridings that the member represents.

Would you agree with that, Mr. Holland?

Mr. Mark Holland: Absolutely.

Hon. Judi Longfield: Thank you.

The Chair: Again, as I said, I'm not trying to stifle the debate, but we had an understanding that we would go to the other report.

Mr. Reid, questions for our witness.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I have just a couple of things here. First, in your comments earlier, you used fairly strong language. One of the words you used was “disinformation”. From my understanding, the word “disinformation” means false information.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Lies.

Mr. Scott Reid: Lies, essentially, yes.

I have a suspicion that you didn't actually mean to be that strong. If someone is actually putting out things that are outright lies, I think there are legal avenues open to respond to this.

Am I correct that this wasn't actually what you were asserting?

Mr. Mark Holland: I don't recall using the term “disinformation”. I think the thrust of my concern was that information of a partisan nature, containing party logos, was being sent to the riding. Moreover, it was soliciting information whose main purpose would be for use in an election against an individual member.

Mr. Scott Reid: You actually did use the word “disinformation”, but I assume you weren't suggesting that lies were being said.

Mr. Mark Holland: No. Obviously if there had been a lie, I would have raised that matter. It would have been slanderous, and I obviously would have pursued it

Mr. Scott Reid: I guess Ottawa Centre is party central for distributing ten percenters. I've got a 10 percenter here that says, “A message from Prime Minister Paul Martin”, which—

Hon. Ed Broadbent: In my riding?

Mr. Scott Reid: In your riding, yes. It just came to houses in this riding in the last couple of days. I'm guessing, and I don't know for sure, but this was sent out just prior to the anticipated writ that would have occurred had the government fallen a couple of weeks back, in order to arrive during an election period without actually being part of an election expense, but being paid for by the House of Commons. It is highly partisan in nature.

I'll just read some of the things: “Harper Turning Back Progress”, and “Stephen Harper confirmed that he is willing to collaborate with the separatist Bloc Québécois....” That's certainly partisan.

[Translation]

There would be “bad guys” in the Bloc québécois. That is one opinion.

[English]

And:

It wasn't too long ago that Stephen Harper was falsely telling Canadians that the Liberals would find a way to prevent the [Gomery] Commission from carrying out its mandate.... In contrast to Stephen Harper's political games, this Liberal government has remained committed to making parliament work for Canadians.

Down here at the bottom is one in French:

[Translation]

One can read that Stephen Harper should stop playing partisan politics on the backs of Canadians and that the Liberal government is determined to see Canada move forward.

[English]

So you've certainly made the case that we're spending too much on these things as a whole. I just want to point out that any potential implication that the Liberals are angels in this regard should be set aside.

Of course, ten percenters cost money, but franked mail costs a good deal more, or several multiples as much. I'm now in what's regarded as a safe riding, but back in the days of the last Parliament, when I was in what was regarded as one of the most marginal ridings held by the then Canadian Alliance, many of my constituents were recipients of bountiful addressed mailings sent out under the franks of Liberal MPs, particularly Joe Fontana, who has since lost his interest in our riding, ever since it stopped being regarded as a swing one.

My question is, if you feel strongly about ten percenters being sent to other people's ridings, do you also feel strongly about very large numbers of franked letters being sent to them as well?

●(1135)

Mr. Mark Holland: Well, let me address your first point, and then I'll come to your second point.

Your first point was with respect to mailings going out from a particular party, in this case from the government.

I wasn't going to get into examples, but if you want, I can give you examples. In my riding, immediately before the period of an expected election, I received all kinds of ten percenters with Conservative Party logos on them, saying, "Have you had enough of Paul Martin and his corruption? Do you think Stephen Harper is doing a wonderful job? Do you think it's the right time to elect Stephen Harper as the Prime Minister?" They actually had an area you could fill out that said, send in your name and address postage free, and then we can put it in our database and use it for electoral purposes. I'm obviously adding the last part, which it didn't say, but that was clearly the intent. If you have a blank spot and you're asking for people's names to confirm that Stephen Harper is wonderful, I can only imagine that information is finding its way into a database somewhere for an election campaign.

That was my concern, but I purposely didn't address any particular party, because my concern, Mr. Reid, wasn't with respect to any particular party, but with respect to all parties, which is why I addressed it the way I did.

With respect to your second question, obviously if somebody is mailing a letter or two to an organization in other ridings, I don't think any of us would have a problem with that. But if it is being misused in such a way that it is almost a ten percenter itself, because it's a bulk mailing, then of course I would have a concern with that practice. I think that should be restrained as well.

There should be room for reasonable communication to other ridings outside of a member's riding, but it has far surpassed that. I would encourage members of this committee, as they're reviewing this process, to take a look at the number of items that were in queue immediately before the anticipated election. It was something in the neighbourhood of three million pieces of correspondence, and a lot of those were not bound for members' own ridings but were to other ridings. I think this is why this matter needs to be looked at.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Holland.

Next, Madame Boivin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Holland, I would like to speak briefly about the timing of the mailings. We must be very careful before jumping to conclusions, because I know full well that the people in my riding received a ten percenter that was I believe prepared around the end of February or early March. Ten percenters are so popular that it is crazy and printing is often backlogged. There is therefore a certain lag time before they are sent out. Some people are convinced that we plan our ten percenters for a specific date, but it is very difficult to know when they will be delivered in our ridings.

That being said, that is not my question. I would like to know if, following upon your receipt of the letter from Canada Post, you are satisfied and if it at least gives answers to your questions relating to the problem you have outlined, in other words the fact that there was an insert—so to speak—in your householder mail-outs. Is that the end of the story in your view, or are you expecting something else with regard to the question of privilege you put before the House?

I am aware that virtually every week we are told that there are a lot of mail-outs to be done, but are you satisfied with the answer you have received with regard to the placement of a Conservative Party insert in your householders? Might we say that that part of the problem, at least, has been resolved?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland: Let me first comment on the issue of timing. I am not here at all—and it certainly wasn't my intent and I don't want it to be inferred as my intent—to pass judgment on whatever individual members decide to do in their riding to communicate to their constituents. That's not my business, and frankly, it's not what I'm here to discuss. When I reflect on timing, I'm just talking about those that were bound for other constituencies.

I've sent out a great number of ten percenters and householders in my riding. I think it is imperative that all members do, and I would never question their right to do so. It was simply with respect to outbound and into other ridings that I had a concern.

On the question of privilege, as I said earlier, no, I don't think it's completely closed for me, and the reason it's not is because I want it to be communicated that this isn't just something like, "Oops, these things happen. Maybe it will happen again. Sorry it happened, but occasionally we're going to have a Sears catalogue or something put inside your householder."

It is important to communicate to Canada Post that with respect to a communication coming out from a member of Parliament, it's confusing and improper for there to be ten percenters from outside inserted into them. I think that message should be conveyed, that it's taken seriously and that it shouldn't occur again.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Fine. Thank you.

We will now hear Mr. Epp.

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Epp: Thank you.

While this conversation has been going on, a whole bunch of things have been going through my mind. I look back at the election campaigns that I've been involved in, and one of the good things about those campaigns is that all of the candidates from the different parties get to stand or sit at a table in front of the constituents and give their diverging views of how the country should be run and what the policies should be, and so on. With that mix of information, the voters can hopefully use that also as part of their input.

Would you consider it useful if we were to, say, offer to everybody in the country one householder a year, where, of the four pages, each page was filled by each of the parties giving their primary positions on things? This would be just to help inform Canadians of the different points of view.

I have a specific example. I've had Liberal ten percenters in my riding, and I was quite taken aback by some of the things that were stated in it, because in my view, they frankly were not factual. But I had the opportunity then to counter that in a ten percenter of my own. Maybe we should do this in the interest of public debate and public information. I have a problem with having people only receive one side of an issue, whether it's my side or just the other side.

For example, we've had communications into my riding that say we have to allow Gomery to do his work before we have an election and anybody who doesn't want this is prejudging, is jumping to conclusions, and all this stuff.

So all of this is there, and yet I think the voters and the citizens have a right to know that the terms of reference specifically prohibit the commissioner from naming names of individuals or organizations, of assessing civil or criminal liability. Also, I think they have the right to know that Gomery's report goes to the Prime Minister, and maybe they should have a choice of who is going to be in the Prime Minister's chair at the time the report is received, so that the amount of filtering that takes place is going to be altered.

I would like the citizens simply to know that. I think it's quite appropriate for me to respond to that in kind in my riding, and if that same information is going into Liberal-held ridings, maybe the citizens there need to know that too, because the press isn't always diligent in communicating these little nuances that I think the citizens need to know.

What's your response to that, Mark?

Mr. Mark Holland: I have a couple of points.

The first is that my position would be, frankly, that we eliminate ten percenters altogether. I'll briefly outline why.

First of all, if there is something that is not factual, as Mr. Reid questioned me on earlier, I certainly would recommend that if you feel there is something that is not factual—or is disinformation, I believe is the term that was used earlier—obviously there is an opportunity to pursue that through other venues. But I would say we have to ask why we have the right to send ten percenters and householders as members of Parliament.

The reason I view that I have the right to send out ten percenters and householders as a member of Parliament is to communicate to my constituents about the job I'm doing for them as a parliamentarian, to give them access to their member of Parliament in terms of letting them know when I'm having town hall meetings or when there are opportunities to attend different events, so that there is a dialogue back and forth between the people I represent and their member of Parliament.

I don't think we would benefit from a war of ten percenters, a war of information flowing from both sides. Not only would it be very costly, but frankly, I don't think it's the appropriate place, and I don't think it's why we have householders and ten percenters in the first place. Better to leave the role that you've just described, in terms of getting both sides of the debate, to journalists. I don't think we

should try to supplant the place of journalists and newspapers, but instead our ten percenters and householders should be focused on communication with our constituents.

• (1145)

The Chair: I'm in the committee's hands here, but the time we had assigned for this has already expired. There are still people wanting to ask questions.

One member has been waiting patiently. We could entertain Madame Picard's question, and then we could make the witness come back, if that's what you want, or if you think we've covered enough.... Anyway, let's decide that after Madame Picard speaks. But the time we had assigned has expired, and we have another item on the agenda that we had agreed to do at 11:45 a.m.

Madame Picard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): I am in complete agreement with you.

I would like to come back to the debate at hand. In my view, the matter is dragging on. We seem to be giving ourselves a broader mandate than that which the House has granted us. If you look at what the House referred to the Committee, you will see that it does not deal with the question of privilege relating to the Conservative Party inserts placed in householders. We are aware of the mistake made by Canada Post. It is not for us to delve into the matter of the ten percenters, of the information supplied or of partisanship. We were charged with establishing what took place and why these inserts were placed in the householder. Canada Post having admitted its error, why go any further? I fail to understand why we are having this discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Picard.

I would simply explain, in order for all MPs to understand, that three issues have been referred to us, each one of them containing various elements. We stated that we would report on the three of them together. This is becoming difficult.

Ms. Pauline Picard: We do not need the witness in order to deal with these other issues which we will look into some other time.

The Chair: Very well.

If all colleagues are in agreement, we will now conclude this portion of our session.

Do you wish to hear the witness again at a subsequent meeting, or do you have enough information?

Some members: We are okay.

The Chair: We are okay.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Holland.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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