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Thursday, September 13, 2007

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Chair

Mr. Gary Goodyear

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• (1330)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, let's resume our meeting from this morning, or rather start the meeting, since we did actually adjourn.

You have another agenda in front of you for this afternoon's meeting. Of course, administratively it says 1:15 to 1:30. We're a little bit behind that time, so I'm just going to acknowledge that it's an administrative timeline.

We will start the meeting today with a motion. Can all members just confirm that they have the motion in both official languages in front of them? Everybody has the motion? I think we can proceed with that.

There has been a suggestion already of a slight change in the French version. I'll ask the clerk to identify that slight change and then I'll ask Mr. Poilievre to confirm that that's okay; then we'll have him speak to it.

Mr. James Latimer (Procedural Clerk): The French text should read as follows:

[Translation]

Mr. Poilievre moves:

That the committee call on the Chief Electoral Officer to use his powers of adaptation to require electors to show their faces before being permitted to vote at voting stations across the country.

[English]

So it would be simply adding the word “à” after the word “appel”, and the English text remains. After the word “appel” in French would be the word “à”,

[Translation]

“to use his powers”,

[English]

to make it grammatically correct.

The Chair: Okay.

We're all happy with that, and it seems to make sense.

Mr. Poilievre, are you prepared to speak to this motion then?

We'll open the debate, please.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Yes.

This committee has already called on the Chief Electoral Officer to revise his interpretation of the legislation in order to permit him to force voters to reveal their faces before casting a ballot at a voting booth.

What this motion adds, though, is that we have specifically cited the adaptation power that is available under the law to the Chief Electoral Officer. So here we have given him the clear means by which he can prevent people from voting with covered faces. The section is section 17. He knows that. The power is called the power of adaptation. He should know that, and we as a parliamentary committee have asked that he use that power in this particular case.

I know this motion might be difficult for some members to vote on, particularly for the Liberals among us. They were originally of the view that the legislation allowed the Chief Electoral Officer to prevent people from voting with covered faces. Today they argued, however, that the Chief Electoral Officer's hands are tied, so they've changed their position once already. I'm asking them to change it again. It's particularly in light of the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer himself indicates that he has this power, but he says he's not prepared to use it.

The Chief Electoral Officer argued today that this is a matter of rights, but they are rights that no one is asking for. He seems to be forcing rights on people who don't want them. We've had testimony from a whole series of Islamic groups. We've heard public commentary from groups of various—

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): On a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: A point of order, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Poilievre said that we heard testimony from Islamic groups. I think there was a wider diversity. I don't know if he wants to correct himself.

The Chair: I don't think that's a point of order. It's a matter of debate.

Mr. Poilievre is just speaking to his motion and he may have clarified that later, but that's not a point of order.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: There were people who follow Islam amongst the panel, and I don't see how there's any mistake in pointing that out. One of the witnesses in fact called herself "a proud Muslim", as she should be, and she, along with the rest of the panel, argued that they have never asked for this right, and the groups that have commented in public from various branches of Islam have, in a very dignified fashion, pointed out that they have never asked for these rights. And if I just might say, Mr. Chair, the Muslim community has conducted itself with the utmost grace and dignity throughout this debate. They have had something thrust on them by the Chief Electoral Officer that they did not ask for.

To conclude, the Chief Electoral Officer cannot invent a right that no one is seeking out, and we therefore seek to put forward a specific motion that calls on the Chief Electoral Officer to use the powers that he has in section 17 to force all voters to show their faces when they show up at voting stations.

I look forward to having the support of members. I'm hoping the Liberal Party will change its position again and support this motion to require that people who vote demonstrate their identity by showing their faces.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, Mr. Proulx, please.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I'll surprise you; we have no comments.

The Chair: I'm sorry, I think—that took me a minute. Thank you very much.

Are there any other comments on the debate?

Mr. Dewar, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Yes, Chair. I just want to clear up a couple of things. One is Mr. Poilievre says the issue was thrust upon the community because of the Chief Electoral Officer. I respectfully disagree with him about that. People who have been observing this debate, reading about the debate, would perhaps suggest that the source of this is not simply the Chief Electoral Officer alone.

However, that said, the position from our party has been clear. As I said, and as I observed in the Moroccan elections, what we should have here is that you show your face; the veil has to be removed to get your ballot.

My concern with the motion is, first of all, the way we came to it, but most importantly it is the understanding of what it can actually do. I think Mr. Lukiwski was trying to have us direct the Chief Electoral Officer as if we were an executive branch of Parliament, which we clearly are not. Our responsibility is to have oversight of legislation when it's written.

I think most people observing the deliberations on this bill, and back in the spring, will have noted that there were some problems in our oversight. It's worth taking responsibility as parliamentarians.

I would argue that the Chief Electoral Officer—as I said in my opening comments, I respectfully disagree with him about how this should be applied. As he suggested, and I don't think he was alone in

terms of the people who work in his office, the fact that he had a premise for this objection, which means the way the legislation was written and the fact that back in May, as we saw in media reports, he had underlined this concern and nothing was done.... It wasn't done in the Senate; it wasn't done around this table.

This motion will be passed, it will go forward, and the efficacy of it is what? We know what the response will be. So we can pass this motion—I'll support it—and it's fine, but at the end of the day we have the parties looking for positioning here as opposed to looking for clear oversight of legislation, which I would argue the people around the table missed.

I have stated on the record why we oppose this bill. We voted against it consistently. It was not crafted well. It was done too quickly. We are now seeing the result.

I'll end my comments there and just say it's clear this is a further attempt by the governing party to take attention away from the key issue, which I hope we get to and I hope they're committed to. As soon as we finish this issue, as soon as we vote in favour of it...that we get right to the issue of election financing, which they were going to filibuster yesterday, and did. I'm hoping they won't filibuster after this so that we get right to the issue.

I'm looking for responsibility from the people on the other side to not play around anymore, to quit the games. I know that school is going to be out soon. I think the students should pay attention and get to the business at hand.

So I will be supporting it. I hope they will be supporting actually getting to the business that was in front of us before this issue came to us.

• (1335)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Reid, please.

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

Although I appreciate Mr. Dewar's support for the motion, I think as a matter of practice and fact he's incorrect in his assumption that this would have no efficacy. When we were discussing section 17 of the Elections Act, the Chief Electoral Officer did draw our attention to the fact that these are powers to be used in extraordinary circumstances. He stated he didn't feel the circumstances were extraordinary.

Surely a measure that the circumstances are extraordinary is the fact that the relevant committee of Parliament has asked him to exercise these powers. He looks for signs, and in this case, leaving these things entirely to his sole discretion as opposed to giving oversight to that body of Parliament, which is the most senior body capable of meeting at this time, would be an incorrect way I think of dealing with extraordinary circumstances as they arise.

We are attempting to demonstrate that in the opinion of this body this is an extraordinary circumstance. I think that is a significant message to him. One hopes that he will be receptive to it. Thus I have some hope that it will have some efficacy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues.

Is there any further comment on this particular motion? I saw his hand first, so I will go to Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I simply want to clear up a point—and it is simple—to Mr. Reid and to anyone else on the other side. I know what the motion says. We also know what our role is here. We can't direct him to do this; we can suggest it. That's all I'm saying. So the efficacy is questionable. We heard his testimony about what he's going to do—*point final*.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: To conclude on my motion, Mr. Chair, we of course are excited about getting onto the issue of electoral financing. We will do that, and we hope this time the opposition won't block those sorts of hearings from going ahead.

In concluding this today, this motion is put forward in the spirit of the Prime Minister's earlier remarks. The Prime Minister has made it clear that the existing law permits Elections Canada to require people to reveal their faces when they vote. That's what the Prime Minister said. He said that the existing law permits that to occur, and now we are voting on whether or not that is true.

My motion indicates that there are powers of adaptation. The Chief Electoral Officer admits that he has such powers, and we look forward to having members vote on the powers of adaptation and encourage the Chief Electoral Officer to use those powers in order to uphold the integrity of our electoral system.

I thank the members for their fair hearing and I look forward to their support for the motion.

● (1340)

The Chair: Thank you. Are we ready for the question?

Mr. Scott Reid: I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman. I would like this to be a recorded vote.

The Chair: Fair enough. We will record the vote. I will ask our clerk to read the motion and then we will call the question.

Mr. James Latimer: Mr. Poilievre moved:

That the Committee call on the Electoral Officer to use his powers of adaptation to require electors to show their faces before being permitted to vote at voting stations across the country.

The Chair: Could we have it read in French as well?

[*Translation*]

Mr. James Latimer: Yes, of course.

Mr. Poilievre moved the following:

That the committee call on the Chief Electoral Officer to use his powers of adaptation to require electors to show their faces before being permitted to vote at voting stations across the country.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will now take the vote on Mr. Poilievre's motion.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: Colleagues, the motion carries unanimously.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I would request that you convey this motion directly to the Chief Electoral Officer. It has been the position of the Prime Minister that the existing law allows him to force voters to show their faces. The Prime Minister's conviction on

that has now been upheld by the committee, and we ask that you convey that directly to the Chief Electoral Officer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Poilievre. That does not mean I'm going to do it, just so you know. I don't know that we need to get into a discussion.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: No, no. I don't want to get into a discussion. It's just that I like people who respect their word. I like committees that respect the rules and regulations.

We had agreed this morning that we would handle this particular matter at this special 15-minute committee meeting prior to going into an in camera session to prepare the draft report.

I don't think it's relevant that Mr. Poilievre wants to tell you or the committee what to put in the letter. I think this should be discussed in camera, in the preparation of the report, so that we can get this moving.

The Chair: Indeed, that is the decision of the chair. We will go in camera right now so we can discuss the preparation of a report that stems from this particular motion.

We will suspend the meeting for two minutes so we can prepare the room for an in camera meeting.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

●

_____ (Pause) _____

●

[*Public proceedings resume*]

● (1415)

The Chair: Colleagues, let's take our seats, please, and continue the meeting.

I will go through my introductions first. I just want to remind colleagues that we are now in public, televised, and that we are brought here together—the time is about 2:19—to deal with the original motion.

I am going to recognize Monsieur Proulx first. Are these points of order? We're going to carry on with the meeting—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: No, we're into the meeting and I want to debate the motion.

The Chair: You want to be first. Here we go. You're first.

We're taking names and we'll start right now.

Just so colleagues know, we're on the original motion, back to Monday. Mr. Proulx, you have the floor, and the debate begins.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The original motion suggested that we discuss allegations of systematic attempts on the part of the Conservative Party of Canada to defraud Elections Canada and Canadian taxpayers in connection with the 2006 electoral campaign. During the previous meetings on Monday and Tuesday there were all sorts of dilatory tactics and attempts to delay proceedings and to prevent us from discussing that motion. You will certainly recall that an amendment was tabled by our Conservative Party colleagues in an attempt to cloud the issue and weaken this motion. It was debated at length and the outcome was that the amendment was defeated. So we are now discussing the original motion.

Mr. Chairman, the original motion is the result of allegations made against the Conservative Party. I should perhaps say, rather, that they were brought against certain individuals in the Conservative Party who are reputed to have used a method known as the in-and-out method to transfer money from the Conservative Party of Canada—the national party—to riding associations, and to then... As my colleague Mr. Guimond said during previous meetings, the transfer of funds from a national party to a riding association is a process approved by Elections Canada and by the Canada Elections Act. However, according to these allegations that money from the ridings was used to pay expenses incurred by the Conservative Party of Canada—the national party—which allowed it to exceed the spending limits set by the Canada Elections Act.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that it would be entirely appropriate to examine those allegations. To give you a context and to help you understand why this study is so important, I will give you the name of a few witnesses who could be invited to testify before the committee. Among the array of witnesses we could call, I am thinking in particular of Ms. Sylvie Boucher, a Conservative member elected in 2006 in the riding of Beauport—Limoilou in Quebec. Ms. Boucher enjoys great credibility, I am sure of it.

A voice: Hear, hear.

[English]

An hon. member: Could you repeat the name?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: It was Mrs. Sylvie Boucher.

An hon. member: She was a member of your caucus. You probably don't know her.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: She was elected a member of Parliament in 2006 in Beauport—Limoilou, and I'm sure that—

An hon. member: Is she a Conservative?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Madame Boucher, who is a Conservative, has very good credibility. As a matter of fact, she was appointed parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister; therefore, she has to be very honest and very frank.

An hon. member: Yes, she is a VIP.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: It would be interesting to hear what she has to say.

• (1420)

Heidy Cornejo was the official agent for the Conservative candidate, Mrs. Boucher, in Beauport—Limoilou in 2006. It would

be interesting to hear their versions, as far as they knew or didn't know what was happening with this money.

I remind you, Mr. Chair, that both the official agent and the candidate have to sign the return filed with Elections Canada to request the reimbursement of expenses. As you well know, because you've done that—meaning you've signed a report, and I'm not alleging anything wrong on your part—you're telling Elections Canada that you know where the money went, how it was spent, and you agree with the way the money was spent, according to electoral laws in Canada.

We could also invite Mrs. Ann Julie Fortier, who was a Conservative candidate in the Quebec riding of Berthier—Maskinongé prior to the 2006 election. We are told by the media and by Mrs. Fortier, who wrote a very extensive, complete letter to *Le Devoir*, a well-read and honest French language newspaper, that she was—I'll use the expression “flushed”, but it's not the right word—pushed aside by the Conservative Party because supposedly she didn't agree to be involved in these different transactions.

There could be the official agent for the Conservative candidate in the riding of Bourassa in 2006, Brian Eugene Alexandrovitch.

There could be the candidate in Bourassa in 2006, Mr. Liberato Martelli.

• (1425)

The Chair: Mr. Proulx—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Yes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm just wondering if it might be more efficient to hand in a potential witness list, once we've decided to investigate this matter.

I'm happy to let you go, because I sure don't want to cut you off, but the history of the committee is to simply hand in a witness list.

Let's shorten it up a bit. How about that? There we go.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Yes, except that we're on debate. I don't think you're trying to cut my time; I'm sure you're not.

The Chair: No, not at all. It's just the witness list. There we go.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Yes, and the reason for me not handing in the list as such is that I'm not saying it would be the total or final list. I'm making suggestions to the committee about why we could consider inviting these people to be witnesses.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: The member is making reference to a witness list for a study that he voted against.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, let's debate.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: We put forward a motion to have a study on these sorts of things. So there is no such witness list because there is no such study, which he voted against.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you.

I thought when you ruled it was not a point of order the microphones were then cut off.

The Chair: That was not a point of order. Technology....

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I see.

I think the committee should be considering, in the study of these allegations, that.... For example, in the riding of Compton—Stanstead, also in the province of Quebec, the Conservative candidate was Mr. Gary Caldwell and his official agent was Mr. Réjean Fauteux. My understanding is that it's their allegation that there were incorrect transactions.

In the riding of Outremont, which is a riding we speak of very often these days, because, as you well know, there's going to be a byelection on Monday, September 17, the former candidate in 2006, a gentleman by the name of Daniel Fournier, and his official agent, a gentleman by the name of Sylvain J. Perron, have also alleged that they were coerced, or that they were obliged—using the term in the French sense, *obliger*—or forced to participate.

There was a candidate in Richmond—Arthabaska in 2006, also for the Conservative Party of Canada, a fellow by the name of Jean Landry. It seems that Mr. Landry has a multitude of allegations, a multitude of facts, that he wants to bring forth.

There is also the lady, a very honest lady, Mrs. Lise Vallières, who would have been the official agent for the Conservative candidate in 2006 in Richmond—Arthabaska, who could be called as a witness. Her testimony would certainly help us to understand what was happening or what the intent was of all these transactions.

I'm not saying that all of these people should be called as witnesses for our study; I'm suggesting that there are interesting and honest people in this group that we could consider. Should the allegations we hear from these witnesses turn out to be true, then, as you are well aware, Mr. Chair, this is the opposite of what the intent of the electoral law of Canada is all about.

Our understanding of the law is that a national party is allowed to spend, let's call it, a “ceiling” of expenses for a campaign in Canada, and ridings—local ridings, local organizations—are allowed a maximum, another ceiling, of expenses. And you know the calculation. It works according to the number of voters in the riding, and there are additional amounts that can be allowed for extra population, distance, or a large area in a riding to help the candidate cover the extra expenses.

The allegations are that these ridings were forced by the national organization to state that they had used money for local advertising when supposedly, allegedly, the advertising was not for that particular riding.

I find it very amusing. I read a report in the media that the name of my riding, Hull—Aylmer, was used to run an advertising campaign in Quebec City, if I understand it right. I don't know why they would use the name of Hull—Aylmer in Quebec City, but supposedly this was done. And there are other examples like this that we could actually look at.

We could certainly call on officials of the Conservative Party of Canada to come and explain to us why it has been done this way.

There have been allegations that.... The leader of the Conservative Party is a very smart individual who controls or knows everything that's going on, whether it be in his party or in his government, and it might be interesting to know what he knew about this process of “ins and outs”, as it's been called.

• (1430)

Mr. Chair, I think you will find it very interesting if we continue in our investigation of these allegations. And by all means, Mr. Chair, if these allegations turn out to be false and if this is a story that has been invented or, as we say in French, *montée de toute pièce*, well then it will be a different story. We will shut it down in the sense that we will shut down the rumours. It would certainly help Elections Canada to once and for all decide if they're going to pay. I guess they would have to reimburse all of these ridings, because I understand Elections Canada has been holding back on quite a few reimbursements, the 60% of expenses being reimbursed with taxpayers' money, to the ridings for the different election expenses.

I am convinced, Mr. Chair, that there is a multitude of good reasons why the committee should look into these allegations so that we can come up with answers for the Canadian public. And for these different campaigns, should the money be legally due to them, let's make sure that Elections Canada returns the money to them as soon as possible.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Proulx.

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to Mr. Proulx as well for his very interesting contribution.

Mr. Proulx listed a large number of people he thought would be appropriate witnesses to come before the committee on the subject of electoral finances, transfers between riding associations, national parties, and so on, but he's very anxious, based on his prior commentary at previous meetings, to ensure that this deals only with the previous election and only with the Conservative Party of Canada, despite the fact that his party, the Liberal Party of Canada, has engaged in similar practices, which are perfectly legal, and despite the fact that of course his party has also engaged in some financing practices that are very much not legal.

We are anxious to ensure that all these matters can be reviewed by this committee. You'll recall that at our first meeting I drew to the committee's attention the fact that the motion as submitted by Liberal members calling for this committee to come back was aggressively rhetorical, unnecessarily rhetorical, and made allegations that on the face of it are not so, certainly assuming the existence of facts that are incorrect, asking us as a committee to make findings of fact, which parliamentary bodies do not do, and violating the *sub judice* convention, that is, the convention that parliamentary committees and Parliament itself should not deal with and debate matters that are before the courts. What is before the courts is a matter in which the Conservative Party of Canada...or rather a number of representatives of local campaigns who had worked under the umbrella of the Conservative Party of Canada have taken Elections Canada to court because these campaigns engaged in perfectly legal activities that they were not receipted for. What they are arguing as plaintiffs is that Elections Canada is not merely incorrect in disallowing these expenses but actually owes a substantial amount of money. Now this has been turned around and twisted by members of the opposition into somehow being an action in which the Conservative Party of Canada is a defendant. This is clearly not the case.

We are very concerned, speaking of the *sub judice* convention, that these hearings could prejudice the results of that court action, in which we are attempting to get moneys owed to our local campaigns, and it would make it harder for us to compete in future elections, that we are denied moneys that the other parties have received in past elections when they've engaged in similar transfers between riding associations, campaigns, national campaigns, and the national party.

This is, of course, completely unjust, using a parliamentary committee in this way. So on this basis I've tried to devise an amendment that would allow us to deal with all these matters fairly and equitably, dealing with a number of election campaigns, and for that reason I would like to propose the following amendment to what we are dealing with:

That the Committee for Procedure and House Affairs conduct a thorough study as to whether and to what extent the Conservative Party of Canada and its predecessors, the Liberal Party of Canada, the Bloc Québécois, and the New Democratic Party, have engaged in the elections of 1997, 2000, 2004, and 2006,

(1) in the practice of transferring funds in the following ways:

- (a) transfers from the national party or national campaign to local campaigns or riding associations,
- (b) transfers from riding associations or local campaigns to the national party or national campaigns,
- (c) transfers between riding associations and local campaigns; and

(2) the uses of any funds at the level of local campaigns:

- (a) to pay for advertising that could promote campaigns or candidates in other ridings, or
- (b) to pay for advertising that could promote the national campaign.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1435)

The Chair: Mr. Reid, I wonder if you could just help the chair understand how that's an amendment to the original motion and not a motion unto itself. How do you see it fitting in as an amendment to the motion before us?

Mr. Scott Reid: What it's doing, Mr. Chairman, is allowing us to deal with a scope that includes all relevant practices. I think you've

heard in Mr. Proulx's presentation a discussion of certain practices he felt were relevant to discussing transfers between associations.

The reference is made to allegations in the original motion, so one has to go back to look at what allegations they might be referring to. These are allegations of these kinds of transfer practices and the uses of funds. So I tried to enumerate the kinds of practices I found in the initial press reports to which, I assume, the movers of the original motion were referring when they spoke of allegations.

• (1440)

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, a point of order.

I realize there's a little bit more detail, but I fail to see in substance how this is different from the amendment put forward earlier in this committee by Mr. Poilievre.

The Chair: I rule that's for debate. I'll make the decision whether it's different or not. If I could see how you've written the amendment to the motion, I'll take a second, if we can, just to make a ruling.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'll give a copy to the clerk.

The Chair: Colleagues, I am ruling the amendment to the motion in order. We'll begin debate on the amendment.

Hon. Karen Redman: I challenge your ruling.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Can I have a point of order, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No. We have a challenge on the ruling here. There's no debate required on that. I'll accept the point of order after we go for a vote.

The chair has been challenged on the ruling that the amendment is in order. I probably should explain that amendments that are substantially the same as other amendments are allowed but not during the same meeting.

The amendment is in order and I've been challenged on that decision.

All those in favour of sustaining the chair's decision will raise their hands.

An hon. member: May we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: A recorded vote? All right, then, call the names, please.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: Okay, the chair's decision has been overturned.

We'll go to the first point of order, Mr. Poilievre. The second point of order is from Mr. Reid.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I note that the Liberal Party is now on record twice having shut down any examination of its own books. It is joined by the Bloc Québécois, which would not like to see its in-and-out scheme, widely reported on in 2003, come under any scrutiny either.

We have more information coming out, Mr. Chair, about the practices of the Liberal Party in reference to these sorts of—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Poilievre. That is actually a matter of debate. Although I appreciate your support, it's a matter of debate.

Mr. Reid, on another point of order.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, Mr. Chair. The chair was not even able to express the basis on which the ruling was made or to refer back to the rules at all before it was challenged. This seems to be part of a pattern of behaviour.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): That's not a point of order.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, it is, David.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: You don't decide; you're not the chair.

Mr. Scott Reid: You're not the chair, David.

The Chair: Order. I'll make the decisions, thank you very much—and you can overturn them.

Mr. Reid is on a point of order and I am listening intently to the point.

• (1445)

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, the practice of calling for a challenge to the chair and summarily dismissing anything, including the ability of other amendments to be made, effectively means that anything that is not supported by a majority of the members of the committee at any time can be shut down simply by pushing the chair into a ruling and then challenging the chair's ruling. This means in practice that what the Liberals have just done, effectively, is to ensure that no matter can be discussed in this meeting or any other meeting when they don't want it to be discussed. No matter can be addressed; freedom of speech can be silenced.

This is effectively a method for muzzling opposition at their will, the will of the majority at the moment. It's a very, very dangerous precedent.

The Chair: Okay, I appreciate that, Mr. Reid. I think I have the intent of your point.

My ruling on the point of order is that the chair is not obliged to give his opinion on the ruling; that is at the option of the chair. I was hoping to convince my members in front of me of the reasoning for my correct ruling.

It is overturned, and we will now go back to the original debate on the original speakers' list.

Mr. Poilievre is up first and then Madam Redman, please.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: This time it was caught on camera. Once before the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, and the NDP voted against having their books come under public examination, but they did that in a very dark, quiet place underground here in the Parliament Buildings. This time, however, the sunshine of cameras was on their faces.

A lot of voters, a lot of Canadians, will be watching these proceedings wondering why the Bloc Québécois and the Liberal Party do not want their financial practices to come under public scrutiny. They'll wonder why only the Conservative Party in this room has offered to have its financial practices brought for public

scrutiny. We are the only party that has offered, in a motion, to have our practices questioned by a public committee of Parliament. So a lot of people are going to wonder why only one of the four parties represented here would be willing to put up with that kind of scrutiny.

I wondered myself why the Liberals, the Bloc, and the NDP were so hostile to opening up their books and being transparent. As I started to research some of their practices, some answers started to come to light explaining why they might not want to have their books brought under some sort of examination.

I look to the riding of Ms. Marlene Jennings. In her constituency, \$16,132.93 was transferred from her electoral district association to the Liberal Party of Canada. Then just over a week later, the Liberal Party of Canada transferred that exact same amount—\$16,132.93—without reporting it, mind you, back to Ms. Jennings' riding association. Ms. Jennings' riding association then transferred that money to the candidate, who then claimed a rebate on that amount of money. Then Ms. Jennings transferred that money back to the EDA, and the circle was closed after four transactions of exactly the same number of dollars—\$16,132.93. The Liberal Party has benefited from a rebate, and it is not known why these transactions occurred in the first place.

I will be more than willing to have members of the media approach me afterwards, and we will put them in contact with auditors who will show them all of the steps in this very interesting funnel of money. They can review them themselves directly, not relying on our sources but relying on the information we have been able to dig up.

They will find that this is not an isolated incident in the Liberal Party of Canada. In fact, in the riding of Mr. Pablo Rodriguez, the Liberal Party of Canada transferred \$13,322.68 on May 4, 2004. This was reported in the electoral district association's report; the federal party did not report it at all. That money was then transferred to the candidate, Mr. Rodriguez, who then recorded it as an expense and was eligible to receive the rebate. So federal money was spent locally obtaining a rebate for the local candidate. The EDA says it made a mandatory transfer to a candidate. The candidate says it received a non-monetary transfer from the Liberal Party of Canada. Who is right? There's a contradiction between the two.

Perhaps the riding association will come forward and explain these peculiarities away. Perhaps the Liberal Party will come forward and explain why it has engaged in transfers for a generation to its riding associations and that those transfers have been claimed for rebates. Perhaps, as the Liberals would have us believe, they did absolutely nothing wrong. If that is the case, then they should have supported Mr. Reid's amendment to have them come forward. If they argue that they have done nothing wrong and that there's nothing there, and if they argue that their practices are comparatively superior and cleaner, then they should welcome this investigation that we're proposing they participate in.

•(1450)

Mr. Chair, there's additional information on the Liberal Party of Canada. I have another four-step funding method carried out by one of the members of Parliament whose name I will make known and public a little later on. That member will have a lot of explaining to do, because he puts himself forward as the moral example of his party. This particular member has engaged in a degree of righteous indignation that would make any one of us blush. His practices are going to come under scrutiny later on today.

Before I go there, I would like to discuss the term "in and out". It was coined earlier this decade not by the Conservative Party or its predecessor parties but actually in reference to the practices of the Bloc Québécois. I have here an article from the front page of the *National Post*, entitled "How Bloc Boosted Federal Funds": "Party says tactic proper: BQ paid campaign workers, who then donated to party". This article explains how the Bloc Québécois would give salaries to campaign workers; those workers would donate those salaries back to the party; then the worker would be eligible for a tax credit and the party would be eligible for a rebate. All of that was subsidized by the Canadian taxpayer.

No committee on Parliament Hill was ever able to fully investigate these claims. No parliamentary committee in this setting was able to get to the bottom of it.

So why not come clean now? Why not put all of this to rest and simply agree to have Bloc Québécois books examined, along with Conservative, NDP, and Liberal books?

This report, by a distinguished journalist, Andrew McIntosh, indicates:

Political organizers, supporters and candidates for the Bloc Québécois participated in a province-wide effort during the 2000 election to boost their campaign spending to help the separatist party secure larger federal government-funded election expense refunds for its coffers.

A *National Post* investigation has found that more than 1,000 Bloc Québécois organizers, supporters and candidates took part in the effort using what party organizers called "La Methode In and Out."

That's where we get that term from.

It saw Bloc organizers, supporters and candidates move money in and out of their bank accounts in a web of deals designed to create expenses that generated larger post-election government refunds for the Bloc and tax credits for its supporters.

It goes on:

According to thousands of pages of documents Bloc Québécois organizers filed with Elections Canada after the 2000 campaign, Bloc candidates paid normally unpaid organizers and volunteers a sum of money for organizing or for car expenses or the use of their basement offices or home telephones.

So they effectively paid people to rent people's domestic telephones and then asked that those payments be reimbursed to the party.

What does everyone get out of this scheme? Well, the person who rented their telephone out gets a big, fat tax credit. The Bloc Québécois gets a rebate, because the payment is considered an expense

•(1455)

Mr. Chair, how many times did this practice occur? Not once, not twice, but one thousand times. This distinguished reporter refers to it

as a "web of deals" designed to create expenses that generated larger post-election government refunds for the Bloc and tax credits for its supporters.

Now, the Bloc claims that it has nothing to hide in this matter. Fine; we'll take their word on it, I guess. But we'll check to make sure and we will move that they, as well as all of the parties, do what we have pledged to do, which is to make all of their finances public and to be susceptible to questions in front of the committee, so that all eyes can see and all ears can hear.

Chair, I have article after article looking into "*la méthode* in and out".

[*Translation*]

The Bloc Québécois used the in-and-out method in order to pay volunteers to provide services that are normally provided free of charge. Afterwards, the volunteers gave that money to the Bloc Québécois in order to be eligible for a tax credit, and to allow the party to obtain a rebate from the government. That is in this article. So these facts are public, but there has never been any investigation of the practices of the Bloc Québécois. Now, its members are hiding these facts from the committee. They never explained why these volunteers and party workers could not appear before the committee. What do they have to hide? What is the problem? Are they trying to hide certain things from us, Mr. Chairman? As far as I am concerned, I imagine that that is the case, since they have had two opportunities to support our motion requesting that we invite all of the parties to appear before the committee. And why shouldn't they?

Mr. Proulx referred to witnesses that he might like to have appear before the committee, and that is his right. But if he wants to do so why does he not support the motion we have introduced? It would allow him to call all of the witnesses he mentioned. If he really wants an investigation into some of the practices of the Conservative Party, we are in agreement; let him do so. We introduced two motions which would allow everyone to do so. He voted against holding this investigation. Is that the right thing to do when people want an investigation? I don't think so.

You can't claim to be in favour of holding an inquiry and then vote against it. And yet that is what he did. Just like all of the other Liberals, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP, he voted against holding an investigation of the parties' practices. They're willing to do this before the cameras. This is hypocrisy on the part of the opposition parties. I think that our party has a lot of reasons to be proud of itself today because it is the only one to agree to have its accounts and practices examined within the context of such an inquiry. We are so open that we will allow the committee to investigate this, but we are the only ones to set this challenge to the committee.

Mr. Chairman, in another Liberal riding the decision was made to transfer an amount of \$12,200...

• (1500)

[English]

from the local association of the Liberal Party to the local campaign. Then an invoice was produced. That invoice talked about non-monetary services being rendered. The campaign then sent that money back to the national party. That same amount—\$12,200—was transferred from the local Liberal association back to the Liberal Party of Canada. That was on April 22, 2004. And then on May 7, 2004, the Liberal Party transferred that same \$12,200 back to the local Liberal riding association.

This is a very strange circular pattern in which money is flushed into the party, out of the party, into the association, out of the association, in exact dollar values that are unchanged from transaction to transaction. No details were given to Elections Canada of how the money was actually spent. The only way to find out would be to ask those responsible for these transactions how the money was spent, because the invoice in question that the local campaign used says only that it was for non-monetary services. So there are very few details.

Chair, I'm hoping that the committee will be prepared for this, because I think unfortunately this is going to become much more serious. The riding in question is the riding of Mr. Stéphane Dion.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, if I could just—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, you were very patient in letting Mr. Proulx talk through different possibilities.

I know they're upset—

Some hon. members: [Inaudible—Editor]

• (1505)

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr. Poilievre, I just want to make a suggestion that I am offering some leeway, because you are correct. Monsieur Proulx opened the door on mentioning names and making allegations. So I'm offering as much leeway as I can.

I just want to make sure we're focused on the motion at hand. I believe we are at this point, but this is just a little caution. Thank you.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: There seems to be quite an emotional outburst over there, Mr. Chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: And to the viewers, I apologize if you've not been able to hear my remarks, because there have been some gyrations over there.

When I brought forward the name, that this is in fact Stéphane Dion, I know it's probably something they would have liked to know before the leadership convention occurred.

Although it's not normal to have a leader of the opposition before a committee, I would be prepared to let him explain his conduct and the conduct of the riding association before the committee, as part of the overall study that would look into the financial practices of all parties.

So I say that to them, if they would be so kind—I see that we have Mr. McGuinty, Mr. Patry, and Ms. Redman—to feel free to communicate to their leader that we on this side would be willing to entertain a motion to bring him forward to explain these new revelations.

It looks like there's a real mess on hand, Mr. Chair, because we have a whole group of opposition parties who have declared that the practice of transferring funds between parties and local riding associations is an egregious violation of the law, but today we find out that they have engaged in exactly the same transfers.

I think with these new revelations in mind, the committee, I'm sure, would be willing to change its approach and that members of the opposition who have been blocking any study of their financial practices would alter their position and agree to have hearings on how they've been managing their affairs, now that this has been publicly revealed and it's no longer being kept a secret that they have engaged in exactly the transfers they are decrying.

With that in mind, Mr. Chair, I propose an amendment. It reads as follows:

That the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs conduct a thorough study into the Conservative Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada, the Bloc Québécois, and the NDP's use of transfers between the national parties, the electoral district associations, and the local campaigns to determine if these transactions were sufficiently legitimate, transparent, and in congruence with the law for all elections dating back to 1997.

I know that some in the past have been anxious to defeat such a motion and have it ruled right out of order, because they've already voted against it, but in light of the new revelations that have come forward today, I think the motion is deserving of some more consideration. I think that given that the cameras are here and given that Liberal members are learning about the practices of their leader and his riding association, the members might entertain this motion and start to begin hearings as soon as possible, so that we can get to the bottom of all of these things, and that all members and all parties —

Mr. Paul Dewar: A point of order, Chair

The Chair: Mr. Dewar has a point of order.

Mr. Paul Dewar: We seem to be in a pattern of trying to amend and amend and amend. It's a war of attrition, it seems. Notwithstanding the best attempt to play Perry Mason across the way, we have a motion that was in front of us before, to deal with advertising, not just in and out...

What Mr. Poilievre seems to be trying to do is to bring in yet another motion. I would like to stick to the motion. It wasn't about in and out; it was about advertising money, and I think we need to stick to that.

Thank you.

• (1510)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Poilievre, do you have the amendment in writing? Could I have a look at it for a minute to make a ruling?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Yes.

Mr. Chair, could I be allowed to speak to my motion?

The Chair: Wait until I make a ruling, please.

Colleagues, I am going to rule that the amendment to the motion is in order.

Hon. Karen Redman: I challenge the chair.

The Chair: The amendment is in order and we have a challenge to the chair.

There is no debate. The motion on a challenge is “shall the chair’s ruling be sustained?”

I’m hearing that we need a recorded vote.

Some hon. members: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: I’m sorry, there’s a lot of noise. Order. Order, please.

I know it’s getting late, but it’s difficult enough to hear with all the conversations. Did I or did I not hear someone request a recorded vote?

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Yes. That’s for transparency reasons, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right. Then we’re going to go to a recorded vote.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 7; yeas 4)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: The chair’s ruling is overturned. We’re going to continue with debate.

Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: On a point of order, I just want to confirm that I had not surrendered the floor but merely submitted a motion, so I’d like to continue.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, I think because the amendment you chose was overturned by the committee, I’m going to recognize the next speaker.

Go ahead, Madam Redman.

Hon. Karen Redman: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At the risk of looking like I’m currying favour, I think you’re doing a great job. I know this is very difficult.

I’m really pleased. I would have to agree with Monsieur Poilievre that I’m very pleased that the cameras are here. My only sadness is that this filibuster, which has been going on all week on this very important item, isn’t a little bit more interesting.

It’s important to point out for our viewing audience—and I know members around this table recognize this because we have all run successfully in elections or we wouldn’t have the privilege of being members of Parliament—that all elections are subject to Elections Canada rules. I know previously when the Conservatives tried to bring in this broad-brush motion they seemed to say they needed some kind of standard of behaviour. Well, I would contend that there is a standard of behaviour and it is indeed the rules and regulations of the Canada Elections Act. Those are the rules under which all of us not only run elections but we abide by spending limits, whether it’s the national party or the individual constituency in an election, and that is the yardstick by which we are measured.

The reason that four members—three Liberals and a Bloc member—asked for this meeting to be convened is because there are issues with Elections Canada, dealing directly with the Conservative Party, their candidates, their official agents, and some of their current members, over irregularities. And it isn’t about transfers, as the Conservative members would have had the viewing audience believe, but indeed it was what would appear to be a widespread scheme in order to allow them to spend more than their limit.

If the allegations are correct, the Conservative Party of Canada used a systematic approach to funnel money into riding associations that had not spent up to their allowable limit and then turn around and help defray the cost of a national media campaign to the tune of slightly over \$1 million.

Some of the issues around these allegations include the fact that there is no evidence that the ad expenses were incurred by the actual candidates who claimed them. There is no evidence that the candidates contracted the supplier for the purchase of the ads. Some of the candidates are on record as saying they had no knowledge of the buy details, and some said they were asked to contribute to the national advertising campaign.

The scheme was designed to give the appearance that local campaigns made the payment, and Conservative official agents characterized it as an in-and-out transaction. The scheme appears to have been designed to get additional rebates as well for candidates, because if you get 10% of your possible votes in an election, you do get a rebate from Elections Canada. The costs to run the ads were not an expense of the candidates but actually an expense of the national campaign.

The letter I referenced earlier was submitted on September 5, and the wording of it is to call a meeting under Standing Order 106(4),

in order to look into allegations made against the Conservative Party of Canada’s systematic attempt to defraud Elections Canada, as well as the Canadian taxpayer, in relation to the 2006 federal election.

I need to point out that these allegations that we’re referring to were not made by Liberals; they were not made by Bloc members, nor by NDP members, but rather Conservative Party candidates in the last election, and these individuals have a right to have their story told.

● (1515)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, in the interests of proper procedural comportment, these allegations have not been made by anyone—

The Chair: I accept that.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: —and I further note that they could be studied here before this committee if she had just supported the amendment we brought forward to hear all the parties.

The Chair: That’s debate. Thank you very much.

Madam Redman, please.

Hon. Karen Redman: The issue is quite simple. The Conservative Party is alleged to have developed a scheme that may have shuffled more than \$1 million in advertising money between itself and Conservative candidates, boosting candidate expenses by putting some of the national campaign costs on their books and qualifying, as I have stated earlier, for them to have larger Elections Canada rebates at the end of their election.

We all know that Elections Canada has rejected some of the expense claims filed by the Conservative candidates, stating that the national advertising campaign expense should have gone to the national campaign and not to these individuals. Should Elections Canada's decision stand, the national Conservative campaign could be forced to bring the cost of those ads into their books, which potentially could push their campaign over its legal spending limit, in violation of the Canada Elections Act. This is according to the *Ottawa Citizen* article dated August 25, 2007.

As I've mentioned earlier, these are serious allegations, and again, they are not made against the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, or the New Democratic Party, but these are against the Conservative Party of Canada. The only party that Elections Canada is having trouble with is the Conservative Party of Canada.

The Chair: Excuse me, Madam Redman, there's a point of order.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: On a point of order, no such allegations have been made against the Conservative Party.

The Chair: That's debate.

Ms. Redman, please.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Chair, for a political party that extolled, as a matter of fact characterized, its party as one of accountability and transparency, you would think it would welcome this. Yet it has filibustered all week and not allowed us to go forward with this very important study.

I ask the Conservatives to allow a vote on the main motion. What are they afraid of? Mr. Chair, what do they have to hide?

Individuals have been named, and I will just name a couple in the spirit of expediency because I know my Bloc and NDP colleagues, as well as perhaps other Liberals, would like to have a chance to speak.

There are statements by Jean Landry, who ran for the Conservatives in Richmond—Arthabaska, who reported to the *Ottawa Citizen* that, “Directors of the Conservative party called me to tell me not to talk to Elections Canada again because there were others dealing with the problem”.

Perhaps you'd like to hear from Mr. Gary Caldwell, who ran for the Conservative Party in Compton—Stanstead, who reported, and I quote, in the *Ottawa Citizen*, “The federal party wanted to put through some of their expenses through the accounts of candidates who weren't spending up to their maximum”.

Mr. Chair, these are serious allegations. It is the appropriate mandate of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to deal with this. I would ask our Conservative colleagues to quit filibustering and allow us to get on with this very important issue. Thank you.

● (1520)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Redman.

Next on the list is Mr. Dewar and then Mr. McGuinty.

Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know this is frustrating for people who are watching. They're confused as to what this matter is about. Maybe I can come back to it, because I think it's important.

This isn't about money going in and out. This is about how money is spent, how money is claimed, and it's actually about truth in advertising. The truth in advertising is the following: did the local campaigns who supposedly authorized spending know that they were doing it for their own campaign, or was it in fact for the Conservative Party of Canada?

My friend across the way would have you believe that this is about money going in and out of campaigns. It is not that. It is Elections Canada's assertion that the party had transferred large amounts of money to the candidates' campaigns—more than \$40,000 in several cases—and financial agents for the candidates promptly then transferred the money back to the party as a payment for radio and TV advertising.

Elections Canada says the candidates could not provide evidence they incurred the expenses. That means the cost would have to be credited to the party. As we've heard in media reports, the national ads the party unveiled during the campaign show very scant evidence that this had anything to do with local campaigns. Indeed, what we heard through the media reports that have already been referenced is that the candidates were unaware of the intent and use.

What this comes down to is a matter of trust, Mr. Chair, and the trust question is about who we should trust here. Do we trust the candidates at the local campaign who said they weren't aware of this scheme, or do we trust the party officials who have said everything was fine and that we should just trust them, or do we trust Elections Canada, which is, after all, the institution responsible for overseeing how spending is done? I would submit to you, Mr. Chair, that we need to have this in front of us. I would like Canadians to be able to see the truth.

I would finally like to talk a little bit about past experience. We know that this kind of scheme has been uncovered before, in the province of Manitoba. In fact, Minister Toews was known to have had a similar experience with this kind of situation. It might be interesting to have him in front of the committee to explain his experience in this kind of scheme. In fact, if you look at this, Mr. Chair, what we need to do is not examine the question being portrayed by our friends across the way, of opening books and looking at in and out, but what we need to do is to have a full examination of the issue of the day.

That is what I have just described from Elections Canada. That's what this is about. All parties had their books looked at, and a failing grade has only gone to one party to date. If there is further evidence that other parties and citizens wish to bring forward to Elections Canada, they can do that. That's why it's important that the Conservative Party stand down with their court actions to try to cover themselves.

I have to say that in the previous Parliament, in a previous time, it was the Conservative Party that did want to bring forward issues around malfeasance and misspending with another government, and they certainly didn't worry about whether or not court action was being taken. In fact, they dismissed it. I am saddened to say that this is a party that was being truthful—we thought—on changing the way business is done. We worked to have Bill C-2 amended to change who funds political parties in elections. We were hoping that was the congruent position of the party opposite, of the government. It's sad to see that they are fighting accountability, that they're fighting the Chief Electoral Officer, whom they appointed.

I just ask that the Conservative Party support us on this and support this motion. Let's get to work.

Thank you.

• (1525)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dewar.

Am I hearing a point of order?

Mr. Reid, please go ahead on a point of order, .

Mr. Scott Reid: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, if memory serves, the Chief Electoral Officer was appointed unanimously with the support of all MPs, including this one. It was interesting to hear him on the one hand castigating the Chief Electoral Officer earlier as being unrepresentative and out of touch and now finding the exact opposite when the issue is more in his favour.

The Chair: That's more a point of clarification. I think that's fair.

Next on my list is Mr. McGuinty, please, and then Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. David McGuinty: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to pick up on some of the comments made by one of the Conservative members with respect to other members of Parliament. It's unfortunate that the member of Parliament is prepared to so seriously try to deceive the Canadian people with respect to the nature of this investigation. So for the sake of clarity, let us review what has been happening with the members of the Conservative Party on this committee who are charged with the responsibility of debating intelligently whether this motion ought to pass or not, whether this should be the subject of a formal process by this committee.

Before I go through this list, I want to remind Canadians once again of something that my colleague, Ms. Redman, just did for the benefit of all Canadians watching and listening. There is only one party at the federal level right now that is subject to a formal investigation by the commissioner of elections. There's only one party subject to formal investigation, and that's the Conservative Party of Canada. No other party has been approached by the commissioner, no other party is being formally investigated, and no

other party is trying to stop that investigation by challenging its conclusions in, I believe, Federal Court. That's an interesting variation in development.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McGuinty said that the Conservative Party is challenging the conclusions of an investigation. There have been no such conclusions, so that's inaccurate from a judicial perspective.

The Chair: Colleagues, as I have mentioned earlier to a number of other members, I don't want the conversation to drift too far off the central point, which is the debate on the motion to go forward with the study. I am offering tons of leeway here.

Mr. McGuinty, I'll give you back the floor with that caution.

Mr. David McGuinty: I think this is right on point, Mr. Chair. Is there something I'm missing? Is this not on point with respect to the motion we're debating?

The Chair: I have had a number of questions as we've listened through the afternoon. It almost sounds like we're having the study right now. I'm not going to tell you which direction to go in. I've made the caution to other members. I'm just asking you too.

Mr. David McGuinty: I agree.

Coming back to the point that was being made, the Conservative members, with respect to other transactions that have occurred in other ridings, which are frankly outside the ambit of this motion...I think it's important to remind viewers that they are outside the ambit of this motion. If the Conservative members on this committee really think there is some kind of unethical or potentially illegal activity around the fact that Mr. Reid himself transferred \$4,592.58 to his campaign, in and out, but he's not listed as an in-and-out participant by Elections Canada.... Mr. Poilievre transferred \$15,672 to his campaign on January 23 and then he paid his riding association back the same amount. He's not listed by Elections Canada as participating in the in-and-out ad buy scheme. Joe Preston's riding association transferred \$10,500 to his campaign and then back again for advertising expenses. They're not listed by Elections Canada as participating in the in-and-out ad buy question. Mr. Lukiwski transferred from his riding a total of \$12,000, transferred in with only about \$5,000 being expensed as advertising. And finally, on that very same note, Mr. Stephen Harper transferred \$40,000 into his campaign, but he books only \$20,401.22 as a refund of expenses incurred on behalf of the national campaign.

Those transactions occurred. There's no doubt they occurred. Here's the difference. Somebody on the other side said there are all kinds of transactions not reported. Well, obviously they don't understand the election financing laws of this country, because any expense over \$50 must be backstopped with receipts.

Let me go back to my main point. There is only one party being investigated by the elections commissioner—not two, three, or four; there's only one.

I would suggest that another aspect of this motion be factored in, Mr. Chair, and that is what took place in my own riding, my own electoral district of Ottawa South, where there was a \$41,000 transfer into the riding association of a Mr. Allan Cutler, the accountability guy of the government, the accountability guy who received \$41,000—

• (1530)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: A point of order.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Under the guise of parliamentary privilege, Mr. McGuinty is seeking revenge against a whistle-blower who exposed his previous government's activity, and I think that's highly inappropriate. This is not the forum for character assassination.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Poilievre. That's debate.

I would just remind members that a point of order is to point out a deviation from the rules and practices of the House or committees. It's not to be used as a matter of debate.

Mr. McGuinty, you still have the floor.

Mr. David McGuinty: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's obviously a very sensitive issue, because the truth hurts.

The reality here is that in my own riding there were all kinds of transactions that went on that I think we ought to hear about. I think it would be very interesting, for example, to convene Mr. Alan Riddell as part of this study. Mr. Riddell participated in a \$50,000 payoff to step aside in my own riding to allow another candidate to run—a payoff that was denied by the Prime Minister, denied by the Conservative Party of Canada, until a Superior Court of Justice in Ontario ordered the government's party, the Conservative Party, to honour the payment, which now we discover may or may not be in breach of the Canada Elections Act and financing laws themselves. This is such a serious issue, which is linked to this motion, Mr. Chair, that the Prime Minister himself has been repeatedly convened to testify and is hiding behind parliamentary privilege and immunity. Just as recently as three weeks ago, when he already had one judgment against his party, he's now desperately trying to defend a second action that speaks to libel and other issues by a former candidate of the Conservative Party of Canada.

I think Mr. Riddell has a lot to tell us about in-and-out schemes—a \$50,000 receipt of moneys, a sum that is in excess of the actual amount of money he could have spent in any nomination campaign, which may or may not be in breach of Canada's election financing laws.

What did Mr. Cutler know about this? What did Mr. Harper, the Prime Minister, know about this? Did he authorize such a payment to Mr. Riddell? Did he knowingly authorize it, knowing it might be potentially illegal? When was it authorized? What about the \$41,000 that flowed in from the central party? We're not sure what happened to it. How much of that went to central advertising? How much came back in the form of subsidies by the Canadian taxpayer to subsidize the Conservative Party of Canada?

Please correct me. Have I misspoken? Have I misstated any facts? The chief justice of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice was forced to rule against the party after serious stonewalling by the president of

the party, who refused to come and testify—not once, not twice, but four times—until under threat of subpoena the president of the party showed up under protest, Mr. Chair, to have to deny that a \$50,000 payoff occurred, a secret deal, the payoff. Unfortunately for the Conservative Party of Canada, this involved a candidate who happens to be a very solid citizen and a very, very accomplished civil litigator. Perhaps the Conservative Party of Canada might want to rule out the participation of civil litigators as candidates in the future. I don't know.

I think those questions deserve to be examined. I think Mr. Cutler would have something to tell us about this. He's a very decent man. I'm sure he has some insight as to what took place here. What \$41,000 did he receive? How did it flow out? What advertising costs were assumed? I don't know. My constituents would like to know. I'm sure Mr. Riddell has something to help us understand in this respect. He has very intricate knowledge of—

• (1535)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): A point of order.

The Chair: A point of order, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Riddell and that issue are before the courts. Therefore, I think it's inappropriate to be speaking about this at this meeting.

Mr. David McGuinty: I disagree, Mr. Chair. You can go ahead and rule, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I will, and I'll just take the microphone for a moment.

All colleagues will remember the convention. It is voluntary—the *sub judice* convention where we try not to state anything that might influence the courts or bias either party before the courts, such that they get a fair trial. I would caution members to restrict their comments and respect that convention.

Thank you.

Mr. David McGuinty: I couldn't agree with you more, Mr. Chair.

Everything I have said today has been widely reported in half a dozen media outlets across the country, perhaps more on the Internet. I agree with and respect the convention.

But it is interesting how the gist of the pure Conservative spin on the other side doesn't deal with the fact that transfers from political parties to riding associations and candidates are legitimate and permitted by Elections Canada.

Because one of the members happened to single out my leader's riding, let's talk about that. Let's get that on the record, debunk the myths, and tell the truth.

What happened in Mr. Dion's riding is completely different from the alleged Conservative election deception, because in that riding no one exceeded advertising limits. That riding didn't get any Elections Canada rebates. The transfer wasn't even for advertising; it was for signs and insurance.

Elections Canada audited the file and found no concerns, unlike the cases of so many Conservative candidates who are now picking and rolling on their party. Former Conservative candidates Jean Landry and Ann Julie Fortier are on the record saying that Conservative ad expenses were not local campaign expenses and that they were forced, almost coerced, to participate—and the direction came from the very top. Did the Prime Minister authorize this? Did he knowingly allow this shenanigan to happen on his watch?

The reason Elections Canada challenged the Conservative Party on their advertising expenses was because they were expensed as campaign expenses, but there is no evidence that they were in fact campaign expenses.

There's an allegation here of an orchestrated, top-down scheme involving 70 ridings—not 7 or 10 of them—in the 2006 campaign. This appears to have allowed the Conservative Party to spend more on national advertising than the law permits, while at the same time inflating the rebate moneys that Conservative candidates were entitled to receive.

Elections Canada determined that these were not local campaign expenses. As a result, Elections Canada did the right thing and refused to provide the rebates to the candidates.

The Conservatives' former candidates—again, Jean Landry and Ann Julie Fortier—are on the record saying that these were not local campaign expenses, that they were forced to participate, and that the direction came from the very top.

In the instance of my leader's riding, there was no rebate from Elections Canada. Neither the Liberal Party of Canada nor the riding exceeded advertising limits, and most importantly there was no scheme orchestrated by the Liberal Party to do what the Conservatives appear to have done. The expense in question on the Saint-Laurent—Cartierville books did not even involve advertising; it was for lawn signs and insurance.

What also needs to be made clear about the situation in that particular riding is that \$44,000 was owed from the party to the riding association from fundraising revenues at the beginning of 2004. This money was returned to the riding in two instalments, the first on May 7, 2004, in the amount of \$12,200. This was used to pay for the riding's services package, provided by the party to all campaigns, including maps, materials, and other items to assist local campaigns. Another payment in the amount of \$32,549.17 was made on May 26, 2004. This was the remaining debt that was owed.

It's important to remember that transactions from a political party to a riding association or candidate, and even back again, are permitted by Elections Canada law.

The reason Elections Canada is challenging the Conservative Party on their advertising expenses is because they were expensed as local campaign expenses, but there is zero evidence that they were expenses incurred by the local campaign. There is not a shred of evidence.

This is not the case for the riding of my leader. In fact, Elections Canada reviewed these expenses, as they do and as they will for all candidates' election filings, and raised no concerns, unlike in the case

of the Conservative Party, again, where they found serious problems in 70 campaigns.

• (1540)

So I would like to see the witness list include, for example, the president of the Conservative Party of Canada, the chief financial officer of the Conservative Party of Canada. I would like to see—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Chair, on a point of order.

The Chair: Excuse me one minute, Mr. McGuinty.

On a point of order, please.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: For there to be a witness list, we require a motion to be passed. He's voted down a motion to investigate any of this. So he's blocking any investigation of these matters by voting against our motion to have such an investigation. If you could, indicate to Mr. McGuinty that he's out of order by putting forward a witness list for an investigation that he's defeated from happening.

The Chair: I believe we're still on the main point, which is investigating the original motion. We've all been putting forward witness lists for various sides, so I am going to allow him to continue.

Mr. David McGuinty: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I again would like to see, for example—I'd suggest for the committee's consideration—the president of the Conservative Party of Canada, the chief financial officer of the Conservative Party of Canada, the chief legal adviser to the Conservative Party of Canada, the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Alan Riddell, Mr. Allan Cutler, and all kinds of other players at the local level in 70 campaigns.

I think we could really do a great service to Canadians by examining in detail how this scheme actually worked and who knew about it. After all, these are the accountability guys. If the accountability guys really are interested in seeing election financing laws improved, it's very important to get to the very bottom of this, Mr. Chair.

Those are my remarks, Mr. Chair. I think the sooner we get to this, in terms of this study and the examination of these witnesses, the better off the Canadian public will be.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McGuinty.

Next on my list is Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Chair.

I, too, will echo the comments made by several of my colleagues around the table, and I'm very pleased to see that this is on camera.

The one main difference between my colleagues Ms. Redman and Mr. McGuinty and me is that I won't be reading prepared remarks by our research staff; I'll be talking about some of the things that actually occurred and some of the things that we should be talking about here.

Let me first say that one of the things I believe the Canadian public should be aware of, and one of the reasons we have raised amendments to the motion presented by members of the opposition, to include investigations into spending practices and election practices of all opposition parties, is that in fact, Mr. Chair, as you would well know, when we asked the chair to rule on whether their motion was actually in order, your ruling came back, supported by the law clerk of this chamber, Mr. Walsh, saying, no, it is not in order because it is too restrictive.

Ultimately, your ruling was challenged and overturned by members of the opposition, which further demonstrates their willingness to become no more than a partisan witch-hunt operation. Mr. Walsh correctly noted that to be in order this motion should be more inclusive, more expansive, in its nature. That's why we're saying, hey, we want an investigation; let's expand it to include the practices, the advertising practices, the spending practices, and the transfer practices, in elections not only in 2006 but going back 10 years, of all opposition parties.

I believe that motion would be well in order and is consistent with the legal findings of some of those people who advise all members in this chamber. Yet, of course, the members of the opposition chose to ignore that, because that's not what they want to get at. They don't want to do a thorough investigation of advertising and spending practices. They want to engage only in a political witch hunt, and they're attempting to do that.

Hence we have seen, time and time again, when we have offered to allow them to enter into a clear and thorough discussion of practices of their own parties, by way of our amendments, they have voted against it. In fact, they will continue to do so, because I am convinced, and I think most Canadians who give any more than just a cursory glance to the proceedings here today and the issues at hand will recognize as well, that there's a reason for their reluctance—frankly, more than reluctance, their absolute resistance to having their own books opened up.

We absolutely have nothing to hide. We want and we welcome an investigation. We've been calling for that. We are the only party of this committee calling for that. But we also, in the issue of fairness, are saying, "Why don't we examine all of the practices?" I am sure, as exhibited by illustrations given by my colleague Mr. Poilievre and more—and there will be more to come—the practices of opposition parties, whether they be Liberal or Bloc Québécois...there are many, many questions to be answered by members of the opposition parties. They choose not to allow those questions to be even posed, let alone answered.

I want to directly talk a little bit about the question at hand, and that is whether or not there was any untoward activity by the Conservative Party in their advertising in the 2006 election at the local level.

Apparently, the suggestion is that if a local candidate ran an ad that happened to be one that was running nationally, that would be wrong. I can assure you, having dealt with this issue intimately over the course of the last 10 years at a provincial level, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. The key is to ensure that all ads run by a local campaign, should they be national in perspective, be tagged

that they are authorized by the local candidate and the official agent, and that's exactly what happened on every single occasion.

I am absolutely convinced that when the investigation that is currently before the courts is concluded, they will find there has been absolutely no untoward, illegal activity whatsoever by the Conservative Party or any of its candidates. That is just a given.

● (1545)

Mr. Chair, I can relate this point to comments I made yesterday during proceedings. During my time as executive director of two provincial political parties, we undertook an examination of the Saskatchewan Elections Act. We made sure that we mirrored as closely as possible the proceedings and the guidelines of the federal act. We obviously made some localized amendments that would be unique to Saskatchewan, but on the whole and in general, Mr. Chair, the amendments we made when we revised the Saskatchewan Elections Act were very consistent with what the Canada Elections Act says.

With respect to this very issue, Mr. Chair, we were absolutely on point. We absolutely mirrored or replicated, if you will, what is allowed in terms of advertising at the federal level. That is to say, Mr. Chair, that if a local candidate wanted to run an ad that happened to be produced by the provincial—or, in this case, the federal—party and that happened, perhaps, even to be running on a provincial or federal basis, it was absolutely allowed, as long, of course, as you had the required tag line, which is "authorized by" such and such a candidate and his official agent.

The premise there is probably pretty easy to understand for all Canadians who are watching these proceedings. In other words, Mr. Chair, who is to tell a local candidate what he or she can or cannot run in terms of advertising that would promote their candidacy? If I wish, Mr. Chair, to run an ad that may not be considered local in nature but that I believe has the best opportunity to garner support in my riding, I should have the right to do so. That's what's at issue here, Mr. Chair.

But as we examine the spurious allegations by members of the opposition in saying this is a systematic, top-down attempt to defraud the Canadian public, which I absolutely and totally, without equivocation, reject—as does our party—they do open the door, Mr. Chair, for the examination of practices of the opposition parties.

I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that members opposite and their respective parties have been throwing a lot of rocks, but they have an awful lot of windows, because there's a bunch of glass houses over there, which we have seen and examples of which we have given today: practices that should be questioned by this committee. Their avoidance of that questioning, Mr. Chair, to me speaks of only one thing: they don't want to get into a discussion of what some of their candidates and some of their parties have done, not only in the 2006 election but in previous elections.

My colleague Mr. Poilievre has made reference to what happened in the 2000 election with the Bloc Québécois—and I reiterate some of those, Mr. Chair—talking about the in-and-out scheme, about which, although on one hand members of the opposition at this table seem to say “we can't talk about that, let's just talk about ad content”, yet in the same or the next breath they say that this in-and-out, top-down scheme to defraud the Canadian public is something we should investigate.

You can't have it both ways.

Clearly, in 2000 there were questions about the practices of the Bloc Québécois. My colleague has mentioned a number of them, and there are others. For example, the newspaper report my colleague referenced also stated that there were many examples in which suppliers, wishing to donate services to a local Bloc Québécois candidate, were told, “No, we will pay you full retail value for those services, but in turn you can donate that money back to our party. In that manner, you, being a donor to the party, would receive a tax credit, and we, being the local candidate, can claim an expense, because we have paid for your services, rather than your donating them to us.” That is an in-and-out scheme, Mr. Chair.

There were great questions about that, answers to which have never been received. There are questions my colleagues have brought forward today about Liberal spending practices.

• (1550)

I think this is the important point to note, Mr. Chair. It's not only the practice of what's been called the in and out, but there have been some serious concerns about some of the practices the Liberals engaged in, in 2006, that frankly were more than simply transfers between the Liberal Party of Canada and their riding associations or candidates.

Our research has shown examples where transfers occurred between EDAs and the Liberal Party of Canada, where the EDA claims, in their return, that a transfer was made, but the Liberal Party of Canada does not claim there was any transfer. In other words, two returns were filed.

As we all know—we've all been in this business a long time—the local candidate has to file an election return and the central party has to file an election return. Mr. Chair, when an EDA claims on their return that they received money from the Liberal Party of Canada, but the Liberal Party of Canada does not indicate on their return that they gave that money, the question has to be asked, “Why not?”

Yet the Liberals—particularly the Liberals—at this committee refuse to allow those questions to be asked. Why? I think it's reasonable to suggest that the reason is that they don't want to find out the answers. And more importantly, Mr. Chair, I would suggest they don't want the Canadian public to find out the answers to those questions.

Once again—and I will say this for the umpteenth time—we are not rejecting or refusing or trying to filibuster any request for a thorough investigation. We are only suggesting and recommending, Mr. Chair, that if you want to have a thorough investigation, tit for tat, let's take a look at all political parties, because there are many questions that have not been answered, many of which we have raised today.

We are fully prepared to answer any questions. Whether they be officials of our party, candidates, or official agents, we are fully prepared to have them answer those questions. We have engaged in a legal action with Elections Canada, not because we're trying to obfuscate or delay proceedings, but we're trying to get the money back that is rightfully owed—the rebates—to our candidates, because we contend, and I certainly support that contention, that we did absolutely nothing wrong. Yet there are questions we have raised today that the opposition members refuse to answer and refuse to have brought forward to this committee.

Now, who is hiding what, Mr. Chair? I ask you that. It's certainly not us. And I would suggest, Mr. Chair, if they were truly sincere in their beliefs or their contention that they have nothing to hide, then what is the problem? Why do they repeatedly refuse examination of their election practices for the last number of years? I think we can safely say, Mr. Chair, that there is a reason why they certainly don't want to go back to 1997 and the 2000 campaigns. As Justice Gomery pointed out, there were a lot of irregularities during those two campaigns. In fact, Mr. Chair, as we pointed out, there is \$40 million that can't be accounted for. And we know, as Justice Gomery pointed out in his report, copies of which we have here, that there was a lot of money being illegally transferred to and from the Liberal Party of Canada during those years.

Perhaps, Mr. Chair, one of the reasons members opposite are refusing our request to expand this investigation, as legal counsel has suggested we do, is because they don't want to know the answers. They don't want to have anybody digging into past practices, not only because they're afraid that Justice Gomery's report, which was restricted to a degree by the terms of reference set out by the former Prime Minister, but that we might open it up and expand those terms of reference and we might find things they don't want us to find and they don't want the Canadian public to find.

Mr. Chair, there is only one party, as my colleague Mr. Poilievre has said, that has said it wants to have a full airing of all of the practices that occurred, not only in 2006, but in previous years, and that's the Conservative Party. I have yet to hear one Liberal member on this panel suggest they would be willing at this committee to investigate spending practices and election practices over the last decade. Why hasn't one of them come forward and said, “We have nothing to hide, let's open this up?”

• (1555)

In fact, Mr. Chair—although I'm certainly not authorized to do so—here's what my suggestion would be. If we agree to that, if we agree to bring all of the parties into the fold and to examine all of the practices, my suggestion would be, hey, let's have all of the Conservative witnesses first. Let's examine the Conservatives first. Get that right out into the open right from the get-go, right off the top—as long as they would agree to give us equal time to examine the witnesses we would like to bring to explain their very curious practices, some of which we have illustrated today.

• (1600)

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, thank you.

I'm not going to take the floor from you. I just want to remind members that the original closing time for this meeting was 4 o'clock.

Hang on, now. As I said at the beginning, we did get started a little bit late, so I'm willing to go a few more minutes here, if it's okay with members.

I see some members have other engagements and are leaving. Just out of respect for everybody, I would like permission from the committee to continue for maybe another 10 or 15 minutes.

I'm seeing that people are okay with another 10 to 15 minutes.

Mr. Lukiwski, you still have the floor.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Let me just say, Mr. Chair, that as far as I'm concerned—and I think I can speak on behalf of my colleagues—we'll stay here as long as you want, because I think we want to make sure the Canadian public understands that we are not the ones resisting discussing this issue. It is the members opposite. They will not allow, under any circumstances, Chair, an examination of their own election practices over the last decade. That has become exceedingly evident. I think people who are watching these telecasts today understand that now.

If they have nothing to hide, Mr. Chair, it's very easy: just agree to an amendment to allow this to expand, as the law clerk of this assembly suggested. Let's just open it up. Let's bring every party's books to this committee.

The Chair: There's a point of order, Mr. Lukiwski, please.

Madam Redman.

Hon. Karen Redman: I hope this is a point of order.

I don't think anybody asked to see the Conservative Party's books or any other party's books. We're asking to look at a specific point in time. I say this just for clarification.

The Chair: That's debate, thank you.

Mr. Lukiwski, I will entertain a motion to extend the meeting, as suggested, but right now I'm looking at—

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I think we all agreed with you.

The Chair: Well, I saw this side agree with me.

Is this other side agreeing with me?

Okay. You see, I do have somebody saying go to 4:15 only.

I do not have the authority to continue past 4:15. When we get to 4:15, if there's a motion to extend the meeting, I'll entertain that, but right now I don't have one. I'm sorry, I don't have consensus to go past 4:15.

Mr. Lukiwski, you have the floor.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Chair, I think I've made my point, which has also been made by other colleagues of mine. I know there are other colleagues, and perhaps other members of this committee, who want to speak to this issue, so I will conclude.

Again, Mr. Chair, I would like to offer an amendment to the motion before us that is reflective of my comments, and my comments on expanding the terms that this committee wishes to engage in when examining spending practices in previous elections.

For the clerk's purposes, I will read it into the record.

The Chair: One minute, Mr. Lukiwski, please.

Could I have quiet around the room? I only want to hear from members at the table, and preferably only those with the microphone. I am about to hear an amendment and I need to hear it.

Mr. Lukiwski, my apologies.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Chair.

The amendment reads:

That the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs conduct a thorough study of the spending practices of the Conservative Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada, the Bloc Québécois, and the NDP during each and every election and by-election since 1997. This study would include use of funds transferred in and out of national campaigns, local campaigns, and riding associations.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Could I have a look at it, please, Mr. Lukiwski?

Some hon. members: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Order, please.

Earlier in this meeting I ruled these types of amendments in order and was overturned. It's a bit of a quagmire because this amendment is substantially similar to a previous amendment that I ruled in order but was then overturned. So let's just save ourselves a lot of time.

I am going to rule this amendment out of order, simply because it is substantially similar to a previous amendment at the same meeting.

The amendment is out of order.

A point of order.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. If it's potentially similar to another motion, you've already ruled it in order.

•(1605)

The Chair: Well, as I said, I think if I rule it in order, we're just going to end up taking a vote. Ultimately it is substantially the same as a previous amendment.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I don't think you should feel intimidated by members of the opposition. You should rule how you want to rule, regardless of how they're going to overturn you.

The Chair: I'm trying to proceed, Mr. Poilievre. I can guarantee you I am not intimidated by anybody. I'm trying to make sure we can get as much done as possible in the few minutes we have left. So the amendment is out of order.

Mr. Lukiwski put the amendment forward. We are now on to Mr. Reid. You are up, if you want to speak.

Mr. Scott Reid: I just got handed a note here. I was actually in the process of being prepared to make a point of order, but maybe the best way to deal with this is in the process of the debate.

Mr. Chair, the fact that the majority of members present here are willing to ride roughshod over the rules does not mean those are the rules. The fact that the majority of members here are willing to say they don't care what the rules say and will simply force the chair to make a ruling and then challenge the ruling, argue that the ruling is out of order, and suspend all debate effectively means they're imposing closure. There are methods for imposing closure; this is not actually in order.

In fact the majority on that side of the table who have been acting in this manner have been out of order every time they have done this. In fact this committee has been operating in violation of the orders because of this abuse of the orders by members opposite here. I think this is indicative to some degree of the kind of attitude by the parties opposite towards getting to the bottom of the fact...the attitude toward generally being respectful of the rules not only of Parliament but the rules that are contained in the law of the land.

I heard one member, Mr. McGuinty, go on at some length citing the number of ridings involved in Quebec in the matter he's trying to get discussed here. He of course avoided mentioning the 21 ridings in Quebec in which brown envelopes full of cash were delivered to the Liberal Party. Later on, as this was being brought up, he was saying that it was in 2004, and that was before the current law was in place. But when you're talking about actual fraud—actual completely illegal criminal activities—of course it's a different matter.

What has happened is that we've opened up an opportunity through our suggested amendments to deal with these other activities, including criminal activities. The Liberal Party was pretty clearly involved in Quebec, and he now wants to stop that investigation from going forward, just as his former leader, former Prime Minister Paul Martin, was anxious to make sure Judge Gomery would not be allowed to investigate these kinds of transfers and these kinds of criminal activities in the Gomery commission. That's why former Prime Minister Paul Martin chose to ensure that chapter 7 of the Auditor General's report dealing with these matters would be excluded from Judge Gomery's mandate.

This matter could be opened up now for investigation. The motions a number of us put forward, as I did myself, would have permitted it to take place. They would also have allowed investigations into other actions the Liberal Party has been engaged in—actions that are not illegal, but simply the same as the actions the Conservative Party has been engaged in and that we have been defending.

I emphasize once again, Mr. Chairman, the importance of remembering that all these matters have been brought to the attention of the public because the Conservative Party of Canada is engaged as a plaintiff in an action in court to ensure that we are paid the moneys owed to us for legal and permissible expenses that we undertook, moneys Elections Canada is refusing to give to us. It's a court matter. Ultimately I'm not going to be making that decision, nor will this body; it's going to be the courts that decide whether or not the action undertaken by the Conservative Party and the official agents for its various local campaigns is legitimate.

Even Elections Canada has only taken the position that there's a disagreement over an interpretation of a section of the law. This is very different from the over-the-top allegations contained in the

original motion put forward by Liberal Party members in order to summon this committee here. They use terms like “systematic fraud”. This is the kind of thing that clearly Elections Canada is not asserting, but which did take place in the case of the practices on the part of the Liberal Party in Quebec, which transferred in periods now closed under the terms of the Canada Elections Act and its statute of limitations and which Judge Gomery should have been allowed to investigate.

If there has ever been a systematic attempt to defraud Elections Canada and the people of Canada, it has been in actions undertaken by the Liberal Party of Canada in its Quebec actions as part of the sponsorship scandal and in the web of intrigue in those envelopes of cash that it was involved in transferring around during the period leading up to 2004.

• (1610)

So part of the reason for us suggesting that we should go back to 2004, 2000, 1997, those elections, is that this opens up these activities—activities that are excluded by the choice to only look at the 2006 election that the Liberals have very selectively chosen to ask us to focus on.

It just seems to me, Mr. Chairman, that this kind of fairness issue could be opened up, could be discussed. I really am very disappointed in the Liberal members opposite, that they are so reticent to having a little bit of light shed on their own past practices, so shameful and so inappropriate in the context of an advanced democracy like the Canadian democracy. Mr. Chairman, I hope they will seriously reconsider; otherwise I think when they go home and look at themselves in the mirror tonight they will want to hang their heads in shame for having tried to close down an opportunity that was presented here to have a truly valuable cleaning of house with regard to their own past financing practices.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I have four principal points that I would like to make, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Excuse me one moment.

A point of order?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Am I still on your list?

The Chair: Yes, sir, you are still on the list.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: You didn't forget me. You wouldn't do that.

The Chair: I would never do that. I am sure you wouldn't allow me to.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Exactly. That's why I was checking. Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Marcel is unforgettable.

You know, the irony of today's discussion is that we could have started the hearings we're all discussing if the opposition had just voted for our amendment on Tuesday. We would have witnesses before us right now, the hearings would be unfolding before our eyes as we speak. But because the Liberals, the Bloc, and the NDP voted against opening their books to public scrutiny, we are continuing to debate the same thing we were on Tuesday. They have kept a full-blown filibuster going ever since.

My second point, Mr. Chair, is that—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Poilievre. There is a point of order.

Hon. Karen Redman: Albeit a very poor filibuster. Everybody viewing can see the Conservatives are the ones who are filibustering.

The Chair: That's definitely debate.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I see that the member interrupted my remarks to filibuster and accuse someone else of filibustering at the same time. I have to commend the creativity of that kind of intervention.

My second point, Chair, is that Mr. McGuinty points out that there were transfers between my campaign in the 2006 election and my riding association. He's made that allegation, and you know what? It's absolutely true; it's a fact. My riding association transferred money to my election campaign in what is considered to be not only allowed but mandatory. My riding association cannot participate in

an election campaign. It has to transfer funds over to my election association.

Now, the reason he did that—because he knows the law very well and he knew that was perfectly permissible—is he was trying to make a comparison with what Mr. Dion was up to with his \$12,200 campaign transfer between his riding association and the national party. Here is the distinction: Mr. Dion was making transfers between his riding association and the national party without any explanation of what those transfers were for, and then they were transferred back to his local riding association. An invoice provides very little detail of exactly what the \$12,200 was used for. The only way we could find out what he was up to in engaging in such a transfer, for which, by the way, he was eligible to have taxpayers rebate him, would be to have him come before this committee and present that invoice to us for our examination and further questioning.

I, on the other hand, did not flush any of my money through a national party and have it transferred back to me. That has never happened. That's not how we do business in Nepean—Carleton. In Nepean—Carleton we follow the rules. That's exactly what we've done.

• (1615)

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Poilievre.

Colleagues, I have to respect everybody at the meeting, please.

It being 4:15, this meeting is now adjourned.

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