



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 144

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Chair: Mr. John Williamson



Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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• (1615)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)): Good afternoon. I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 144 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[English]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we begin, I'd like to ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, especially the interpreters. This is a kind reminder to all those in person and online that, for the safety of our interpreters, it is very important that your microphone is muted when you are not speaking.

[Translation]

Thank you for your co-operation.

[English]

All comments should be addressed through the chair.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), the committee is resuming consideration of "Report 6: Sustainable Development Technology Canada" of the 2024 reports 5 to 7 of the Auditor General of Canada.

[English]

I'd like to welcome our witness, Navdeep Bains, who is joining us remotely.

I understand that you have opening remarks, which are welcome. You have five minutes. The floor is yours, sir. Thank you for joining us today.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, my name is Navdeep Bains. From November 2015 to January 12, 2021, I served as Canada's minister of innovation, science and industry.

Having once appeared at the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, I'm here to answer any questions regard-

ing Sustainable Development Technology Canada and my role when I was minister.

Sustainable Development Technology Canada is an arm's-length organization established by an act of Parliament. As minister, my only role, as outlined by the act, was to make appointments to the Sustainable Development Technology Canada board. The appointments I made when I was minister were recommended to me through a fair, open and transparent process brought forward in 2016 to allow more opportunities for all Canadians to serve their country.

Through that process, all positions are posted publicly on the GIC appointments website. Applications are simple and made online, and postings are posted until an appointment is made. The goal was to bring a consistent process to appointments. After receiving applications for an appointment, a selection panel was led by the Privy Council Office with supports from across government. These panels conducted interviews with the candidates and presented ministers with short lists of candidates. Positions were kept open until a successful candidate was recommended. Accordingly, it would also not be uncommon for multiple groups of candidates to be recommended. I recommended over 100 applicants in this open, transparent, merit-based process from when I was first appointed minister in November 2015 until I left cabinet on January 12, 2021.

With respect to the relationship between me and Sustainable Development Technology Canada, as I have previously testified, Sustainable Development Technology Canada is an arm's-length organization. My role as minister of innovation, science and industry was to recommend seven of the 15 board members, including the chair. While funding for Sustainable Development Technology Canada flowed through the department, we were not responsible for the management and governance of the staff or board.

I believe in the clean-tech sector and the benefits it has brought to Canada. I am proud of the incredible people and companies that have made this sector in Canada a global leader.

Once again, I am here to answer your questions.

Thank you very much.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now begin our first round. The four members have six minutes each.

Mr. Perkins, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank former Liberal minister Bains.

I would like to ask him this: As a minister of the Crown, you were responsible to Parliament for all parliamentary appropriations under your department, were you not, in addition to appointments?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: When all ministers set budgets, they need to be approved by Parliament. That is correct.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's right. You're accountable for that. You're accountable for every dollar that was spent and allocated.

I'm going to ask you, first of all, about your appointment of the chair, Annette Verschuren, who, at this committee, said three times that she didn't apply—that you phoned her twice to ask her to serve. Then, apparently—

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —she applied after that.

It's not a point of debate, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Perkins. Hold on. I do have to hear the point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. We'll start all over again.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The member knows full well that the particular person he's talking about has corrected the record in writing.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, she hasn't. If you listen, you will get the answer, so I'll do it all over again.

The Chair: Okay, gentlemen, stop. This is clearly a point of debate.

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, it isn't.

The Chair: I'll just remind the government members that I don't like needless points of order on either side.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm a backbench—

The Chair: My point, though, is not to highlight that it's a government member issue. It's not. It happens occasionally on both sides when the debate gets heated.

You always have the immediate right of reply after Mr. Perkins. It is you, in fact, Mr. Drouin, and I hope that if you extend, on your side, courtesy to the official opposition, they will do the same. If they do not do so, I will censure them as well. I am going to back up the clock for Mr. Perkins.

You can restart your question, Mr. Perkins—not the time, just your questions. I'm backing up the clock, not from the top, but you can start your question from the top.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I think he interrupted me before I even got my question in.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, I said that I'm backing up the clock. You have the floor.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bains, according to Annette Verschuren, you phoned her twice to ask her to serve. Is that correct? That's what she said at the committee.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I have stated in my previous testimony—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I don't want a dissertation on the appointment process. It's a simple yes or no. You phoned her twice—yes or no.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I stated in my previous testimony at the industry committee, I reached out to a number of people during my tenure as a minister and asked them to participate in its open, transparent, merit-based—

Mr. Rick Perkins: You called her twice.

• (1625)

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, I have a point of order. I've stopped the clock.

Yes, please go ahead.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much.

I believe that Ms. Verschuren—sorry, I don't know how to pronounce her name—did correct her testimony.

The Chair: Okay. I just ruled on this. This is not a point of order. Stop.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We will start from the top.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: It doesn't make sense to us to continue to harass a witness on this—

The Chair: All right. I endeavour to act—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: The evidence is there, so I'm just not sure why it just—

The Chair: Ms. Khalid—

Mr. Rick Perkins: She applied after the phone call. Listen, and you'll learn something for a change.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Let's not go down that road—

The Chair: Mr. Perkins—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Why don't you want to learn anything?

Is that part of the cover-up coalition?

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, before I remind—

Mr. Rick Perkins: You should. I take exception to your cover-up.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I take personal exception to the witness being—

The Chair: Order. We are going to suspend for a minute.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1625)

The Chair: I'll bring the meeting back to order.

If I could have everyone's attention, including the official opposition's, first I'm going to highlight the safety aspect. When everyone is talking at once, it is putting the interpreters in a very difficult position. We've made many changes here to ensure their health is protected.

I also want to highlight that Mr. Bains is here for about an hour, because of a conflict, which I understand, and I appreciate his being here. He has agreed to come back. If we continue to go down this rabbit hole and these debates that are happening while it's a member's turn to speak, and when those items will be brought up by an opposing side in a later round, we're not going to get anywhere, and we'll be back.

Now, further, I had committed not to sit next week, but if this devolves the way it is going to devolve, I might reconsider that.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Bring it on.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, you be careful saying that, because we sit a lot in recess weeks—a lot.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's about an hour's drive.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It's 30 minutes.

The Chair: I don't think your colleagues will appreciate your cheerleading me on, calling me....

• (1630)

Mr. Francis Drouin: They will.

The Chair: No, Mr. Drouin, I can assure you they won't.

Anyway, if we can proceed civilly....

I'll say, as well, that Mr. Bains is an experienced parliamentarian, and I am sure he's going to be able to provide answers to committee members on both sides. I hope we can get through this without this devolving into a shouting match again.

Lastly, I'm going to close by saying again to please respect the interpreters.

Mr. Perkins, you have just a little over four minutes on the clock. The floor is yours again. Please begin.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

I have six minutes left.

The Chair: Pardon me. You have five minutes on the clock.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have six minutes on the clock. They haven't allowed me to get a single question in.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, first of all you asked a couple of questions about—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I haven't asked anything.

The Chair: —Mr. Bains's role as a minister, what he's responsible for, etc. I'm not cutting you short. I just want you to know that you have just over five minutes on the clock.

The floor is yours, please, Mr. Perkins. Proceed.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bains, when I ask you a yes-or-no question, I appreciate a yes or a no, not a rag the puck. Please answer yes or no with regard

to whether you called Annette Verschuren two times, as she testified here at the committee.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I mentioned in my previous testimony, I was responsible for over 100 Governor in Council recommendations, and I don't recall specific—

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, I do not need the list of appointments. Please answer the question, or I'm going to interrupt you constantly. Answer the question. Did you phone her twice? That was her testimony. Is she telling the truth?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I said, I don't recall any such conversations taking place.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Okay. She testified here that she was asked by you three times. Who told you to ask her?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I've said, in 2016 a new appointments process was introduced. It was open to all Canadians, and it's not uncommon for me as a minister or any minister—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I don't need a recitation of your opening statement again, Sergeant Schultz, saying, "I know nothing!"

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Look, I'll go on to the next question.

In 2016, did you appoint Andrée-Lise Méthot?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. Maybe it's a point of clarification.

I believe the witness here today is Mr. Bains. I'm not sure who Sergeant Schultz is, or whoever this member is referring to. That's absolutely disrespectful.

The Chair: I agree.

Mr. Perkins, if you could refer to Mr. Bains as "the witness" or as "Mr. Bains", it would be appreciated to maintain decorum in the committee.

Thank you.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Former Liberal minister Bains in charge of the Liberal green slush fund appointed Andrée-Lise Méthot in 2016 under a new and clean process. Is that correct?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I indicated in my opening remarks, my responsibility as a minister was to appoint seven out of the 15 board members.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You appointed her, then. While she was on the board and while you were minister, \$114 million of green slush fund money was voted to her companies. Also, you had an assistant deputy minister at every single meeting. Do you expect Canadians to believe that you knew nothing?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Sustainable Development Technology Canada is an arm's-length organization. The management oversees the day-to-day operations, and there's a board that oversees management. Again, as I said in my—

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's true. Cycle Capital, Andrée-Lise Méthot's company, also had a lobbyist for 10 years. His name was Steven Guilbeault. It still is Steven Guilbeault. He lobbied for 10 years, and \$100 million during those 10 years went to Cycle Capital. He met 25 times with your office and you in the year before he was nominated. Do you remember any of those meetings?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: During my tenure as a minister, I met with a number of stakeholders from the clean-tech sector. I don't recall any specific meetings with the individuals you have mentioned.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You don't remember meeting with the now radical Liberal environment minister, who was a nominated Liberal candidate. Then I will ask you once again—

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, wait one second. Ms. Khalid has a point of order.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm not sure why there is name-calling going on within our committee here.

Mr. Rick Perkins: He's proud of being a radical.

The Chair: Please. This one I will allow. These are statements that we hear on the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You guys have established...and you guys keep repeating those statements. I'm not sure why you think it is okay, within committee, to repeat those and to call them credible. They are not credible.

The Chair: I didn't weigh in on whether they're—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You just did, Chair. You just did.

The Chair: I said they're echoing what we hear in the House of Commons, which is permitted, ergo it's permitted here.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I would appreciate it if the member redacted those comments.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, that's not your call.

Mr. Perkins—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm asking you to do it, Chair.

The Chair: Pardon me?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm asking you to ask the member to redact those comments, because they are absolutely unreasonable, impolite and against our democratic institutions.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, I have ruled that they are in order. Mr. Perkins has the floor.

You have the floor, sir.

• (1635)

Mr. Rick Perkins: You don't remember meeting with radical Liberal Steven Guilbeault. Do you remember meeting with a fellow named Gerald Butts in those meetings, who was working in the PMO? He's listed as meeting with you on this at the same time.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As you know, when I was made minister in 2015, Mr. Butts, the individual you mentioned, worked for the Prime Minister's Office.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Those meetings were about funding Cycle Capital fund four—that's what's listed in the public thing—and he met with you. EDC, after those meetings, then invested in Cycle Capital fund four. That happened fairly quickly.

Do you remember having those discussions about having Gerald Butts and the now radical environment minister lobbying you to get funds for Cycle Capital, whose founder was on the board that you appointed, from EDC?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I said before, Sustainable Development Technology Canada is an arm's-length organization. As you mentioned at the beginning, budgets are approved through the parliamentary budget process.

Mr. Rick Perkins: On October 19, only 14 days after some of those meetings, EDC announced \$145 million for that. You don't recall any of that, just like you didn't recall anything when you were at the industry committee.

Is that correct?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Could you repeat the question, please?

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, I won't repeat it.

One of the last things you did as minister, after all of this corruption, was take forward another \$750 million for the green slush fund, which was announced a month before you left the job to go and work at CIBC, and now you're at the most expensive cell phone company in the world, Rogers.

Can you tell me—

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —with all that corruption going on—

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —why you sought \$750 million more of taxpayer money?

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, there is a point of order.

Mr. Francis Drouin: What's the relevancy? The member who is before us is not here to answer about his future life but to answer about SDTC, so—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Well, if you got the wax out of your ears, you would hear that I asked about the \$750 million approved by cabinet that he took for the green slush fund.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have the same point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, your actions are encouraging them to be belligerent to the chair, as you're being belligerent to the chair. I would ask you to cease and desist when a point of order is called.

The same goes for you, Mr. Drouin.

I allow members on both sides latitude to probe. There is no question of relevance here. Mr. Perkins was—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Rogers. Really?

The Chair: Mr. Perkins is—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair.

The Chair: Just let me finish.

Mr. Perkins is entitled, as all members are, to ask the questions in the manner he pleases. However, his question, from what I can see, is clearly going in the direction of the topic we're studying.

Ms. Khalid, you have a point of order.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, it's on the same point of order that was raised by Mr. Drouin.

I don't see how the wax in his ears has anything to do with the questions that are being asked today.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Perkins, I'll back the clock up. You have the question again. Go ahead.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'll make it simple for you, Mr. Bains, since that seems to be the only way to try to get an answer.

After \$114 million went to Andrée-Lise Méthot's companies, you went to cabinet seeking another \$750 million for the green slush fund, when 25% of the money was going to Cycle Capital, which Steven Guilbeault owns shares of and was a lobbyist for.

Why did you go to cabinet for another \$750 million for such a corrupt organization?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As has been discussed before, Sustainable Development Technology Canada is an arm's-length organization. The management oversees the day-to-day operations. There's an independent board that oversees the management. The budget process is debated in the House of Commons and approved by the House, and these monies are allocated to promote and support the clean-tech sector.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Chair, I think this witness is in contempt of this committee, since he refuses to answer a question and keeps repeating his written PMO speaking points. That's all he's doing.

The Chair: Well, we're just starting, and as skilled parliamentarians you'll have repeated opportunities to get Mr. Bains's answer.

Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, on a point of order, I doubt the member opposite has the qualifications to make those allegations. I believe it is up to you to decide whether somebody is in contempt or not. I, personally, don't think anybody has been in contempt so far.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You were just trying to make a ruling earlier.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Perkins, can you ask your question again? We will get an answer and move on.

● (1640)

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's very simple. Why did you seek \$750 million more for this organization, which was funnelling money to

your Liberal appointments, when you knew it was a corrupt organization?

You then went forward to give it more money from the taxpayer to further featherbed your political appointees and the Prime Minister's political appointees.

Are you really that corrupt?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Budgets are approved by Parliament. As I said, this is an independent organization that oversees the disbursement of these funds.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Please go ahead, Mr. Drouin. You have six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have to say I'm still questioning why Mr. Bains is before our committee, as both Mr. Perkins and Mr. Cooper got to ask him questions in June. I'm wondering about their competency in auditing and whether or not they are competent to actually ask questions, because you'd think that when you get the time to ask questions, you'd get to the bottom of this. However, this is obviously not about getting to the bottom of this, as we've seen.

I've been here for only about five meetings—

Mr. Rick Perkins: This is a joke.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —and we're still in the spirit of asking who briefed you, who briefed the witness and who appointed you to the board.

I find it funny, because Mr. Perkins was appointed by a Conservative to a board. He was appointed in 2008. In the press release, I don't see that he previously worked for a Conservative government, but we know he did, and now he has the audacity to ask who appointed whom to a certain board.

The funny thing....

Mr. Chair, I can't stop laughing. It's actually funny, because it's hypocritical.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Chair, I have a point of order on the relevance.

We're not here to talk about the BDC appointments. We're here to talk about the Liberal green slush fund. I know that's a confusing thing for MP Drouin—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

Again, while I think Mr. Drouin is a bit off topic, he has heard my—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Nobody stole money from the BDC. You guys stole \$400 million.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Perkins. We will be back to official opposition members soon.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor again, please.

Mr. Francis Drouin: He actually provides me a great segue.

They want to make Canadians believe Mrs. Verschuren is a Liberal, but like Mr. Perkins, she donated the same exact amount—\$1,600—to a Conservative leader, a potential candidate and the last Tory candidate.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I didn't appoint her.

Mr. Francis Drouin: She gave the same amount of money.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Neither did Jean Charest. What's good for the goose....

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Perkins, I can't stop....

[Translation]

The hypocrisy on the other side is astounding.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The great hypocrisy is the whole—

Mr. Francis Drouin: If you don't mind—

Mr. Rick Perkins: —appointment of Ms. Verschuren,

[English]

who stole money.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, you can just cool your engines a bit.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor again.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It's all in the public records. I wonder if they were holding hands when they donated together.

Again, I warned at the last committee meeting that I'm not interested in going on a wild goose chase, and right now we are entertaining a wild goose chase. They're trying really hard to make a connection between a minister and some low-level bureaucrat who committed errors.

We're not saying, on this side, that they haven't committed errors. We agree. However, the idea that the minister was connected to that is baloney. It's just baloney.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): The connection is real.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Who appointed them?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Brock, if you were in a courtroom, you would have been fired and disbarred from the Law Society of Ontario.

Mr. Larry Brock: I could draw one dot to the second dot, right to the minister.

The Chair: Gentlemen, we're doing ourselves no favours here.

I would ask that we respect Mr. Drouin's time.

You have the floor again.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, my point is that I've read the transcript from Mr. Bains's appearance at the INDU committee. In the last six minutes, I have not learned anything new from Mr. Perkins's questioning other than the fact that they will interrupt Mr.

Bains and they will ask them a yes-or-no question, knowing full well that he does not know the answer because SDTC is arm's length, and it's always been arm's length. The idea that the minister has direct control over the decisions and the financial decisions—

• (1645)

Mr. Rick Perkins: They had an ADM in every meeting. Do your homework. You've been here five meetings.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —of SDTC is out of touch.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, with all—

[English]

Mr. Perkins maybe has a right.... Maybe his experience at BDC—

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, I'm just going to try to bring order here.

Ms. Khalid, if you have a point of order....

I appreciate everyone saying point of order, otherwise I just think you're participating in the bunfight that's going on.

It is a point of order, so yes, go ahead please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I would appreciate it if colleagues could not holler and yell and shriek across the way. My colleague is sitting right beside me, and I can't even hear him due to all of the shrieking that is happening from those folks over there.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khalid. I too would appreciate that.

Again, unfortunately, what's good for the goose is good for the gander, so I would ask that all sides refrain from speaking when an individual has the floor.

Mr. Drouin has the floor, please.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I can tell I'm ruffling some feathers, if we want to talk about geese and ganders and whatnot.

Perhaps Mr. Perkins has some other idea of how boards work. Perhaps he was breathing down the neck when he was appointed at the BDC, and perhaps ministers' offices were breathing down his neck to make decisions, but that's not how we operate. We changed the process. We changed the way people are appointed to different boards, and it's actually on websites, so the idea that these were some secret Liberal board appointees and that it somehow benefited our friends and blah, blah, blah.... Well, I'm still waiting for my friends to say, "Thank you so much, Frank, for having contributed to my personal wealth." I have none.

I'll go back again to the rationale as to why Mr. Bains is here. It's because there was some....

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's because he appointed these people.

Mr. Francis Drouin: No. There were some issues with the fact of a testimony, which the witness later corrected, and it's on the record. She later corrected it. The idea that somebody would—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's convenient. The truth came out at committee.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —somehow accept an appointment without having applied is ridiculous. Name me any employer that would say, “I named this person my employee without their having applied.”

[Translation]

What the honourable members are saying doesn't even make sense. I repeat, the people applied—

[English]

Mr. Larry Brock: It's Liberals helping Liberals.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Perkins and Mr. Cooper already had the opportunity to question Mr. Bains, and the fact that he is again appearing before a committee where the same individuals are present doesn't make any sense.

I don't have any questions for Mr. Bains. I understand perfectly what he said. I read the transcripts of all the meetings since June. It took these people five months to make their accusations, even before he got to answer.

[English]

Mr. Bains, you're going to go through a certain issue. You're going to be asked for a yes-or-no answer, and you're going to be accused. They're going to opine on certain facts that they will not allow you to answer because they will interrupt you. That's the way it's gone at the INDU committee—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's because he refuses to answer.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —and unfortunately—

Mr. Rick Perkins: He's hiding his corrupt friends.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You're interrupting now.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —it's the way it's going to go at this committee, and I apologize for this, but we know you had nothing to do with this.

There were certain people who had something to do with it, but it was never connected to a minister's office. It was never.... I know you guys are trying hard, really—

Mr. Rick Perkins: He directed and managed the conflict.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I know, Mr. Perkins, that maybe it worked at that time when you were at the BDC, but it certainly does not work at this committee—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin, that is—

Mr. Francis Drouin: —and with the way we appointed people.

Mr. Rick Perkins: You ignored testimony.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins and Mr. Drouin—

Mr. Rick Perkins: You ignored the testimony.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, we will be back to your side.

That is the time.

[Translation]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you may go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Chair, I'd like to use my first few seconds to ask my fellow members to take a deep breath. We have work to do. I urge the government members to give me their time if they don't have any questions for Mr. Bains. I, myself, have many.

Mr. Bains, what is your relationship with Amber Batool?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Thank you for your question.

[English]

I worked with Ms. Batool when I was at CIBC.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Did you not know Ms. Batool when she was vice-president of Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: I'm sorry.

[English]

Can you repeat that, please? I'm sorry, but I didn't hear.

• (1650)

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Did you not know Ms. Batool when she worked at SDTC?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: I think I met her maybe once or twice at an event.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Ms. Batool was the vice-president of SDTC, and during that time, you didn't speak to her more than once or twice.

However, Ms. Batool followed you to the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, CIBC. She got a job at CIBC right after you. That's pretty—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Point of order, Mr. Chair. Again, Mr. Bains is being suspected of making that decision at CIBC. It has nothing to do with SDTC. Can we stick to SDTC, please?

The Chair: Just a moment, Mr. Drouin.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Come on.

The Chair: The chair let you talk about what you wanted to talk about when it was your turn, Mr. Perkins and goodness knows what else. Mr. Bains is perfectly capable of speaking for himself, so he can answer the questions Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné is respectfully asking him.

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I think some people are afraid of the answers Mr. Bains might give.

I'll start over. Ms. Batool followed you to CIBC—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Again, Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: That is a fact.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It has nothing to do with the decision. If Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné suspects that Mr. Bains made the decision to hire—

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: —Ms. Batool, she should provide proof.

[English]

The Chair: You're beyond thin ice, because we just listened to you. The chair allowed you to go on for six minutes—

Mr. Francis Drouin: I was interrupted, too.

The Chair: Yes, and I stopped the clock every time that happened to give you your time, but now, for you to jump in and say that another member who's trying to put questions to the witness can't be allowed to do so, I'm not sure who you think you are.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I think about the relevancy of this. Why are we here? We are here to study SDTC, not CIBC, not Rogers, not anything else, just SDTC.

The Chair: The member's questions are going exactly in that direction.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On a point of order, I take exception to your questioning who Mr. Drouin thinks he is. He is a member of Parliament with the exact same privileges that we all have in this committee.

I don't think—

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: As am I.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Exactly. We have the privileges that we have within this committee, and I don't think that is something you should be calling out.

The Chair: That is correct, and Mr. Drouin was given an opportunity to speak.

Madame Sinclair-Desgagné is now speaking, and it's not up to Mr. Drouin to suddenly decide that what another member is asking is relevant or not.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Why do we have points of order, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Well, again, I ruled on it, and now I'm moving on.

Mr. Perkins, you also had a point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: My point of order is about Mr. Drouin. From the moment I asked my first question, within the first minute, he was interrupting. He chose as a tactic to try and disrupt every single sentence I said.

He's now doing it to the Bloc member. It's a specific tactic to disrupt the committee, and because of his disruptive behaviour, I would ask you to consider that you not allow him to speak, or remove him from the committee.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I would ask the same favour for Mr. Perkins, who interrupted me.

The Chair: Gentlemen, let's try to proceed with this.

I would ask that Madame Sinclair-Desgagné be allowed to continue her questioning.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I've been interrupted several times.

The Chair: You can ask your question again, and when you're done, I'll give you back five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: You'll have to stop the testimony, Chair, I think.

[Translation]

The Chair: Just a moment. There is another point of order.

[English]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Chair.

I think it's only fair that Madame Sinclair-Desgagné gets her full six minutes at this point.

[Translation]

The Chair: Certainly, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné will have her six minutes.

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you may ask your question again.

[English]

Ms. Khalid, I appreciate that, but the interruption happened because of the numerous points of order, which were, as I said, a little thin regarding relevance, and I have always allowed members a lot of latitude.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you to the member across the way and especially Mr. Drouin for mansplaining the issue before us.

Now, let's carry on. Ms. Batool followed you to CIBC, and according to the information I received, you met with her a few times while she was vice-president of SDTC. Are you saying that that wasn't the case, that you met her just once or twice? That is not the information I was given.

Could you please confirm?

• (1655)

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I've said before, I may have met her a few times. I don't recall a specific number of times.

Again, SDTC is an arm's-length organization in which the management oversees the day-to-day operations.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you.

Just to give us an idea, when you say “a few times”, do you mean once or twice, or 10 to 15 times?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Again, I can't put a specific number on it. It was over six years ago. I dealt with a number of people during my tenure as a minister.

As a minister, my objective was to oversee and make sure that I was part of the process—

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: All right. Thank you, Mr. Bains.

Were you later involved in Ms. Batool's hiring at CIBC? Did you know her or not?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Again, I'm here to talk about Sustainable Development Technology Canada and any questions you have pertaining to that.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: This is my time, and I can ask you questions about your possible involvement in the process to hire Ms. Batool.

All I want to know is why you pushed for Ms. Batool to be hired at CIBC if you didn't know her or hardly knew her.

You'll see where I'm going with this. It has to do with SDTC, so answer the question, please.

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I said, I'm more than pleased to answer any questions pertaining to Sustainable Development Technology Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Chair, I'm getting to my question about SDTC. My questions do pertain to SDTC.

The Chair: Ask your question again, please.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: For the third time, I want to know whether you were involved in the process to bring Ms. Batool to CIBC, after your meetings with her when she was the vice-president of SDTC.

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I've mentioned, I met with Ms. Batool when I was a minister. I don't recall the number of times specifically.

As I've also highlighted, Sustainable Development Technology Canada is an arm's-length organization.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you.

You're saying, then, that the fact that you had met her previously, when she was the vice-president of SDTC, did not influence your decision to later bring her to CIBC. You maintain that your co-op-

eration and meetings with her while she was at SDTC had nothing to do with the fact that she came over to work with you at CIBC.

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I've mentioned before, the management oversees the day-to-day operations at Sustainable Development Technology Canada, which is an arm's-length organization.

My sole responsibility—

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, but you're not answering my question. It's a pretty simple one.

Did your meetings with Ms. Batool while she was the vice-president of SDTC affect her being hired by CIBC? It's a yes or no question, Mr. Bains. Please answer.

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: It's an arm's-length organization that oversees SDTC, and my responsibility as administrator was to appoint seven of the 15 board members.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Since I'm not going to get an answer from you, I'll move on to something else.

You were asked a question earlier.

Who encouraged you to hire or appoint Ms. Verschuren? Was it someone internal, within Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: With respect to the individual, Ms. Verschuren, as you know, she had an impeccable track record. She was appointed by Stephen Harper in 2006—

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I asked you who encouraged you to appoint Ms. Verschuren. Can you tell me, please? Was it Andrew Noseworthy who encouraged you to hire her? Did Mr. Noseworthy have anything to do with the process?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: There was a new process established in 2016 that was open to all Canadians, and it was an open, fair—

• (1700)

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: All right.

[English]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, even though I'm sitting quite far away from my Conservative colleagues, I heard one of them call Mr. Bains a liar, which I think is not only disrespectful but also goes against our Standing Orders.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: I'm sitting with my Conservative colleagues. I heard no such thing.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You laughed at it.

Mr. Larry Brock: More importantly....

I laugh at many things. I didn't laugh at that, because I didn't hear it.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: You laughed at it.

Mr. Larry Brock: Chair, on that same point of order, I'm getting quite frustrated—and I'm sure other members are getting frustrated—by the obvious attempts of this particular witness, a former minister of the Crown, to deliberately waste time. He is not answering a direct question put to him and repeating the same talking lines over and over again—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brock, but—

Mr. Larry Brock: —on the same testimony he gave at Industry on June 4, 2004.

I'm asking the chair to interject and get this witness to answer the question.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: I have a couple lined up here.

Mr. Cooper, did you have a point of order you wanted to make?

No.

Okay, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I would appreciate it if Mr. Cooper apologized to Mr. Bains for calling him a liar. We all know that when witnesses come to this committee they are under an obligation to be truthful. I know for a fact that Mr. Bains has been a truthful and principled person, not just during his ministry but also in the work he's done throughout his entire life.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I take personal exception not only to members of the Conservative Party laughing right now but also to an innocent person being maligned by the Conservatives. This is their go-to. It's their motto of hearing, time and time again.

It's absolutely unreasonable, Chair.

The Chair: Why don't we hear from Mr. Cooper now?

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Well, on the same point of order, perhaps Mr. Bains can apologize to taxpayers for \$400 million—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Okay, ladies and gentlemen.

An hon. member: Retract those comments.

The Chair: Okay. All right.

Mr. Michael Cooper: That happened when he was the minister.

The Chair: My job is to....

Order. Order.

The Standing Orders lay out my role, which is to attempt to maintain order and hope to succeed with that.

In terms of any kind of censure, that needs to be reported to the House, if you wish to pursue it.

I'm going back to Madame Sinclair-Desgagné.

[Translation]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have about two minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Fellow members, we are trying to do our job. As far as I'm concerned, this witness is a key witness in our study on SDTC. Therefore, I would like him to answer my questions, which are clear, and I would like members to stop interrupting my questions. I am simply trying to do my job, here.

Mr. Bains, did Mr. Noseworthy have anything to do with the process to select Ms. Verschuren, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: There was a panel set up as part of this new process—

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Did Mr. Noseworthy sit on the panel or help choose the panel members?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: It was led by the Privy Council Office and included the relevant departments.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: All right. Again, did Mr. Noseworthy sit on the panel or help choose the panel members?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: I don't recall the specific members of the panel. I know the Privy Council Office led the panel.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Is there a way to get that information? If so, can you please send it to the committee?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Are you asking about the panel composition?

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Yes, please.

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains: My understanding is that the Privy Council office will be speaking on this matter, and I believe they will have the relevant information you have requested.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I'm sure it's not news to you that Mr. Noseworthy was personally involved in a conflict of interest by virtue of his friendship with Ms. Verschuren. Consequently, favouritism may have played a part in her selection and the selection of the board of directors. As the minister in charge, you normally would see that and take steps accordingly.

• (1705)

The Chair: Ask your question, please.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Here's my question.

You announced with great fanfare in January 2020 that you were investing \$46.3 million in 14 start-up companies. If you can't recall things that happened eight years ago, perhaps you'll recall things that happened four years ago. Five of those 14 start-ups received pandemic support without being individually assessed. That funding wasn't part of the contribution agreement, and one company was not eligible for it. Actually, nearly half of the start-ups you were so proud to fund were not eligible.

Does knowing that today bother you, or do you have absolutely no regrets about everything you did while you were the minister responsible for a situation like that?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Thank you for your question.

[English]

The decisions that were made by the management and the board were independent. As I have mentioned, it's an arm's-length organization, and there are clear rules in place to determine how these funds should be disbursed. Those rules needed to be followed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for six minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Bains, for being present for this important work.

As you're likely aware, the work of public accounts is to look at Auditor General's reports. The Office of the Auditor General is an independent office that has found a way to verify specific instances of very serious issues related to public trust and related to the accountability that's needed for Canadians in regard to potential breaches of the act, which I hope you can help clarify.

The overall message in the Auditor General's report, on page six, is that they "found significant lapses in Sustainable Development Technology Canada's governance and stewardship of public funds".

It goes on to suggest, "The board of directors of Sustainable Development Technology Canada did not ensure that the foundation complied with its enabling legislation."

Mr. Bains, are you aware of the enabling legislation of SDTC?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Are you referring to the legislation that was passed by the House of Commons?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Yes.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: That is the act that ultimately determines the role of the minister to appoint members to Sustainable Development Technology Canada.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Who was the minister between 2015 and 2021?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I stated in my opening remarks, in November 2015, I took on the role at ISED, and I left on January 12, 2021.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you for that, Mr. Bains.

Would you agree that you were the minister responsible for compliance with the act during that period of time?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I indicated in my opening remarks, the role of the minister is to appoint seven of the 15 board members to this organization, which is independent and at arm's length.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Just so that people are aware, did you, in fact, appoint those members? Did you appoint the satisfactory number required by the board?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: I believe that there were a number of appointments that were made during my tenure.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Were you aware that the board had supported reducing that number to two?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Could you repeat that in terms of the board—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Of course, I'm happy to repeat it. Mr. Bains, I am happy to repeat and clarify this for you. Perhaps it's easier if I ask whether or not you read the Auditor General's report.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: I did read the report.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Bains, if you read the report, you'll know that it suggests that the minister is required to appoint a satisfactory number of board members. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt to suggest that maybe you did, in fact, do the work needed, as the minister responsible, to appoint the satisfactory number.

The issue that the Auditor General is pointing out is the fact that the board was then reduced to two people. These two people, including Ms. Verschuren, would go on—and it would be difficult during their tenure at that time of the board—to engage in direct conflicts of interest that the Auditor General has found to be pertinent to many companies, including her own company, that had received government funds. This is the crux of the issue, Mr. Bains, one I think Canadians want serious attention paid to and one that needs real accountability.

I understand that you have to get going in five minutes, and this is going to be probably my last round to ask questions. I do appreciate your being here. I don't necessarily appreciate the lack of answers, but that's your prerogative. My prerogative is to ask the questions, and your prerogative is to answer them. If you don't want to answer them or haven't read the report, that's completely up to you, and that's the sense I'm getting at this point, but I think you'd understand the issue that I have, that Canadians have and that the Auditor General has. You were responsible as a minister to ensure that the enabling legislation was followed and, at that time, was appropriately enforced.

The Auditor General is pointing out the very serious fact, Mr. Bains, that, during your tenure, that did not happen. In addition to these very serious concerns, there was a very legitimate issue that you were responsible for, which was the attendance of an assistant deputy minister named Mr. Andrew Noseworthy within your ministry. You were Mr. Noseworthy's supervisor, and you were directly responsible for him. You've met Mr. Noseworthy. Is that correct?

• (1710)

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Noseworthy did work at ISED.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Did you meet him?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Yes, I met with Mr. Noseworthy.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: You had many conversations with Mr. Noseworthy, I presume.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: There were several conversations over my tenure as minister at ISED.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I appreciate that, Mr. Bains.

One of the issues that we found with Mr. Noseworthy is that he didn't know what his job was. What kind of boss—in this case, the minister—would have an employee, a very senior executive employee, an assistant deputy minister, who the Auditor General had to, unfortunately, describe as someone who didn't know their job—or their roles or responsibilities, to be exact—in relation to the fact that this person, one of your staff members, was present in the decision-making process of a board of two people who ended up giving themselves millions of dollars? That's a serious concern, Mr. Bains, and it's one that Canadians are upset about. It's harmed the very real and legitimate policy of ensuring that Canadians get access to innovation funding for small and medium-sized businesses.

I'd encourage my colleagues to take this issue far more seriously than we have today, because there's a very likely fact, which is that Mr. Andrew Noseworthy knew that he was likely going to find himself in a position where he had to report to you, as the minister responsible, for what he had heard at the two-person board meeting he was at.

At any point in time, do you think he was ever going to question whether or not you would ask him what his roles and responsibilities were?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desjarlais.

It is my intention to get through a truncated additional round, so I'm going to cut you off there.

Government and official opposition members will have four minutes each, and the two remaining parties will have two minutes each.

Mr. Cooper, you have the floor for four minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Former Liberal minister Bains led the committee to believe that he had no active role in the appointment of Ms. Verschuren beyond receiving a recommendation from the Prime Minister's department, the PCO, as part of a so-called “open, transparent, merit-based” process.

You know that isn't true, just as you knew it wasn't true when you misled the committee in June. Isn't that right?

The question is for the former Liberal minister, Mr. Bains.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I've highlighted before, Ms. Verschuren was appointed by Stephen Harper, Jim Flaherty, Christian Paradis—

Mr. Michael Cooper: This is also for the former Liberal minister, Mr. Bains.

Let's follow the chronology of events leading to Ms. Verschuren's appointment—someone who was in a conflict of interest at the time you appointed her.

On March 15, 2019—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Is the former employer of the leader of the official opposition's wife out of order in calling Mr. Bains the names that he's calling him?

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, come on. You, in fact, are up next, so you will have a four-minute right to the floor, during which you'll be able to make full use of it.

Mr. Cooper, you have just over three minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Cooper: This is for the former Liberal minister, Mr. Bains.

Let's follow the chronology of events leading to Ms. Verschuren's appointment.

In September and October 2018, the PCO received 54 applications for chair of SDTC. On March 15, 2019, it provided you with a short list of five recommended candidates.

That's the process you keep referencing. However, you sat on your hands; you ignored the recommendation of the PCO. In April 2019, according to Ms. Verschuren, you called her and asked her to serve as the chair of SDTC. All of a sudden, on April 30, 2019—one and a half months after you had a short list of five recommended candidates—she applies. On May 21, 2019, the PCO adds her name to the short list, and you thereafter appoint her.

Do you really expect this committee and Canadians to believe that she was picked as part of a transparent, independent, merit-based process and that you didn't have your hand involved in picking her? Is that what you want Canadians to believe?

• (1715)

Hon. Navdeep Bains: It was an open, transparent, merit-based process.

As I've highlighted, former prime minister Stephen Harper—

Mr. Michael Cooper: What happened here is that former Liberal minister Navdeep Bains didn't follow the process.

You didn't respect the process. You politically interfered in the process.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: As I was trying to state before, Ms. Verschuren was appointed by Stephen Harper to the Canadian North American Competitiveness Council in 2006. Jim Flaherty appointed her to the economic—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Did the other five recommended candidates have conflicts of interest with SDTC? Ms. Verschuren had a conflict of interest. What happened with regard to the other five candidates?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Again, when we spoke about Ms. Verschuren, I highlighted the fact that she was appointed by Christian Paradis, the former minister, to the Science, Technology and Innovation Council.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Bains, you're not answering my question.

I asked you this: Did the other five candidates also have conflicts of interest? Ms. Verschuren had a conflict of interest at the time you appointed her. Her company was receiving \$12 million from SDTC, and you knew about that.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: All public office-holders—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Bains. There's a point of order.

Yes.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I truly respect Mr. Cooper, but he's asking the witness to opine on other members who were part of a board. I don't know what Mr. Bains can say. We know the former employer of the Conservative leader's wife is asking tough questions—

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, this is not a point of order.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Well, it would be thrown out of court if this were a real court. This is a kangaroo court.

The Chair: As government members are prone to remind this committee, we are not a court. This is a question and answer session.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We'll quote that.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: I've said that before, many times. It is not a court. We're here to ask questions and receive answers.

Mr. Cooper, you may proceed.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Bains, did the other five candidates have conflicts of interest, as Ms. Verschuren did, yes or no?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: It's important to note that all public office-holders must respect and follow the Conflict of Interest Act.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You were advised that Ms. Verschuren had a conflict of interest and appointed her anyway. I'm asking you

about the other five candidates. You refuse to answer. I take it they didn't have conflicts of interest. You appointed someone with a conflict, because you don't give a damn about conflicts of interest.

Isn't that right?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: During my tenure, I made over 100 Governor in Council recommendations. It's important that all individuals who are recommended and ultimately appointed follow the Conflict of Interest Act.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You knew she had a conflict of interest. You didn't give a damn—

The Chair: That is the time, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: —and, as a result, \$400 million taxpayer dollars went out the door improperly following that conflict-ridden appointment.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, I will remind you—as I was reminded today in the House—that we use parliamentary language in this committee room.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor for four minutes.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair.

As much as I appreciate my opposition colleagues trying to get their clips for the Russian Rebel News, I have some serious questions to ask our witness here today.

Mr. Larry Brock: On a point of order, here we go again with—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: It's the Russian Rebel News.

Mr. Larry Brock: —yet another Liberal who is trying to associate—

Mr. Francis Drouin: That's debate.

Mr. Larry Brock: —the Conservative Party of Canada with the Russian administration.

The Chair: Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: There were members in the House—

The Chair: Mr. Brock, whoa.

I heard what was said by the member, and it has nothing to do with the Conservative Party. This is not a point of order. Even if it were, I'm ruling in your side's favour.

I'm going to give the floor back to Ms. Khalid, unless you actually have a genuine, new point of order.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a point of order, Chair.

I would invite Mr. Brock to look at—

The Chair: No, no.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —FBI records.

• (1720)

The Chair: Stop.

All right. We really don't want to go down into U.S. politics, or bring U.S. politics into this committee room.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm going to put some things on the record with respect to the topic we are talking about today.

Mr. Bains, I appreciate your patience with our opposition colleagues on everything they've been hammering you with today.

Prime Minister Mulroney asked that Ms. Verschuren serve on his national science and tech committee, and Minister Flaherty tapped her as an economic adviser to serve on his economic council during the 2008 recession. She donated to the Simcoe-Grey Conservative Association between 2013 and 2016. She donated to Lisa Raitt. She has donated consistently, since 2013, to the Conservative Party federally, and she also donated to the last two leadership campaigns.

Can you help me understand how partisanship works with these kinds of appointments, please?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Thank you very much for the question.

As I highlighted, it's important to note that in 2016 there was a new process put in place. This process was designed to encourage all Canadians to apply to various positions made available in different organizations and agencies. The Privy Council Office led this panel with the various departments. They ultimately made recommendations and brought forward names to the minister. Then the minister made a GIC recommendation. As was discussed before, the process was open. It was fair. It was transparent.

Specifically with regard to Ms. Verschuren, as you can tell, she worked with the previous government in different roles. She also received the Order of Canada.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Bains.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: She was a well-recognized CEO, so—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Bains.

I'm sure you'll be able to provide in writing for all of us the rest of what you were going to say, for the committee to understand and appreciate.

Given that we've been talking—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Get the PMO to write it for you.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm sorry, Mr. Perkins, but I couldn't hear myself over your voice.

Given that we've been talking about the Auditor General's report and everything that has been going on, I want to move a motion right now on this topic. That motion is:

That the committee reaffirm the independence of the Auditor General of Canada to conduct her work free of interference and echo the concerns of the Auditor General of Canada regarding the Conservative Party House order of June 10, 2024, that ordering her office to produce her audit file on Sustainable Development Technology Canada to the law clerk and parliamentary counsel compromises her independence and is likely to discourage departments, agencies and Crown corporations from providing free and timely access to information required for her audits to go forward.

Chair, I would love to talk more about this motion, but I do want to make sure that it's in order, given the topic today.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, have you submitted the motion to the Chair?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I've just right now read it into the record, Chair, but I am more than happy to put it in writing for all members as well.

The Chair: You don't have it in—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I don't have it in writing right now, but I can get it to you as soon as possible.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Would you like to suspend while we do that?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a question of privilege.

The Chair: What? A question of privilege...? This is new.

Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'd like to raise a question of privilege, and I would ask, as part of that question of privilege, because the witness has refused to answer questions.... He has repeated one line consistently for an hour. It was obviously written by the PMO to try to protect from their corruption.

I would move the following motion as a question of privilege:

That the committee instruct the clerk and analysts to prepare a report to the House, which the chair shall table forthwith, outlining the potential breach of privilege concerning Navdeep Bains' refusal to answer questions which the committee put to him.

• (1725)

The Chair: I'm going to consult with the clerk. We'll suspend for a few minutes.

In the meantime, Ms. Khalid, if you could send that in—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'd like to speak about it as well—

The Chair: Hold on. I'm going to suspend.

I do not like to do this, but I can also see that this is going to go on for a bit.

Mr. Bains, I am going to excuse you, because I know that you had a—

Mr. Larry Brock: Chair, before that decision is made, I'd like to discuss that.

The Chair: No. I have to suspend here to go over.... I now have competing motions.

Mr. Bains is on the clock. He made it very clear to me beforehand—

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

The Chair: I'm going to finish my thought here.

I appreciate his coming. I had also, through the clerk, discussed with him the possible and perhaps likely need to come back, and he is aware of that.

That is my ruling, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Bains, you are excused.

Mr. Michael Cooper: For now.

The Chair: I appreciate your coming in, and I'm sure the clerk will reach out to you. Ms. Khalid asked for some information, and you can submit that to the clerk as well.

In the meantime, I'm going to suspend for about three minutes.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

• (1726) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1736)

• (1735)

The Chair: I'm going to call this meeting back to order, please.

Members, please take your chairs.

I have two motions on the floor. I don't have the first motion yet for the clerk to disseminate for discussion.

Mr. Perkins, I'm going to turn to you. You have the floor on your motion, please.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, I have a point of order from Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): I'm a bit confused. The traditional path here is the first motion that is moved.... It was read into the record. The interpreters interpreted it for us. We have it in both official languages.

I would like to hear from the clerk as to what the proper process is. This is backward as far as anything I've seen in 10 years.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): It's just to respectfully clarify the rules for my honourable friend.

Ms. Khalid, if you'd like to speak on this point of order, you can propose to do so, I suppose.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Would you like to do the chair's job for him?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're welcome to continue heckling, I suppose. I'll just ignore you, I guess.

For the members who are interested in knowing, the process is that when there is a question of privilege, the chair rules on the question of privilege.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a point of order, Chair.

The chair can make his own rulings. I love Mr. Genuis, but he doesn't need to explain this to the committee.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Another rule, Mr. Drouin, is that you don't speak unless you're recognized, even if you think you have a point of order, which you don't.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On that point of order, Chair—

The Chair: All right—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: What is wrong with you?

The Chair: Let's hear from Mr. Genuis, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On that point of order, Chair, we have four Conservative members in this committee right now. We have a fifth one who has come in and is now on the speaking order. I'm not sure who he's replacing here.

Mr. Francis Drouin: He's not a permanent member.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just for the Liberal members, there's a green book—you can get it for free—that explains the rules.

Mr. Perkins has raised a question of privilege—

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Has Mr. Genuis been subbed in for another member?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: If the chair considers it a matter dealing with privilege, then privilege supersedes—

The Chair: Hold on for just one second, Mr. Genuis.

Your whip will sub in your members as requested.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'd like to know who he's replacing, because we have a couple of votes on order.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I see four members on the other side.

The Chair: I see five.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I have a point of order.

Many times in this committee we've come to this point, I believe, Chair—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Great. We'll bring Elizabeth May.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: We can reflect on the last three years. There have been moments when this kind of disruption has taken place in the past.

There are two concerns that I think are really important while we have this...whatever this is. One is the interpreters. If we can find a way to make this as easy as possible for them, that's great.

Second, a speaking list could be instituted by you, Mr. Chair. I don't want to tell you how to do your job—certainly not. That's not what I'm saying. It just that perhaps a speaking order or a speaking list could help us predict when we should speak and when we shouldn't.

Thank you.

The Chair: You're absolutely right.

I am hearing points of order right now. I just heard from Mr. Erskine-Smith. Mr. Genuis has the floor.

Mr. Genuis had informed me before; I was expecting him to speak on his other motion, which he's not doing.

You have the floor, Mr. Genuis, on your on the point of order.

• (1740)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I was just responding to the point of order from Mr. Erskine-Smith.

I hope this is helpful. I'm not trying to start a needless conflict. It's just that we're all guided by rules, and those rules are well established.

When there's a question of privilege—much as is happening in the House right now—that supersedes other business. If the chair rules that it is a matter touching on privilege, then that supersedes the other matters.

To Mr. Erskine-Smith's point, it's not as if someone just moved a motion on another topic. It has unique status as a privilege motion.

Again, I hope that's helpful.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, do you have a point of order, or is it moot now?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm just wondering if you've been satisfied by Mr. Genuis doing your and the clerk's job for you.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I would also entertain the fact that a question of privilege was raised on whether or not a question was answered.

I don't recall in any committee in nine years as to the quality of responses that we were provided, at any committee in the past nine years, 15 years, 20 years, 30 years and so on—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's debate.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The quality of answers is not a question of privilege, and I would divert to you, Mr. Williamson, for the answer.

Mr. Larry Brock: Arrive scam.... Kristian Firth....

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Also, on another point of order, Chair—

The Chair: Hold on. As Mr. Desjarlais said, I have several points of order.

I believe it's Mr. Erskine-Smith in a second, but I want to hear Mr. Perkins first.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The confusion here started with a legitimate question by MP Erskine-Smith about a motion that was moved by Ms. Khalid. Then I moved and put forward a privilege motion about.... I think the question was whether you can do those two things at the same time.

The precedent was set in 2020, in FINA, on a similar item, when there was a motion on the floor, and then our current leader, Mr. Poilievre, moved a question of privilege during it because a question of privilege takes precedence over everything else.

MP Khalid has asked if we could circulate my question of privilege. It's been sent to the clerk, so hopefully we can get that out.

Thank you.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Okay, I think I have it clear, then.

If there's a legitimate question of privilege, then that will take precedence. In this particular case, that seems unlikely, but that's the process as far as it goes. Now I have it clear.

The condescension is not needed, Garnett, but it's nice to hear from you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I was more responding to the others.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Khalid, did you have a point of order? No, okay.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Chair, I'd ask that you suspend the meeting just long enough for us to get the privilege motion in both official languages. That would be very helpful for our team.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, I'm going to suspend for two to three minutes.

• (1743)

(Pause)

• (1747)

• (1745)

The Chair: I'll bring the meeting back to order.

After discussing it with the clerk and reviewing some standing orders and some precedent, I am going to recognize Mr. Perkins's motion as a privilege motion.

The first step is that you're flagging a....

I'll come to you in just one second, Mr. Erskine-Smith. Why don't you hear what I have to say? Then I'm sure we can have points of order and discussions about it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Can I speak to it first?

The Chair: Possibly.

I'm going to uphold your belief—that you believe your privileges have been infringed upon—which then triggers your motion.

I will turn to you, Mr. Perkins, to now speak to your motion.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For all those who are watching, the reason I move this is that part of this process of being accountable to Parliament is for witnesses to actually answer the questions that we pose. I'll go through a series of some of the questions that were asked that I'm aware of, and I'm sure others may add a little more to it, that were very simple questions put to the former Liberal minister, but he refused to answer them. He basically kept repeating the lines from his opening statement, the same lines over and over again, as if he were some sort of automaton or something.

I started by asking him whether he had called and spoken with Annette Verschuren twice. It was a very simple question. He refused to answer that. He talked about the appointments process. I said Ms. Verschuren had testified before committee that he had called twice. I asked who was right, him or her. He again talked about the appointments process.

After, obviously, some frustration and interruptions, I went on to another area. I asked him whether he appointed Andrée-Lise Méthot in 2016. He went on about the appointments process and wouldn't say yes or no about somebody he is on the record appointing as a GIC appointment. It's not that he is on the record; it's on the public record.

I pointed out the fact that while she was on the board, under his watch, \$114 million went to her companies. I asked, was he aware of that? He talked about the good work of SDTC. He didn't talk about whether he had knowledge of that. I said his assistant deputy minister, Mr. Noseworthy, was in those meetings, and he must have been informed about that. He basically said that it was a fair and open process.

I went on to ask him about the \$750 million he gave to.... Before I asked that, I asked whether, in the 25 times that the current environment minister, Steven Guilbeault, was lobbying in the year before he was elected, while he was a nominated candidate, he was lobbying his office on the public record, the lobbyist registry, for Cycle Capital—for money for Cycle Capital fund IV. I asked whether or not he remembered those meetings. He basically talked about the open appointments process and that he shouldn't have to remember everything in his life. I said, okay, so those meetings were about, as in the registry, meeting with him to get money from EDC, and EDC gave \$145 million. I asked if he remembered that. He talked about the activities of SDTC, not about that process to get money.

I asked about the fact that after all of this corruption that was going on within the fund—his appointment of a conflicted chair; his appointment of board members who were conflicted, like Andrée-Lise Méthot; and the fact that he had officials in every single meeting where 82% of the time they were voting themselves taxpayer money.... Why did he get cabinet approval to give \$750 million more only a month before he left the job to go to work at CIBC? That is \$750 million more in taxpayer money for this fund, when there were clearly management issues. He, again, talked about the appointments process.

Those were just my questions. There were some excellent questions from MP Cooper around the five appointments that he made, whether or not he recalled any of them, and whether any of them were conflicted. He talked about the PCO appointments process.

I am sure some of my colleagues will come up with some other lists, but the member from the Bloc brought forward a new revelation. Amber Batool, a VP at SDTC, worked there for five years. When he was at CIBC, guess who starts working at CIBC in the investment banking area, where I believe he was? It's the same person who was working at SDTC. He claims to know nobody, and nothing that went on.

• (1750)

Time after time, when we asked about individual appointments, money, the reporting of his assistant deputy minister to him or whether or not he did a basic thing like make a phone call to a prospective chair of the fund, he didn't say, "I don't remember." In most cases, he repeated his opening statement line of an open process and that people applied.

He totally ignored every single question that opposition parties asked. Unfortunately, we don't know if he ignored questions from the government members, because the government members didn't ask any.

That's why we have a breach of privilege. There has to be an attempt by the witness to actually answer the question, not repeat a line that's been written for him and ignore the question totally in order to facilitate the further cover-up of the cover-up of these documents and the refusal of the government to turn over the documents to the House. They're clearly hiding things. They're clearly hiding more corruption.

This Liberal minister—and the current Liberal minister—started the process. The current minister has been asleep at the switch for 40 months and didn't do anything until it was made public in the media. He still hasn't done anything, really, because it's still SDTC. It just has three bureaucrats running it now, as opposed to Liberal board members.

He didn't answer any questions. He is obstructing the work of this committee and our study into the corruption of SDTC. We need to send a report to the Speaker for the House to deal with this breach of our privilege.

• (1755)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perkins.

I have a long list.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, you have the floor now.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Before I get to any kind of response, at the end of the day Mr. Bains said a couple of times, "I don't recall," as an answer. Mr. Perkins just glided by that as if it wasn't a sufficient answer, when it was eight years ago. Of course it is an answer. He might not like it, but it's an answer. We don't have to be children about it. That's an obvious answer.

The second part of this, Chair, is you said he may well come back. This is premature and then some.

Mr. Chair, you said it's based on precedent. What's the precedent? Walk us through it. You have a witness who isn't even done with their testimony yet and there's a privilege motion.

I would love to hear from the clerk. I would love to hear from you. Walk me through why you ruled that this is an acceptable privilege motion. What's the precedent? This is a terrible precedent to set.

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith, at this point I'm not part of the debate, so—

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: No.

What's the precedent? You said there's a precedent, so what's the precedent?

The Chair: Most recently, in January, there was a ruling that involved Mr. Firth and his unwillingness to answer questions. That's all I'm going to say, because I'm not part of the debate.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can I raise a point of order on this, Chair?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: That's the precedent you're pointing to, Chair. That is laughable. That's an absolute joke.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, you have a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry. I have one as well.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Again, I respect—

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, wait just one second.

If you have a point of order, you need to say, "Point of order." Otherwise, I assume you're looking to speak to the motion. I didn't.... I'm sorry.

Mr. Drouin is first, and then I'll recognize you, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Francis Drouin: As much as I appreciate that there are six members of the Conservative Party on the other side, there has to be some form of decorum. I believe if you look at the book....

I still don't know whether or not Mr. Genuis was actually subbed in. I will refer you to chapter 20 of Bose and Gagnon, which reads:

When Members serve on subcommittees or as substitutes for regular members, they enjoy all the rights of regular members: they are counted for purposes of a quorum; they may participate in debate; they may move motions and vote; and, if required, they may submit a notice of motion.

To this hour and minute, I still do not know. I'm looking at Mr. Nater. I'm looking at Mr. Perkins. I'm looking at Mr. Cooper. I'm looking at Mr. Brock. I'm looking at Mr. Stewart. I'm now looking at Mr. Genuis. It does not reflect the decorum of this particular committee.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): I have a point of order on the same point.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Again, I'll refer you to chapter 20. I would like a ruling on that, and I would like to know whether or not Mr. Genuis has actually been subbed in.

Pardon my French.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to know whether he was brought in to the committee as a substitute.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have a point of order from Mr. Genuis first.

Mr. John Nater: It's on the same point, Chair.

The Chair: I'm going to go to Mr. Nater first then.

Mr. John Nater: The Standing Orders are clear on this matter. I refer the members to Standing Order 119, which reads:

Any member of the House who is not a member of a standing, special or legislative committee, may, unless the House or the committee concerned otherwise orders, take part in the public proceedings of the committee, but may not vote or move any motion, nor be part of any quorum.

Any member can participate. It's very clear in Standing Order 119. That's how we govern ourselves.

This has been debated in other committees. It's been dealt with. It's in the Standing Orders, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is it on this issue, Mr. Genuis, or...?

Mr. Francis Drouin: All right. I'll just bring 157 members here. If you guys want to play ball, we'll play ball.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, those are the Standing Orders that we govern ourselves by. It is why, occasionally, we have Green Party members who come to this committee and—

Mr. Francis Drouin: For clause-by-clause.

The Chair: No, they participate with witnesses—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, it is for clause-by-clause.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It is for clause-by-clause.

The Chair: —and do participate.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor, please.

• (1800)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, again, respectfully to members, there are rules that are well established. I think the House of Commons does provide training opportunities for members who are interested in digging further into them.

Mr. Nater dealt very well with the one misunderstanding that's at the table. The other issue is that when a question of privilege is raised at committee, it is not for the chair to rule that, yes, privilege was broken. It's for the chair to determine whether or not it's a matter touching on privilege. It's for the committee itself to determine through a privilege motion in the same way that, in the House, when a question is raised, the Speaker does not determine whether there's been a violation of privilege. The Speaker determines whether there is a *prima facie* case that there's been a violation of privilege, at which point there is a privilege motion that's made.

Members seem to be surprised that it is a considered a matter of privilege when witnesses don't answer questions. There is a massive amount of jurisprudence verifying this. The Winnipeg labs document issue began when a witness refused to answer a question. The issues with Mr. Firth were privilege relating to a failure to answer questions. There was an issue with Minh Doan, where a question of privilege was raised regarding his failure to answer a question. The chair ruled that it was touching on a matter of privilege, although the committee voted against proceeding with the motion.

There are mounds of jurisprudence on this.

I'm not trying to be snarky at all. There's training available. There are documents established. Members can read the books. They can avail themselves of those training opportunities. The rules—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, with all due respect, can you refer to the clerk with respect to an adult conversation as opposed to kid conversation?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm not making this up.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, your comments reflect more on you than on this committee or the chair. You're welcome to conduct yourself.... You have a right to be here. I'm going to continue the debate now.

Mr. Brock, you have the floor, please.

Mr. Larry Brock: I relinquish my time. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, you have the floor.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I relinquish my time.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, you have the floor, please.

Mr. Francis Drouin: All of these questions were asked at the previous committee four or five months ago.

I can read it into the record, but I won't, for your own sake, Mr. Perkins, because it would make you look...you know, whatever.

The quality of answers doesn't pertain to a question of privilege, and that's my issue. They're trying to fish for something, and they have been trying.... The pattern of the Conservative Party is not about finding the truth. It's about stalling what is happening in the House, and we can see it. There's already a question of privilege in the House right now, and there's another one on the docket.

Mr. Larry Brock: This will be a third.

Mr. Francis Drouin: On this side of the House, unlike Mr. Brock, who is a lawyer and would be disbarred from the Law Society of Ontario if he spoke publicly like this, because he simply doesn't.... It questions what kind of Crown attorneys we have in Ontario when this man was able to serve, because he simply does not understand the separation of justice, the executive and Parliament. Parliament has its duty; the executive has its duty, and justice has its duty.

If Canadians are watching, the RCMP has all of the powers in the world to obtain the documents and, in fact, the commissioner of the RCMP has written, the Auditor General has written—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Relevance....

Mr. Francis Drouin: Well, relevancy is relevancy, Mr. Chair, and I will talk about relevancy.

They're questioning someone who has already been a witness in front of another committee, and, by God, they didn't question what was happening. He gave the same answers that he gave at the previous committee. They didn't question his relevancy, and they didn't mention a question of privilege, but, of course, now they are doing that because they want to go into an election.

Mr. Chair, I just have a hard time understanding—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: How did he know?

Mr. Francis Drouin: —when the other side is saying that they want to get to the bottom of this, how we can treat them seriously.

[Translation]

What they want is to ruin the reputation of someone who served Canada, someone who served his department well. They have heard

over and over again that the minister, the former minister and the other ministers have nothing to do with SDTC.

As I wondered the first time I spoke on the committee, when is the committee going to stop with these never-ending investigations? I'm starting to wonder whether we are incredibly incompetent, because we've been discussing this for more than 10 meetings, if I count the other committees that have looked into this matter. There are people who have already given statements to the committee. This makes no sense. We need to be consistent.

Before partisanship reared its head in the committee's work and before the Conservatives had some wind in their sails, this committee always worked well together. Even though I wasn't on the committee, I followed its work. I was on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates for six years, and we, too, had studies and issues we wanted the Office of the Auditor General to look into.

• (1805)

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, I have a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Again, the opposition members are raising concerns because they don't agree with the answers they got from a witness. They didn't hear what they wanted to hear. They gave their opinion repeatedly and even wrote editorials on Mr. Bains.

I don't know how things worked under the Conservative government, but I do know that Conservative ministers appointed members of certain boards and applied some pressure in that regard. However, that's not how we work on this side of the House. A number of witnesses have said multiple times that ministers did not apply any pressure and had absolutely nothing to do with the situation. We respect the decisions made by SDTC, even though there were violations. We acknowledge that, but it's time to stop with the witch hunts.

That's the problem, though. The Conservative members want a witch hunt at any cost. We understand that. They raised a question of privilege to try to stop what's going on in the House. It's funny since it happened right after Ms. Khalid proposed a very good motion to make clear that the committee respected the independence of the Office of the Auditor General in conducting its work. That's quite the coincidence. I imagine that the Conservatives don't respect the independence of the Office of the Auditor General when they aren't happy with its work. It's obvious that they aren't happy with the office's work.

Don't worry, Mr. Perkins, I'm coming back to the matter before us, but it's all connected. The committee has been going around in circles for months. Nothing Mr. Perkins, Mr. Nater, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Brock or Mr. Genuis have brought to the committee's attention in the past three months has been a big revelation.

Now members are asking questions about which witness consulted which witness. Witnesses who appeared before the committee under oath and told the truth have already been questioned, and now members are also accusing Mr. Bains of being dishonest because he was a Liberal minister. Members need to show some respect on this committee, Mr. Chair.

If they really want to know what happened, they need to respect all the reports that have been released and all the evidence the committee has received. I am calling on the members of the official opposition to ask sensible questions because their performance right now isn't at all impressive.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair, and just to start, if it's okay with you, I would like some clarification from the clerk as to what time she received the motion of privilege put forward by Mr. Perkins, and then I have comments to add to that.

The Chair: Well....

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I would like the clerk to respond to that, Chair, because she's the one who—

The Chair: You can fully respond to that, Clerk. I have no idea. It didn't impact the decision I made, but if you want to read out the time sheet for the email you received from Mr. Perkins or his office....

• (1810)

Mr. Rick Perkins: All that matters is when I tabled it.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Ariane Calvert): I received it at 5:15 p.m. today.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That speaks to exactly what I want to talk about, Chair.

We're talking about a motion of privilege wherein Mr. Perkins felt like his questions were not answered. They sent the motion in while Mr. Cooper was asking questions. This was premeditated by metadata. Time-stamps are there. I'm sure that if anybody wants to look—

Mr. Rick Perkins: It wasn't premeditated.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: If anybody wanted to look into when this motion was created, according to the metadata, it was at 5:12 p.m. It was last edited at 5:14 p.m. Mr. Cooper was still talking during that time and still had the opportunity to ask questions of the witness.

What this says to me and what the consistency of the actions of so many Conservatives who are sitting opposite me here today says to me is that this is not a question of privilege. This is a mockery. This is a mockery of our parliamentary system. They're trying to use the system to create their partisan games, to push witnesses into character assassinations and to leverage the time that we have in this committee for their own partisan benefit.

I wonder how many dollars the Conservatives have raised out of clips today. Those dollars, from Russian Rebel News, are being col-

lected on the backs of taxpayers. Let all of us be reminded that this committee functions on the backs of taxpayer dollars. Our Parliament functions on the backs of taxpayer dollars.

We are here in the public accounts committee to make sure that taxpayer dollars are used efficiently and effectively. The fact that Mr. Perkins would move a motion of privilege—before there was any issue of the exact same thing that he's trying to talk about in his bogus motion here, that his privilege was somehow impacted—on the backs of taxpayer dollars, raising Conservative fundraising dollars on the backs of taxpayer dollars....

Why can we not get to the work that this committee has been assigned to do? Why can we not get to the reports of the Auditor General? Why can we not talk about matters that are serious and that actually impact Canadians?

I really don't understand, Chair, why we're going down this route. I see each and every member of the Conservatives right now on their phones. I'm sure that they're tweeting something or other, again to put—

Mr. Rick Perkins: [Inaudible—Editor]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That's awesome. How is she doing? Is she doing great?

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, come on.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm so glad that Mr. Perkins has had a moment to connect with his wife. I'm sure she's a very lovely person, and I wish her the very best.

I also would like Mr. Perkins to use his time as a member of Parliament in a more judicious manner. I think that putting forward bogus and disingenuous motions like this has a negative impact on what this committee is assigned to do and what it should be doing.

I'm just going to read out the words of the motion. Excuse me while I enter my lengthy password here.

The words of the draft motion are:

That the committee instruct the clerk and analyst to prepare a report to the House, which the Chair shall table forthwith, outlining the potential breach of privilege concerning Navdeep Bains' refusal to answer questions which the committee put to him and his prevarication in answering others.

My English is not as good as yours, Mr. Perkins.

Given the fact that this motion was drafted before questions were even answered by the witness today, while the questions were in process and while each member of the committee had time to ask their questions—this motion was drafted way before then—really calls into question the motives of the Conservatives.

I, for one, do not want to sit here and let them play their games, because, quite frankly, Canadians deserve better than that.

• (1815)

What the Conservatives are doing—all six or seven of them at this committee today—is quite deplorable. I really think Canadians deserve better than to have their hard-earned dollars used for the purpose of partisan hack games.

I've had enough of this, Chair. I don't think this is a legitimate privilege motion. This is premeditated and being used to raise fundraising dollars for the Conservatives, delay important legislative work in the House of Commons, delay important committee work in this committee and agitate.

We are not in the business of agitation here, Chair. We are in the business of trying to make sure Canadians understand how their tax dollars are spent and have the ability to review how we can improve the process of...Canadian dollars in our government and democracy. For us to be sitting here debating a bogus motion like this for the sole purpose of agitation, delay and fundraising dollars.... That is quite the slap in the face of democracy in our democratic institutions.

I can hear Mr. Perkins snickering right now. It's very unfortunate, because he knows exactly what he's doing. What he's doing is agitating and using Canadian taxpayer dollars to raise funds.

Mr. Michael Cooper: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm sure Mr. Cooper does not have the floor, Chair. I'm sure the floor is mine, currently.

I encourage all of my colleagues to think about what they are doing and why. This is not how we govern. This is not how we should be conducting ourselves as parliamentarians. This is a very.... I'm defining my words so that I'm using parliamentary language: This is an attempt to take us away from the work of the committee. I think we are above that. I really do. I'm sure Mr. Perkins's wife would appreciate him doing the right thing.

Some hon. members: I have a point of order.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I hope Mr. Perkins acknowledges that this is not a motion of privilege at all. This is a motion of agitation and trying to use taxpayer dollars for the political gain of the Conservative Party, trying to stop the House from functioning, trying to stop committees from functioning and trying to raise money for the Conservative Party using clickbait for Russian Rebel News or what have you. It's not right. I encourage Mr. Perkins to "back off, man". This is not the right thing to do. We have better things to get to in this committee. I don't think this motion is in order, at all.

"I have sat on a lot of committees," said the experienced litigator. In my nine years as a member of Parliament, I have listened to a lot of testimony from witnesses. We do not get to decide what the witnesses we invite to this committee have to say. We can ask them for clarification in writing. We can subpoena them to come to committee and answer questions.

• (1820)

Chair, it is your call how the committee functions and what a witness is able or not able to say at committee, so this should be just as much of a concern to you as it is to me right now. Your privilege and order as chair are questioned.

Also, what is the purpose here? Are we setting a precedent where every single witness who comes to committee, across the entirety of our committees, is now going to be judged on whether they have answered a question or not? To whose liking is that question going to be answered? I'm sure Mr. Perkins, even after being appointed to

the BDC, would love to sit there and judge whether a witness has actually answered a question to his liking.

This reminds me of Trump, to be honest, when he decides whether something is foreign interference or not, or democratic or not, based on where somebody is on the political spectrum and whether they support him or not. This is the exact same thing. If we pass this motion today—if we even entertain this motion today—we are giving in to the politics of agitation here today. I do not think that is the right way for us to approach our democratic institutions or the way we should function here as a committee.

Chair, I will park my comments there, but I would like to get back on your list, at the bottom. I'm letting you know.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: You have been added to the list.

Ms. Bradford is next.

You have the floor.

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I must say that I'm a little alarmed that you based your ruling, that this was actually a breach of privilege, on Mr. Firth. There is no way that Mr. Bains could possibly be put in the same category as Mr. Firth, who as we all know is in a class all by himself.

I was here at this meeting, and I found Mr. Bains to be a very credible, respectful witness. In all of our committees, we ask questions. Usually, when we ask the question, we don't already know the answer. Sometimes we do, but sometimes we don't, so we have to accept the witness's answers as given, even if we don't like the answer.

What I observed before, while the opposition was questioning this witness, as is often the case, was that the witness wasn't even given a chance to respond. They were constantly interrupting. He would try to say something, and he would be interrupted constantly. There is a certain level of rudeness with that. We invite people here to testify, and we should give them a chance to answer the questions. Unfortunately, I find that it wasn't the case today. Now the opposition is complaining that he didn't answer the questions. He needed some airtime in order to do that, without being constantly interrupted.

This goes on and on. It's a very bad reflection on this place and on the people who serve here.

One of the things that I would like to point out.... I was elected in 2021, and I was appointed to this committee by the whip. I remember the whip telling me, "You are going to love serving on the public accounts committee, because you're going to learn so much about the operations of government because you review the Auditor General's reports." The Auditor General examines many different things. She decides what she wants to look at and reports back with inadequacies, and there's learning to be had from that. I wish that's what this committee was doing.

I would say, for the last eight months, that we haven't had the opportunity to review reports. We haven't been tabling reports from this committee in the House, because we're no longer reviewing the Auditor General's reports. Instead, this committee, like most parliamentary committees, is being held up with motions, whether they're privileged or not, brought forward by the opposition. They're always the same motions on four different committees, looking for a smoking gun, on some kind of a witch hunt. The prize would be to tar a cabinet minister with some wrongdoing, and there's nothing to see, but it ties up very expensive resources.

I want Canadians to know that these committees cost thousands of dollars every time we meet. If we're talking about wasting taxpayers' dollars and being judicious about taxpayers' dollars being spent fraudulently, or not in a good way, what's happening at our committees when every committee is dealing with the same motions?

This committee probably had 25 meetings on ArriveCAN. Do Canadians care about ArriveCAN anymore? There were 25 meetings, and each meeting probably costs \$10,000 or \$15,000, when you think of the analysts, the clerks, the interpreters, the catering and all the resources...for nothing.

Now we're going down the same rabbit hole, but this time with Sustainable Development Technology Canada. It's the same thing. There are multiple committees looking at this. What is it for? The problem has already been resolved. We know there was a problem, but when it was brought to light by the Auditor General's report, immediately, the current minister decided to transition it over to the NRC and appointed a temporary brand new board of three, and it'll be transitioned by the end of this year to the NRC. The funding will resume. It's under control.

Therefore, really, when the problem has been taken care of, I don't know why we persist in continuing to find faults that no longer exist. It has been dealt with.

I find this a very frustrating process.

There is a letter that I would like to read into the record from our Auditor General, because, again, I remind everyone that this is the public accounts committee. We are supposed to be reviewing the Auditor General's reports and looking at her work. We shouldn't be doing anything that impedes her work. However, I want to read it into the record, because I think it's an important document.

• (1825)

It's a letter to our chair, Mr. John Williamson, dated June 10 of this year.

Dear Mr. Williamson:

I am writing further to the motion in the House of Commons seeking the production of documents regarding Sustainable Development Technology Canada. I understand that it will be considered by the House of Commons this afternoon.

I wanted to ensure that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is aware of some of the short-term and long-term impacts of this motion. In my view, the requirement to produce my entire audit file to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel compromises my independence, and is also likely to discourage departments, agencies, and Crown corporations from providing me free and timely access to the information required for my audits going forward.

The objective of this motion appears to be about ensuring that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has access to the information in my audit file. In cases where the RCMP has engaged with my office, we have always cooperated in a timely manner. Doing so has always involved direct communication with the RCMP investigators and a timely response by my office to production orders from the RCMP. It is unclear to me why the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel should be part of this established process with the RCMP.

I believe that it is also important to inform the Committee that there will be considerable expense to my office to produce our entire audit file to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel. Our understanding is that translation of all documents would be required. The budget for my office's resources does not include such expenses. We would need to divert financial resources that would otherwise be used to produce audits for Parliament.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Hogan...

Auditor General of Canada

Clearly, the point our Auditor General is making is that this request or demand is compromising her work and her future work. It would cause great disruption to her department. It would take them off the work they would normally be doing. It's a great expense she doesn't have a budget for, and all for what? It is to do something that shouldn't be requested in the first place because it not only compromises her, but it would also compromise the independence of the RCMP.

I do have really grave concerns about this privilege motion and about why we have to debate it. I don't think, just because some of the MPs didn't like the answers Mr. Bains, our witness tonight, was giving when he had an opportunity to speak—which was very limited—means that somebody's privilege has been abused.

We called him here. He was quite prepared to answer. Yes, maybe sometimes he did use the phrase, "I don't recall". We often hear that. You have to consider the man left the position as the minister in January 2021. That'll soon be five years ago. How many of us can remember every conversation and meeting that we had four and a half or five years ago? I know I don't. Maybe some of you do. I don't think it's reasonable to expect anyone to. I think if they say, "I don't recall", that's very likely an honest answer.

Those are the points I wanted to speak on this. Thank you for giving me time.

• (1830)

The Chair: You are welcome, Ms. Valerie Bradford.

[Translation]

Now it's over to Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is something that's important to me. Right now, a government member is rejecting the premise that the witness's answers were wholly unsatisfactory. I'll get back to that. The government member believes he is entitled to criticize the questions committee members ask the witness. I don't think he understands how committees work. The premise of the question is established by the person asking it, and the answer is based on the question being asked. The witness is expected to answer in good faith.

Here's a good example of a question that the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology did not ask. It ties in with my initial questions to the former minister regarding his meetings with Amber Batool when she was chief of staff at SDTC. Mr. Bains said at first that he had met her maybe once or twice. Then he said that he had met her a few times. When I asked him to give me an idea of how many times he had met Ms. Batool while he was the minister and she was the chief of staff at SDTC, he said he wasn't sure whether it was once or twice, or 10 to 15 times.

That is absolutely impossible. It shows that the witness is acting in bad faith. Anyone here would be able to ballpark how many times they had met someone over a given period of time.

I could tell you how many times I had met most people. At the very least, I could provide a ballpark number. Not being able to provide such a number shows bad faith. That is unacceptable.

Mr. Bains didn't answer a single question committee members asked him, even though they were put to him calmly and respectfully. That is shameful. The work we're doing matters. The Auditor General flagged a number of very problematic issues in her report. Mr. Bains was the minister in charge of SDTC when the situations described in the report occurred.

He should therefore have been able to answer our questions, but he didn't answer them. He had numerous opportunities to do so today, but he didn't. That is on top of the example I gave. All of that shows his lack of good faith and plain refusal to answer parliamentarians' questions. That, in my view, is a breach of parliamentary privilege.

I'll leave it there. I hope we can proceed to a vote as quickly as possible to ascertain whether it does amount to a breach of parliamentary privilege. As far as I'm concerned, that's exactly what happened today.

The Chair: Thank you.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Joining us online is Mr. Erskine-Smith, please.

You have the floor.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thanks, Chair.

I have a couple of things on this, but it is I think virtually impossible, given where we are right now in the process, if we were to report back to the House on this question, that the Speaker would find a *prima facie* case that their privilege has been breached here.

We have a situation where a witness said they didn't recall in a couple of cases and where the witness was repeatedly cut off in the

midst of answering a question. I take the point of Nathalie that she didn't feel that her questions were directly answered in a way that she was looking for. The witness is still in the midst of.... From what I heard from the chair very clearly at the outset and then again when he excused Mr. Bains, there was an understanding that he could come back and he was willing to come back.

I've said previously that it was premature, but if we were to report it at this time, it very obviously would not be a *prima facie* breach of privilege. Not only does it not amount to anywhere close to the Firth precedent, which is a deeply concerning precedent, but this is no different from any number of instances of testimony I've heard over the years where we don't get the yes-or-no answer we demand from a witness, perhaps, but there's still an answer, whether we like it or not.

I should just note, because there have been many aspersions of criminal conduct on Ms. Verschuren by Conservatives, that in the midst of answering a question about Ms. Verschuren and the point that she was appointed by the Harper government initially on a board.... It would be worth understanding. I don't know if the Conservatives fully understand her history. We know that the Ethics Commissioner has found a couple of violations—for example, she should have recused herself instead of abstaining. In a second instance, she voted for a bundled approval in keeping with legal advice and ultimately that was incorrect advice to follow. This isn't a criminal character or criminal conduct here, despite what Conservatives allege.

If we had allowed Mr. Bains to finish his answer, we would have learned, for example, that she began her career as a development officer with the Cape Breton Development Corporation. She then worked with the Canada Development Investment Corporation. She then worked at AMASCO. She launched Michaels of Canada—for those who know and I have kids who enjoy arts and crafts—and then she landed the CEO role at Home Depot, where she grew Home Depot Canada in a significant way.

She has been appointed to a number of government advisory roles, including the economic advisory council during the economic crisis in 2008, the Canada-U.S. Council for the Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders and the advisory council for NAFTA. She recently participated in government round tables on climate action decarbonization. She is the chair of the MaRS Discovery District board. She's on the board of the Ontario Energy Association.

In 2011, in the Harper tenure, she was honoured as an Officer of the Order of Canada for her contributions. She was appointed in 2010 as the co-chair of the Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Chair.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I'm sorry.

Yes, sure. What's the point of order?

The Chair: Yes, I do have to get to it.

Go ahead, Mr. Genius.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This is not relevant to the question of privilege regarding Mr. Bains' non-responses to questions—

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Yes, it is. Mr. Bains was cut off by Mr. Perkins in answer to a specific question about Ms. Verschuren when he was starting to articulate her long-standing record of public service and contribution, including the fact that she was appointed not only by Mr. Harper but by Mr. Flaherty. That answer is relevant because he was cut off in the course of answering it.

To be of assistance—and I'm almost done, Garnett—in 2010, she was appointed co-chair of the 2012 Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference, Canada's premier leadership training event, and she was honoured by the Canadian Business Hall of Fame in 2019. Cast criminal aspersions as you like, but definitely do it with parliamentary privilege at your back because it's defamatory outside of the House of Commons. There is no criminal conduct here—on behalf of Ms. Verschuren—and there's a long-standing record of contribution to Canada.

Keep in mind here that, yes, I'll be the first to criticize the conduct of SDTC in relation to its conflicts mess. I'll be the first to criticize the fact that it was following incredibly bad legal advice. I'll be the first to criticize ethics violations where a recusal should have been necessary instead of an abstention. Of course, they should not have bundled approval, where they were considering past conflicts as sufficient. They should have declared continued conflicts. Of course, that is the case. That is why major action has been taken to clean up that mess.

However, to suggest criminal conduct, to then cut off former minister Bains when he's in the midst of answering a question about her character, and to then further claim that your privilege has been violated because questions weren't answered, answers that you previously cut off, is laughable. We can invite Mr. Bains back because my understanding is that his testimony wasn't over.

I'll be voting against a privilege motion because this sets a terrible precedent. If this is a violation of privilege, any witness who comes and doesn't give us an answer we like ends up being in violation of privilege. A violation of privilege is something that we should take very seriously. We should not lower the standard in a laughable partisan way.

The second thing I will say is that I will guarantee you that, if we report this back to the House, it will be dismissed by the Speaker because it is impossible to think that, on such a low standard, which would apply to so many witnesses that we've seen come to this committee and many other committees.... When we get an answer that we don't like, such as, "I do not recall"—and you might not like that answer, but that's an answer, Mr. Perkins—it's certainly not going to be found to be a *prima facie* violation and breach of privilege.

• (1840)

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

We now go to Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm following the discussion on the motion put forward by my colleague, Mr. Perkins, here, who is out to raise a point of privilege. At the same time, members of all stripes on the other side of the House have used public funds to attend partisan conventions. Whether it's members of the Bloc Québécois, the NDP or the Conservative Party, they're all the same. We put an end to that practice in 2014.

When I hear the members on the other side of the House talk about transparency and the importance of spending public funds properly—

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, please—

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'll get straight to the point.

[English]

The Chair: Please do. I'll remind you that your entire caucus visited St. Andrews in my riding just two short years ago.

An hon. member: Mr. Chair, that's quite inappropriate.

The Chair: However, I would ask you to stick to relevance, please.

An hon. member: Here in Ottawa, how is—

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: You're quite right. We visited your riding, but it was for a caucus, and not for a partisan convention. That's the difference, Mr. Chair, and you didn't really understand that. You want to be in power and to govern, but you don't even understand the rules of the House, Mr. Chair. I find that problematic.

On the other side of the table, people are talking about—

[English]

The Chair: Keep it relevant to the motion, Mr. Drouin.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: It's not up to you to speak to relevance.

[English]

The Chair: That is my job: to keep members relevant to the motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Exactly, you're on a pedestal. You're promoting the fact that it's important to ensure transparency and to invite witnesses to appear before our committee. You're saying that taxpayers' money needs to be spent properly.

You're in the opposition, you aren't even capable of spending public funds for which House rules exist and yet here you are, accusing us of that. It's clear that people at SDTC made mistakes. However, jumping from that to going after his aunt and his uncle just doesn't fly.

Mr. Bains has come here, and I wouldn't be surprised if someone were to ask him who consulted him about coming before committee. Was it his aunt or his uncle? Will we then start inviting his aunt and his uncle and everyone else to committee? It makes no sense. It has to stop.

The Auditor General of Canada published a report. The firm Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton published an excellent report, and McCarthy Tétrault wrote another. That's three reports. When will it end?

There's no longer any connection to what's happening here. The proof is that the Leader of the Opposition is circulating fake petitions, and inviting people to sign them. I see that people are being redirected to a partisan website, a Conservative Party website. Yet he points fingers at others.

My colleague Mr. Erskine-Smith is quite right. If it's determined that the issue before us is a question of privilege, it means that the testimony of all the witnesses who've appeared before us will be called into question. They'll say it's a question of privilege. For example, there are people who believe in climate change and those who don't. The Bloc Québécois and the NDP believe in climate change. Those on the other side of the table aren't convinced. The testimony of people who appeared before us will be called into question just by saying that it's a question of privilege. It makes no sense.

I come back to what Ms. Khalid and Ms. Bradford said, that all this was done to hold things up and filibuster in the House of Commons. I'd like to tell the Conservatives that there's already filibustering going on. They're filibustering their own motion. It makes no sense.

Can we treat the Standing Committee on Public Accounts with respect? Are we able to focus on concerns that really affect Canadians and Quebecers? Take, for example, the whole issue of cybercrime. The Auditor General of Canada has issued a report on the subject. Right now, because we're in a hurry to do endless investigations, we're not looking at other issues that are much more important to seniors.

Is the Bloc Québécois, which defends seniors in the House day after day, telling me that seniors aren't important here in committee? Is it saying that we shouldn't look at the Auditor General's report on cybercrime, knowing that the majority of victims are seniors?

No, there'll be more and more inquiries. People will say that the witnesses who appear before us are no longer credible. It makes no sense.

I would invite my colleagues in the Conservative Party to tell us, in all transparency, how much money they have raised by talking about this subject. Apparently, they don't have enough yet, because they want to keep talking about it. But they don't want to talk about other concerns that are more important to Canadians and Quebecers. I just mentioned an excellent example.

I'd like to come back to the point raised by Mr. Erskine-Smith. It's the whole question of the precedent we're setting. If we don't agree with what a witness says before committee, we're going to start saying that it's a question of privilege.

• (1845)

I can see that the opposition parties aren't willing to work to advance issues that are important to Canadians. Some want to gather more names for partisan reasons. People are being asked to give

their name, address and phone number and are told that their concerns will be addressed.

What are the other parties doing? They are complicit. Mr. Pierre Poilievre, Mr. Yves-François Blanchet and Mr. Jagmeet Singh form a coalition. They're all guilty of working together. Mr. Poilievre must be so popular in Quebec that I have no doubt the Bloc Québécois is proud to defend him. The Bloc Québécois members are toeing the Conservative Party line, and I don't understand why. NDP members are in the same boat; they're toeing the Conservative Party line, and I don't understand why. I don't know what's happening on the other side of the House, but there seems to be a new coalition comprising the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. Mr. Perkins can say whatever he likes, but there was no problem when he was appointed to a board by a Conservative. No Liberals were appointed.

It's no secret, Mr. Perkins, that you and your colleagues are the best of friends when it comes to making donations. You made donations, just like the chair of the board of directors. You're in the same boat. You didn't give one dollar or two dollars or three dollars, you gave \$1,600 to a candidate running for leadership of your party. You're guilty. You're in the same boat. Now you're trying to paint us into a corner with this, and I don't agree. The new minister, Mr. François-Philippe Champagne and Mr. Navdeep Bain have nothing to do with this, and you know that full well.

• (1850)

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Pardon me, Monsieur Drouin. I'll come back to you.

On a point of order, I have Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Nine Liberal directors have been—

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, no.

Mr. Rick Perkins: He made a reference—

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, if you put your—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That member made a reference to me.

The Chair: That does not give you the right of reply.

Mr. Rick Perkins: He's doing the same thing that Liberal appointees have done. Liberal appointees have stolen \$400 million.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, that does not give you the right of reply on the spot. If you'd like to raise your hand, I'll put you down.

Monsieur Drouin, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I sense that people feel passionate about this issue, even at this hour.

If people have stolen money, we need to let the RCMP do its job. Let the RCMP conduct its own investigation. If there are guilty parties, they should be brought before a judge and put in jail. I have no problem with that.

The problem is that this is a wild goose chase, so to speak. It's a wild goose chase and Mr. Bains is the target. They're doing the same thing to Minister Champagne, despite knowing full well that he's viewing all this from 20,000 feet in the air and that he doesn't see these details. The problem I have with this is that the opposition has heard the arguments loud and clear.

This week, a board member was even asked about things that didn't happen. She was asked what she was going to do. Can we let the board see the report before making a decision? That would be the rational thing to do, but that's not what we're doing. Accusations are being made. We want to sully the reputation of people who have nothing to do with this. The goal is to add more names to the Conservative Party database and to raise even more money. We've heard it—

[English]

Mr. Larry Brock: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, as thrilled as I am to be sitting in committee at 6:52, listening to this wonderful tale told by my colleague, he's repeated himself numerous times. You know the rules and he knows the rules on original thought. He's running out the clock and repeating the same talking lines.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor. I'll ask you to remain relevant and to come up with new ideas. It's over to you, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Once again, I sense my colleagues don't like when we lay out all the facts revealed in committee.

I see that my dear colleague Mr. McCauley has come to provide backup. I welcome him to committee. There are now seven Conservative Party members here. It takes a lot of Conservative members to fight the Liberals, but that's okay. We welcome it.

How was the interpretation, Mr. McCauley? Was it spot on?

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): It's coming through as nonsense.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Here is how the nonsense goes. How many meetings are we going to hold on the subject? So far, we've held more than eight. The Standing Committee on Industry and Technology has also met several times. The MPs who asked questions there in June are here today, asking the same questions. They never raised a question of privilege about what Mr. Bains said. Suddenly, they no longer like the answers, and they're wondering whether Mr. Bains was telling the truth or not.

Frankly, Mr. Chair, I'm being treated like a fool, and I won't have it.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: That's unparliamentary.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I was referring to myself.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: It's still unparliamentary.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Once again, I was referring to myself.

[English]

The Chair: If you insist.... You have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I didn't treat any of you. I treated myself.

[Translation]

The Chair: If you insist, Mr. Drouin.

You have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Francis Drouin: The fact is that we're questioning whether or not Mr. Bains' testimony to questions the opposition was asking was satisfactory. He perhaps didn't know the answers. I would love to question everybody in testimony on what happened eight years ago. I'm sorry, but that is not a question of privilege.

Time and time again, we have heard in different testimony that ministers or ministers' offices were not involved in the day-to-day operations of SDTC. We have heard it time and time again, and they're still not believing that.

An hon. member: [Inaudible—Editor]

• (1855)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Go home if you're so tired.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Here's my question: How long are we going to go around in circles? Not a single member of the opposition has taught me anything new in the last five meetings.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, this is repetition.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, when we return—

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's repetition.

The Chair: It was a quick line.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor

Mr. Francis Drouin: Is “I” repetition or is “the opposition” repetition? You can call me out, Rick; you're giving me a break anyway.

More seriously, when we're questioning whether or not a witness, who has already appeared and been questioned by the same member at a previous committee in June.... Whether that's a question of privilege has absolutely nothing to do with SDTC, but everything to do with what is happening in the House.

They don't want to come to work. We know they want to go into an election right away. They've all told us. They're not interested in getting to the bottom of this. Any motion of production of papers that they put forth is not serious—I haven't said that word, by the way—because they want to go into an election tomorrow morning. They probably have their campaign office already rented and their campaign signs.

I haven't said that, by the way; it's not repetition.

I'm questioning the seriousness of their actually getting to the bottom of this.

It's shameful that we're asking a member, who has already appeared and testified before committee, to come back.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, this is now getting—

Mr. Francis Drouin: I put a new adjective in, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You are getting repetitive.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I'll conclude with this thought. I expected the Conservative Party to play political games. I did not, however, expect the party of Mr. Jagmeet Singh or the Bloc Québécois to join ranks with the Conservative Party.

I'm convinced that, in Quebec, everyone knows that these people are joining ranks with Mr. Poilievre and that they have no respect for anyone. Mr. Poilievre does not respect the values of francophones in Quebec or Canada. He doesn't want to know what happened at SDTC or what Mr. Navdeep Bains did. The only thing he's interested in is making sure to fundraise and launch more petitions to get more names for the Conservative Party database, and that's it.

I'll stop there, Mr. Chair, because I know that you're going to say that I'm repeating myself.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

We are going to have a five-minute health recess. Then we'll come back and Ms. Khalid will have the floor.

This meeting is suspended.

• (1858) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1907)

• (1905)

The Chair: I'm going to bring our meeting back to order.

Ms. Khalid is not here, so I'm just going to move her down one.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

I'll just very briefly observe that we are clearly in the middle of a Liberal filibuster. The Liberals are filibustering to prevent accountability. Liberals claim to be confident that the Speaker would not consider this a matter of privilege. If that is the case, why are they filibustering? Why are they filibustering if they're confident that the Speaker wouldn't rule in their favour anyway?

Let this go to a vote. The Liberals can vote against it. We'll vote in favour of it, and the chips will fall where they may. The fact that the Liberals are filibustering suggests that they're not confident in the outcome at this committee and that they're not confident in the outcome in the House. If they are confident, then let it go to a vote. Stop the filibustering, and let's get some accountability. The Liberals are filibustering to try to prevent this privilege motion involving former Liberal minister Navdeep Bains from going to a vote.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'll just start by saying that I've seen the Conservatives filibuster their own privilege motions in the House and committees so, no, this is not a precedent.

I love that Mr. Genuis brings so much to contribute to this committee, but I would like clarification through you, Chair, to the clerk, as to which Conservative members are subbed in on this committee. We have seven of them here in the room, and I just want to know which ones are here—

Mr. John Nater: The permanent members are at the table. The permanent members vote. That's the rule.

• (1910)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Would you like to do the clerk's job for her? I didn't ask you.

The Chair: We appear to have Mr. McCauley, Mr. Nater and Mr. Cooper.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. McCauley, Mr. Nater and Mr. Cooper—

The Chair: They can all sit at the table.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Which is fair, but again it goes against exactly what Mr. Nater quite wholeheartedly tried to mansplain to me, which is who is at the table and who is not at the table. I don't appreciate it, but I do appreciate that the clerk clarified—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It has nothing to do with gender. You don't know the rules.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Please don't heckle me. You're not at the table, buddy. Walk away.

The Chair: Please, Mr. Genuis....

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you so very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll let the chatter in the room kind of die down a little bit before I continue, if that's okay with you, because I think what I have to say will probably want to be heard by members.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: Order, Mr. McCauley. Ms. Khalid has the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair. No, I think—

An hon. member: [Inaudible—Editor]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: No, please, get the heckles out. I have a really prolonged comment to make so, please, get your heckles out.

Are we good? Okay.

Chair, as this motion of privilege has been called, I sat here and reviewed committee after committee, not just on the SDTC issue but generally all committees, all questions and all studies that have been put forward. There is one common denominator in the way that questions get put from the Conservative benches to witnesses.

With question after question, it is unfortunate to see.... I know I get called out on calling so many points of order on the way that the Conservatives treat witnesses, but we see time and time again—and I can go through the transcripts and relay to you what they are—the way the questions are posed to witnesses. Whether they're friendly to the Conservatives or not friendly to the Conservatives, they're not welcoming an answer.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Ms. Khalid has the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm happy to let the chatter die down. It's fine.

Respectfully, Chair, they're all in the back of the room, and I can hear exactly what they're saying over here. They're from your whip's office, and I don't think that I should be hearing what they're saying.

The Chair: I couldn't hear anything except a mild murmur.

Ms. Khalid, this is a committee room. It's not a library.

You have the floor. It is relatively quiet in here.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

As I was saying, transcript after transcript of committee meetings have shown that Conservatives don't want to hear the answers. They want to ask the questions. They want to get their clips and move on, but not let the matter move on. They want to move on to their next objective.

My dad says this one thing: "Iqra, don't be somebody who wants to be someone. Be somebody who wants to do something."

The way the Conservatives are behaving with this bogus privilege motion shows me they are very much in the business of wanting to be something, rather than doing something good for Canadians.

I've seen time and time again how questions are posed to witnesses in this committee without giving them the opportunity to answer the questions and without giving them the opportunity to clarify. It's been said here before: This is not a courtroom. This is a place for, hopefully, distinguished and educational conversation. The fact that we don't have that right now is kind of disturbing.

This privilege motion itself has no water to float on, because of the nature of the questions that have been asked over these past.... I've been on this committee for the past year. The fact of the matter is that, the way questions are posed again and again, witnesses are disrespected again and again. If this were the case, the member opposite would feel that his privilege was violated, because nobody was answering his questions. Well, he's been on this committee for

a very long time. He's been on many committees for a very long time. Why has he never brought such a motion forward before?

Is it because the witness is a former minister of the Crown? Is it because the Conservatives are looking for dirt, or whatever it is that they're looking for? I have no idea, to be honest.

This motion was put forward before the Conservatives had all of their time to ask the questions. This motion was put forward while the witness was not able to answer all of the questions. The witness kept getting heckled, and he kept getting cut off with the questions that he was supposed to answer with whatever limited time the Conservatives were going to give him.

As he was trying to answer, he would get cut off after the first couple of words he was trying to get out of his mouth. That is unfortunate, because when we invite witnesses to this committee, we invite them, hopefully, with the intent that we're going to learn something from them. It's not to interrogate them, not to humiliate them and not to move bogus privilege motions based on a political need.

It is a political need right now from the Conservatives. They're just grasping at straws, anything and everything, whatever can stick. It's really unfortunate. Quite frankly, I don't think the other opposition parties have done this debate any favours either. As I was reading through the transcripts, I see that the member from the NDP has a page-long question. You don't get a lot of time to ask your questions.

• (1915)

Obviously, we want to hear what people have to say, rather than indulge our witnesses with soliloquies. However, that is exactly what has happened. That is exactly what I see in our transcripts: elongated paragraphs and broad statements trying to virtue signal all of that. Then, when it comes time for a witness to answer a question, what happens? It's "Oh, no, you didn't answer my question". Well, buddy, give him some time to answer the question. How about that?

An hon. member: How about that?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, how about that? It is very unfortunate that our democratic institutions—our parliamentary committees—have come to this. This is a very low point for us, as public accounts committee members. I remember that, when I first started on this committee, we were able to work together. We were able to collaborate and find good resolutions to the issues at hand. We did that cordially. We did that respectfully. However, here I sit a year later with a privilege motion over a witness being accused of not answering a question. Somehow, this has led to the privilege of Mr. Perkins being violated in the House and in this committee.

Can you imagine, Chair, what privilege means to democratic institutions? Canada is lucky to have that privilege.

Mr. Michael Cooper: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Don't heckle me, Mr. Cooper.

Canada is privileged to have the ability to call privilege and to have democratic institutions that make sure all Canadians have their rights enshrined in our Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, yet here we are calling privilege because a member felt he didn't get a proper answer to his question. What are we doing here? We're wasting government resources, taking time away from the important issues and Auditor General reports we should be reviewing, and discussing this bogus privilege motion.

What exactly is the privilege? It's "Oh, I didn't get the answer I wanted from a witness who was called before this committee" on another bogus motion. That witness should never have been here in the first place. What does he have to do with how we are going forward with SDTC? It makes no sense, other than the fact that the Conservatives are holding up the work of this committee and the House of Commons.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Your government shut down—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Don't heckle me, Mr. Cooper. I am making a point here. Don't do it. Just don't...not today.

The Conservatives are holding up everything to be somebody, rather than to do something. What's worse is that the Bloc and the NDP are propping them up to do it. I think that's even worse because, at the very least, Chair, the Conservatives are honest about what they want to do. They want to delay government work. They don't want any work to happen within this committee. They don't want any semblance of functionality within our democratic institutions.

• (1920)

What is terrible is that the Bloc and the NDP prop them up, and this motion is blatantly, obviously, a jamming tactic to delay and just stop the function of all of the work that we are able to do within our committee. It is deplorable that we are not able to get to the work that we should be doing on this committee. It is deplorable that the Conservatives think that it is their privilege to stop the work that we have spent hundreds of years building within our democratic institutions and to set precedents that we should not be setting, all because they want to be somebody.

Can you imagine?

Chair, I do not agree with the premise of this motion at all. I do not agree that, when witnesses don't provide the answers that the opposition is looking for, it leads to a violation of the privilege of a member. I do not believe in the genuineness of this motion.

As I have outlined, this motion was drafted way before it was presented, way before the Conservatives had even finished asking their questions, so this is all a ploy. I refuse to buy into this ploy. I will continue to stand up for the democratic values of our Parliament.

Mr. Cooper can snicker at it, as he has been doing all evening. However, unlike him, democratic values mean something to me, and unlike him, the work that we do in this committee means something to me. I will continue to stand up for the work that we do. I will continue to ensure that this work is protected and that the sanctity of this place is maintained, regardless of who wants to be somebody, as opposed to doing something for Canadians.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1925)

The Chair: Thank you.

Up next, I have Mr. Brock, please.

Mr. Larry Brock: I'm relinquishing my time.

The Chair: Mr. Brock is relinquishing his time.

Ms. Yip, you have the floor.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Once again, we are taking up valuable committee time when we could be studying the Auditor General's report—

The Chair: Ms. Yip, just a reminder, you are not permitted to read notes at this time. You need to....

Ms. Jean Yip: That's fine. As Ms. Bradford has mentioned, thousands of dollars have already been spent and really for what? It has already been determined—

Mr. Larry Brock: On a point of order, Chair, she continues to read from prepared notes.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, just on that same point of order—

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Not everybody is as eloquent as Mr. Brock, and if someone needs to rely on notes to speak to the issue at hand, then I think that she should be absolutely within her right to be able to read notes.

The Chair: Thank you, just one second, please.

Ms. Yip, you're permitted to refer to notes. You just cannot be reading. Okay...? I appreciate it.

Ms. Jean Yip: These are my own notes. They're not, you know—

The Chair: You can refer to notes. You just cannot read, whether they're written by you or someone else.

Ms. Jean Yip: I've heard others read whole paragraphs.

The Chair: You have the floor, Ms. Yip.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, just on that point of order, the standing order in the House, as you know, is that we are not able to refer to any notes. That is the particular standing order, but the practice has completely changed and I would expect that it is the same thing in committees.

I understand the ruling. The standing order in the House says that there should be no reference to any notes, but that practice has completely changed over the last 40 years.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip: As I said, so much committee time has been wasted and so many hours have gone to the same thing, yet the Conservatives have not been able to determine that a minister has been involved.

Why do we continue with this? Maybe the Conservatives don't care about the issues that matter to Canadians. After all, the Auditor General selects topics that are of concern to Canadians in her selection of the reports that she presents, and the Conservatives seem more interested in posturing for social media than going back to issues that matter to Canadians.

We did have consensus, at one point, to study reports like cyber-crime and like professional services contracts. I thought, "This is good", but the consensus was short-lived because we never went through with studying those reports. Instead, we've done over 25 studies of ArriveCAN and now nine studies on SDTC.

We really need to return to what our original mandate of public accounts is, which is studying the reports of the Auditor General, and not taking up time and second-guessing the Auditor General. We should be able to trust in her reports and not have the Auditor General feel compelled to write a letter asserting her independence. It proves that this committee, like some of Mr. Perkins' comments, has gone too far.

Some of the reports we could have been studying also include contaminated sites in the north, looking at the board of directors of Canada Lands Company or the greening of building materials in public infrastructure. These are all important reports that need to be studied, and I hope that we would return back to them before the year is ended so that we would actually have something to show. In fact, we have not even finished our draft reports, and they've been waiting since January of this year, like the GBA+ report.

I hope that we would be able to focus on what really matters to Canadians instead of going on witch hunts.

Thank you.

• (1930)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné): Thank you, Ms. Yip.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, you're next on the list. You now have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thanks.

I understand, obviously, that the Conservatives brought this motion. They're going to support this motion and they have bought into the partisan procedural games of all this. That is what it is. That's the environment we live in.

I understand Nathalie from the Bloc was quite frustrated. Her questions seemed reasonable as far as it went with respect to Ms. Batool. It was a fair line of inquiry and she was frustrated with it. I think it's still premature, and it doesn't make a lot of sense to buy into this motion as a result of that frustration, but I at least understand it.

In terms of Nathalie and Blake, given they've not bought into the partisan games of all this, my comments are mostly to both of them.

I'm not opposed to the idea that, if we have a former Liberal minister and he's incredibly evasive—if he just stalls and if he refuses

to answer questions and it rises to a level of impropriety—we report back to the House. I'm not opposed to that in principle, but that's not where we are at. What we saw here....

Look, I've reviewed the testimony of Mr. Bains at the industry committee, and Mr. Perkins already knew what the answer was going to be. It was "I don't recall", in reference to the conversation about Ms. Verschuren. He mentioned that there were over 100 GIC appointments in his time, and he didn't recall how the conversation went in terms of Ms. Verschuren. He pointed to the fact that there is this independent process via the Privy Council, which gives him a short list. He knew what the answer was going to be, and the answer was, frankly, the same. Whether Mr. Perkins thinks it's a sufficient answer or not is beside the point.

The threshold here that we ought to be dealing with when it relates to a matter of privilege is whether a member's privilege was breached by virtue of the fact that, like with Mr. Firth, there was a complete and total refusal to engage such that he was called to the bar and forced to answer questions, and only then was he properly forthcoming with answers.

This is not the same kind of case. It's not even close. This is more akin to an abusive process in keeping with silly partisan games.

To Garnett's question, why not just send this to the House because it's going to get dismissed by the Speaker. It's going to get dismissed by the Speaker, so Blake, you might be sitting there thinking, "All right, that seems reasonable. Kick it over to the House and just have at it." My challenge with that is what we already see happening in the House. We see privilege motions being abused to stall, delay and undermine the ordinary workings of the House.

If I knew for certain that what we would see here is Mr. Perkins standing up and speaking for 20 to 30 minutes on this motion in the House and the Speaker then taking it back for consideration.... What I know would happen is that he would turn it down because there's not a *prima facie* case. If I knew that this was limited to wasting 20 or 30 minutes of House time, I wouldn't be so opposed to the idea of kicking it to a vote right now.

However, why is it actually a problem right now? It's because what we are seeing in the House is not privilege motions that are being abused to have a 20- or 30-minute debate and then kicking it over to the Speaker. We are seeing repeated amendments and repeated duplicative interventions in order to simply waste House time.

I do not think we should take a matter that does not rise to a *prima facie* case and deem it to be that on the basis of partisanship, and then kick it over to the House so that Conservatives can waste additional House time and delay, stall and undermine the ordinary workings of the House.

My appeal, especially to my colleague from the NDP, but also to my colleague from the Bloc, is that Mr. Bains can come back. In fact, that was the basis of the opening to all this: The chair said Mr. Bains was “here for about an hour.” He said he was tight on time and there was an understanding that he might be called back. We heard the very same thing when he concluded and when he was excused.

I fundamentally don't understand why we would entertain a privilege motion, which should be a very high bar, when this is not even close to meeting that bar. This is going to be dismissed by the Speaker. However, to get there, we are going to waste endless hours and days, not only of our time here at this committee, obviously, as we are, but of valuable House time. That can't possibly be what we came to Ottawa to do.

My appeal is to have former minister Bains back and let him answer the questions. You have a number of other opportunities to ask questions.

• (1935)

Don't buy into this premature privilege motion. Let's not waste our time further on this, but let's not waste valuable House time on a motion that isn't even close to meeting the standard of a breach of privilege.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Up next is Ms. Khalid.

You have the floor, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, I know that Monsieur Drouin had some points to make, so I'll let him go first as I review my notes and testimony.

I'd like to come back after Monsieur Drouin.

The Chair: We will do that.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor, please.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to be speaking again against this particular motion.

I think we have to set the frame as to why we're dealing with this. I want to inform the committee, in case they didn't see the letter, but I would assume.... I know I wasn't a member of this committee at the time, but I would like to refer to them the letter dated July 26, 2024. I'm assuming that members were—

The Chair: I just want to interrupt.

Just as a reminder, I have received a note that there should be no photos when the committee is in session, please.

We'll go back to you, Mr. Drouin.

Ms. Jean Yip: Who is taking photos, Chair?

The Chair: I actually don't know.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

It is just a general reminder.

Mr. Francis Drouin: If somebody is taking pictures, just let me know so I can smile.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Is there somebody you can point to in the room?

The Chair: I don't know.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Something prompted you to say that, Chair.

The Chair: Yes, it was a note.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay.

Just again, if somebody is taking pictures while we're not allowed, let me know. I do want a smile. I don't want to look inappropriate, *s'il vous plaît*.

To set the frame, those members who were here back in July would obviously have seen this particular letter. It refers to why Mr. Bains was here, but it's also the rationale as to why we should be careful in using our parliamentary privilege to undertake certain investigations when we know for a fact that the commissioner, Mike Duheme, wrote to this committee. I just want to read it into the record, but I will point to a specific paragraph in this, which I think is important.

In a July 25, 2024, letter from RCMP commissioner Mike Duheme to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, he stated:

I am writing to you regarding the Opposition Motion that was passed in the House on June 10, 2024—

• (1940)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Drouin. Could I ask you maybe to first explain the relevance of the letter?

I allowed the auditor's letter to be read in as a courtesy, but I did feel at the time it was addressing the motion Ms. Khalid had put forward today, not the motion of Mr. Perkins. If you could—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, I could speak to that.

The Chair: I'm afraid Mr. Drouin has the floor.

Mr. Drouin, could you just explain the relevance, please, first?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Absolutely.

If you let me finish the paragraph, it says:

—which requires the production of documents from the government, the Auditor General, and Sustainable Development Technology Canada—

We are talking about SDTC at this committee. Are we not?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

The Chair: We're talking about the motion that Mr. Perkins put forward.

Again, I am allowing you to take us down...but I'd like to have the relevance of the letter before you read it.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, it is relevant.

The Chair: First, I want to hear Mr. Perkins' point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: My motion is not about the generalities of SDTC. My motion is not about the production of documents in the House. My motion is about the privilege of Mr. Bains' testimony, so I would ask that members keep their comments to Mr. Bains' testimony.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, that is what I am trying to do.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead on the point of order.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On that exact same point of order, I think you give a lot of leverage to members on this committee to get to the point they need to make.

I think Monsieur Drouin was getting to the point, and I think it is fair for him to read into the record what happens and how witnesses respond when they get called and hauled in before committees and when there is a disregard for the separation of powers within our Parliament. I think it is absolutely fair—

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, this is no longer a point of order. It sounds like you're trying to speak for your colleague Mr. Drouin.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm not speaking for him. I'm just trying to say that as this bogus motion has been put before us—

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, please stop. I have not cut off Mr. Drouin, so you're arguing with yourself.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm arguing with you, Chair, not with myself.

The Chair: I have asked Mr. Drouin to provide this trail. I will correct....

Since you raised it, members have huge latitude when it comes to questioning witnesses, but when it comes to debating a motion, we debate the motion at hand. That's all I'm looking to enforce here.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

Why Mr. Bains was invited here is important.

Again, with regard to SDTC, I don't need to read the entire letter into the record. All I can say is that the commissioner has clearly said, "There is significant risk that the Motion could be interpreted as a circumvention of normal investigative processes and Charter protections."

It has everything to do with the fact that we are trying to get to the bottom of this, and you, sir, are potentially impeding an RCMP investigation.

The Chair: The chairman is doing no such thing.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

The Chair: I would ask you to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Perkins, do you have a short and relevant point of order?

Mr. Rick Perkins: No.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: On the same point of order, I have a great deal of respect for my Liberal colleague Mr. Drouin, but I would seriously caution him about the language he just used to imply

criminality with respect to my colleague Mr. Perkins. I know he appreciates and has parliamentary privilege, but this is dangerous territory.

I warn Mr. Drouin to reflect upon that moving forward.

• (1945)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of privilege, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Why don't we just leave it?

Mr. Drouin, I would ask that in this room, with colleagues at work shoulder to shoulder, you be generous, as you would hope.... Live by the golden rule.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, I literally heard Mr. Brock threaten Mr. Drouin, and I don't appreciate that.

The Chair: I did not hear that.

Mr. Larry Brock: I did not threaten him.

I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: The chair will sustain your point before you make it, Mr. Brock.

Mr. Larry Brock: I cautioned. I did not threaten.

The Chair: I did not hear that. It was....

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Cautioning with those terms is definitely a threat.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Larry Brock: Listen to what he had to say.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Look at how you're pointing at him. Poor guy. Why are you doing this?

The Chair: I will suspend for two minutes, which just means the time is going to get added to the clock.

We shall return in two minutes.

• (1946)

(Pause)

• (1951)

• (1950)

The Chair: We'll bring this meeting back to order.

[Translation]

Mr. Drouin.

[English]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do want to point out that my opposition colleagues had some objections to certain words I'm using. I will point out that a member of this committee has—

The Chair: Let's have order in the room, please.

Go ahead, sir.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I don't mind you guys talking. Just take it outside. It's all good.

I was just accused of using certain words that might inflate certain reactions. I just want to inform you, Mr. Chair, that certain words are often used at this committee. For example, Mr. Cooper has characterized the conduct of a minister as “corrupt”. We often hear “corrupt”. Well, corruption is a criminal offence, so none of us can determine whether or not someone is corrupt until there is due process.

On that due process, I will get back to the letter from the commissioner, who has informed us that there is “significant risk that the Motion could be interpreted as a circumvention of normal investigative processes—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order. It's not relevant.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The relevancy is that our getting to the bottom and continuing to ask other witnesses to come before us to testify on SDTC may actually impede the investigation that the RCMP may be doing—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Enforce the rules.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The relevance, Mr. Perkins, is that you keep—

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, not only does that not address the motion, but the broader question you're suggesting is that the committee not have the hearings that this committee passed in motions, many of them with support from all parties.

I suspect that's not what you're saying, but I don't see how that responds to the motion that is before us now on referring this to the House. Of course, you're welcome to argue that it's not valid, but this is not an order for production of documents or about a police investigation. This is about a motion before us that is quite specific.

I would ask you to speak to that, please.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, the point is that the actions we do today may impact the very same investigations that the RCMP has warned us about. That is the whole point.

[Translation]

If the chair or the members of the opposition cannot understand that, I'll repeat it in French, because I think it's important.

Essentially, we're calling into question the relevance of knowing whether a witness said what opposition members wanted to hear. Questions continue to be asked when everyone knows full well.... I too would like to know what's happening.

We know there was wrongdoing, we don't deny that. The problem is that opposition members are trying to draw connections with everything they've got. They're trying to draw a connection with a Liberal with a viewpoint from 30,000 feet up—

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order on the relevance to witness Bains' testimony.

This is rambling about generalities. If he can't speak to the motion, I think we should move to the next person on the speaking list.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On that same point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, he's in the universe.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: The reality of the matter is—

The Chair: [Inaudible—Editor] you're on the list.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On that same point of order, Chair, with respect to relevance—and I'm hoping you will rule on this—we've been here for a couple of hours over time and Mr. Drouin is raising very valid points—

• (1955)

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm waiting for one.

The Chair: I am granting him time.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Again, it goes to the whole point of this motion and what Mr. Perkins thinks is irrelevant.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's debate.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'd like to thank my dear colleague Mr. Perkins for allowing me to pause every three seconds while he interrupts me. I know he doesn't like to hear it, but the problem is that a witness's testimony is being called into question. We know full well that Mr. Perkins didn't question the testimony of that witness when he appeared before the other committee.

Mr. Chair, the RCMP wrote to you and made it clear that the continued attempts to try to manipulate testimony to this committee, as they're trying to do with Mr. Bains, who already appeared four or five months ago, may have repercussions on its investigation.

So I ask my colleagues, are they serious or not? Three weeks ago, they already wanted an election to be called. I know they're not serious about this. Mr. Bains came here in good faith. He's a private citizen who has no connection with SDTC other than the fact that, when he was minister, he signed the contribution agreement. He has, however, never taken part in SDTC's day-to-day decisions. This is a fact, but one that they refuse to hear. The witness has repeatedly tried to explain that, not only to this committee, but also to the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology.

I don't know whether it's because the opposition needed a break over the summer, but no question of privilege was raised, even though Mr. Bains gave the same testimony he is giving here today, with many interruptions from opposition members. It didn't seem important to raise this question of privilege. My colleague Ms. Khalid defined the problem quite well: It has nothing to do with a question of privilege. It's simply a matter of giving the official opposition another opportunity to ensure all work at the House grinds to a halt.

I was elected in September 2021 to work here, not to filibuster. I was elected to represent my fellow citizens. Multiple reports have been submitted by the Auditor General and we seem to be at a standstill due to one report. We know full well that there have been other studies by other committees. Right now, we're wondering whether a witness gave the answers the opposition wanted to hear. It's not a question of privilege.

This is appalling. If we had done this before June, I could have understood. I fully agree with the official opposition for inviting Mr. Bains to appear before the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology. However, since all committee members received the letter from the RCMP Commissioner, which we have here today, everyone knows full well that what we're doing may impact the RCMP investigation.

If we really want to look at this issue, we have to take a different approach. Whether we agree with Mr. Bain's testimony or not, it's not up to us to judge. Mr. Bains accepted the order and came to testify before committee, but the opposition members decided to interrupt him because he wasn't saying what they wanted to hear. They had heard the same thing in June, but since then, the RCMP Commissioner has written to this committee and made it clear to committee members that what they were doing was potentially impacting the RCMP investigation. I have a problem with what the opposition is doing.

This isn't a banana republic. Wake up.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: It's a banana monarchy.

Mr. Francis Drouin: On two occasions, Quebec said it wanted to remain in Canada. It's time to move on.

These institutions are being treated as if this were a banana republic. There's no awareness of the fact that our actions may impact one or more investigations. The committee's actions can have consequences, and that's unacceptable.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's not relevant at all.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: I know Mr. Perkins doesn't like to hear the truth, but at some point, he needs to listen, to hear what's happening here, to hear what the RCMP is telling him, to hear what the Auditor General is telling him, and perhaps, at some point, he'll catch on.

● (2000)

Currently, we may be influencing an investigation that the official opposition has been complaining about for months. For the past week and a half, it's been totally obstructing the business of the House.

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, the member is debating what's going on in the House, not my motion here. I ask that you keep him to the point of privilege before us.

The Chair: Yes. I'm getting there.

Mr. Drouin, you are beginning to repeat yourself, not only in this round but also your previous round. I remind you as well.... Let's talk about that letter quickly. That letter responds to—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I don't think it's up to you to defend what the letter is or not.

The Chair: It is relevant. The letter, which we've all seen, is about the production of documents.

I go back to you, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It's on SDTC, so it's absolutely relevant to what we are doing here, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's not relevant to the motion, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It is absolutely relevant to what we are doing here, the fact that we are questioning the testimony of a witness who was previously questioned by the same Mr. Perkins—maybe it's the “other Rick Perkins” from the INDU committee—but it's the same person. I have the testimony. In fact, I'm going to read it into the record because I think it's important that we are made aware of what Mr. Perkins asked. You'll see they are the same questions—

The Chair: No. That, actually, is not in order. Each committee is independent. The business that happens in one—hold on—committee can be picked up by another, but we're completely independent here. What happens in another hall has no bearing on the work of this committee if members choose to go in a certain direction.

Ms. Khalid, you have a point of order.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm sorry, Chair, but I absolutely disagree with you. I think that what happens in other committees, especially when there's so much redundancy of the work that is being done in multiple committees, absolutely has bearing.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, that is your opinion, but—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Everything is in Hansard. It is on the record. We are able to work and share information between committees. Everything gets reported to the House of Commons, and we vote on things in the House of Commons. Of course all of our committees are interconnected and have relevancy.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, that is not a point of order. On top of that, your voting record does not reflect what you just said. You voted for this committee to go in this direction.

Go ahead, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I have a point of order. Just for clarification, Chair, I agree, as a matter of redundancy, that it doesn't make sense to refer to another committee's proceedings because we are the masters of our own committee. I completely hear what you're saying.

However, on the core question of whether it's appropriate to bring a privilege motion when a witness hasn't fully answered a question or hasn't answered a question to our satisfaction—because my argument is certainly that this is a terrible precedent, and any number of witnesses could be accused of breaching our privilege because we don't like the answer to a question—every single parliamentary transcript of a committee is relevant for that reason if we're pointing to other answers that we might deem inadequate or that the member asking the question doesn't happen to like.

The Chair: No, we're dealing with testimony that happened in this committee.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: No, Chair, it's a question of relevancy. Our argument—my argument, certainly—is that this is a terrible precedent to set. On the basis of that, every other parliamentary transcript in which I can point to an answer that I don't like or that I think is insufficient or that the member asking the question deems to be insufficient for some reason, is relevant to the core question of this being a bad precedent to set.

The Chair: If I allow it, it's just going to reinforce, according to Mr. Drouin, that Mr. Perkins has actually given the witness opportunities, twice now, to answer the questions, but he has not, perhaps making his motion even more relevant.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Or you'll hear him answer the question and say, "I don't recall," as he did multiple times.

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, this a point of debate. It's not a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith, you're down to to speak in three slots.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor again, please.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The point is that we have the same questioner who asked the same witness at another committee.... It is relevant to this committee because that same witness called him.... I'm sorry, but he mentioned the word "amnesia" multiple times when referring to that particular witness.

• (2005)

The Chair: You are making his point that the witness was given multiple opportunities to answer these questions but has not done so to parliamentarians and is, therefore, subject to this motion. You are making his point that the witness keeps flouting these parliamentary committees—not one but two now.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Francis Drouin: No. They are accusations. Mr. Chair, I'm happy to have a debate with you.

The Chair: Witnesses can clear the air by answering the questions.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I thought I was having a debate with the opposition.

If you want to let go of your chair and join Mr. Cooper—

The Chair: No. I've made a ruling—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Madame Sinclair-Desgagné will be in your chair, and we can both argue over here.

The Chair: I've made a ruling that reading the testimony from another committee is out of order.

You have the floor to debate this.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm sorry. Pardon...? Is reading evidence, no matter where it comes from, out of order in this committee?

The Chair: I didn't say that. I said what you're referencing right now.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Why is it out of order?

The Chair: It's out of order, because it's redundant and you're reading it.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It's not redundant. It's the point. He's making the same accusation to the same witness as to the reason why he was here. He appeared before another committee, asked the same question and treated him as if he had memory loss.

Is that the way we are to treat committee members, or witnesses, in front of this committee?

The Chair: Again, don't you see you're reinforcing his point?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: No, absolutely not.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I'm sure Mr. Perkins is capable of making his own arguments, but if you want to argue on Mr. Perkins' behalf, I would ask that Madame Sinclair-Desgagné occupy the chair, and you and I can have this debate here.

The Chair: Again, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: No, but you keep interrupting me.

The Chair: Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

On that note—

[English]

The Chair: No. You're not going to read in the record to filibuster lines and lines. You can refer to notes and you can talk at this committee until you're blue in the face and it's four in the morning, but you're not going to read from another committee that has nothing to do with this question.

If you insist, I'll move on to the next person on the list, and you can come back later.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I won't read into the record. I'll just paraphrase, Mr. Chair.

Am I allowed to paraphrase in this committee?

The Chair: Of course.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Therefore, Mr. Perkins has referred to the previous witness. The reason for the motion in question and why we're here right now debating this particular question of privilege is the fact that Mr. Bains suffers from amnesia. I'm hoping that perhaps Mr. Perkins is a doctor. Perhaps he's had medical advice. Perhaps he's providing medical advice to witnesses now.

However, we can see from the laughter on the other side that there is no seriousness on this particular issue. All they want to do is interrupt the business of this committee and the House. They'll put it on Russian Rebel News. I'm glad to fundraise for you, Mr. Perkins, but some of us are here to be serious.

[Translation]

I'm going to take a step back, because I find my colleagues opposite—

[English]

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Go ahead, guys. Do you want to talk? Just go ahead. I'll just wait for five seconds.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, the floor is yours. I don't think you're yielding.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm just waiting for them to stop interrupting.

Are they done?

The Chair: I believe so.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I fully understand that my words anger the official opposition, since it doesn't like to hear the truth. However, I sincerely believe that the journey we're embarking now on is an embarrassment to our committee, which has always operated in a non-partisan manner.

The credibility of a witness is now being called into question. I know people will say that what happened in another committee doesn't count, but it's important to understand that it's the same two people who asked the questions and received the answers. That's why it's important to know what happened in this committee.

I find it disturbing that there is no interest whatsoever in what happened at Sustainable Development Technology Canada or SDTC. What I find most disappointing is that the Bloc Québécois and the NDP are joining the coalition led by Pierre Poilievre.

We tabled a motion to validate the report of the Auditor General of Canada. However, we can't debate it, since a question of privilege was tabled immediately. What a nice surprise! I find that disappointing. I'm disappointed in my colleagues.

I'm now going to give someone else the floor, Mr. Chair.

I've read the transcript of the testimony given before the other committee, and I'd like to say that I was hoping that Mr. Bains would get a different reception. He has appeared twice, but the opposition members asked him the exact same questions.

I'd hoped that we could have a debate and a conversation amongst adults, but that's certainly not the case. I'm disappointed.

Thank you very much.

• (2010)

[English]

The Chair: I had Ms. Bradford and....

Ms. Khalid, you kind of yielded your spot. Would you like to speak now?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, I was just wondering who is on the list currently.

The Chair: I have Ms. Khalid, Ms. Bradford, Mr. Erskine-Smith, Mr. Desjarlais and Mr. Genuis.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, I'm sure this is unconventional, but would it be viable for me to yield my time to Mr. Desjarlais and then perhaps come back after him?

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and colleagues.

Wow. I haven't seen such a thing in a long time in this public accounts committee. I think there are a few of us who are original members of our 44th Parliament on this committee, and we remember that we were able to do quite a substantial amount of work. Our analysts remember this and our clerk, I'm sure. This has obviously become an impasse on a very serious issue and one I sympathize with in both cases.

To Mr. Perkins, I understand the very relevant frustration you deeply feel with the fact that Mr. Bains has failed to answer questions whether in INDU, the other committee that was mentioned, or here. I feel that frustration as well. It was very obvious to me that we had a very limited amount of time. That's a concern that, I'm sure the Liberals, Conservatives and the Bloc can all agree on. The limited time obviously frustrates our ability to understand the testimony of Mr. Bains. I also agree that it's extraordinary to report this to the House.

There has to be some position, if we are to be adults in the room and if we want to take this issue very seriously. I take it very seriously. I think Canadians do. They want to know that they don't have to suffer through Mr. Drouin's continuous conversation, blaming and trying to find every which way to assume someone's character. I'll forgive him for that, because I'm sure he's obviously frustrated with this as well.

It's the same with Ms. Khalid. I'm sure you're both very frustrated with this circumstance. It's unfortunate, and you're just doing your jobs. I get it. The Conservatives, I understand, are just doing their job as well, but we have to find a way to get to a place where we can all agree that Mr. Bains must testify to the questions that are still outstanding.

That's the most credible point I've heard in this very long, exacerbated debate this evening about privilege. I do think that there's a way we can find accommodation if our colleagues are interested. We may entertain the idea that we resubmit Mr. Bains and bring him back to this committee. To the Conservatives' point—because I understand that trust is largely broken, and I would agree with it—maybe we can bring him back, and if at that time he doesn't answer the questions, then we can refer this under this motion to the House.

I think that's a reasonable process and a reasonable step to take, because I certainly couldn't get through all my questions and that frustrates me. I had one round. I even mentioned that I could only get one round of questions in, and I wasn't able to get the substantial answers that I was hoping for.

I want to be able to balance these two obviously important facts.

Yes, the Conservatives are right. To my Liberal colleagues, they are right when they're saying that their questions aren't being answered, because my questions weren't answered either. I get that. It's brutal that we can't get to the bottom of what is a real issue of accountability, which was present to the Auditor General. I read from the Auditor General's report questions to him that he wouldn't answer.

I also understand what the Liberals are saying. One hour of discussion should not end up being referred to the House as something to admonish the guy—which is something that's only been done twice in Canadian history and is an extraordinary process—because of the fact that there's an election coming up and there's a desire to see polarization. I get that. I'm a politician too. I understand partisanship.

What I don't like is when that partisanship gets so extreme that the truth is going to be confiscated for everyone. The truth will be gone for everyone here, as will the opportunity for Canadians to get down to the bottom of this issue and to understand SDTC and Minister Bains, who was the minister responsible at that time, and how this all happened. I think most Canadians believe that politicians are reasonable people if given the opportunity to see each other's points of view.

I'd ask my colleagues if there is a way we can come to a consensus on this. I propose that perhaps Mr. Perkins amend his privilege motion to include an opportunity to invite Mr. Bains back under very serious consequences if he fails, as he did today, to give us the answers and the appropriate amount of time we need as parliamentarians to get to the bottom of this very serious issue that is present to Canadians.

• (2015)

We're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars. We're talking about a report from the Auditor General that I'm interested in getting to the bottom of, which is why I've entertained this discussion for as long as I have. I want to understand deeply the concerns that all of my colleagues have.

I've heard, I think, an exhaustive list of these concerns, and I think that we can all get to what we want here. I want fiscal accountability and transparency and I want answers that are present to the Auditor General and present to Canadians. That deserves to happen. However, I also don't want to lose sight of the goal here, which is to have answers, instead of becoming a very partisan arena where we would lose all of the opportunity to get that information. Therefore, I'm inclined to suggest that we do a process here, one in which everybody still gets what they need—Mr. Perkins will get what he needs—under the circumstance of inviting Mr. Bains back here.

We can invite him back here, Mr. Chair, for two hours, a full meeting. I am disappointed that he only came for one hour. I find that frustrating and an issue for me. I have at least six more questions, and you know that as an NDP member here, I only get two minutes afterwards, so one round isn't going to be enough for me. It's not going to be enough for the New Democrats, who feel that we have a unique perspective on this issue because we take financial accountability seriously, regardless of who is in government. We need to get system answers on this. Mr. Bains is a subject to this work, this investigation and this study. He should come back. Let's invite him back.

With regard to Mr. Perkins' point and to my Conservative colleagues' point, I agree with their frustration because it's true that they've asked good questions and haven't had good answers. What we can do here, if we can come to unanimous consent, is invite Mr. Bains back. We've done this before. You might remember, Mr.

Chair, that we've done this before. We've said to witnesses that if you don't come at a reasonable time, spend the necessary amount of time and answer our questions, we will report this to the House, and we'll use the powers that we have to get the answers that we must have.

I think that's what Canadians expect. I think Canadians largely want that. They don't want to have to suffer through what the Liberals have been doing here in this large filibuster, blaming everybody, saying, "Oh, the Bloc Québécois are evil. The New Democrats are evil. You're all evil," as Mr. Drouin has suggested over and over.

I hope that is a reasonable path forward that we can take, Mr. Chair. I would seek your will to see that convention practised and to take the step necessary to invite him back, and that if he doesn't come, we send a strongly worded letter that suggests that if he doesn't come, we will do this.

Liberal colleagues, you must agree that if we give you this opportunity to support Mr. Bains' coming back to this place and if he does again fail to give us the answers necessary, it would be incumbent upon you to vote in favour of this breach of privilege motion, because that would be the right thing to do, given this opportunity. I think it's fair and just, and I think it's a reasonable position for all of us.

The alternative, of course, is that we continue on with the Liberal filibuster and get no answers at all. That doesn't serve anyone, other than partisan interests.

I suggest that solution, Mr. Chair, and I hope that my colleagues can understand where I'm coming from on this and can see it as an offer of goodwill.

• (2020)

The Chair: I want to see if there's any goodwill on this. Usually that happens, as you know, off-line, so I'm going to suspend for about five minutes, please. Then we'll come right back here.

This meeting is suspended.

• (2020)

(Pause)

• (2030)

The Chair: I'll bring this meeting back to order.

I'm going to recognize Mr. Desjarlais once again. I'll give him a few more seconds.

You have the floor, sir.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your grace.

I also appreciate our ability to take the time necessary to come to a position where we can best reflect the desire of Canadians, which is to ensure that Mr. Bains is present for this committee and answers the questions presented by all members, including my colleague Mr. Perkins, who made a very credible point of privilege. I think this is a very fair and balanced approach.

To my Liberal colleagues, I believe your requirement is satisfied within this agreement as well. It dispenses, in some way or form, with the prior motion in exchange for this new motion, which I hope we can adopt by unanimous consent.

The clerk has a copy. I wish to read it into the record, if I may.

I move:

That the committee instruct the clerk and analysts to immediately prepare a report to the House, which the Chair shall table forthwith after 14 days have elapsed since the adoption of the motion, outlining the potential breach of privilege concerning Navdeep Bains' refusal to answer certain questions which the committee put to him and his prevarication in answering others, provided that the Chair will not report to the House if Mr. Bains returns to the committee within 14 days and the committee agrees that he has answered the questions to its satisfaction.

● (2035)

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais is seeking unanimous consent to replace the motion Mr. Perkins put forward with this motion.

Do I have unanimous consent to make that change? Then we can open debate on it.

Wait one second.

Before we hear comments, I need to seek UC. I could hear a point of order, but I'm the—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: There you go. Why not?

Chair, I would like to see the language of this motion. I would also like to seek clarity on how privilege motions get replaced with other motions before I give UC for anything.

The Chair: The email has been sent to you with the wording. When you're ready....

Perhaps I wasn't clear. This motion Mr. Desjarlais is proposing effectively swaps the original motion Mr. Perkins tabled with this new language that provides a window of opportunity for Mr. Bains to come back for two hours.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: It would need UC to adopt the motion.

The Chair: Well, we can do it one of two ways.

We could adopt it by unanimous consent right now. I was taking the more gentle route whereby we replace it. Hopefully, if we get that, we'll get it afterwards.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: As long as it satisfies—

The Chair: I'm trying to work with the government members here.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Yes, I understand. I'm sorry.

The Chair: I don't want to feel like I'm hitting out with a fire-hose and they won't have a chance to weigh in on the motion.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I would like to seek some clarity.

In my nine years as a member of Parliament, I've never seen any chair seeking UC to replace one motion with another. Do we need UC to procedurally withdraw the initial motion and then present a new one? I would seek clarity from the clerk on this, based on the green book and how things are done in Parliament.

The Chair: I'll double-check and tell you what I have experienced. I will then turn to the clerk to ratify this approach.

In the past, the committee itself has adopted this approach. Committees, of course, are masters of their domain. We have both the privilege and the right, through unanimous consent—that would be all of us—to replace the motion. Mr. Perkins cannot just withdraw his motion. This is a way we found that expedites the process to undo what has been done and replace it with what Mr. Desjarlais is proposing here. I mentioned this to the clerk. I'm going to make sure that I am correct about that. This is meant to move us forward together.

Wait one second.

I'll answer Ms. Khalid.

Yes, with unanimous consent, without opposition, we can replace Mr. Perkins' motion with the motion Mr. Desjarlais put forward. Then we can speak to it as well.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Just so I'm clear, we're replacing a question of privilege motion with another question of privilege motion.

● (2040)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: No. It's unanimous consent.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That's the ultimate impact of what we're doing: We would replace one question of privilege motion with another question of privilege.

The Chair: Yes, it would, with the caveat that the minister would come back, so the short answer is yes.

An hon. member: That's what it says.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That's not what it says at all.

The Chair: Why don't we suspend for another five minutes?

Members can.... There's some reluctance here.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: What's the question?

You have, like, a hundred people here.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, are we sitting or suspended, Chair?

The Chair: I will suspend for five minutes.

● (2040)

(Pause)

● (2040)

The Chair: Let's bring this meeting back to order.

I'm going to go back to Mr. Desjarlais to speak to his unanimous consent motion. I'll hear a few points of order and then I'll have to call the vote.

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor.

• (2045)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's the government's opinion. With the government members, my Liberal colleagues, we found difficulty trying to get unanimous consent on this, which is a very large offer for what Canadians expect. People—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: No, they don't.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Now they're laughing because they don't take this issue seriously. Ms. Khalid and Mr. Drouin do not take this issue seriously. It's clear to me that they don't, which is very disappointing.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I take it very seriously.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: She's still heckling, even though she asks everyone else—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm going to shut up.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I'm trying to be very reasonable. I even went to Ms. Khalid and Mr. Drouin, Liberal members, with an offer in order to try to bridge the gap, which I mentioned before.

Please recognize that the Conservative member, Mr. Perkins, is claiming a breach of privilege. He's one of our colleagues. I'm saying I sympathize with that, because as an MP, I wasn't even able to answer. He wasn't able to answer. I had one round. He couldn't answer the question. If Mr. Drouin or Ms. Khalid had that happen to them, then maybe this would be taken more seriously.

I'm going to ask one more time: What can we do to get unanimous consent on these two positions, one being the fact that Mr. Bains is failing to answer questions in the committee? I believe the most reasonable step forward is to invite Mr. Bains back to this committee for two hours, have him speak to our questions and hopefully answer our questions. If he doesn't answer our questions, as in what happened today, then Mr. Perkins' privilege motion will then continue.

I really think that if we can't come to a conclusion on this and if we can't get to a compromise in exchange for whatever opinion the Liberals have, it's not going to work. It's going to jeopardize the opportunity for co-operation.

The Liberals just finished having a giant filibuster about how they want to co-operate and how hard all this is, calling us a big coalition, because for some reason no one's listening to them, even though I've put directly into this unanimous consent motion some of the requirements and some of the issues the Liberals want.

This is a democracy. You can't just get everything you want just because you want it. You have to work with other people. You have to learn to work with other people. This is why so many issues are present. It's because of this very narrow approach by Liberals to have this extreme level of caution and risk, even when dealing with serious matters raised by the Auditor General.

Forgive me, Chair, if my frustration is demonstrated at this moment, because it is a very earnest, honest proposition that I'm making here. He has 14 days to come to this committee and answer questions for two hours, and to the Liberals' point—even to Mr. Erskine-Smith's point about how the Speaker is just going to dismiss this anyway—what better evidence is there to dismiss a privilege motion like this if Mr. Bains comes back to the committee for two hours?

Please. Canadians really need us to maybe put our egos aside for a second and just come to a realization that it is the right of parliamentarians to ask questions and get answers. I'm offering Mr. Bains an opportunity, which is what the Liberals want, to not refer this to the House until such time that Mr. Bains is given an opportunity to come back to the committee and answer the questions, and then this will all be over.

There needs to be at least some semblance of trust. I hope that my goodwill here can demonstrate that if 14 days go by and Mr. Bains is present here and he answers all of our questions, you would know where I stand on this.

The alternative, of course, is we dispose of my intervention and just toss away the opportunity of consensus we've come to now and move forward with what I perceive.... I'd be forced to have to vote with Mr. Perkins, because he's raising a credible issue that I have experienced in this committee.

• (2050)

I understand what he's saying when I get one round to ask one question of the former minister responsible for SDTC, after the Auditor General has found credible governance issues and a lack of public stewardship. I read that at the beginning of my question.

Who's not taking this seriously? I begin to question that.

Please, let's put our egos aside—particularly my Liberal colleagues. I understand what you're saying when you say you're scared of Mr. Bains being referred to the House and being admonished. That's not going to happen—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Not at all.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Now they are trying to interject again.

Ms. Khalid, please, I've spent three hours listening to you. I'm asking for five minutes. I can't believe how quickly you've dismissed this opportunity for co-operation, Ms. Khalid and Mr. Drouin. Instead, you're angry. You're still mumbling under your breath because it's frustrating for you. I get that. I want you to know I understand that.

Now you're having a conversation. Sure.

Please understand that if you want this to go away, Mr. Bains must come back to this committee. That's what I'm offering.

Your attitude right now is so disappointing to me. You're taking such an aggressive approach avoid your colleagues questioning the former minister of SDTC. If this were the other way around and the Conservatives were in government, I'm certain you'd be questioning the same things. You'd even be asking why we can't summon Harper.

Please have some consideration for the fact that multiple opinions matter here. The truth matters here. We can get to some of that truth by inviting the former minister of SDTC. I have questions for him. I have six questions. I was only able to ask one. I think it's only reasonable that I get an opportunity to ask him the remainder of my questions for two hours here.

I recognize the Liberals' concern about reporting this to the House before the opportunity is presented to Mr. Bains. I'm telling you that I understand that. That's why the motion is written the way it is. It's so that we can get support from our Conservative colleagues, who do not trust that Mr. Bains has given them good answers. That is a breach of privilege and should be referred to the House, but until that issue is more credibly established, which I don't necessarily believe has happened.... If that's our only option and the Liberals are telling me my only option is to just say to Mr. Bains that he is free to go and we don't have any more questions, that's not the truth either. We're between a rock and a hard place.

As a member of this committee, either I'm supposed to accept that Canadians are never, ever going to get their answers to my questions, or there will be this giant sword that will force me to admonish him. I don't agree with either of the positions that either of the major parties have, which is why I'm suggesting we can come to a compromise. I really hope that's enough to motivate my Liberal colleagues.

The most important piece in Mr. Erskine-Smith's point is that even if we vote on a breach of privilege and this goes to the Speaker, he may dismiss it, so what better evidence is there to dismiss that than having Mr. Bains come here and answer our questions? That is the most reasonable path forward. It may be the only path forward.

I really implore my colleagues, particularly my Liberal colleagues, to set aside the deep partisan selfishness, which is what I think my Conservative colleagues have done here in order to give an opportunity to Mr. Bains. I'm sorry that this is frustrating for members here. I know it sucks to not always get what you want, but you have to learn to work together.

● (2055)

The Chair: In a moment I'll look for points of order, comments or queries on this.

As I try to guide this discussion and find resolution, I will point out two items.

Mr. Desjarlais has proven himself on this committee. His word has been trustworthy. I've found that to be the case, which is why I think I work well with him. He stands behind what he says.

This is important for two reasons. He raises the point that not only is there the threshold that he has—and again, Mr. Desjarlais won't be looking for the answers he wants to hear—but that he'll be

looking for answers that he views as being credible. We don't often hear the answers we want to hear, but we do judge witnesses by how they answer, the words they use and their general posture. While witnesses might not always be forthcoming for some reason—maybe they don't remember—you do get a sense of that. I think Mr. Desjarlais often judges that as he questions witnesses.

The other thing—and I think this is a very valid point that he raises—is that should Mr. Bains come forward here and, let's say, Mr. Desjarlais was subbed out for someone who might not have his view, then the Speaker would then have a very strong case to say there's nothing here.

I think Mr. Desjarlais has made some very good points, but that's just me trying to guide this to a resolution.

Like many of you, I've been in committees in which filibusters have gone on for days. I hope that won't happen here. This does buy some time, I think, for the committee to bring back Mr. Bains and to hear from him in hopefully a more forthcoming and credible manner.

I'll look for some points of order, which is a bit unconventional—

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Maybe it's more of a point of clarification. I appreciate what Blake's trying to do. I agree that if the goal is to have Mr. Bains attend again within 14 days for one to two hours—I couldn't care less, but two hours—and then determine after those two hours whether his answers are sufficient and whether we're going to go around this merry-go-round again in terms of a privilege motion, I'm actually perfectly okay with that. However, there are a couple problems with the motion, as I see it, if we're going to get to that goal.

Number one is that it speaks the language of prevarication, which is to lie, to deliberately mislead or avoid the truth. That is pejorative in a motion like this when we're stipulating that he lied while attending today, which I think is inappropriate if we're trying to find some consensus.

The second part is that it says the committee would not report back to the House if the “committee agrees that he has answered the questions to its satisfaction”.

Here is the point of clarification that I genuinely don't know the answer to.

How do we determine that? Is it another full conversation like this, and there's a vote? Is it as long not one member says it's not to their satisfaction? Chair, you just said “credible”. “Credible” and “satisfactory” are two different things.

Again, if the goal is to bring Mr. Bains back within 14 days, have him answer questions for another two hours—although that's over and above the original two-hour allotment that we were getting, but fine—it would make more sense to me that we would simply agree to revisit the question of a privilege motion after the fact. We would have this full debate all over again, as opposed to trying to word-smith a motion to say whether it's not to our satisfaction.

Could someone clarify for me what it means for it not to be to the committee's satisfaction? Is that a vote that we would take? Is that a number of members?

Can someone clarify that for me? Maybe we're closer on this than I think.

The Chair: I would view it as a vote by the committee.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Is there a further debate before that vote?

The Chair: We could have that discussion, sure.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: If it's just an up or down vote and we've passed this motion that it's to our satisfaction, to someone's satisfaction or to another's.... It's obviously not to Mr. Perkins' satisfaction to hear "I don't recall", even though I think that's not even close to a breach of privilege.

These are different standards we're dealing with, which I think we ought to be clear on.

I'm perfectly happy if the goal is to come back and have a full-on debate after he's testified for two hours as to whether there's a breach of privilege. We can have at it all over again. So be it. However, I think the language of this motion as it is right now goes a bit further than that. Maybe we can amend it down to something that lets us get to where I think we all agree we need to go.

• (2100)

The Chair: Sure.

To answer that question, I would view it as, yes, obviously a debate with a vote at the end. It would not be up to one member—far from it.

I have a couple of hands up. I think it was Mr. Genuis next and then Mr. Drouin.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I guess the goal is to get unanimous consent on what Mr. Desjarlais has put forward. Maybe we'll still get that.

To Mr. Erskine-Smith's questions, I don't mean to be pedantic or to unnecessarily quote the *The Princess Bride*. With respect to "prevaricate", I don't think that word means what you think it means. The dictionary definition of "prevaricate" is "to speak or act in an evasive way"; it's not to lie. It's to be evasive.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: It's "the deliberate act of deviating from the truth". That's the.... Come on, Garnett.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I just googled the definition, and it provided me with an Oxford definition, which is consistent with my own experience of the word, which says to "speak or act in an evasive way".

Again, *The Princess Bride* aside, I think we can at least understand the term in the way it's used in that dictionary if it doesn't conform with the dictionary you maintain, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Beyond that—

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: It's the Merriam-Webster. It's to fabricate.... I mean, come on. They're synonyms.

What are we talking about, Garnett?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Maybe we should take this off-line.

The Chair: All right. Is there a point you want to make, or should I go to Mr. Drouin?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: To the more important point, the latter part of the motion that Mr. Desjarlais put forward refers to an agreement of the committee. I think that's fairly clear.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, I believe you had a point of order.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Again, we're talking about something that may be debatable but may not be debatable.

I appreciate what Mr. Desjarlais is putting forward. I want to assure him that my intention and Mr. Erskine-Smith's intention.... We're not running again. We don't give two.... I can't say the word, but I don't care about re-election. I'm just here for work, and I just want to make sure that we're following due process.

My intentions are definitely not partisan. I want to make sure, in the motion that you have presented—and I just want to reread the words—that we are talking about a motion on a question of privilege.

When you include the words "outlining the potential breach of privilege", then we are dealing with a question of privilege. Whether we give unanimous consent to remove Mr. Perkins' motion so that you can reintroduce your question of privilege motion because it presupposes that perhaps we may not be satisfied with Mr. Bains' answers, then of course I do have an issue, because we're presupposing something, and we're....

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: We don't [*Inaudible—Editor*] the Speaker does.

I'm giving you evidence for the Speaker.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The point is that we've made those arguments. These guys have no interest in understanding the Speaker's ruling. They're filibustering their own motion in the House, and everything's stalled to a halt. We care about what goes to the House and what doesn't go back to the House.

I also care about private citizens coming before this committee, and when we treat them as liars before the investigation, before we're even done analyzing this study, how the heck are we supposed to make sure that this analysis is done properly? Who is the judge?

Some hon. members: It's the Speaker.

Mr. Francis Drouin: No, the Speaker will not be able to rule whether Mr. Bains....

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: He will be able to rule whether or not we have a breach of privilege.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Is this a debate or a conversation...?

The Chair: It's a bit of an informal point of order conversation.

Mr. Francis Drouin: We don't mind inviting Mr. Bains to committee, but there's also....

Mr. Desjarlais, you said you had six specific questions. I'm sure you can write those questions, or the committee can write those questions to Mr. Bains, and I'm sure we can ask him to write back to the committee.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Okay, just hold on.

Ms. Khalid has a brief point of order. I just want to hear it—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Why? There's no UC. The question was whether there is UC.

The Chair: —because sometimes these come together, and sometimes they don't.

Ms. Khalid, you had a point of order you wanted to raise.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Actually, Chair, I see that Mr. Genuis has one, so I'm willing to yield the floor, as long as it comes back to me at some point.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: As a matter of order, where are we procedurally?

Mr. Desjarlais has sought unanimous consent on something. Fundamentally, it seems like there isn't unanimous consent. Can we see if there's unanimous consent? If there's not unanimous consent, then we're debating the motion.

I suspect that the Liberals are trying to use this moment of procedural ambiguity to simply delay. If they want to filibuster, they can filibuster, but they have to do the hard work of filibustering. They're either agreeing to this UC motion or they have to do the hard work of filibustering. It's got to be one or the other, and I think that's how we should proceed.

• (2105)

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, the last point of order is to you. I will then call the question.

Mr. Genuis said it. We are seeking UC. We're in that process right now.

Ms. Khalid, go ahead on your point of order.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

Speaking to that UC, my colleagues have raised very important questions as to the language that is being proposed here. I want to reassure Mr. Desjarlais that none of us are here with any nefarious thoughts or intentions. We are here to do the work of this committee, and the language of the motion presupposes the work we're trying to do.

I take exception to being accused of trying to hold things up, when I know what is happening in the House of Commons and I know what is happening on the floor.

Mr. Rick Perkins: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm making a point, Mr. Perkins, I promise you.

Mr. Rick Perkins: There's no unanimous consent. Let's move on.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: There is no unanimous consent—

Mr. Rick Perkins: She just said it.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: —but I do want to find a way forward.

We're looking at this motion here. If there is goodwill—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. There is no unanimous consent, so it's on the amendment, and she has to speak to the amendment.

The Chair: Yes, I am getting that sense from both sides. There's no unanimous consent.

Mr. Desjarlais, the floor is yours again, to either debate Mr. Perkins' motion or to make amendments to it.

I have you on the list already, Ms. Khalid.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Can I be added to the list?

The Chair: Do you want to come back?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Yes, I'll come right back to where you are.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks very much, Chair.

As I was saying before, the language of the replacement motion that Mr. Desjarlais proposed—which was defeated, obviously—didn't address the challenges and issues that our committee members raised today. I think better language would be to give UC to withdraw this privilege motion completely and replace it with another motion that summons the witness in question within 14 days. Then, if members don't get their questions answered, we can decide the next steps.

I think that is the most reasonable proposition we can make. It would get all members' wishes and intentions met. Failing that, what is before us right now is a fishing expedition, or a witch hunt on a private citizen, which we've seen again and again.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's repetition.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have never said that before, Mr. Perkins.

This does not help us get to the bottom of what we're trying to do.

Absolutely, we have concerns about what happened at SDTC. Absolutely, we have concerns about trying to recover the monies that were misspent. Absolutely, the minister took action to try to get to where we need to be. Absolutely, our committee has a role to play in all of this. Is that role bringing a privilege motion before the House or this committee? It absolutely is not. That is partisanship to the nth degree and does not solve anything for anyone.

I would be more than willing to have the Conservatives withdraw their motion. I would be the first to propose a motion to bring in the witness again within 14 days, and then decide where we go from there.

As Mr. Drouin said, no committee member is precluded from writing to a witness when questions are not answered or when they feel questions have not been answered. Mr. Chair, I've heard you ask this many times of many witnesses: "If questions are not answered, can we write questions to you and then have you give us a written answer?"

Throughout this whole evening, as we've gone through this process, we discovered this privilege motion was drafted before the witness was able to answer all of the questions. The witness was not given the opportunity to answer all of the questions. The questions had not been posed to the witness. Mr. Chair, I know you usually do this. I know how difficult a meeting today has been, but the witness was not asked to respond to written questions.

What we've seen here is a consistent, deliberate approach—oh, my dad's calling—to delay. It's what's happening in the House of Commons, which is already stalled and delayed. Let's not do that in this committee, Mr. Chair. We have such important work to do here. This is not it. There are so many procedural ways around this.

I understand and appreciate that members may think their pretentious motions are the solution and they are the Messiah for how things are going to get resolved. They absolutely are not. Mr. Chair, at your discretion, you have the ability to get the answers these members need, whether it's bringing back the witness or sending questions in writing to the witness to ask for those answers. I'm not sure why we went from zero to 100 within the span of two or three minutes of the witness trying to answer questions and being consistently cut off.

Mr. Chair, at your discretion, I would propose, in quite a friendly manner, that we suspend for the evening, have cool showers, have discussions with each other and figure out the way forward.

• (2110)

That includes you, Chair, because I think it is your discretion to be able to get to the answers that committee members are looking for. This is not the way that we get answers. This is absolutely not the way.

If members wanted to submit in writing whatever questions they have that they feel have not been answered, they can tell you, Chair, and through the clerk, we can send those questions off to the witness, as we have done numerous times in the past.

I will park my comments there, Chair. I believe Mr. Drouin is on the list as well, but I will leave my two cents here for you, Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: I have a few members on the list.

Ms. Bradford, we've kind of moved things around. You were on the list some time ago. Would you like to speak to this, or should I go over to Mr. Erskine-Smith?

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Go to the next one. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith, you have the floor, and then I have Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thanks very much.

It is not at all apparent to me, given the testimony we heard and the high threshold for a breach of privilege and the weaponization of process we currently see in the House, why the compromise isn't to invite Mr. Bains back with a summons to appear for an additional two hours and to then reconsider the question of privilege, which I'm more than happy to do.

I would note that this is important, because we just went through this at the committee last week, when Mr. Ouimet was at the committee. Mr. Perkins was asking questions and said:

...in your statement to the Ethics Commissioner and in other board director testimony before this committee, we found that there was a process, I think, when you were about to consider an investment. The process was this. A few weeks beforehand, board members would get a list of investments that were being considered. Board members would let the—

—and he went on:

Were you, the board members, recusing yourselves or abstaining 82% of the time?

Mr. Ouimet said:

...allegations of conflict of interest were made against me last year. A detailed and complex investigation was completed by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. All these issues of administrative misconduct and recusals—

He was cut off at this point, and Mr. Perkins said:

Sorry, I have limited time, Mr. Ouimet.

That was not my question, Mr. Ouimet. I would appreciate that you stick to answering the question out of respect for members of Parliament.

My point is that based on that interaction, could we have had a privilege motion last week on that basis? Is this the threshold we are setting for breach of privilege motions at committee and in Parliament?

It is an absurdity to me. I appreciate the desire to find some consensus, but when people are actively acting in bad faith for partisan ends, you're not going to find unanimous consent on issues like this.

The reasonable path here is that I think we can find unanimous consent on asking Mr. Bains to come back and on summoning him back within 14 days for two hours. People can have at it and ask as many questions as they like. We can revisit a privilege motion if there is high-handed conduct by the witness in saying, "I'm refusing to answer questions," and completely sidestep accountability. So be it; revisit it, but we are nowhere close to that after less than an hour of testimony, given the number of interruptions and interventions.

It is incredibly frustrating, especially given the weaponization of process in the House right now, that we can't find a path to simply ask Mr. Bains to come back and then reconsider this as a committee in a reasonable manner.

• (2115)

The Chair: I'll speak to that briefly, Mr. Erskine-Smith, and then I'll turn things over to Mr. Drouin.

Don't just measure it from the official opposition. When you have all three opposition parties lined up, that's a signal that perhaps trust has been broken. I appreciate what you're saying, but I think, given this and previous interactions with Mr. Bains, that trust is broken. I think that's why we are where we are.

Your solution might have been worthwhile if we'd had this discussion a month ago or two months ago, but I watch these members to my left, and when they're all singing from the same songbook, that tells me something, and I think it tells the room something as well.

I'll turn to Mr. Drouin now. He has the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I didn't necessarily have something else to say. I had a question.

The Chair: I was just trying to be helpful in guiding it. I appreciate what he's saying, but I think it's clear that the Rubicon has been crossed.

Mr. Drouin, go ahead.

Mr. Francis Drouin: My issue is that we're putting the cart before the horse.

Clearly, from previous testimony, I've heard opposition members say that I don't believe you or I don't trust you or I don't believe the answers that we are given, but they don't have the evidence to suggest why they're not believing what the witness is saying. That is my issue. They have made some claims that Mr. Bains is not answering questions or they don't believe what he's saying, but I have failed to get any documentation to prove the point.

Now, as a committee, without having the full story of SDTC, we are going to make a decision as to whether or not Mr. Bains' testimony was truthful. Let's understand that the minister flies at 10,000 feet, but SDTC is at arm's length, not even close to the minister's office. We've heard that from multiple testimonies. The minister's office is not involved in the decision-making at SDTC. The only relationship that ISED has with SDTC is the contribution agreement that they've signed. That's it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I guess you don't [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Mr. Francis Drouin: Actually, I do, Mr. Perkins. I made a living out of it.

The contribution agreement was breached. It was breached by SDTC. That we agree on. There is currently a review by a third party to analyze all—

Mr. Rick Perkins: This is not related to the privilege motion.

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I call relevance. This is not related to the privilege motion.

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I want to thank Mr. Perkins. There's coffee over there if he's tired.

We're still ready to go, because we don't necessarily agree with the way that this has been presented before this committee.

I salute what Mr. Desjarlais has tried to do in trying to rally us, but it fails to get to the bottom of what we are trying to do. It was another question of privilege. We certainly don't agree that Mr. Bains' testimony was somehow not truthful to this committee.

I'll go back to why I say that. No one in the opposition has provided evidence to this committee as to why his testimony was not truthful, none of you, and if we are to make accusations that witnesses who come before this committee are not being truthful, then surely to God I would hope that those who are making those accusations would have evidence to provide to this committee.

The Chair: Hold on one second, Mr. Drouin.

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

Mr. Rick Perkins: My point of order is that he's referencing comments that have never been made by the members of this side, the entire opposition.

We've had provocation and unwillingness to answer questions. That's what we said. He should stick to the language instead of making stuff up.

• (2120)

The Chair: I'll nudge you back.

I don't think the issue is truthfulness. I think it's more evasiveness and an unwillingness to answer questions.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Again, Mr. Chair, I would challenge all members of Parliament to give me a date and an exact time of who they met exactly five years ago on October 9. Who did they meet exactly then, right at this committee? They don't know, obviously, and that's the type of question they're asking former Minister Bains.

We know for a fact that the minister's office was not involved in day-to-day operations, yet they still want to make that link, even though there's absolutely no evidence tracing SDTC all the way up to the minister's office. There's no evidence. The Auditor General report does not mention that at all. Nobody has mentioned that.

Now we're trying to bring to the cleaner a now private citizen who has served this country honourably. Are we trying to say that he was corrupt? That's the language the other side is using. Are they trying to say he's corrupt? Come on, guys—let's be reasonable.

I would have no issues—I think my colleague, Ms. Khalid, has referred to that—with inviting Mr. Bains back to the committee or having him respond to the questions that somehow some members of Parliament did not get the same time to ask, although we all get the same time to ask them. There are various ways they can do that.

[*Translation*]

It's now almost 9:30 p.m., and I think we're going around in circles. For our part, we don't agree that this is a question of privilege before we've even had a chance to fully question the witness, even though he may have been asked questions in another committee. I think we're going around in circles here.

I don't know what the way out is to resolve this, Mr. Chair, but if—

[English]

Mr. Rick Perkins: Then stop talking. That's what I'm talking about.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes, but it's because you immediately move a motion to say that this is a question of privilege, but at the same time, you say that you didn't have enough time to ask the witness questions. It doesn't make sense. Either we've had enough time to ask questions and determined that we didn't have enough time to answer questions, or we've had enough time to answer questions and we don't trust what the witness said. That's the question. That's your motion, Mr. Perkins. As long as you don't withdraw your motion, I'm definitely going to oppose it.

I think everyone has the right to a trial or the right to come and speak or testify before the committee. We can't immediately judge the situation and say that we don't trust what the former minister said or that he was evasive. You're asking specific questions about things he has nothing to do with. It's quite normal for him not to have an answer. If you ask me what's going on in the Ontario government, I'll definitely tell you that I have no idea and that I'll be evasive, since I'm not part of the Ontario government. That's what the minister is saying: He wasn't involved in the day-to-day decision-making about SDTC.

[English]

Even before I would entertain a question of privilege as to how this committee determines whether or not a witness is being truthful or evasive on certain questions, we should have a discussion on setting criteria. What are the criteria for us to determine that? Who makes those decisions? I don't have a framework to determine whether or not a witness is being truthful or evasive. We haven't established the framework.

I mean, the rationale—

Mr. Rick Perkins: If asked if the sky is blue, you'd say “Let's talk about this”, and that's not being evasive.

The Chair: Order, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Francis Drouin: There's coffee over there, Mr. Perkins, if you want it. I'm just saying.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I don't need coffee. I have a lot of energy and I can't put up with inanities.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Well, Mr. Perkins, I have to put up with your shenanigans in the House and I smile when you speak and I respect you, so you have to put up with my shenanigans once in a while. All I'm trying to say is....

• (2125)

My colleague Ms. Khalid is right. We've gone from zero to 100. We know the motion was pre-written before the questioning was over. We know that and we've established that, so I'm trying to know the intent of the official opposition and whether they would speak to it and I'm trying to understand what exactly they want to hear from the former minister. What do they want him to say?

Obviously, they want him to say, “Yes, I was involved. Yes, I was part of the decision-making every day that I was there.” The simple answer is that he wasn't.

I know that you're trying to make these Liberal ties and all this—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I want him to say, “Yes, I phoned her”—

Mr. Francis Drouin: —and it's not fitting your narrative.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins—

Mr. Rick Perkins: He knows that.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, you are welcome to have the floor at the appropriate time.

Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: He wants somebody to say something, but he doesn't know that. He thinks somebody was suddenly appointed out of nowhere to a Governor in Council appointment, that somebody was just randomly appointed like this, without exception, without applying—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's what happened.

Mr. Francis Drouin: That is ridiculous, and we know that for a fact. The witness has corrected that record. He knows that.

The Chair: Order—

Mr. Rick Perkins: He called her to change her testimony—

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, order.

Mr. Francis Drouin: He knows that. Perhaps he was collaborating with the chair—

Mr. Rick Perkins: The truth is the first answer, not the twelfth.

Mr. Francis Drouin: —because I know they love to donate to the same candidate. They're two Tories collaborating in order to put this on us.

It's ridiculous. They're Tory donors collaborating together.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Speak to the motion.

Mr. Francis Drouin: So—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, how can you let that happen? That makes no sense.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin is skilfully plowing through it.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I know it's late. Sometimes we say things we don't want to say when it's late, because we're angry and we want to go to bed and everybody's tired.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm not angry. I'm disappointed in the government.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm ready to go until 11:00 p.m. tonight if we need to go until 11:00 p.m. tonight. My point to this motion is that I wish we had gone—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I seek unanimous consent to go to 11:00 p.m. tonight.

The Chair: That's not how it works.

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The suggestion was made. I'm just accepting the—

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Well, you know, you may not have constituents here, but I may have constituents in the back rooms here, so I want to be careful when I say that—not that it matters for my election purposes, but I'm still respectful of their time.

[Translation]

So, if we had chosen another strategy instead of going from zero to 100 miles an hour right away, I would have been in agreement. I would have agreed with the Conservatives' strategy as to whether Mr. Bains had indeed answered—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Order, please. An honourable member has the floor right now.

Mr. Drouin, you may continue.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I don't know what was put in the coffee, but it makes you laugh.

I would have agreed with the Conservatives' strategy. The problem is that they went from zero to 100 miles an hour right off the bat. We didn't even get a chance to finish questioning the witness. We had to let him go. My colleague put forward a motion that I thought was honourable. Right after that, Mr. Perkins moved his motion, which is actually a question of privilege. A question of privilege is serious. This is an abuse of parliamentary procedure.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, you are repeating yourself. There are other colleagues who are on the list. Perhaps we could turn to them.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, I'm not going to be in this place for a long time. I like to hear myself talk once in a while, so I'm sure—

The Chair: You have the right to do that as long as you just stay on the motion.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I can see that Mr. Nater, Mr. Perkins, and especially Mr. Cooper and Mr. Stewart are appreciating my comments as they are laughing on the other side.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, I said it in English and I said it in French, so I will conclude. All I want to say is that I would have preferred to let Mr. Bains finish his testimony. On our side, we were open to the idea of inviting him back. A number of people had other questions to ask him. Now, we know in advance that Mr. Bains did not answer the questions. That's kind of what we see as the problem. We have to finish our investigation. Afterwards, we can determine who among the witnesses may not have told the truth or may have given evasive answers to the committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

• (2130)

[English]

Mr. Erskine-Smith, you have the floor again, followed by Ms. Khalid.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I've mentioned this a few times. I want to speak to the threshold for questions of privilege and related questions of reporting to the House.

Chair, you mentioned the instance of Mr. Firth as a precedent, which seems incredibly offside to me. I want to go through that instance, if that is to be the precedent that we're setting here and holding ourselves to, because it's wildly different, and people should know.

You'll know that OGGO, the government operations committee, did report to the House in relation to Mr. Firth. This is the level of evasion that we saw from that witness.

On Monday, October 17, the committee agreed to undertake a study of the ArriveCAN application. In the course of this study, the committee chose to invite Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony to appear before it. The committee reported the following to the House:

On November 2, 2023, and February 9, 2024, subpoenas from the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates were issued to the owners of GC Strategies, Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony. The latter refused to testify before the committee.

(ii) The Auditor General revealed that GC Strategies might have received nearly 20 million dollars in government contracts for the ArriveCAN application.

I'll skip ahead a little bit:

According to Bosc and Gagnon, "If a witness declines an invitation, the committee may issue him a subpoena by adopting a motion to this effect. If the witness still refuses to appear, the committee may refer the matter to the House, which may then order the witness to appear. If the witness disobeys the order, he or she could be found in contempt."

In order to see the witnesses in committee to testify, the committee recommended the following:

...an order of the House do issue requiring Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony each to appear before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates...with such accessibility accommodations the witnesses may request and the chair agrees to arrange.

If the chair of the committee informs the Speaker and Sergeant-at-Arms in writing that one or both have failed to appear as ordered after those 21 days:

(a) the Sergeant-at-Arms shall take Kristian Firth, Darren Anthony or both of them, as the case may be, into his custody for the purposes of enforcing their attendance before the committee at dates and times determined by the chair of the committee, for which the Speaker shall issue his warrant accordingly;

(b) the Sergeant-at-Arms shall discharge from his custody a witness taken into his custody, pursuant to paragraph (a)....

The point of going through this is that we have a situation here that is more akin to Mr. Ouimet's than Mr. Firth's: We have a situation of a witness who attended but didn't answer questions to the satisfaction of Mr. Perkins or of my colleagues from the Bloc and the NDP.

I don't know if Garnett wants to check his dictionary once or twice again, but if the synonym is "fabricate" and "to lie", then yes, the language of "prevaricate" is a problem, because this isn't just clever. There are any number of instances in which I see politicians being asked questions and then pivoting. They move to acknowledging the question. They move to answering it in a different way, in an unsatisfactory way for many of us who might be asking the question.

That is very different from a refusal to attend. Mr. Bains attended of his own volition. We asked; he attended. My understanding from the chair is that he was willing to attend again. Instead, our response, heavy-handed as it is, is to suggest that he has breached a member's privilege.

I'll get back on the list to run down a number of examples of breaches of privilege, not only in Canada but in the U.K., and the severity of this is significant. We should not be watering this down. This isn't "I didn't like the answers, and I'm going to throw a tantrum about it and then point to privilege." That's not what privilege is about.

Honestly, I don't love speaking until 9:30 or 9:50 at night on this and I don't love when witnesses don't give us the answers that we want. We should go after them as we deem fit. I've been known to do that too. I find that in committee is the one time I get to act like a lawyer again and cross-examine, but that's wildly different—wildly different—from suggesting that one's privilege has been breached and elevating it to that standard, akin to Mr. Firth refusing, absolutely refusing, to testify in the face of a proper summons, let alone an invitation. We didn't have to summons Mr. Bains. He attended on an invitation.

I'm going to get back on the list, Chair, and I'm going to run down a lengthy list of examples of privilege being properly breached so that members can understand the significant threshold that this reaches, and we are nowhere near that threshold.

Please put me back on the list.

• (2135)

The Chair: You are added. Thank you.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair.

Listening to all of my colleagues from all sides of the aisle today on this motion has really helped me to understand how procedure can be used to stop the important work that this committee needs to continue to do. As we go through this motion of privilege, I know I said this before and I apologize for repeating myself, but I think that building on that point—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: On a point of order, Chair, Ms. Khalid herself is mentioning that she's repeating herself, so it goes to repetition.

The Chair: It is a pretty big giveaway, Ms. Khalid, when you self-confess the infraction. If you could maybe get—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I love it when a man tells me what I can or cannot say. It's awesome. Thank you so much.

The Chair: I'm afraid it's in the Standing Orders.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, Chair, there is a convention around respect for chairs in committee.

Ms. Khalid is trying to accuse you of making some kind of gender-based limitation to her ability to speak. The rules are the rules. You're the chair. Frankly, she diminishes the many instances in our world of real sexism when she throws out these casual accusations.

In any event, it's a violation of the rules to treat the chair with such disrespect.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: When somebody says, "I'm going to repeat myself" but doesn't necessarily repeat themselves, is there an issue? We haven't heard what Ms. Khalid was going to say. There was an interruption right away.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin, but I think it was fair to say where things were going.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: As I was saying before I was interrupted and then mansplained to, I was going to start with a point that I was going to make to build on that point—

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, in all seriousness, would you prefer that the clerk read you the Standing Orders?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: That's all right, but you see my point.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm not sure what Standing Order you're referring to, Chair, so I would love for the clerk to read me the Standing Orders.

The Chair: About repetition, you imply that I am somehow explaining myself when it's in the Standing Orders. We all follow the same rules here.

Ms. Khalid, you have—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Let her finish her sentence.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: If you had let me finish my thought, Chair, I would have said that yes, there have been a lot of points made by a lot of our colleagues today and, as I was saying, for fear of repeating myself—not just myself but members all across this table—to consolidate the arguments that have been made today with respect to this privilege motion, I'm sure that you can check Hansard records to see what those arguments are.

I'm now afraid to repeat myself because I'll get called out on it. I'm not trying to repeat myself. I'm trying to help our committee members understand why this privilege motion is a process to jam this committee, to jam the House of Commons, not for reasonable purposes but for nefarious purposes.

If it were a reasonable argument—

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's Standing Order 11(2).

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you so much, Mr. Perkins, for your interruption.

I'm sorry; I'm not sure what Standing Order this gentleman is referring to.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's obvious. Standing Order 11(2) is the one that says that you cannot do repetition.

Mr. Francis Drouin: You're just blabbering that stuff out. Are you calling a point of order? You have to say "point of order". That's also in the Standing Orders—

The Chair: Our colleague Ms. Khalid has the floor.

We're back to you, please.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much.

If Mr. Perkins has contributions to make to this very valuable debate, I'm sure he can raise his hand and get on the list that you're keeping, Chair.

The point that I was making, first, is that this motion is for nefarious purposes—jamming up this committee, jamming up the House of Commons.

Second, it is procedurally incorrect, I would say, because there are so many other options and other ways for this committee to be able to get to whatever answers it is looking for through written requests or through inviting the minister back again or through many other ways.

I'm not sure why Mr. Perkins is shrieking at me. I do like that word "shrieking". It's a nice word.

• (2140)

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, this is repetition. It's Standing Order 11(2).

The Chair: That is a good point of order, and you cite it.

Go ahead, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: On a point of order, if Mr. Perkins has evidence that there's repetition, then he can submit it and exactly cite the member of Parliament on repetition.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I will cite the repetition—

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'd be happy to.... Maybe his memory is causing him some issues.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Would you like me to cite the repetition?

The Chair: No, thank you, Mr. Perkins. Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: As I was saying, Chair, I just listed the reasons that I find this motion to be misplaced and nefarious in this committee.

I also want to point out that this motion does not lead to where members want this study to go. We have had numerous meetings on SDTC. Our objective here, collectively on this committee, is to make sure that this does not happen again and to find a way to recuperate funds that have been misappropriated in any way. If that's the ultimate objective of this committee, how does this motion get to where we want to go?

I argue, Mr. Chair—for the first time, in case Mr. Perkins wants to question me on that too—that this motion does not help us get to where we need to go.

I agree 100%. I think all members on this committee are united in saying that SDTC messed up. The minister acted. Now we're

looking at what happens next through the transition phase and how to recoup funds. I don't see how creating a privilege challenge—not just in this committee, but in transferring it to the House of Commons to jam debates on all matters in the House—gets to the objective of what we're trying to do here as the public accounts committee.

When I first joined this committee, I did it with the knowledge and the understanding that all members of this committee are respectful, that they don't call other people liars and that they have a collective goal of making sure that taxpayer dollars are accounted for and spent reasonably. If not, then we, as a committee, have an obligation to raise the alarm. We work with the Auditor General and her reports and ensure that we are doing the good work that Canadians expect of us and have put trust in us to do in spending taxpayer dollars.

What are we doing? We're sitting here at 9.43 p.m., debating a privilege motion that is frivolous and unnecessary and has gone from zero to 100, without taking into account all of the discretion the chair has in getting to where committee members are trying to go. Our Liberal members on this side of the committee have not held up anything on this committee without reason. We continue to try to collaborate with our colleagues.

I still remember, Mr. Chair—Mr. McCauley is here—when we suspended the meeting for an hour while we all huddled together. We composed a motion and collaborated to put together language on a motion for a study that we all agreed to. We did that. We were able to do it because the cameras were off. There was no clickbait. There was no Rebel News coverage of whatever the opposition was trying to do. We were able to work together.

This motion is the exact opposite of where we started as a committee. We had the ability to collaborate with one another and we had the ability to get to the objectives of what we're actually doing here. For us to use procedure to jam things up and call people liars.... I understand and appreciate that shift and using the F7 key on your computer help you bring up a thesaurus, and you can use the thesaurus all day long. What—

• (2145)

The Chair: Hold on, Ms. Khalid.

I assume that you're now talking about the witness and not one another.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: No, I'm talking about the language of the motion, Chair.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Actually, it doesn't use "lie" or "liar", and I'm just raising this point because I wasn't sure whether you were referring to a member calling another member the word that you used, but even the motion does not use that word.

You have the floor again.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Chair, on the point of order, just on that—

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Regardless of whether she was referring to another member or not, we are debating the motion. I ask that we bring it back to relevant debate.

The Chair: I believe it was referencing the motion. I just don't think it was quite accurate.

I turn things back over to you.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: The motion uses the word “prevarication”, which, according to the dictionary, means “the deliberate act of deviating from the truth”, a.k.a. lying. When you put that in a privilege—

Mr. Rick Perkins: [*Inaudible—Editor*] that definition, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Well, what else do you take from that, Mr. Perkins? What else does that mean?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's evading the truth.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Debating the truth—

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, it's evading....

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I know that you guys are masters at evading the truth, but I'm not, and I prefer plain language. I prefer to have a solid understanding of what is happening around me on a regular basis.

I just googled what “prevarication” means, and it's right here in front of me. It says synonyms are “fabrication” and “lying”. When you're referring to witnesses—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'll tell you what a synonym is.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: —with that kind of language, no matter how deep you have to dig into your thesaurus to find the proper word—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I know the language around a thesaurus.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins—

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, Mr. Desjarlais.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do have plain language for Ms. Khalid on the same motion, if she would entertain a UC on this: “That the committee summon Navdeep Bains to the committee on the matter of SDTC within 14 days of the adoption of this motion, and should Mr. Bains' answers be deemed insufficient, that the chair be instructed to report a breach of privilege to the House.”

Some hon. members: It's the same motion.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: It doesn't have “prevaricate”. You just talked about “prevaricate” for five minutes.

The Chair: Thank you. I appreciate your effort, Mr. Desjarlais.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor again.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Chair.

I would appreciate it if the member can explain to me what “satisfaction” means to him and to members, and to how many members of this committee. Is it unanimously, individually or on a majority vote? What are the measures for satisfying this committee?

As we've seen time and time again, nothing has been able to satisfy the opposition members, no matter which witnesses come here or how many documents they provide or how many hours they spend answering questions.

What is satisfaction? What is that measure of satisfaction? If you can explain that for me and help me understand what that measure of satisfaction is, maybe I can debate this.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I will. I would like to respond to this.

The Chair: Are you talking procedurally?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes. Please help me understand. What is the measure of satisfaction?

The Chair: In response to Mr. Erskine-Smith's question earlier at the top, I said it would come back to both a debate and then a majority vote.

You have the floor, Ms. Khalid.

An hon. member: It's if we have UC.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: We don't have UC.

I will clarify that, because I don't want members to think that I'm being a stickler. I'm not. The point here is for us not to—

Mr. Rick Perkins: That word you didn't like—you didn't like it because it doesn't—

The Chair: Mr. Perkins—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm more than happy to yield the floor to Mr. Perkins, if that's—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you. I'll take the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: —but I will take it back after he's done, Chair, just so we're clear.

I'm doing you a favour. If you want to say something, Mr. Perkins, you can say it.

• (2150)

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'll take the floor for the next one minute that I think we have left.

The Chair: The floor is yours.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The hypocrisy of the Liberals knows no end. I'm amazed by it every day. Here they're saying they object to a particular word in a motion. The NDP member—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Calling people liars—

Mr. Rick Perkins: —offered a perfectly reasonable solution, which was to withdraw the word, and then the member objected to the word that she objected to being withdrawn.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: This is not a reasonable solution. A privilege motion is not reasonable.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's the definition. If you don't know, look it up. The definition of “hypocrisy” is saying, “I want a word removed,” and then, when it's offered to be removed, objecting to its being removed. We've been here while you guys continue to filibuster to cover up your cover-up on the—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: It's through the chair. Isn't that right?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It's you guys. The chair is not covering it up; the Liberals are covering up their cover-up on their scandal—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Through the chair—

Mr. Francis Drouin: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, can the member speak to the motion at hand?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes. The motion is that you're objecting—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, this is repetitiveness.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —to the privilege motion and the words in the privilege motion.

A former minister, when asked questions, couldn't answer a simple question: “Did you have a conversation?” As was testified by his own appointed chair, they had two conversations about taking over the chair, and he couldn't even say yes or no as to whether he had those conversations. He then talked about something totally unrelated to the question.

The very essence of hypocrisy is what we saw here tonight with the Liberals in their attempts to yet again cover up a cover-up over a cover-up over a cover-up. It's one cover-up after another cover-up over another cover-up. The documents—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —and the testimony that they're trying to prevent—

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, there is a point of order.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Chair, I would like to call the exact same point of order on repetitiveness for Mr. Perkins.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, why don't you wrap up? We're on the cusp here.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Here we go.

The original study is about the corruption of Liberal appointees in the Liberal—

An hon. member: Mr. Chair, that is way off topic.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We have had witness after witness come here, and all of them have answered the questions except for one—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On a point of order—

Mr. Rick Perkins: —Navdeep Bains, who refused to answer any questions.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: On a point of order—

Mr. Rick Perkins: For some reason, the Liberals want to protect him. Why do they want to protect him? They want to protect him because he's responsible for this corruption.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure why you're not recognizing my point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, think of the interpreters.

Ms. Khalid, what is your point of order?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: My point of order is on relevance, Chair.

The Chair: Oh, well, if that's the standard, we're all in trouble.

Mercifully, the resources are eclipsed.

I'm going to suspend this meeting.

[The meeting was suspended at 9:52 p.m., Wednesday, October 9]

[The meeting resumed at 11:08 a.m., Thursday, October 10]

● (3505)

[Translation]

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

[English]

We're now resuming debate.

We're going to turn to Mr. Perkins in a second, which is where we left things last night. Then I have Mr. Erskine-Smith, Mr. Drouin and Ms. Khalid, and of course I'll look for hands.

Mr. Perkins, you have the floor.

Remember, we are debating Mr. Perkins' motion and members need to speak to its relevance. Repetition will be noted and you'll be asked to get back to relevance. Of course there is no reading.

Mr. Perkins, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just as a quick reminder, it's nice to see everyone again. I hope you got a good night's sleep. I missed you as well.

We're here, as the chair said, debating a motion I moved—for those who have just tuned in—on privilege. What this means is that we had a witness here, the former Liberal minister in charge of the Liberal green slush fund, Navdeep Bains, who basically gave one answer to every question no matter what the question was last night. As a result he was stonewalling, prevaricating—that fun word—and not answering questions anywhere near the vicinity of what was asked. It didn't matter what the question was, the answer was the same, and the answer was that it was a fair and open process of appointments. It didn't matter whether it was coming from Conservatives, the Bloc or the NDP, his answer was the same, regardless of the question.

He didn't answer about the hiring practices of a former SDTC staff at CIBC, where he worked. He didn't answer the questions about the phone calls that he made to the chair of the green slush fund, Annette Verschuren, whom he appointed. He didn't answer the questions about anything to do with that appointment process or the appointment process through which he appointed, Andrée-Lise Méthot, from Cycle Capital, whose companies received 25% of the billion-dollar green slush fund money and received over \$100 million while she was on the board. He didn't remember any of that. In fact, he couldn't even remember appointing anyone. He just said, I made 100 appointments.

• (3510)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I have a point of order, a point of clarification.

Mr. Rick Perkins: There is no such thing as a point of clarification.

The Chair: I heard “point of order” first, so go ahead, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Perhaps just as a point of clarification, I’m a bit confused....

On the one hand, Mr. Perkins has said that he didn’t answer questions but on the other hand he—

Mr. Rick Perkins: Order. Come on, it’s per the rules.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I’m confused. He says he didn’t answer the questions, and then he says he didn’t recall and answered the questions. Which is it? He said he didn’t recall—

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith, you’re next on the list. You’ll be able to—

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Maybe he couldn’t get his story straight.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Go back to reviewing your dictionary.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: You’re wasting our time. Rick, get your story straight.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I’m not surprised—

The Chair: Wait just one second, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: —that MP Erskine-Smith is confused. He is confused on just about every single issue he has ever spoken on.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, you’ll have the floor in a second.

First of all, I am going to ask everyone to respect the interpreters. Speaking over one another not only makes it very difficult for them to do their job, it can actually be potentially damaging. I am going to urge you all to respect the team that is supporting us in our important work.

Mr. Drouin, you have a point of order, I believe.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It was on the interpreters, because everybody was talking over....

The Chair: Yes. Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I must talk about how the Liberals and particularly Mr. Erskine-Smith, who is a newbie on this committee, haven’t done their homework, haven’t read the documents and haven’t looked at the spreadsheet from the green slush fund of all the grants they made over the 20 years. I’m not surprised that he hasn’t made the effort to do that. He’s too busy interviewing the current finance minister, conflict carbon tax Carney, to do his homework on this committee. He’s too busy promoting his podcast with the soon-to-be former Prime Minister and trying to rescue his career than doing his parliamentary work on this committee, which is to actually read documents, other than the PMO’s speaking points he is given, that deal with the issue of the corruption and the \$400 million of stolen money by Liberal appointees.

I thought Mr. Erskine-Smith had more integrity than that, than to not be worried about \$400 million stolen from taxpayers.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: This is absolute bullshit.

The Chair: Whoa—

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Come on. My integrity...? He can fuck right off.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Perkins, first I’m going to ask you to get back on topic.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, I understand your irritation. First of all, your language, I am going to ask you to retract your language.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I’ll retract when he retracts. He impugned my integrity. It’s deeply unparliamentary.

We can both retract, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith, I’m talking about your curse words, not what you actually said.

We all have ample time to speak today. We can all see that when we interrupt a member, everyone gets wound up. Let’s just let everyone have their time, and you’re welcome to respond to it in your time. I believe that if we show each other the courtesy.... While we might not always like what’s being said by other members, I think the thing we ought to do is just listen and get through this in a civilized manner.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, I’m not going to press it with you, but I will ask you to use parliamentary language and not curse in a committee setting.

Mr. Perkins, you have the floor again. Please stay on topic.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I will stay on topic.

Witness testimony, such as Annette Verschuren’s, said—which obviously MP Erskine-Smith hasn’t read—that she “never applied”—she said it three times—for a single job in her life, including this job. Conveniently, afterwards she filled out the application after the minister called her twice to ask her to do the job, after former minister Bains refused to answer the question on even those phone calls or the content. Perhaps MP Erskine-Smith could do some of that reading.

Perhaps he could also do some reading about Andrée-Lise Méthot, whom former Liberal minister Bains, overseeing the green slush fund, appointed in 2016 to the board, whose companies got more than \$100 million of green slush fund money while she was on the board.

Perhaps Mr. Erskine-Smith could read the testimony of previous witnesses, including the chair of the fund, who admitted that when Andr  e-Lise M  thot was moved by the Liberals to the Infrastructure Bank board for a new appointment, the first thing she did was approve \$170 million for the slush fund chair's company, NRStor, but that would require a little research. It would require research to find out that, in 2023, the natural resources department gave Ms. Verschuren's company \$50 million. That's after the staff were employed at SDTC to find her company more money, since her company was rejected, finally, for SDTC money because of conflicts.

• (3515)

Mr. Francis Drouin: I have a point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: These are the testimonies that the minister refused to answer.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins, I have a point of order from Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I just want you to be fair when you're applying the rules. I didn't raise a point of order on this, but Mr. Perkins evaded the current motion on the floor. You allowed him to speak, so I'm expecting that you will not interrupt me when I talk about the same issues that Mr. Perkins is talking about. I just want the chair to apply the same rules to everyone. I'm taking notice, and I'm recording what he's.... We have blues, and I'll repeat them. If I find that you're not being fair, I will raise a—

The Chair: That's fine, but again, it needs to have relevance, which I urge Mr. Perkins to get back to, no repetition and no reading.

Mr. Perkins, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Perkins: The other thing, of course, is that these questions were asked of former minister Bains, the architect of the Liberal green slush fund. He refused to answer. He gave the same answer to every question. Regardless of what the question was, the answer was not relevant. That's what prompted the question of privilege. When we asked him about the issue of the appointment process for Ms. Verschuren, all he could say was that he made appointments and didn't remember. These things are why we're here talking about the privilege motion I moved. While it's true that witnesses can give answers to questions that members may disagree with, they have to be relevant to the question. He didn't give one single relevant answer to any of the opposition members' questions.

Mr. Erskine-Smith knows that, because he was here at the committee. He heard it. Now, maybe he had a challenge understanding when the member asked whether he'd talked to Annette Verschuren in a phone call about the appointment. He said it was an application process, a fair and open process. I guess he doesn't understand how to make the distinction between yes and no, I spoke with her or I didn't, versus saying some automaton, hologram-type answer he was preprogrammed to say. It's one line all the time.

I understand the Liberals are upset that every time we have a meeting—except with former minister Bains—we uncover and reveal more Liberal corruption. All the other witnesses have been here answering the questions and revealing shocking revelations about these Liberal appointees, who were hand-picked by the Prime Minister and put in by Navdeep Bains. Somebody told him to do it, because it's very clear he didn't know what to do. He was just told

something. All he seems to do is repeat things other people tell him to say. We're trying to get to the bottom of that.

It's incredible that the privilege breach we saw yesterday with the former architect of the Liberal green slush fund, Navdeep Bains, was not seen by Liberal members as something to be troubled by. They're not troubled by the theft of \$400 million. They're not troubled by the fact that it only represents half of what the Auditor General had available to look at. The Liberal members, including MP Erskine-Smith, have never once acknowledged the fact that, out of the \$856 million in the audit period the Auditor General looked at, only half of the conflicts of interest were revealed, because she only looked at half the transactions. Shockingly, 82% were there.

Mr. Erskine-Smith would have us believe that an ADM sitting at every meeting never reported anything to Minister Bains. About 82% of the time, these Liberal appointees were voting on money for themselves. Never once would a senior bureaucrat have reported that up to Minister Bains or Minister Champagne, who was also silent on this for 40 months and never said anything until it was public.

These are the issues of privilege that former minister Bains breached. That's why we're here, and that's why the motion is on the table.

I will leave it at that for now, Mr. Chair. I'm sure we'll have great insight from the Liberal members, and perhaps an explanation from Mr. Erskine-Smith about his language.

• (3520)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Erskine-Smith is next.

You have the floor.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Rick, if you impugn someone's integrity, you deserve every language that comes your way. There's nothing more important than a member's integrity, and you have no business impugning mine.

What are you doing right now, Rick? You have brought a privilege motion, an incredibly high bar, and on what basis? Before Mr. Bains was even finished his testimony, you brought a privilege motion.

We're happy to have him back to answer clear questions. Look, I'm not even disputing.... You can say that you didn't like all of his answers, that he wasn't as forthcoming as you wanted him to be. However, you can't say that "I don't recall" isn't an answer. On the one hand, you're saying that he wasn't answering your questions, and on the other hand, you're saying that it's insufficient for him to say "I don't recall". Unless you're accusing him of deliberately misleading you and members at the committee, unless that's the accusation, which I haven't heard, then your privilege has not been breached.

I want to run through just how high of a standard we are talking about here. I would love at some point—and I'll come back to this—for the clerk and analyst to clarify. I mean, when I run through the rights of members around free speech and the privileges of members, I see that a breach of privilege occurs when there's "Any disregard of or attack on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its Members, either by an outside person or body, or by a Member of the House". That's what a breach of privilege is, and "all breaches of privilege are contempts of the House". A breach of privilege is always contempt, and I'm going to give you a few examples.

There is deliberately misleading testimony. In 2003, the former privacy commissioner was found in contempt of the House for providing deliberately misleading testimony during hearings of the OGGO standing committee. Is deliberately misleading testimony your accusation? I haven't heard it. If you're going to make an accusation of breach of privilege, make sure it's consistent with what a breach of privilege actually is.

In 2008, deputy RCMP commissioner Barbara George was found in contempt of the House for providing misleading testimony during the Standing Committee on Public Accounts' hearings on allegations of mishandling of the RCMP's pension and insurance plans.

We also know that impeding access to the House is a breach of our privilege. Denial of access and significant delays experienced by members of the House constitute contempts of the House. That's nowhere near where we are at the moment.

Another is refusal to attend in the face of a summons. In 2013, the RCMP failed to allow a witness to appear before a Senate committee that was investigating harassment in the RCMP. That was found to be a breach of privilege, and rightly so. It was refusing or failing to attend, or in that case, impeding the ability of a witness to attend.

I could run down a longer list. The United Kingdom, on parliamentary privilege, has a list of contempts here:

assaulting, threatening, obstructing or intimidating a Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties;

deliberately attempting to mislead the House or a committee—

I mentioned this. It continues:

deliberately publishing a false or misleading report of the proceedings of the House....

removing, without authority, papers belonging to the House;

falsifying or altering any papers belonging to the House;

deliberately altering, suppressing, concealing—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

This member who's speaking right now just had a full-on meltdown where he used grossly and obviously unparliamentary language. He was asked by you to withdraw those comments. He refused to withdraw those comments.

Frequently, in the House, when you have even much more minor or marginal cases, members are required to withdraw, based on the authority of the chair. This member has just shown grotesque, flagrant disregard for the rules of the House, literally dropping an F-bomb and saying that it was deserved and that he won't apologize.

I believe it is within your authority to tell him that he cannot continue to speak, on the basis of his refusal to withdraw unparliamentary language. Obviously, that's within your discretion, but this is not an ambiguous case. This is a Liberal who is desperate, having meltdowns on the microphone and using gross, foul language in unparliamentary ways.

• (3525)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: How about interrupting someone who impugns my integrity, Garnett? Get out of here.

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm not going to get out of here. I know the rules, and you should follow them.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I didn't mention anything about bathtubs, buddy.

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith, Mr. Perkins was under a barrage yesterday in a manner that he thought was unfair. I would ask you to withdraw—

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Chair, on that same point of order...

The Chair: It's a request. I'm trying to keep things moving along here.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I heard him retract the comments, so I would ask you to go back to the blues and check, because I heard Nathaniel Erskine-Smith retract. He said, "I retract".

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith, did you, in fact, withdraw?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Are you asking about my remarks in relation to Mr. Perkins or the "I'm not talking about bathtubs, buddy"?

The Chair: It's the cursing. Mr. Drouin is under the impression—

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I would be pleased to retract my comments. I assume you will also ask Mr. Perkins to retract his comments when he impugned my integrity.

The Chair: I'll take that as a no, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

I'm not going to be the schoolyard nanny. You have the floor, but you're conducting yourself in a manner that is not appropriate.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: You gave us less than an hour's notice, Chair, if you want to talk about appropriate behaviour.

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith, you repeatedly complain about this committee's schedule. As I said to you in response to an email, you need to work with your team and your whip if it's not conducive to your schedule.

You have the floor again.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Again, the threshold for a breach of privilege is incredibly high. We have to take this incredibly seriously when it occurs. Again, running down the list, there's falsifying; deliberately misleading; falsifying documents without reasonable excuse; refusing to provide information or produce papers formally required by the House without reasonable excuse; disobeying a lawful order of the House; interfering with or obstructing a person who is carrying out a lawful order of the House; bribing or attempting to bribe a member to influence the member's conduct in respect of proceedings of the House; intimidating, preventing or hindering a witness from giving evidence; assaulting, threatening or disadvantaging a member or a former member on account of the member's conduct in Parliament; and divulging or publishing the content of any report or evidence of a select committee before it has been reported to the House.

I would love to understand, when Mr. Bains comes and says, "I don't recall", how that amounts to a breach of privilege. It might be insufficient. I say let's have him back to answer an additional two hours of questions. No one's hiding from accountability. Let's have him back.

What is happening now is a waste of our time. You might say, "Well, you guys are wasting time at the committee." Do you know why we're spending time at this committee? To make sure that this doesn't become a waste of House time. We all know what's happening in the House right now. We have privilege motions through which the Conservatives have a weaponized process to ensure that the House cannot function.

If this privilege motion were to pass, which would be absurd because it's not anywhere close to a breach of privilege, the Speaker will swat it away, but if it were to pass, if we as a committee were to send it to the Speaker, we are going to waste countless hours. We're going to waste days. We know this because we see it right now. We're going to waste days of House time on something that is absolutely frivolous. If we want to get answers from Mr. Bains, let's have him back for two hours within 14 days.

Please, let's stop wasting our time and making a mockery of the process of the House.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor, please.

Oh, I picked up yesterday's speaking note. Pardon me—I jumped one.

Mr. Drouin is first.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a few things before I get going.

I will say that I'm a bit surprised. This is the first time this has happened to me in nine years. I had the pleasure of serving with an opposition chair by the name of Tom Lukiwski, who is an honourable man and who was a good chair at government operations. He never once called a meeting with 50 minutes' notice. I want to be respectful of everybody's time. I don't think that is being respectful of everybody's time.

On this particular matter, if we want to continue discussing it, I am happy to sign a 106(4) with the opposition. I'm sure they will want to come back next week. I'm happy to sign a 106(4) with you guys, so we can get to work next week if this discussion is not over. I will happily draft it and we can all sign it, because I know this is very important to you guys.

Secondly, I will talk about the bullying tactics of two members of this particular committee—Mr. Perkins and Mr. Genuis—who have instructed their fan club to call my office.

I want you guys to know that I've instructed my staff to give out your phone numbers. They're calling my office and then they're calling your offices. That's just so we're clear. You can do your little videos outside. You can do your Facebook videos after this. Know that you can do that and instruct your fan club to call my office, but they're calling your offices afterwards.

• (3530)

Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC): Can we get selfies?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Absolutely...if you want selfies.

I thought we had some decent respect. I've never done that to other members of Parliament. I don't care if you do that to me. I just want you to know the consequences of what happens afterwards. Your staff will be busier at your offices. They're redirected to your offices. It will be a pleasure for me to continue doing that.

I'll move to the matter at hand.

Again, I'm surprised. Mr. Perkins has a short memory. He knows Mr. Bains asked the very same question. He's saying that Mr. Bains, somehow, did not answer. However, Mr. Bains said, "I don't recall a specific conversation, but I would say that it was not uncommon for me to reach out to CEOs to engage them in the board selection process." I don't know what he'd call that, but that's an answer. Mr. Perkins doesn't like the answer, because he's trying very hard to tie SDTC to ministers when there is simply no connection there.

He knows that. I'm quite surprised that Mr. Perkins, who once worked at CIBC, would tarnish the reputation of somebody who's worked at CIBC, as well as the institution of CIBC.

That's exactly what you're doing. You're tarnishing the reputation of private citizens. It's unfortunate.

Mr. Rick Perkins: He's not a private citizen.

Mr. Francis Drouin: He is a private citizen now.

Mr. Rick Perkins: He served in public office years ago.

Mr. Francis Drouin: The wheel goes around, my friend. One day, it will be you in front of that committee.

Mr. Rick Perkins: No, it won't, because I won't have friends who are corrupt.

The Chair: Mr. Perkins....

Mr. Francis Drouin: Again, why are we doing this study if the Conservatives have already made up their minds? They are not interested in investigating this stuff. They are using words like “corrupt”. Obviously, they’re calling me corrupt and blah, blah, blah. It’s simply that they’re not interested in making this a study. They’re not interested in the words of the Auditor General. They’re not interested in what the commissioner of the RCMP said. They’re not interested. All they’re interested in—we saw it yesterday, again.... Mr. Genuis laughed at me the other day. They are treating this committee like their own little private Facebook studio, and it’s a shame.

Have some decency for democracy—just a bit.

Sometimes I wish the kids in short pants on this committee would grow up. Some of them have and some of them haven’t.

Mr. Chair, I would love to hear from the opposition about my proposition to sign a 106(4). We can do it right now and come back next week. We can spend a full day talking about this. I’m sure you’d love to come back, too, Mr. Chair. I know you would. The tactics you’ve used today.... I want to warn you that we have a lot of chairs who can do the same thing to other members. The precedent you have set for other committees is completely uncalled for. You’re not being respectful of everybody’s time on this particular committee. Tom Lukiwski would never have done that. I’m not sure who’s running the show now, but they obviously have no respect for members of Parliament.

I’m close. I’ll be here next week. I don’t mind coming here. I can spend a week. I’m sure we can come back on Thanksgiving Monday, if you like. I’m here. I’m ready. I’m still not hearing the opposition say they want to sign a 106(4). This proves how dedicated they are to this particular cause.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You don’t understand the process. At a basic level, you don’t need a—

The Chair: Order, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Actually, Mr. Genuis, you can sign a 106(4), and you have to deal with the proper matter of a 106(4) at first. Then you deal with the suspension, just so you know. Check the Standing Orders, buddy.

Here we are on the matter of this question of privilege, which has been raised without even having to hear completely what the member said. This was submitted half an hour before the testimony was completed, so we know this was all made up. How serious are these guys about finding the truth? They’re not.

• (3535)

[Translation]

They’re not serious. We’re here to talk about a bogus motion that has nothing to do with our study. Mr. Perkins had a chance to question the witness in June. I don’t know how much time he needs to ask questions, but give me a break, it’s not that difficult. In fact, I’m surprised to see that the other coalition parties are helping the Conservative Party debate this motion.

Furthermore, I find it absurd that, on a number of occasions, whether they are from the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois or even, on a few occasions, the NDP—it wasn’t Mr. Cannings, for whom I have a lot of respect—members have mentioned that they

weren’t satisfied with a witness’s answer. The witness wasn’t a former Liberal cabinet minister, so they didn’t raise a question of privilege. I find that a bit strange. A standard is a standard. In my opinion, it seems to me that the same standards and criteria should be applied to all proposals. If we believe that a witness has not adequately answered our questions and a question of privilege is raised about one witness but not about another, I wonder what about the desire to know the truth.

I’m asking to be put back on the list, Mr. Chair.

I believe Ms. Khalid is next. I think she’s having a conversation with Mr. Cannings. Out of respect for Ms. Khalid, so she can finish this conversation, I will continue with my intervention.

I think the motion moved by my colleague Mr. Perkins is too strict for the time being. Mr. Erskine-Smith did a good job of explaining that matters of privilege must be taken seriously. Just because he’s a former Liberal cabinet minister doesn’t mean that all of a sudden we have to become partisan on this. I’m pleading with the opposition members to withdraw this motion. We agree to reinstate Mr. Bains to testify before this committee.

I have a theory that could explain why we believe that Mr. Bains didn’t answer certain questions. I think it’s because the official opposition keeps changing the players. On our side, it’s always the same people, but on the other side, there’s a first and a second team. It looks like there are members aspiring to join the pack on the other side.

If you don’t remember the answers that were given to other members, it’s up to you to go back and review the blues. I’m just looking at the blues right now, and I can’t for the life of me figure out how Mr. Bains hasn’t answered the questions appropriately. Of course, the opposition members are looking for a culprit. They want to be able to point the finger. They’ve already accused him by saying that Mr. Bains was the instigator of the green fund from Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC. They accused him directly without even showing any evidence of Mr. Bains’ direct involvement in SDTC.

I would remind you that neither the Auditor General, the McCarthy Tétrault report nor the Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton report provided evidence. I’m convinced that the current review of contributions from SDTC recipients will raise this issue, and it will be said that, ultimately, there was too much interference from the minister’s office or the minister himself at SDTC. That’s the crux of the matter, and that’s the connection the opposition is trying to make, when there is none.

So we’re going around in circles and wasting our time. We’re wasting the time of this study. As I said before, I’m starting to question our collective jurisdiction to find the answers we’re looking for.

If I understand correctly, the opposition is saying to hell with the Auditor General and all those who audited this matter. All these people want is to create a hypothetical link with a minister who had nothing to do with it, except for the fact that his department signed a funding agreement with an organization. However, the department isn't responsible for the day-to-day administration of this organization; that's what the opposition doesn't seem to understand.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'm going to stay on the list, but I'm going to take a little break and have a couple of glasses of water.

I give the floor to Ms. Khalid.

• (3540)

The Chair: That's great.

[English]

You've been added to the list again.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm going to raise some concerns here. I had a full day planned. My constituents need me for so many different things. For this meeting to be called within.... For me, it was half an hour's notice. As you can see, my hair is still wet. I'm trying to get through the day. I had to change a lot of what was on my schedule today.

I'm not sure why you would do that, Chair. Perhaps I can seek some clarification from you and the clerk before I continue with my remarks.

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, the floor is yours. The chair is not required to answer why a meeting was called. We suspended in the middle of our debate. Resources did not permit me to go further last night. I picked it up at the earliest possibility.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm not going to get clarification from the clerk or you on why you recalled the meeting without giving members notice.

Personally, I had half an hour's notice that this meeting was going to continue, but do you know what? I am more than happy to continue from where I left off last night. We had a five and a half hour long conversation about how this motion is actually not a privilege motion. I am more than happy to continue—

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have a point of order.

The chair has already ruled that it's a point of privilege, or we wouldn't be debating it. I would ask the member not to question the chair's ruling on that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor again.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Look, I understand and appreciate the importance of the work that this committee does. I understand and appreciate why we do this work because, ultimately, we need to find accountability for the hard-working taxpayer's dollars, which Canadians spend to keep our democratic institutions going and alive.

I'm not sure why we are wasting those dollars, which Canadians have worked very hard to build, on a privilege motion whose intent

and purpose is to delay democratic proceedings in the House of Commons and in our Parliament.

Our job as members of Parliament is not partisan. I support my constituents regardless of which party they support. That is my job. I do it because I love to do it. I have conversations with Conservatives in my riding all the time. I have conversations with New Democrats in my riding all the time. I try to understand and appreciate where they're coming from.

That is, ultimately, who we are as elected representatives in our communities and how we bring those voices up in Parliament. It is a diversity of opinion that we really have high regard for. What really hurts, not for us individually but, yes, for us individually and collectively, is partisan games, and this is exactly what this motion is.

It is not about getting to the bottom of what happened with SDTC. It is definitely not about what happens going forward. We see that there is a plan from the minister as to how we go forward, and that is the transfer to the NRC. That is a really concrete plan as to how to move forward.

This entire program has been implemented over the past decade. What I have seen over these past number of meetings from my Conservative colleagues, my Bloc colleagues and my NDP colleagues are very partisan questions where any witness who comes here is not given the opportunity to actually respond to the questions that are being posed. They're being cut off. They are props in how the opposition wants to be somebody.

That's not fair to Canadians whatsoever. I am more than happy to have the witness in question come back before committee for however many hours the committee wants, but when we're questioning whether a witness has been able to answer questions to the satisfaction of the questioner—in this case, the opposition—I find that to be quite damning, because, first, the Charter of Rights is implicated with respect to how people are able to express themselves.

• (3545)

Our parliamentary rights and privileges are implicated with respect to how we determine what is satisfactory to one party versus another party versus another party. When we're talking about satisfactorily answering questions that have been posed, regardless of who they've been posed by, what is the ultimate goal? What is the objective?

Why do we have to now question who's right and who's wrong among us as members of Parliament? Not even the witnesses who are here to provide expert testimony on the issues we discuss on a regular basis....

Yesterday, I raised the point that the motion presumptively called the witness a liar beforehand. How do I know that members opposite are not trying to use this motion to create their partisan games and work with Russian Rebel News—

Mr. Rick Perkins: On a point of order, I will refer to Standing Order 11(2).

For two hours, MP Khalid said all of this last night, about four times. She's repeating what she said last night. If she has something new to offer, I would encourage her to do so, or we should move on to the next speaker.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: As the member can see, I have no notes in front of me. I am not repeating myself. I am not going verbatim.

Chair, yesterday, you said members should not be reading from notes. I'm not reading from anything. I'm talking about what is valuable to our democracy here, and this ain't it. This is absolutely not it.

For Mr. Perkins to call a point of order on something he knows is bogus is very unfortunate.

• (3550)

The Chair: Ms. Khalid, as I mentioned, it's repetition about a member.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm making a point, Chair.

The Chair: It is getting very close to what was said yesterday.

You have the floor. Again, I will just repeat that it's not just reading; it's relevance and repetition. The floor is yours again.

Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: On that same one, I keep hearing the opposition saying, "corrupt Liberal green slush fund". That's repetition, so I'm expecting the same level of fairness.

The Chair: All right. Unfortunately, we've heard those words being thrown about on both sides. That, sadly, is the business we're in. It's the the school of hard knocks.

The point for standing committees is about when arguments begin to be repetitive. You're welcome to make arguments that speak to the motion, but repeating the same arguments again and again is what is not permitted.

Ms. Khalid, you continue to have the floor.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate your clarification.

The point I'm trying to make today, which I did not make yesterday, which I have not made.... I'm not sure how your standards of repetition would work in this committee regardless, but the point that I'm trying to make is that this does not have to be a privilege motion, because we know where a privilege motion leads. We know the partisan hacks and their objectives on what a privilege motion can do.

What I'm trying to say to this committee is that we can achieve the objective of having that witness back before this committee without this being a privilege motion to allow Conservative hacks to jam up the work that is being done in the House of Commons. We can achieve our objectives without being superpartisan. I use that as a better way of framing it, Chair.

I am more than willing to work with all members on this committee to ensure that the work and the objectives of this committee are fulfilled. What is that work and objective? It is to make sure that taxpayer dollars are held to account. It is to make sure that... On this specific issue, as has been acknowledged by all of my Lib-

eral members here, as has been acknowledged by everybody at this table, wrongdoing happened. There was no ministerial influence on that wrongdoing, but the government does have an obligation to act on this and it has acted on this.

If members on this committee want to have a witness reappear to answer the questions they need answered, we can do that without setting a terrible precedent within the House of Commons by use of a privilege motion. That privilege motion, as I think we can all agree around this table, is not meant to get to the bottom of what needs to happen. It is to jam the work—the legitimate work—that Canadians expect us to do in our Parliament, and that is really unfortunate.

You look very impatient, Mr. Chair. You called this meeting on a half-hour's notice, and I am here to help express the viewpoints of the majority of reasonable Canadians who want to see Parliament function, who want to see Canadians have that representation but also to see work being done.

The fact that this motion has been moved in this committee for the exact purpose of stalling work in the House of Commons is unfortunate. There are so many significant bills that are going to the floor right now. What are we doing? We're doing privilege after privilege after privilege, because God forbid that the privilege of those folks is violated. God forbid their privilege is ever in question.

Privilege, Chair, is not a right. It's a privilege.

I have a right to have a voice in this place. I have been elected by my constituents to have a voice in this place and to speak for them. They don't care about Mr. Perkins' privilege to be satisfied by a witness's answer. There are ways in which he can get the answers that he rightly deserves.

• (3555)

Is this the right way? No, it is not. The right way is for us to be able to collaborate, to be able to identify what the issue is and to be able to find ways to get to the solution of that issue. We have proven in the past that this has been possible. We have been able to work together, to come together and to do the right thing for Canadians and by Canadians.

Why are we here today? Why are we here at this meeting that was called at the last minute? What are we here to discuss? It is to discuss an issue that could have been dealt with at your own discretion, Chair. The fact that we haven't gotten there tells me that there are nefarious purposes for why this privilege motion was moved in the first place within this committee. I cannot, with respect to my morals and the responsibility I owe to my constituents, support this nefarious purpose whatsoever.

I would recommend and strongly suggest to my opposition colleagues that this motion needs to be withdrawn and replaced with another motion to say that this witness needs to come back and that this witness absolutely needs to answer the questions that all of our colleagues across this table have for this witness.

Then, we also need to understand and appreciate how the report is going to look and not be redundant in the questions we're asking time and again of the same witness while badgering and calling witnesses liars, etc. It's not appropriate and, quite frankly, it is beneath us. The public accounts committee has a higher mandate than to be a political tool for the opposition.

Chair, I know how much principle you have with regard to how we conduct ourselves in the House of Commons and how we conduct ourselves in our constituencies. The purpose of the work here happens to serve the purpose of the exact same constituents we serve, so I would again implore you, Chair, first, to find this motion out of order, because there has been no violation of privilege.

If you can't find that for the sake of your own constituents, then I would encourage you to work with your opposition colleagues and withdraw this motion so we can put forward a more concrete and more substantial motion to say that, yes, we need this witness back, we need him to answer the questions that any committee members may have and we want to send him written questions he may not have answered at this committee.

There is no privilege that is being questioned here, Chair, and you of all people know this.

• (3600)

I put that proposal forward to you, Chair, firstly, to consider whether this motion is out of order—which I think it is—and, secondly, to encourage your colleagues to withdraw this motion and put forward one that is not so partisan, one that encourages all of us as committee members to work together, to summons any witness we have any challenges with and to help them answer the questions we have for them, and, lastly, to send in the written questions any of our members may have or were raised by members over the course of the past two days and have those written answers back.

We can't go from zero to 100 all the time. We saw, in the context of what happened over these past couple of weeks and months, the use of parliamentary procedure to play political games and to stop the work Canadians expect us to do.

I park my comments there, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Far from being impatient, the chair is fully engaged and reaching out to the vice-chairs to try to find resolution here. I note that your hand is up to speak again, so we will add you to the list.

Mr. Stewart, you have the floor.

Mr. Jake Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We come to public accounts to question, to provide oversight for taxpayers' dollars and to check for value for money and whether or not it achieved value. Members have privileges here. One privilege is that, when you come into these hearings, you're not here to evade. You're here to answer questions—important questions.

At first glance, 186 conflicts of interest were found by the Auditor General. The taxpayers deserve clarity, accountability and the oversight that we provide. It's deeply disappointing and alarming that Liberal government members—the committee members here—simply don't want to find the truth for Canadians.

There are no points for evading questions at a hearing such as this. This brings us precisely to the moment we're at. Mr. Bains knows the political process, what is acceptable and what is not, and what it means to be held accountable and to be transparent with taxpayers' dollars. He has to be held to a higher standard: He was a cabinet minister. He told the president of SDTC that they will manage her conflicts when they appointed her the chair.

Though he's not a politician today, there are no points for evading or refusing to answer the questions posed by committee members. He is, however, accountable for his time in office. He was, is and will always be a member of the Privy Council, forever bound by those rules, and \$400 million is a lot of money—

Ms. Valerie Bradford: On a point of order, I believe Mr. Stewart is reading from notes.

Mr. Jake Stewart: It's just a few things I scribbled on paper.

The Chair: I was watching. I hear what you're saying, Ms. Bradford. I don't think so. I've been watching it. He is allowed to refer to notes, but he just cannot read those notes.

Mr. Stewart, you have the floor.

• (3605)

Mr. Jake Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bains is accountable for his time in office. He's still accountable because he is a member of the Privy Council and, therefore, is forever bound by these rules.

Four-hundred million dollars is a lot of money. It may not seem like a lot of money to some of the members of the governing party, but I tell you what, Mr. Chair. When there are record numbers at food banks, carbon taxes, record inflation and inflating grocery prices, people in my constituency of Miramichi—Grand Lake who call me on a daily basis, choosing between medications and groceries, sometimes fuel and groceries, and mortgage rates, interest rates and rents going up, all of these problems are on the watch of the current government.

You know, I remember in the 1990s—I was in high school—when Jean Chrétien was a former prime minister. I remember hearing so much about the sponsorship scandal. The only reason I bring it up today is that, for its time, it was quite a thing. It upset Canadians, very clearly, but the interesting thing is that, today, this scandal in particular is eight times larger than the sponsorship scandal. This is a massive scandal. It's a massive misuse of public funds, \$400 million, for which there was no value achieved.

The reason we want this sent back to the House, with the production of documents, and the reason we want this privilege to pass is that our questions were not answered. The questions of other members from other parties were not answered. When the questions are not answered by the individuals who have those answers, it is our privilege to get those answers for the public of this country. It's deeply disappointing that the Liberal members are not supporting this privilege motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

Up next is Mr. Genuis.

I think I'm going to suspend for five minutes because there seems to be a discussion on the side, and maybe it will lead somewhere.

I'm going to suspend.

• (3605) _____ (Pause) _____

• (3645) **The Chair:** I'd like to bring this meeting back to order.
[Translation]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, the floor is yours.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Good morning, everyone.

I believe that while we were suspended, we were able to come to a more than reasonable compromise. I'm seeking unanimous consent to move the following motion: "That the committee summon Navdeep Bains to appear for three hours, on the matter of SDTC, within 21 days of the adoption of this motion." That would be a three-hour appearance within 21 days.

Mr. Francis Drouin: It was said that it would be for two hours.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Yes, but this is how—

The Chair: Hold on a second—

Mr. Francis Drouin: It was said that it would be two hours and 21 days.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: That's true, but they agree that it should be a three-hour appearance within three weeks.

[English]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Come on, guys.

The Chair: We're looking for unanimous consent to swap Madame Sinclair-Desgagné's motion with what Mr. Perkins put forward.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Excuse me, Mr. Chair. The unanimous consent I'm seeking is for the committee to adopt my motion immediately.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. There's just a little bump. What was sent to the members said two hours, not three, so what is it you would like?

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Just for information, Mr. Chair, what we had negotiated behind the scenes, in the hallways behind this room,

was a two-hour appearance within 21 days. However, I'm suddenly learning that it's a three-hour appearance. For us, it's—

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: It's outrageous.

Mr. Francis Drouin: No, it's not outrageous, but I would like us to keep our word and stick to what was negotiated behind the scenes, that's all.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, I think we should settle on two hours. This will ensure that the member comes back. We've already had an hour.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: All right, let's stick to a two-hour appearance, according to what was sent.

I therefore propose an appearance for two hours within 21 days. Do I have unanimous consent to adopt the motion?

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, the interpreter said, "invite", but my understanding was "summon".

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: The motion uses the expression "*assigne à comparaître*" in French, which is equivalent to "to summon" in English.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: So it was an error in interpretation.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: The motion was sent to your emails, and it contains the word "summon".

[English]

The Chair: You have the copy.

I'll hear you in a second, Ms. Yip.

We're looking for unanimous consent to approve this motion as it has been distributed. The witness will appear within three weeks for two hours.

Go ahead, Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip: I just want to make sure we're all on the same page. Can we just read out loud what the motion is, just to make sure?

[Translation]

I'd like it to be read in French as well.

[English]

The Chair: Sure. I will do that.

[Translation]

I'll read it in both official languages.

The motion in French reads, "*Que le Comité assigne Navdeep Bains à comparaître devant le Comité pour une durée de trois heures, sur le rapport de TDDC dans les 21 jours suivant l'adoption de cette motion.*"

[English]

Then in English, it says, “That the committee summon Navdeep Bains to appear before the committee for two hours, on the matter of SDTC, within 21 days of the adoption of this motion.”

[Translation]

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you. I would just like a clarification.

If we ask for unanimous consent to adopt Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné's motion, does that mean that the motion we've debated at length is set aside?

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Actually, I'm still on the list to speak to the privilege motion. We're continuing the debate, but it will be adjourned very soon, by the way.

● (3650)

Mr. Francis Drouin: We will therefore continue the debate on—

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: No, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Are you kidding?

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: No, I'm not kidding. I'm going to ask that the meeting be adjourned.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay, that's fine.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Do I have unanimous consent to pass, with your approval, the motion put forward by the Bloc member?

I see heads nodding in the affirmative. There is no opposition. I declare the Bloc Québécois motion passed.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I have my turn back now, don't I?

The Chair: Yes, please.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Given that we've been able to find some consensus, at least on the motion that we just tabled, I move that this meeting be adjourned.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any opposition to adjourning the meeting?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Very good. Have a nice Thanksgiving recess week.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: You want a recorded vote on an adjournment...?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It can be on division.

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to on division)

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