



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 079

Monday, May 8, 2023

Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

Monday, May 8, 2023

• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 78 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

[English]

For many of you who have been here before, you know that in the hybrid format, if you look at the bottom of your screen you will see a globe. If you press the globe, it will give you choices for the language you can conduct your meeting in. That's one thing.

Then, public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy have removed the mandate for wearing masks indoors. We still hear from the World Health Organization that masks are excellent tools for preventing the spread of COVID.

I want to take this opportunity to remind all participants that you are not allowed to take pictures of the screen. You're not allowed to take pictures of what is going on here. You can get this on the House of Commons website.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, March 20, 2023, the committee is meeting to continue its study on tech giants' current and ongoing use of intimidation and subversion tactics to evade regulation in Canada and across the world.

We have two witnesses here.

I also want to remind you not to speak unless the chair recognizes you. Please speak through the chair whenever you're speaking.

Before I go into this, we have two witnesses here from Meta Platforms. They are Kevin Chan, global policy director, and Rachel Curran, head of public policy in Canada.

Both of you have a total of 10 minutes. You can choose how to use that 10 minutes yourselves. I'll give you a 30-second shout-out.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): The witness who is not appearing today, Madam Chair, is Nicholas Clegg. He was invited and has not appeared.

Hopefully we can move quickly on this point. I wanted to move that in relation to the committee's study on Google, Facebook and Bill C-18, Nicholas Clegg, president of global affairs for Meta be—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): I have a point of order.

The Chair: All right, go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I just need a clarification. Are we entering into committee business? That's normally when motions are moved.

Is this a point of order? Motions are not allowed to be moved on a point of order.

The Chair: I don't think he made a point of order to move a motion. He informed us all beforehand that he was going to move this motion.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It's my understanding that we've now entered into committee business, then, for him to be able to move this motion.

The Chair: What he is moving is directly related to the meeting we're doing right now. He can do that at any time. It's directly related, in fact, to this particular meeting.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: All right. I'll allow him to continue, then. Thank you for the clarification, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Peter, you may continue, and then I have a question I need to ask the clerk with regard to your motion.

Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll state it again.

I move that in relation to the committee's study on Google, Facebook and Bill C-18, Nicholas Clegg, president of global affairs for Meta be summoned to appear before the committee for two hours on May 15, 2023.

I move the motion. Hopefully this won't engender a lot of discussion.

He was invited. He is not appearing. This would be a summons, so he would have an obligation to appear.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter.

I just wanted to suggest that there was a summons sent on Friday—two weeks ago—for Nicholas Clegg to appear. It was already made by this committee and it passed unanimously.

We had originally, in our very first motion, asked for specific people to come.

I wanted to ask the clerk this: What happened when we invited those specific people from Meta to come?

Then we sent a summons. The clerk shared with me that Meta decided that they would love to co-operate with the committee and they would come, despite the summons, if we sent them an invitation. We also sent an invitation following the summons. Why is it that of the people who I was told were going to appear, one suddenly decided not to come on Friday? Can you tell us the reasons you were given, Clerk?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson): That would be a more appropriate question for the witnesses than for me.

The Chair: No, but you were informed. You were told, as the clerk, that Mr. Clegg was not coming. What was the reason given to you when he called on Friday or when they decided on Friday to renege on that agreement to come?

The Clerk: Again, I would suggest, since the witnesses are here in the room, that it would be a more appropriate question for the witnesses.

The Chair: Then you were not given any reason. You were just told that they weren't coming. Is that it?

I'm just trying to clarify for the sake of the committee.

The Clerk: I would suggest that the witnesses are sitting right here and can clarify. You can get the news right from the witnesses themselves.

The Chair: We also have a motion on the floor from Peter.

Martin, are you speaking to the motion?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Yes indeed.

Madam Chair, I too have some questions about clarifying the sequence of events.

We did in fact send a summons to appear to some Meta representatives, and afterwards, through the clerk, Meta sent a request. We agreed to send them an invitation afterwards, but the summons to appear had already been sent to Meta. Out of courtesy, and at their request, if I recall correctly, we added a letter of invitation to the summons. The clerk can correct me if necessary. Meta had agreed that the people we had invited would appear. It had been confirmed that Mr. Clegg would be among those who would attend, and we believed in Meta's good faith and assumed that Mr. Clegg was bound, not only by his agreement to appear further to the invitation, but also indirectly as a result of the summons we had sent a few days earlier.

So, what reasons were given? Could they just be toying with us? I'd also like to know whether the clerk has further details about why they said they were cancelling Mr. Clegg's appearance before the

committee. All we've seen is an amendment to the meeting notice for today, which simply leaves out Mr. Clegg's name with no further information.

Were there any explanations, yes or no? I don't think it's up to the witnesses to tell us why, given that there was probably a conversation held between the committee and Meta.

Can the clerk provide us with further details?

• (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. Your synopsis of events is accurate.

I have Marilyn waiting and I have Peter waiting, but I think you are asking the clerk a specific question. Is that right?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Yes, I'd like some clarification. I want to understand what purpose was served by the summons to appear that we sent. Did it become void because we agreed to send an invitation? After all, a summons stands for something. So I want to know what reasons were given. Are there valid reasons that would justify Mr. Clegg's absence, when we willingly agreed to send an invitation rather than a summons to the people at Meta, which had made a commitment to appear before the committee? We didn't receive any notification to that effect.

These are important questions, and I'd like answers.

I would add, Mr. Clerk, that these answers might well affect our decision with respect to Mr. Julian's motion this morning.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Well, to begin with, a summons for a sovereign citizen of another country has no effect from this committee, so there is that. It was relayed back to me from Meta that there wasn't a need to abide by the conditions of a summons, because it had no effect.

They extended an offer to have Mr. Clegg appear voluntarily if the framing of the meeting was such that it was an invitation and a collaboration and an effort to work collaboratively with the committee. That was all set up.

Then, as the events unfolded, I was instructed to alter the title of the committee's study from a generic description to the exact language of the motion, which presented a different framing for the meeting, which was perhaps unpalatable to Sir Nick Clegg.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Am I to understand that he was asking us to change the title of our invitation?

[*English*]

The Clerk: The invitation was sent under a certain title. Subsequent to the invitation being accepted, Sir Nick Clegg was scheduled to appear.

When the notice of meeting went out, it had a different title that framed, I believe.... Once again, I cannot speak on behalf of Meta, but I believe, based on our exchanges, that the framing of this particular meeting with the particular study title was not acceptable to Sir Nick Clegg.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: You weren't told specifically why Mr. Clegg refused to appear. You were not told clearly that this was why he was not coming. That's what I wanted to know.

[English]

The Clerk: You're asking me to provide precisions from Meta, and I'm trying to say that the people who I was basically discussing the matter with are sitting in the room. Perhaps it would be better to ask Meta.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'm not trying to put you on the spot.

[English]

The Clerk: The email that I received from them was that the framing of the meeting was no longer acceptable to Sir Nicholas Clegg.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: That's all I wanted to know. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Before I go to Marilyn, I want to say that the framing of the title of this meeting came directly from the motion that was passed unanimously by this committee, so there was nothing strange or new, and it was a public hearing when that motion was passed.

Now, to Marilyn—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: On a point of order, just to correct the record, it was not passed unanimously. There were individuals who abstained.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is that true, Mike? I can't remember.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): That's true.

Clerk, I would just say that certainly we want to hear from Nicholas—I think that was the intent—but previously, when we had Google here, the title of the meeting was “Activities of Google in reaction to Bill C-18”. I would move to amend the motion that Mr. Julian has made to say that the meeting be called “Activities of Meta in reaction to Bill C-18” to provide a more accurate topic and in a more collaborative way.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there discussion? Are you amending Peter's motion?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Yes, that was my intent.

The Chair: All right.

Does anyone want to speak to the amendment to Peter's motion?

Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

If the committee is in agreement, I would accept that as a very friendly and amicable amendment to my motion.

The Chair: Anthony, please go ahead.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am absolutely in agreement with the motion, although I do note, as you have said, Madam Chair, that we've already summoned Mr. Clegg and we had summoned Mr. Zuckerberg, and neither of them is here. We've summoned another Canadian employee of Meta, who is not here either. There are two people here who were not invited by the committee or summoned by the committee. I find that extraordinary.

While I would be prepared at this point to refer this to the House, as opposed to summoning Mr. Clegg again, I certainly will support summoning Mr. Clegg again. I do find it strange, given, as you said, Madam Chair, that this is all based on a motion that was adopted weeks ago. Nothing changed within the scope of the motion that invited or summoned Meta here.

I don't understand how somebody who agrees to come in a Tuesday letter to the committee pulls out on the Friday before the meeting. If the issue is indeed that Meta doesn't like the way the committee has framed the wording of the meeting, that is extraordinary too. Meta wants to dictate to us what legislation we should pass, and they also want to dictate to this committee what we call our meetings. I'm aghast.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

For clarification, I would like to read the motion that Mr. Housefather proposed and that was passed by this committee. Whether it was unanimous or not, it was passed by the committee.

The motion reads:

That, given the dominant market position of Meta and Google and each company's recent actions in Canada which appear to be attempts to intimidate Parliament and which follow a pattern of repeated subversive tactics used by tech giants across the world to prevent accountability, the committee undertake a study on tech giants' current and ongoing use of intimidation and subversion tactics to evade regulation in Canada and across the world, and that as such, the committee hold a minimum of 5 meetings; and that, as part of this study;

(I) The committee summon Meta—

It has the names of everyone. There's Mark Zuckerberg, Nick Clegg and Chris Saniga.

The motion then reads that Meta Platforms would provide us with documents, which we have not received, as you well know. This committee knows we were sent generic documents that can be found in the public domain. We actually subpoenaed those documents, and they have not arrived yet.

Let's be very clear on what we're talking about. The committee was asked to study "tech giants' current and ongoing use of intimidation and subversion tactics to evade regulation in Canada and across the world". That is the exact wording of the motion. That is the exact wording for this meeting today. In fact, this was done in a public hearing, so that Meta was fully and well aware—and so was Google and everyone else—of what that motion said. This is not some sort of sleight of hand at all. I want to be very clear about that.

I have Marilyn and then Peter.

• (1120)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Chair.

Absolutely. We were also advised that people who are in the United States are not necessarily legally subject to the subpoenas we send. In the spirit of wanting to hear and work collaboratively, Mr. Julian is okay with the amendment to name the meeting as we said, and so I'd like to have that vote.

The Chair: I will call the vote if there is no one willing to speak to the amendment, Marilyn. I will reserve the right to do that.

Peter wants to speak.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, I do. Thank you, Madam Chair. I won't take a lot of time.

Mr. Clegg is a very experienced parliamentarian. I believe he understood the ramifications of proposing that an invitation be issued, knowing that in parliamentary terms, what that does is have an impact on the summons. That is why I'm proposing a clear summons today that goes forward such that if he chooses not to come on Monday, as he has chosen not to come today, he will be in non-compliance, and there is a process we have as parliamentarians. I'm sure Mr. Clegg would understand that there are consequences for his refusal to respect our democracy in Canada and our Parliament.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter.

Is there any further discussion on Ms. Gladu's amendment?

No.

I will call the question on the amendment.

All those in favour of the amendment? All those opposed?

Mr. Housefather, are you voting?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I abstain.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: As we clarify this situation, I think Martin Champoux made a very important point.

We sent a summons, as the committee asked us to. As a result of that summons, we heard from Meta Platforms that they were a little concerned about our summoning them and that they would like to come and work collaboratively with the committee. If we think about it, we are simply repeating—even though the motion has passed—exactly what they promised to do, and then they withdrew on Friday.

Those are some of the things that I gather everyone is concerned about.

Chris, did you wish to speak?

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): I have a point of order before we move to the witnesses. I would like to see them sworn in, please, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. There's a point of order.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*].

The Chair: I didn't hear you.

The Clerk: Mike just said that they're sworn in already.

The Chair: Okay, the witnesses have been sworn in.

Go ahead, Ms. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, on May 1 it was agreed in the meeting that there would be 15 minutes of business at the end of this meeting, so I was confused as to why that didn't make it into the notice of meeting. I would ask that it be accounted for or provided for today.

The Chair: Okay. I would like to ask the clerk again to remind us.

Was there a vote taken on the idea to stay an extra 15 minutes today?

The Clerk: [*Inaudible—Editor*].

The Chair: Did we make a vote? Was it the committee deciding we should to that?

The Clerk: There was not an official vote on it. There was some discussion around the invitation to the Auditor General. I believe there was a promise by the Bloc member, who is present, to also move that motion in INDU. He's given notice of the exact same motion to have the Auditor General appear at the industry committee.

• (1125)

The Chair: No, it's not on the Auditor General. I'm asking about that motion by Ms. Thomas to spend 15 minutes at the end of this meeting. Was it a motion? Was it voted on? Was it passed? I cannot recall that it was. That's why it's not in the minutes of the meeting, Ms. Thomas. It's not part of the meeting because I don't think it was voted on.

Go ahead.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, there are many decisions that are made around this table through a collaborative approach rather than taking a vote. If that's something that you require going forward, then I will insist on that, but the decision was made at this table. We do not have blues, unfortunately, but you can pull up CPAC and watch the film. It was agreed to around this table, based on a friendly conversation, that we would have 15 minutes of committee business at the end of this meeting today.

The Chair: Then we will have 15 minutes at the end of this meeting today. Thank you.

Go ahead, Chris.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Isn't Thursday the open meeting? Didn't we agree, but now Thursday is the open meeting? Do we have a set agenda?

We have witnesses here right now. Let's move forward. I know the Conservatives may not want to trouble Facebook too much, but let's hear from the witnesses. They're scheduled. The notice of motion has happened. If there are 15 minutes after one o'clock, great. If not, let's push it to another time. The witnesses are here.

The Chair: I have just a bit of correction, Mr. Bittle. Thursday is going to be two hours with the new president of Soccer Canada, Charmaine Crooks. On Monday we were going to have one hour of witnesses with regard to safe sport and one hour of an in camera committee meeting.

Are you suggesting, then, that we leave the suggestion that everyone seemed to tell me that they all agreed to, even though there was not a vote? They all agreed to it. Do they want to do that today?

Mr. Chris Bittle: I think the agreement, Madam Chair, was for an extra 15 minutes. If there isn't an extra 15 minutes, then let's just go to the witnesses.

The Chair: Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I cannot stay past 1 p.m. I have to go to the House, so I won't give my consent to extending the committee, but I do believe 15 minutes at the end would be warranted. We have now summoned Mr. Clegg, so we will be coming back to Facebook potentially next week, or discussing non-compliance with a summons.

The Chair: All right. We will have the 15 minutes at the end of the meeting, as suggested.

Ms. Thomas, did you have something else to add?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I am happy to accommodate Mr. Julian and to have those 15 minutes take place within the meeting, but I will just clarify that based on the discussion that took place on May 1, it was agreed to have an extra 15 minutes at the end of the meeting.

Clerk, it's your prerogative, so if you wish to include those 15 minutes within the framework of this meeting, I'm just very much aware that this is limiting our witnesses.

The Chair: It is limiting our witnesses, yes, indeed.

Peter, you're not going to be able to stay for 15 minutes, but it seems to me that the discussion suggested an extra 15 minutes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Again, Madam Chair, I do not give my consent for the extra 15 minutes. I do believe Mrs. Thomas' request is reasonable. I would suggest we go to committee business with 15 minutes remaining and come back to Facebook next Monday, when hopefully Mr. Clegg will be available to respond to our summons.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have two witnesses whom I will introduce. We said originally that these witnesses would have 10 minutes.

The witnesses are from Meta Platforms. Kevin Chan is global policy director, and Rachel Curran is head of public policy at Facebook Canada.

You have 10 minutes. You can divide the 10 minutes as you choose. I will give you a literal shout-out when you have 30 seconds left.

Thank you. Please begin.

Mr. Kevin Chan (Global Policy Director, Meta Platforms Inc.): Madam Chair, members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, it is a pleasure to once again be before you today. My name is Kevin Chan, and I'm a global policy director at Meta Platforms. I am here with my colleague Rachel Curran, our head of public policy in Canada.

Madam Chair, as you will know, your committee clerk wrote to us on Friday, April 28, to confirm an invitation to appear before this committee for its study on the "reaction of companies in the information technology industry to Bill C-18".

We were delighted at the opportunity to once again make a representation to the committee of our serious concerns with the online news act and readily agreed to accept the invitation. To demonstrate how seriously we took this opportunity, our president of global affairs, Sir Nick Clegg, confirmed his participation as our principal witness.

Unfortunately, late last Thursday, May 4, we were notified by the committee clerk that the title of the hearing was changed to a much more confrontational one, one that seemingly had nothing at all to do with the online news act. Given this development, on Friday Meta notified the committee that our president would no longer be appearing.

I think we were all looking forward to a substantive discussion about Bill C-18 today, much like the thoughtful discussion that occurred at the Senate Standing Committee on Transport and Communications last week. That seemed like a high-water mark of legislative deliberation.

• (1130)

[Translation]

As you know, the clerk of your committee wrote us on Friday, April 28, to confirm that we had been invited to testify before you in connection with its study on, and I am quoting now, the reaction of companies in the information technology industry to Bill C-18.

We were delighted to have another opportunity to speak to your committee about our major concerns with respect to the Online News Act, and willingly accepted the invitation. To demonstrate how seriously we were taking this opportunity, our president of global affairs, Sir Nick Clegg, confirmed that he would be attending as the principal witness.

On Thursday, May 4, we were informed by the committee clerk that the title of the study had been amended and replaced by another much more worrisome version that apparently had nothing to do with the Online News Act. In view of this change in direction, Meta advised the committee on Friday that our president would no longer be attending.

I believe that we were all keen to take part today in a serious discussion about Bill C-18, like the thoughtful discussions held at the meeting of the Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications, which seems to have been the high point of the legislative proceedings.

[English]

With that in mind, I am pleased to now share with you the opening statement that our president of global affairs, Sir Nick Clegg, had written and was prepared to make for your original study on the reactions of companies in the information technology industry to Bill C-18.

This is what he said:

"Madam Chair, my name is Nick Clegg and I'm President, Global Affairs at Meta. I'm grateful for the opportunity to address this committee.

"Madam Chair, the Online News Act is based on a fundamentally flawed premise. Meta does not benefit unfairly from publishers sharing links to news content on our platform. The reverse is true.

"Publishers choose to share their content because it benefits them to do so, whereas it isn't particularly valuable to us at all. As such, we've taken the difficult decision that if this flawed legislation is passed, we will have to end the availability of news content on Facebook and Instagram in Canada.

"The truth is, our users don't come to us for news. They come to share the ups and downs of life, the things that make them happy and sad, that interest them and entertain them. Links to news stories are a tiny proportion of that—less than three percent of the content they see in their Facebook Feed.

"But news publishers do find our services valuable. We estimate that Facebook Feed sent registered news publishers in Canada more than 1.9 billion clicks in the 13 months to April 2022. This amounts to free marketing we estimate is worth more than \$230 million. Publishers choose to share their content because it drives traffic to their websites. It helps them sell more subscriptions, grow their audience and display their ads to more people than they might have otherwise.

"The traditional news industry faces profound challenges. New technology has emerged, consumer behavior has changed, and old business models don't work anymore. Of course, everyone wants quality journalism to thrive. But it makes no more sense to claim social media companies are taking money from publishers than to say car companies stole from the horse and cart industry.

"It seems we're having a debate as if the internet was frozen in time about 10 years ago. The way our users engage with content has changed dramatically. Just in the last year or two we've seen an enormous shift in people consuming creator content and short form video. Watching video is now more than half of time spent on Facebook and Instagram. People reshare Reels—our short form video format—more than two billion times every day on Facebook and Instagram, which has doubled in just the last six months.

"The world is constantly changing and publishers, like everyone else, have to adapt. Asking a social media company in 2023 to sub-

sidize news publishers for content that isn't that important to our users is like asking email providers to pay the postal service because people don't send letters any more.

"And not all internet companies are the same. We're not Google. They are an amazingly successful company that does extraordinarily useful things for people, but they operate a search engine that functions by using links to news web pages. Meta, by contrast, doesn't solicit, need or collect content from news websites to put on our services. Our users—and in this case, news publishers—choose to share it themselves. Globally, more than 90% of organic views on article links from news publishers are on links posted by the publishers themselves.

"I've heard a lot in this debate about how this legislation is replicating what Australia has done. In fact, the laws are different in important respects—and C18 will go further than the Australian legislation. First, the Australian code doesn't apply to Meta because we haven't been designated by the Treasurer there. If we do end up being designated and forced to pay publishers, we will be faced with the same difficult choice we are making in Canada. But perhaps more significantly, this legislation would make Canada the first democracy to put a price on free links to web pages, which flies in the face of global norms on copyright principles and puts at risk the free flow of information online. Canada—and Canadian liberals—have a long-standing reputation for believing in multilateralism, and for defending the free and open internet—C-18 would be a direct contradiction of that long held and honorable tradition.

"I spent 20 years of my life as a legislator, so I understand how difficult it is to craft good policy and sensible legislation. In this instance, I believe C-18 is flawed legislation which would deliver bad economic policy too. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that most of the funds generated by the Act will go to broadcasters, not the local and regional publishers it was supposed to support. It's Robin Hood in reverse. The Act would subsidize big broadcasters at the expense of independent publishers and digital news sites, skewing the playing field so it's even harder for smaller players.

"Ultimately, this legislation puts Meta in an invidious position. In order to comply, we have to either operate in a flawed...regulatory environment, or we have to end the availability of news content in Canada. With a heavy heart we choose the latter. As the Minister of Canadian Heritage has said, this is a business decision. It's not something we want to do, but it is what we will have to do.

• (1135)

“I welcome your questions.”

With that, Madam Chair, Rachel and I welcome your questions as well.

The Chair: I was giving you the 30-second shout-out. Thank you, Mr. Chan.

Now we will begin our question-and-answer period. The first one is six minutes. The six minutes, actually, is for the questions and the answers, so I'm going to ask you to be as clear and crisp as you could be.

The first question comes from the Conservatives.

Ms. Gladu, you have six minutes.

Oh, it's Mrs. Thomas, then. Thank you.

• (1140)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

About three weeks ago, Bill C-11 was rammed through the Senate. There were amendments suggested originally, but they weren't taken by this government. Then it was sent over to the Senate. Yet again, the Senate did not give it the sober second thought it deserved, so it got pushed through. It now gives this government unprecedented power to control what people can see, say or hear online.

Then at the Liberals' convention this weekend, they put through another intention—a proposal—which is that they would actually regulate news sources. Basically, the state would have to approve a journalist's news source. If the government gives that news source a stamp of approval, then that article can be published. If the government—through the CRTC, I would imagine—doesn't give that stamp of approval, then of course that article would not be publishable. It's form of censorship.

What's interesting is that a journalist, Paul Wells, who traditionally is very liberal and very much inside the pockets of the Liberals, wrote an article on Friday outlining what's happening here.

He said, “It is impossible for any government to subsidize journalism without deciding, at some early point, to exercise its prerogatives as an owner.”

What's interesting is that this government has funded the media to the tune of about \$600 million. As the owner of much of the media here in Canada.... Of course, there are many fantastic independent sources and alternative sources of media, but the mainstream tends to be largely owned by the government, because they're the ones that are keeping them afloat or propping them up with this massive amount of grant money.

Now it would appear, based on their convention, that the Liberals are looking to cash in on this. They're looking to exert their power. Some might call it bullying. In fact, I believe that is how many members of this committee have referred to it when power is misused. It's called bullying.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I have point of order, Madam Chair.

I don't expect a question in the near future, but I want to clarify that things that are passed at a convention aren't government policy. Those are things by members.

I'll clarify that for people who are listening at home.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bittle.

Continue, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I believe that was debate.

Policy passed at the convention often makes it to the floor of the House of Commons, and then, of course, it impacts Canadians. That is concerning. It's concerning to Paul Wells and to other journalists because it would be an infringement on their ability to function as journalists.

Ms. Hepfner often talks about the fact that they're so incredibly well trained and should be trusted to tell the stories they research, so I'm confused as to why this government wouldn't trust them to tell those stories without first needing to give a state stamp of approval as to their sources.

Nevertheless, this government has managed to turn into a bully, because they own part of the media. In the same way, Facebook, or Meta, is being put in a position where it will have to enter into monetary contracts with news sources, which then gives Facebook, or Meta, an incredible amount of power as well. It would appear, then, that they are also using that power to make decisions that have a detrimental impact on Canadians.

I actually see two peas in a pod. I see two sources of tremendous power dictating to Canadians what's going to happen in terms of access to news.

I'm curious as to what you would make of that.

Ms. Rachel Curran (Head of Public Policy, Canada, Meta Platforms Inc.): Thank you for the question, Mrs. Thomas.

Part of our concern with the online news act, with Bill C-18, is the fact that it ties the fate and the fortunes of the Canadian news sector to the fortunes of two American technology companies. We think that one of the major flaws with the legislation, as you've stated, is in fact that it makes the news sector almost entirely dependent on foreign technology companies. That is one of the points of concern we have with this piece of legislation.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I guess I need some further help, though, to know why it is in the hands of these two giants.

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you for the question, Mrs. Thomas.

That is the way the legislation is drafted. That's certainly what the minister has indicated also. It's that this legislation is intended to apply to two American technologies companies, which are Google and Meta. I understand there may be some room to scope in other platforms or other technology companies, but for now, very clearly it's directed at Google and at Meta.

• (1145)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: It's my understanding that you've entered into several agreements already. Does Meta intend to uphold those agreements or pull from them?

Mr. Kevin Chan: Well, Madam, I don't know that we have an answer for that. Of course, it depends on what the framework for Bill C-18 will ultimately be. We have to understand what is scoped in with Bill C-18 to understand what can and cannot be ultimately on the platform from a news content point of view.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm curious. For Facebook to continue to carry news and to continue forward with these deals that have been sprung—I think it's 14, or something like that—I'm wondering what is required in terms of legislative change. Right now, Bill C-18 is in the Senate, so it's possible to have amendments made. What should those amendments be?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Mrs. Thomas.

We have proposed a list of amendments, both to this committee and to the Senate.

I'm sorry, Madam Chair...?

The Chair: You speak through the chair. Thank you.

Ms. Rachel Curran: Oh, I'm sorry, Madam Chair.

Yes, we have proposed a list of amendments to this committee and to the Senate committee looking at the bill. One of our primary concerns with the bill in the amendments we have proposed is to scope out what we call publisher-posted content, which is content that's posted voluntarily by news publishers to our platforms, whether it's written text, hyperlinks or audiovisual content. If publisher-posted content were removed from the scope of the act, we think it would make it a much better piece of legislation. That is one of the primary amendments we propose.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to the Liberals and Anthony Housefather, please.

Anthony, you have six minutes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Anthony, but you're on mute, I think. We can't hear you. At least, I can't hear you.

Could we suspend the time for Mr. Housefather while we find out what's going on?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I'm very confused, Madam Chair. Can you hear me?

The Chair: Now we can hear you, yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Okay, I'm sorry. I don't know what happened. I apologize to the witnesses.

Witnesses, I'm going to be asking a couple of questions that can be answered by “yes” or “no”, or “I don't know”. Feel free to say “yes”, “no”, “I don't know.” If I ask you to expand, feel free to expand.

My first question is for Mr. Chan. Did you encourage Mr. Clegg not to come here today?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I believe this was his decision.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Did you have any role in that?

Mr. Kevin Chan: Well, I'm an adviser to our president, so of course I would be part of that decision.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Did you agree with that? Did the advice that you gave correspond to his decision?

Mr. Kevin Chan: As all good advisers will do with a former deputy prime minister, you'll appreciate that we will keep my advice confidential so that I may be fearless in my advice, and he is the decider.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Has Meta's board of directors discussed the content-blocking decision you've made in the event that Bill C-18 is adopted?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I'm sorry, but I didn't hear that. Could you repeat it?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Has Meta's board of directors discussed the proposed content-blocking in Canada if Bill C-18 is adopted?

I can't hear your answer, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Kevin Chan: Oh, I said, “I don't know.”

Mr. Anthony Housefather: You don't know.

Was the decision to do content-blocking in Canada if Bill C-18 was adopted made exclusively by the Canadian team?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I think there were a number of people involved. I'm not really part of the Canadian team any more, as you appreciate, but I think this is concerning on the global level. I don't think, as I said in the opening statement, that we haven't seen—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That's fine, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Kevin Chan: —any democracy make an attempt to put a value on links, which is concerning—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chan, I'm reclaiming my time. If you can answer questions with yes or no, I'll ask you to do that.

Was Mr. Clegg involved in that decision, yes or no?

Mr. Kevin Chan: As president of global affairs, he would have been.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Was Mr. Zuckerberg involved in the decision, yes or no?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I don't know.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: You don't know. Okay.

I'm going to focus my questions going forward on the Australian activities of a couple of years ago.

Per The Wall Street Journal's reporting of whistle-blower documents, Facebook deliberately over-blocked Australian emergency services, health and government pages as part of its news take-down. I'm going to focus on what I've heard from Facebook whistle-blowers in these documents.

One of the things the whistle-blower stated was that the Australian takedown was carefully planned over months. As the bill was tabled in the second half of 2020—many, many months before the eventual decision—Facebook created a special team of product staff and engineers to deal with the content-blocking scheme.

Has a content-blocking team for Canada been created, Mr. Chan?

• (1150)

Mr. Kevin Chan: I'm not aware.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Ms. Curran, are you aware?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Yes, I can answer that.

We do have cross-functional teams working to understand the legislation and to prepare for the removal of news on our platforms, yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Ms. Curran. I appreciate the way you answer the questions.

Let me ask a question, then. Per the whistle-blowers in Australia, the team that was created for Australia was required to sign NDAs in an unprecedented way. It was not the existing NDA that you sign as an employee of Facebook, but a special project-related NDA.

Has anybody within Meta been asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement in conjunction with planning for blocking content in Canada?

Ms. Rachel Curran: I can only speak for the Canadian team. We have not been asked to sign anything like the NDAs you referenced.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Are there others outside of Canada who would be on this team?

Ms. Rachel Curran: We have a broad cross-functional team, Mr. Housefather, working on this file, working to understand the legislation, working to prepare for the ending of the availability of news on our platforms, so it is a large team, yes.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Okay, perfect.

Are you aware of any documents that have been created to prepare for the content blocking?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

I don't know if you're referring to specific documents. Certainly that team's work is under way, and in the normal course of business, they would be, of course, recording the work they do.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: The committee, in its order from March 20, had requested to receive these documents. I'm wondering, Ms. Curran, if you could tell me why they haven't been produced yet.

Ms. Rachel Curran: Yes. As my colleague Mr. Chan said, we're working to comply with the committee's order for document production. We've just got to make sure that we respect confidentiality and various other legal considerations, so we're taking the advice of our legal counsel on this and working very closely with them to make sure that what we're providing is in accordance with all of the laws and rules around these documents.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Perfect.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have a little under one minute left.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you. Then I have time for one more question.

Whistle-blowers disclosed multiple company documents in the United States to the United States Department of Justice. As part of a deck, one slide called "product readiness timeline" states that ideal takedown timing is after legislation has been passed by the Senate but before it receives royal assent. This is, again, the Australian example. The same deck shows the takedown plans needed to be ready for February 5, a week before Facebook expected earliest passage of the bill.

Ms. Curran, that would seem to indicate that the takedown was essentially to maximize negotiating leverage in Australia.

Is the Canadian model similar? Is the threat similar to what was happening in Australia to maximize negotiating leverage, or is it different?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

I can confirm that the way Australia unfolded was not ideal. There were some technical errors made in the way that we removed news from our platform. We fully intend that those errors will not be made in the Canadian context, and we're preparing very carefully to ensure that this is the case. We're going to make sure that we're fully transparent with Canadians, with parliamentarians, as we move towards news removal, if we're forced to do that.

Of course, Mr. Housefather, that's going to depend on the final scope of Bill C-18, and we don't want to pre-empt the work of the Senate in that regard.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Curran. You're well over time. Thank you very much.

Now we go to the Bloc Québécois and Martin Champoux.

Martin, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Is Meta listed in Canada's lobbyist registry?

[English]

Ms. Rachel Curran: Yes, we are.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: When a bill is tabled in the House of Commons, it goes to committee for debate, where MPs from all parties meet the stakeholders and organizations affected by the bill so that they can explain their concerns or expectations.

Have you met MPs from various parties in connection with Bill C-18?

• (1155)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Curran: Yes, we have met with some MPs and some senators to discuss our concerns with Bill C-18, and all of those interactions and engagements are recorded in the lobbyist registry, as required by Canadian law.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Ms. Curran, what you're saying is very interesting. I never received a request to attend a meeting to discuss Bill C-18 with Meta representatives. And yet I believe we might have been able to have some very interesting conversations. We could have debated our respective ideas.

Did you have direct discussions with government representatives during the debate surrounding Bill C-18?

[English]

Ms. Rachel Curran: Look, Mr. Champoux, we would love to meet with you about Bill C-18, and we can certainly rectify that very quickly. We'd love to have a conversation with you about it and about the amendments we've proposed.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: These discussions should have been held before we voted to send Bill C-18 to the Senate. It's now being studied by the Senate. We're a bit late for that.

I understand from the way you're nodding that you have indeed met government representatives.

Did they listen to your concerns? Did you get the impression that you had been answered? Tell me a bit about what happened.

Mr. Kevin Chan: For the committee meetings, we were almost not invited the first time. I'm therefore very pleased to see that we still have the opportunity to take part. So we're going to plan for that as soon as possible, Mr. Champoux.

As for meetings with government representatives, we did have some. We were told that they were to discuss an aspect of the platform that could not be changed. That put an end to our discussions.

On the other hand, we suggested some changes to this committee and to the Senate committee.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Okay, we can talk about that again later. I want to return to today's meeting. Like my colleagues, I'm extremely frustrated to see that Mr. Clegg decided not to attend.

Mr. Chan, I believe you were involved in those discussions and that you may have advised that avenue.

Mr. Kevin Chan: No, I didn't say that. What I said was that my advice was confidential.

Mr. Martin Champoux: You're right, but you were part of the process. All of which is to say that if you felt it was appropriate for Mr. Clegg to be here today, you might have been more forceful about suggesting that. But that's not the point I'm trying to make.

The fact remains that after discussing it, this committee agreed to redo the process, and to offer an invitation to Meta in response to its offer to collaborate, and for Mr. Clegg to agree to come before the committee.

The wording of the motion had been clear since March 20. The way it was framed became public on March 20. You were therefore aware of the title of the study and the wording of this motion.

I'm trying to understand the attitude that would lead the president, Mr. Clegg, to change his mind even though he had more or

less promised to appear before the committee and was already aware of the content of the motion under study. I must say that it seems pretty straightforward to me.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I understand your question. I'd like to say that Mr. Clegg is a very honourable man.

Mr. Martin Champoux: I don't doubt it.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I couldn't tell you what he was thinking, but to me, it wasn't at all clear that the motion of March 20 was related to the invitation we had received. It was an email inviting us to appear for the study of Bill C-18. We were delighted to...

Mr. Martin Champoux: So you weren't aware of the fact that the summons to appear, which had been sent pursuant to the motion voted upon here on March 20, and in connection with which you contacted our clerk and said that you were unhappy about a summons, but that you would willingly agree to cooperate if it were an invitation.

You didn't connect the three.

● (1200)

Mr. Kevin Chan: I don't know about that. As I said, we received an email and all I saw was an invitation to come and discuss Bill C-18. We are still transparent and would like to work with you.

Mr. Martin Champoux: You're saying that you weren't aware that the letter of invitation was related to the summons sent the previous week further to the motion voted upon at the committee on March 20. You didn't connect the dots on the three events.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I know that it's hard to grasp...

Mr. Martin Champoux: It's mainly hard to believe.

Mr. Kevin Chan: For people who are not experts in parliamentary procedure...

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Clegg is an expert in parliamentary procedure. He's a former British deputy prime minister.

Mr. Kevin Chan: He's our president of global affairs. He leaves to others the task of acknowledging invitations and deciding which of these...

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Chan, do you understand that the members of this committee feel justifiably frustrated about Mr. Clegg's absence, and about the explanation you are giving today, to the effect that you didn't make the connection between the invitation and the summons that had been sent the week before? Do you understand why we are irritated?

[English]

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

We are frustrated too. We really wanted Mr. Clegg to appear here. He was eager to appear to discuss the online news act, to discuss Bill C-18. We received last-minute notice on Thursday evening last week that the title of this hearing would be changed, and we took that, understandably, as a very significant change to the framing of the hearing, in that that it would not be about Bill C-18 but about a suite of other matters altogether, and on that basis Mr. Clegg decided not to appear.

He was really looking forward to being here and talking about Bill C-18 and the impact of that bill on Canadians and globally.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Okay. He's perhaps a bit thin-skinned...

[English]

The Chair: You are running out of time. I will now go to Peter Julian.

Peter, you have six minutes, please. Everybody is going over six minutes and I'm allowing you to have equal time, so go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The questions that Mr. Champoux just asked are altogether legitimate.

Mr. Clegg is an experienced parliamentarian. I therefore find it hard to believe that he didn't know he was muddying the waters by requiring an invitation rather than a summons. He can prove that he is prepared to come and testify by responding to our summons and coming to answer our questions next Monday.

We'll see. I remain skeptical with respect to some of the answers, but grateful in other instances for your clarifications.

[English]

Ms. Curran, you talked about the product team that is currently working on what I perceive to be a threat to parliamentarians and our democracy, saying that you will respond if Bill C-18 is passed in the Senate.

At this point, is that product team examining limiting access by Canadians to emergency services information? You can understand that in an emergency, people need information immediately. Meta Platforms did that in Australia, and I find it absolutely reprehensible that Meta may be looking at doing that in Canada.

Ms. Rachel Curran: Through the chair, no, it's our intention that none of those pages that are not in fact news pages will be blocked or removed or removed from access by Canadians. We are working very carefully to ensure that doesn't happen.

Mr. Julian, this is a business decision that we're being forced to make by this legislation. We wish we were not in this position. We don't want to have to make this decision, but if we are forced to make it, we will remove news in a way that's very careful, that is responsible, that is transparent. We'll make sure Canadians still have access to emergency pages, to government pages, to community service organizations and to politicians' pages as well, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you. It didn't happen in Australia. Reprehensibly, Meta blocked access for Australians, and I think you're not reassuring us today that Meta will not do the same thing.

What were Meta's profits last year in Canada? What were the revenues raised in Canada?

Ms. Rachel Curran: We don't break out Canadian revenue. I can confirm that Meta's revenue for the last quarter, I believe, was in the order of \$13 billion.

Mr. Peter Julian: My other question, which I imagine you will not respond to, is this: What were the taxes paid in Canada in the last year? There have been a lot of concerns raised about Meta not paying its fair share of taxes. Can you share those figures with us?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Yes, we can follow up to give you a number for that, Mr. Julian. I can confirm that we do pay all the taxes we're required to pay in Canada. That includes corporate tax. That includes payroll tax. That includes GST and HST.

Mr. Julian, we do pay our taxes in Canada. I can give you that figure once I've followed up to get it.

● (1205)

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you. I appreciate that and I appreciate getting your overall revenues in Canada, because then we can determine, and Canadians can determine, whether it's a fair share of taxes.

It's in the billions of dollars, of course. We know this, and with billions of dollars, you seem unaware that Bill C-18 was substantially changed through this committee process. The NDP tabled a whole range of amendments that put the focus on small local news organizations.

In your testimony to begin, Mr. Chan, you didn't seem to be aware of those amendments passing and the overall impact that it has on the thrust of the bill. The PBO report that you cited took place before all of these amendments were brought forward by the NDP to put in place a framework that favours local businesses and community businesses that are providing information in communities across the country.

Are you aware of those amendments being passed?

Mr. Kevin Chan: Mr. Julian, I have to say that on these sorts of matters, we take advice from our legal counsel, and our legal counsel continues to advise that the scope is unprecedented across the western world. It ingests all news links. It ingests audiovisual content and—

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes—

Mr. Kevin Chan: It would make us pay for something that we don't put on our system.

Mr. Peter Julian: My question was very simple: Were you aware of those amendments? You don't appear to have been aware.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I did not say that, Mr. Julian. I want to be accurate for the record.

Mr. Peter Julian: Were you aware of those amendments? That's my simple question. Yes or no, were you aware of those amendments?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I'm aware of amendments, but unfortunately, our legal counsel has—

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay, then you were aware in giving your presentation that it was inaccurate. I find that distasteful.

Mr. Kevin Chan: Mr. Julian, I don't know that this is accurate at all.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, if you were—

The Chair: Mr. Chan, please allow Mr. Julian to finish his sentence.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

I would now like to go to concerns that have been raised about Facebook and Meta doing little to counter the use of their platforms to spread hateful, false information from conspiracy theories. Also, in Europe, initiatives have taken place to flag content that incites and advocates extremism. Content must be removed from the web within the hour.

Is Meta co-operating with European authorities that are trying to crack down on what has been seen as hateful extremism that Meta has permitted online? Is Meta co-operating with the European authorities?

Mr. Kevin Chan: Of course, Mr. Julian.

As we have indicated—and I believe you have been also present for some of these discussions—we have very strict content policies that go well above the rule of law in terms of what the laws require us to remove. We remove harmful content, we remove terrorist content and we remove violent extremist content, so yes, Mr. Julian, we do very much co-operate, and we welcome further opportunities to do so.

Mr. Peter Julian: The message today is that you will follow the law as adopted by Parliament, by the House of Commons and by the Senate.

The Chair: We're at time, Peter.

Mr. Chan, please answer the question.

Mr. Kevin Chan: Of course. We've always done so.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we move into the second round. We will have a five-minute round this time. We'll begin with the Conservatives.

Mr. Shields, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate all of the witnesses being here. No matter what the context, I think that what we found the last time, when we finally had.... I appreciate your coming, but the people we were looking to come should understand the frustration that we had when the appropriate people did not come. It makes it very difficult for us to have good clarity in the questions, because those people can answer them.

When you see our frustration, our concern that we are not getting to where we were....

With the resources that you have, to suggest that you did not know what that original motion was and that you found out late last week what that motion originally was, whether I agree or disagree with it, I find that it's just highly unlikely to have happened, and you would have known what that motion was a long time ago when it was passed.

You have incredible resources, so for somebody to take that and say, "I'm not coming because of that one" really taints the conversation in the room. It really does, no matter what your position or mine might be. The experts in the room that we need to have here make those conversations much more useful.

Having said that, I'm going to go specifically to—and this has been already alluded to—the contracts that you've already signed.

It's been reported that you have 14 of those contracts signed in Canada now. Is that true?

• (1210)

Ms. Rachel Curran: We have 18 now, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: Would you define who those 18 are?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Mr. Shields, through the chair, the content of those deals and who they are signed with is a matter of commercial confidence.

Mr. Martin Shields: I understand that.

My honourable colleague here suggested that they had amendments approved that would help support local newspapers, but he didn't support ours, which would have supported solo journalism. In my riding, where there are 13 weekly papers, we have a number of those with one journalist. They have not had an agreement with you.

Are you going to have an agreement with them?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Through the chair, we share your concerns that small and local publishers and news outlets will not benefit from this bill. In fact, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer has recently confirmed, more than 75% of the funds that are purported to be raised under this bill are going to go to the most profitable and highly subsidized broadcasters in Canada.

In fact, Mr. Shields, that's one of our other concerns with this bill. It's not going to help small local journalists like the ones in your riding.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yet you've gone out and made agreements with 18 others. Why aren't you making agreements with those independent small ones? If you can take the time to do 18, why aren't you doing those ones?

Mr. Kevin Chan: Mr. Shields, we would welcome a conversation with the CEO of your publication, if that is what you are seeking. I think that would be very appropriate.

Mr. Martin Shields: Would you like the names of the 13 weekly papers in my riding owned by the one-journalist operations? Would you meet with them and make a deal with them?

Mr. Kevin Chan: We have before, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: No, you didn't.

Mr. Kevin Chan: No, it wasn't in your particular riding, but we have met with other one-person operators or owners, as you say.

Mr. Martin Shields: Can you give me an example of one of those?

Mr. Kevin Chan: Sure. We've met with Indiegaf and Erin Millar. We've met with Jeremy, whose last name starts with "K" at The Sprawl in Calgary.

I guess what I'm reacting to maybe is to clarify, Mr. Shields, if you are under the impression that we have not talked to small publishers, that in fact it's the opposite. We've spent most of our time with small publishers.

Mr. Martin Shields: But you've made no agreements with them.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I believe we have some agreements with.... I'm trying to remember. We have an agreement with Indiegaf and with The Discourse.

Mr. Martin Shields: Are those one-journalist....?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I think there might be two. I'm not sure, exactly, but I think, by anyone's definition, it's a very small publication.

Mr. Martin Shields: In the 13 in my riding, that's what they live on, by the way.

Mr. Kevin Chan: We would be very pleased to speak with them, especially—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Kevin Chan: —out from under the challenge of Bill C-18.

Mr. Martin Shields: You'll get those names. I'll be looking forward to those conversations happening.

Mr. Kevin Chan: Thank you, sir. Sure.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Martin.

I will go to the Liberals now, and Lisa Hefner. Lisa, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Lisa Hefner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chan, are you aware of the U.S. antitrust lawsuits against Google's dominance in ad tech? I'm asking specifically about the lawsuit that alleges that Google and Facebook illegally agreed not to compete with one another on advertising technology, which is a violation of the Sherman antitrust act.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I don't think I'm familiar with that particular part. I am aware of the legal—

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Okay, let me go on and give you a little more detail.

We've seen some information coming out of this lawsuit that shows evidence of market-rigging between Facebook and Google. To be specific, Facebook signed a quid pro quo agreement with Google to kill the rival ad tech called "header bidding" in return for special privileges for Facebook. Header bidding was an alternative ad tech that news publishers were embracing in order to increase their online ad revenues.

How does Meta expect news organizations to innovate in the digital space when it colludes with Google to kill rival ad technologies?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I'm happy to take that, Madam.

In Canada, you don't have to look—

The Chair: Answer through the chair, please, Mr. Chan.

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Chan: I'm so sorry, Madam Chair.

I should just point out that you don't have to look at the United States, Madam Chair. We can look just in Canada. Jeff Elgie, who runs Village Media, has his own ad tech platform that he just launched to much acclaim. He has been and continues to be a long-time colleague and partner of ours, and we have no intention, of course—

Ms. Lisa Hefner: I'm sorry, sir. To go back to the California lawsuit that we were talking about, the lawsuit shows that Google knew that header bidding increased publishers' ad revenues by 30% to 40%. That's for the news publishers. In return for killing that technology that benefited the news publishers, Google guaranteed that Facebook would win 10% of ad bids on Google servers.

My question is this: What is Meta's increase in ad revenue since Sheryl Sandberg signed that agreement with Google back in September 2018? How much did Meta gain with this scheme, to the detriment of news publishers?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I'm not aware. I believe that a lot of this will probably be best addressed to Google.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Perhaps you can give us the Facebook data in writing after this meeting, if you don't have it on hand.

Really, how can you state that you're a partner to news organizations and small businesses when you're working behind the scenes with Google to hurt those same businesses, hurt their innovation and their ability to grow online?

Mr. Kevin Chan: Madam Chair, I still get The Globe and Mail delivered to me every day. I've been doing this for over 20 years, and I enjoy flipping through it every day and seeing the partnership we have with The Canadian Press. Are you aware, Madam, that on every article written by one of our news fellows, there is a byline at the end that talks about how these fellows are made possible through a partnership—

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Okay, great. Let's talk about that. Let's talk about that exactly.

Facebook has a journalism project. In 2019, your company announced it would donate \$300 million to the news business, with a special focus on local journalism. However, research from Columbia's Tow Center for Digital Journalism found that \$29.4 million was actually allocated to local U.S. news organizations. Furthermore, about half of the 500-plus newsrooms received only one grant of about \$5,000 each.

Why did you allocate only 10% of your initial commitment to that journalism fund?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I believe it was a global fund that was announced. We have spent \$8 million in Canada with respect to programs with news publishers and partnerships. That includes our Canadian Press news fellowship program. That includes the accelerator program—

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thank you, sir.

I want to point out that this fund actually represents a very small percentage of what Facebook paid under the news media bargaining code in Australia and what it would be mandated to pay under Bill C-18.

I want to go a bit into your statement that news has no value to Facebook.

We know that Facebook collects millions of data points on its 21.5 million Canadian users. Your company has pushed back against regulation internationally that would limit your ability to harvest data for ad tracking. Are you really telling us that the data collected on the content a user views on your platform is of no value to Meta?

Mr. Kevin Chan: Madam Chair, with apologies to my journalism and publisher colleagues, I think what we're saying, as we have said elsewhere, is that this type of content—news links, etc.—is highly substitutable, so—

Ms. Lisa Hefner: How much time do—

The Chair: I'm sorry. You are out of time.

Mr. Chan, did you want to finish your answer? Answer very quickly.

Mr. Kevin Chan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's highly substitutable. What that means is that if the content were not there, people would nonetheless engage with other kinds of content, with no—

Ms. Lisa Hefner: If journalism that has been sourced is not there, people will find other sources of information. That's very illuminating.

Thank you, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I think that's fair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hefner.

Now I'm going to go to Martin Champoux from the Bloc for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

You said earlier, Ms. Curran, that in the last quarter, Meta's global revenue was \$30 billion. Is that right?

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Curran: It was \$13 billion in North America for the last quarter, Mr. Champoux.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: It's for North America. Okay.

And you also said that the sharing of news content accounted for less than 3% of content on your platforms. I think that was in Mr. Chan's speaking notes. Now 3% of \$30 billion is roughly \$900 million. That's what's generated in North America by the sharing of news content on your platforms. That may not be a big deal for Meta or Facebook, but what represents a drop of water in Meta's ocean probably amounts to the bread and butter of small newspapers. It could save many companies, like those in my colleague Mr. Shields' region, about which he spoke earlier.

Don't you think that numbers like these deserve a little more serious attention?

Mr. Kevin Chan: Mr. Champoux, societal debates over principles are sometimes needed. Now, attacking the concept of an open and free Internet is an important issue.

Mr. Martin Champoux: We are not attacking the concept of an open and free Internet, we're talking about content, those who created and those who don't really have the option of using platforms today because it's the new way of communicating. People end up on platforms using search engines and that's where they find information. Content creators, and the news media, can only comply. If they had a choice, they would probably not be on your platforms but the choice available to them is to use the platforms or die.

Once again, Mr. Chan and Ms. Curran, you're telling me about \$30 billion in revenue in North America in the last quarter. At a rough estimate, \$900 million of this revenue comes from the sharing of news content. Let's say it's only \$500 million, or half a billion dollars. I think a figure like that would make any news organization green with envy.

Mr. Kevin Chan: Those numbers are wrong. The percentage of a type of content is not equivalent to the percentage of our revenue that it generates.

The money we get comes from small- and medium-sized businesses that want to publish advertising...

Mr. Martin Champoux: You sell advertising. You sell data.

Mr. Kevin Chan: ... on our platform for an audience of 24 million Canadians.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry; I'm going to Mr. Julian for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Meta representatives are telling us that they want to respect the committee, except that Mr. Clegg refused to come here today. They spoke about transparency, but they refused to disclose the figures for revenue generated in Canada. They are here to talk about Bill C-18, and even though they admit that the bill has changed considerably, they continue to speak about the initial version rather than the current one.

I'm therefore somewhat skeptical about Meta's sincerity. Moreover, there have been some extremely serious allegations made against Meta.

[English]

I'm speaking of course, Madam Chair, of the horrific allegations contained in reports recently about Facebook amplifying hate. The Amnesty International report found that Facebook amplified hate ahead of the Rohingya massacre in Myanmar, and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism has talked about Facebook letting activists incite ethnic massacres with hate and misinformation in Ethiopia. We have reports that Facebook's ethical failures are not accidental; they are part of the business model.

How do you respond to these serious, egregious allegations that amplifying the most horrific human rights violations and ethical failures are part of Facebook's and Meta's business model? How do you respond to those allegations, and why should we believe you now when you come to this committee and say that you want to respect laws and respect Canadian values?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

I can say this. Our community standards prohibit hate speech and prohibit misinformation on our platforms. We have large teams working around the world to remove content that's forbidden by our community standards, and that includes hate speech or any content that would incite people to violence, and we work very hard to remove that.

It's not perfect. Our enforcement systems aren't perfect, but they're getting better every year, and we report on those results transparently and publicly in our transparency centre so that Canadians and parliamentarians know that we're holding ourselves to a certain standard and that we're improving all the time in meeting our goals.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up for this round of questioning.

I'm going to Ms. Gladu from the Conservatives for five minutes.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I think I'm going to pick up on the topic that I left off with last time, and that has to do with the fact that since I have been on this committee studying Bill C-18, I have been explaining, as a person who was in business for over 30 years, that if the government brings in a plan that says that if you allow the sharing of news links, you have to pay, a logical business reaction is to say that you won't allow the sharing of news links so that you don't have to pay.

Mr. Chan, does that seem like a logical business decision?

Mr. Kevin Chan: That is an eminently logical conclusion, ma'am.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you.

It seems to me that the shock and surprise that is being expressed by the other parties, as if it's something unthinkable that Facebook is doing, is exactly the reaction that was predicted, and this is exactly what happened in Australia.

Now let me talk about the Australian situation. You mentioned that you are now not under the Australian legislation. Could you describe, after there was blocking of information in response to the Australian legislation, what led to Australians being able to see content again?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Through the chair, yes, we're not designated under the Australian legislation. It does not apply to us or to any other platform.

One of the key differences between the legislation in Australia and the legislation in Canada is that the Australian legislation allowed time for a process to unfold whereby we could reach what we call an untidy and short-term compromise for news to remain on our platforms, and that's currently where it sits now.

If we were to be designated under the Australian legislation, I think the outcome would be very similar to what we are signalling here.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you.

Knowing that Canadians do not want to lose their ability to share news links—Australians didn't either—and they certainly enjoy that, has the Liberal government approached you in any way to have the similar conversations that were held in Australia to preserve the ability for Australians to share news content?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Through the chair, one of the problems with the Canadian legislation is that it doesn't actually allow for any kinds of discussions like that, or for a process to unfold, before we are designated and subject to the framework contained in Bill C-18. We are virtually automatically designated under this framework as soon as the bill and regulations are finalized.

One of the amendments we have proposed is that to allow for some time for those discussions to happen, we should not be automatically designated under the legislation. As it stands, the Canadian framework does not allow for that.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Chan, my understanding is that you mentioned you were at Senate committee, and it was actually a productive discussion with respect to the amendments. What amendments did they seem to be favourable to that you would like to see modifying Bill C-18?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Yes, one of the things we spoke to senators about, which they seemed interested in, was the preservation of copyright principles. This is what the EU has done in a similar context with respect to news publishers.

There is no monetary compensation required for the posting of links or snippets in the EU. That protects and preserves copyright principles. We suggested that this was something that might be looked at in Canada as well. Senators were quite interested in that proposal.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Certainly, the Supreme Court in Canada decided that there should be no monetary value for the links. That would be consistent with what the courts have said, although not consistent with the legislation the Liberal government has brought forward.

One of the concerns I have about Bill C-18 is that the CRTC will be involved in the oversight. They have said that they currently don't have experience in the oversight of digital platforms. Do you share my concern?

• (1230)

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Through the chair, we can't speak to the CRTC's current resourcing. My understanding is that they are not currently resourced to deal with this legislation or to implement it, and that they would need to acquire the resources to do that.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: This is my final question.

I have recommended that the government consider abandoning Bill C-18 in favour of models of the kind used in Taiwan, where monies can be brought in that would actually benefit the local and smaller media outlets. Are you involved in any relationships like that in the world?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Through the chair, we have certainly signed a number of deals with Canadian publishers to support the work they're doing, and in particular to support new and innovative business models.

Look, a central fund model would be very different from what's proposed in Bill C-18. I think that in principle, that model would be an easier one for us to support.

The Chair: Thank you. I will go now to the Liberals.

We have Mr. Bittle for five minutes, please.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you very much.

Again, this is disappointing. This whole exercise has once again shown Facebook's contempt for not only our democracy but for democracies around the world.

We've heard from you, Mr. Chan, multiple times on other committees as well. It really is your willingness to only answer questions if they're softballs from the Conservative Party.

You even started this by saying, "Oh, we didn't know." The motion passed by this committee was that "the committee undertake a study on tech giants' current and ongoing use of intimidation and subversion tactics to evade regulation in Canada and across the

world". You pretend you didn't know that? I doubt that you didn't do your homework, Mr. Chan. It's disappointing that you would come here and mislead the committee on that.

You misled the committee on other items. You say news outlets get hundreds of millions of dollars in free advertising, but you leave out the part that your company is engaged in monopolistic practices that take the vast majority of ad revenue, so the free advertising is worthless.

I'd like to ask you about a 2018 meeting between the British culture secretary and Mark Zuckerberg, your CEO. He threatened to pull investment out of the U.K. if the government did not look to soften its stance on tech regulation.

Can you explain why your company would go to these lengths against legislation that seeks to protect children online?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I'm not aware of that meeting.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Fair enough, but you'd agree with me, though, Mr. Chan, that everyone keeps talking about different countries, different regulations. You're a massive company that does not want to be regulated and you will go to any lengths to avoid that regulation.

Are you familiar with the term "astroturfing"?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I believe you asked that question of Google, and I have learned—

Mr. Chris Bittle: I'm asking that of you, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Kevin Chan: —of it through that, and now I am informed.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Excellent.

There are about 13 non-profits, all backed by Meta, currently blitzing through state houses to kill online harms legislation. These same organizations have consistently lobbied against all forms of tech regulation, be it anti-sex trafficking laws or antitrust reform, while failing to disclose their financial links to big tech. Non-profits like NetChoice, backed by Meta for the last eight years, are even coordinating litigation right now to oppose legislation in numerous states.

Is Meta currently funding any Canadian third party organizations that have lobbied or advocated on behalf of tech regulations in Canada?

Mr. Kevin Chan: No.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Meta has listed all third party U.S. organizations it funds in the United States on its political engagement page. Will you commit to provide a similar list of Meta-funded Canadian third party organizations if you do undertake that or if we find out that you do, which is probably more likely?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I wish we had money to spend these days on these sorts of things, but if you would like a list—

Mr. Chris Bittle: You're just a little upstart that's struggling in the world, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I have to say—

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Chan, let me—

Mr. Kevin Chan: Madam Chair, may I answer the question?

Mr. Chris Bittle: No, no, Mr. Chan—

Mr. Kevin Chan: Madam Chair, may I answer the question?

Mr. Chris Bittle: No, Mr. Chan, this is my time—

Mr. Kevin Chan: I have an answer.

Mr. Chris Bittle: —it's not your time.

The Chair: It's Mr. Bittle's time to ask questions.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I have an answer, though, Madam Chair.

Mr. Chris Bittle: No, Mr. Chan, we're going to move on.

Mr. Kevin Chan: I see.

Mr. Chris Bittle: We're going to move on, Mr. Chan, because clearly, it's again nothing but contempt and evasiveness.

I can ask softball questions like members of the Conservative Party, and I know you'll answer those directly, quickly and succinctly, but it's weird to me, and I think it's weird to Canadians, to say on one hand that news isn't important to your platform, that it's only 3% and it's not important, even though you want to be a trusted source of information, while on the other hand you're entering into deals with 18 publishers, and we have no idea who they are.

You are picking the favourites. We're trying to balance the playing field.

Is news important? On the other hand, you're saying you spend hundreds of millions of dollars on news and enter into deals and you're good players even though you're a small tech start-up that struggles to get by day to day.

Which one is it, Mr. Chan?

• (1235)

Mr. Kevin Chan: I need to just clarify a few things that are misinformed in that statement.

Mr. Chris Bittle: You mean specifically in my last comment? Yes, please go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Chan: If you're looking for the list of companies we have supported, we do have annual reports we release in Canada every year that show who we fund and who we support. There were things like Canada 2020 in the past, things like Equal Voice, organizations like OCTEVAW in Ottawa, things like the Broadbent Institute. We're happy to provide those for you. They are public. I believe they've been subject to access to information requests. We'd be very pleased to share those with you, and I will ensure we do that, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you. That's the end of that time.

Now I need to speak to the committee.

You wanted to take 15 minutes out of this meeting. It would mean we could have a third round, if this committee is interested, but it would be a round of three minutes, three minutes, one-and-a-half minutes, one-and-a-half minutes, three minutes and three minutes. Are you in agreement to do that? That would give us 15 minutes in all. It would mean we would have 10 minutes, with a little five-minute overrun, for the 15-minute meeting.

Go ahead, Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Just to clarify, Chair, I thought we had just started into the next round, in which we'd have five and the Liberals five, and so the next would be two and a half and two and a half. Is that wrong?

No. We just finished the round. Okay.

The Chair: We just finished that.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: That's fine, then. That would be fine too.

The Chair: All right, that's fine. Okay, I'll begin, then.

I'll go to Mr. Waugh for three minutes.

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

There's lots of talk about disinformation in Canada. We just saw it. The Liberal convention brought it out. There is disinformation. Shame on news sources in this country, whether it's Meta or Google or CTV or Global or even the prize, the CBC.

I see that people always seem to be hacked on Meta Platforms. How does one hack? Every day I see friends who are hacked.

Mr. Kevin Chan: Well, sir, it would depend on a bunch of different things. One way that it happens oftentimes is that when someone is sent a malicious email, they click on it, and that reveals certain information on their computer to the person who is trying to hack. They are then able to take control of certain accounts or the computer in question.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: With this talked-about new policy at the Liberal convention about misinformation, it says there will be money available, public funds to support this.

Would Meta be at the table for money from the Liberal Party if this policy becomes law through the Liberal government?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

Certainly if there are government funds on offer to Meta, we would apply for those, absolutely.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: This was the issue I had with this proposal that came up on the weekend. It's the most ridiculous thing. We have all seen misinformation, and not only on social media. I was a broadcaster on for over 40 years. There was misinformation during my time that was spread on local news. I saw it. You just shake your head. You go back in time....

Ms. Curran, I think you want to answer some of this.

Ms. Rachel Curran: Yes. Well, I think that's true, Mr. Waugh, through the chair.

If I could, I'd just respond to this question about the value of news, though, which I know you raised also.

I think that when we're talking about value, we believe that news has a real social value. The problem is that it doesn't have much of an economic value to Meta. That's the real concern with this legislation. We are being asked to compensate news publishers for material that has no economic value to us, and that's where the problem is.

We agree, though, that news has a real social value and that it's entirely appropriate for legislators and policy-makers like yourself, particularly if you've been involved in the industry, to think about how to support the news industry as it transitions into the digital world.

• (1240)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It hasn't done a very good job of transitioning. I mean, it has just been brutal with the newspapers. With the firewalls, the attempts they have, it has been disastrous from day one.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to the Liberals and Anthony Housefather for three minutes, please.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to come back to the issue of Australia. Again, I'm concerned about the overreach in the content blocking that happened in Australia and making sure that this does not happen here.

Whistle-blower documents state that Facebook violated its own company policies during the gradual rollout of the takedown on February 17, 2021. Facebook ignored error signals at the 10% mark, 25% mark, 50% mark, as senior executives ordered the full rollout to take effect within hours. Errors would normally have paused the rollout.

One example of a weird thing that happened is that Facebook policies, which you both know very well, require prior content review and cross-checking of lists of sensitive accounts, including accounts of critical online infrastructure, to avoid harmful over-blocking of content. Whistle-blowers reported that "before the Australia takedown, apparently for the first time in its history, Facebook did not develop or utilize lists of sensitive accounts before activating the Australia takedown", which threatened COVID vaccine rollouts, response to wildfires and more.

In response to other Facebook employees who were trying to fix the over-blocking, an Australian response team member posted ac-

knowledgement that guidance from the policy and legal teams had been found to be overinclusive in blocking.

Ms. Curran, you were very nicely answering my questions earlier. Can you confirm that you will not be over-inclusive in blocking and that you will develop a list of sensitive accounts to avoid over-blocking?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Thank you, Mr. Housefather, for the question.

Through the chair, yes, it is absolutely our intention not to make the same errors in Canada that we made in Australia. We're working very hard to make sure that's not the case.

Of course, the way we do this is going to depend, by necessity, on the final scope of Bill C-18 and how it emerges from Parliament.

We will be absolutely transparent with parliamentarians and with Canadians. I'm happy to have the conversation with your office about these details as well, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you. I'm happy to do that.

Could I also confirm that you will not block government IP addresses? I think that was another thing that happened in Australia that could be avoided here.

Ms. Rachel Curran: Yes, Mr. Housefather. We are not going to block government pages, emergency service pages or community organizations. With regard to some of the things that were mistakenly scooped into scope in Australia, we're working very hard to make sure we do not do that this time.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Was there a post-mortem done of the Australian situation?

One would think that with such an huge overreach, there would have been a very quick post-mortem to make sure that the process didn't repeat itself. Was there a post-mortem done?

Ms. Rachel Curran: Yes, my understanding is that there was a post-mortem. That is informing the way we are proceeding with ending the availability of news in Canada as well.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: To the extent that you're able to, would you be able to share the findings of the post-mortem, at least the high-level findings, so that we can see what will not be repeated, based on what you learned?

Ms. Rachel Curran: We'd be happy to follow up with your office, Mr. Housefather, and have that conversation.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: As my last question, in Australia there was no appeals mechanism. Was that being appealed?

The Chair: You have one second. I'm sorry, but you've run out of time.

Ms. Curran—

Ms. Rachel Curran: The answer is yes, Mr. Housefather.

The Chair: —please send that information to the committee—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, ma'am.

The Chair: —and not simply to Mr. Housefather.

Thank you very much.

Martin, you have one and a half minutes. Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to go back to the significance of the news content that can be found on platforms like Meta.

In terms of circulation, 3% of content searched for by users is news. You said that there were 1.9 billion clicks on news content over the past year, and added that the free marketing was worth a total \$230 million. So you're admitting that there is a value attached to this content.

My question is more about Meta's interests further to the adoption of Bill C-18. You mentioned earlier that contracts had been signed with 18 news organizations and I find that positive. Moreover, I think it's interesting to note that although you're not really interested in news, you are nevertheless signing commercial agreements with news companies. This nevertheless raised some questions that need to be asked.

If Bill C-18 is adopted, will initiatives to support local journalism continue? Will these contracts continue? Is Meta going to remain interested in quality journalism content, particularly local?

Unfortunately, you only have a few seconds to answer, because I don't have much speaking time.

Mr. Kevin Chan: Mr. Champoux, I think it will depend entirely on the content of Bill C-18 once the act has become law. If you want the framework to be very broad, that could influence certain things. If the framework is much narrower, it might mean something else.

We are waiting to see what parliamentarians and Parliament are going to do with their decisions.

• (1245)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Martin. That was nicely done.

I'm going to go to Peter.

Peter, you have one and a half minutes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Peter Julian: Since I'm the final questioner, Madam Chair—

The Chair: No, I think we have two others.

Mr. Peter Julian: No, we don't have time. I will be the last questioner if we want to take the 15 minutes.

The Chair: I thought the committee agreed to three and three for the last two.

I want to hear from the committee. Do you all agree to that? No? You're fine? Good. If everyone is in agreement, that's fine.

Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to come back to Ms. Curran, who said just a few weeks ago,

I would say that we're still looking at all of the options based on our evaluation of the legislation.

That was in response to a question about whether Meta is going to act the same way it did in Australia.

From what I understand from your response to Mr. Housefather, you are saying under oath that Meta will not be impacting health emergency information and will not be restraining or suspending information people need, as they're seeing now in Alberta around wildfires and around emergency services as well.

All of those things took place in Australia in the most reprehensible way, with people being denied access to information that was actually critical for them, perhaps, to save their property and often to save their loved ones. Meta denied the access to that information.

Are you saying under oath now that this will not happen and that Meta in no way will impede Canadians' access to information that is fundamental for their health and safety and the health and safety of their community and that Meta will not do that again?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Rachel Curran: That's correct, Mr. Julian. We're working very hard to make sure we don't make the same mistakes in Canada that we made in Australia when we removed news from our platform. We're working very hard to make sure that we don't take down pages we don't mean to take down and we don't take down pages that don't fit the definition of “news”.

The Chair: Thank you, Peter. I think that's it.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have 15 seconds—

The Chair: I don't have 15 seconds on my clock.

Mr. Peter Julian: —so I will reiterate that we would like to have the documentation that has been requested over the last few weeks, including the information that you have committed to give to Mr. Housefather.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: That's very good.

Now I want to thank the witnesses for appearing here and I'd like to suspend so that we can go into the 15 minutes of committee business.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chan and Ms. Curran.

Mr. Kevin Chan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Inaudible—Editor] so reprehensible.

The Chair: I'm sorry; did you say something, Mr. Chan?

Mr. Kevin Chan: I was speaking to Ms. Curran.

The Chair: I see, but your mike was on, so we all heard your comment. I just thought you should recognize that, and it was quite inappropriate. Thank you.

Ms. Thomas, go ahead on your motion that was tabled on Monday, March 27.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, I did bring forward a motion earlier. Out of respect for the committee and the witnesses we had that day, I agreed to put it aside and discuss it more fully today.

It's based on a letter we received from the Auditor General on April 19. She expressed to us that she was interested in coming to the committee if we were interested in having her. It was, of course, with regard to a report she wrote on connectivity in rural and remote areas.

I acknowledge that this report blends between this committee and the industry committee, but the Auditor General is very clear in her report that some of the funding comes from Canadian Heritage. She is also very clear in her letter that this is one of the committees she would be looking forward to attending, should we invite her.

My motion reads as follows:

That, considering the Auditor General report tabled on Monday, March 27th titled "the Progress on access to high-speed Internet and mobile cellular services lags behind for rural and remote communities and First Nations reserves", the committee invite Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada, to testify before committee as soon as possible for no less than 2 hours.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I had raised this earlier and I guess I didn't have a concern at the time, but my understanding is that the Bloc will move an almost identical motion at the industry committee.

I know when there's an issue like sport.... We were specific in making sure we were focusing on something very different from Status of Women. We didn't want to duplicate particular—

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: It has been moved.

Mr. Chris Bittle: It has been moved.

I don't know whether we want to be more specific in terms of what we're doing, rather than calling all the same witnesses, or whether we're just calling the Auditor General. If we're calling the Auditor General in both committees to deal with the exact same thing.... Mrs. Thomas is right that it does have a Heritage element, but I think we can all agree this is—to go back to my law school days—pith and substance. It's something in the jurisdiction of the industry committee.

I'd like to hear from others in terms of not duplicating our efforts.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Champoux, and then Ms. Gladu.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I believe that it's very important for the Auditor General to appear before the committee in connection with this information. Indeed, as Mr. Bittle said, it has more to do with the standing industry committee. On the other hand, if we want to spend more time on content and news to which people don't have access, that's another matter.

It's important to make sure which is most appropriate. I think that it pertains mostly to the standing industry and technology committee, which is no doubt in a better position to do much of the work, and even deal with some of the matters that fall under the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

I'm curious to hear what the other members of the committee think. I would tend to say that it might be a bit much for two committees to send an invitation for the Auditor General to appear.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Marilyn, and then Peter.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My concern is this: Even though the motion has been brought forward at the industry committee, they have numerous things on their agenda. I'm not sure whether they've agreed to schedule it or where that is at.

That said, there are monies coming out of Heritage towards this effort. I would at least be interested in knowing what those are and how successful they've been in achieving the objective.

The Chair: I don't know whether the industry committee has agreed to and adopted the motion. We're just discussing a motion. We haven't adopted it yet. I just want to point that out. We're just trying to get a sense of what everyone thinks.

Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: I support it and hope we vote on it in the next six minutes, Madam Chair.

I understand there is an overlap. There is no doubt. Industry can choose to do that as well. The difficulty may be scheduling, because we have a lot of things on our radar screen. That being said, I think the idea of adopting a motion and putting it into the hopper is not a bad one, and I support it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Chair, my understanding from the clerk, and perhaps I'll seek his confirmation, is that the industry committee has not passed a motion.

The clerk confirms that the industry committee has not passed a motion. That's interesting to me, then.

The Auditor General has written to both committees saying that she would be happy to appear at both committees. It was not framed as either/or. Seeing as how we're the first to discuss this and the first to bring it to a vote, there is absolutely no reason that we can't be the ones to host it. The industry committee can make a decision. If they feel that they're potentially being repetitive, then they can call it off on their end. There is no reason that we should be holding back from doing the important work that we're called to do as a committee. A part of it is certainly to hear from the Auditor General in this regard, so I would ask for a vote at this time.

• (1255)

The Chair: I was going to say that if everyone wants us to finish this on the dot, as Peter is suggesting, it will depend on the committee members to limit their conversation.

Does anyone else wish to speak for or against?

I will call the question.

Is there a sense that there's unanimous consent, or will we go back to questions?

Go ahead, Martin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I'd like to check something before the vote, Madam Chair.

My understanding is that the motion has not yet been debated at the standing industry and technology committee. This committee has therefore not yet decided whether to invite the Auditor General. We're going to be the first to have to decide whether to do so or not.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, I think that's what Mrs. Thomas was pointing out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux: That's what I thought. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Tim is next. Be quick, please.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Could someone read the motion?

The Chair: I can read it for you:

That, considering the Auditor General report tabled on Monday, March 27th titled "the Progress on access to high-speed Internet and mobile cellular services lags behind for rural and remote communities and First Nations reserves", the committee invite Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada, to testify before committee as soon as possible for no less than 2 hours.

Does everyone have that motion?

We'll call the vote.

Mr. Chris Bittle: On division.

The Chair: Okay.

(Motion agreed to on division [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

Thank you.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

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

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

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

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

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