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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 95 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

To begin with, I'd like to reassure the interpreters that I will make an effort to avoid any whimsical allusions, fatuous remarks and lame puns to make it as easy as possible for them to do their work of enabling everyone to follow our proceedings on their headsets, because I'm going to be speaking largely in French.

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

While public health authorities and the Board of Internal Economy no longer require mask wearing indoors or on the precinct, masks and respirators are still excellent tools to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory diseases and their use is strongly encouraged.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants and observers that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

Although this room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. I therefore ask, as all meeting chairs do, for participants to exercise a high degree of caution for the protection of our interpreters. When handling the earpieces, especially when your microphone or your neighbor's microphone is turned on. An earpiece worn too close to your or someone else's microphone can be extremely harmful to our interpreters, and we need them.

The first hour of today's meeting will deal with the order in council appointment of Mr. Jean-François Bélisle to the position of Director of the National Gallery of Canada. He is with us today.

Welcome Mr. Bélisle. You will have an opportunity to speak and each party will then be able to ask you some questions, in accordance with a predetermined speaking order.

I'd like to tell all the participants that I've brought a little of my handiwork with me this morning. To let you know when there are only 30 seconds left, I'm going to raise this piece of cardboard, on which the number 30 shown is not for minutes, but seconds.

Mr. Bélisle, you have the floor for five minutes to give your opening address.

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle (Director and Chief Executive Officer, National Gallery of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you—and all committee members—for this opportunity to meet you. Today marks the 114th day since I joined the National Gallery of Canada as Director and CEO.

My journey is uniquely Canadian. It started here, extended globally, and refocused on the work I could do at home. Previously, I developed Plural, Canada's second-largest art fair, co-founded the private art foundation Arsenal Contemporary Art, which has venues in Montreal, Toronto and New York City which is dedicated to helping Canadian contemporary artists reach wider national and international audiences.

I then joined the Musée d'Art de Joliette as Executive Director, Chief Curator and Director of Philanthropy. Over a seven-year period, we doubled in-person visits to the museum and multiplied philanthropic donations by a factor of 20. We did so by leveraging the creativity, expertise and ambition of the curatorial, operational and administrative teams, by fostering a sense of community and belonging for the donors, volunteers and visitors who trusted us to deliver on our shared vision and by expanding our collection, which now has over 9,000 works spanning 5,000 years of visual art history, in an accessible physical and virtual environment.

[*English*]

Joining the National Gallery of Canada represents an exceptional opportunity. We have an extraordinary team of curatorial and administrative staff whose commitment to building, sharing and preserving a collection that benefits all Canadians is unflinching. We collaborate with volunteers, donors and partners from across Canada whose ambitions for the gallery are limitless.

The value of these relationships was felt most intensely during the pandemic. Fiscal 2022-23 began as the world emerged from COVID-19. Last year, total attendance at the gallery was 279,000—up 68% from the year before—and revenues from operations were up by 81% to \$7.7 million. Most importantly, the gallery could not have survived that test without the support of the government and Parliament.

The National Gallery of Canada Foundation, as well as our distinguished patrons and corporate partners, also made extremely generous contributions, including art donations valued at \$11.1 million, helping us to further enhance the collection.

Building from these successes, I intend to focus on three key points that will all be articulated through art.

First, we put at the centre of everything we do meaningful and collaborative relationships with our employees, visitors, donors, volunteers, community partners and stakeholders. We are at our strongest when we act as a platform to pursue our collective ambitions as a community of shared interests.

Second, we want the gallery to remain a place where the collections, the exhibitions and the experiences that we facilitate are the vehicle for diversity, dialogue and inclusiveness. We're going to make sure that artwork, rather than corporate policies, does the talking.

Finally, we need to keep our strategic focus on transforming the gallery into a modern institution that helps Canadian artists from each of our diverse communities find their voices in local, national and international conversations. We'll do this by expanding our collection and by building partnerships that help our exhibitions reach galleries, museums and artist-run centres across the country. We'll also build the gallery of tomorrow by digitizing our collections and fostering online communities so that Canadians anywhere can enjoy our offerings any time.

[Translation]

I'm confident we will succeed. I encourage you to look to our fall programming for signs of what is still to come. From the 2023 Sobey Art Awards, our new "Riopelle: Crossroads in Time" centenary retrospective, our forthcoming "Humour and Horror" exhibition of indigenous artist Nick Sikkuark's work, to the Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts, the Gallery will be the hub of enlightening, lively and inclusive dialogue about the role of art in shaping the Canada we know and love.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you very much, Mr. Bélisle. Congratulations for finishing with 40 seconds to spare in your allotted time.

We are now going to move to the round of questions.

Mrs. Thomas, of the Conservative Party, you have the floor for six minutes.

• (1110)

[English]

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

Thank you for taking the time to come today and to answer important questions for us. My colleagues and I do have important questions to ask.

However, I need to move a motion at this time, first and foremost. I move:

That the President of the CBC, Catherine Tait appear before committee for a total of three hours on Thursday November 2, 2023.

I believe that everyone has received this motion. The clerk sent it out. However, I'm happy to pause at this time should anything else need to happen administratively before I speak to it.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): I have a point of order.

I find this very disrespectful to our witness. Mrs. Thomas has the opportunity at the end. That's normally when motions are moved. We have questions for the director of the National Gallery and—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian, I understand what you're saying, which has more to do with the debate. Mrs. Thomas moved her motion within the specified time and she can use her time to speak to her motion.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have no intention of filibustering this meeting. I do have the intention of speaking to my motion and then allowing it to come to a vote. Let it be known that, if this meeting is frustrated in any way beyond that, it is because of Mr. Julian.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair—not to frustrate the meeting but just to ask the clerk a question.

Do we even know if Ms. Tait is available for anything beyond the prescribed time? Have we reached out to her about beyond the prescribed time for Thursday, based on the language in the motion? Also, do we have resources to go longer—just so we can manage our own expectations accordingly?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Could you answer the questions, Madam Clerk?

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Geneviève Desjardins): For the resources, that is a good question.

Should the motion pass, I would request the additional time. Regarding Ms. Tait's availability, I asked and she has a meeting and needs to leave at 9:30; however, should a motion be passed, that doesn't mean she wouldn't change that depending on what the committee decides.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You have the floor, Mrs. Thomas.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, it has been pointed out many times by my NDP colleague that Ms. Tait is coming for one hour on Thursday. At this committee meeting, she will be answering questions with regard to her role as the CEO of the CBC, where her contract has been renewed until 2025. Of course, there are many important questions that we have for her when she comes. Many of those have been brought up over the last number of days, and there have been a few attempts to ask for additional time.

There is currently a Bloc motion that has been tabled asking for additional time with the CEO of the CBC, Ms. Tait, and now this is a Conservative motion that is coming forward. I think it is clear that there is a hunger or an appetite to have additional time with Ms. Tait.

Let me briefly outline why it is so important and why I would be requesting the support of my colleagues at this table.

Within the CBC mission and principles that they outline, there are words like “public interest”, “reflect diversity”, “protect our independence”, “act responsibly” and “be accountable”. These types of phrases are used. Further to that, under their principles, it states the following words: accuracy, fairness, balance, impartiality and integrity.

I want to talk about what is specifically going on right now.

Of course, we have many questions for Ms. Tait having to do with her entire mandate since 2018. Right now, there is a war taking place in Gaza, and the CBC has determined to cover it from one angle. Most recently, they put out a headline that was entirely false in nature, where they readily accepted Hamas as their sole source of information and then released that in an article.

This is an organization, a public broadcaster, that receives \$1.4 billion from taxpayers, and they commit to a principle of accuracy. They say, “We seek out the truth in all matters of public interest.” I beg to differ. They took Hamas's word and spread it as if it were fact. There was no second source consulted for this particular article. I would raise issue with this statement. They do not, in fact, seek the truth.

I have very important questions for Ms. Tait, as I am sure many people at this committee do. To expect us to get through all those questions on behalf of Canadians within one hour is simply expecting the impossible. In order to be able to ask the questions that need to be asked and to be able to get to the bottom of some very important issues, we do need the opportunity to have additional time with her.

The request is for three hours. Again, it's to give her the opportunity to speak to not only the false headline that was put out but also to the decision that was made by the CBC to refuse to refer to Hamas as a terrorist organization. It has been declared by the Canadian government to be a terrorist organization since 2002—more than 20 years.

Again, Ms. Tait, as the CEO of this organization, a public broadcaster, is the only one who needs to answer for this.

I could go on and on. There are, of course—

• (1115)

[Translation]

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

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, I took note what you told me earlier when I raised a point of order. In view of that, I would point out that the member has exceeded the six minutes allotted to her. I would therefore request that you move on to the next person on the list for the round of questions, who happens to be a Liberal MP.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): We are debating the motion, Mr. Julian, which means that the six minutes of speaking time do not apply.

Mr. Peter Julian: I am appealing your decision, Mr. Chair. We had already approved today's agenda, which was to receive Mr. Bélisle, the Director and CEO of the National Gallery of Canada. To be sure, Mrs. Thomas is entitled to speak about whatever she wants during her allotted speaking time of six minutes. Nevertheless, we have questions to ask the National Gallery of Canada representative.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): As Mr. Julian is appealing my decision to allow the committee to debate Mrs. Thomas's motion, we must immediately vote on upholding my decision. I would first like to consult the clerk. I would ask the committee for a brief pause.

Mrs. Thomas, the standing order is clear on the fact that when a chair's decision is challenged, one cannot debate it, even if the decision is upheld. In such a context, one must immediately proceed to a vote. As you know, we can't debate a challenge of a chair's decision.

I am accordingly asking the committee to vote on the motion to uphold the chair's decision. I am giving the floor to our clerk.

Mr. Noormohamed, I can see that you wish to intervene, but we have a vote and, unfortunately, can't debate it at this time. I am therefore asking you to postpone your comment or question until after the vote.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I just want to comment on the procedure.

I'll summarize. A decision was made and it's possible to challenge the chair's decision. My question is the following: if we proceed to a vote on the motion—as soon as possible, because I believe it's important—how much time will we spend debating—

• (1120)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Noormohamed, we are debating a decision from the chair that has been challenged, even though I clearly explained two minutes ago that we couldn't do so.

As I explained earlier, the standing order allows Mrs. Thomas to continue to debate her motion. Mr. Julian has appealed this decision. My duty is therefore to vote on it. That's what we are going to do now and the vote will be on whether to uphold the chair's decision.

(Chair's decision upheld: yeas 7; nays 1)

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

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Having understood that the committee has upheld the chair's decision, I'm wondering whether we should suggest to Mr. Bélisle that he leave.

Parliamentary obstruction has occurred on other committees. Keeping witnesses in the room when there's obstruction—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I understand your suggestion, Mr. Julian. I can assure you that if I see that debate is becoming overly drawn out, which did not appear to be Mrs. Thomas's intention, I would ask that Mr. Bélisle be allowed to leave. For the time being, I think we can still expect discussion to be brief.

Ms. Gladu, do you have a point of order?

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Yes. Chair, on a point of order, I certainly think we can get through this quickly. Mrs. Thomas has clearly stated that she's not filibustering. I want a chance to speak to this. Then I have questions for this existing witness.

What I would say is that, technically speaking, when I use my “raise hand” function to get in line for speaking, any time there's any other dilatory vote or anything, this system is automatically taking my hand down.

I just wanted to be sure I wasn't removed from the original order.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I can assure you, Ms. Gladu, that you're next on the list. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

[*English*]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

Thank you to the committee. Interestingly enough, that conversation and little charade that was pulled off there by the NDP member, Mr. Julian, took almost eight minutes. I was just about ready to wrap up my comments at six minutes. Again, let the record show that the frustration taking place at this committee is at the hands of the NDP member.

I came forward with a very straightforward motion asking for Ms. Tait to appear here for three hours so that we would have sufficient time to be able to ask her questions with regard to her mandate as the CEO of the CBC. That is my question. I'm further outlining a few, a very few, of the concerns that I have with regard to the CBC and with what I would say is their biased coverage with regard to the war in Gaza. Of course, there are many other topics that we would wish to ask her about as well.

At the end of the day, it comes down to two words. Ms. Tait has said that the CBC is committed to telling the “truth”, and Ms. Tait has said that it is important to restore “trust” in journalism. The

CBC has not told the truth in many of its articles that it has released. In particular, one comes to mind with regard to the war in Gaza. With regard to the second thing, that of trust, she is right that the Canadian public does deserve the restoration of trust. That will take place when the CBC refuses to continue to perpetuate its biased coverage, actually looks at multiple sources and covers the news from multiple angles.

We'll give her the opportunity to answer questions in this regard when she comes on Thursday. We would ask that it be three hours long.

Thank you.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mrs. Thomas.

Ms. Gladu, you have the floor.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I'll be brief.

We originally were calling her for an hour. It's simply not enough time. I am concerned that they continue not to call Hamas “terrorists”, even though they're listed as an organization. I'm concerned about the false reporting that the Israel Defense Forces bombed a hospital when in fact that didn't happen, and there's been no retraction. I would like to ask questions of Ms. Tait about the many reports that have been done, the surveys and summaries, stating that the CBC is partisan or left-leaning. Finally, I want to talk about how the CBC is not going to interfere in the next election by not suing the Conservative Party in the middle of a federal election.

Those are the questions I'm looking for. We're going to need three hours. I do support this motion.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Mr. Waugh, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, Chair. It's nice to see you in the chair today. I'm sorry I can't be with you in person.

I agree with both the members who have spoken about the head of the CBC coming for three hours on Thursday, if possible.

I'm also concerned with the recent reports that CBC News is investigating claims of indigenous identity. The latest is Buffy Sainte-Marie. It has rippled through my province, including the Piapot reserve, which she...has grown up. Brodie Fenlon of the CBC posted the reason that CBC News is starting to investigate indigenous identity. This is a new facet that we would like the head of the CBC to comment on. I believe this is the third investigation done by the CBC, one by Geoff Leo out of Regina and one or two out of Saskatoon recently. I just want to know if, as I see it, they are the only organization in this country investigating claims of indigenous identity.

I would support the motion to get Catherine Tait to committee for up to three hours.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

Go ahead, Mr. Noormohamed.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I, like Mr. Julian, find it regrettable that we are wasting Mr. Bélisle's time, but here we are.

I think it's important to remember that Ms. Tait is, indeed, coming on Thursday. It's nice that everybody in the room has now acknowledged that indeed she is coming on Thursday. The clerk has indicated that she has certainly reached out to see what her availability is, but we have no idea what Ms. Tait's answers to the questions that she's going to be asked will be. I'm assuming that members will treat her with a respectful approach and that, at the end of that meeting, if people are not satisfied, we will have the option to bring forth a motion to bring her back if that is what we need to do.

I must confess that I am troubled by the ongoing claims or assertions—whatever we want to call them—and that people are trying to get Canadians to believe that somehow the CBC is on the side of terrorism and that there are those who have decided that it is okay for the government to dictate to journalists and the CBC what they should be saying, etc. I think we should be very careful and mindful of the fact that we live in a country where the independence of the media and the freedom of the press are critical. I shudder to think about what a Conservative government might do in dictating the terms of what journalists should and should not be allowed to cover, of what is news and what isn't. I'm not really interested in living in an Orwellian world like that. I think it's really important for us to ensure that we do everything we can in this committee to recognize, preserve, protect and indeed defend the independence of the CBC and Radio-Canada and to stop this ongoing demeaning of the work they do and of the journalists who put themselves in harm's way to provide Canadians with news. We don't have to agree with what they say or how they say it, but I think we have to agree that their independence is paramount.

It is important for Canadians from coast to coast to coast to see this committee as much as possible standing up for the independence of journalism and standing up for the rights and the protec-

tions of journalists to do the important work that we need them to do in this country from coast to coast to coast and indeed around the world.

I look forward to having discussions about this. Indeed I think it is important for us to have conversations about misinformation and conversations about the way in which it can mislead Canadians and the implications about that for the independent, fantastic journalism that the CBC and other independent journalists provide, and about what that misinformation can do in terms of trust and the ease with which things can be misconstrued. I know there are bot farms across the world, whether they're in Egypt or Russia, that amplify misinformation.

I look forward to bringing forward a motion to this committee in not too distant a future, whereby we will actually have the opportunity to discuss openly the notion of misinformation and disinformation and the impact of that disinformation on public broadcasting, on journalism, on the lives of journalists, and indeed, on the way in which people see and understand one another, and the consequences of that misinformation.

The idea that we would bring someone or call someone onto the carpet—which is what I think my colleagues would really like to do with the head of the CBC—and demand that she carry the government's message is, I think, remarkable. I think it is remarkable, coming from a party that talks about gatekeepers, that somehow they would now like government to dictate the terms under which Canadians should understand what news and journalists are doing—

• (1130)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: On a point of order, Chair, I would just ask that the honourable member watch his terminology and be very careful. If he's going to make accusations, he should make sure there is substance to them and that he's able to point to the facts. None of what he's slinging right now—the accusations—has actually taken place.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mrs. Thomas.

Please continue, Mr. Noormohamed.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I will take no lessons from somebody who says that the CBC is on the side of terrorists. I think that is abhorrent and it puts journalists at risk. I certainly assume that is not the intent, but—my goodness—it certainly feels as though it is.

I think it is absolutely within the purview of Canadians and it is their right to demand and to question editorial decisions. That's what the ombudsman is for. That is why there is an ombudsman of the CBC. I just find it strange or troublesome that we, as politicians, would call journalists or those who represent journalists here to answer questions, to explain themselves and to explain their decisions.

I don't always like what I read in the media, Mr. Chair. I've had things written about me that I didn't like, but I don't attack those journalists because—do you know what?—they have the right to do what they do in this country. I don't always have to like what they say, but I will absolutely always defend their right to say it.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

You have the floor now, Mr. Shields.

[English]

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

I call the question.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Shields, there are two speakers left on the list. We can't call the vote while there are speakers on the list.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to quote Mrs. Thomas when she said a few weeks ago, I will make this committee "hell." She is certainly proving that she is willing to do that. What I find disturbing about this isn't just that she is making the committee hell, yet again stopping the committee from doing its work, in this case with the National Gallery of Canada, an important cultural institution that is financed by the federal government, where we are unable now to ask questions of the new chief executive officer after what has been—

• (1135)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I have a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: —it's fair to say, a troubled period for the National Gallery.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You have a point of order, Mrs. Thomas.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

We are absolutely able to proceed to questions. Mr. Julian is actually the only one standing between us and our ability to do that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

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

As you point out, that is not a point of order. After all of the false, dishonest comments that have just been made by Mrs. Thomas, it is important to be able to respond and set the record straight. First of all—

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: On a point of order, Chair, clearly the Speaker of the House has provided some clarification of the guide-

lines to keep the discourse...and one of them is to not imply that members are dishonest, which is what Mr. Julian just did. I find that offensive and would have him withdraw those comments.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian, will you withdraw your comments at Ms. Gladu's request?

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: As you know, Mr. Chair, we've seen this in question period from the Conservatives. They've made far worse comments. I think it is important to never say anything negative about the individual, but about the comments, absolutely.

What we see now is that the Conservatives, a few weeks ago, wanted to have Ms. Tait come forward and she is. Ms. Tait will be coming to committee on Thursday. Last week, it was for two hours that the Conservatives filibustered the committee. We were unable to ask questions of the CRTC, which is very important at this point, but the whole week was filibustered.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I have a point of order. We've asked to bring the CBC head for three hours. That's what we should be talking about, Mr. Chair.

It's not appropriate for this member to be going back three or four weeks and talking about what Conservatives said. The motion was to bring the head of the CBC for three hours—yes or no?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Waugh. That's a good point.

Mr. Julian, I'd appreciate it if you could stick to the motion.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: It's absolutely relevant, Mr. Chair, to say that last week the Conservatives were saying two hours, and a few weeks ago they were saying one hour. It is absolutely appropriate for me to question the legitimacy of, every week, a different demand coming forward, all of which is blocking this committee's ability to do its work. It is completely relevant. This week the Conservatives are saying three hours. Last week they said two hours. A few weeks ago they said one hour.

The reality is that we have the opportunity to question the president of CBC on Thursday. The Conservatives have known about this for weeks. Am I open to having the CBC president back? Certainly, but I want to hear the testimony first. I want to be able to ask the questions first. Then, after that, we see where we go. That's the way we've always functioned at this committee.

Today's motion, this filibuster motion, is basically to block testimony from the National Gallery of Canada, to block our ability to ask questions—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: On a point of order, I don't know if this is relevant. I think Mr. Julian is reading a motive into this motion.

Again, I would point out that I wrapped up my comments after six minutes, and it's Mr. Julian who is the only one standing between us moving forward right now.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mrs. Thomas, that pertains to the debate, but I have noted your comment.

Mr. Julian, can you stick to the motion, or wrap things up so that we can give the floor to someone else.

[*English*]

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

Most of my comments have been consumed with points of order from the Conservatives. They've now taken 40 minutes of committee time. Mr. Bélisle was scheduled to be here for an hour, so I think people can quite properly draw their conclusions that the Conservatives, yet again—as they destroyed last week and the previous week and the week before that—are filibustering out, making this committee hell, as Mrs. Thomas promised to do, and blocking the committee's ability to do work.

For this particular motion that last week was two hours, a few weeks ago was one hour and now is three hours, it's accompanied by—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I have a point of order. Mr. Julian knows very well that he's being extremely repetitive in his remarks. Perhaps you could maybe help him bring that in line. Thanks.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I have taken note of this comment, Mrs. Thomas.

Mr. Julian, do you have anything else to say about the motion?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, I do, Mr. Chair.

I think the comments of Mrs. Thomas last week, which tied CBC journalists, who were in critical and dangerous situations in the Middle East...and purported that they were on the side of terrorists, were incredibly irresponsible and regrettable. They have been universally condemned. Mrs. Thomas has yet to apologize to those journalists. She should. She should do it promptly. She should do it immediately. Quite frankly, her refusal to apologize for those comments, which both you, Mr. Chair, and I, and a number of others found incendiary, is profoundly regrettable.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Waugh, do you have a point of order?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: We're just going around the table, Mr. Chair. I went 36 seconds when I talked about why I want Ms. Tait here. We do have a guest. We would like to get to this vote, but Mr. Julian continues to talk about issues that don't deal with this three-hour motion.

Can we please get to the vote that Mrs. Thomas asked for?

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Waugh. Understood.

Mr. Julian, I'd like to point out that there is only one person left on the speakers list, and that's Ms. Gladu. I'm pretty sure that Ms. Gladu will want to call the vote quickly, which would leave us time for a round of questions for Mr. Bélisle, but I will allow you to use the rest of your speaking time.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: On a point of order, Chair, I have withdrawn my hand. Mr. Julian is the only one standing between us and the vote.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Mr. Julian, the ball is in your court.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, the Conservatives are showing rampant hypocrisy. They have eaten up 40 minutes of this meeting with points of order and speeches. I think it's very clear that the facts speak for themselves. The fact that they have changed their motion every week and they have eaten weeks of this committee's time is regrettable. I am concerned about the report that now has been sitting, because of the Conservative filibuster, for weeks without being considered. The victims of the abuses that we've seen in sports deserve more than yet another Conservative filibuster.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you.

As there are no speakers left on the list, we can call the vote on Mrs. Thomas's motion, which reads as follows:

That the President of the CBC, Catherine Tait appear before committee for a total of three hours on Thursday November 2, 2023.

Would you like me to read it in English?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): No, I just want to make sure. Ms. Tait is scheduled to be here on Thursday. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I have read the motion and we will now call the vote, Mr. Coteau.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 4)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Shields, you raised your hand, but the outcome of the vote had been announced. Unless you have a point of order, we're going to return to our work for today, which is to ask Mr. Bélisle some questions.

[*English*]

Is it a point of order?

Mr. Martin Shields: Mr. Chair, I was wondering if you could ask the witness if he could stay longer.

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: Mr. Chair, I do have later appointments, but I could potentially stretch it by 10 to 15 minutes.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Bélisle.

If the committee is agreeable, I understand that Mr. Bélisle has generously offered us an additional 15 to 20 minutes.

I am now giving the floor to Ms. Hepfner of the Liberal Party for six minutes.

• (1145)

[English]

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

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): One moment, Ms. Hepfner, while I consult the clerk.

Mrs. Thomas, in view of the limited time we have left for questions, and as you used your speaking time to debate your motion, you will only be able to have the floor again in the next round of questions. I'd like each party to have the opportunity to ask Mr. Bélisle some questions.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Is that in alignment with the green book?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): There are precedents. Normally, once the speaking time has been used up, whether for asking questions or debating a motion, the current practice is to move on to the next speaker. There have indeed been exceptions over the years, but generally speaking, in a case like this one, the next person on the list gets to speak.

If we had a lot of time left, I'd be happy to allow you the rest of your speaking time. However, there isn't much time and I'd like everyone to be able to have their allotted six minutes. We will therefore return to you in the next round of questions.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, are you going to skip your turn as well?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian, there are over 18 minutes left in the meeting, since we have the room until 12:15, I believe. That means there are 28 minutes left for all the speakers to have their say.

Mr. Peter Julian: Are you going to use your six minutes?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I may ask one or two questions, but I won't use the six minutes normally assigned to me.

Ms. Hepfner, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you, also, to Mr. Bélisle for being with us today and for being so patient while we get to our questions.

I was telling you that my colleague, Mr. Coteau, and I are very familiar with the Art Gallery of Hamilton, which is very well served under the leadership of Shelley Falconer.

I was interested in your opening statement. You talked about moving the collection of the National Gallery beyond the boundaries of the museum that you're in charge of, so that people who may not have access to the national capital and may not be able to come to Ottawa can also enjoy some of the art that is in your collection.

Could you expand a bit about how you intend to do that?

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: I think that's a very important question.

The National Gallery of Canada is the only art gallery, or museum, that has a national mandate as set out by the constitution of the gallery. It's extremely important that we make our collections accessible to Canadians from coast to coast to coast, including our productions, programming, expertise and everything we do.

A number of things have been tried over the past years. We have had touring exhibitions and joint projects. All of these things are great examples of what works and what doesn't work. Because we've tried so many things in our long almost 150-year history now, I feel confident that we will very quickly be able to bring our artworks to different art galleries, not only art galleries but artist-run centres, research institutions and universities, so that we may make the collection more accessible, as well as our expertise and programming.

I dream of a gallery that is active throughout the country every year, and not every five years, six years or 10 years. We already have a program called the national outreach program that is only starting up now. Well, it started a year and a half or two years ago now, but it is scaling up. I intend to scale it up very quickly to bring the National Gallery to every Canadian across the country.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you.

Could you describe for us some of your other ideas about how to widen the audience of the National Gallery in order to bring in people who haven't been before, or who haven't felt that it speaks to them?

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: That is also extremely important to me: to make sure the National Gallery is accessible to all Canadians. A great example of that is something we have been doing for a little while now, with the free Thursday nights. We actually advertise for these free Thursday nights throughout the Ottawa region in five different languages. Mixing the content of the exhibitions, the types of artists who are shown, the types of artwork that are shown and adapting the communications language around the exhibitions have already generated extraordinary results.

If you have a chance to come to the gallery on one of those free Thursday nights, it's a very large crowd. We're talking about close to 2,000 people coming to the gallery within a two-hour window. They are from all walks of life, all ages.

I think that is extremely important for us to maintain and to develop even further, and for us to adapt to our national program as well, to make sure that when we send artwork out, we're not simply sending a canvas and hoping for it to be well-received by people. It's to also put in the time, energy and money to make sure it's made as accessible as possible to everyone.

• (1150)

Ms. Lisa Hefner: You spoke about the plan to have more outreach across the country. What about internationally? Are there any ideas to maybe collaborate with galleries around the world? I might be biased, but I think there's a lot to be gained in sharing Canadian art with the world.

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: For sure. That's something that is also part of our mandate, and I think it is extremely important. I personally came from living abroad for a good part of my life and looking at Canadian art from an international perspective. This is something that I'm extremely interested in and fascinated by.

Of course, the Canadian representation at the Venice Biennale every other year is sort of the pinnacle of that international outreach, but I think it needs to come together through partnerships with other galleries on a regular basis and touring exhibitions.

We are doing that. We have an exhibit right now in Berlin by a group of Canadian artists, General Idea, which is a tremendous success. It was shown in Amsterdam last year. These are the types of exhibitions that we build with other partners.

We're also working on an exhibition called Woven Histories about the history of textile art, which we co-produced with LACMA in Los Angeles, MoMA in New York and the national gallery in Washington. It's being shown in Los Angeles right now, and it will be shown in Ottawa next year.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Fantastic.

I have 30 seconds left. Maybe I'll just ask you whether you have anything else in, say, your five-year plan that you want to highlight for this committee.

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: Another big priority for the coming years is building up in-house capacity to make sure we produce the best exhibitions, the best catalogues and the best research about Canadian art that we can. I think the National Gallery needs to be a locomotive for that type of content. I want to build that in-house capacity to make sure that we assume our leadership role on that front.

Ms. Lisa Hefner: Thanks very much.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Ms. Hefner and Mr. Bélisle.

Under normal circumstances, it would now be the Bloc québécois' turn to speak, but I'm the only Bloc member on this committee. As I am chairing today, I'm going to request that my colleagues allow me to ask Mr. Bélisle a question, if that's all right with them. I'll take as little speaking time as possible, because I do indeed want to give my colleagues the time they need for their questions.

I am acquainted with Mr. Bélisle, because he was the director of the Joliette art museum, and we met a few times.

I and many others had been concerned in recent years over something that was happening at the National Gallery of Canada. I'm talking about the thrust or direction they were attempting to give to the gallery's mission, which was an exaggerated emphasis on equity, diversity and inclusion. I don't want to put words in anyone's mouth, but that's where the gallery was headed.

Mr. Bélisle, I'd like to know how you intend to guard against any ideological influence that might come from sources like politicians or a board of directors. I know that you are now here with a blank slate in front of you and that you intend to look to the future and do great things for the gallery, but you are no doubt aware of what's been happening in recent years. How do you intend to counter this kind of influence while you are heading the gallery?

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: Thank you for your question, Mr. Chair.

As you mentioned, I haven't been at the head of the National Gallery of Canada for very long. That means that I cannot unfortunately talk about the past. On the other hand, I can talk about where we stand today and where we're headed.

The current transformation of museum institutions is not limited to the National Gallery of Canada. It's the whole milieu, around the world, which has been striving to better understand and rectify any historical preconceptions and prejudices. My view is that it's very important for any such adjustments to be effected in a positive and constructive manner.

Acknowledging the diversity of Canadians and Canadian artists is extremely important, but it needs to be done by accrual to, rather than subtraction from, what the gallery has been producing and exhibiting. The best way to do this is by making sure that decisions are made with the right people around the table and with solid representation from this diversity, both within and outside our institutions, and on our advisory committees. That's how we work in putting together our current teams, and in all the considerations that come into play with respect to acquiring works of art, programming exhibitions, and conducting community and educational projects.

The works of art should speak to us, not the institution. I believe this to be a very important concept. The National Gallery of Canada does not have an ideology. No ideology has ever been forced upon it, either internally or externally, whether politically or financially. I believe it's our duty at the gallery to breathe life into the works, and to explain them and contextualize them now and in the future.

• (1155)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Bélisle.

Mr. Julian, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

[English]

Thank you so much, Monsieur Bélisle, for being here. I'm very sorry, on behalf of the committee, that you had another Conservative filibuster cut three-quarters of your speaking time. Hopefully we can have you back to answer more questions, hopefully at a time when there won't be hell in committee. I find it really unfortunate—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You have a point of order, Mr. Waugh.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I am tired of this member. He went eight minutes in his filibuster leading to the vote. Would he stick to the topic? He has six minutes, so could he please question the National Gallery CEO in front of us. He has six minutes, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It wasn't a point of order. The Conservatives have used up five of the eight minutes. I must say I find the harassment by the Conservatives a bit much today. It's really unfortunate.

Mr. Bélisle, you've done an enormous amount of work. You have an impressive background, particularly at the Musée d'art de Joliette. You've just become the head of a gallery that has experienced problems in terms of human resources and dismissals. It needs mentioning, because the general public is aware of it. There were concerns about morale in the institution.

What have you done from the human resources standpoint to begin restoring morale at an institution that is so important for the whole country?

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: Thank you very much for your question.

As I was saying, I can't speak about the past, but since arriving here, my priority has been to listen to the teams so that I can understand what they were going through and what they had in mind, with a view to boosting team spirit.

Earlier on, I mentioned the importance of building the institution's internal capacities. That begins with individuals. My management style focuses on individuals, and it proved successful in Joliette. Since my appointment, I have accordingly spent an enormous amount of time meeting the National Gallery of Canada's teams, with a view to understanding what they think would work well or less well, and where improvements might be made, all with a view to continually improving our working relations and methods. It is already paying off, at least in terms of the overall atmosphere in the institution.

What I've been feeling from the very outset, and it's truly remarkable, is the strong desire for internal capacity-building and for

developing outstanding projects that will put Canadian artists on the map from one end of the country to the other, as well as internationally. I think a management style that puts people first will enable us to build tomorrow's National Gallery of Canada.

• (1200)

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much.

[English]

You talked about from one ocean to the other. I represent a B.C. riding. For most of my constituents, they will never have the opportunity to go to that extraordinary building conceived by Moshe Safdie. I'm interested because you mentioned in your initial remarks about transforming art at the local, national and international level. What kind of outreach does the National Gallery do and how do you perceive doing that in the years to come for the artists, for example, in British Columbia and for the public in British Columbia, who may never have access to cross the 5,000 kilometres to come to Ottawa? In many cases if they do come it's the trip of a lifetime.

How can you outreach to a country so vast so that the National Gallery has a pulse everywhere in the country?

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: There are a lot of things that need to be done and there are steps to be followed along the way. I would not want a national gallery that comes down from Ottawa and goes into various parts of the country simply putting up artwork and saying, "This is what you need to look at." What I want to build is a national gallery that is in touch with the local communities and local artists throughout the country to better understand what different cities and different provinces are interested in, need and require and how we can build something together.

What I have been doing since I started is that I've gone to British Columbia twice already and different parts of the country, and I have trips to all parts of the country scheduled for the next couple of months to meet the artists, to meet the stakeholders and to understand what the reality on the ground is in order to be able to include that reality into the future of the National Gallery.

The first step is to listen and to understand the diversity of the country, the geographical diversity, and to build a better plan. As I said earlier, there are wonderful examples in the past of touring exhibitions, of satellite spaces and of joint productions—and all of these things are on the table—but I want to decide with our local stakeholders across the country and local artists what the next best step is.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you.

Because of the Conservative filibuster I can't ask all of my questions, but I have two quick questions to end with because I know that the chair will cut me off.

One is on indigenous artists and the other is on the parliamentary allocation now, which is \$45.8 million. Is that sufficient to reach the goals that you see for the institution? How can indigenous artists across the length and breadth of this land be brought more prominence in the National Gallery?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): If you could answer in 10 seconds, Mr. Bélisle, because the member is out of time.

[English]

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: The \$45 million equates to less than \$1.50 per Canadian, and it is not enough. It is not enough for the National Gallery to fulfill its national mandate from coast to coast to coast. Indigenous artists are a big part of our programming, and they will remain so. We have a wonderful internal department called “Indigenous Ways”, where people work both on curating and the administrative instruction of the gallery, so they will be part of our collective future.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you very much, Mr. Bélisle.

We are now beginning the second round of questions. I would suggest the following structure to my colleagues: five minutes each for the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, and two and a half minutes, as initially planned, for the NDP. That will amount to approximately to the additional time that Mr. Bélisle generously gave us.

Since everyone is in agreement, you have the floor for five minutes, Mr. Shields.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here and spending your time. I appreciate it.

As you know, the controversy has been significant. You have a plan in place that was built starting on a \$30,000 contract, which almost ended up as \$1 million for a California organization, but it doesn't match what the National Gallery in London has done. You talked about digital. You talked about some things, but it doesn't match what they have suggested at the London museum came out of a California...besides the HR they're doing.

Are you going to match what London does, or stick with the California one? Are you going to hire curators instead of them being your HR?

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: Thank you very much for your question.

There are a few items in your question that I would like to speak to.

With consulting contracts that have been given out, as I said, I can't talk about what was given out in the past, only about how we move forward from there. In terms of the strategic plan that exists, strategic plans are made to be looked over and updated on an annual basis. This one dates from a few years back. I think it's a very positive, inclusive and lofty strategic plan. The interesting part in the next part will be how we make it land into the specific context of an art gallery. If I use your links, this is perhaps what London has done that we are doing now, but it is not the general document that you are referring to. This is a very concrete action plan.

However, the action plans that exist, I think, also need to be tweaked, as any action plan or strategic plan needs to be, on an annual basis. It needs to be done in consultation with the teams that make the plan happen to see what the hurdles are on the ground, what is working and what is not working. That is the very process we're involved in right now, with me talking to every team within the gallery. It will result in a wonderful—I hope and I believe—action plan that is anchored in the strategic plan. We're working on that now.

As far as the consulting contracts, I think there is room and a need for some consulting at times, but for the moment, I want to make sure, as I said, that we build the in-house capacity and that we don't rely on outside consultants to do what should be done internally. In that sense, a lot of the consulting contracts have expired, have been renegotiated or have been cancelled so within months, very few of them will be left.

I do believe we will probably need consultants at one point in the future, but when we do, we will make sure the contracts are done in full compliance with the procurement policies of the federal government and of the gallery, because we do have our own policies as well.

● (1205)

Mr. Martin Shields: You made a statement: “His point was not that the National Gallery crafts Canadian identity but that it speaks to it.” That's a statement you made to media.

How would you interpret that so we could understand what you want to do?

Mr. Jean-François Bélisle: We're not into crafting identities. Artists are into raising interesting questions and generating dialogues that are interesting. Our role is to bring those artworks that have these questions in them to the public space. The National Gallery does not, and I think should never, have an opinion in those questions and dialogues.

If there is a Canadian identity being crafted, being questioned or being improved on, or however you want to say it, by artists and Canadians across the country, then wonderful. That's going to transpire through the art. It should not transpire through us.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you. I appreciate your answers.

I'd like to move a motion. There's a notice of motion that has been distributed:

Given that, the Department of Canadian Heritage approved ‘anti-racism’ grants upwards of \$130,000 to Laith Marouf of the Community Media Advocacy Centre (CMAC) despite his open and repeated history of racist, anti-semitic, violent and anti-francophone language, and that, after 8 months of the Department of Canadian Heritage confirming that they have revoked the grant funds and requested a return in full, the Department has yet to receive any of the revoked funding, the committee:

- a) Demand the immediate return of all government grant funding awarded to Laith Marouf;
- b) Call on the Government of Canada to collect the revoked grant funds by any means necessary, including legal action;
- c) Hear testimony from the Minister of Heritage on this matter within one week of this motion being adopted;
- d) Report this to the House .

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Shields, do you wish to speak to your motion now?

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: There is no translation.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Do you want to debate the motion right now?

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes.

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

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You have the floor, Mr. Julian.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: He did say, “notice of motion”. I thought it was customary to give a notice of motion for the next meeting.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: He said it was on notice.

Mr. Martin Shields: It was on notice.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Shields' motion was distributed on Friday and he would like to speak to it.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, what I hear the Conservatives saying is that they are now starting a second filibuster, not allowing the second—

• (1210)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian, your intervention is not a point of order, but a comment.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm asking you, Mr. Chair, to clarify that they are now starting a second filibuster. I have a second question period to ask of Mr. Bélisle—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Julian, I understand what you're saying, but Mr. Shields does have the right to speak to the motion he moved on Friday. I'm going to ask him whether that is what he intends to do.

In the meantime, Mrs. Thomas raised a point of order.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: No, Chair, I'm good.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Shields, do you want to speak to your motion right away?

Are you rising on a point of order, Mr. Coteau?

[English]

Mr. Michael Coteau: Are we finished with our very kind witness?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Yes. That's an excellent point.

I am nevertheless going to ask Mr. Shields to tell us whether he wants to speak to the motion.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Okay.

Mr. Bélisle, we thank you kindly for having attended, for your patience and for generously responding to all our questions. Feel free to leave now, and we look forward to crossing paths with you at the National Gallery of Canada.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian: It is very regrettable that this is being cut off again.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Have you finished, Mr. Shields?

We're going to suspend the meeting for two minutes.

• (1210)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): We're reconvening the meeting now.

We need to debate Mr. Shields' motion.

Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor.

• (1215)

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I think he does.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You are absolutely correct.

Mr. Shields, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, I will speak to the motion.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Shields, on behalf of the interpreters, I'd like to request that you speak a little closer to your microphone. There are moments when the interpreters can't hear you clearly enough.

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: I'll move it closer.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think this is an important issue. We dealt with it some time ago in the belief that there could be the result that needed to happen, which we asked for. It's the media that has pointed this out and has brought it up again. That's why, when the media is paying attention to something that we did back some time ago....

They brought up the story about how this hasn't been followed through on, and the challenge it's creating for us in the sense of what Mr. Marouf has done, what he did so wrong and the grant that was given to him to continue that kind of work. The request for the return of that money is critical, by any means.

That is the only penalty we can place on him as a committee, and I think that's something that has to be done because what was done and the granting of it was wrong. We, as a committee, made a decision to force the return of that grant. I think it is important for Canadians to understand that we're following up on that.

It didn't happen, and we're taking a position again to follow up on that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Shields.

Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Marouf was given almost \$130,000 to do what the government called "anti-racism training". We're not entirely sure what was accomplished with that \$130,000.

What we do know is that his entire social media feed is filled with anti-Semitic comments, images and things he has also said with regard to the French language, the French people and very much—I would say even vehemently—against their language and culture. Of course, it should concern us, as Canadians, that there would be an individual who functions like this in the public realm and is then being paid almost \$130,000 to run anti-racism training. Almost \$130,000 was given to Mr. Marouf in order for him to run anti-racism training, yet his Twitter feed is full of these images, full of these statements that are unquestionably anti-Semitic. It's disgusting, absolutely disgusting, yet this government approved this individual to receive nearly \$130,000 to run anti-racism training. I mean, you can't make this stuff up.

This committee then looked at that and came to the conclusion that this was wrong. Then it put forward a motion asking that the money be paid back. It has been more than eight months—eight months—and not a single dollar has been repaid. In fact, the government has spent a fair bit of money trying to get a collection agency to go after Mr. Marouf, but without success.

The question, then, is this: Why hasn't Mr. Marouf paid back the money? Why is Mr. Marouf still allowed to hold this \$130,000, and what's he doing with that money? Some of the reasons that this question is all that much more important right now are the war that's taking place in Gaza, the heightened tensions and the heightened anti-Semitic behaviour and comments that are being made in

this country. Meanwhile, 130,000 taxpayer dollars still remain in the hands of a verified anti-Semite. That's extremely dangerous and problematic.

We are asking that the committee:

- a) Demand the immediate return of all government grant funding awarded to Laith Marouf;
- b) Call on the Government of Canada to collect the revoked grant funds by any means necessary, including legal action;
- c) Hear testimony from the Minister of Heritage on this matter within one week of this motion being adopted;
- d) Report this to the House.

The reason the Minister of Canadian Heritage needs to come and answer is that, ultimately, it is her responsibility to make sure that this money is brought back into the government coffers. It was given to an anti-Semite. It has been demanded that he pay it back, and he needs to make good on that. It is within the mandate of this committee to ensure that's the case.

If the members of this committee vote against this motion, they will be saying that it is okay for Laith Marouf to hold this money and continue to perpetuate his anti-Semitic behaviour. They are saying that it is okay for the government to turn a blind eye. They are saying that it is okay for the heritage minister to not have to answer for this, and they are saying that there is no accountability to the House.

• (1220)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

A point was made earlier by Mrs. Thomas, and I want to remind her—through you, Mr. Chair—of what she said. Her point was to not presume, to not assume and to not put words in the mouths of members of this committee. We have all now sat through several moments of her doing precisely that. Perhaps she might consider her own advice.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you.

Mrs. Thomas, you have the floor.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: For my honourable colleague across the way, through you, Chair, for his benefit, I was simply reading the points of this motion and, if the members opposite were to vote no, I'm not sure why that's so offensive to him, unless, of course, his conscience is bothering him today.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, this is now the second time that Mrs. Thomas has made specific comments with respect to me, and I am now beginning to see a trend.

I don't want to assume what her intentions are, but it seems awfully convenient that the two times we have been discussing issues related to anti-Semitism, the two times that we have discussed issues related to people saying abhorrent things about the Jewish community, her comments were made directly to me, and I'm now really beginning to take offence to this.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mrs. Thomas, do you wish to comment on this point of order?

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I'm sorry, but I have to be able to come to this committee and contend for a motion like this, where I am calling to account someone who is a raging anti-Semite. I have to be able to talk about that issue without being attacked from across the way.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mrs. Thomas, I agree with you, but we are getting into a debate. Do continue to express yourself, but you should pay attention to occasional insinuations about the possible voting intentions of your committee colleagues.

Having said that, you are correct. You are perfectly entitled to come here today and speak to a motion that has been moved. You have the floor.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: When my colleague across the way puts words in my mouth and makes accusations, he is gaslighting me, which is inappropriate conduct at this committee.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, my request was simply, after having sat through Mrs. Thomas saying what it meant or what our words were if we didn't vote a certain way, I was simply asking her to afford us the same courtesy that she sought for herself, which was to not assume the intentions of other members.

If that's what she wishes to do, I am sure others in this committee would be more than willing to do that, but I think that, in the interest of productivity in this room and in this committee, we should stick to the substance of the motion.

I think the point has been well made what this motion is about, and if we're interested in having a debate rather than another filibuster, perhaps we should move on to that.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Again, I'm being gaslit by the member opposite simply because what I am reading into the record is each statement that is within this motion and then what it would mean if you were to vote no. If you don't vote yes, then you vote no. If you vote no, then it means the opposite of what the motion reads. That's just logic.

For the member opposite to ascribe my motivation or to attack me or my character is absolutely deplorable.

We have to have the safety to come to this committee and have these robust discussions and, yes, sometimes tensions get high in this place, but for me to be gaslit by the member across the way is

absolutely inappropriate. In fact, I'd give him the opportunity to apologize.

• (1225)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Are you asking the colleague to apologize?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Yes, I'm giving him that opportunity.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You have the floor, Mr. Noormohamed.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Is my colleague ceding the floor?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Mr. Chair, you know how this is conducted.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Absolutely not. She'll be waiting a very long time. I'm not going to apologize for what I said.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): There's your answer, Mrs. Thomas, and you have the floor.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

The level of tension created by a motion asking for an anti-Semite to be held accountable is interesting to me. He's an anti-Semite who was given close to \$130,000 by this current government. The members across the way can't stand that a motion like this would be moved to hold this individual to account. It's a motion that would draw attention to the fact that this individual took this money. It was demanded that he pay it back, but he hasn't. It's a motion that points out the fact that the current government has done little to get the money or hold Mr. Marouf to account. It's been more than eight months, and not a single dollar has been repaid.

I believe it's incumbent upon us. I believe it's the right thing to do. Allow the Minister of Canadian Heritage to come before this committee to be asked questions with regard to her intent and whether or not this money is in fact going to be reclaimed. The Canadian taxpayer deserves to know their money isn't being used by a raging anti-Semite. The Canadian public deserves to know the money they pay into the coffers of this government is going toward the common good. Certainly, when money goes into the hands of an anti-Semite, it is not for the common good.

I'll leave my comments there.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mrs. Thomas.

You have the floor now, Ms. Gladu.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would say that I support this motion, because I am very concerned about the rise of anti-Semitism in the country.

We see from this Laith Marouf incident that he hasn't paid the money back. There was no consequence to him. There was no consequence to Minister Hussen or Minister Rodriguez at the time. Now we're seeing, within our country, a rise in anti-Semitism inflamed by the situation in Israel and Gaza. We have Jewish children afraid to go to school. We have clear pro-Hamas demonstrations happening in the country. People are saying to me, "Where are the police? Where are the consequences? Where is the action? What will the government do to stop this rising anti-Semitism, so Jewish people can be free here in Canada to worship in safety?"

I think this is the tip of the spear, as they say. I certainly support this resolution. I think it makes a point that there needs to be consequences for anti-Semitism in our country, and it begins here.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Mr. Waugh, you have the floor now.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was appalled when I saw the article by Jamie Sarkonak last Wednesday. Listen, we had Canadian Heritage officials in this very committee stating the fact that \$123,000 of the \$134,000 has still not been paid back. They held back \$10,000 of the first grant—the anti-racism grant. The Department of Canadian Heritage awarded Mr. Marouf \$134,000, but they're waiting to hear back on the remaining \$123,000. We were told by department officials at the time that they've sent it to collections, and they haven't received a dime back.

I will echo what my colleagues have said.

Last night, the Sergeant-at-Arms issued that we should lock our offices back home, from coast to coast. We are in an intense time. In Saskatchewan, two or three offices have been invaded in the last couple of days. Right now, because of certain anti-racism comments made in the past number of weeks, we are seeing this. I'm floored the Department of Canadian Heritage has not taken this at all seriously...from Laith Marouf. This is an anti-Semite. It was brought up by the member for Mount Royal at the committee. It was brought forward, almost a year ago, to his own department. This person shouldn't have received a dime from the Liberal government, yet he did.

Mr. Chair, I'm appalled by what I saw in the National Post. I had suspected the collection agency had received most if not all of the \$123,000.

I support the motion put forth today by Mr. Shields, and I will call for the vote.

• (1230)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Waugh, as you know, before calling the question, everyone on the list must have spoken. But there are still people on the list, including Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Noormohamed, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by putting a couple of things on the record.

I take great pride at being among the first members of Parliament of any party to condemn what Mr. Marouf did. On August 21, when the issue first was brought forward, I put out a statement saying that Mr. Marouf's comments were vile, racist and anti-Semitic. They were wrong by any measure, and particularly for someone who is supposed to be working to help eliminate racism from broadcasting.

I stand by every single one of those words. I believe that Mr. Marouf's actions were vile. They were reprehensible. They were anti-Semitic. They did absolutely nothing to advance the cause of diversity, inclusion or elimination of racism in this country. I believe that to be the case, and I believe every single person in this room would agree with that.

I also think it's important for us to try not to use incredibly inflammatory language around things that are causing deep distress in communities right now. In my riding, this was something of great upset to my constituents. I believe very strongly that Mr. Marouf should never have received the funding that he did. I believe very strongly that Mr. Marouf should pay back every single dime of the money he received from the government and the taxpayers of Canada.

I also understand that collecting money from people once they have it, no matter the instruments we have at our disposal, can sometimes be difficult. It is my understanding that this has now been turned over to a collection agency. I don't know whether anyone opposite has ever had an experience with a collection agency—thankfully, I have not—but I understand it to be a very unpleasant experience. I am hopeful that they are successful in their work.

I don't want anyone to assume for a moment that any of us think that Mr. Marouf should be able to keep the money he got from the federal government, nor do I want anyone in this room to assume that anyone condones anything that Mr. Marouf has said or done, because we don't. Making that the assumption when reading this motion, as others in this room have chosen to do, is patently inaccurate, unfair and untrue. All it does is seek to cause division and to stoke further hatred.

I am concerned about a motion that seeks to call the minister, who by the way was not the minister at the time, to come and present within a week. I am concerned about a motion like this, which doesn't actually call the perpetrator of that hatred to come. It leads me to wonder whether this is a political hit or whether it's a desire to actually collect the money. If this is a desire to collect the money, which the taxpayers of this country must have back, I think the real question is how we make sure that the work that is being done to collect that money is being done. I think it's important for us to be able to ask those questions, and we are asking those questions.

With this motion calling for the minister to appear and to explain, I'm not sure exactly what the minister is going to be able to explain to us beyond that this has gone to collections and there are legal processes under way to collect that money. If there are other things beyond that.... I don't know whether the Conservatives are proposing to send a hit squad. I don't know whether that's in the tool kit that is being proposed.

I am very curious to understand what else—

• (1235)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: I have a point of order.

Chair, I'm not sure what the member opposite meant by bringing “a hit squad” That sounds like he's thinking we're going to be violent. I think that is totally unacceptable and not reality in any way. I would request that he withdraw that.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Ms. Gladu.

Mr. Noormohamed, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: If that is how Ms. Gladu understood what I said, then I take back my comment unreservedly. I apologize if that is how that was taken.

There have been comments made in this committee over the last little while about the scourge of anti-Semitism. I think it's really important for every single person in this room to condemn those things when they are heard and when they are seen. I think it's important for members opposite to condemn those members of their party who chose to have dinner with a raging anti-Semite, Islamophobe and neo-Nazi. I am still waiting for every single member opposite to do that because, my goodness, if we are going to hold ourselves to that standard, then we must all be held to that standard.

I take great pride and great responsibility in ensuring that when I see an act of anti-Semitism or Islamophobia or hatred that I speak out against it. That is our obligation, even when our colleagues are doing that. It is important for us not to equivocate on this.

I look forward, as part of this conversation, for the members opposite, who have yet to apologize unreservedly for the actions of their colleagues and their party in hosting an anti-Semite from Germany, from a neo-Nazi organization—

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I have a point of order.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'm still looking for that apology to all Canadians.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Noormohamed, Mrs. Thomas is rising on a point of order.

Go ahead, Mrs. Thomas.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you.

I just wanted to raise that I'm still waiting for an apology from the Liberals on behalf of their Prime Minister for doing blackface.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): That's a matter of debate.

Mr. Noormohamed, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: This is, I think, very clear. They have now said that as individual members who take responsibility for their own actions, they are not prepared to call out their own colleagues. That's fine.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I have a point of order.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: That is their prerogative. That is their decision.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mrs. Thomas has a point of order.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I appreciate the point raised there—that we are responsible for our own actions. Just like the Prime Minister is responsible for choosing to do blackface, an individual is responsible.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): That's definitely a matter of debate and both parties are now mudslinging.

Mr. Noormohamed, I'm giving you the floor so that you can continue to speak to the motion.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

I look forward to—given that we are so keen, all of us, to make sure that we don't do things and shouldn't do things to incite hatred or racism—that, as we ensure we work hard to make sure that our colleagues call out when they are associating with anti-Semites, Islamophobes and neo-Nazis, we take it upon ourselves to make sure that our colleagues are doing that, we take it upon ourselves to apologize when we try to implement government policies like a ban on the niqab and we apologize for voting against motions that condemn Islamophobia. It think it's really important that we hold ourselves to these very important standards and that we are consistent in that.

I am grateful that all of us in this room have decided that we take it upon ourselves to condemn anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, because that's the right thing to do. We have all rightly condemned the work of Mr. Marouf, or I think we have, anyway—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Waugh, do you want to rise on a point of order?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes. I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

Please stick to the motion, which is calling for the Laith Marouf money to be returned. That is what we are trying to accomplish here this morning.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Thank you, Mr. Waugh. We do indeed need to stick to the motion.

Go ahead, Mr. Noormohamed.

• (1240)

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps I might end with this. I think Mr. Waugh's point is absolutely right. If the goal is that this committee pass a motion saying that the Government of Canada must do everything in its power to get that money back, I don't think you're going to see any objection from anybody on this side of the House. If they are prepared to amend or if we are able to work on an amendment to this thing that says this committee would like for the Government of Canada—"instructs" or "directs" or whatever word we're going to use—to get that money and to report back to this committee on the progress, I don't think you're going to get any objection here.

If that's the intent, let's do this, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mr. Noormohamed, are you proposing an amendment to the motion? If so, could you please read it out to us so that we can write it down and distribute it to all members of the committee?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Yes. Can I have a few minutes to do that?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I'm going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow you to draft the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): We will now suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

• (1240)

(Pause)

• (1255)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): We're reconvening the meeting now, dear colleagues.

Mr. Noormohamed, you've prepared an amendment to the motion and I would ask you to read it to us.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I would like to formally move this amendment to the motion: That the preamble—

Do you want me to read the whole thing, Mr. Chair, or should I just read the amendment?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You can just read your amendment, and specify where it is to be inserted in the motion.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

The amendment reads that the committee "Instruct the Government of Canada to continue to use all efforts to collect all government grant funding awarded to Laith Marouf; and that officials report to this committee within 30 days on its progress on recuperating the funds."

The amendment, Mr. Chair, has been shared with the clerk. I believe it is being distributed.

I just want to be very clear that, if it is the intent of every single person on this committee that we get that money back from Mr. Marouf, which we should be darned certain we absolutely do and we should be pushing for, then all of us, I think, would be fully supportive of this committee ensuring the government continues to do what it needs to do to get that money back, and that we get a report back at this committee that lets us know how that's going. I think that gives us what all of us need. It is a unifying motion, I hope.

It is something on which we can all agree. I have not touched, Mr. Chair, the preamble that Mr. Shields has so eloquently put together. We all agree on the facts. We all agree on what needs to be done. It would be a wonderful show of unity, given everything that is going on in this country right now, particularly around the rise of hate, for us as a committee to vote on this unanimously to support it and to then move on to the very important work that Mr. Julian noted: getting back to the work of discussing safe sport, which athletes from across this country who have been through terrible trauma deserve to have us finish.

I hope, Mr. Chair, that with that we can find unanimity and we can find some ability to really work together to get this thing passed.

I know that we are now pretty much out of time in this room. I had more things that I did want to say about this, because I do think this meeting should not end without us all being absolutely on record that Mr. Marouf's comments were vile, reprehensible, disgusting, anti-Semitic and anti-francophone. They are anti-Canadian and un-Canadian in their truest form, and I think that getting this money back for the taxpayers of Canada is something that we are all united in and committed to doing. That is what I really hope this amendment, along with Mr. Shield's preamble, will actually accomplish.

With that, Mr. Chair, it may also be worthwhile for us to now adjourn the meeting so that we can begin this conversation properly anew.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Coteau would like to comment on Mr. Noormohamed's amendment.

Mr. Julian, would you like to add your name to the list?

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

We usually do follow the list, and I believe I was next, after Mr. Noormohamed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): You were next on the list of speakers wishing to comment on the motion. However, an amendment to the motion was moved, meaning that it's a brand new list, as you know. If you would like me to add your name, Mr. Julian, I'll do it right now.

• (1300)

Mr. Peter Julian: Once again, Mr. Chair, those already on the list are usually asked whether they would like to speak to the amendment. A whole new list is not drawn up. If the people already on the list wish to speak to the amendment, then the speaking order should be maintained.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): I hear you, Mr. Julian. However, I took the trouble to speak with the clerk before the amendment to the motion was moved, in order to determine what to do with the previous list. My decision is the outcome of recommendations from the clerk, and my discussion with her. Once again, feel free to appeal my decision.

Mr. Peter Julian: As I know that the committee approved you in the role of chair, I will not challenge your decision.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): That's more than kind of you. Thanks.

Mr. Peter Julian: Generally speaking, the chair asks those whose name is already on the list if they would like to discuss the amendment. If you had asked me that, I would have said yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): All right. I'll make a note of that for next time and will keep your recommendation in mind.

Mr. Noormohamed, am I to understand that the final part of your intervention requests that we adjourn today's meeting?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Yes, that's right.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): Okay. Then let's vote on the motion to adjourn the meeting.

Madam Clerk, are you ready to proceed?

The Clerk: The motion is to adjourn the meeting.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Martin Champoux): The meeting is adjourned.

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