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Chair: Mr. John Brassard



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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• (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC)):
Good afternoon, everyone.

I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 86 of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and the members before we begin.

Please wait until you're recognized by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice.... I don't think anybody is on Zoom today, so I'm going to skip that part.

Although the room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to interpreters and can cause serious injuries. The most common cause of sound feedback is an earpiece worn too close to the microphone. We therefore ask all participants to exercise a high degree of caution when handling the earpieces, especially when your microphone is near your neighbour's microphone and is turned on. In order to prevent incidents and safeguard the hearing health of the interpreters, I invite participants to speak into the microphone into which their headset is plugged and avoid manipulating the earbuds by placing them on the table, away from the microphone, when they are not in use.

I'll remind you that comments between members should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the committee is receiving a briefing on the RCMP's decision not to pursue an investigation in relation to the SNC-Lavalin affair.

Before I introduce our witnesses and before the commissioner makes his opening statement, I want to advise the committee that I've exercised my prerogative as the chair to invite the RCMP before the committee today. I did so with the backdrop of recently released documents from which we have learned that the RCMP wanted to investigate whether criminal activity had been committed in the SNC-Lavalin affair. They couldn't because they apparently

weren't given access to cabinet documents. It was reported that the RCMP commissioner personally made the request and that the request was denied.

This raises many questions, so I wanted to give the committee an opportunity to ask these questions.

In addition, last week, in a question put to the public safety minister in question period about this, he responded, "My hon. friend knows very well the RCMP operations are conducted independently from government. If he has operational questions for them, I would suggest he contact the RCMP."

In a published report this morning, the Prime Minister's Office, like the public safety minister, suggested directing questions to the RCMP, which brings us to this moment.

Given the public interest in this, the recent work and recommendations of the committee on access to information as it relates to cabinet confidentiality, the comments of both the public safety minister and the Prime Minister's Office and an opportunity that presented itself in the committee's calendar, I want to thank the commissioner and the staff sergeant for making themselves available today.

I now welcome the commissioner to provide an opening statement, followed by questions.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): May I say something, Mr. Chair?

I'd like to respond to what you just said.

[*English*]

The Chair: Are you asking on a point of order?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: No, that's not it. I just want to ask some questions, because I'm very disappointed to see that you took the liberty of inviting RCMP officials.

[*English*]

The Chair: There's no translation, apparently, Madam Clerk.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: We weren't notified of this meeting until very late Friday afternoon, about five to five—even though, at Wednesday's meeting, we talked about how we were going to continue our study on TikTok. Normally, a notice of meeting has to go out at least 48 hours in advance, so this is a bit last minute.

What's more, apparently, you had already been in contact with the RCMP officials and they were invited to appear before the committee today on Wednesday morning. The committee hadn't even discussed it at that point. The clerk would probably be able to confirm that.

The committee should have the opportunity to debate the motion that was on the table, and I don't think impeding the committee's ability to move forward is the right approach.

For all those reasons,

[*English*]

I would like to adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: Hang on a second, Ms. Fortier.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I move to adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: You are officially moving to adjourn the meeting today.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Yes, I move to adjourn the meeting.

An hon. member: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: It's a non-debatable motion, Mr. Barrett, unfortunately.

Were you asking this on a point of order, Ms. Fortier? Were you just making a—

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Chair, that's not how these meetings are conducted. You read your remarks. She interrupted you—

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): It's non-debatable, Chair.

The Chair: I want to hear what he has to say.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The witnesses were to give testimony, and now we have government members looking to shut down a hearing on a very serious matter—

An hon. member: It's non-debatable.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): I'm so sorry, Mr. Barrett—

Mr. Michael Barrett: —with respect to a criminal investigation into the Prime Minister. We have the commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at the table.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: That's not appropriate, Chair. That is really not appropriate.

Mr. Michael Barrett: This is unacceptable.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, I'm going to ask you for a second, please, to just refrain.

Ms. Fortier had the floor. She moved the motion. The motion is not debatable, so we're going to have to go to the vote.

I assume that there's no agreement on this.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Certainly there's no agreement to shut down a meeting when we have the commissioner of the—

An hon. member: Chair, that's very—

The Chair: We're dealing with this right now. I have made my ruling. We are going to the vote, because it's a non-debatable motion.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

The Chair: Thank you. The vote has passed. My apologies to the commissioner and the staff sergeant.

This meeting is adjourned.

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