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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley



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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 96 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, also known as the mighty OGGO.

If you're watching at home, I hope you will tune in later for our annual Christmas special, "An OGGO Christmas Carol", in which the estimates of Christmas past, present and future come back to haunt Scrooge.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: This committee is meeting to consider matters related to committee business.

As a reminder, please do not put earpieces next to the microphones as it causes feedback and potential injury.

Go ahead, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Since we're in committee business, I'd like to move a motion, which reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a):

the Government of Canada be ordered to produce unredacted copies of:

(a) any contract, memorandum of understanding, or other agreement between any minister, department, agency or Crown corporation of the government and:

(i) related to the construction of an electric vehicle battery facility in Windsor, Ontario:

aa) Stellantis N.V., LG Energy Solutions, Ltd.,

bb) NextStar Energy Inc.

cc) or Volta Energy Solutions Canada Inc.;

(ii) related to the construction of an electric vehicle battery facility in St. Thomas, Ontario:

aa) Volkswagen Group,

bb) Volkswagen AG,

cc) Volkswagen Group of America, Inc. or PowerCo SE;

(iii) related to the construction of an electric vehicle battery facility in Saint-Basile-le-Grand, Quebec:

aa) Northvolt AB,

bb) Northvolt North America,

cc) Northvolt Batteries North America Inc. or Cubery, Inc.,

(iv) related to the construction of an electric vehicle battery materials production plant in Bécancour, Quebec:

aa) Ford Motor Company,

bb) Ford Motor Company of Canada, Limited,

cc) EcoProBM Co., Ltd.,

dd) EcoPro Innovation Co., Ltd.,

ee) EcoPro Global,

ff) EcoPro Co., Ltd.,

gg) ECOPRO,

hh) Eco CAM Canada Inc.,

ii) EcoPro CAM Canada General Partner Inc.,

jj) SK On Co.,

kk) SK ie technology Co., Ltd.,

ll) SK Inc.,

mm) SK Innovation Co., Ltd.,

nn) SK Engineering & Construction Co., Ltd.,

oo) Sunlake Co., Ltd. or

pp) EcoPro CAM Canada, LP;

(v) related to the construction of an electric vehicle battery materials production plant in Loyalist Township, Ontario:

aa) Umicore Rechargeable Battery Materials Canada Inc.,

bb) Umicore SA/NV or

cc) Umicore Canada Inc.,

(b) all Labour Market Impact Assessments, including the applications for them, prepared in relation to the construction of an electric vehicle battery facility in Windsor, Ontario;

And that all documents:

a) include all provisions related to the hiring or use of foreign workers and concerning language requirements and language of work, and that these clauses be released unconditionally;

b) shall be deposited unredacted with the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel within three weeks of the adoption of this motion;

c) be submitted with proposed redactions for commercially sensitive information;

d) following the review by the Parliamentary Law Clerk, all contracts, redacted for commercially sensitive information, shall be published on the committee's website.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think all members have the motion. If I can take a few moments to explain the motion, we've had a few variations.

I know of various attempts by the committee to come to an agreement from our original motion, which was to release all the unredacted contracts, to—I think—a compromise motion that MP Masse tried to put forward during the last couple of meetings, to have those reviewed by a third party prior to being released to the committee. Having the third party review is in order to ensure, I believe, that only commercially sensitive things were being redacted, and other things for other political reasons perhaps weren't being redacted by either the government or the co-signer for these contracts. Then it would be reviewed in secret in committee as to whether or not these contracts said the things that people in public have said they said, such as seeking to have anywhere from 900 to 1,600 foreign replacement workers, for an example, in the Stellantis plant.

We've basically used and taken most of Mr. Masse's motion from the last time and agreed with him as a compromise, as a condition of trying to break the logjam on behalf of Conservatives, to have a third party review these contracts. We would trust, in our case, the law clerk, but I think we're open to other independent parliamentary officers if that would make people feel more comfortable—the access to information clerk was suggested, I think, in Mr. Masse's last version—and that it be reviewed, but I guess where we differ is on the issue of what happens then.

• (1540)

I trust whoever the independent body is to make the right decision about what should be redacted and what shouldn't.

I don't think it should be subject to a political review after that and a second-guessing after that by this committee. First of all, as I understand it, that would be done in secret in an in camera session, which would allow a very political discussion about redacting other parts of contracts. Ultimately, this committee would have veto to add in other thoughts about why they might redact certain clauses outside of commercial sensitivity.

Of course, this is what the Liberal members have talked about extensively over this number of meetings. Their concern is that releasing the unredacted contracts would somehow compromise either the companies involved or some mythical future contracts.

As we know, most companies that do business with the Government of Canada expect that a level of transparency is required when receiving taxpayers' dollars. That might not be the case if it were between two private parties, but it's different when it comes to spending taxpayer dollars, as it should be.

In an effort to reach a compromise, I've put forward a motion that takes Mr. Masse's motion pretty much word for word, with a cleanup of some of the language. It does give the blessing to having a version of a redacted contract released, but that contract is redacted only on commercially sensitive reasons. This would be judged solely by the parliamentary law clerk, who is an officer of Parliament and a neutral third party, not by this committee and the individuals in this committee.

For some strange reason, politicians may have other agendas that may force them or make them want to redact certain parts of contracts for political expediency that are not in the public interest of transparency in the expenditure—in this case with Stellantis—

of \$15 billion of taxpayer money, which is \$1000 per household. If you take the three main contracts together—the Ford contract, the Stellantis contract and the VW contract—they represent over \$40 billion in six years of taxpayer subsidies to large foreign multinationals, a number of which have already indicated they're bringing in foreign replacement workers and not using Canadian workers.

The best way to shed light on that is to have the contracts released publicly, but we acknowledge that there may be some commercially sensitive things in the contract. I've read the Volkswagen contract. There isn't a lot that's commercially sensitive, from what I saw in it. Nonetheless, let's put that in the hands of somebody without a political agenda as an officer of Parliament, like the parliamentary law clerk.

Mr. Chair, I'll leave it there for now. I might reserve the right to speak on this a little later.

I would appreciate any thoughts and input from our colleagues around the table.

The Chair: Thanks.

I had started a speaking list. I had Mr. Masse.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, was it something on this motion or on something else?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): It was on something else.

The Chair: Okay.

I have Mr. Masse, Ms. Vignola, and Mr.—

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: It's on this motion. Pardon me; I didn't know what you meant.

The Chair: Okay, I'll go to Mr. Masse, Mr. Kusmierczyk, Ms. Vignola and then Mr. Genuis.

Go ahead, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Perkins for bringing forth a motion to try to bridge to where we're going.

I've reviewed it. There's certainly a lot of reflection of some of the things that we've tried to do here. I think he has done so with the interest of trying to move this forward.

However, I believe that the motion that I have submitted provides more information to the public and has more details. My preference is to continue the course to work on my motion.

I do appreciate it. I think it's a sincere attempt to try to get something done here. At the same time, I think it leaves it short from where we were going with my motion, which was prepared beforehand and has been cleaned up quite a bit since I submitted it.

I would be hopeful to move to that debate sooner rather than later, because this is affecting a number of different things taking place with regard to the auto industry and investment. Certainly I am hopeful that we can move on from a stalemate here and try to get to something at the end of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1545)

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

In order for us to understand that, is there an actual other motion that we can see?

The Chair: There was Mr. Masse's motion.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, but it sounded like he had a new one.

The Chair: You were referring to your other one. Is that right, Mr. Masse?

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes, I am. I'd like to proceed to debate on my previous motion at some point. I do appreciate the effort, but at the same time, I'd like to conclude that first before considering anything else. I think it has a few other characteristics that are important. I don't have anything new, just what I've had tabled before.

Thank you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): On a similar point of order, Chair, Mr. Masse did say he'd cleaned it up substantially since it was initially tabled, so I'm a bit confused by that as well. Maybe we're having a misunderstanding here, but—

The Chair: I think we can get back.... From what I understand, Mr. Masse would like to get back to his motion eventually, but we're still debating Mr. Perkins'.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: He implied that he'd made some changes to it by cleaning it up. The motion that's on the table is the one he proposed, not a cleaned-up version of it.

The Chair: No, we're discussing Mr. Perkins's motion right now.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, exactly.

The Chair: We'll move to Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Mr. Chair, I move that the committee proceed to debate on Mr. Masse's Stellantis motion.

The Chair: Okay, we will take a vote on Mr. Kusmierczyk's motion. It will take us to Mr. Masse's motion with Mr. Genuis's amendments, if it passes.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Chair: We'll move on, then, to Mr. Masse's motion with Mr. Genuis's amendment.

Mr. Kusmierczyk has indicated that you all have copies of where we're at. Is that correct for you, Mr. Sousa and Mr. Powlowski?

A voice: Can we have it sent around again to make sure?

The Chair: Sure. Let's suspend for about 30 seconds just to send it around again. I'll start a speaking list again, with Mr. Genuis, Mr. Sousa and Mr. Masse, I am assuming.

• (1545)

(Pause)

• (1600)

The Chair: We are back.

Before we start with Mr. Genuis, I want to propose a couple of quick items.

There was the dispute about the “new (f)” in the blues. If we can all agree, we'll take out the word “new” from the motion and the amendment.

Under “(h) that the committee calls for the government to...”, do you see the word “immediately” struck out there? There's some dispute as to whether that should have been struck out or not. I'm looking to see if we can agree that we leave that word in for the purposes of the motion and the amendment.

Are we fine with that, everyone?

We are. Wonderful. So be it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry; could you repeat that?

The Chair: It is, “that the committee calls on the government to...”, and then you see that the word “immediately” is struck out. We believe that was struck out somewhere along the line; perhaps it was an error. To seek clarification, I'm saying to leave it—to un-strike the strike and leave the word “immediately” in. It would be “immediately continue to work”.

Are we fine on that, please?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I was going to say that “un-striking the strike” sounds quite anti-labour, and I don't know if it's consistent with this.

The Chair: I don't think that Bill C-58 has passed yet, so I think we can still use that language.

I'll take that as everyone being in agreement. Thank you very much.

You have the floor, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: [*Inaudible—Editor*] replacement word for that.

The Chair: I don't know how to un-strike in South Korean.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): I'm so confused. Are we still striking out the word we initially agreed to, “immediately”?

The Chair: Do you mean right now? I don't think there was an agreement anywhere in the motion—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think we agreed to return to Mr. Perkins' motion.

The Chair: I think we're just returning it to the original....

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do I follow?

The Chair: Let me finish.

If you're not in agreement, let's move on.

We don't have consent. Let's continue.

A “new (f)” is on there, and the word “immediately” is—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The word “new” is still in before “(f)”—

The Chair: I'll add you to the speaking list as we go on.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is the word “immediately” still on strike?

The Chair: Go ahead. The floor is yours, Mr. Genuis—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): I have a point of order.

For the past two or three minutes, everyone's been speaking over each other, so the interpreter can't make out what's being said. I can't even keep up with all the details flying back and forth.

Put yourself in my shoes. Imagine being in a group of 10 or so francophones, Quebeckers to boot, so they are talking especially fast and, even though you're bilingual, you can't follow what they're saying. That's what it's like for me right now, not to mention the interpreter.

I would really appreciate not being shut out of the conversation because everyone is talking over one another. I would be eternally grateful.

Thank you.

• (1605)

[*English*]

The Chair: It's a fair point; there was a bit of joking back and forth. Let's stick to whoever has the floor. I will ensure that we can all participate properly.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor on your amendment to Mr. Masse's motion.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Sadly, here we go again. Conservatives have been trying to get the contracts publicly released so that the people who paid for these contracts can see them. We saw some shifting in position, sadly, of one party in particular around this table, which has changed the dynamic, and Conservatives are going to continue to fight for the release of these contracts.

Here's the situation. We have over \$40 billion in public subsidies planned for various companies—over \$40 billion. That is about \$3,000 per Canadian family. That's a very significant amount of money per Canadian family, and I know many families are struggling as a result of the affordability crisis. Food prices are up, rent is up, housing costs are up, defaults are up, and hunger is up. There are so many challenges facing our country.

While Canadians are pinching pennies, especially at this time of year, the government has made decisions around very significant subsidies to companies to the tune of \$3,000 per Canadian family. Canadians have a right to know what they are getting in return for those subsidies.

What we hear from the Liberals on this is an insistence on praising the deals, and yet an insistence on not showing the details of their work. They want Canadian workers to believe that these are great deals, and yet the Canadian workers can't see them. What we hear from Liberals is that essentially this is the best deal you've never seen. We're saying that if it is a good deal, show it to the people who are supposed to benefit from it so that they can make up their own minds. The public can decide whether or not they think

that each one of them should be on the hook for \$3,000. What are the corresponding benefits associated with these expenditures? If these are good deals, then let people see them.

For hours and hours on end, members across the way have said that these are good deals, great deals. They've said these are investments in people, these are fantastic deals, the best deals that you've ever seen—well, that you've never seen, actually. They've said that these are the best deals that you could imagine—well, you'll have to imagine them, because you don't get to know what they are. They're the best deals you can imagine, and that's all you'll be able to do. That's the approach that our colleagues opposite want to take.

This bluster about the glory of something that can't be seen is bizarre. It's unprecedented that they would be so shameless in making claims on the one hand about the quality of their work and on the other hand about the necessity of keeping that work completely invisible.

We have taken a clear, principled position, saying that these deals should be subject to democratic scrutiny by the people who are looking at them. Those who are supposed to be, in effect, the shareholders for this deal, those who are putting their money into this deal, should get to see what is in the deal.

Are there protections for workers in these deals? In the process of negotiating the handover of \$40 billion-plus, which is \$3,000 per Canadian family, did the government think to include provisions that would provide protections for Canadian workers that would definitively ensure that a certain number of jobs are being created in Canada? Did the government think to do that, or did they forget? Was it a matter of incompetent oversight, or was it a matter of indifference? Did they include those provisions? Did they intend to not include those provisions? Did they have ill intentions towards workers? Were they simply capricious in their disregard for Canadian workers? Did they just say, “Well, who cares? We don't need that.”

What was on their minds? What's in this deal? We don't know. As they would like to have it, we'll never know.

• (1610)

Mr. Chair, call me a skeptic. I want to be hopeful, especially at this time of year, but as a father of five children, experience teaches me that when somebody wants to hide something, maybe there's a reason. When one of my kids says, “Don't look at that. Don't go in that room”, I can tell you that the first thing I do is I want to know what's going on. Any parent of young children has probably had that experience. You're used to a noisy household; then, all of a sudden, you think, “It seems a little too quiet. I wonder what's going on?”

Well, members across the way who may have similar experience will have to acknowledge that they're acting a little bit guilty here. They're acting a little bit like there are things they want to hide in these contracts. I invite them to prove me wrong. I invite them to come clean with Canadians.

A prime minister of this country once said, “Sunlight is the best disinfectant.” I think it was the current Prime Minister who said that. In fact, it was the soon-to-be-former prime minister, who for now is the current prime minister, who said, “Sunlight is the best disinfectant.” Let's disinfect the suspicion that is hanging over our colleagues opposite. Let's give the good people of Windsor the chance to know the truth. We've heard from MPs from the Windsor area and elsewhere saying that it's the best deal you could possibly imagine, but that's where it's going to stay: in your imagination. It's the best deal you've never seen.

We're saying, “Show your work. Let the taxpayers, let the workers, let the voters know what's in these deals.”

We started with a situation in which all of the opposition parties were on board with that principle. In fact, we had the NDP leader standing up in the House of Commons calling for the release of these contracts. We had agreement from all three opposition parties in this committee to support the release of these contracts. Then we had a feeble filibuster for a short period of time from the Liberals, who wanted to keep these contracts secret and were going on and on about how great a deal it was, but in the process of talking about how allegedly great a deal it was, they were filibustering to prevent the release of this information.

I was extremely disappointed to see the NDP, just with a little bit of Liberal pressure, buckle under that pressure from their costly, corrupt, cover-up coalition compadres. They changed their position. First they called for the release of these contracts, and then in a fiery fury of flip-flopping—that's the end of the alliteration—they switched sides and voted with the government to kill our motion to order the production of these contracts. I think that was a sad betrayal of Canadian workers by the NDP.

The NDP likes to claim that it's the party of Canadian workers, yet we've seen repeatedly again today a sad betrayal of workers by the NDP. The NDP is now a shadow of its former self, and it's become a shadow of the Liberal Party. One of the Liberal members said, in fact, in the House yesterday that the NDP are in their pocket. Well, it's sad but true.

We now have two parties of government. We have the Liberals, and to be fair to the Liberals, they've at least been consistent on it. They've been the party of cover-ups for decades at least. That's their brand. They're the party of corruption and cover-ups. That's what they do. They don't quite put it on the sign, but it's pretty close.

• (1615)

However, the NDP have sold the farm and have fully joined this tragic coalition—tragic for Canadians—that is trying to hide important information from Canadian taxpayers. Here we are. They defeated our motion and then put forward their own motion.

Now, this motion that the NDP put forward initially, I must say, Mr. Chair, is one of the most bizarre motions I have ever seen come before a committee. The NDP, I think, in the midst of caving to their coalition colleagues, wanted to still put some window dressing out there for workers. They put forward a motion that effectively says they're going to use the ATIP process.

It seems that some NDP MPs could simply be replaced by a five-dollar bill, because that's all it costs to file an ATIP. It's five dollars. We don't need a parliamentary committee to file an ATIP. Any citizen—any person from Windsor or any other part of the country—can take five dollars and go file an ATIP.

Under this government, the ATIP process has become severely challenged. Under this government, if you file an ATIP, you get massive delays and horrific redactions that prevent you from knowing anything useful. You get your money's worth for that five dollars. That's the ATIP process.

My colleague Mr. Perkins is saying you don't get your money's worth for five dollars. Well, keep in mind inflation. With “Justinflation”, that five dollars doesn't buy as much as it used to.

It's true with ATIP as well. Before Justinflation, you could actually get some information for five dollars, but now you can't.

Anyway, there's this ATIP process whereby Canadians can, for five dollars, file an access to information request. My colleague from the NDP says that as a parliamentary committee, let's do what any Canadian can do and file an ATIP. Okay, he has some other language in there about ensuring that some specific information is included.

Frankly, I think there are some procedural problems around the information they're asking for in terms of whether it will actually come up. The procedural problem is that committees have an unfettered right to order the production of existing documents, but they cannot order somebody or some entity to create documents that do not exist. Committees can order copies of all of my love letters to my wife, but it cannot order me to write love letters to my wife, to use a somewhat absurd analogy.

Committees can order documents that exist. They cannot order someone to produce documents. I think there's a little bit of a misunderstanding with this motion in terms of whether it orders the production of existing documents or orders the creation of documents.

I would like to think we can order the transfer of that information, but I suspect that if the motion were to pass, we would in some cases not get the information we want. The entities in question would come back and say that they're not producing documents that don't exist; they're only complying with the committee's orders insofar as they involve providing existing documents. In that regard, there was a little bit more heat than light, let's say, in the motion that's been put forward.

The basic substantive core of this motion is a five-dollar ATIP. Maybe the committee can save some Canadian the five-dollar fee or maybe we could just pass the hat and have everybody throw a nickel in and get this done.

This is not the serious work of a parliamentary committee, Chair, quite obviously. Parliamentary committees, unlike private citizens, have the right to request access to any document, unredacted. We have taken the position that parliamentary committees—this committee—should use the power they have to order the production of these documents.

• (1620)

We have over \$40 billion spent, which is \$3,000 per Canadian family. Liberals say these are great deals. We say, “Show the deals.” We say, “Let’s produce the deals.”

At first, we have the NDP agreeing with us these deals should be produced, while the Liberals are filibustering and trying to hide the deals. Then the NDP flip-flops and proposes this ridiculous motion that says essentially that this committee should do the work that a five-dollar bill could do on its own, with the help of a person submitting the request, I suppose.

Mr. Rick Perkins: It’ll only take 11 years.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The committee can order it on any timeline. The committee can order these documents right away. They can say it’s to be within a week, 10 days or two weeks. It’s whatever timeline the committee thinks is appropriate. They can order the documents to be produced right away in both languages, so we should do that. We should order these documents so that they’ll be made public.

In an effort to find further compromise and in an effort to reason with the other side, my colleague Mr. Perkins has put forward a motion that tries to find a middle way. It orders the full production of the documents with suggested redactions, which will then go to the parliamentary law clerk. This is a procedure that has been used in the past as a compromise. Instead of even debating that motion, we had New Democrats and Liberals voting to adjourn debate on that motion. They did not even want to talk about our compromise proposal.

We’d be happy to talk further about options for how to make this issue move forward, but the motion the NDP has put forward is just a complete joke. The NDP members are trying to cover up for their complicity in the Liberal cover-up by putting forward a motion that pretends to ask for information; it doesn’t ask for any information that isn’t already available through a five-dollar ATIP. This underlines the NDP’s disregard for the real interests of workers, of taxpayers and of all Canadians. Canadians paid for these deals. They deserve to know what’s in them. If they’re great deals, show your work.

Mr. Chair, I do have more to say on this, but I will conclude my remarks for now. You can add me to the list to say a few more words on the amendment. I do want to give a chance to colleagues to weigh in on this, so please add me to the list, but I will leave my comments there for the moment.

The Chair: Thanks.

It’s Mr. Sousa and then Mr. Masse.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have an amendment I’d like to move. It’s now been submitted to the clerk—

The Chair: To be clear, is it an amendment to Mr. Genuis’ amendment to the original motion?

Mr. Charles Sousa: No, it’s an amendment to Mr. Masse’s motion.

The Chair: We’re debating Mr. Genuis’ amendment, so it would have to be a subamendment to Mr. Genuis’ amendment.

Is that your intent or—

Mr. Charles Sousa: Okay. I’m sorry. I have nothing more to comment on Mr. Genuis’ amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Masse, go ahead, please.

Mr. Brian Masse: I’ll withdraw. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Perkins.

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

I can understand why government members are confused about whether this is an amendment, subamendment or a sub-sub-subamendment to a motion that was about as clear as mud in the first place, although I think it was all done with the best intent of trying to move us from the original spot to what we believe is the importance of true transparency, which is the release of the contracts completely publicly, versus the government’s desire to keep them completely secret to hide something.

They claim it’s about confidentiality. Of all of the government members who have circled through this committee since I’ve been on this debate, not one of them has read the Volkswagen contract—but I have. I’m the only one here who can speak with any clarity about what’s in these contracts, because I’ve read them.

I can tell you that there’s virtually nothing in them that is commercially sensitive, unless you find it politically disturbing that contracts don’t contain clauses that guarantee Canadian jobs. I can tell you what’s not in the Volkswagen contract, and that is a clause that protects Canadian jobs—and that’s a guarantee. I can also tell you what’s in it. Is there a clause that prohibits its release? There is no clause that prohibits its release.

What we’re dealing with here is a legitimate attempt by the member for Windsor West to try to find a way out of the two sides between complete disclosure—where we and the Bloc Québécois and the NDP were—and the government’s intransigence in trying to keep poorly negotiated contracts secret. That’s the real reason they’re trying to keep them secret: They didn’t negotiate a good contract. They’re being caught by those failures of both the Department of Industry and the Minister of Industry to read them.

If you can believe it, I’ve been actually questioning the Minister of Industry about a number of contracts that he’s responsible for having signed. Recently, a few weeks ago—about two weeks ago—in the finance committee, I was asking him about the contract on Stellantis and whether he had read it, and he said no.

I asked the Minister of Health in the health committee whether the Minister of Health had read the contract to procure vaccines from Medicago before he wrote a \$150-million cheque, from the taxpayers, to pay for a contract that they essentially cancelled. He said it was an advance payment on vaccines, which we didn’t receive. When I asked him if he had read the contract, he said that no, he hadn’t read the contract. He wrote a \$150-million cheque to the largest company in Japan on behalf of taxpayers, and it was based on not reading the contract.

The Minister of Industry said he hadn't read these contracts. Why would a corporate lawyer not read a contract? Now, he also said he didn't sign it—and fair enough, I guess he has people for that, as he's too important to actually read and sign a contract that is fewer than 30 pages. At some time when he's flying around the world—I'm sure in his business class seat—he can find the time to read a 30-page contract. I'd advise him to do so and take a look at these contracts.

He will not be scared, if he reads them, about releasing them—or maybe he will—but if he is, it's not because of all the commercially sensitive information that's in these contracts; it's because of how poor a contract the Liberal government negotiated and how they've been caught in it.

In an attempt to try to make Mr. Masse's motion a little more legible and transparent, my colleague MP Genuis started with an amendment to the first paragraph, which starts at, “That, an order...for production...and upon receipt immediately post on its web-site”.

• (1625)

The idea was that the most important thing that we thought the NDP cared about, along with the Bloc and ourselves, was transparency, and that it would be made public. That wasn't contained in Mr. Masse's motion, so we thought that in the spirit of consistency with the NDP and what they said publicly—and what their leader said publicly in the House of Commons in question period—maybe it just slipped, because we're all working hard at this time of day, so we'd help the motion along and provide an improvement. We know it's Mr. Masse's intent to actually have these contracts released publicly, because that's what he and his leader said in the House of Commons. It's what Mr. Masse said in this committee. I'm sure that Mr. Masse has no objection to an addition to his motion that actually inserts what he said we should do, which is releasing the contracts publicly.

Now in the confusing paragraph of (f)—and we can debate whether it's new or not—that time will come, I guess. We started to try to have that discussion earlier. In that, I think MP Genuis made an amendment that helps actually make this a little more legible by....

I'll leave the word “new” out because that's a little confusing, but paragraph (f) said, “That the departments and agencies tasked with gathering these documents be redacted according to the Access to Information Acts with the exception that all companies must fully disclose and make publicly available to correct any misinformation the following”. That sentence is sucking and blowing at the same time. It's very confusing. It says we're going to have them redacted in making them public and accessible, but let's redact them to correct misinformation. How do you correct misinformation if it's not public?

It's confusing, so Mr. Genuis proposed to remove the words “and agencies tasked with gathering these documents be redacted according to the Access to Information Acts with the exception that all companies must”, so it would read now, “that the departments fully disclose”, an idea that the NDP clearly supported many times, hopefully, “that departments fully disclose and make publicly available the following”.

It's a much cleaner and simpler way of what I think MP Masse was originally trying to get to. In his attempt to make a friendly or compromise motion, I think some of the language got muddled. I think, in a genuine attempt to ensure that Mr. Masse's motion is clear for all the public and for everyone that we want this public, we want to make sure that Mr. Masse is expressing exactly what it was he said in committee and in the House, and what his leader said, which is that these should be public. That confusing back-and-forth redaction of “redact this or redact that, but make it public”, was a redaction that's very confusing, so now we've cleaned it up so the thing is consistent with the words Mr. Masse said in the past.

Item number four under (f), “that redacted versions”, again is very confusing, because Mr. Masse said he wanted these public, and the intro line in (f) said it would be redacted but made publicly available. Well, we're just assuming that the NDP wants to be consistent with what they said publicly and that they're not changing their mind and flip-flopping, or, as I said in the last meeting, quoting Churchill, that they're ratting. That's when a politician crosses the floor. In Britain they call it ratting. Churchill said that it was easy to rat but it was really tough to re-rat, so we're making some cleaned-up language here so that Mr. Masse doesn't have to re-rat and so that Mr. Masse and the NDP can stay clean with their public statements that they want these contracts public and transparent to ensure Canadian workers are protected.

Isn't that the best way to ensure, with all the stories that have gone out there, starting with the ambassador from South Korea and his meetings in Windsor, who said 1,600 foreign replacement workers were coming and they needed to find houses? I'm sure, as everyone knows, that many of us interact with diplomats all the time. I've not met a diplomat who's allowed to freelance, to go out there and make these things up on their own—

An hon. member: Bob Rae.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, I guess Bob Rae, a bit, on what's going on in the UN. He's maybe not always been consistent with where the government is, apparently, in its flip-flop on Israel....

However, when you talk about the issue of consistency, I think it's important. The public expects that when we make a commitment and say that we want to do something, like making contracts public, we do. For the life of me, I can't think of any reason—because I have read the Volkswagen contract—for what they're afraid of.

The contracts, like any well-negotiated contracts with the government—and I've read the Medicago and the Volkswagen contracts—have clauses, standard sorts of government clauses, on public release. When you as a corporation deal with the federal government, whether you're a domestic corporation or an international corporation—and Stellantis is a very sophisticated global company—you know that when you're taking taxpayer money, if you're going to take taxpayer money, if you're going to vacuum up taxpayer money to pay the cost of assembling batteries....

• (1630)

That's what these contracts do. It's in the IRA.

For those who don't know, for the many thousands who are watching this committee on ParlVu, the IRA is President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act. It's a bit of a misnomer, because when you spend a trillion dollars, that's actually an inflation act, so it's not an inflation reduction act—but I digress, and I try not to do that.

We have a contract that the minister and the Parliamentary Budget Officer say mirrors the Inflation Reduction Act. The Inflation Reduction Act is very public and clear, including a congressional parliamentary budget officer's estimate of what it will cost on the issue of battery assembly.

Remember, this is about battery assembly; it's not about battery manufacturing. There's a lot of talk that we're protecting auto manufacturing jobs here. There isn't one auto manufacturing job being protected here. These are assembly jobs. These parts are made in China.

Just ask the workers at the CAMI plant in Ontario that has been shut down. It's the only EV manufacturing plant in Canada, and it's been shut down after only six months because they can't get the parts from—anyone can guess it—China. China doesn't have the parts—or it does have the parts and won't give them to North American plants?

Because that got shut down, we expect that Chinese parts coming for the EV batteries to be assembled in Volkswagen, Stellantis and Ford will somehow magically appear from China. In this case, don't we want to have that transparency?

If, as the government says, we're making this up.... The Liberals keep saying we're making this up. They have two excuses. One is that they say we're making it up. I'm not, because I've read the contract and the government members have not. Certainly Kathleen Wynne's former finance minister, who sits at this table, has not read the contracts, but it doesn't stop him from talking about it.

In the case of these contracts, I would think that if we were wrong, the best thing you could do to prove us wrong is to release them. Won't we look foolish if these contracts actually do contain a job guarantee for Canadians? Prove us wrong. Release them.

My colleague Mr. Genuis, in his motion, talked a bit about the last item on MP Masse's amendment, which I find confusing too. It's item (i). This is the one that says we're ultimately going to ask for these contracts through an access to information request or we're going to have the Information Commissioner look at it.

If the Information Commissioner was looking at it and applying some sort of theory and saying, "Okay, this contract can be released publicly, but the terms say you can't release these commercially sensitive things," and Stellantis has said, "We believe those things are commercially sensitive," and the Information Commissioner agrees that those things are commercially sensitive and they're just not a political game to hide failures of contract negotiations, and then they would be made public, that would be great.

That's essentially the motion I proposed earlier today. The language is a cleaned-up version of what MP Masse was asking for,

but it's a little more legible and understandable. It actually says, "Let's trust these officers." However, this motion, I think, is trying to say, "We don't trust them, so we'll actually get them in some sort of secret room and have a political debate, with the cameras off, about whether we agree or disagree and whether the government wants to use the process in this committee to remove even more embarrassing clauses from the contract in order for it to be released."

Mr. Genuis spoke eloquently about the efficiency of the access to information process. Far be it from me to say that this is an abuse, but let me give you the example of the 112 access to information requests that my office filed this summer, thanks to my assistant, Graham O'Brien, who did amazing work in trying to get some clarity and transparency from this government.

I'll give you an example of two of the 112. I can get him to bring over all 112 and the responses, just to give you a bit of clarity on this one aspect, and I will be speaking to the motion if I read all 112.

• (1635)

I think Graham has left the room temporarily. I'm sure he's gone to the office to get the 112 and the responses from the government.

From memory, let me give you two examples of the great transparency of the industry department, which is the department that signed these contracts. Let's talk about that.

I asked in an access to information request for the schedule of the deputy minister of industry for the last 12 months. I got a response, Mr. Genuis, and it did come back within the time, but here's what it said: The one year of schedule that I asked for from the deputy minister of industry would take 11 years for the department to produce—11 years.

I'll remind you that Mr. O'Brien, who did all this great work in my office, could be sent over to the department of innovation, science and industry, so this doesn't give you a great deal of confidence that this department can negotiate a good contract or actually understands what innovation and science are.

I'm sorry. I made a mistake. It was eight years for the deputy minister. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to exaggerate. Graham has reminded me that it was eight years for the deputy minister. That makes it better, because it was only eight years to get his schedule.

Graham knows how to use a Microsoft Outlook schedule. I think most of us do here. When you open up your day on the schedule, if you hit the button "File", up comes a drop-down menu, and guess what it says on that drop-down menu?

A voice: What does it say?

Mr. Rick Perkins: It says “Print”.

We tried that for a few days of my schedule. It took five seconds to print out a single day. I am making that offer right now to the department of industry, which can't negotiate good contracts with Stellantis because they can't figure out how to hit “File” and “Print” on the deputy minister's schedule. Mr. O'Brien will come over and teach the department of innovation, science, and industry how to use “File” and “Print” on the Outlook schedule.

Not to be outdone, the deputy minister is an important man, as we all know. He has an associate deputy minister who appears before the industry committee on just about everything we do. We asked for his schedule for a year too. We did. Clearly, he's much more important than the deputy minister. Do you know why? I made a mistake earlier when I said it would be 11 years for the deputy minister's schedule, rather than eight, but for his associate deputy minister it was 11 years, because he's a much more important man than the deputy minister. It would actually take another three years to hit “File” and “Print” for all the days in his schedule.

I have to tell you that this is the department that MP Masse wants to rely on in item (i) to release the contract and for the ATIP.

I might challenge it, but it would probably take 11 years. That may be a dilatory sort of thing that the industry department is trying to hide. The industry department is actually trying to hide the deputy minister's schedule for some reason. They made claims in Bill C-27 that they've had 300 meetings over the summer, and it turns out they had about 300 meetings with the Canadian Marketing Association and the Canadian Bankers Association, but nobody who actually cares about the privacy of individuals, just people who care about abusing an individual's privacy, so they're trying to hide things at every turn, and that's why we need the transparency of the amendments that Mr. Genuis put forward, or my genuine compromise motion that I put forward today, which has about 80% or 90% of MP Masse's motion in it. It has the idea of having a third party review it, which is a compromise on our part, and having it released publicly.

The only difference, aside from all the grammatical errors, is the issue of a public or a private release. We trust parliamentary officers to release it and make those judgments. Apparently the government doesn't. I wonder why. Now the NDP no longer trusts the officers of Parliament to make the decision and release things publicly.

• (1640)

This is a production of documents motion, or that's the intent of what we originally put forward. MP Masse's version is somewhat of a production of documents motion, but it actually asks for things that aren't documents, so I don't know that it actually qualifies. I've not challenged the chair on whether or not this motion is acceptable under the rules. It's not really a production of documents motion in the truest sense, because it's asking for things that are not in the contract. It's asking for things like the number of foreign workers who are building plants involved in equipment installation and technology transfer.

Well, do you know what? Why don't we just have Stellantis before the committee and ask them that? I can tell you that this is not part of the contract. The contract has employment stuff. It doesn't

list out the foreign workers they're bringing in, so it's about asking for the production of a new document that does not exist.

There are ways to do that. The member could have asked and filed what's called an OPQ around here. We're in Ottawa. Ottawa, like all governments, lives on acronyms. We're in the OGGO committee—another acronym. I sit on the INDU committee. The industry department is called ISED, which actually doesn't bear any resemblance to the title of the minister: The minister is Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, and it's the Department of Industry, Science and Economic Development. They can't even get the title and the department straight and linked up, but we want to trust them that they're not hiding something and that they're negotiating a good contract.

He's asking for a document that requires special production, and OPQ means “Order Paper question”. Members of Parliament can ask what's called an Order Paper question. The government is compelled, in 45 days, to respond to those Order Paper questions. This is a perfect item for that, and I would recommend that MP Masse file an OPQ. You're allowed four at any given time. I've always had four, but I actually am so curious about what the government's doing that I generally have eight, 10 or 12 in at any given time, although you're only allowed four, so other MPs have to sign them.

You find out quite interesting information. The number of foreign workers who've been building the plants involved in equipment installation and technology transfer is a number. Numbers are what OPQs are best at exposing, so we don't need this here. In fact, that's not a document that is signed in the contract. I think it should be asked under an OPQ. That's not production of documents.

Number two is about the number of Canadian temporary and/or construction jobs to be created and how many permanent production positions are to be created as part of the contract guarantees. Well, the minister has said quite clearly, publicly, as has the Prime Minister, that there are 2,500 permanent jobs. I don't need to produce a document for that unless, for some reason, MP Masse doesn't even trust that number is correct. It says 2,500 jobs. That's the answer to the number of permanent production positions created as part of the contract. That's 2,500, or 2,300—we've heard a couple of different numbers. They're close. They've said both of those, so we don't need a motion to ask for that unless we don't believe the minister that it's even in the contract.

I trust the minister that when he said there would be 2,300 permanent jobs in the contract, that's what there will be. The minister just hasn't said that they're Canadian, or at least the company has said that they're not all Canadian. The minister has said they're Canadian, they're not Canadian, some of them are Canadian, a small portion are now in there—and then it's, “I really don't want you to know because I won't release the contract.”

Maybe MP Masse has a point. Maybe we can't even trust the number that the minister has put out, but again, that would make a classic OPQ. It's just a straight number. In fact, items one and two could be—wait for it—in the same OPQ, and they would have to respond within 45 days.

Item three is about the steps that will be taken to prioritize the employment of Canadians for building plants and equipment. Again, on the release of the contract, if it says that these jobs have to be Canadian, it would say that in the contract, but it isn't listed there.

In no contract that I've ever seen, and I was in large corporate businesses for 25-plus years.... I ran them. I was on boards of directors of publicly traded companies, private companies. You don't outline in a contract all the steps you take:

- (1645)

Number one, let's post an ad; number two, here are the qualifications; number three, let's do the interviews at this date; number four, let's interview the people; number five, here's how we'll score them. You don't put the steps that will be taken to prioritize the employment, as in, are they Canadian? Those steps on that hiring are not in a contract. It just says you're going to hire so many people to do so many things, and either they're Canadian or they're not.

One would expect that if you're putting up, in this case, \$15 billion—the largest corporate subsidy in the history of Canada, for a single company for a six-year period, meaning \$1,000 of taxes per household in Canada—you would put that requirement in the contract.

I think that could be very simply an OPQ, but it's not a production of documents question because that wouldn't be in the contract. They could have put in the construction schedule of the plant. That's in one of these contracts. There are two contracts for each of these. You could put that in the contract. You could ask for the steps of the construction schedule. That would be a legitimate element of the production of documents, but it wouldn't be the steps to be taken to prioritize employment other than saying....

I think what MP Masse is generally saying is that we want to know if it says you have to hire Canadians. If it does, release those clauses. MP Masse didn't ask for those clauses to be released. It's this liberalized, bureaucratized language that says, "Prioritize the employment of Canadians." It sounds like the people who write acronyms wrote this up.

Number four says that the documents should be deposited with the clerk of the committee within—I have "one" blocked out—three weeks. I don't know if that's an old strikeout or not, but the redacted versions.... This again is where we had some confusion. Maybe it's a typo that we're trying to fix that's in the motion, because MP Masse said many times in the industry committee and in this committee that he wants it in public, and so does his leader in the House. He actually questioned—quite emotionally—the Prime Minister and the Minister of Industry on this issue, calling for the release of the contracts. I think that was probably a typo in the rush to get this done, and that's why, in all good spirit of assistance, MP Genus has offered to help out to make sure that the motion is clearly consistent with the public position of the NDP.

Number five is that the "information related to the above specific areas not available in the contract be provided by the above mentioned companies to the committee in writing." Here we go. It's the cone of silence.

There is a bit of grey hair around this table, but some people here may not remember, and some may, that classic TV series—I was a tiny little kid, I must admit—called *Get Smart*. Do you remember *Get Smart*? There isn't much *Get Smart* in this contract, but in *Get Smart* they had the cone of silence, and Max would go in and they'd have something secret to talk about, he and the chief. The cone of silence would come down over them. They'd try to talk to each other through the cone of silence and they could never hear anybody. That was the cone of silence.

This is the "cone of silence clause" here that MP Masse has put in. Do you know what happens when you put a cone of silence into this committee, in OGGO, in looking at the contracts? It's the same thing that happened to Max and the chief in *Get Smart*: It doesn't work. It doesn't provide transparency. Nobody can hear the contract. Nobody can see it. Nobody can prove it. It ties the members' hands to secrecy, and it's the goal of the Liberals to tie our hands to secrecy.

The only reason to do it is that they're hiding something. If they were proud of this contract, as they claim they are.... I've heard the Liberal members go on at length about the pride in these contracts. I've heard them and seen them do media. If you're proud of these contracts, release them. Obviously, you're not proud of the contracts; you're just proud of the rhetoric. If you were proud of the contracts, you'd release them.

- (1650)

Now that my assistant Graham O'Brien is back, I'd like to thank him again for all the work he did on exposing the secret society of industry that has decided that access to information doesn't apply to them and that it will take 11 years to produce a print copy of the deputy minister's and the associate deputy minister's schedules—Mr. Schaan. I would like to thank him for that work.

Graham, did you go back to the office to get the other 110 access to information request responses? I could really use them here.

I know the committee members would be fascinated with paragraph (j) on using access to information as the way to get this contract. That's just to give examples of how effective access to information is at getting secret government documents when the government doesn't want to do it.

Graham, maybe you could send.... We have a couple of part-time students. Maybe just give them a call and ask them if they'll bring them over. It may require a wheelbarrow.

I am prepared, in the hour of transparency, to demonstrate to this committee just how many access to information requests the Liberal government treats with a great deal of openness and respect in putting things forward.

I can tell you that I think the intent by Mr. Masse is right. I think he made some typos that Mr. Genuis is trying to fix in an earnest way—as my colleague always is—in trying to fix the motion.

If it would be okay, I'd like to make two more corrections, if I could, as a subamendment to Mr. Genuis's motion.

The chair proposed at the beginning of this meeting to clean up some of the language, so I would like to propose—

• (1655)

The Chair: Before you start, do you have a copy of that for me or for the clerk?

Mr. Rick Perkins: I'm just going to repeat the one you gave at the beginning, so you probably already have a copy of it, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to move that the word “new” beside paragraph (f) be removed. I think it should be removed because it's no longer new. It's been talked about now for a couple of meetings and it actually doesn't read well. If I read it right now, it says, “these documents are received by the clerk: new (f) That the departments..”. It just doesn't work.

I move that the word “new” be removed. I'm having trouble following all the crossed out parts and the things that are in it.

In paragraph (h), the word “immediately” is struck out for some reason, but I don't recall our striking that out and I don't know which version it is, so I would add to that same motion, as the chair pointed out earlier, that we return the word “immediately” to the motion.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sorry, but is “immediately” in or out, Chair?

The Chair: Just to go back, I tried to take out “new” and “immediately” and there was another one. There is the word “one” somewhere.

However, I am advised that the “new (f)” and “immediately” were not part of Mr. Genuis's amendment, so you can't move a subamendment to it.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I can't move an amendment to the amendment?

The Chair: You can't do it on this. I'm told by the clerk that “new”, as in “new (f)”, and striking “immediately” were not part of Mr. Genuis's amendment, so—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, I'd like to challenge your ruling on that.

The Chair: Okay. I won't take it personally.

Give us a second and we'll get our tracking chart out.

I will note that this was your Christmas card and I am now withdrawing it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'll challenge that as well, Chair.

The Chair: I am a vindictive chair.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aimée Belmore): The question is, shall the decision of the chair be sustained, the chair's decision being that the subamendment is not in order?

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 8; nays 2)

• (1700)

The Chair: Your subamendment is out of order, but you still have the floor, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: That's great.

How are we doing on those...? Oh, Graham has left. He's gone to get the other 110 access to information items—ATIPs, as they call them. There's another acronym: ATIP.

Let's talk about why, because this is the heart of what Mr. Genuis is trying to do. I appreciate MP Masse's very humorous comment about my attempt to do a subamendment. I take it in the spirit with which he and I always kibbitz.

The spirit of the amendment to Mr. Masse's motion is transparency. Transparency is what we want to have and what we thought we all wanted to have. Certainly, when this Liberal government was elected with their sunny ways slogan in 2015, they made a lot of commitments about government transparency: that this would be the most transparent government in the history of the country, that they would ensure committee business would not be influenced by parliamentary secretaries, that the committees would be more independent, and that they would ensure that we would have open access through access to information, better access to information laws and more open and transparent government.

After eight years, it appears that the transparency they like and the transparency they're protecting is a transparency that matters only when it suits their political means. When it harms their political means, they will use every trick in the book to try to stop that transparency. Why? Why is it that they would do that?

Well, as you know, at the launch of these contracts, the Prime Minister said that this would create lots of local construction jobs in southwestern Ontario—thousands, in fact—and it would create lots of local jobs when it came to permanent jobs, and that this would be, as they called it, the saving of the hundred thousand jobs in the auto business that we have in Ontario. Right now, the average cost to save those 3,000 jobs in total in one plant—so the total in all of them—is about five million dollars a job.

In terms of job creation, in the evolution from the Auto Pact through to the protection of the auto industry in the open markets and the free trade agreement in the United States, which the United States passed in 1989, to the further North American Free Trade Agreement, which integrated and guaranteed good-paying union auto jobs as part of the Mexico-Canada-United States relationship on auto production, I'd say that not only has it produced good jobs and a good stable industry, but it has also produced the best cars in the world.

The government now is engaged in an exercise of catch-up—not ketchup like you put on your hamburger, but catch-up. They're catching up to the IRA. President Biden caught them flat-footed. He said, “Here's what we're going to do. We're not going to impose a carbon tax in the United States like Canada does. That would be foolish, because a carbon tax doesn't work. What we're going to do is invest in technology, not taxes.”

What an idea: Let's invest in technology and not taxes. They used something called ITCs—more acronyms—and PTCs—more acronyms. ITCs are called input tax credits and PTCs are called production tax credits—in other words, government tax breaks to companies that do certain things. In the IRA, they put in a clause that says if you assemble EV batteries in the United States to go into EV vehicles assembled in the United States, you will have a massive subsidy for the next little while.

• (1705)

Here's what the IRA says about that subsidy. It's something, I guess, they don't want us to see in these contracts, whether or not these contracts actually do what they say on this. The IRA says that between now and 2029, 100% of the cost of assembling those batteries will be covered by the taxpayer—100%.

If you're a global company out of Germany or Korea, who wouldn't sign up for that deal? An EV battery is 40% of the cost of the car. The United States says, "No problem. We'll subsidize 40% of the production of the car to the manufacturer", immediately increasing the profitability, massively, of these expensive vehicles. Since there isn't a market for them, because nobody will pay the retail price of those cars, we'll subsidize the cars on the other end too. We'll give the consumer a subsidy of \$7,500 per car.

If you can believe this, folks, we're taking a car that will sell for \$50,000, and we're saying that the taxpayer will pay 40% of the cost to build that car through 2029, but Stellantis, Ford and Volkswagen will make 100% profit off that. Then we're going to further subsidize \$7,500. You're talking about potentially a \$25,000 to \$30,000 taxpayer subsidy on the cost of a \$50,000 vehicle.

The Trudeau government says, "Sign me up. I think that's a good deal. I'm busy shutting down the resource industries that drive our economy, pay for our health care and pay for everything." The growth that we have, our greatest global competitive advantage, is from our natural resources: oil and gas, forests, minerals, mines, fisheries, agricultural, renewable resources. We're busy shutting all those down on an extreme agenda, and we're going to replace them with an industry of central planning, of state capitalism, through which it is the state that actually subsidizes private sector companies, not private capital.

That's what the IRA does, in the extreme in this case. Do you know what? The United States government isn't out there hawking that thing very much. The congressional budget officer said that this is going to cost \$30 billion to \$40 billion. He was clearly underestimating it, because in Canada we're already spending, with three plants, over \$40 billion on three assembly plants.

If you're going to do that and if you're going to push forward the idea of a 100% subsidy on batteries through 2029.... By the way, the IRA says in the year after that—I'm sorry that I meandered a bit—it goes to 75%, and the next year it goes to 50%, and the next year it goes to 25%. Over those years, that's the percentage the taxpayer is going to pay in covering the cost of the batteries in the IRA.

That's supposedly what's in these contracts, because the minister said they are the same as the IRA. I'd love to see that publicly. I'm sure the public would like to see that we're 100% subsidizing Volk-

swagen so that Volkswagen has an increase in profitability in the cars they sell by 40%. It's at 100%, then 75% and all that, and then in 2033 there is no subsidy. At least, that's when the IRA part of this ends, if it doesn't extend. We know that the minister has said publicly that if the U.S. Congress extends the IRA, then they'll extend the subsidy, so we can expect that this is in the contract.

These are really jobs that won't exist unless there is a \$1,000-a-household, per manufacturer, subsidy. I have to tell you that the people in my riding, as much as they love the auto jobs, are not keen that \$1,000 of their tax dollars is for Volkswagen, which has more revenue than the Government of Canada, and that another \$1,000 of their taxpayer money is for Stellantis, which has more annual revenue than the Government of Canada.

• (1710)

We're actually subsidizing companies that have more money than Canada. The incredible part of this is that the NDP members rail on against corporate profits. We hear it all the time in the House: Corporate profits are bad. Well, actually, corporate profits produced the phones all the NDP members use, and the computers they're logged onto here are produced through corporate profits and the innovation that comes from that. If corporate profits are bad, I'm left scratching the few hairs I have left on my head about how that's consistent with taking these companies that are larger than the Government of Canada and paying 40% of the cost of the production of their vehicle when they get 100% of the profit.

You'll say to me, "But Rick, it's helpful, because these cars will be sold in Canada and they'll help reduce our carbon footprint in Canada." You know what? You'd be wrong. I know that it's an assumption you would make, but do you know that Volkswagen does not have an assembly plant for internal combustion engines or an EV plant in this country? Do you know how many plants they plan to build assembling EVs or internal combustion engines in Canada?

I'm asking the members on the government side. Please tell me, in all of this great work, in the negotiations and the fine contract discussions you've done that you're trying to hide, how many commitments you got to have a battery plant and then a car assembly plant from Volkswagen or Stellantis in Canada? I'm listening.

Wow. They usually heckle me, but they're silent now, because you know what the answer is? It's zero—not a single plant.

Now prove me wrong. Release the contract. Maybe it's in the contract, but because of the silence, I suspect it's not. You know why it's not? It's because Volkswagen has already said where these batteries are going. Do you know where they're going? Come on; I know you're listening intently. I know the government members know where they're going. Help me out here.

Help me out here: Where are they going?

I know they're laughing. The camera won't show them.

Where they're going is Tennessee. They're going to get trucked. Heavy, heavy EV batteries for an EV Volkswagen car are going to be put in an 18-wheeler driven by diesel and will go to Tennessee. That really helps the carbon footprint of that EV. Then the vehicle is assembled in Tennessee. Guess where the vehicles assembled in Tennessee are sold? Come on....

Garnett, you must know where vehicles in Tennessee are sold. They're sold in the United States. The Canadian taxpayer is subsidizing vehicles to be sold in the United States.

"Sign me up for that deal," say the Liberals. "I'll subsidize almost half the car and I'll give it to foreign multinationals so they can make more profit." They're supported by their NDP coalition partner in this. We'll increase the profitability of these foreign multinationals by almost 40% on each vehicle. We'll do that so that we can sell the cars in the United States.

You know what? Let's assume President Biden, the Democrats and Republicans see the light and discover they can't afford to subsidize these cars anymore. Now, they're not really subsidizing them, because we're the ones who are out there marketing and saying "Don't go to the U.S.," so they don't actually have to pay for what's in the IRA; we're the ones paying for the IRA—Canadian taxpayers.

Let's just assume that all of this is true. You're Stellantis, you're Volkswagen and you're Ford in Quebec, and when the subsidies end in 2033 and you have to pay for 100% of the cost out of your own capital of your own shareholders for the heaviest part of the vehicle—the battery—where do you think that's going? Do you think they're going to truck from Windsor and St. Thomas, Ontario, and from Quebec? Do you think they're going to continue to truck those batteries to the Midwest and the southern U.S. to be assembled in the plants? If you believe that it will exist without more subsidy, then you've never worked in a business. You've worked for a not-for-profit. Maybe you've done good work at a not-for-profit and a community charity, but that isn't the way that it goes on. It doesn't work that way. Once the subsidy ends, the biggest part of any kind of business like this....

• (1715)

I was in the retail business for many years—a large retailer—and the biggest cost to the people whose products we sold, and to our operations, was actually trucking the stuff around—moving the product, touching the product, moving it from place to place, putting it in an 18-wheeler. That's what costs money. That's what eats up your margin. The last thing you want to do is touch the product and move it halfway across the North American continent to be put in another vehicle.

The earnestness with which my colleague from Windsor West, whom I do quite admire, believes that these jobs will continue to exist after that.... I believe that the only way they will continue to exist is if there is a clause in these contracts that says, "You know what? You have to pay back every dollar of these subsidies the minute you move this plant out of Canada."

Now, anyone who knows how to negotiate a contract.... I'm not a lawyer, but I am a corporate strategist and a marketer. I've been on boards. I would never let my company and my government sign a contract that says that after receiving \$15 billion of taxpayer money you're free to go—adios, and don't let the door hit you on the way out. That's what this government has probably done in these contracts: "Oops, I forgot."

I have to tell you that I had an ADM for industry in committee the other day on the green slush fund scandal. You guys all know about that. It's yet another scandal. I have a spreadsheet in the office for trying to keep track of all of these scandals.

The ADM for the SIF program, the strategic investment fund, was at the committee. He is the ADM who is responsible for this contract. There was another ADM there, and the deputy minister. I like to call the SIF program the sieve program. It's more appropriate, because it's basically a Liberal slush fund that goes out to any corporate partner who wants to come in here to sell Canadians' IP off to the world. For instance, Nokia came to Ottawa. "Oh, please, give us a couple of jobs. We'll give you \$40 million. We'll help pay for the IP you develop and you take back to Europe, but we're happy you gave us 12 jobs."

It's so Canadian, and it's destroying our economy. We have the lowest per capita productivity in the OECD, and that's happened over the last eight years. Our per capita income—the productivity of our workers—for decades was essentially the same as the United States. Since 2015, the U.S. is now 40% more productive than we are. Those numbers are only getting worse. We see that the U.S. economy is growing at 5% right now, and we're in a statistical recession after two quarters. We have negative growth.

Apparently, according to the Liberal government, it's the dog ate my homework. Everybody else in the world is responsible for the fact that our economy is dead, stalled, not going anywhere, while the U.S., our most important trading partner—we are on the same continent—has an economy that is growing five times faster than ours. We're saying, "Oh, sorry. Let's impose some more taxes. Let's shut down industries that have capital on their own to finance them and produce wealth for Canada. Let's shut those down, and let's take taxpayer money and subsidize foreign multinationals and be thankful for those jobs."

Now, that's bad enough, but what's even worse is that we're not even getting those jobs. There are 1,600 foreign replacement workers coming in from South Korea. Apparently \$15 billion buys you...I don't know, 2,300 jobs, 1,600 for this.... You do the math: It's 700 Canadian jobs. Wow, I bet they're lining up to come here. Why wouldn't they? Sign me up. Pay half my costs of what I'm doing. I can bring in all the foreign workers I like. They will pay taxes back in the country where I'm headquartered, and the Canadian government will sign a deal with me.

- (1720)

Come on, guys. Prove me wrong. Release the contracts. Set them free. Reassure Canadians if you think we are wrong, if you claim we're wrong. You can stop all of this by simply releasing the contracts, and the NDP can stop all of this by correcting the typos in their motion and accepting Mr. Genuis's amendments to make sure that the motion earnestly put forward is consistent with what the NDP has said publicly.

These are just two of the examples for "Let's rely on the Access to Information Act to get the contracts." These are just two of them. I was looking for all 112 of them, Graham. We have two here. We have a few examples here.

I told you about the one for Mr. Schaan, right? This is the efficiency of the innovation department that doesn't know how to click "File" and "Print". For the schedule for Mr. Schaan, a senior assistant deputy minister, it took 4,015 days to click "File" and "Print" for one year of his schedule. They're either really inefficient at that department or they don't know how to use YouTube and Google to find out how to print a schedule. As I said, I could bring Graham over.

That's just one. They said it would take 4,015 days, and that's for the assistant deputy minister.

Look at this one, the Access to Information Act reference here in the bottom part of MP Masse's motion. This is how effective that is. We said, "Please provide the emails for Mark Schaan." He's a very likeable fellow. He's been at the Industry committee. We have a lot of legislation at the industry committee, a number of bills, and he's the government person who is there, and he seems to know his answers. He's the senior assistant deputy minister, strategy and innovation, policy sector. Wow—how do you fit that on a business card? It probably goes over onto the back.

We asked for his schedule from.... I have to tell you. I exaggerated. I apologize to the committee, Mr. Chair. I exaggerated. We didn't ask for his schedule for a year; we asked for it from May 1, 2023, to September 30, 2023. We actually asked for a few months

of his schedule, not a full year, but it says right here that it's 2,960 days to print a schedule of about five months. That looks obstructionist to me. I don't know about you. It seems as though they don't want to share their schedules. They're hiding something, just as they're hiding the contracts.

Here's another one: "Please provide emails and texts from May 1 to September 30" in relation to a single amendment. We made amendment CPC-6. That's another acronym, but it was Conservative Party amendment number six to Bill C-34, the bill that changed the Investment Canada Act, which is stalled in the Senate because the Liberals won't move it forward. On Bill C-34, we said to give us the emails and messages from between May 1 and September 30 of this year around that one single amendment.

Apparently doing a search for the word "C-27" in emails is a big task at the Department of Innovation, Science and Industry. There doesn't seem to be much industry there, because it's 1,920 days to do that.

This is the efficiency and the great abuse that government departments do with respect to the Access to Information Act, on which Mr. Masse is depending for a clean and honest accounting of the contract on behalf of the government.

Here's another one, a request for emails and messages with regard to our amendment CPC-5 on Bill C-34. Apparently doing a search of emails for "CPC-5" will take 1,920 days. It goes on. For "CPC-7" for that same bill, it's 1,920 days.

- (1725)

Do we sense a pattern here? The pattern is obstruction, I believe.

CPC-9 was 1,920 days. Apparently.... Wait for it. This is a good one. For emails regarding CPC-8—not CPC-7, not CPC-9, but CPC-8— for Bill C-34 for the same period of time, May 1 to September 30, it takes 1,400 days. Apparently, it's 500 days fewer to search for CPC-8 than it is for CPC-7 or CPC-9.

In order to determine that, they must have done some sort of search to say that somehow that's 500 days fewer for the department of innovation to do a search on their IT program. Maybe the people that designed the Phoenix pay system for this government are answering these access to information requests.

Another one here is from May 1 to September 30. Mr. Masse is asking for access to information to play a role in this, but here's how effective access to information is. We asked for emails from May 1 to September 30 of this year from Jamieson McKay, director general, strategy and innovation policy, in reference to Bill C-34. You would think a strategy guy, a director general....

For those who don't know and who are watching, you have these policy people, and then you have the hierarchy of directors or the bosses of policy people, and then you have.... In everything in government, you get paid by how many people you manage. The higher up you get, the more pay you get. Of course, there's a director general above a director, so the director general manages a lot of directors. That gives them more pay. This guy is a director general. Above a director general is something called an "assistant deputy minister". There is a whole whack of assistant deputy ministers above these directors general. Those folks all report to a deputy minister. That's the hierarchy for all those.

Just so you know, the director general of strategy and innovation apparently has difficulty doing a search on his emails for six months for the term "C-34". It's a big bill. It amends an important act, the act that deals with foreign investment into Canada and whether the Chinese continue to be allowed to buy up everything in Canada. This guy is a big player in developing that act. We asked for his emails on that. Apparently, it's complicated.

"It's Complicated": There once was a movie called that, but I'll go there another time.

It's complicated, because it's 2,960 days to do a search and print the emails. It must be an awful lot of paper.

I would think the government members.... I think that if I went to Mr. Sousa's email and said, "I want you to organize his emails, the sent side".... You know how you go into Outlook and to the inbox and you can see what's come in. You can see the sent items. If you go to the sent items—it's not complicated—and just search for Bill C-34, it organizes that way, and all the Bill C-34 emails come up for that time. You can actually see them.

Apparently, that's a difficult thing for the Department of Innovation and Industry to do. There must be too much science in it for them to do that and to then open it up and print it. Apparently that's going to take 2,960 days. I venture to say that by the time they get all that done, many of us will be off to other jobs and other lives, and maybe not even on this earth, but it takes the department that long.

Well, well—look at this: There's another one here. The respect that the industry department has for freedom of information and transparency, for ensuring that Canadians get to see open and transparent government, the most transparent government and the sunny ways Trudeau promised in 2015....

- (1730)

It says here that in asking for emails and text messages with regard to CPC-1.... CPC-1 was an important amendment that got through.

A voice: It didn't get through.

Mr. Rick Perkins: We posted so many good amendments. There were 15 good amendments. This is one of the ones the Liberals voted against, unfortunately, and it didn't pass.

To understand why the government seals voted against it, we needed to see what the department of bureaucrats told them was wrong with it, because those are secret memos, apparently. Apparently, the government is trying to hide the reasons—much like this contract—that it wants this motion that we put forward to amend the Investment Canada Act defeated. That, again, would not take 2,959 days, which is a slightly different number than the last one, and it wouldn't take 2,961 days, a separate number, but for some reason, it's the exact same amount of time—2,960 days.

The Phoenix pay system is at work here in the openness and transparency under these Liberals that Mr. Masse wants to depend on for the release of the contract.

Mr. Masse has been in this place a long time. I believe it's since 2004. Did I get that right? It was since 2002. Thank you, Mr. Masse.

An hon. member: I was in high school.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I have to tell you that this is impressive public service and an impressive number of elections won by MP Masse. I have to say that I suspect that even for somebody with the patience of Job—which Mr. Masse has, having been in this place for so long—needing 2,960 days to release the reasons the department didn't want that amendment to the bill is too long. Mr. Masse was present on this bill, a very important bill that Mr. Masse did very good work on with us in that committee, and he wouldn't want to wait that long to find out why that important one was defeated.

Mr. Masse, we should probably do some access to information on the reasons the government voted against your amendment. You would think that voting against your amendments would motivate you to want to make sure there was more openness and transparency here. However, apparently we have a problem here again on the ability of access to information to work.

We asked again for the emails, memos and texts from someone named Mehmet—sorry, Mehmet, if I pronounced your name wrong—Karman. Now, Mr. Karman is a senior policy analyst.

Do you remember when I talked a minute ago about policy folks, then directors, then directors general, then ADMs, then DMs, then the elected minister over them and how that's the hierarchy of government? Well, he's one of those policy analysts who would have worked quite a bit on the meat, on the details, of this stuff.

An hon. member: You're sweating.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Am I? How can you tell? I have so much hair.

We asked him for his emails and for mentions made of him in the drafting of Bill C-34 to amend the Investment Canada Act.

Now, just to shake it up a little, I think, in analyzing these access to information requests, the creativity in the innovation department comes through in their response in this one. Instead of saying, as they did in the past, the number of 2,960 days, they became very creative on this one and said 2,440 days.

File, print, memo, sort, sent.... Apparently, it's a difficult thing in the innovation department. Maybe the government screening doesn't allow them to go on YouTube. I don't know. Maybe it does; maybe it doesn't. If they can go on YouTube, at least they could do it at home, because I know they're dedicated public servants. They could go home and google it on YouTube on their home computers if they wanted to see how to print an email on Outlook, if they don't have an IT department in the innovation and industry department.

Like I say, I'm a generous fellow and I have an excellent staff. I can send 23-year old Graham O'Brien over in between working on my legislative stuff and working on the master's degree that he's taking right now at the same time. He's a very talented man.

• (1735)

He's doing all of that. Because he does get paid by the House of Commons, I will allow him, during question period—that's the only time—to go over to the industry department and show them. Maybe the government members could organize this meeting; perhaps I should ask the minister if he'd be willing to sit in on the meeting. Graham can do a tutorial for the department about how to hit "File" and then "Print". It's a difficult thing. Here's a pro tip: It's "File" and then "Print".

It was 2,440 days—very creative— but that's where the creativity ended, because on the next one, when we asked for the emails, memos and texts with regard to CPC amendment 2.... Now, remember that some of the CPC amendments had 2,690 days or something else. Apparently when they were running this one through their AI machine for how they were going to respond to it, they didn't tell the AI machine to, when we submitted an order to them, actually vary the number of days to make it look like they put some creativity and thought into this, that they actually put some work into finding out whether or not this could be done in a meaningful, open and transparent way, as Mr. Masse wishes for in this memo and as government members apparently support, since they skipped over my motion.

I guess they were offended by my motion. It's unfortunate. They must have been offended by my motion, since my motion at the beginning of this meeting.... I know how fascinating you're finding these access to information requests, but all of this could have been avoided if we were debating my motion now and you hadn't skipped over it.

I know the government members were afraid of my motion because it said to let the Parliamentary law clerk determine what can be released and what can't, not government officials who clearly are very open and transparent; not government members who have

been saying that they haven't read the contract. The Minister of Industry said that he never read this contract on Stellantis. The Minister of Health said he never read the Medicago contract before writing a \$150-million cheque to the largest company in Japan, claiming that it required an advance payment.

Guess what? I read the contract. I did. In fact, I have it here now if you want to see it. Graham has it with him, because Graham is a diligent staffer. He always comes prepared.

That contract does not have an advance payment clause, as the minister claimed before committee, but then how would the Minister of Health know? The previous minister of health actually negotiated the contract.

When I asked him if he had read the contract, he said no, so perhaps that's why he didn't know it existed. However, when I asked him and told him that the advance payment clause wasn't in that contract, he turned to his deputy minister, one of these fellows from the industry department, and asked, "Is he right?"

So—

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Perkins. We have a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Sousa.

• (1740)

Mr. Charles Sousa: I just want clarity. Are you talking about the contract that you're not allowed to speak about?

Mr. Rick Perkins: Yes, I'm talking about the contract.

Mr. Charles Sousa: You're releasing information on that contract.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I haven't released any information on the contract.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I haven't released any information on the contract.

The Chair: Thanks for clarifying.

Go ahead, Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Rick Perkins: I've released information that the minister, in a public committee, said he hadn't read the contract. He wrote a \$150-million cheque to the largest company in Japan without reading the contract, the contract that doesn't contain what he claimed it contained. Take another look, if you have access to it. Take a look. You can look for that clause. I challenge you to look for it. Please, enlighten me with the clause. Just give me the clause number.

When they don't read the contracts, they're not actually doing their work. I'm not asking them to go into the room and negotiate. They have thousands and thousands of bureaucrats, but I would think they would actually read the contract before the minister put his signature on it.

Maybe he didn't put his signature on it. Maybe it went to the autopen. In each minister's office there's a mechanical arm that can write the minister's signature. It shouldn't be done on a contract because it's actually illegal, but it happens. That's another insider tip. It happens. A lot of the letters you get back from a minister the minister has never seen. They were signed by the mechanical arm. Maybe the response by Christopher Parsons was signed by the arm.

I have a few more of these to go through. I do see some smiles and I do see some great interest in them, but I can continue at another time if you like, because I'm sure there are colleagues who would like to speak.

I'd like to end my current dissertation on transparency this way: The earnestness with which this motion was put forward by both Mr. Genuis and MP Masse is beyond reproach. One wants to get a compromise to get out of these things; the other also wants that. We want transparency, something that seems difficult for the industry department to do, whether it's in access to information or in contracts.

I'm sure MP Masse will correct me on this, but we believe that in the haste with which MP Masse put this forward in all earnestness, there were a few minor typos, and we want to make sure that the motion is consistent with all of the public statements about openness, transparency and releasing the contract.

I'm sure MP Masse would want to make sure that his leader is not left in the lurch, in that he is now asking for something that his leader isn't. His leader asked for openness and transparency; the motion as it appears now, in our reading of it, is for secrecy and for keeping the contracts hidden, even though they will be reviewed by some other officer.

The amendment we're dealing with here helps to make sure we shine light and have clarity so that government members can prove us wrong. I know that's what the government members want to do. I can see it on their faces. They want to prove us wrong. You know what? I'd be happy if they proved us wrong by releasing the contracts and showing us that the clauses that guarantee good Canadian unionized automotive jobs are part of the condition and show that these plants could not leave once the subsidy ends. I know they

want to do that. I know they want to prove us wrong. I ask them because I know they've been listening intently. I can see it on their faces. You can't see it at home, but I can see how intently the government members have been listening to this.

I think I may have convinced them. I hope I've convinced MP Masse on this, even though his Detroit Lions are not doing as well as he had hoped this year.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Perkins.

Ms. Vignola, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That was a fascinating monologue, but I don't think it was all that convincing, unfortunately.

I did, however, start putting something together that may satisfy not only the opposition parties, but also the government, in all likelihood.

I'll conclude on that hopeful note—there's light at the end of the tunnel. Someone else can have my time.

● (1745)

[*English*]

The Chair: That's wonderful. Thanks, Mrs. Vignola. If it's a lengthy subamendment, I'd appreciate it if you could send it to us in advance.

I have Mr. Sousa. Then we go back to Mr. Perkins, and then we have Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Chair, I move that the meeting be adjourned.

An hon. member: Hallelujah.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Before we get to too many cheers, we'll do a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Chair: I wish everyone a merry Christmas. I thank our wonderful clerk and our wonderful analysts.

We are adjourned.

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