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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley



Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. We'll call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 152 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

I will mention that in a couple of days it's my wife's birthday. In keeping with the tradition of being cheap as part of the operations committee, this is your birthday gift, dear.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We are resuming debate. We're starting a brand new speaking list on the debate at hand, which is the amended motion to have Mr. Clark for one hour.

We have Mrs. Kusie, Mrs. Block, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Sousa and Mrs. Atwin.

Just very briefly, we had a meeting of all of the committee chairs. I can't recall if Mr. Coteau was with us. There was an issue in another committee where the speaking order wasn't perhaps communicated properly and they went to a vote early.

What I will start doing here is that when I'm announcing, for example, Mrs. Kusie, I will say both Mrs. Kusie and then the next person in line. That way we will always know that there is at least one more speaker. If you do not hear me state that there's a next person in line, you can assume that it's the last person. You can put your hand up then and there.

We'll start with Mrs. Kusie and then go to Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I feel that we left the last meeting in a good place. Mr. Bachrach, who was present at the time on behalf of the New Democrats, seemed to speak in support of the previous motion, never mind the amended motion. I believe it was in support of the general idea that we should see the recall of Mr. Clark, given the precedent of the committee to recall witnesses where further information after their testimony was found to be in conflict with the testimony they provided to this committee.

Then, of course, Madame Vignola provided an amendment that was amenable, it appeared, to the entire committee relative to the reduced appearance of Mr. Clark from two hours to one hour.

As I indicated, I feel that we left this motion in a very positive place for members of the committee. Therefore, I'm very happy to see discussion on this amendment resume today. As I said, we seemed to have agreement with two of the opposition parties initially. After the amendment from the additional opposition party, it appeared we were in a good place. Members of the government of this committee seemed to be in agreement with and amenable to the amendment of Madame Vignola.

It would seem to me, Mr. Chair, that this would be a fast process this morning. This would be my anticipation, since we are all singing from the same Canada...sheet, *O Canada*.

I gave away a bit of my joke there, before I said it, with one word. My apologies. I'm sorry.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay, maybe it's not all of us. Pardon me. Let's start with "O". That's one word.

At any rate, I expect it to be a rapid decision today, Mr. Chair, that we can come to agreement that this is acceptable. Given the precedent, the agreement and suggestion of a fellow committee member, and the agreement around this table, I'm looking for swift passage to a vote today.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will conclude. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

I apologize, Mrs. Vignola. Mrs. Block mentioned that you were before her. Go ahead. Then we'll go to Mrs. Block, or Mrs. Block can pass it over.

Go ahead, Madame Vignola.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On Tuesday, we discussed an amendment that had the effect of reducing the time for Mr. Clark's appearance to one hour. When it is necessary for testimony to be clarified, it is usual to request an additional appearance. It would also seem that there was some agreement around the table on this.

In fact, in looking for assurance of that agreement this morning, I heard that Mr. Clark had, was to have, will have to, or will—I don't know which tense of the verb to use—intended to write to the committee. In any event, I wondered whether we had received any communication from Mr. Clark other than what we received in August.

I have just seen it come up in my email inbox.

Would it be useful to know what the content of that communication is before continuing the discussion?

We are talking about Mr. Clark now.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think it's just a one-page letter. It's gone out to the P9s now.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Can we take a few minutes to read it?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm happy to suspend for a minute.

• (1105) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1110)

The Chair: Thanks. We are back.

Mrs. Vignola, the floor is still yours.

[*Translation*]

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

My understanding of Mr. Clark's letter is that he is contextualizing what was reported by the media and in the committee today. This is essentially the reason why we wanted to meet with him for an hour.

In my opinion, the situation is already clearer.

Do we need to meet with him for an hour, given that we have received this letter?

I am putting the question out to all committee members.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next, we have Mrs. Block, then Mr. Lawrence and then Mr. Sousa.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I appreciate Mrs. Vignola's comments in regard to this letter that we are just seeing now. Maybe it's not surprising that we would receive this letter on the heels of some media reports that he provided contradictory testimony to us on September 12, at which time he was most emphatic about not having said anything to anyone ever about his current residence.

Therefore, I also believe that some clarification needs to be made here this morning. This is not something the members on this side of the table came up with. We are responding to what was reported by media about information that was uncovered through an ATIP in regard to his involvement in ensuring that perhaps a new residence would be sought, so I would suggest that—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: He can come and make his case and clear the air.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Yes, I suggest that he could easily come here for one hour, state what he needs to in response to what was reported, and provide us with the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions. This is, as my colleague pointed out, the precedent we set on this committee. When witnesses come to testify before this committee, they provide us with information. When it is found that they have misled the committee or provided us with information that is contradicted by information uncovered later, we always ask them to come back to clarify—whether or not they were misleading this committee—in order to ensure we are getting the most honest testimony we can get, to continue doing the work we're doing.

Because this letter has come, again, on the heels of a request to have him appear—not unlike the emails that were suddenly uncovered or sent the day after we asked him to appear the first time—I suggest that he needs to appear before this committee, as we've asked, for one hour. I think that was a compromise made on this side of the House to ensure the governing members would support it. As my colleague pointed out, it appeared they were in support of bringing Mr. Clark back, so let's have him here. Let's provide him with the opportunity to reiterate what he sent in this letter on the heels of the media reports, and provide ourselves with the opportunity to ask questions.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Block.

Next is Mr. Lawrence, then Mr. Sousa.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Thank you.

I thank Mr. Clark for providing the letter.

However, I'm left with significant questions about that letter. It has not resolved the issue for me or, I think, all reasonable-thinking Canadians. There are still additional questions about the discrepancy between his testimony and the media reports. This letter has not clarified why he unequivocally said he did not discuss the upcoming purchase of the condo, when, clearly—according to media reports—he did.

I find it a little ironic that Mr. Clark thinks a simple letter is sufficient, given that his prior career was in the media. What is the entire responsibility of the media? Well, it's to test the evidence of people. Whether we look to journalism and democracy or to the court, we need to test the evidence. It could be that this is all completely understandable. That's why we'll have Mr. Clark come here, clear the air and provide that testimony. However, this letter is clearly insufficient. It's the reason that journalism exists. His former career was to test the evidence and make sure Canadians were comfortable with it. Quite frankly, we would be more than negligent, as a committee, if we didn't fulfill our obligation to Canadian taxpayers to find this out, because this letter does not resolve the discrepancy between his testimony and media reports.

Thank you.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Sousa, then Mrs. Atwin.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Tom Clark's letter is rather clear. It's obvious he was not involved in making the decision to move locations, and that the issue has been ongoing for a long time—long before he was appointed. There were former Conservative appointees, who cited the fact that the residence was in need of much repair and improvement.

With that, Mr. Chair, I move that the committee proceed to the testimony of officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development on the purchase of the official residence of the consul general in New York.

The Chair: There's already a motion on the floor, so you can't move that motion.

Mr. Charles Sousa: It's a dilatory motion, sir.

● (1120)

The Chair: I've received commentary from the clerk that it is indeed a dilatory motion, so we'll go ahead with the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Chair: Why don't we suspend for a couple of moments? We'll allow the witnesses to take their spots.

● (1120)

(Pause)

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you for your patience everyone. We're back.

Mr. Dubeau, please go ahead with your opening statement.

Mr. Robin Dubeau (Acting Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Real Property and Infrastructure Solutions, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to address the committee to provide clarity around the replacement of the official residence for the Canada consulate in New York.

I am here as the associate assistant deputy minister of Global Affairs' real property branch.

[Translation]

The relocation of the official residence in New York City was an operational decision taken at the end of an exhaustive and thorough process. This process centred on creating value for Canadian taxpayers, while aligning with Canada's representational needs for one of our most important missions.

[English]

First, I would like to emphasize that this transaction was driven by program requirements and supported by sound analysis. Documented issues with the residence had accumulated for well over 10 years, making it increasingly unsuitable for Canada's evolving needs. The residence did not meet accessibility standards, had mounting recapitalization costs and faced restrictions that impacted its suitability for official functions. These are issues that the mission had been raising consistently for over a decade.

[Translation]

These limitations ultimately led us to a crossroads: continue investing in a building that no longer aligned with Canada's evolving requirements or proceed with a more sustainable, future-focused option that could support the work of the consulate in a more efficient manner.

After extensive review, it became clear that replacing the property would best serve Canada's interests and deliver considerable financial savings over the long term.

● (1130)

[English]

Regarding the transaction process, the acquisition followed all relevant policies and directives established by the Treasury Board Secretariat. As part of our mandate, we undertook a validation of requirements and a life-cycle cost analysis to ensure that this decision was fully justified from both financial and program delivery perspectives.

Multiple properties were assessed and the selected property was independently appraised. Each step was documented and validated through the departmental-established real property governance structure.

[Translation]

I would like to clearly address any concerns about potential undue influence on the process. As a result of a number of building assessments and evaluations, the headquarters property team was well aware of the numerous issues already raised with the property.

The personal views of the consul general were not directly sought, and any views on the suitability of the existing residence in the documentation as relayed second-hand by the mission would not and did not weigh into the ultimate decision. The entire end-to-end process was independently managed by the real property branch in headquarters.

[English]

The well-considered decision is a prudent and long-term investment that delivers savings, strengthens Canada's presence in New York and ensures maximum value for Canadians.

[Translation]

I am now going to give the floor to Ms. Guay.

Ms. Karolina Guay (Former Chief of Staff to the Deputy of Foreign Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Dubeau.

[English]

Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee.

[Translation]

I am here today to talk about my involvement and to clarify the communications between the minister's chief of staff and myself concerning the relocation of the consul general's official residence in New York.

For information, I was the chief of staff to the deputy minister of foreign affairs from September 2022 to August 2024. My role as chief of staff was to ensure that the deputy minister had the necessary information for performing his duties, which meant facilitating access in a timely manner to the relevant departmental expertise and information.

In this role, I also oversaw the flow of communications between the department and the minister's office by relaying requests for information to the experts in the department.

[English]

My engagement on this issue before the committee today centres on two conversations with the minister's chief of staff, first on June 14, 2024, and second, on July 25, 2024.

On June 14, the minister's chief of staff requested information on the rationale for the department's decision to sell the official residence in New York and to confirm whether the consul general was aware of that plan. On July 25, the minister's chief of staff requested information that all rules and procedures had been followed by the department and to understand the consul general's involvement in that purchase.

In both instances, these requests were to receive information about a process that had already been approved at the departmental level. I relayed these two requests of the chief of staff to the associate deputy minister of foreign affairs, who was the lead person on corporate files in the team. She subsequently engaged with departmental experts and provided a response. That correspondence has been provided to the committee.

I would like to clearly state that at no point did I receive or give instruction to alter any correspondence gathered.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am available to answer any questions that members of the committee may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll start with Mrs. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

It is a pleasure to see you again, Mr. Dubeau.

I have to apologize. We had received a notice that your presence today was not necessary. My colleagues and I thought that there was going to be a different agenda for this meeting.

The plans changed, however, as is often the case here. This is not a normal situation for us, particularly since we received the letters from the witnesses who have already appeared, with their correspondence, just before the meeting.

• (1135)

[English]

However, we came to discuss the motion for Mr. Clark to return to the committee today.

Again, I'm grateful to the witnesses for being here, I believe, unfortunately, at the misdirection of the government. However, this is something we're used to, and it's not a surprise to me that we've received correspondence at the last minute, on the second occasion now. I feel very sorry for taking your time like this because, having been in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and having served alongside at least one of these individuals, I know that their schedules are busy and certainly filled with matters beyond the government operations committee.

Nonetheless, here we are today, and we did arrive here today with the understanding that we were going to have the debate and the discussion on the issue of Mr. Clark returning.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'm going to move another dilatory motion. I move:

That, given the letter received today from Tom Clark, the committee hear from Tom Clark for two hours and not undertake any other business this 7th day of November 2024 until Tom Clark has addressed the committee.

[Translation]

I believe the text of the motion has been provided to the clerk.

[English]

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

Is this debatable? I don't believe it's dilatory.

The Chair: I'll let her finish it.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

I read the motion—given the letter received today from Tom Clark—but I believe the witnesses are here today to have the discussion around the purchase of the residence that is inhabited by Mr. Clark. We are, in fact, here today to find out more information about Mr. Clark's input into the process of purchasing this residence. I believe it's very relevant.

I will now read it in French.

[Translation]

Que compte tenu de la lettre reçue aujourd'hui de Tom Clark, le Comité entend Tom Clark pendant deux heures et n'entreprend aucune autre affaire ce 7e jour de novembre 2024 jusqu'à ce que Tom Clark se soit adressé au Comité.

[English]

It is a debatable “matter at hand” motion, it would seem, so I do believe it is acceptable to submit at this time, Mr. Chair. As I said, I have sent it forward.

Again, I apologize to our witnesses, but this was the intention of this committee. It was stated on the notice of meeting. For it to be changed at the last minute, frankly, is not fair to the witnesses either. I feel they were brought here disingenuously, when everyone on the committee knew that the intent was for us to debate this motion.

Maybe it was the goodwill of the government, and they thought, “Oh, we will pass this quickly.” Actually, no, I can't even say that because it was brought forward to adjourn debate and move to them. They had the opportunity to pass this motion before moving on to the witnesses, but that didn't happen.

As I said, I'm moving this motion. I guess I don't have too much more to say about this, except that it's unfortunate this situation is happening, but here we are, and here I am talking about this.

As well, I will say this is very embarrassing for me, in front of my former colleague, and those who may be my future colleagues. That's a possibility. I would love that. You never know, right? We take a leave of absence sometimes, and sometimes we have the opportunity to return. That would be great. It was a very satisfying half career that I had, and I would love the opportunity to find myself perhaps as vice-consul in Lagos, or some other such place. We have fascinating opportunities. Maybe there wouldn't be as many earthquakes as there were in San Salvador, but it could be a good time nevertheless, Mr. Chair.

• (1140)

The Chair: Do you mind if I interrupt? Perhaps we could suspend and we'll get the motion distributed properly. We'll get it translated and distributed. Then we'll go back to you, Mrs. Kusie.

• (1140)

(Pause)

• (1145)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Thank you for your patience. The motion has been distributed in both languages to everyone.

It's back to you, Mrs. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Yes, I have presented this new motion. As I indicated, it is relative to receiving further clarification to the letter we received today, again, with the understanding when we arrived that we would discuss the previous motion I presented.

As it was raised on Tuesday, the consulate general of Canada in New York notified Global Affairs that the unit at 550 Park Avenue “required immediate replacement”, as it was indicated both here and in the House, and that, “The current [Consulate General New York, Head of Mission] expressed concerns regarding the completion...of the kitchen and refurbishment project”. He indicated that the unit was “not suitable” and that the accommodations did not have “an ideal floor plan for representational activities.”

These terms “not suitable” and “required immediate replacement” seem to fly in the face of the testimony he provided here previously. It is for that reason, Mr. Chair, that we're following the precedent we've followed several times when we received informa-

tion that was contrary to what a witness testified at committee previously: We're recalling him.

In an attempt to have Mr. Tom Clark come here and provide some clarification, and perhaps even clear the air—unless the government is hiding something additional around this, which I suppose is possible—and in light of this incredibly disappointing tactic today, it seems to me that we should really resolve this as soon as possible. Let's get to the understanding that the majority of people on this committee would like to have Mr. Clark return to allow him to clarify his position. I believe it is the desire of this committee to understand that.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thanks, Mrs. Kusie.

We will go to Mr. Jowhari and then we have Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to start by thanking the officials scheduled to be here today.

Thank you for making the time and coming to the committee. Hopefully, we'll get to you soon.

Our colleagues across, led by MP Kusie, are trying to portray the image that we, the committee—and especially the government—had full knowledge of what the agenda of today's meeting was prior to coming here. Let me start by saying that, no, we did not, because the amended notice of meeting came in today at 8:53 a.m.

Therefore, to Canadians and especially to the media, which seems to be setting the agenda for this committee, it's not—

A voice: Oh, oh!

Yes, it is. Every time they report something, we have to deal with what they said in our next meeting. I'll come to that.

To the Canadians and the media watching this, the original agenda of this meeting was to have witnesses we all agreed on. The discussion on that motion was adjourned. There was a conversation held among the parties that tried to come to a solution. This, apparently, is now on hold. That's number one. On Tuesday and Wednesday, and up to 8:53 a.m. this morning, we were led to believe that we were going to have a meeting calling officials. Our team is prepared. I'm glad they're here, because we want to get to the bottom of this.

Now what we are hearing is that this email from Mr. Clark was sent as a response. Driven by the fact that this committee, all of a sudden, amended its agenda at 8:53 a.m. this morning, he decided to send this letter. Basically, what we are trying to tell Canadians is that Mr. Clark was watching our committee at 8:53 a.m., saw a change to the notice of meeting, and said, “Let me start writing this letter.” We received that letter. That letter was supposed to further clarify. It didn't have anything to do with this meeting.

Therefore, I want to make sure everybody understands that the original agenda we are hoping to get to today is on asking very clarifying questions of the officials who are here. The letter sent by Mr. Tom Clark does not have any relevance to the notice of meeting that was amended at 8:53 a.m.

I have a bunch of other stuff to say, but I'm going to choose not to, because I'm hoping to get to the officials.

Thank you.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thanks.

I have Mrs. Vignola, then Mr. Lawrence.

[*Translation*]

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

We did in fact receive the information about the cancellation of the witnesses' attendance, at 8:53 this morning. I was prepared. I had spent last night, and part of the day before, preparing. I read everything. I went back over the testimony from the last meetings to make sure I had not forgotten anything. I spent several hours doing that, and I read the proceedings published in Hansard since August 20 with fascination.

That said, I also understand the need to meet with Mr. Clark. On that point, I am going to move an amendment that I hope will satisfy the people on both sides of this table.

I hope that this motion will enable us, as responsible adults worthy of our office, to agree to Mr. Clark appearing for one hour, while allowing the opportunity to hear the witnesses' testimony. I am sure that I am not the only one who had prepared for the committee's meetings. We don't do our preparation between 9:00 and 11:00 in the morning, as a rule, so I am sure that my colleagues have all prepared.

This is the amendment I have drafted, which has been submitted to the clerk. I hope my translation will be adequate.

I move the following:

Given the letter received today from Tom Clark the committee hear from Tom Clark for 1 hour and that, after his appearing, the committee asks the clerk to begin to write the report in order to table that report to the House of Commons as soon as possible and that, according to article 109 of the Rules, the Committee ask an answer from the Government. Finally, that the Committee hears the witnesses as scheduled before the annulment received at 8:53 this morning, November 7th, 2024.

What I am trying to do with this motion is have the opportunity to hear the testimony of the witnesses who were scheduled to appear. I also want to have the opportunity to delve further into the issues we wanted to raise with these witnesses, while still having

the opportunity to meet with Mr. Clark for one hour, as mentioned earlier. I would also like us to be able to submit the report as soon as possible. I am trying to split the apple, the pear, the melon—choose your fruit—to satisfy everyone now around the table.

I know the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and sometimes good intentions are not taken into consideration. However, I hope this will fall on both wide open ears and minds, as is usually the case. We work well together in this committee, and I hope that practice will continue.

I am going to stop here so we can move on to the vote as quickly as possible.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks.

Are you sending it to the clerk?

• (1200)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Yes.

The Chair: We haven't received it yet.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'm sending it.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll suspend while we're doing this, as always.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, again, for your patience.

We'll start with Mr. Lawrence on the amendment, please.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to make a small friendly amendment to the amendment. I know that, technically, “friendly” does not exist in the green book, but I am hoping that it is of that nature. I'll read the entire motion, and then I'll just highlight the subamendment. “That, given the letter received today from Tom Clark, the committee hear from Tom Clark for one hour”—and then this is the friendly subamendment—“within 21 days, and that after his appearing, the committee ask the clerk to begin to write a report”, and it just goes on from there. So, our addition, for clarity, is to just put a timeline. We believe it's more than reasonable to get one hour—I would assume likely virtually—from Mr. Clark within 21 days.

The Chair: All right.

Do you wish to speak on the 21 days, Mrs. Vignola, or on a different issue?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I just wanted to say that I accept Mr. Lawrence's friendly amendment.

We are always friendly in this committee, Mr. Lawrence.

• (1215)

[English]

The Chair: Are we fine with that, colleagues?

(Amendment agreed to)

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

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola, for your Pearson-esque work with us today. That's timely because I'm reading the book *The Duel*, which is about Diefenbaker and Pearson.

We are now back to our regular order. Mrs. Kusie has done her time. Now we're on Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Okay, in the anticipation that we were going to have this meeting start about an hour earlier, I wanted to start asking the officials... I had an opportunity to go back to the newsletter that Politico put out called Ottawa Playbook. If I go to the section of the November 5 edition, "Home Sweet Home", it says:

Both the Consul General in New York, TOM CLARK, and his office raised concerns about his official residence in Manhattan prior to Canada buying a new C\$9 million luxury condo, documents obtained through access to information laws show.

But a spokesperson for Global Affairs Canada tells Playbook the input "did not influence the final decision to relocate."

My colleague MP Bachrach had brought up a point. When Mr. Tom Clark was here, I specifically asked this question: "Did you at any time talk to anyone regarding a desire for relocation?" Mr. Tom Clark said, "Never." Then I followed up with "Did anyone talk to you about the need for the move, at any point or any level?" Mr. Tom Clark said, "I was aware, as the head of mission, that there were discussions going on with the property division. I was not part of those discussions. I did not involve myself in them in any sort of way." So, I personally asked the question of Mr. Clark. These are the extracts from the Evidence.

Based on access to information, Politico has drawn a conclusion. Can you help clarify?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Chair, yes, I can certainly bring some clarity to the matter.

Ultimately, a head of mission expressing a view about a property does not necessarily influence the process and I will explain to you why.

We have a very robust process by which we capture all of the needs and the requirements from various sources. That would include consulting with the mission and the mission staff on the ground. Then we receive input and all of that is compiled in a document that is called a statement of investment requirement. It's a very sophisticated document in which we put all of the requirements.

That document is used to go to governance and then the governance looks at the requirements and applies the standards that we have as per our manual. All of this process is very regulated. It has very robust governance looking at it.

In the course of doing this, we have asked the mission for their views. We didn't ask the consul general directly for his views. He didn't engage with us to give us his views directly. However, in the documents, somebody has quoted an opinion that he may have shared at the mission with his staff.

I would say that with all of that due process that followed the reception of the statement of requirement, the process was very isolated and was managed all by headquarters without influence from Mr. Clark.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

You used the word "isolated". Apparently there were 21 properties.

Do you have any knowledge of whether the consul general went and looked at other properties as part of this process or was the property in discussion the only one he looked at?

• (1220)

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I have no knowledge of him visiting other properties.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Since it's being portrayed that somehow the consul general had influence, if I may ask you, why would he choose the lowest priced condominium rather than choosing the, I don't know, \$44 million one or other properties that other consuls general had selected?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I would say that he didn't choose. We did. We picked that property from that list of 21 mainly because it met all of the requirements for the program and also because it was one of the least expensive properties that we visited, both in absolute cost and in cost per square metre. That was a big driver for us to select that property.

All of this went through a very robust process that was supervised by governance, so he didn't have any influence on that choice.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Can the consul general come back and say, "I don't want to move to this property"?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Chair, we work in collaboration with the mission, so this process is years in the making. It would be surprising that, coming at the end, the head of mission would not move to the property. It would not be his decision because we made a decision based on the portfolio requirements.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: We are told that he supposedly influenced only two months after he was appointed.

How long was this process going on for before he was appointed as the consul general in New York?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Chair, it started 10 years ago with reports about problems arising at the official residence. We had a building condition report done in 2017. We had a project that was approved for some renovation in 2021.

I would say this whole reflection on how we should manage the deficiencies of the official residence was under way for more than 10 years.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Is it fair to assume that all the comments you were making were based on the briefing that was given?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: The comments that I read in the document are all aligned with things that already existed.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

We're going to go to Mrs. Vignola, but if you don't mind, can I ask just a quick clarification on Mr. Jowhari's question?

Have you provided when the decision was made to actually buy a new residence, as opposed to renovating?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: We launched an option analysis in June 2023. That's when we looked at whether we should go—

The Chair: Yes, that's all I was trying to clarify. Thanks very much.

Mrs. Vignola, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, Mr. Dubeau, Mr. Hounzangbé and Ms. Guay, for being with us.

Mr. Hounzangbé, the residence on 57th Street is one of the five cheapest properties on the list of properties that were visited and considered for purchase, the initial 39 properties having been got down to 21. The testimony of the broker who appeared before this committee on August 21 was that there were three days of visits, after which four residences remained on the list.

I would like to put two questions to you.

How much did these residences cost and what were their characteristics?

If it is not possible to provide us with that information orally today, which I imagine might take half an eternity, you can send it to us in writing.

Why was one of the residences costing less than \$9 million not chosen, for example, like the ones for \$4 million or \$5 million?

Why choose the one that cost \$9 million, rather than the other three that were still on the list?

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé (Director General, Policy and Planning, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question. I also thank her for giving me the opportunity to provide some clarification.

Whenever we look at properties, we are juggling two factors. The first is the cost of the property and the second is the benefits it provides. We have to determine the extent to which the property

will meet the requirements set out in our property management manual.

I do not actually have the specific information about those four properties, but the decisions are always made based on one factor that corroborates another.

You asked why we did not select the cheapest property. Once a property is selected, a number of stakeholders in a department have their say, in particular regarding matters relating to security, architecture, and so on. So that is why cost is not the only determining factor in choosing a property.

• (1225)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Mr. Dubeau, to your knowledge, have the consuls happened to give their opinion, since 2014, whether officially or informally, about apartment 12E at 550 Park Avenue?

Might the details of an informal conversation have made their way to the ears of people in high places?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Chair, I would not be able to recall information provided since 2014, because I have only held this position since 2022. However, it may be that a consul general expressed opinions at that time that might have been heard by the people they have with them or their employees.

The diplomats who live in our residences very often have opinions about the usefulness and effectiveness of their residence.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

The apartment does belong to the Government of Canada and not to the consul in office.

Is that correct?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: That is correct.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

When a new consul takes up office, do they have a say in the contents of the apartment?

For example, can a consul choose the wall art or furniture, or do they have to work with what is there in the residence? Do they get a say when they move into the apartment?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: They do not get a choice. Ordinarily, an official residence is assigned to an ambassador with its contents, and they have to accept it as is.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

Much has been said about the condition of apartment 12E at 550 Park Avenue. It has also been said that \$2.6 million needed to be invested to renovate it. From what I understand, that was just the beginning.

I am the happy owner of a more than century-old house, and I can tell you, once you start on renovations, there are strangely a lot more that become necessary.

We have heard about problems with the hot water. Was the central heating system hot water? Was this one of the items that was causing a problem?

There was also talk about the electrical system. Was there a danger of fire?

Was water leaking in this apartment, were there problems with the flooring?

Exactly what were the problems?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question.

In 2017, as I explained, we wrote a very detailed report about the condition of the asset that came to nearly 100 pages. Everything you cited was included in the report, Ms. Vignola.

The heating, ventilation and air conditioning system was one of the items where there were deficiencies. The electrical system was almost at the end of service life and needed to be replaced. The same was true for the plumbing.

Since 2020, 2022, we had known that all the items you cited were among the items that had reached the end of service life.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Has that report been provided to the committee? If not, can you send it to us?

I have not finished compiling all my data.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes, I'm going to send it to you.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: You had a few more seconds.

Mr. Boulerice, welcome back, sir. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dubeau, Mr. Hounzangbé and Ms. Guay, thank you for being with us today to discuss these issues, which are generating a lot of interest.

In the Westminster model, one of the main roles of Parliament is to oversee spending, somewhat like a watchdog. It must make sure that taxpayers' money is being invested wisely. That is more or less what we are doing today: We are doing our job.

As parliamentarians, we have to make sure that the public service and our diplomats and representatives have the tools and equipment they need to do their work, particularly when it comes to foreign relations and diplomacy.

Canada actually is a G7 country; we are not going to host people in a broom closet. We have to be able to do our work and present Canada in a professional light.

What do you think the consul general in New York needs?

How does having this function in a metropolis like that benefit Quebecers and Canadians?

• (1230)

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Chair, I am going to say a bit more about the tools we need to do our job. I am not quite as qualified to speak to the value of the work the consul general is called upon to do. I know that the consul general and his deputy and the geographic group have testified before the committee regarding the value of having a consul general in New York.

A lot of trade goes on in that city. It is a crucial hub for a number of states. This serves Canada and Canadians. Remember that 200,000 or 300,000 Canadians live in the New York region. It is therefore important that the consul general's official residence be well equipped for both trade purposes and consular services. This is a very large mission.

This brings us to what the consul general needs. As I explained earlier, an exhaustive needs analysis is done based on the expected hospitality or representational functions. That is the public part. The property also serves as a private residence. We have to think about how the apartment can be divided between the public and private parts. That is an important factor.

There is also security, which is a major factor. We want to be sure the property is safe for the consul general. There are also other factors considered, such as accessibility and the environment. For example, the building has to meet environmental standards.

A lot of factors have to be considered in choosing an official residence. This is codified in a manual that explains exactly what a consul general could expect.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: In your presentation, you said there were accessibility problems at the former official residence.

I would like to know a bit more about what caused problems at that property. Did this justify moving out and buying a new residence?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I thank the member, Mr. Chair.

That is an excellent question.

We have a very large portfolio consisting of 2,500 assets. It is important to note that since 2021, we have had to comply with the Accessible Canada Act. We therefore did an assessment of our assets in relation to the new legislation. When apartment 12E at 550 Park Avenue was assessed, it did not meet the standards.

I will turn the floor over to Mr. Hounzangbé. He will be able to explain what it was that caused problems.

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: Thank you, Mr. Dubeau.

Thank you for the question, Mr. Boulerice.

As Mr. Dubeau said, the accessibility rules were introduced in 2021. Two factors in particular presented problems at the former official residence.

First, several steps had to be climbed to get directly to the apartment. This kind of problem could not have been solved as part of a renovation.

Second, the visitor washrooms for the representational areas did not allow for wheelchair access. That could have been solved, but it would have called for reconfiguring the room, and that would have been expensive.

We therefore made the decision to relocate the consul general's official residence.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: In any event, the purchase of this new residence results in an asset for the federal government.

This residence may eventually be sold on the market someday, after a certain lifespan, which we do not yet know.

Is that correct?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: That's true.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

In general, what is the life of an official residence? Five years, ten years?

In Canada, are we in line with the norm when it comes to the purchase and sale of residences abroad that are meant for this type of function?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I thank the member for his question.

I believe your question is about the useful life of a building.

We owned the last building for over 60 years. In the real estate world, the useful life of a building is estimated to be 60 to 80 years.

The one we have just bought is not yet a year old, because it was just renovated, so it is in very good shape for the next 50 or 60 years.

• (1235)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Very good.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We'll go to Mrs. Block, please.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

This is quite an incredible study that we've undertaken in regard to the \$9-million condominium that was purchased for Mr. Clark.

My questions will start with you, Mr. Dubeau. Ms. Nicholson said that she was given the information contained in the two emails sent to the minister's office by members of your team. This information stated that Tom Clark was instrumental in the process of the purchase of the new official residence. Which one of you was responsible for sending her the information that was used in her memos?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Responding to our chief of staff or deputy ministers is always a priority. We strive to provide the information very quickly in as much detail as possible. It's a collective effort. In the case of the first question that we received on June 14, we undertook, Mr. Hounzangbé and I, to produce the information that was required, and I relayed it to Ms. Nicholson myself.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Okay, thank you.

There was a report in Politico that stated that:

Concerns raised: Two months after Clark's appointment, the Consulate General of Canada in New York notified Global Affairs that the unit at 550 Park Ave. — the official residence since 1961 — was "not suitable" for hosting, or for living and "required immediate replacement," documents show. "The current [Consulate General New York, Head of Mission] expressed concerns regarding the completion ... of the kitchen and refurbishment project and indicated the unit was not suitable to be the [Consulate General New York] accommodations and it does not have an ideal floor plan for [Consulate General New York] representational activities," documents from a May 2023 report show.

Your testimony here this morning is somewhat contradictory to the documents that have been supplied from Global Affairs Canada after an ATIP request. Who in your department received this information?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to bring some clarity. As I explained, the statement of investment requirement is a document that is done by a lot of subject matter experts. It is led by the real property team in headquarters. It involves input from many stakeholders. One of them will be the mission that will be required to provide feedback and, in providing that feedback, what you have quoted there was captured inside the statement of requirement and was put in the document as the mission feedback to assess their requirements.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Even in the letter that we just received from Mr. Clark, he admitted to making observations of this nature. He has come back now, after we've put forward a motion to have him appear before committee. We've received a letter in which he now says he made certain observations about the unsuitability of the accommodations.

What you're suggesting is that none of this reflects any of the concerns that he raised with Global Affairs Canada. Is that what you're asserting?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Chair, what I would say is that he may have shared opinions with his staff in New York. I wouldn't be privy to that information. Our staff, in putting together the statement of investment requirement, captured the feedback from the mission.

I wouldn't be able to comment on the opinion he would have shared with his staff.

• (1240)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Embedded in the emails that came from Emily Nicholson, it states very clearly that he had influence in determining the purchase of the new residence. He had significant influence in the decision that was made.

I am wondering how you can continue to deny what has been put forward in a number of documents that were ATIPed and indicate that he did, in fact, raise concerns and that he misled this committee when he provided the testimony he did, which was that he had never raised anything with anyone, ever. Now we have three documents that would suggest the opposite. I am deeply concerned that we continue to hear the same kind of push-back from members of Global Affairs Canada, when we actually have the documents in front of us, saying something completely different.

Again, I would go back to the testimony of Ms. Nicholson. She indicated that he had influence in the decision-making in her first email. The second email came on the heels of a request to have him appear before the committee, saying, “No, that’s not true.”

Who told her to put that in the email?

The Chair: Give a brief response, please. We’re past our time.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I wouldn’t be able to comment. I provided input to two requests from Ms. Nicholson.

The Chair: I have to cut you off there. We are past our time.

We’re going to Mrs. Atwin, please.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much to our witnesses for joining us again today, and for your patience as we work through, as we often do here in OGGO, some of our housekeeping items.

Getting back to the questions, as part of testimony on August 20, 2024, a Treasury Board Secretariat official explained that the Treasury Board approval threshold for Global Affairs Canada’s real property purchases is reviewed roughly every six years. The threshold was increased from \$4 million, where it had remained since 2006, to \$10 million in 2019.

Did Global Affairs Canada officials request the threshold increase in 2019?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I’m not a specialist of that kind of increase of delegation of authority, and maybe Franck can add to my answer, but I would say that those requests are made, as you said, regularly to update and review the delegated authority for a department.

What I know is that we first received our delegated authority in 1993. It was reviewed in 2000 and 2006. It was adjusted in 2019 and, finally, in 2022. It started at \$3 million and went up to \$4 million. Ultimately, in 2022, it was increased to \$10 million for the purchase of official residences.

What I understand from the process is that a thorough analysis is done in a Treasury Board submission to describe how the markets for this kind of asset evolve. I believe, from what I’ve read, there were 23 different markets studied, and the result of that study showed that the average cost for a building that would be in the category of an official residence was around \$9.5 million, therefore explaining why—I assume—the Treasury Board gave us that authority up to \$10 million.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you very much.

Given that Global Affairs Canada purchased a property in Manhattan, one of the world’s costliest real estate markets, under that \$10-million threshold, can you offer reflections on the appropriateness of this threshold for this and other official residences?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Mr. Chair, I would say that what we have observed postpandemic is a sharp increase in the cost of real property, either in the purchases or in any kinds of projects. The kinds of houses or the kinds of apartments, especially in a market like New York’s, which is one of the most expensive markets in the world, give enough flexibility for the department to be able to do

transactions that are not complex and that can bring good assets into our portfolio.

My reflection is that \$10 million in 2024 is probably adequate for the kind of business we’re doing.

● (1245)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you.

Questions have been raised regarding the timing of this transaction in relation to Mr. Clark’s appointment in February of 2023. Can you clarify?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes. Absolutely.

I’d like to offer the committee the way in which I saw the evolution and the timeline of this project.

When I got in the job in 2022, we were coming out of the pandemic. Coming out of the pandemic, the real property world was very affected in two ways. There was a large delay in some of the projects, because during the three years of the pandemic, many projects didn’t move forward. There was also a sharp increase in everything that we were trying to do, because of the inflation in many jurisdictions. Remember, we are in 112 different countries. Prices were going up. We basically wanted to accelerate some of the work we wanted to do. We looked at process. We looked at governance. We wanted it to be agile. We wanted to be able to catch up a little bit on the backlog and to be able to avoid further increases in costs as we moved forward in time.

The New York residence was exactly one of those properties. We had a project since 2021. We were not able to deliver this project during the pandemic. There were delays in getting the permits. In 2022, toward the end of the year, we were questioning ourselves and looking now at the increasing costs for that project. It all started at close to \$1.5 million. Then it was \$1.8 million. Now we were looking at \$2.6 million.

We went back to the drawing board in 2023. As part of the governance, we accepted to review options. Then we started investigating what the market could offer. That’s exactly where we found that the market in New York could offer an option that would not only meet all our requirements but also bring down the cost. That’s when we started zooming in on that option very quickly.

My timeline that I’m following is that in 2021, we could not deliver. That dragged into 2022. Then we changed, we pivoted, and finally found a solution. We have resolved the issue of the official residence in New York and we have saved millions of dollars on it.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We’ll go to Mrs. Vignola, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Hounzangbé, if I am not mistaken, you are the person to whom responsibility for signing the purchase agreement was delegated.

Is that correct?

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: That's right.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Did your responsibilities extend beyond signing the purchase agreement?

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: Yes, my responsibilities included overseeing the entire transaction process. I was also the chair of the governance committee that did follow-up, determined needs, analyzed options and ultimately made the decision.

Signing off on this transaction was definitely in line with my delegation of authority.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Did you observe anything out of place about the process?

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: Thank you for the question.

Nothing out of place was observed throughout the process.

I have reviewed a number of projects that fell under our governance. They might have involved not only an official residence, but also a chancery or annex, in countries that have relatively complicated markets. I can say that this transaction was more or less classic. This was a situation where we were not able to deliver a project using standard operating procedure and had to change direction.

The interesting thing about this transaction is that we found an opportunity to save money. In the case of a relocation, we generally expect some cost increase. In this case, all steps in the process were rigorously adhered to and documented by my team. However, we went further and were also able to save money proactively.

To answer your question, we adhered to all the steps and we did not observe anything abnormal.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Apartment 12E at 550 Park Avenue was in a co-op. You can't always do what you want in a co-op or a condominium. In fact, a co-op may be more restrictive.

For the repairs that had to be done, particularly in relation to accessibility, would special approvals have had to be obtained from the city council, for example, since this was a heritage apartment and its structure or its architecture needed to be changed a little?

• (1250)

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: There are three aspects to my answer.

The first is that since 2021 it has been very difficult for us to obtain various permits for renovations, particularly permits issued by this property management committee.

Second, the other restrictions that were extremely difficult to deal with, in the case of the use of an official residence for representational purposes, were limits on the type and number of events that could be held in the residence.

Third, a determining factor in our decision to relocate the official residence was the Vienna Convention, which provides for a tax exemption if you are outside the model.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Boulerice, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You have told us several times that the process is robust, rigorous and independent.

To help me understand, and also to assist the people listening to us, could you tell me when this re-assessment process starts, that is, the process by which you determine whether to keep and renovate or sell and buy?

Is it done on an annual basis or does it happen every five years, for example?

Is the process triggered by employee complaints about problems with insulation, heating, water leaks, and so on?

What is the starting point?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I am going to let you answer the question, Mr. Hounzangbé.

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: I thank the member for the question.

The first step is to establish a portfolio plan for each mission. We have 182 missions in the world. The plan is for five years. In the plan, we identify the needs, the problems to be solved, at various properties, be it a chancery or an official residence.

Once the needs are defined, we prepare documents on a case-by-case basis. That is what we did in the case of the official residence in New York. For example, we explain in these documents that we are trying to solve problems one, two and three. It is then submitted to the governance committee for approval. That exercise enables us to put forward the funds needed for the research.

The second step is to determine how we are going to solve the problems listed in the needs analysis. We have to do that using an options analysis that is based on two factors: costs and benefits. What do we mean by benefit? For example, we need an official residence that includes a portion for representational activities and a portion for living space. So we need an official residence that can accommodate a dining room with a certain number of chairs in order to meet the needs for the representational aspect.

Once that is approved by the governance committee, which includes members of the finance committee and members of our security team, along with architects and interior designers, we make a decision.

Ultimately, it is signed, based on the recommendation by the governance committee.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Might there not be situations where the diplomat says they would like to have a bigger bedroom, because they find it more comfortable?

Mr. Franck Hounzangbé: As Mr. Dubeau said, and in my experience, that happens with anyone who arrives somewhere and has not had an opportunity to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the place.

A diplomat is a person who has been given a property. So it is very common for us to find that the person has opinions about the options available. However, they may never request that changes be made.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mrs. Kusie, then Mr. Sousa.

We'll have abridged, two-and-a-half-minute rounds.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

Monsieur Dubeau, you said there was a collective involved in gathering this information.

Can you share the names of those involved in that collective, please?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Do you mean the project team that gathered the information, along with the team in New York?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Yes. You referred to the collective.

Who was in this collective?

• (1255)

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I can go back to the department and see what is available.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay. If you could table those names with the committee, it would be appreciated.

Excellent. Thank you.

Would you be able to table the emails that were communicated among the collective related to the purchase of the residence?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I will look at what is available and get back to you.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

Who was your contact at the consulate in New York?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: My main contact in New York would be the head of administration. We called them a management and consular officer. We have a very senior one in New York. That would have been my primary contact on the matter of real properties.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Who was it at the time you were doing the research? Was it one continuous head of administration during that time, or was there more than one during that process?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: There was more than one.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Could you provide the names of who they were to the committee, please?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Yes. Do you want me to come back to the committee with those in writing, or would you like me to—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: If you're aware of the names now, that would be helpful.

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Okay.

Mr. Chair, the first management consular officer with whom I interacted was Mario Bot, and the current one is Christopher Veenstra.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much.

Would you be able to table your communications with these heads of administration as well, please?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I can go back and look at what I have and share that.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Excellent. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Sousa, please go ahead.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you.

Thank you for being here.

Did Tom Clark approve the decision to sell the old residence?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, he did not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Did Tom Clark approve the decision to purchase the new residence?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, he did not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Did Tom Clark have any influence, in any way, on any of the decisions?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, he did not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Is it normal or common for a new head of mission to express their views regarding the accommodations that they're in, by any appointment, any other head of mission? Do they comment on the accommodations, as tenants?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: I would say it's normal for a head of mission to comment on their accommodation to their staff.

Mr. Charles Sousa: What measures are taken, then, to ensure that there's no undue influence in the decisions?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: Ultimately, a head of mission expressing concern or views about the official residence to his staff doesn't necessarily influence the process that we've been describing, so there's no direct connection, and there's no influence.

Mr. Charles Sousa: There's no direct connection between the head of mission and the decisions with regard to a real estate transaction, which is—

Mr. Robin Dubeau: That's correct.

Mr. Charles Sousa: —always the case.

Did the Prime Minister of Canada have an influence or a decision in regard to this purchase?

Mr. Robin Dubeau: No, he did not.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, if I can also conclude by requesting that you adhere to the majority will of the members of this committee not to have a meeting next week, during constituency week, for the benefit of Remembrance Day and of the veterans we are acknowledging and honouring, please.

The Chair: Thanks for your time.

Gentlemen, thank you. I appreciate your patience.

Everyone around the table, I'm not sure if we got everything answered. I do apologize that we had to take away two full rounds from everyone.

Perhaps we'll have you to come back and finish that time for the committee.

We're adjourned.

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