



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 023**

**PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT**

Thursday, May 19, 2022

---



Chair: Mr. Pat Kelly



# Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

Thursday, May 19, 2022

• (1540)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to the 23rd meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the committee is considering, from the main estimates 2022-23, vote 1 under the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying, vote 1 under the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, vote 1 under the Office of the Senate Ethics Officer, and votes 1 and 5 under the Offices of the Information and Privacy Commissioners of Canada, referred to the committee on Tuesday, March 1, 2022.

Before I welcome our witness, I'll say a couple of words.

My apologies to Commissioner Bélanger for getting this meeting going a bit late. A colleague announced his intention to resign from the House of Commons and was making a statement in the House, and I wanted to give members an opportunity to be present for that. That's why we're starting late.

We do have some committee business that we need to attend to at the end of the meeting. We had scheduled half an hour, but I don't think we need that long. I'm going to play it by ear a bit and see how we make out with questions for Commissioner Bélanger. We'll see how many rounds we need to have to get out all the questions that members may have, and then we will proceed in camera to discuss committee business.

With that, I would now like to welcome our witness. From the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying, we have Nancy Bélanger, Commissioner of Lobbying.

Ms. Bélanger, you have up to five minutes for your opening statement.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger (Commissioner of Lobbying, Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members.

[Translation]

I am very pleased to be here today to meet many of you for the first time and to speak to you about the work of the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying.

The Lobbying Act recognizes that lobbying is a legitimate activity that should be transparent.

The *Lobbyists' Code of Conduct* ensures that lobbyists meet the highest ethical standards. Together, they aim to foster public confidence in federal decision-making.

This past year was another busy one for the three areas of my mandate.

The first is to maintain the Registry of Lobbyists. As the main tool for enabling transparency, the registry provides information about who is communicating with public officials and about what subjects. When individual consultants, corporations, and organizations lobby federal organizations, they must file a public registration. In 2021-22, there were over 8,000 lobbyists registered.

A report of certain oral and arranged communications with designated public office holders must also be completed on a monthly basis. Last year, there were approximately 25,000 communications. The top subject matters for the year were health, economic development and the environment.

The second aspect of my mandate is to raise awareness of the lobbying regime. This past year, we gave about 80 virtual presentations reaching more than 1,300 stakeholders, who now understand better the requirements of the act and code.

• (1545)

[English]

The final aspect of my mandate is to ensure compliance. We investigate allegations of non-compliance with the act and the code. A preliminary assessment is undertaken to investigate the nature of the alleged contravention and to gather some information. If I determine that further action is required to ensure compliance, I continue the investigation. When I complete an investigation under the code, I must table a report to Parliament.

Non-compliance with obligations under the act is an offence. When I investigate and have reasonable grounds to believe that such an offence has occurred, I must refer the matter to the RCMP and suspend my investigation until it has completed its process. Once this has occurred, I can cease the investigation or complete it and report to Parliament.

Last year, in addition to the preliminary assessments that were carried over from the previous year, we initiated 22 and determined that no further action was required in 14. In addition, we finalized five investigations carried over from previous years, including one report to Parliament and one referral to the RCMP. At the beginning of this fiscal year, we had 32 ongoing files.

I also decide whether to grant former designated public office holders an exemption from the five-year prohibition on lobbying when they leave office. Of the nine applications, I granted two and denied three. Two were withdrawn and two remain to be reviewed. Once granted, the exemptions are published on the office's website.

All of this work and the necessary corporate functions are performed by a very small team of about 28 employees. I want this committee to know how very proud I am of all my staff as they continue to excel during a period that has undoubtedly been challenging to us all, demonstrating adaptability, resolve and compassion.

Last November, we received additional annual funding of approximately \$590,000 to increase our personnel by five employees to ensure that the registry and other IM/IT systems remain modern, secure and accessible. We have recently staffed three of those five positions.

My total budget is now approximately \$5.2 million, including employee benefit payments. About \$4 million of this allocation goes to salaries and benefits, leaving an operating budget of \$1.2 million. About \$630,000 of that amount is spent to obtain services such as HR and financial from other government institutions.

[Translation]

Looking ahead, I remain available should a parliamentary review of the Lobbying Act be undertaken. As you may know, I submitted a report with 11 preliminary recommendations to improve the Lobbying Act.

I will also share with you a renewed *Lobbyists' Code of Conduct*. The revised code will bring a new level of clarity to the standards of behaviour expected of lobbyists. I have undertaken two phases of consultations and I expect to do one more round in the near future, before finalizing the code for your review.

Mr. Chair and committee members, those are my opening remarks. I will now gladly answer your questions.

[English]

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The first questions will come from Mr. Kurek, for up to six minutes.

**Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madam Commissioner, for your attendance here today. I appreciate it.

Let me just note how important it is, especially when it comes to trust in our institutions from the Canadian people, to ensure that

there is a transparent, fulsome and understood lobbying regime in our country. I appreciate the role that you play in that.

I have a practical question first. I'm being mindful of the time. In terms of the workload over the course of the pandemic, was it something that you saw increased in lobbying efforts or challenges with reporting? In about a minute or so, could you outline what the ebbs and flows were during the course of COVID?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I could be very quick: It definitely increased.

Monthly communication reports before the pandemic were about 18,000 for the year—mind you, it was an election year. During the pandemic, there were 28,000 oral communications. That, in and of itself, was an increase. We saw an increase of active registrations.

Now, everything was done virtually. Of course, oral and arranged communications.... If it's arranged in advance and it's virtual, it must be reported, so automatically the virtual world increased those oral and arranged communications. You had to plan the Zoom call. It was not something that was spontaneous on the corner of the street, which, I think, had an impact as well. For sure, there was a lot of lobbying happening.

• (1550)

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Did you notice any specific trends, outside of Zoom? Were there any specific trends in terms of—

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Not in the oral communications.

With respect to the subject matter, health had never really been in the top two or three, and obviously it became the top two or three. Economic development was always in the top four or five, but it became the top one or two.

There was a trend in subject matter and a trend in, obviously, oral and arranged communications.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** Thank you very much for that.

Madam Commissioner, in terms of helping to make sure that Canadians understand both your role and the role that the Lobbying Act has in ensuring that there is a high level of transparency, because of course, when there are incidents, as we have seen from time to time.... What efforts do you and your office undertake to ensure that Canadians are aware of your efforts and the work you do?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** First of all, we deal with stakeholders on a daily basis, so those who want to register, or think they need to register, are calling us regularly. In the last year, I think we had 5,000 emails and phone calls to get help to register.

With respect to awareness, we're actually going to be working on a stakeholder engagement plan in this coming year. I find that because of the resources we have, we are much more reactive. We do go out. We speak to universities. We talk to organizations. We talk to public office holders. They understand our role. We're mainly talking to lobbyists, but we could do a lot better, and I do think that we need to start.... I don't want to say "travelling", because it's not the right thing to say to do right now, but for sure we need to step up our engagement. Right now, it's a resource issue.

We've actually increased our international presence during the pandemic. I've done many presentations at the international level, which was really permitted because of the virtual world. We're continuing to work hard to increase our presence on social media, a little bit on our Twitter account and the Internet.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I appreciate that, but specifically.... Within Ottawa and the national capital region, those who are connected within policy and political circles will understand the work that you do, but in terms of somebody who has an intent to lobby the government, or who simply wants to learn about the process to ensure there is transparency, are there tools that you have provided, or steps? For someone who isn't engaged in decision-making or the lobbying itself, or, say, who hasn't lobbied before but wants to engage in that process, what steps have you taken?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** First of all, Canada is a big country. There is lobbying happening in all of your constituencies, so I'm relying on you to help me in that area. For sure, we do have work to do in getting out there in the community, but apart from the fact that we continue to.... We do issue products. We do have documents that we provide to people, but very often they reach out to us, or we see a lot of things going on in the media, so I can tell you that it's targeted outreach. When we see that someone is communicating with any of you and they're not on the registry, we follow up, so we do advise people, but unless I know what I don't know, it's difficult. The resources to start doing a full-blown outreach program....

It's difficult, but I'm working on that. That is my objective in the next year.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I appreciate that.

I think my time is almost done, but I would just note that in the report that was provided to us—which, after some clarification, you provided to the committee during the second session of the last Parliament—one of the recommendations was regarding foreign lobby efforts, and I certainly think.... That's something I would just note so that it's on the record, Mr. Chair. I know there's probably no time to answer the question, but it's an important thing.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** You're out of time, and if there was a question there, there's no time to answer it.

**Mr. Damien Kurek:** I would simply note that.

**The Chair:** Okay. You have done so.

Now we go to Ms. Hefpner.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witness for the testimony today, and thank you to my colleague for starting my clock for me.

I want to go back a bit. You talked a little bit about the pandemic and how you saw an increase in requests for service, and you saw different types of requests. I'm wondering if there's more to add about how your commission was able to respond. What were the challenges in terms of remote work and pivoting to meet the demands within your own department during the pandemic?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I have to say that I was extremely impressed by how our team responded. For the most part, it was because we were already equipped. We had just moved into a new location, in May 2019, fully "3.0", I'll call it. As far as I'm concerned, we had all the tools to be able to do our work remotely. On that Friday, March 13, I just told people, "Bring your things home, because we don't know what's going to happen." So they were really able to pivot and continue the work.

In terms of our client services team, we have a service standard where we respond to telephone calls within 30 seconds. Those who had kids at home really had to adjust, and they did it. We continued to meet our service standards. I'm in awe of them. We somehow functioned and we did it. We're all tired, but we all did it. Everybody's tired. I get that. People were able to adapt and they continued to work hard.

At the beginning, up until October, we weren't allowed to see anybody because of the bandwidth. Everything was by Zoom but without the camera. It became a little frustrating. We were eventually able to see each other at some point. The personal aspect was tough, because we're small. We're 25 people. Families are bigger than that. We get to know everyone.

So that was a bit of a challenge, but somehow we got it done.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** I can tell that you're very proud of your team.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I really am.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** Where are you at now? Are people back in the office or are they still working remotely?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I asked everyone to come back one day a week as of the beginning of April. It's been wonderful. People are getting to connect. We had hired three people, I think, during the pandemic who were supervising others and had never met in person, so that's been a very good thing. I'm in the office pretty much every day. I'm here. I need to see people.

**Ms. Lisa Hefpner:** Let me take you in a little bit of a different direction. You mentioned 11 recommendations you had for changes to the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct. Can you go over those for us a little bit, or over the most important ones? We have about four minutes left. I'd like to hear what you think are the most important changes that we need to see in the act.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** There are 11 recommendations. I tabled a report to this committee in February 2021. Those 11 recommendations are preliminary. They're really to enhance transparency and fix the gaps. They're all important. I don't believe in band-aids. I think we need to have an integrated approach to changes to the Lobbying Act.

The biggest irritant—we have seen it in the media, and lobbyists agree with this—is the significant part of duty threshold before an organization needs to register.

The code of conduct is not the 11 recommendations. We're redoing the code of conduct. I've done two consultations, because I have to do consultations with stakeholders. A third consultation should go out next week. Then I have an obligation to submit that new code of conduct to you for your review, which I'm hoping to do in the near future.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** What sorts of things are you hearing from stakeholders that we should hear about?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** For certain, the significant part of duty threshold is difficult for organizations and corporations to figure out. It's about 30 hours in a month, cumulative, of all their employees who do lobbying. It's hard for them, especially for organizations that are spread across the country. Sometimes they will register even if they don't meet the threshold, just to ensure that they don't run afoul of the law, because it is an offence.

It's difficult for me to then enforce as to whether or not somebody really did 30 hours in a month. It's a lot of work to figure that out. There really should be transparency by default, as far as I'm concerned. That's one of the biggest irritants for the community that I think this committee needs to be aware of. It needs to be a priority when there's a Lobbying Act review.

• (1600)

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** You mentioned having some constraints due to resources in your department. What kind of budget increase would you look for?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It's interesting; we had asked for these five employees in the IT world back in 2019, hoping it would be in the budget of 2020. It wasn't. We got the money in 2021.

My next review, which will probably be a budget ask in the next year, I think would be for another five employees. I'm not looking to...but it's 30 people to do the same reporting burden as all other institutions, plus our mandate, which is quite demanding.

I'll say that probably it would be between five and 10, just so I don't put myself in a corner.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** But you could use more people.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Absolutely, yes.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** I think I only have a few seconds left.

**The Chair:** That's correct.

**Ms. Lisa Hefner:** I'll leave it there. Thank you once again for your time today.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now it's Mr. Villemure for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Madam Commissioner.

It is interesting, because I have been following the activities of the Office of the Commissioner since the beginning, that is, since 2008, when the 1989 Lobbyists Registration Act became the Lobbying Act. I believe that the first few years were devoted to the Registry of Lobbyists. People had to register and understand why they had to do so, how it worked, and so on. Now, we can see that the second and third points in your presentation are probably more important.

When we look at your website and your annual reports, we can see that there are a lot of figures: the number of people registered, the number of investigations, and so on. We also hear about your key values, but mostly about transparency. Generally speaking, you want to be transparent to inspire confidence.

Do you find that the current level of compliance is sufficient to maintain or inspire confidence?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** That's a good question.

Given that there are 8,000 lobbyists and that I have 32 files, we can say that there is compliance. There is no doubt about that.

However, that does not mean that the transparency of the current regime could not be improved. A lot of lobbying activities can take place without ending up in our registry. So I think the opportunities for improvement are related to the regime, not to compliance.

**Mr. René Villemure:** These opportunities for improvement are still important.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** They are very important, and I think it is time to start looking at them.

**Mr. René Villemure:** That's right, because you've shifted into another gear, in my opinion.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Yes, that's it.

**Mr. René Villemure:** I'd like to talk about foreign lobbyists, because during the pandemic, communications were online. How do you handle that?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** If consultants or organizations communicate with any of you and they reach the threshold, they have to register. Organizations, and even foreign governments, are represented by consultants and are on the Registry of Lobbyists.

If you want to know whether unregistered lobbying is taking place, I have no such records. I have not seen any lobbying activity, whether in the media or elsewhere, that is not in my registry.

**Mr. René Villemure:** The big companies will not run any risks, I believe. It's not worth it.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Exactly.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Earlier, you talked about a stakeholder engagement plan. Could you tell us a little about that, please?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** That is part of our plans. We have to find out where the shortcomings are, who we should contact, and how to proceed. We're prioritizing that, because, as I said, we're short on resources. At the moment, we rely a lot on what is happening in the media and the allegations we receive. When we see that someone is often late in declaring his lobbying activities or calls us to say that he's not sure of his obligations, we contact him again to make sure he understands them. However, we don't know what's going on across the country, and we have to find ways to do that.

I'm not the expert on this. I have an excellent team that is working on it. So I hope to be able to give you more details the next time I come to see you.

**Mr. René Villemure:** So what is controlled is well controlled.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** That's right. The problem is what I don't know.

**Mr. René Villemure:** What are the highlights of the consultations that you conducted in 2021-22?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** The 2021-22 consultations dealt with the *Lobbyists' Code of Conduct*, because I felt that it had shortcomings. When I decided to hold the first consultation, in 2020, it had already been in force for five years. I also had the opportunity to table reports in Parliament, in which I was able to identify these shortcomings. I want to remedy them, because the code is under my authority, as it is not a law or a regulation.

So I did a consultation, and the feedback I got was positive. Half of the people said it was fine and clear, while others were a bit more concerned about the hospitality they could offer in the context of political activities that might affect their lobbying activities later on. So I've read everyone's comments, and we're reworking the code. I'm not aiming for perfection, but I am aiming for excellence. I really want it to be a code we can be proud of. Other countries are looking at what we are doing, so I am working very hard with my team to ensure that we have a code that contains high ethical standards for lobbyists.

• (1605)

**Mr. René Villemure:** Are you looking for a prescriptive code or a code of principles?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It is quite prescriptive.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Okay, so that's the direction we're going in.

Finally, earlier, you talked about clarity. What aspects do you see as needing clarity?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** In fact, we would need clarity with regard to the rules concerning gifts.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Okay.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** The concept of the current *Lobbyists' Code of Conduct* was very much based on what is reasonable.

I'm not sure that what is reasonable for one person is also reasonable for the other. So there may be abuses. I try to make the code clear with clear indications of what is beyond the acceptable limits. That's where I'm going on the side of clarity.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Thank you very much.

I would suggest accountability; it's an interesting concept to examine.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It is, indeed.

Thank you.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now, for up to six minutes, we have Mr. Desjarlais.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witness for being present with us today in person. It's a nice touch to be able to know exactly the folks who are doing such great work in our public service. Thank you very much for that.

You mentioned a few really interesting points related to the review. It was a review that was supposed to be regularly scheduled. The last regularly scheduled review was in 2012. That would mean five years from 2012 to 2017, so we're almost lapsed for a second review of the act. I understand the importance of your review and the work you've done in terms of your recommendations here. I think they're very good, and parliamentarians should take those concerns seriously.

I want to address one of them in particular, in relation to the final recommendation, recommendation 11. Recommendation 11 states, "Provide immunity against civil or criminal proceedings". This is one that I want to wrap my head around to understand the motivation for your recommendation here. I think Canadians would also like to know what level of immunity these persons should be able to be protected by in order to actually do the work of advancing your office's mandate, and whether that is appropriate.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Every other agent of Parliament has that clause. I think it was simply an oversight in the Lobbying Act. It's in the performance of our work, obviously, but we do important work. I do send files to the RCMP. I do believe that my staff and I should have the same protection that my colleagues have. I think it was really an oversight, and I thought I should flag it as something that should be included in it.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much for that.

Given that experience and the understanding that other offices may be doing this, there's a slight difference in mandate, I would assume as well, so maybe it's not necessarily an oversight in that case. What concrete examples, in your experience, can you provide of prior situations where a lack of immunity impeded the work of the commissioner?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It has not impeded my work at all. I do my work. To me, I think it is an oversight. I have not felt threatened. There has been no situation in which I think that clause would have allowed us to do more work. It really was just a flag that it should be in there, like any other agent of Parliament.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much for that.

I guess we'll move to a different item related to the Lobbyists' Code of Conduct. You mentioned it at the very end of my colleague's good questions. It's here in your department plan for this current year we're in. There's a renewal and modernization process that I understand is required for this code of conduct, and there are some key initiatives. Your office actually conducted some consultations. You mentioned that they've finished the second round of three.

• (1610)

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Yes.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** I'm really curious about how those first engagements went. Can you provide some feedback as to what you heard in terms of your engagement with those folks in the first two rounds?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Sure.

There is no requirement to renew the code. That was a decision on my part, because after five years of dealing with it and identifying some issues, some concerns I had with the code, I thought it was time to do it. I had also heard from the lobbyists that at the end of the day our guidance document was clearer to frame their behaviour than the actual rules themselves, so I thought, okay, we have a problem here.

The first consultation was in fact for them to tell me what they wanted me to know about how they thought the code was working. I did not have suggestions. In that round, I think I only had four responses. Then we issued a draft code, and I received 40-some comments and suggestions. There was also a template letter; I received about 180 of the same template letter.

Then I went through them all. Now we've readjusted and we are going out on the third consultation. As I was saying, I really want to get this as right as possible, so we should issue a third consultation next week.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Next week....

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Yes. I hope so.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** It's a huge undertaking, I'm sure.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It is.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** In terms of what you heard from these responses, I understand that this consultation is not yet complete, but in terms of the third round and the planning that would likely have to go into absorbing those recommendations, how long do you think before Canadians can expect to see a new code being released?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I suspect that I won't get that many comments this time around. I think what will happen is that I will be sending it to you for your review, because those are the steps, if you choose to review. If I get permission, I may end up sending it to

you over the course of the summer. That's if I'm allowed. I'll look into the rules.

Obviously, I would want to see in the fall if you had a reaction to it. Otherwise, it would be gazetted and then in force after that, obviously with some transition, depending on when facts occurred and when the code would be applicable. I'm hoping that in the fall or in the new year there would be a new code in place.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** In my last 20 or 30 seconds—I apologize for the time—what can we anticipate some of those changes to be?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It's about clarity and making it a lot more prescriptive than it is now. That's really what you're going to see. It's straight to the point. It has very specific rules.

We've really enhanced the expectations we have from lobbyists. We've really defined it. There is no guidance required. Everything is in one package with very clear definitions, examples and standards for the behaviour.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Interesting. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

With that, we will go to Mr. Bezan for up to five minutes.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the commissioner for joining us today. It's great to have you here in person. I appreciate the work you do.

Now, you referred to how many cases in your tenure to the RCMP for investigation, and what were the circumstances that would require an RCMP investigation?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I'm sorry. I didn't hear the first part of your question.

**Mr. James Bezan:** You said in your opening comments that you referred—

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It was one this year.

**Mr. James Bezan:** —at least one this year, but how many in total?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I have referred 11 in four and a half years.

**Mr. James Bezan:** How many of those resulted in charges against those individuals?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** So far, none.

**Mr. James Bezan:** What was the determination that you wanted the RCMP to take a look at them?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I'm sorry. What was...?

**Mr. James Bezan:** Was it violations of the Criminal Code or was it—

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** No. Failing to register, or lobbying when you're prohibited, is an offence under the Lobbying Act. When I investigate, the moment I have reasonable grounds to believe that there was lobbying that was unregistered, or that someone lobbied when they were prohibited, I must suspend and refer to the RCMP.



**Mr. James Bezan:** But if the RCMP doesn't follow up, then they're getting away.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** The RCMP takes it over. They decide whether or not to investigate and to pursue and to lay charges.

• (1615)

**Mr. James Bezan:** So you're saying no charges have ever been laid—

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** No.

**Mr. James Bezan:** —in the 11 cases that you've referred.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** They have returned two to me. They now have nine files.

**Mr. James Bezan:** So the two they returned they were not going to move forward on.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** One of them continues to be suspended. One of them I decided to close, because one of my recommendations is a spectrum of sanctions. Not all offences are created equal, and I have no discretion. The moment I think the communication they had was in fact lobbying and they should have been registered, I have no discretion. I have to send it.

The file that was returned I simply closed, because it was someone who obviously did not know that they were lobbying. It was one incident. There was no reason to do a report to Parliament on that issue. If I thought that it came back and that I should file a report to Parliament, that's one option that I could do. That's the state of—

**Mr. James Bezan:** Knowing that you have the responsibility to report to other agencies like the RCMP, when you come across an individual lobbyist who is offering gifts, for example, to parliamentarians or public office holders, do you also then notify the Ethics Commissioner?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** When it's an investigation under the code of conduct, I report to Parliament. It's two things.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I'm saying that if you have a case where a lobbyist offers a gift that's over the threshold to a public office holder, that being a parliamentarian, would you then also notify the Ethics Commissioner that you're investigating somebody for giving a gift to a parliamentarian that they—

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** No, I would not. I have to conduct all my investigations in private. A breach of a gift issue under the lobbying regime is a code of conduct issue. It's not an RCMP matter, in that particular case.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I understand that. If a lobbyist gave a gift that shouldn't have been given, you would only notify Parliament in one of your reports, then. That would be the trigger that the—

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** No, and I understand what you're getting at.

If I am of the view that the gift could be investigated under other legislation, I could suspend and refer the matter to the RCMP. I do have an obligation to suspend anything I'm doing that I believe another authority should look into. That could happen. It has never happened, but that could happen, as well.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Of course, a public office holder accepting a gift from someone is a violation of the Criminal Code, paragraph

121(1)(c). That would definitely be for the RCMP, but isn't there still the obligation for the Ethics Commissioner to look at the public office holder who accepted that gift? Wouldn't you want to notify the Ethics Commissioner that somebody had done so?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I'm not the one who's regulating public office holders. I regulate lobbyists. Under the—

**Mr. James Bezan:** There are two sides to that—

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** There are two sides.

**Mr. James Bezan:** —as sometimes those wires cross.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Absolutely.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Then there should be communication between your office and the office of the Ethics Commissioner, should there not?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Well, I can tell you that all of us agents of Parliament have an obligation to conduct our investigations in private. Should there be a will that we do share, I even think that sometimes investigations might be more effective if we could do interviews at the same time or whatever, if in fact they're the same.

Let's not forget that lobbyists also lobby senators and public servants. I'm not the mirror image of my colleague Monsieur Dion. I have investigations where a lobbyist might have given a gift to a public servant or to a senator. It's not always a perfect match, in that lobbyists don't just lobby members of Parliament or people who are under the jurisdiction of Monsieur Dion.

For me, it's under a code. If I do think it's something under section 121 or any other, such that I see there's been theft or fraud, I would suspend and send the matter to the RCMP under that banner.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We're significantly over time, but it was important to at least try to get an answer in the time we have. You may get another chance. We'll see.

Next it's Mr. Bains.

Go ahead, Mr. Bains, for up to five minutes.

**Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the commissioner for joining us today.

Several years ago, your office conducted an investigation into sponsored travel. What level of compliance did you find?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I found an almost perfect level of compliance. The current rule under the code of conduct allows lobbyists to give gifts in cases where the public office holder is allowed to accept them. By the way, in the next version, that will not be the case.

In light of that, because lobbyists were permitted to give the gifts of sponsored travel, what I ended up verifying as well was whether or not, while the lobbyists were travelling, they did lobby. When they did lobby, was it communicated on the registry? I found that it was.

• (1620)

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Okay.

Did you observe any gaps in the act?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Well, that particular report was under the code of conduct. The gap that I found was the fact that I had to consider whether or not the person who was accepting was allowed to accept. That requires me to put myself in the shoes of one of my colleagues. That was an issue with the code of conduct.

With respect to the extent of the investigation, we were able to complete it.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Thank you.

You introduced two new departmental results indicators in 2020 and 2021 that still do not have targets for them determined two years later, according to your departmental plan. Why do you think it's taking so long?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It's because when we issued those, we needed a full year. They will be there. Those results will be in our departmental results report, which will be issued in September or October. We needed a full year to be able to evaluate them. Then we will be reporting on them. It really took a full year. That's just because of the way the reports are tabled and prepared.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** According to the departmental plan, you anticipate an increase in staff. I think you mentioned something about that earlier. Will you be using the new staff to conduct the experiment to help innovate and find new ways to improve program delivery? Can you talk a little about that?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** The new staff will all be in the IT field and working on the registry and further developing it. Of course, we're going to continue to look for ways to make it simpler. Just last year, we were able to have the reporting done via a mobile device. Before that, someone had to be on their computer.

We are going to continue to invest in finding ways.... We've actually just issued a survey to users of the registry to see how we can make the data more accessible. We are always looking for ways to innovate. Part of the staff we are going to get will help with that, absolutely.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** You have about a minute and a half left, Mr. Bains, if you have any other questions.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Okay.

You just mentioned the survey. Have those results come in?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It was still open until.... No, I don't have the results yet. We just launched it maybe a month ago, so I don't have them yet.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Are there other experiments that you're working on, besides the survey itself?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** No. Again, we don't really have the resources. One thing we're doing is asking people after our presentations how we did and how we can improve and what kinds of tools they would need to better understand the regime. I consider that to be somewhat of an experiment, but it's minimal. We just have

enough people to keep the core of our mandate going, so we are very slim, but we're working on it.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Thank you for your work.

**The Chair:** Mr. Villemure, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. René Villemure:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Commissioner, I only have two and a half minutes. I will ask you two questions, and if you have any additional information, you can send it to us in writing.

Gifts have always been the subject of endless discussion. How do you distinguish between hospitality, a bribe or an attempt at bribery?

I'd like you to answer in 30 seconds.

• (1625)

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** According to the rule as it is written, receiving a gift is not allowed, unless the public office holder can accept it, and it's up to me to do that verification.

In the new code, there will be two categories: gifts and hospitality. The only gifts allowed will be to show appreciation or to thank a public office holder for performing an official function. For hospitality, I have set a limit of \$30. That is all that will be allowed. I hope that by setting such a small amount, a public office holder will not be influenced in any way.

**Mr. René Villemure:** We can't believe that a \$30 gift could influence anyone.

What is strange is that the Government of Canada itself gives lavish gifts worth much more than \$30.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Were they given to influence a public office holder?

**Mr. René Villemure:** No.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** That's it.

I only regulate lobbyists. The purpose of lobbyists' communications with public office holders is precisely to express their views. The word "influence" is used, but I'm always afraid it has a negative connotation. Lobbyists give their views, which is good for policy-making, but there is a limit.

**Mr. René Villemure:** It's a self-serving view, though.

I'll move on to another question.

You talked about exemptions for former public office holders. You made a few enquiries, two of which were not followed up.

Tell me a little bit about David MacNaughton from Palantir Canada. What made it not work for him?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** The Lobbying Act says that when you leave politics, you can't lobby as a consultant or as a consultant lobbyist. You can't lobby for an organization. However, if you work for a company, you can have lobbying activities that represent up to 20% of your duties.

This should be eliminated, and this is one of my recommendations. It should be equal on both sides. You can decide to leave an exemption in place, which is a matter of policy, but I don't understand this 20% limit. I might have understood it more in the case of lobbying for charities.

Some of Mr. MacNaughton's communications were not on reportable matters, but some were. I think that these communications did not even add up to two hours. They represented nowhere near 20% of his duties, so they were allowed.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you. Mr. Villemure's time is up.

[English]

It's Mr. Desjarlais for up to two and a half minutes, and maybe a little extra, given what's happened.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks again to our witness for sharing her plans with us here. One of the plans I want to address is your annual report and some of the work that was in there.

I know, given the pandemic, that workers and employees in the public service have taken on an extraordinary amount of work, having to adjust their lives, having to change everything, find child care, do everything from home and be a teacher at the same time. I'm sure that your employees are very much the same.

What I also found quite disturbing, especially on behalf of labour, was that there was a survey conducted during this report, and we found that employee job satisfaction fell dramatically, from 88% in 2019 to just 65% in 2020. You identified telework as being the primary reason there was such a shortfall in the training and why it could have led to some of your employees feeling unsatisfied. How are you going to enhance training for employees, and how are you going to find a way to enhance satisfaction in terms of your employees feeling supported?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I will never repeat it enough: I have the best team in Ottawa.

Well, first of all, we did do a lot of training in the last year to address that, so that particular annual report is from the previous year. What we have done this year is that we have created.... Each group, so the investigation team and the communications, has a community of practice where they are working with other agents of Parliament, and they really create a network.

We have done a lot of training for our investigators. We have allowed people in this virtual world to attend many international conferences and COGEL, and come to sessions where I meet with my network. We have also done mandatory training for diversity, inclusivity and mental health. I have an awesome champion of mental health. Interestingly, some of these sessions are not mandatory, and

my employees are all there. I think that when we do another survey, we will have gone up again. We reduced, but that's two employees. I have 25 people, so it's, you know....

I am a great believer in an exceptional workplace, and I will do everything in my power to support people in their professional development. We ask them what they want to do and where they want to go, because I know that in a team of 25, I can't offer promotions to everybody. Sometimes we've moved people around when they're starting to feel like they want to learn something new. We do that. Luckily, people don't really leave. When they do, it's really because there's a promotion, but people enjoy working in our office, so it's good.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you. With that, we again went quite a bit over time.

We're going now to Mr. Williams.

Go ahead for up to five minutes.

**Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC):** Thank you very much, Ms. Bélanger.

I'm going to start with the 11 preliminary recommendations you gave to the House for updating the Lobbying Act. It has been a year since you compiled those recommendations. Would you change any of them, or do you have any new ones?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I don't know that I would change any of them, but I will have new ones.

One that I am seriously considering, and British Columbia has done this.... When in-house lobbyists lobby about contracting—not about the process of obtaining a contract, but sometimes there are conversations occurring on the side—right now that is not a registrable activity under the Lobbying Act. It is if you're a consultant, but it's not if you're in house. That's one aspect.

Another one that I think we seriously need to consider is volunteers. Of course, that's a touchy one. We're not talking about constituents who are talking to you about an issue that they're passionate about. Yukon has adopted a new rule, and I reference it in my.... It's a different document than the one I'm working on, but the Yukon has a “directing mind”, so even if someone is not paid but they're on a board of directors or they're someone who has clout, importance or decision-making powers, maybe that person should also be included in the requirements to lobby. Sometimes people will make phone calls and say, “Oh, I wasn't lobbying because I don't get paid,” but their phone call was important. I think there are some transparency gaps in that area.

Those are two, but the ones that are there I don't think I would actually change.

**Mr. Ryan Williams:** Thank you.

We have a lot more, obviously. I'm here on Zoom tonight, unfortunately. I'm sorry that I couldn't be there in person.

Did we see an increase in the last two years, during the pandemic, of lobbying through virtual meetings?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Ryan Williams:** Okay. Are the Lobbying Act and the lobbying registry properly set up to accommodate this shift in meeting locales? If not, how do we need to update that?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I'm sorry. If the Lobbying Act is equipped to...?

**Mr. Ryan Williams:** Is the lobbying registry properly set up to accommodate this shift in meeting virtually? Is there anything we need to change there, or is it set up already?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** No, I don't think the registry needs to change. Right now, any oral and arranged meeting in advance needs to be reported, so the virtual meetings meet that definition and they just need to report it. I don't think there need to be changes to the registry.

**Mr. Ryan Williams:** Okay.

I think you talked a little bit about this, and I apologize if I'm asking about it again, but the United States, Australia and soon the U.K. will have laws around the registration of foreign lobbyists and foreign influence agents. Is the influence of foreign lobbyists something your office is concerned about?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I don't know that my office has concerns about it, because right now if a consultant or an in-house organization meets the threshold, they need to register. Again, we can have a conversation about the threshold.

I am aware of a bill that was tabled in the other place. I have started to look at it because I think there's some reference in that particular bill that copies parts of our registration, but not all of it. I'm going to have to study that in particular.

I think right now, if the requirements are met, foreign entities do have an obligation to register under the Lobbying Act. The problem is, if there is an allegation of non-registrable, can I enforce it? That's another question.

• (1635)

**Mr. Ryan Williams:** That's the main question. Is there any way to know the extent of foreign lobbying and foreign influence activities in Canada, if they haven't registered? Are we able to understand that extent right now?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Right now, I certainly don't have the capacity to understand that, no.

**Mr. Ryan Williams:** In terms of any concerns, obviously looking at the acts of other nations.... Do we have concerns in Canada right now that this is something we have to look at sooner rather than later?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I can have my personal opinion, but as Commissioner of Lobbying I probably don't have a position on that.

**Mr. Ryan Williams:** Okay.

**The Chair:** You are out of time, Mr. Williams, so I'll have to stop you here.

**Mr. Ryan Williams:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Ms. Saks for five minutes.

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you so much, Commissioner Bélanger, for joining us today.

I first want to commend you, as a mental health advocate myself, because the way you prioritized your team in that space is really exemplary and something we should all be proud of in terms of public service, especially during the pandemic. I would just add that anecdotal piece here.

I'm going to ask a few questions about the workplace. We'll start with this, and I'm sure this is something my colleagues in the Bloc would also ask: How does the workplace embrace both official languages, both internally and perhaps with your work outside?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** All of our employees—or most of our employees—are CCC, so everybody can choose the language of their choice when they work in our office. All of our presentations are always bilingual. I have a champion of official languages who used to work at the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. I'm a francophone. I'm a great believer in official languages, and we do make sure that everything we do is bilingual.

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks:** Then you're able to fully support all organizations and individuals who come through the registry in both official languages, both in digital communication and orally.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Yes. Even our URL is in French.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks:** That's excellent.

[*English*]

I like to hear that.

Moving on, in terms of workplace, management and resourcing, you mentioned earlier the need for more IT. We're in this kind of critical moment of IT staffers, more specifically data management. You mentioned you're on Twitter now and you're out there more, but you're also monitoring more. We live in this age where there's so much information and people are posting their meetings online and who they're with. Can you talk to me a little bit about that in the context of asking for more IT in your teams and how you're managing all that data in relation to tracking lobbying?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Well, I just received money for IT and we're having a really hard time finding people. I'll just put that on the record. We just hired three, and we received the money as of last November. That is a challenging thing.

One of the persons we specifically asked for money for is in information management. She just started last month and she is there to do exactly that: train us, help us to manage all of the information that we do have in all of the systems we use. We have a registry, but we also have an investigations program, GCdocs. She's an expert in GCdocs. We are all looking forward to having her train all of our employees to make sure we keep it manageable. I used to be the deputy commissioner of access to information, so I'm very much aware of the need to make sure we keep that manageable. We're working on that too.

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks:** Okay. Thank you for that.

I'll touch on what my colleague before me asked about. Again, this is coming back to information and how we manage it, especially in the digital spaces that we're working in. We consume our news and our updates.... You mentioned earlier that you track media to know who's doing what and where, and that also relates to foreign lobbyists and foreign information.

Do you have strategies in place? Again, I'm asking this in terms of resourcing. The net is huge. The database is huge and in multiple languages and so on. What is the forward-thinking approach in making sure that you're well resourced to filter through all this information so that it's aligning with the registry and so you can continue to report well?

• (1640)

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Well, I don't know that I have a huge strategy. Right now, I rely on the people I have in the office to simply do the basics.

When we say that we look at the media, we look at the media. We start with that. We have some keywords. I might have 10 or 15 articles a day, so it's not that big. Then we go from there. We try to keep an eye out for what's going on.

As I said, we are going to be working on information management. We just hired her. We had no one. We have some cleaning up of boxes to do. We're there.

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks:** Do I have two seconds?

**The Chair:** You have five.

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks:** It's a yes-or-no answer: Would you hope to see a transition from reactive to proactive in that space?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Absolutely, yes.

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks:** That's good stuff—a big yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Commissioner, I think that after my term as a member of Parliament, I will want to go to work for you, because there seems to be a good working climate there.

According to what you said earlier, lobbying is a way of exerting influence, it is a good thing and it must exist. I agree with you on that. However, we can see that you are setting a huge number of rules to provide a good framework for this activity.

After all this time, is lobbying well known and well understood?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I would say that lobbying is not well understood.

I make a lot of presentations and, as soon as I say the word "lobby," people roll their eyes. I find that unfortunate and I work hard to make people understand that it is a legitimate activity. It's the only way you can get the information you need to do your job.

So I would say that it's not always well understood. I think there is indeed an American influence that interferes with our work, but I'm working hard on that. The lobbyists who are registered in Canada know the rules. They are registered and there are not many violations of the *Lobbyists' Code of Conduct*.

I hope that, at some point, this perception can be improved.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Having talked about ethics for 20 years, I can tell you that there is still work to be done.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** There is still work to be done, absolutely.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Should politicians be better informed about your work?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Actually, I don't know how well all politicians know my work. I give presentations to government officials, senators, and members of Parliament, and a lot of people call me and ask me to do it. I'm always happy to be there.

I think there is still work to be done in this respect, especially in terms of understanding the details of the regime. It's all very well to talk about lobbying and the Registry of Lobbyists, but it's complicated. Sometimes people don't understand what their own obligations to the registry are.

I think there is still work to be done in this respect.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Some people understand that there is a registry, but that's it.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Exactly. For some, that's it.

**Mr. René Villemure:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Desjarlais will have two and a half minutes. After that, I might have one or two from the chair. Then we'll wrap up, if there's no one else.

Go ahead for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to my colleagues' very good questions, I believe we have a good understanding of what your role is and the lobbying registry—or at least I understand much more, being a temporary member of this committee.

I want to back up to one of the anomalies that happened and try to better understand that. Your annual report, the 2020-21 report, delivered the largest average of active lobbyists in the history of the registry of the lobbyists. I can only imagine that was a big shock, given your capacity. You were probably already operating at a fair capacity, given the existing workload. Then there was a massive spike in workload.

Were you able to learn from that experience? Can we predict that there will be a continued increase in this pattern? Have you witnessed that pattern?

• (1645)

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** In 2021, there were 28,000 monthly communication reports. In the last year, we had 24,000. So it went down a little bit, but it was an election year. Every election year, when there's a caretaker mode, there is no real lobbying that's occurring. In light of the fact that it was 24,000, even, I think we're on a trajectory. In 2012, I think there were 11,000, and we're now at 25,000. Clearly, there is an increase.

There's also, I think, a better understanding of the regime. People are showing up and registering. We get a lot of calls asking, "Should I register?" As much as we may not be out there engaging so much right now with all Canadians, I think the word is getting around. People are calling us to make sure they don't run afoul of the law. Nobody wants to end up on the front page of the news or in a file at the RCMP.

I do think that the workload is not going to reduce.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** In terms of the pattern of workload, of course there are years we can predict that workload decreasing, as you mentioned, with the exception of last year. Without that exception, we can probably predict at least a near pattern or estimate that there is an overall increase.

When was the initial amount in terms of a workload? I'm sure we would have to anticipate that in terms of how much work you're doing and in terms of the size of the financial envelope you have in order to conduct that work. When was that original amount?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** It was in 2008.

From when the office was created until just recently, it was the same budget.

**Mr. Blake Desjarlais:** Wow.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Wow. Exactly.

It requires work to evaluate and do a submission. We did one in 2019. I arrived in January 2018. It took me a bit of time to get my footing. Then we did a request for the IT. It's grand time that we asked for more.

**The Chair:** Thanks. That got us into a little bit of overtime there.

I want to squeeze in a quick question, if I may. We could probably have a whole study on your 11 recommendations, but let's look at the first one. I guess I've long held that many regulations that are designed to protect the public wind up protecting incumbents in business. In other words, a large, well-capitalized organization can handle compliance a lot better than a smaller, newer one.

On the expansion to require the reporting of all activity and to do away with the threshold around the amount of activity that you do and whatnot, can you comment on whether or not there are really some winners and losers and whether or not compliance ends up making it more difficult for a small enterprise to make its case to policy-makers than a large incumbent organization?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** I guess it's about how much weight you put to the value of transparency. To me, it's up there. To me, the burden of going into a registry to put in who you're going to communicate with, and about what, is not that high.

Right now, because the threshold is where it's at, there is a lot of lobbying that's occurring that we don't know about. With the threshold of 30 hours a month, you can make four very important phone calls that have a great impact that Canadians don't know about. To me, transparency is more important than....

I put the threshold at eight hours in three months. It could be eight or it could be 10, or it could be whatever policy decision we make. You could still be doing those two or three phone calls, but at the end of the day, a lot of organizations and corporations possibly do 20 hours a month and they still don't need to register. That's too much lobbying that goes unreported, as far as I'm concerned.

**The Chair:** It's perhaps not quite the same point, but yes, I get the matter of what the threshold is.

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** Yes. Exactly.

**The Chair:** With that, I see that Greg has his hand up.

Go ahead.

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Is it possible for me to slip in one question, following a question from Mr. Desjarlais?

**The Chair:** All right. I did offer one more time around.

Just make it a quick one. We do have other committee business, and on a Thursday, travel is an issue.

Go ahead.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** First of all, thank you for your question, Ms. Bélanger.

In response to Mr. Desjarlais, you said there wasn't a lot of lobbying during the election period.

Is there not lobbying that continues to be done with officials or non-elected people?

**Ms. Nancy Bélanger:** In fact, there is the transition period, which corresponds to a suspension period. There may be lobbying of officials, but not of members of Parliament.

The House of Commons being the highest institution, this is a time when there is less activity.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Okay. Thank you.

[*English*]

We will now suspend while we go in camera.

**The Chair:** With that, Commissioner, thank you.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

---







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

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

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

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

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

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

---

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