



PRESENTATIONS & SPEECHES

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Opening remarks before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

Honourable Konrad W. von Finckenstein, C.M., K.C. –
Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner
Ottawa, Ontario, June 11, 2026

I am pleased to appear before the Committee today.

With me are Lisa DeMoor, Director of Advisory and Compliance, and Michael Aquilino, Legal Counsel.

The subject of the motion that brings me before the Committee today revolves around a potential conflict of interest of the Minister of Finance, François-Philippe Champagne.

He has been facing scrutiny for his role in government decisions and votes on support for Alto and high-speed rail. It has been suggested that he was in a conflict of interest because those decisions and votes could benefit a Vice-President at Alto, someone the Minister has a close relationship with.

Mr. Champagne is subject to the *Conflict of Interest Act* in his role as a minister.

Under the Act, a public office holder is in a conflict of interest if they exercise an official power, duty or function that provides an opportunity to:

- One, further their private interests,
- Two, further the private interests of their relatives and friends, or
- Three, improperly further the private interests of anyone else.

There are three key points to consider.

One, the Minister has no control or authority over Alto.

It is a wholly owned subsidiary of a Crown corporation that reports to Parliament through the Minister of Transport—not the Minister of Finance.

Two, the exercise of the Minister's official duties and functions does not provide an opportunity to further the private interests of any specific Alto employee. Decision-making authority over human resources resides with the management of Alto. Alto is a Crown corporation that is not part of Minister Champagne's portfolio, thus he cannot direct or influence it.

Three, given that the Minister has no means of furthering the private interests of an Alto employee, he is not required to recuse or abstain from discussions, decisions, debates or votes related to Alto.

In short, the Minister's involvement in discussions or decisions that may benefit Alto is simply too remote to provide an opportunity to further the private interests of an Alto employee who has close ties to the Minister.

Sometimes it is reasonably foreseeable that a public office holder could be involved in discussions or decisions where they have a potential conflict of interest. In those cases, our Office works with them to set up a preventive compliance measure such as a conflict of interest screen. We then post the screen in the public registry.

We did not require the Minister to establish a screen, as the concerns regarding the Alto employee are so remote.

The Minister, however, proactively created such a screen without input or direction from our Office. He advised the prime minister of the screen and copied us. As this was not a screen required by our Office, we did not publish it in the public registry.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer the Committee's questions.