

Late night email reveals Senate squabbles over Bombardier loan

[John Paul Tasker](#) · CBC News · Posted: Apr 11, 2017 6:15 PM ET

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/late-night-emails-francis-lankin-1.4066251>

Independent Senator Frances Lankin accused a Conservative senator of playing "partisan games" over the Liberal government's loan to aerospace giant Bombardier in an email sent to all members and employees of the Senate in the early hours of Saturday morning.

The tone of the email exchange reveals mounting tensions between Senate Independents and the opposition Conservatives as they spar over the legislative agenda and the government's attempts to remove party politics from the Red Chamber.

Quebec Conservative Senator Leo Housakos emailed his Senate colleagues Friday evening pointing to a report in the Vancouver-based National Observer about a motion he introduced to have the Senate's transport committee study the terms of the Trudeau government's loan to Bombardier.

The government is providing \$373 million in interest-free loans to the aerospace firm to support the Global 7000 business aircraft, which is scheduled to go into commercial service next year. The company ignited a political firestorm after it handed down [multi-million dollar bonuses to executives](#) after the loan was announced.

Housakos said the government's point man in the Senate, Peter Harder, and his lieutenant, Deputy Government Representative Diane Bellemare, are trying to shield the government from a Senate inquiry.

"If the Trudeau government won't give Canadians the answers they deserve about the use of their tax dollars, then the Senate must. They're trying basically to pull the wool over the eyes of the public," Housakos is quoted as saying in the National Observer story.

"Really, Leo?" said Lankin in a reply sent at 12:28 a.m. Saturday that was cc'd to all senators, staff members, Senate administration, Parliamentary Protective Officers and even members of the cleaning staff and later shared with CBC News. "There is nothing honest about how you positioned this story."

"As you know I spoke to your motion and indicated I support having a Senate committee examine the Bombardier deal. However to suggest the government blocked your motion is such a blatant misrepresentation of what happened as to be truly shocking," Lankin wrote in her email

'Galling'

Lankin wrote that Independent senators were not comfortable supporting Housako's Bombardier motion after only 11 minutes of debate.

"You tried to force it to a vote. It certainly is galling, given all the times your caucus has insisted on adjourning debates on motions, reports and bills that have been in the Senate for weeks or in some cases months, that you are objecting to some other senators wanting to speak to this next week."

However, the Senate's Hansard transcript shows that Housakos did not have time to call a vote on his motion. Rather, Bellemare, an Independent, stood to adjourn debate after another Conservative, David Tkachuk, voiced his support for the study.

A vote on Bellemare's motion to adjourn was backed by Independent and Liberal senators, and opposed by 18 Conservatives.

Just ask Senator Bellemare to move over and we will debate. What is the government Deputy Leader afraid of??- *Conservative Quebec Senator Leo Housakos*

Harder, and members of the Independent Senators Group (ISG) are raising serious concerns about the use of adjournments to delay government bills. The Conservatives have used this tactic on three key pieces of legislation for weeks, including changes to union laws, the Citizenship Act and protections for transgender Canadians. These bills have been before the Senate for more than six months.

"I don't think government legislation should be held hostage to tactical politics," Harder [said in an interview with CBC News](#).

In her email, Lankin said the Housakos motion — and the subsequent media report — is simply an attempt to fire off a partisan potshot.

"I said at the time that I expected to see a press release from you blaming the government for delaying and here it is. You pulled this stunt to create the situation to match what I am sure was already written in your press release. It is these kind of partisan games that make Canadian cynical about politicians and our democratic institutions.

Lankin told the National Post, which also reported the story Tuesday, that the email was an internal communication.

"I really don't have any comment ... everything I have to say is in the email," she told the Post.

Lankin did not respond to requests for comment from CBC News.

'What is the government Deputy Leader afraid of??'

In another series of emails exchanged between senators Monday evening and also shared with CBC News, Independent Quebec Senator Andre Pratte said he isn't necessarily against a study of the Bombardier loan, but he takes issue with the Tory approach.

"Senator Housakos' tactics on Thursday had the hallmarks of a partisan trap: after a few minutes of debate on his motion, the senator tried to force a quick vote rather than allow an adjournment, which is the norm after such a short debate.

"The Independent Liberals and the Independents opposed this manoeuvre, and rightly so. That was all Senator Housakos needed to issue a news release."

Housakos said it wasn't the Conservatives who adjourned. "The Deputy Government Leader [Bellemarre] adjourned with your support!" he said in a reply to Pratte and Lankin Monday.

"Clearly you are ready to debate and so am I. Just ask Senator Bellemare to move over and we will debate. What is the government Deputy Leader afraid of??"