



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

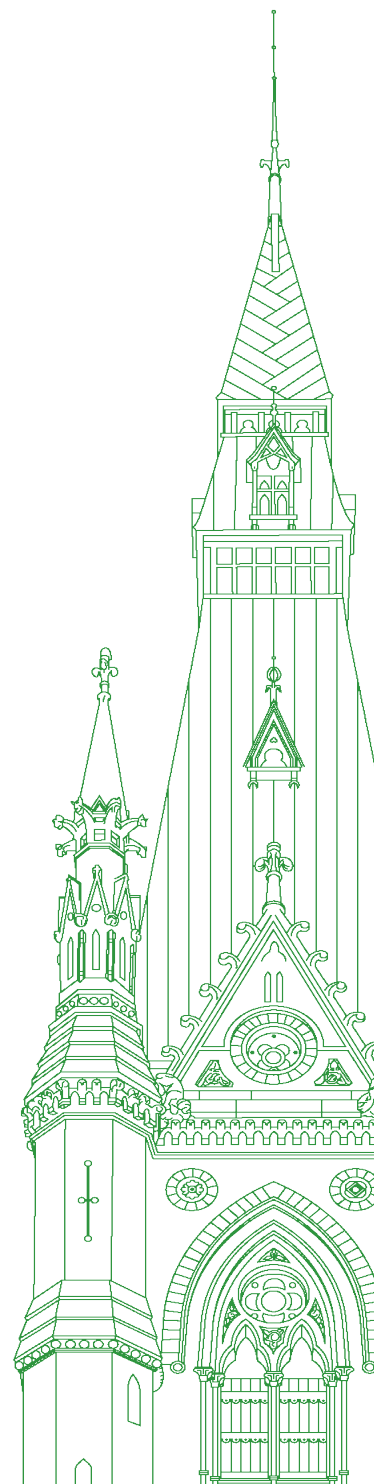
43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

House of Commons Debates

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(Hansard)

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Tuesday, October 20, 2020

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 20, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

[Translation]

Prayer

The hon. member for Montarville.

SAINT-BRUNO FIRING RANGE

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1005)

[English]

PETITIONS

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to take the floor from British Columbia where the sun has not yet risen. I apologize for the darkness.

It is an honour to rise this morning to present a petition from petitioners concerned about Canada's commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The petitioners point out that Canada has existing obligations under other human rights declarations that apply globally. They specifically point out the need to have a piece of legislation in Canada that brings the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into legal effect in this country, and to update our legislation to reflect Canada's obligations to enforce the rights of indigenous peoples in multiple situations. They specify the Wet'suwet'en territory and the conduct of the RCMP.

FIREARMS

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition signed by over 58,000 Canadians who are calling on the Liberal government to repeal its order in council.

On May 1 of this year, with the stroke of a pen, overnight, the Liberals, with their order in council, made hundreds of thousands of law-abiding citizens criminals. It had a catastrophic impact on sporting goods owners, like K.K.S Tactical Supplies and Cassandra Parker in my riding who, overnight, faced catastrophic losses to their business because of the inventory they had that they could no longer sell. It had no value.

I hope that the Liberals will see their way to repeal this order in council. If not, a new elected Conservative government will do so.

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members to be as concise as possible and to not go into a discourse. That is for debate.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(6), it is my pleasure to present a petition signed by 1,745 individuals, most of them residents of Montreal's South Shore.

The petition states that the former Saint-Bruno firing range is a National Defence site measuring 4.5 km². It has not been used for some time, it is in the process of being transferred, it is locked and monitored, and all recreational activities that used to take place there have been suspended. The site has mountain bike, cross-country ski and snowshoe trails that were established and groomed by volunteers in such a way as to respect protected areas set aside for the preservation of rare and endangered species. It also has soccer fields, which means it has tremendous recreational and tourism potential for the greater Montreal region. The petitioners are asking the Minister of National Defence to act quickly to transfer the site to a Quebec organization such as SÉPAQ or to a regional or municipal authority in order to protect it from real estate development and restore access to citizens for recreational purposes while respecting areas reserved for the preservation of protected species.

[English]

PORNOGRAPHY

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition to Parliament that speaks to the sexual exploitation of children. The petition draws attention to this growing threat. It says that our children are being exposed to pornography online, their health can be threatened, with some addicted to pornography, some producing and distributing pornography, some performing sexual assaults on other children, some planning suicides online and some planning violent acts to public safety online. The petition says that our parents, caregivers and professionals require increased education, and that the Government of Canada should support the efforts of the federal Canadian charity Internet Sense First and its anti-Internet child exploitation team's goal of the education of Canadians regarding the theory of digital supervision for proactive online child protection.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Black Horse community which is part of the town of Caledon in my riding of Dufferin—Caledon, is terribly underserved by rural broadband. Many studies have been conducted to show that upload speeds and download speeds are exceptionally poor. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, with businesses operating from home and children having to do some of their schooling at home, they call on the Government of Canada to make broadband Internet service an essential telecommunications service.

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Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first is from members of my riding who were very concerned when the House of Commons was shut down. They indicated that the House of Commons should be considered an essential service to Canada. They said that limiting the business of the House of Commons, along with matters concerning the COVID pandemic, inhibited the ability of members of Parliament to hold the government to account, virtual meetings were insufficient, the Prime Minister's daily press availability was not an effective forum for holding him accountable and unprecedented levels of public spending were hurried.

A return to normal in-person sittings of the House of Commons and its standing committees is needed. This took place during the months prior to the actual prorogation by the Prime Minister. The 13,346 petitioners call upon the Prime Minister to immediately reconvene the House of Commons.

• (1010)

SEX SELECTION

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in regard to sex-selective abortion. It indicates that sex-selective abortion is legal in Canada because there are no laws, yet sex selection is antithetical to equality between men and women that we promote as a nation. A 2019 DART & Maru/Blue poll indicated 84% of Canadians believe that it should be illegal to have an abortion if a family does not want a child because of its sex. International organizations including the World Health Organization, United Nations Women and United Nations Children's Fund have all identified unequal sex ratios at birth as a growing problem internationally. Canada's own health care professionals recognize sex selection as a problem here. The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to pass a Criminal Code prohibition of sex selection abortion.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ANTI-CORRUPTION

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC) moved:

That the House:

(a) note that the WE Charity scandal has preoccupied Parliament since the Canada Student Service Grant (CSSG) was announced on June 25, 2020, and despite many meetings on this topic held by several of the standing committees of the House of Commons in the subsequent weeks, the outstanding and unanswered questions only became more numerous and increasingly serious;

(b) further note that several other scandals and potential scandals have come to light more recently in the context of government expenditures related to the COVID-19 pandemic response, including, but not limited to,

(i) the awarding of contracts to the employer of the Prime Minister's chief of staff's spouse to administer the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program,

(ii) allegations of lobbying by the Prime Minister's chief of staff's spouse to secure amendments to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy program (CEWS) which would benefit his employer,

(iii) the acquisition of ventilators, which did not have regulatory approval for use, manufactured by a company owned by a retired Liberal member of the House of Commons;

(c) acknowledge that the Prime Minister's abrupt decision to prorogue Parliament intensified the need for parliamentary accountability;

(d) believe that, to ensure that the work required to achieve this accountability does not interfere with the ordinary operations of the House's network of committees, a special committee with a dedicated mandate should be established; and

(e) therefore appoint a special committee on anti-corruption, to be styled: The Anti-Corruption Committee, with the mandate to examine and review,

(i) all aspects of the CSSG, including its conceptualization, planning, development, establishment, implementation and termination,

(ii) the assorted relationships between WE Charity, including any of its affiliated or related organizations and the Kielburger family, on the one part, and the government and ministers of the Crown and their families, on the other part,

(iii) all aspects of the CECRA program, including its planning, development, establishment and implementation,

(iv) all aspects related to the allegations of lobbying by Rob Silver or MCAP for amendments to the Income Tax Act in respect of the CEWS program,

(v) all aspects related to the acquisition, purchase and regulatory approval of ventilators manufactured by, or otherwise associated with, the Baylis Medical Company,

(vi) any other matter connected to the government's COVID-19 pandemic response measures that any standing committee of the House may request the committee to investigate,

provided that,

(vii) the committee be composed of 15 members, of which six shall be government members, five shall be from the official opposition, two shall be from the Bloc Québécois and two shall be from the New Democratic Party,

(viii) the members shall be named by their respective whip by depositing with the Clerk of the House the list of their members to serve on the committee no later than the day following the adoption of this order,

(ix) the Clerk of the House shall convene an organization meeting of the said committee within five days of the adoption of this order,

(x) changes in the membership of the committee shall be effective immediately after notification by the whip has been filed with the Clerk of the House,

(xi) membership substitutions be permitted, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2),

(xii) notwithstanding Standing Order 106(2), the committee be chaired by a member of the official opposition, and in addition to the Chair, the first vice-chair shall be from the Bloc Québécois, the second vice-chair shall be from the New Democratic Party, and the third vice-chair shall be from the government party,

(xiii) quorum of the committee be as provided for in Standing Order 118 and that the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including one member of the opposition and one member of the government,

(xiv) the committee be granted all of the powers of a standing committee, as provided in the Standing Orders,

(xv) the provisions of Standing Order 106(4) shall extend to the committee,

(xvi) the committee and any of its subcommittees have the power to authorize video and audio broadcasting of any or all of its proceedings,

(xvii) the provisions of paragraph (o) of the order adopted on September 23, 2020, shall apply to the committee and any of its subcommittees until January 29, 2021, provided that the meetings of the committee and any of its subcommittees shall have the first claim to the priority use of House resources available for committees,

(xviii) the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, the President of the Treasury Board and the

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Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth may be ordered to appear as witnesses from time to time, as the committee sees fit,

(xix) the committee be instructed to present an interim report no later than February 15, 2021,

(xx) the committee's initial work shall be supported by orders of the House issuing for

(A) the unredacted version of all documents produced by the government in response to the July 7, 2020, order of the Standing Committee on Finance, provided that these records shall be filed directly with the Clerk of the House either electronically or in hardcopy within 24 hours of the adoption of this order and, in turn, transmitted to the committee which shall, until it may decide otherwise, consider them in camera,

(B) a copy of all records at Speakers' Spotlight pertaining to speaking appearances arranged, since October 14, 2008, for the current Prime Minister, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, Margaret Trudeau and Alexandre Trudeau, including, in respect of each speaking appearance, an indication of the fee provided, any expenses that were reimbursed and the name of the company, organization, person or entity booking it, which had been originally ordered to be produced on July 22, 2020, by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, provided that these records shall be filed directly with the Clerk of the House either electronically or in hardcopy within 24 hours of the adoption of this order and, in turn, transmitted to the committee which shall, until it may decide otherwise, consider them in camera,

(C) all memoranda, e-mails, documents, notes or other records from the Office of the Prime Minister and the Privy Council Office, since June 25, 2020, concerning options, plans and preparations for the prorogation of Parliament, including polling and public opinion research, provided that these documents shall be laid upon the table within 10 days of the adoption of this order and, upon tabling, shall stand referred to the committee and to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs,

(D) a complete accounting of all communications between the government and any of WE Charity (or its affiliated organizations), Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger, Speakers' Spotlight, Rob Silver, MCAP, Frank Baylis or Baylis Medical Company since June 25, 2020, in respect of the prorogation of Parliament, provided that these documents shall be laid upon the table within 10 days of the adoption of this order and, upon tabling, shall stand referred to the committee and to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[English]

We are here this morning for accountability. As public officials, all parties, including the government, should re-evaluate their reason for being in this Parliament. Public service is deeply important to me. That service is rooted in respect for all Canadians, love of country and deep respect for parliamentary democracy.

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[Translation]

I have high expectations of my colleagues because I have high expectations of myself. I believe in this country and the nobility of serving it.

[English]

To whom much is given, much is expected. Ultimately, it boils down to trust. Public officials should garner the trust of Canadians, not erode it.

[Translation]

There is no question that this government has been incompetent for several years now, as evidenced by its mismanagement.

[English]

Our party has uncovered a trove of compromising information in this WE scandal affair, a pattern that started to arise involving Liberal insiders and the Prime Minister's family.

● (1015)

[Translation]

A charitable organization, WE, became an extension of the Liberal Party, but worse yet, it soon became clear that the more WE paid members of the Trudeau family, the more the Liberal government rewarded WE. That connection undermines the trust of Canadians.

[English]

The opposition must stand up for Canadians. There is concern about corruption, in some cases with the highest offices in the land and with the Prime Minister, who has already been found twice to have violated public ethics rules. The WE Charity, we know, secretly lobbied the Liberal government dozens of times in the past, including during the pandemic, and never registered to do so. That is just further proof that the Canada student service grant program was never truly about the students.

The Ethics Commissioner is investigating. The lobbying commissioner is investigating. The official languages commissioner is investigating. The procurement ombudsman is investigating. We are running out of agencies to investigate the government's conduct. These are valid questions we have that we bring today.

I want to share, for a moment, a lesson I learned from my air force time, talking to some of our incredible World War II bomber command veterans. They had a rule of thumb. They said that when they were navigating night bombing missions and they started getting lots of fire from below, when they started getting flak, it meant they were over their target.

We are getting a lot of flak for this motion. That is because Canadians know we are over the target and we should keep asking questions. We will hold the Prime Minister and his government accountable, as it is our parliamentary function.

[Translation]

We know that when the Prime Minister took office, WE Charity had already begun paying members of his family. Over the past five years, those payments have totalled more than half a billion dollars.

[English]

The WE Charity was awarded multiple sole-source contracts over the past five years, well before it worked directly with Bill Morneau to come up with the Canada student service grant. We know that the WE Charity employed a member of former finance minister Morneau's family, and that his family went on two luxury vacations paid for by the WE Charity. We also know that the Prime Minister, Mr. Morneau and several officials and ministers in the current government turned around and handed to their friends a WE management contract of a billion dollars under the guise of supporting youth programming during the pandemic: youth programming that never came to fruition.

[Translation]

The Liberals must immediately stop this cover up, release the documents, tell Canadians the truth and let Parliament do its job. If the documents do not contain anything incriminating, there is no reason for the Liberals to spend so much time and resources hiding them. We are still wondering how much we do not know.

[English]

We have already seen that flak firing up from below. The Prime Minister is throwing all of his heavy artillery at us because we are over the target. Prorogation, resignation, filibusters, delays, political games and threatening elections are all just to ask us to stop asking to remove the blacking out of documents and asking for transparency. The Liberals were willing to shut down Parliament in a pandemic after it had already been shut down for months while emergency programs for the country, like the CERB, were expiring. They were willing to put all those Canadians to the side in order to stop a few tough questions from the MP for Carleton. Canadians should wonder why. Now the Liberals are threatening an election in the middle of a pandemic to avoid these secrets coming out.

● (1020)

[Translation]

When the government got caught, it tried to hide. It answered with talking points. It turned over redacted documents. It filibustered at committee. Then it shut down Parliament.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Today, I am introducing the Conservative opposition day motion. We are making a modest proposal to establish a committee to look into various ethical questions and problems with the government's handing out of COVID-19 funding to insiders and friends. It is a committee that would examine the misuse and potential breach of trust during the worst crisis Canadians have experienced in their lifetimes. The committee would examine the Canada student service grant, as well as the relationship between WE, the Liberal government and members of family; lobbying efforts for income tax changes, particularly with respect to the Canada emergency wage program; the acquisition, purchase and approval of Baylis Medical Company ventilators, and I know the name "Baylis" is pretty well known in this chamber; and, of course, topics the other parties will identify specifically for this committee.

The committee's initial work would be supported by the disclosure of documents, which this government continues to delay and avoid. The committee would simplify multiple committees into one special committee with a specific mandate to allow finance, health and other committees to do their work.

[Translation]

It is time to put our house back in order and rebuild Canadians' trust. This is the primary duty of any government managing a crisis. We must unite Canadians and put an end to the double standard, with one set of rules for the Liberals' friends and another set for everyone else.

[English]

The motion would also be amended today to make clear that the appointment of a special committee to look into the use of public funds by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic shall not constitute legitimate grounds for a general election. We would be changing the name of the committee based on some advice from the New Democratic Party, and we would be challenging all members, including the deputy House leader of the Liberal Party who is shrugging and guffawing at my remarks. I would remind him of his public duty to Canadians. I would remind him that to whom much is given, much is expected. Canadians expect the truth.

Can that member handle the truth? Canadians also deserve accountability, and that is exactly what this committee would do.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Conservative Party says that we need to re-evaluate why we are here. I think he is right: We do need to re-evaluate why we are here.

Canadians, in the last election, put together a minority government, and they expect the opposition parties to work with government. All parties need to work together, and the focus of our attention should be on doing what we can to fight coronavirus and the pandemic, just like other jurisdictions across the land are doing. From non-profits, to government agencies and private people, they understand and appreciate the importance of the pandemic and us as a government working together.

My question to the leader of the official opposition is this. Why does he not recognize that the value of being part of the official opposition means that one comes up with ideas of how we can work for the betterment of Canadians?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the deputy House leader from the Liberal Party for his indignation this morning and remind him that our party, particularly our health critic, has been asking questions on COVID-19 and the absence of rapid health testing in this country. Canada is the only major OECD country without rapid health testing, which is a failure of this government. We are more than happy to explore the failures of this government, but we would need to extend sitting times in Parliament.

We are going to study and fight the coronavirus, but we are also going to study, at committee, the Liberal corruption virus.

• (1025)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we know, WE Charity really had no French arm or French name. A literal translation into French would be "nous, charité" or "we, charity". It reminds me of the expression "charity begins at home". In this case, I have to say that it certainly applies to both the organization and the Liberal government.

The government has been telling us that we are in the midst of a pandemic and that this is not the time to be discussing corruption. When the government spends billions of dollars, is it not the right time to deal with this issue? It should not threaten Parliament with an election just because we are simply calling for transparency on the government's part.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

He is right. The Commissioner of Official Languages is concerned about this scandal. That is why we need a committee to address all aspects of the scandal, namely official languages, health, spending and ethics. That is why we will have this debate today. That is why Canadians need the truth, accountability and answers to reasonable questions.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the great concerns that we have had with this situation is that in March we were plunged into an unprecedented crisis. We were all told that we could work together, and I think this Parliament did some extraordinary work together.

At issue is the Prime Minister making a promise on April 8 to university students who were suffering massive levels of student debt, high tuition costs and complete uncertainty. He promised to have a plan in place for university students. That was on April 8.

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On April 17, the minister of youth and diversity had a secret meeting with Craig Kielburger and misrepresented those facts to our committees, both at finance and ethics. Out of that we are in this scandal, and the Liberals continue to try and block straightforward answers.

How long does my hon. colleague think the Liberals will carry on with this blockage of answers that the Canadian people deserve?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is right. In March we did work all together. In fact, I had calls with several ministers recommending solutions. I was in a leadership race that I asked to be suspended. I know his party, and all parties, tried to get solutions for Canadians in the midst of a pandemic. We know the Prime Minister promised testing and tracing in March that has not been delivered. As the member said, on April 8, the government promised students something that was not delivered, and then worked with its friends to create a program that appeared to be quid pro quo in the midst of a pandemic.

I am sure the member agrees. We hope the NDP will work with us because we are changing the name of the committee based on its recommendation. We have many of the same questions he had. What was terrible was even in a pandemic with no Parliament sitting, there was one line for Liberal insiders and friends of the Prime Minister, and one line for students, front-line health care workers and all other Canadians.

This motion is not about an election: It is about accountability. We ask the government to stop playing games.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the very important topic of our work here in the House of Commons, which we do proudly and diligently for the good of Canada and Canadians.

Our objective today is to enable all parliamentary committees to continue their meaningful work of oversight during the pandemic and to create a committee that will directly address the current government's unfortunate and irresponsible spending decisions during the pandemic and other decisions that may unfortunately be made. This is why we are here today.

The leader of the official opposition moved this motion, but traditionally, the Leader of the Opposition does not move motions on supply days. MPs are generally the ones who do so. However, our leader decided to move this motion because this is an important matter and Canadians need representatives in Parliament who do their jobs and who can oversee the government's actions, department by department, in parliamentary committees and in the House.

We want to hold the government accountable for its management of public money during the pandemic. Unfortunately, this government has made some highly improper and wrongful spending decisions.

The Prime Minister was very excited about playing Santa Claus, as he gave his little daily updates at 11:15 a.m. in May, June and even July, outside his residence. He announced hundreds of millions of dollars, billions even, in assistance to anything in Canada that moved.

What else did we see? We saw that the Liberal government was also prepared to spend nearly \$1 billion to help Liberal Party cronies and friends of the Prime Minister's family.

• (1030)

[*English*]

This is what we are talking about this morning. We are talking about the misjudgment of the government when it comes to spending money. It spent nearly \$1 billion to help a company close to the Liberal Party and close to the family of the Prime Minister.

[*Translation*]

Nearly \$900 million was involved in the WE Charity scandal. As was mentioned earlier, that organization had no roots in Quebec and barely had a made-up French name. It was the furthest thing from a Canada-wide organization. It was exclusive to English Canada, if not to Toronto, if not to the Liberals.

Through the questions we asked at parliamentary committees, we managed to pull the cat out of the bag and quickly realized that the Liberals were in fact trying help the friends of the Prime Minister's family. I cannot use the word "lie" in the House, but the Liberal version of events underwent a series of changes, which we will politely call an evolution.

First we were told that there was absolutely no connection between WE Charity and the Liberal Party, and that the Prime Minister's family had never been hired by this organization, but that is totally false. Then we were told they were paid only for travel expenses, but that is completely false. Just yesterday, we found out that some of the figures reported by WE Charity at the committee meetings did not line up with the truth. That is why we must have a committee that will focus specifically on the Liberals' mismanagement of public finances. The situation with WE Charity was not unique.

What future does the government have in store for us?

If the past is any indication, we parliamentarians must be especially vigilant to make sure that the billions of dollars Canadians pay every year in taxes to the federal government are well managed. That is our job. It is funny: We are here to ask Parliament for permission to do our job.

[English]

The Conservatives are here to tell the government and Parliament that we want to do our job. We need to do our job; we have to do our job. This is why we are here today. We are asking the government to allow all parliamentarians do their job. When I say that, I am also talking about the Liberal members of Parliament. They also have questions to ask of the government, because unfortunately what we saw this summer was a government saying one thing and then, after being asked more questions, saying sorry that it forgot about other things.

Let us talk about Bill Morneau, who forgot to pay \$41,000. Who could believe that? I can tell members that I would always have in mind that I owe more than \$40,000. This is what we have seen.

[Translation]

We saw the Minister of Finance resign. We saw the Prime Minister prorogue the House to prevent parliamentarians from doing their job. We saw the government table 5,000 pages of documents, a full quarter of them redacted. This is not what Canadians want, and that is why we must conduct this valid investigation, which is key to our work as parliamentarians.

In our opinion, it is essential that ethics be at the heart of what we do, and that public funds be spent appropriately. What do we have on the table today? We have a motion that will allow us to focus exclusively on managing these issues so that other committees can work on the pandemic and the House can do what it is meant to do. The oral question period always starts with questions about the pandemic, and that is how it should be. However, a committee would allow us to precisely manage that pandemic.

We introduced this motion on the Order Paper, as is the custom, last Thursday. Now all parliamentarians are aware of our goals, our intentions and what we want to do. Then, the Liberal government came along with a strange proposal, to say the least. They want to create a committee that will do the bare minimum in certain areas to avoid directly addressing the root of the problem.

The government would like the committee to be chaired by a member of the government. I have considerable respect for all of my friends in Parliament, whether they be Liberal, Bloc Québécois, New Democrat, Green, independent or Conservative. In the past year, we have seen how the Liberals are working on behalf of the Liberal Party rather than for the good of all Canadians.

A few weeks ago, the House and the committees began sitting virtually. The Standing Committee on Finance was one of them. We saw the committee's Liberal chair try to suspend the committee's work by placing his thumb on his webcam. I have never seen anything so ridiculous in my life. I have considerable respect for that person. I will not name him because I have too much respect for him.

Good gracious, that is what is going on in our committees now. The Liberals are filibustering and reading newspaper articles to prevent us from having real parliamentary committee debates. A chair put his thumb in front of his webcam to put an end to the sitting. Just imagine if I tried to put my thumb in front of the camera to adjourn the House. It is ridiculous, but that is what the Liberals did to

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prevent the hon. member from Carleton from doing what he was supposed to be doing in the parliamentary committee.

Let us be serious. Rather than conduct a careful study, the Liberal government is proposing that this be done in four weeks. Four weeks is not enough. Arbitrary suspensions, obstruction, adjournments and cancelled meetings, that is what the Liberals have served up.

For the past two days, the Liberals have been hinting that if this motion is adopted, the government could trigger a general election. How irresponsible. How absolutely outrageous.

• (1035)

[English]

I am sorry to say that, but when we talk about an election we talk about serious business. It is not the time to to play chicken on this issue, even if the House of Commons is the best place to talk about that. "Some chicken, some neck," as we heard on December 30, 1941, here in the House of Commons.

[Translation]

This is certainly not something we can take lightly. It would be absolutely outrageous to trigger a general election in the middle of a pandemic. What would be the reason for it?

As far as management of public funds is concerned, the Liberals are prepared to trigger an election to prevent parliamentarians from doing their work. That way of thinking is unworthy of a parliamentarian, but it is typical of the Liberals. The Liberals prorogued the House, and they are preventing parliamentarians from doing their work in committee. What they are proposing makes no sense.

Since we are listening to our colleagues' recommendations, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord:

That the motion be amended in paragraph (e),

(a) by replacing the words before subparagraph (i) with the following: "therefore appoint a special committee on allegations of misuse of public funds by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, with the mandate to examine and review"; and

(b) by adding the following: ", (xxi) the establishment of the committee shall not, in the opinion of the House, constitute legitimate grounds for calling a general election".

Should this amendment and the proposal we are submitting today in the House be passed by the majority, Canadians will get their money's worth, since we will be able to investigate the Liberal government's management of public funds while continuing our everyday work for the good of all Canadians.

• (1040)

The Deputy Speaker: First, it is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion.

[English]

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Durham if he consents to this amendment being moved?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I do.

Business of Supply

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 2015, there is something the official opposition has been doing consistently. They are constantly looking for an area of mischief where they can assassinate the character of the government. As I have said before, character assassination is something they do well. They will look for and nail down an issue, putting it ahead of any other issue. We have seen that. They talk about filibusters, but I can tell members that no party filibusters more than the official opposition.

Reflecting on what his leader said about why we are here, does the member feel there is an obligation on the official opposition to be more positive regarding ideas on how we can combat the coronavirus pandemic? That is what Canadians want us to be focused on.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I want to pay my respects to the hon. member, because as everyone knows, we are celebrating the five-year anniversary, plus one day, of the 2015 election.

Since I have been in the House of Commons, I have never seen a government so corrupt. Has anyone seen a prime minister under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner and found guilty not one time but two times? Members should watch out. He will be accused again for a third time a few weeks from now.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like us to take a moment to look back.

What has happened over the past few months? A specific committee was created to investigate what went on with WE Charity, and it was making good progress. We had many pieces of the puzzle, but some were missing. Everyone agreed that we had to get all the way to the bottom of things.

Then what happened? We did not complete our work. Now we are proposing a solution that will enable us to keep addressing the effects of the pandemic while doing our work in the House in a responsible manner, because it is up to us to lead by example.

Why is there now a lack of interest in shedding light on what happened?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her remarks. I know a few people in her riding, so I know that she plays a very active role there, and I thank her for that, too. We are all working to improve the lives of Canadians and, in my colleague's case, Quebecers.

We are here to do our job and, as parliamentarians, that job is to hold this government to account. We have to make sure that government members manage public funds properly. Unfortunately, as we have seen in recent weeks and months, they believe public money should be used to help families and groups with ties to the Liberal Party.

The hon. member for Durham and leader of the official opposition was absolutely right when he said earlier that we are here to fight the coronavirus as well as the Liberal corruption virus.

● (1045)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his passionate speech.

The NDP has always been in favour of getting to the bottom of the WE Charity scandal. We have a duty and responsibility as parliamentarians to scrutinize the government's spending and ethics.

The Liberals are so addled that during a recent filibuster in committee, a Liberal member said that only the Ethics Commissioner had the power to determine who is considered the Prime Minister's mother and brother. The Liberals were trying so hard to hide the truth that they were disputing the definition of family members and hiding behind the Ethics Commissioner's supposed authority to define who is considered a mother and brother of the Prime Minister.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this. How mixed up are the Liberals, and how hard are they trying to obfuscate this issue?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank my NDP colleague. I knew that the Liberals were doing everything they could to obstruct the work of the committees, but I did not know that they had stooped to such ludicrous depths. Honestly, I think that everyone knows who the Prime Minister's father, mother and brother are. We do not need the Ethics Commissioner to tell us that. It just shows how completely out of touch the Liberals are with the reality right in front of them.

I am pleased to see that all the opposition parties seem to have the exact same position as we do. We want to investigate. The one does not impede the other. The parliamentary committees will do their job. During question period, we will do our job. We will do our job as parliamentarians by studying bills and asking the government questions about the pandemic every day. We are also responsible for checking the facts, and that is why the opposition parties are proposing to set up a committee that will focus on this government's mismanagement of public funds.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to start things off, I will list a number of points that are important as we continue to debate this today.

First, it is important to recognize that the government does consider this to be a matter of confidence, because the House cannot establish a committee looking into government corruption and, at the same time, claim it still has confidence in the government. Additionally, the motion is nothing more than a blatant partisan proposal that seeks to paralyze the government at a time when the entire government should be focused on keeping Canadians safe and healthy during this second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, we cannot have committees finding public servants in contempt without even providing them the opportunity to explain why they made lawful redactions to a small number of items within more than 5,000 documents released to the finance committee.

Third, we cannot turn our committees into partisan tools to force private citizens to release personal financial information. Where would that end?

Fourth, we cannot have Conservatives drowning the government in requests for documents and arbitrary deadlines that are designed to be impossible to meet, forcing public servants to drop their work on supporting Canadians during this pandemic.

Fifth, the Conservative motion is just proposing more political games. It is not a serious effort to examine all the areas of pandemic spending.

Sixth, Canadians want their politicians to work together in this pandemic, not throw mud at each other.

Seventh, we have proposed a path forward for this Parliament with a serious committee that will do serious work.

Eighth, we do not want an election. Canadians do not want an election. We have important legislation before the House, including MAID, conversion therapy and sexual assault training for judges, and legislation upcoming on wage subsidy, rent support and the Canada emergency business account.

Finally, I would hope all parties will work with us in support of Canadians.

I wanted to highlight these items, prior to my responding to some of the things I have heard from both the leader of the Conservative Party and the Conservative opposition House leader, because I think they are really important.

To start, the leader says we need to evaluate why we are here in the first place. I would suggest the leader is right. We are here in this House because Canadians have bestowed upon us their trust and confidence. When I say “we”, I am referring to every member of Parliament, no matter what side of the House they sit on. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to our constituents.

If the Conservatives were to consult, as we have been and as, I believe, most members of Parliament have been with their constituents, they would find the number one concern facing our country today is the coronavirus. What we can do collectively in order to fight the coronavirus and protect the health and well-being of Canadians, while at the same time protecting our economy, is the priority in Canada today.

Business of Supply

What we hear, day in and day out, from the Conservative Party is the issue with WE. Opposition members want to say it is this huge mountain of corruption. I have been in opposition for many years, and boy they sure can make something look awfully big. I would suggest that, in comparison with other administrations, it is very minimal. It is something a committee could deal with along with all the other things that are done at the House of Commons.

The leader of the Conservative Party said to reflect. I suggest that Conservative members of Parliament need to realize that the track they took in 2015 of character assassinations of politicians on the government side is wrong. I suggest that they put that on hold and start dealing with what our constituents want us to deal with, and that is fighting the pandemic.

• (1050)

What is interesting is that, whether they are in non-profit organizations or governments of different levels, indigenous people or private individuals, people across our country not only recognize but also understand the importance of working together. The only group of people that seems to be so focused on being a destructive force is the Conservative Party of Canada.

For example, its members talk about WE. The leader said WE is an extension of the Liberal Party. Let me tell the leader of the Conservative Party that the WE organization got an annual grant from the Manitoba government. The last time I looked, the Manitoba government was a Progressive Conservative government. That was an annual grant. That is hard to believe based on what the leader of the Conservative party has been saying.

My job is not defend WE. My job is to assure Canadians that, as much as the Conservative Party is so bloody focused on this issue, we are going to remain focused on the priority of Canadians, which is to combat the pandemic. We will work with those who want to work with us, and the list is endless, to ensure we are doing what is absolutely essential to protect the health and well-being of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, while at the same time working on our economy.

I have made reference in the past to what we have been able to do by working with Canadians. We have come up with some wonderful things out of nothing. On the other hand, the Conservatives criticize and black-mark our civil servants, yet it was those civil servants who put together and created the CERB program, which assisted millions of Canadians in every region of our country. It is the credibility of many of those same civil servants that is being called into question by the Conservatives.

In part, they are the same civil servants who put together programs such as the wage subsidy program. By listening to what members of Parliament from different political parties said, including many people from opposition parties, regarding the importance of our seniors, they developed programs that would assist our seniors. We have done that in different ways, such as a one-time payment to the GIS and OAS, which are retirement programs. I am especially proud of the GIS, which is for the poorest seniors in our country. We recognize the importance of and the need for additional expenditures.

Business of Supply

This is the type of thing we should be talking about inside the House of Commons. The Conservatives want to make a change here. I hope they are not going to hoodwink our friends in the New Democratic Party, who have been very critical of the many government ideas and programs we have brought forward. I will not take that away from them. That is part of what they and the Conservatives should be doing as the opposition, which is to look for ways the government can improve the system and take advantage of the opportunity to communicate with ministers during a pandemic.

I find this motion, which I would classify as a confidence motion, to be amazing. The Conservatives should look at the details and read it thoroughly. It will take quite a while to read, because it is a very lengthy motion.

This all goes back to what it is the Conservatives have been up to for the last five years. They may as well not have had a change of leadership, because it is almost as if Stephen Harper is still here.

● (1055)

At the end of the day, the Conservative Party needs to get on track. It needs to put less attention on some issues and more attention on this issue, the issue of the pandemic. We are now well into the second wave.

I made reference to organizations. I had discussions with Folklorama, an organization I am very proud of. It is such an economic driver for the city of Winnipeg. It is an organization that really amplifies and embodies Canada's diversity. It does so much good for my city, and in fact, our country. It is the longest running multicultural ethnic event of this nature in North America, and someone once said to me of the world, which I suspect could be the case.

Folklorama has now been going on for over 50 years, but not this year. This year we did not have those two weeks of celebration of diversity, with displays of culture and heritage, entertainment in the forms of dance and song, or the gathering of hundreds of thousands of people in the city of Winnipeg to appreciate our diversity. The reason for that was the pandemic.

The Government of Canada, through the wage subsidy program, was able to assist Folklorama. This is one organization. Some of its members said they were not sure if it would be able to survive this year because of the pandemic.

Another great program is 211. We finally have a national 211 program in Canada because of funding that in part came from Ottawa. Obviously it is also the United Way and some wonderful people. I think of Ms. Walker in particular, who did a fantastic job in advocating for 211. Now there is an Internet presence, and most importantly, a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week phone line that can be accessed from anywhere in Canada, from what I understand. By calling 211, people can access all sorts of different programs.

Those are the types of things having a positive impact on real people in all of our communities. I remember months ago talking with the United Way about the program and how important it was to try to incorporate it to its fullest extent in the province of Manitoba. I was so pleased the other week when we finally saw it come to fruition.

There are endless examples of small businesses that are here today because of the support they received from the government. I reference the CERB program. Disposable income that Canadians rely on day in, day out is absolutely critical. That particular program, which came from nowhere and is a direct result of the pandemic, was there for over eight million Canadians. It allowed them to purchase the groceries they needed. It allowed them to get the things that were important to their lives.

On co-operation and recognizing how important the pandemic is, we have been working with provinces. I believe the amount was over \$19 billion for the safe restart program. The Government of Canada worked with provincial and territorial jurisdictions in order to ensure we have in place what is important to help us all get through a second wave.

● (1100)

Liberals understand, and I like to think most members of Parliament understand, why we need to be here. We get criticized for proroguing the session. Let me remind members that there was an agreement by the majority of the House when we rose earlier this year that we would come back on September 23. We had agreed to that. We also agreed that we would sit, albeit in committee of the whole, on the floor of the House during the summer. We would have to go back to 1988 to find the last time the House of Commons sat in July and August.

When we were sitting here, I had never before witnessed the opportunity for opposition parties to contribute to policy development for the Government of Canada, never. They had the opportunity not just to ask one question and a supplementary question. They had five-minute slots. We were going for well over two hours, during which hundreds of questions were being asked by opposition and government members of ministers to try to influence policy.

There were more days that we sat in the summer than we lost because of prorogation. Prorogation is utilized, even in the province of Manitoba. Here is a bit of hypocrisy. How can a Conservative member of Parliament criticize proroguing a session, especially if the member is from Manitoba, when the Manitoba government prorogued its session? Go figure. Yes, there is a pandemic in Manitoba, too. It is across Canada. Yes, WE does get money from the Province of Manitoba, too.

The point is that the Conservatives will do whatever they can to twist things. The opposition House leader said the Prime Minister has been investigated by the commissioner more than any other prime minister. We hear that every so often. It was Stephen Harper who established the commissioner. How stupid a comment from the Conservative Party saying the Prime Minister is the worst.

I have far more faith in the commissioner than I do in the official opposition, far more faith, the reason being that the Conservatives obviously have a bias. They have demonstrated that bias since the day after the Liberals were elected five years ago, five years plus a day. Five years ago, the Conservatives started their character assassination and they have not stopped since. Why should people believe what the Conservative Party has to say on the issue of corruption?

Do members recall the Senate scandal during the Stephen Harper government? Do they know how many people were linked to the PMO during the Senate scandal? That is where there was a payout. If we really think about it, the commissioner is there to ensure that the political partisanship we see from the Conservative Party is put to the side and we stick to the facts. The facts on that issue are that it was public civil servants who made the recommendation.

I see my time has expired. I would ask for leave to continue, but I expect the Conservatives would not want this continual barrage of reality.

At the end of the day, I am hopeful that members will see the Conservative interference in the House of Commons, which is having a negative impact on Liberals being able to do what we need to do with regard to fighting the coronavirus that is impacting every region of our country.

• (1105)

That is what Canadians want us to be focused on. That is what the government will continue to be focused on.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am always pleased when the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader is giving speeches, because it offers me an opportunity to do penance and to offer up my suffering here in the hopes of reducing my time in whatever comes next. I am glad that he took 20 minutes. I would have been happy to give him leave for more time to earn more time off from purgatory.

The member has such faulty logic. All along there are just too many holes. I know some of my colleagues want to ask questions, too, so I will not litigate, point for point, all of his logical fallacies.

However, on his idea that focusing and asking questions about this corruption scandal is somehow doing Canadians a disservice, the member is missing the point. It is his party and his Prime Minister that used the pandemic to reward their friends. It is his party that, when Canadians were scared about their health and worried about their financial well-being, took the time to stop and make sure their friends were compensated, that they got a share of the big bucks that were rolling out of the Prime Minister's Office.

That is what this investigation is about: holding a government accountable that would use a pandemic, an unprecedented time in Canadian history, to give itself massive amounts of power and then pay off its well-connected friends. That is what this investigation is about. That is why Canadians deserve to get answers on the WE corruption scandal.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the former leader of the Conservative Party, what balderdash. That is just not true. I do not believe for a moment that, in this pandemic, the billions of dollars being spent is about rewarding Liberals. I do not believe that for a moment.

What I do believe is that the billions of dollars spent have been spent in order to support Canadians in all regions of our country in a very real and tangible way.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that was fantastic. I appreciated the speech by my hon. colleague across the way.

When it was time to get to the bottom of the scandals involving the Mulroney government, the Liberals had some questions, and rightly so.

When the Harper government was involved in scandals, the Liberals wanted to get to the bottom of them, and rightly so.

When the sponsorship scandal erupted, the Bloc wanted to get to the bottom of it, and rightly so.

My hon. colleague said we are being partisan because we would dare try to get to the bottom of a scandal involving the Prime Minister. He said so vigorously and passionately. I actually have to tip my hat to my hon. colleague, because in doing so, he is the one reaching new heights of partisanship. I would even say that his speech was the Himalayas of partisanship.

I listened to my hon. colleague and I must say, I do not know how he does it. I just said I had to tip my hat to him.

This is what I want to know: As a representative of the people, how can he defend the indefensible?

• (1110)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it might be because, in the last 30 years, I have had the opportunity to be in opposition for the vast majority of those years, over 20 years. I am hoping to do the same number of years on the government side, but one never knows. It is Canadians who will make that determination.

At the end of the day, opposition parties do have a choice and it is about where they spend their time. Who am I to tell the Bloc or the NDP or the Conservatives where they should spend their time?

Much like the opposition parties hold the government accountable for what we do, I believe I also have a responsibility to hold the opposition parties accountable, and in particular, the Conservative opposition. I believe the Conservatives are doing a disservice to Canadians by spending so much time on one issue and foregoing a lot of discussion they could be having in regard to what is on the minds of all Canadians: the pandemic.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of April, the Prime Minister made a promise to the people of Canada. That was when he used to come out from his house every day and say what he was going to do. He made a promise on April 8 that he would help university students, and he broke it.

Once it became clear that a group that was tied to his family financially would get an unprecedented amount of money, between \$500 and \$900 million, when no other options were put on the table because it was there from the get-go, writing the plans with key Liberal ministers, what did the Prime Minister do? He pulled that money away from university students. They still have not received a thing.

Business of Supply

That member has the gall to stand in the House and talk about how much his government cares about the pandemic, while threatening members of Parliament with an election if we do not kowtow to the Prime Minister and his government. They sent a letter to our committee telling us that we did not have the right to talk about our privileges as members of Parliament and that they would force an election.

Do not give me any of this hypocrisy about how the Liberals actually care about people in a pandemic when, to protect the Prime Minister in an investigation, he is willing to go to the polls during the worst economic, financial and medical catastrophe in a century rather than having the decency to answer questions of parliamentarians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, with respect to this specific program, it is important to recognize that a suite of programs was made available to support students in university and college, and students in general. For example, we saw the enhancement of the summer youth employment program. Many initiatives were taken.

The member is referring to one initiative. If time allowed, I would welcome the opportunity to continue to expand on it.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Western Economic Diversification Canada) and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (Canada Water Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the speeches of the member for Winnipeg North for some 33 years. He gets more eloquent every year. Of course, we are both from Manitoba. I am the member for Winnipeg South and just yesterday our public health officer announced that our caseload was 122 cases per 100,000 people. That is the nation's hot spot or certainly one of the hot spots. We are very concerned. The chief public health officer here is bringing in new measures.

I wonder if the member for Winnipeg North could provide a few reflections on his community of Winnipeg. What is he hearing from residents? What is he hearing from small business? I know this is Small Business Week and many of our small businesses are hanging on by their fingernails. Why will this motion paralyze the government and prevent us from serving our citizens? Maybe the member has a final few reflections—

• (1115)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg South has highlighted just how important it is to recognize that we are in a second wave. The expectations are just as great, if not greater, than what they were over the last number of months.

Our constituents in certain sectors are very nervous. One can appreciate that, with kids going to school and individuals uncertain about their employment. There is a great deal of concern in the city of Winnipeg as we watch the numbers every day.

I want to assure the residents of Winnipeg North and all Canadians that no matter what is thrown at us from the Conservative Party, we will remain focused on the people of Canada.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I continue to hear the member's speeches and I am a little bit outraged. He is ask-

ing us to work together, but to work together to cover up Liberal corruption. It is the same Liberal Party that was here back in the *scandale des commandites*. It seems that nothing has changed over there.

We saw the Liberal government shut down Parliament and put in place a committee that would only work on one thing, the pandemic. I like all members are here to do our jobs, and we can do more than one thing at one time.

Will the member please support this motion so our health committee, finance committee and other committees can get back to work? Canadians deserve a Prime Minister that can walk and chew gum; do more than one thing at one time.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that if we look at this motion, it is a motion of confidence. I hope people will take the time to read the details of it.

We need to be focusing our attention on what is the primary priority of all Canadians, and that is fighting the pandemic and doing what we can to keep Canadians healthy, safe and our economy in a good position.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, you nearly caught me off guard because it is my oldest son's birthday, so I was thinking about something for him. However, I will get back to these very serious matters.

We are debating a motion, moved by the Conservatives, based on a principle that we support right off the bat, that is, to shed light on the key issues that smack of scandal that accumulated during the second term of this Liberal government led by the member for Papineau. The desire to call out this government is undeniable, but this is more about getting to the bottom of these issues and the errors in judgment that keep piling up one on top of the other. This needs to happen. However, it might also be appropriate to suggest areas of reflection, possible solutions, improvements and ways to tighten things up.

What we would have liked is not to allow the government to sweep the WE affair under the rug by proroguing Parliament, changing the subject, and coming back with a throne speech which essentially had no substance and which should be followed by some hopefully meaningful economic measures. I have to say, so far, it has worked relatively well. The WE affair is much less in the news than it was before Parliament was prorogued, but that is unacceptable, because Quebecers and Canadians cannot remain in the dark and ignorant about so important an issue.

Seeing what was coming, the Liberals strategically decided to introduce a motion that was essentially intended to sidestep the problem. The Liberals decided to introduce a motion that would address all of the financial issues relating to the pandemic, but these are two entirely different things.

The fact is that the Canadian government committed hundreds of millions of dollars to fight the effects of the pandemic. We are up to around \$325 billion. That is one thing. It certainly deserves a careful examination by Parliament, which is tasked with protecting the interests, in particular the financial interests, of Quebecers and Canadians. However, the government's unacceptable ethical behaviour is quite another thing. These are repeated and serious instances of misconduct, of which this is one example.

It seems that the Prime Minister wanted to help a friendly, albeit not-for-profit, organization, an organization that had such serious governance issues that the directors were resigning in droves, an organization that awarded \$250,000 in contracts to the Prime Minister's mother, some \$30,000 to his brother and tens of thousands of dollars in expenses to his wife. The former minister of finance benefited from \$41,000 in trips. In a sort of admission in which he did not want to admit that he was admitting anything, the Prime Minister threw his finance minister under the bus.

We agree, and we immediately said so to avoid having the exercise turn into a mudslinging contest. The Prime Minister's family is not politically active. We respect that. Now, we need to shed light on the matter. I am not saying that it was one rather than the other, but we immediately agreed with the principle because my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord also made a proposal similar to the one in this motion.

With dramatic flair, the Liberals finally decided that they were going to force a confidence vote. I will say right away that they have probably already finagled and squirrelled away the NDP's vote, but one has to keep up appearances. They will have to say that they acted correctly in the WE affair. Otherwise, there will be a general election. The entire exercise is ridiculous, because we do not believe it for a second.

However, if the Liberal government thinks it is a good time for it to call an election, we do not. If the Prime Minister thinks it is a good idea for strategic reasons, and if he is so afraid of what a more in-depth investigation will show, let him grow a spine, even if that is not his specialty, or let him go see his pal the Governor General and call an election. He should not try to blame his own strategic calculations on the legitimate opposition parties, whose members were elected just as the government's members were. A spine is a good thing to have. We can lend him one.

• (1120)

There is something truly distasteful about this challenge. The government is asking us to condone inexcusable behaviour, to say it was all okay. Otherwise, it will call an election. It wants to blackmail Parliament so that it can be cleared of all serious ethical misconduct. Quebecers are honest and intelligent people. My response to the government's blackmail is, "Don't even think it!"

We intended to vote with the Conservatives on this motion, and we will vote with the Conservatives. If the agreement between the Liberals and the NDP still stands after that, the Liberals will remain in power. If not, we will find ourselves in the middle of an election campaign. For those who do not think it is a good idea, that is the Liberals' problem. It is their choice, their fault, and they will have to bear the responsibility.

Business of Supply

Clearly the system does not work very well when it comes to ethics. The Prime Minister was given a trip worth about \$50,000 as a gift from his friend the Aga Khan. He broke the rules and intervened directly in a matter under the responsibility of the Department of Justice. Remember that we are in the age of "Liberalist, part A." In fact, today we have the "Liberalist, part B," which tell us that, if someone wants to be appointed a judge, they will be better off planting a Liberal Party sign on their lawn or writing a \$15 cheque to the Party than having a distinguished legal career. We have had enough. These decisions must be based on fair, relevant and helpful criteria that serve the public interest.

Obviously, there is the WE Charity. There is also—some may have forgotten this—the wage subsidy and the fact that the Liberal Party pocketed some \$800,000 earmarked for struggling businesses. The businesses are still struggling, and the Liberals still have not paid back the \$800,000. I must point out that the Conservatives have given back what they took. We in the Bloc Québécois never even applied for the subsidy, because we are funded by citizens who believe that what we do is fair, good and legitimate, including striving for independence.

Lastly, let us recall—we forget this all too often as well, although it is perhaps the most important example—that the spouse of the Prime Minister's chief of staff is vice-president of a company that was awarded an \$84-million contract. That is a lot, but, for reasons I cannot understand, it has not garnered much interest.

In any case, it directly implicates the Prime Minister or the PMO. The system is not working. We are faced with the classic Liberal arrogance, the belief that power belongs, almost by divine right, to the Liberals. It is not surprising that Canada is still hung up on the monarchy.

However, our system does not work that way. Power belongs to the electorate.

Therefore, we have the following situation. On at least five occasions, the Prime Minister or members of his immediate entourage made serious ethical mistakes. The Prime Minister gets away with it by shedding a tiny tear that would not even wet the corner of a tissue before moving on to something else. Life is good.

That makes no sense. We therefore thought that the Ethics Commissioner should be given some teeth. His decisions have to smart, they have to hurt. They have to give pause to those who lack the good sense to do the right thing for the right reason. If that means they must be punished by sending them to the corner and taking away their dessert, that is what we will do.

I do not wish to present legislation to Parliament, because we are not at that point, but I do have some food for thought. I present to the House for its considered judgment four ideas that we could debate quickly, as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that it is possible to act quickly when there is the will to do so.

Business of Supply

First, when the mistake is quantifiable and the individual is found to be at fault, the value of the mistake must be automatically repaid. For example, the Prime Minister was pleased that the finance minister repaid \$41,000, and yet, the Prime Minister owes \$50,000. Let's start with that.

If the Ethics Commissioner finds someone at fault, they can use their discretion and impose a fine of up to \$10,000. That will give pause.

• (1125)

The Ethics Commissioner could recommend fines above \$10,000 to Parliament, which is completely sovereign. Parliament would vote on whether to approve that fine. The Ethics Commissioner could also recommend that Parliament temporarily suspend the parliamentary privileges of any member found at fault. The higher the member is in the hierarchy, the higher the standard they are held to. The pyramid is currently reversed, and the highest level is the worst.

Lastly, immediate family members, such as children, spouses, parents, and siblings, would be considered the same as the member of Parliament, in terms of ethics. There would no longer be any distinction between the two. If this were enforced retroactively, it would obviously sting some people. That is not what I am asking for. I want us to think of this as a way to issue penalties that are serious enough that even the worst examples, and I will not name any since I am not allowed to under the Standing Orders, will have to think twice, even though that does not seem like a house specialty. If these rules had been around in 2015, I think the Prime Minister would have thought twice. If he wants to trigger an election, I think he should also think twice.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the leader of the Bloc Québécois is bang on. In Quebec there is a long memory. We all remember the sponsorship scandal and this idea of kickbacks, where favoured companies and favoured individuals seemed able to funnel money back either to individual Liberals or to the organization. It is an extremely dangerous situation right now. It is almost as if history is repeating itself.

Why is it so important that we move forward with this committee so that Parliament can get on with the business that Canadians would like to see parliamentarians do? Does he think this is a reason to have an election, or is it important that we get our work done?

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my esteemed colleague.

I will start with the last question.

We are in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of a second wave that may be followed by a third, and we are not sure what is coming after that. This is obviously not the best time to trigger an election.

I heard the bombastic but occasionally likeable leader of the government say that I wanted to trigger an election. No. We wanted to defend our position and condemn a throne speech that was an insult to Quebec for a thousand and one good reasons, rather than condone it by voting for it. This is not the best time, but the question is always the same: Which is the lesser of two evils? Is it better to allow His Majesty the Prime Minister to do whatever he wants, however he wants and whenever he wants, to the detriment and at the expense of Quebecers and Canadians, or is it better to say that he needs to be taught a lesson?

That is the fundamental question. If management improves afterwards, and if, supposing he is re-elected, someone is there to give him a rap on the knuckles and tell him that he can be replaced, that might not be a bad thing.

We need to examine the fundamental issues. On the issue of elections, I must say that I would prefer not to have one, but we may have no choice.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister was leader of the third party, a position the leader of the Bloc has now, he came up with the idea of proactive disclosure. I recall sitting right behind where the leader is right now when we were trying to get unanimous support for this. We never did get unanimous support, but the leader of the Liberal Party at the time, our Prime Minister, instructed all Liberal MPs to live by proactive disclosure with regard to members' office expenditures. It took a little while, but eventually the Conservatives came onside. They were shamed into coming onside.

If the member opposite has ideas that he believes Parliament would be better off to adopt, there are forums where they could be brought in. He could do what the leader of the Liberal Party did in the past and impose them upon his own respective caucus to see if they will grow, or he could raising them at a committee meeting.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, proactive disclosure is always a good thing in principle. However, when a governing party wants to vote against a motion aimed at investigating a matter and revealing the truth, it is clear that its members are not big fans of proactive disclosure.

More generally, if the government is against something ethics-related, it must be a good idea.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned a number of historical events of wrongdoing that we would want to investigate. They were not that long ago.

I wonder if the member agrees with me that the WE Charity scandal fades compared with the allegations of obstruction of justice in the SNC-Lavalin matter. Would we not want to investigate the efforts to block the RCMP investigation? It was before last year's election, but this is not that long ago.

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[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, some mornings, it takes a little longer to really wake up than others. This morning, it did not take long at all. When I read the Radio-Canada piece about liberalism, part two, I was instantly awake and furious. None of this makes one bit of sense. These people believe they can do whatever they want.

When Canada's Liberal Prime Minister is best compared to the former Liberal premier of Quebec, who probably sent post-it notes by express post, there is clearly an ethics problem. We have to get to the bottom of this. People have to be able to judge for themselves.

Is some sort of commission of inquiry really the best way to go? It would be problematic because the government has a minority. The clock is ticking, but there is not much time left. Such a commission's report would not come out until well after what looks like an impending election. Things need to happen faster.

• (1135)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I might ask the member for Beloeil—Chambly why his party made the odd decision, not once but twice, to go easy on the Liberals at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics by agreeing to adjourn. These are typical Bloc Québécois tactics.

If the Liberal government is okay with proroguing Parliament, obstructing the work of two parliamentary committees by filibustering all night long, and threatening to call an election, then probably the Liberal government is in more trouble than we thought with WE Charity.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised to hear the NDP member's concern for the Liberal government. The two parties are so close.

Our tactics are up to us. The difference between the NDP's tactics and ours is that we in the Bloc Québécois choose our own tactics. The New Democrats get theirs dictated by the other side of the House, but that is their choice.

I do not think it is because the government is in that much trouble. Someone is definitely in trouble, but it is not the government. It can save its skin by either using the NDP as a prop or saying that, if an election is called, it is the opposition parties' fault. It is not a bad strategic position to be in.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question.

After everything we have heard, could our leader please take a moment to explain to our future voters, with his usual eloquence and clear language, what is happening in the government in terms of public trust in relation to the pandemic?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague from Laurentides—Labelle for the question.

Again, that is a planted question that was not planted. I was not made aware of it in advance, which makes it more fun.

The government's strategy is more or less systematically the same. If someone triggers an election during the pandemic they are the bad guy and should be sanctioned and punished for triggering an election. The government keeps saying that we have to support everything it does even when it does not make sense, otherwise we will be responsible for triggering an election.

We are not going to back down. We will stand up for our values and our convictions. We will vote in favour of what is best for Quebec and we will vote against what is not good for Quebec. Shedding light on the WE Charity scandal is good for Quebec so we will vote in favour of the motion. Burying the WE Charity affair in a false analysis of COVID-19 spending would not be good for Quebec, so we are voting against that.

If the Liberals decide to make this a confidence vote, it's their neck on the line, not mine.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): I am very proud to be here to speak on behalf of the people of Timmins—James Bay.

We are currently in the midst of an unprecedented economic and health crisis. The pandemic has disrupted our economy. This morning, the Liberal government declared its intent to plunge Canada into an election to avoid questions about the WE Charity scandal and the Prime Minister's family. That is not acceptable. The government must stop shutting down committees and start collaborating with the other parties to explain the WE Charity scandal to Canadians. That is why I am here.

[English]

I would like to read a quote:

It has come to this, Mr. Speaker. In order for members of the House to do our jobs and make informed decisions...we need to pry scraps of relevant information out of the Conservatives' clenched fists and drag it out of them as they kick and scream at committee.

Who said that? It was our Prime Minister, in 2011. Remember that man? That man was open by default. He was the man who told the Canadian people that his would be the government of transparency. That was around the time the Prime Minister was the youth critic for the Liberal Party. He fessed up that while he was the youth critic, he had a side gig of charging massive amounts of money to speak to young people for his private business.

It was fascinating when the Prime Minister had to explain how much money he was making running his side business while acting as a member of Parliament. He listed about 28 public speaking events. I thought it was pretty extraordinary to get paid \$10,000 to talk to young people when every member of the House does it for free because we believe it is our job. However, we found out yesterday in the release of documents that, no, our Prime Minister did not speak 28 times and get paid for it; it was more like 128 times. We just found that out yesterday because the government was forced to turn over documents.

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We are here because of a series of decisions, made at the cabinet level by senior Liberal politicians, that threw off so much of the good work and goodwill in the first wave of the pandemic. I remember those first frightening days in March, when we did not know what was happening and our offices were dealing with Canadians who were trapped all over the world trying to get home. We were trying to answer questions on COVID, and every morning our Prime Minister stood out in front of his house and reassured the Canadian people. Every morning in my home we stopped what we were doing to listen to our Prime Minister speak. I was so proud that in Canada we were showing a unity of spirit.

I remember the press conference on April 8, when the Prime Minister responded to pressure that the New Democrats had been putting on him to deal with the crisis facing university students. Post-secondary students are not only facing massive levels of student debt from years of Liberal and Conservative indifference. They also have huge loans because of the fees they have to pay for university. They knew they had no work coming up this summer, so the ability of post-secondary students to continue their studies was a serious issue.

We heard from some Conservative media people too. They wondered: Are we going to pay students so they can sit in a hammock and smoke pot all summer? What disrespect for students, who are coming out of university with \$50,000 or \$100,000 of debt.

We pushed the Prime Minister for action, and on April 8 he said very clearly that he would have a plan to help university students. It was a promise, and we are going to get into what happened between April 8 and April 22, when the Prime Minister and his team decided that instead of helping university students across Canada, they would help their friends the Kielburgers. I say this because when the scandal broke and it became clear that the money that should have gone to help university students was being diverted to a group that had close financial ties to the Prime Minister's family, Canadians from coast to coast balked.

• (1140)

What did the Prime Minister do? He pulled that money. None of that money ever flowed. He took that money away from university students, who deserve better.

What we are being told today, after the Liberals prorogued and shut down our committees, after two weeks of blocking our work at the ethics and finance committees, is that the Liberals are ready to plunge this nation into an election. We are in the worst medical and economic crisis in a century. The second wave of this pandemic is already much more serious than the first. We have much more insecurity economically right now, yet this Prime Minister is willing to plunge the nation into the uncertainty of an election when we know that the vectors for the virus could easily be magnified a thousand times by polling and people going door to door, and having to do the jobs of a democratic election, but also leaving Canada without any leadership for the coming three months.

Why is that? It is to avoid giving answers about the WE scandal.

We are here this morning because the Conservatives put their offer on the table. We had gone to the government and said that we needed to get focused. The government cannot continue to avoid

questions on the WE scandal and the misspending that happened, and we need to get answers. We cannot have our committees prorogued. We cannot have them filibustered. We asked, in good faith, to set up a committee where we could deal with this so that the finance committee could do its work, House procedures could do its work and ethics could do its work. Boy oh boy, I would love to be sitting at the ethics committee and looking at issues like the importance of getting legislation on facial recognition technology.

We reached out to the Liberals and said, "Let us get a committee in place." The Liberals said they would get us a committee. It would be chaired by Liberals and dominated by Liberals. The Liberals would then get to do what they do at all the other committees they do not like: They would just monkey-wrench them and shut them down. That is not going to work.

Now the Conservatives have come forward with their anti-corruption motion. As always with the Conservatives, they cannot just come forward with a motion that is something that will pass the nod test with Canadians. Not only was it called the anti-corruption motion, and now they are having to walk that back, but the Conservatives had to start naming a bunch of people who have never actually been charged with corruption. Frank Baylis, a former member of Parliament, sat on the ethics committee with me. I know Frank. I do not know anything about Frank's business, and I do not know if Frank has done anything corrupt. That is something to be found out. However, I find it very uncomfortable when I see people's names being thrown around just because they happen to be Liberals. We can do better than that. The Conservatives have a motion on the table, and it is a very serious motion. We need to get this work done.

Of course, there is actually a third option, which the New Democrats have put forward. It is trying to get, between these two old-line parties, a sense of responsibility in the middle of a pandemic: that we have a committee that has the ability to call for documents. That is unlike the House leader, who said that calling for documents would put thousands of civil servants at risk in the middle of a pandemic. Wow. I have heard a lot of whoppers over the years in the House of Commons, but that is going to rank up there in my top 10 favourites: the right of parliamentarians to get documents is somehow putting not hundreds, but thousands, at risk. We are saying no: that another committee, if it is struck, has the right to get documents.

We agree that perhaps the Conservatives demanding that all the documents be turned over in 12 hours, or 15 or 20, is kind of ridiculous. A committee can decide what is reasonable. We also said that given the fact that we saw, under SNC-Lavalin, how the Liberal chair did such an extraordinary job of shutting it down and squashing it, we cannot trust a Liberal chair.

Now I can see that the Conservatives are very wary of our friend from Carleton who keeps taking over the chair at his own committee. They probably do not want that either. Therefore, let us have an opposition chair and let us vote on it. Let us vote on someone who all parties can agree would be a good, solid opposition chair. That way we would know that we could get the job done. That is about working together. That is the offer that is on the table.

In terms of the documents, we have made a number of suggestions. For example, at the ethics committee I put a motion of an amendment to my hon. colleague from Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. We said we understand the Prime Minister has drawn a line in the sand about his family, and the fact that the WE group was paying Margaret and Sacha Trudeau.

• (1145)

We know they got paid. There is no surprise there. We were told they were not paid. That was false. The WE group asked the Kielburgers if the Trudeau family was being paid and was told they were not being paid. We have to ask ourselves what was going on at WE Charity that the board of directors tried to find out whether Margaret and Sacha were being paid and was falsely told they were not being paid. We went from being told they were not being paid anything to being told they were paid an extraordinary amount of money. That is a key issue in terms of the overall question of the conflict of interest facing the Prime Minister, because my colleagues in the Liberal party have gone out of their way to try and read the Conflict of Interest Act to say that family members, such as a mother or brother, cannot be shown in any way under the laws of Canada to be relatives. That is quite the reading, because it is very clear in section 3, and the definitions of family and relatives, that they are relatives.

Why does that matter? Because under section 5 of the Conflict of Interest Act, it is up to the Prime Minister to keep his personal life in order so that he is not put into a conflict of interest.

I invite my colleagues to read the Trudeau 1 report. It was the family members' relations with the Aga Khan, not the Prime Minister's, that resulted in the Prime Minister being found guilty. The Prime Minister's familial connections to WE are very important.

Does this mean the Prime Minister knew what the family was making? I do not think so. I do not think we can make that leap, but what we could say is there is a very strong *prima facie* case that, once the Prime Minister became the Prime Minister of this nation, the WE group was extremely adept at insinuating itself within the Liberal ranks by hiring the mother and hiring the brother. The Kielburgers told us they were not being paid to do public speaking; they were being paid to do corporate events, which they call ancillary events. That is a serious issue, in the same way as the Kielburger group insinuated itself by inviting all kinds of key Liberal cabinet ministers to participate, and when the WE group was in trouble it called those same people who had spoken at its WE events and got the all-access pass.

Having said that, we know Margaret Trudeau and Sacha Trudeau were paid. To me, that is not the hill to die on. The government has released a whole bunch of documents about the payments already. We have that. Whether they got paid 27 times or 28 times is not relevant to me. What is relevant is the issue of lobbying, so let us put that aside. We said that at ethics. We were more than willing to say at ethics not to deal with the family, but with the Prime Minister. Then the Liberals talked the clock out, so I really do not know what their strategy is half the time, because we could have gotten this motion through.

The issue of documents is really important. My colleagues in the Conservatives are demanding documents and saying they do not

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have enough documents. We have 5,000 pages of documents. Our friend from Carleton came in, threw them all over the room and walked out. Five thousand pages of documents was so much that the Conservatives set up a website and asked the public to do crowdsourced reading of the documents for them.

How serious are the Conservatives? Either we are going to read these documents and take them seriously or we are not.

While the Conservatives threw the documents all over and stomped out and then asked for public help reading the documents, we sat down and read the documents. Those documents raised very serious questions, because they clearly contradicted the government line, where it threw the civil service under the bus time and time again. It is still throwing the civil service under the bus. It is trying to claim that it was the idea of the civil service: the non-partisan, professional civil service. The Minister of Youth said 23 times, in one hour at hearing, that the professional, non-partisan civil service came up with the WE idea. The Liberals said it was the professional, non-partisan civil service that blacked out these documents. That is not true. This was done in the PMO.

What do the documents show us? They show that it was not the civil service that came forward with this idea. This happened at an April 17 meeting with the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, the Kielburgers and WE's director of government relations, Ms. Sofia Marquez.

• (1150)

WE is not registered to lobby, but it has a director of government relations. In fact, it had more meetings with government officials than General Motors did. That is pretty wild for two guys who present themselves as young idealists from Thornhill. They were so busy with government relations that, on top of their director of government relations, they were going to hire a manager for government relations, and none of that was registered under the Lobbying Act.

Why is that important? It is because the Lobbying Act allows us to see the key meetings that are being held. It allows us to see where the insiders are moving, but the Kielburger group were such total insiders that they did not bother to register to lobby, because they had the key ministers on speed dial.

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They had the Minister for Diversity and Youth, who they had invited to come to one of their WE events, where she got to speak and was treated like royalty. When they were in financial free fall, they called her and had a special meeting on April 17. My Conservative colleague asked the minister at the finance committee, at our very first meeting on the WE scandal, if she had taken any meetings with anyone from WE prior to the decision by the government. She said that she never discussed the youth engagement proposal with anyone from WE. Naively, we thought she was telling the truth. We found out four days later she had held the April 17 meeting, so we brought her to the ethics committee and tried to get a straight answer. She said again that she never discussed the youth engagement proposal. That is because on April 17 the youth engagement proposal did not exist. It did not exist until April 22.

She said that she never talked about any of the issues around it, but that is not what we got from the documents from Craig Kielburger. That is not what we got from Sofia Marquez. Craig Kielburger wrote to the minister and said, “We appreciate your thoughtful offer to connect us with the relevant members of your ministry.... Over the weekend, our team has also been hard at work to adapt your suggestions for a second stream focused on a summer service opportunity.” That minister still has her seat at cabinet after the misrepresentation she made.

On the morning of April 19, two days after that meeting, Rachel Wernick, the civil servant we have been told came up with this idea and who has been blamed again and again by the Liberals, emailed Craig Kielburger for an urgent meeting because she had been told that this was the direction to go.

On April 20, senior policy officials in Bill Morneau's office were involved. There is a man who had one of the most powerful positions in the country. He never bothered to read the Conflict of Interest Act, and he wonders why he does not have a job today. I asked him if he had read the Conflict of Interest Act, as he had been found guilty, and he shrugged and said he was given a lot of documents. It is the failure of the Liberals to take the issue of conflict seriously that has gotten them into trouble.

We are here today as the Liberals have taken yet another step to avoid accountability. We have offered to work with them and have offered to lay out a committee, but this work will continue. This work will get done. If they obstruct us here, we will continue at the committees that we can control and in which we can use our leverage, because Canadians need an answer. What Canadians need, in terms of an answer, is better than the threat of the government to force an election for the Prime Minister to escape taking accountability.

• (1155)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is fairly well established that the public service made the recommendation to go with WE. The member has made a very specific allegation that the PMO, not a public civil servant, actually made the recommendation.

I am wondering if he would do us the favour of indicating to the House who in the PMO he actually believes gave the recommendation.

Does he have a name, or is it purely speculative?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, if my colleagues were not so afraid to hold committee meetings, they would get those answers. Being that the Liberals are not letting us sit, we are not getting to it.

I would go back to the minister that identified it, who set up those two meetings, who then set up the meetings with diversity, who set up the meetings with finance, who drove this all. Rachel Wernick, in one of the emails, said that at the end the decision is political, and if the minister was good with it, they were good with it.

My hon. colleague is standing up yet again to try to throw our civil service under the bus, over a scheme that would have diverted \$900 million to people who hired the Prime Minister's family, to a group that did election-style ads for the Prime Minister, that did not bother to register for lobbying, yet they got government contract after government contract.

If the member bothered to read any of the documents or bothered to have his people show up rather than block committee, he would know that we are getting close to the answers. I think that is why the Liberals are threatening an election now. It is because they know that this is coming back, again and again.

Finally, in the 5,000 pages of documents, there is not a single person who says, “Whoa, they have pictures of Margaret and Sacha in the promotion of the deal.” They were using the Prime Minister's family to get this \$900-million contract, and nobody at cabinet thought it was a problem.

• (1200)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague and I have been here for a very long time, well over 10 years. It is 15 years for me and I am assuming it is a little north of that—

Mr. Charlie Angus: It is 29.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: There we go. He was here somewhat before me. In that time, we have had some great exchanges in the House, and in that time, my colleague has actually earned himself the reputation of being a fighter of corruption, of being somebody who would stand up for the little people, somebody who would get to the bottom of issues.

He is the critic for ethics for his political party, and he would have been asked by his leadership team for advice on how the NDP would respond to this motion today.

What did the member tell his leader, what did his leader say back to him and what is the NDP going to do when it comes time to vote on the motion?

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Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I have great respect for my colleague. I always get really nervous when the Conservatives tell me how much they like me. I sort of feel like it is being invited to go down and have a picnic by the riverbank with the crocodiles, who are saying, "Come on down and sit with us. We have always thought you were a really decent guy." I have been there and done that, and I wear the scars.

I would tell my friend that there are three offers on the table. One of those offers is coming from us. We are going to see what the Liberals do. Right now, they are taking a dive. Stay tuned. If the Liberals are willing to work and get a committee, we are going to get that committee one way or another.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, one of the arguments made by the Liberals in response to this motion is that this is not the time to look into corruption because of the current pandemic. The government can cite the pandemic as the reason for the blockages at the border, immigration, Service Canada or the Canada Revenue Agency and so forth, but it is completely absurd to say that it is not the time to look into corruption because of the pandemic. Furthermore, the government has only itself to blame for getting embroiled in the WE Charity scandal.

I would like to know if my colleague agrees with me that it is time for the opposition to close ranks and that the proposal to create a special committee to study the issue and let the other committees do their usual work is a good solution.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, it is amazing. We come to committee, we sit there and the Liberals tell us how it is terrible we cannot get to work, but then they will not let us work. They are doing the same now. The Liberals are threatening an actual election over our need to get work done.

The reason this thing matters is that we are spending an unprecedented amount of money, and we will need to spend that money to get people through this. We have to be able to say to the Canadian people that this money was spent to help Canadians, to help students and small businesses, not to help friends of the Liberal Party.

I am very surprised my hon. colleagues in the Conservative Party did not mention David MacNaughton as part of the study. David MacNaughton was found guilty. Here is a top Liberal insider trying to bring Palantir, one of the creepiest companies on the planet, a massive data surveillance company, run by the extreme right. Oh, maybe that is why they did not want to deal with it, because Peter Thiel is an extreme right-wing guy. He got invited right into the deputy prime minister's office, though, because he was a Liberal.

We need to know decisions about the pandemic are not being done to help Liberal insiders. That is why this work must get done.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay will know, as a colleague of mine, that I have worked in the international development sector for over 20 years prior to being elected to the House. I have worked with the WE Charity, and I find it one of the most disgusting organizations I have worked with. It is the absolute

opposite of a good organization for international development or global citizenship.

While I was appalled to hear the Liberal government was working with the WE Charity, I am actually most appalled about where that \$912 million went that was supposed to support students. I have the University of Alberta and many post-secondary institutions in my riding and that money evaporated.

I would ask my esteemed colleague what the students and recent graduates in my riding are supposed to do now. Where did the \$912 million go? Where is the support for students?

● (1205)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, yes, my colleague has had a great deal of experience in the international community and there are many disturbing issues being raised. I know that an international group of charities and NGOs released a statement today about their questions regarding WE's involvement in Kenya. That is very troubling. I do not know if it is necessarily the role of Parliament to carry out that investigation. Ours is how the Liberals were going to give this money.

On the second part of my colleague's question, we have an unprecedented crisis facing university students, with their massive levels of debt and the uncertainty of universities reopening. The Prime Minister made that promise on April 8, by April 17 the Kielburgers were in meetings and by April 22, when it was announced, it was the WE plan. Once WE did not get what it wanted and the Prime Minister's group was not able to transfer that money, that money evaporated.

I am telling the Liberals to show some good faith and put that money back in. Tuition could be deferred this winter. What a message that would send to the young generation that is taking on so much debt at a time of uncertainty if the government were to invest in education, like the University of Alberta and Laurentian University in Sudbury. Students would actually be able to carry on with their studies. However, we are not hearing that from the government. We are hearing the government threaten to cause an election in order to evade the consequences of its actions.

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Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Sport), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have great admiration for the work that my colleagues across the floor have done in international development. I have done some myself as a former athlete ambassador for various organizations. I also have great admiration and respect for the member for Timmins—James Bay.

I just heard a really good idea: that we investigate how we can help students. With all of the things going on right now in Canada, whether it is everything going on in Nova Scotia with the Mi'kmaq and the lobster fisheries or other various first nations issues, I would ask if we should not be focused on ways to help Canadians and whether forming this committee and discussing these issues would help Canadians or if we should focus on some solutions for Canadians, young, old, everyone.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, it is that come to Jesus moment, where the Liberals ask if we can just help Canadians. Yes, we can help Canadians. What have we been doing in this House? He is saying let us help Canadians. The best way we help Canadians is to set this committee up so the other committees can do their work, and have the Prime Minister stop threatening an election.

If my colleague said, how about the government helps Canadians, promises not to threaten an election and actually shows that it cares about indigenous people, then, yes, let us do that. If it actually cares about students, it should transfer that \$900 million—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

We find ourselves here today addressing a persistent problem with these Liberals. I was elected in 2018 and my first committee assignment was on the justice committee. The expectation was that, with the agenda set for the spring session prior to an election, it would be a good opportunity for me to learn about how committees operate.

What we saw 10 days later was a story in *The Globe and Mail* that detailed how the Prime Minister, the Liberal Prime Minister, had interfered in the criminal prosecution of his friends at SNC-Lavalin. This of course led to a real lesson on how Liberals operate at committee and what the Liberals do with their majority at committee. We saw this. They would send in members to shut the committee down. Look, they fired their attorney general.

We heard that because it was 2015 things were going to be done differently. Canada had a female indigenous attorney general. She stood up, spoke truth to power and the Prime Minister kicked her out of caucus. We had Dr. Jane Philpott as Treasury Board president, who stood up and spoke truth to power. She saw that what was happening was wrong. What happened? He kicked her out of cabinet and kicked her out of caucus.

Accountability is not the strong suit of the government, to say the least, and we saw that. Before I was elected, we saw in “The

Trudeau Report” that the Prime Minister did not understand ethics laws. That is what we were led to believe. It was the first mistake. The second time was the “Trudeau II Report”, the second wave, if we will, of ethical law breaking by these Liberals.

We arrive in a pandemic after my second election, not even two years after I was first elected, and parliamentarians worked together to get results for Canadians in challenging times. We hear it over and over again that these are unprecedented times. It was very interesting to observe that. I have heard from veteran members that it was very unique to see that type of collaboration.

One of the first things the government did was try an unprecedented power grab. It wanted the ability to tax and spend without parliamentary oversight until December of 2021. That was the Liberals' goodwill. That was their working together. It was their team Canada approach. It is staggering the arrogance these Liberals demonstrated.

During the summer, we learned an organization that had paid half a million dollars to members of the Trudeau family was given a half-billion dollar contract to administer, by the Prime Minister, whose family members had benefited from that relationship. This is during the same summer we had the Prime Minister's chief of staff with questionable connections in the awarding of the emergency commercial rent assistance program. We had the awarding of a contract to build ventilators, ventilators that had no regulatory approval, but the manufacturer, the person who owned the company, was in the caucus room with these Liberals last year. It was a former Liberal MP.

Parliamentarians started to look at the awarding of this half-billion dollar contract. To be fair, originally it was announced that it was \$912 million. However, what happened seemed like a bit of scattershot because, as we learned in the investigation that followed, the Prime Minister was announcing programs that had just been put on his desk and the details had not been completely worked out. That was on April 22, but on April 21, the program had been written. Who wrote it? It was the WE organization that wrote it.

● (1210)

We will hear that it could only be administered by the WE organization. However, it could only be administered by it because it wrote it. The organization wrote a proposal that only it could complete.

When the proposal went to cabinet, what was included? Ultimately, it did need to be approved by the cabinet. It was accountable and responsible for the decision. Those decision-makers made their decision, complete with a picture book, and the picture book contained pictures of the Prime Minister's family. That was the compelling argument. It was not based on the organization's merits; it was based on who it knew. This is what we are seeing with the programs that are being awarded. It is the connections between these individuals and people in the halls of power. With the Liberals, it is not what they know, it is who they know.

Then questions started getting too intense and documents were ordered. On the eve of the release of these documents, the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament. It was a cover-up prorogation. The Prime Minister said, "When Parliament resumes in the fall there will be ample opportunities to continue to ask whatever questions committees or members want to continue to do."

We were led to believe it was not a cover-up. He said that we could ask any questions, that committees could do their work. Now we are back and the Liberals have taken every opportunity to filibuster those committees, and not just the ones asking about the scandals. They are filibustering the health committee, which is asking questions specifically about COVID-related measures. To be fair, these issues and scandals arose out of an abuse of power when we had these contracts being awarded to Liberal insiders.

Back in August, the Prime Minister said that we could ask whatever questions we wanted. We are in October now and what is he saying? He is saying that if we ask questions about corruption in the Prime Minister's Office or around the cabinet table, members will be met with filibusters. If the filibusters do not wear the opposition down, the Liberals will force Canadians into an election. That is their threat, that is their bluff. During the second wave of a pandemic, they will force Canadians into an election.

We are actually into the third wave, which is the third wave of Liberal corruption. We had that first report from the Ethics Commissioner which found the Prime Minister guilty of breaking ethics laws. The second report from the Ethics Commissioner found the Prime Minister guilty of breaking ethics laws. He is now under investigation for a third time.

Committees have ordered these documents. The Liberals will stop at nothing and literally force an election over not releasing these documents. That is very different from the open by default, sunshine is the best disinfectant and sunny ways Prime Minister we heard from just a few years ago.

Where is that open and accountable government document? Contrary to the promises we heard in 2015, it looks like the Liberals no longer believe that better is always possible. The official opposition, Canada's Conservatives, in concert with the other opposition parties of conscience will stand against Liberal corruption and will not collude with the government. None of us are calling for an election, and it says so in the motion. If discomfort is the ground the Liberals want to use to force an election, that is on their conscience.

We will vote our conscience. We will stand for what is right, we will stand for an accountable government and the Liberals can tell stories about years past and prime ministers long ago. I look for-

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ward to hearing about the sponsorship scandal and the Parliamentary Secretary to the government House leader's stance. We will get answers for Canadians. That is exactly what we promised to do.

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let us be very clear. For five years the sole purpose of the Conservative Party has been to attack Liberal cabinet ministers. The Conservatives have spared no cost and time of the House. They have done endless filibusters and have used privileges and adjourn motions. There are so many to name, and nothing has changed.

Even during a pandemic, when the priority of Canadians has been the health and well being of Canadians as a whole and our economy, the Conservatives are still focused on the same issue they were focused on five years ago. Nothing has changed. It is as if Stephen Harper is still their leader.

Does the member not agree that Canadians deserve an opposition that does more than one thing?

• (1220)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, the same question could be put to the member opposite. We get one thing from those Liberals. We will stop asking questions about corruption if the Liberals stop breaking the law. We have had multiple findings of ethical law-breaking by the front bench of the Liberals time and time again: forgotten French villas, clam scam, billionaire island. It is unbelievable the litany of scandals from the Liberals.

However, we can walk and chew gum at the same time. We can hold the Liberals to account for their ethical law-breaking and also deliver results for Canadians, and we will keep doing that.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, this Liberal government is sending us all kinds of mixed messages through the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

First, he tells us that we cannot do our job as members of Parliament to question the government and hold it accountable, because we need to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic is just an excuse to justify a string of conflicts of interest of epidemic proportions.

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The government does not seem to be able to do more than one thing. The amendment the Conservatives proposed today was proposed in the spirit of collaboration referenced by the parliamentary secretary. This amendment would remove the contentious term of “anti-corruption” and instead talk about a special committee on allegations of misuse of public funds by the government.

What does my Conservative colleague think the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has a problem with? He is completely against us doing our jobs here in the House and holding the executive to account.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, it is tough to say why the member for Winnipeg North persists that the only way to do things in the House is the Liberals' way. The government forgets that Canadians shortened its leash in 2019. They took away the Liberal majority for many of the issues I have highlighted today. Every time the Liberals do not get their way, they move closure, or they want unanimous consent or they need it done now, and no consultations. They write the throne speech and then call the opposition leaders for input. It is supreme arrogance, and this is a classic example of it.

It is time to remind the government that it does not have that majority anymore. Opposition parties are going to hold it to account. It is what Canadians expect.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the people who are suffering the most during the WE scandal are students, and that is abhorrent. It is a real slap in the face to students who are struggling.

Like the Liberal government, when the Conservatives were in power, they found themselves with many issues of conflict, for example, refusal to share budget information. The former Harper government refused to share their reasons for cuts and the impact of those cuts with Canada's independent budget officer, 170 times. They were found falsifying documents and reports about a former minister, Bev Oda. The list goes on and on. Liberals, Tories, same—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes the chance to answer.

A very brief answer please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, the member for Winnipeg Centre offered a very important example of contrast.

Members will recall the minister who the member referenced. I believe there was a massive scandal over a \$16 glass of orange juice. What happened? We do not see that member here anymore. I believe the prime minister at the time took some pretty decisive action. Now we have a situation, not about a \$16 glass of orange juice but about a half a billion dollar contract given to an organization that paid the Prime Minister's family half a million dollars. Let us talk about contrast.

• (1225)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, what a pleasure it is to be back in the House for regular

sittings. It is the first time since, I believe, March 12, so I am glad to be back here speaking on behalf of my constituents in central Alberta and the riding of Red Deer—Lacombe.

I want to thank my colleague who just spoke for the excellent work he is doing in holding the Liberal government to account. He has a very busy job as the ethics critic for the Liberal government, which means he is the busiest man in Canada. I want to thank him very much for the fine work he is doing. I know my colleagues will join me in showing him some appreciation.

My constituents are very frustrated on a number of fronts. They are frustrated with the Liberal government's policy on energy. My riding is much like that of Sarnia, Ontario. There is a large petrochemical installation in my riding. It was one of the last holdouts of good paying jobs in central Alberta, which is now under attack by the Liberal government. Those jobs now seem to be in jeopardy.

More important, my constituents are frustrated with the amount of unaccountable spending by the government. Billions of dollars have been rushed out the door. I cannot remember the last time the House sat and passed an actual budget.

These are unprecedented times. We all know, going back in the history books to 1995 and the previous Liberal government of Jean Chrétien, that when money is being spent in a big rush under the guise of an urgent matter, such as the sponsorship scandal then, the Liberals cannot not help themselves when it came to lining their own pockets. The amount of money back then pales in comparison to the amount of money being spent today.

One only has to look at the reason for this motion today to have an anti-corruption committee because of the amount of money that has gone out, with virtually no accountability. First, we needed to shut down the House because of the pandemic. Now the Liberals are keeping Canadians and Parliamentarians in the dark, not because it suits the health care interests of the country but because it suits their design of holding onto power desperately, so desperately, in fact, that they are willing to cause an election that nobody actually wants. They are willing to throw down that gauntlet, force an election on the Canadian public during a pandemic just to cover up the fact that they do not want to talk anymore or have anymore information uncovered about this WE scandal.

Why is this important? It is important on a number of fronts. One is that we need to have trust and confidence in our institutions. The primary institution that Canadians need to have trust in is Parliament. If parliamentarians are not able to do their jobs, if we are not able to get the information we need at committee, if we are not able to have the correct information to make decisions and recommendations, then we are not able to do our jobs. We need that confidence and ability to get that information.

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What have we seen so far? My colleague who just spoke said that we were in the third wave of Liberal corruption. I would suggest that we are in a wave pool. The waves just keep coming. The first one was cash for access, which was a very big deal. If people wanted to have influence with the government, all they had to do was go to a fundraiser. If it was a foreign government, all it had to do was to put a whole bunch of money into a foundation that happened to share the same last name as the Prime Minister and it could get what it wanted, so much so that the government had to change the rules. Because the Prime Minister was unable to follow his own rules, we had to change them so political entities could continue to do their business without the issue of cash for access or the perception of being able to buy one's way into the Liberal government's inner circle.

That was one of the first major issues the government had.

Then we had the trip to billionaire island, friends of the family. I remember that very well as the former chair of the ethics committee at the time. It was epic.

Four times, under four different counts, the Prime Minister is the very first prime minister in Canadian history to be charged under ethics laws.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Harper brought it in.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: My colleague said that Harper brought it in. Yes he did. He was wise. He knew that the Liberals would someday form government again and they could not help themselves, which is why we know about this. I thank Stephen Harper for that.

This was the beginning of the erosion of trust that Canadians have in the government. The Prime Minister broke the rules four times, but that alone was not enough.

• (1230)

Then we moved to the SNC-Lavalin affair, which is absolutely disturbing. I remember one of the low points in the last Parliament was the feeling of complete and utter disgust. The former attorney general, now an independent member of Parliament, an aboriginal woman with a good reputation who wanted to do the right thing, resisted at all measures and all counts the pressure she was put under by the public service doing the Prime Minister's bidding, by the Prime Minister himself, and by several in the Prime Minister's cabinet and their senior officials. This suggests that the Prime Minister was going to get his way, one way or another.

I guess that is pretty indicative of how this Prime Minister runs things, which is where we find ourselves today. He is going to get his way on this motion, one way or another. How someone does one thing is usually how they do all things, and we have seen this behaviour before. The Prime Minister has thrown down that gauntlet because he was going to get his way in SNC-Lavalin, and he is pretty sure he is going to get his way this time as well.

I am curious to see what the NDP will do when it comes time to vote. The New Democrats say that there are three options before the House, but the last time I checked we can vote yea or nay for a motion. Those are the only two options. I suppose they can abstain and run away, but we will see what the NDP does.

With the SNC-Lavalin affair, it was the first time in history that we had an eminently qualified woman of aboriginal descent, and she was absolutely treated like rubbish. She was cast out of not only her cabinet portfolio but also her caucus. Her reward was her voters in the last election, who sent a clear message, not only to the Liberal government but also to all parliamentarians, that the way we conduct ourselves and the way we comport ourselves matter. Ethics and integrity matter, which brings us to the present day and the WE scandal.

We know, because of the bits of information that we have been able to extract so far, that the government's message and narrative on this issue does not match the evidence we have. It does not match it at all. It is no coincidence whatsoever that the prorogation was timed immediately prior to the release of documents. By the way, the parliamentary law clerk was supposed to oversee the redaction according to the committee's request. However, because Parliament was prorogued, the government got to decide what was redacted in those documents. That is not a coincidence. That has cover-up written all over it. It is not the crime, but the cover-up that causes all the issues.

Instead of talking about the things that we ought to be talking about today, we, as the official opposition, find ourselves doing the work that is necessary to expose this corruption for Canadians, to get to the bottom of it and to send a message to Canadians that their tax dollars are going to be spent on the interests they have. Those dollars will not be spent on the interests of the Liberal Party, the Liberal Prime Minister or well-connected Liberal insiders, instead of being used to deal with other economic issues, health issues or first nations issues. There are all kinds of issues across this country. Many of them are manufactured, I would suggest, by the policies of the current government.

We should be talking about those issues, but there are 338 of us here in this House. There is not a problem at all with a dozen or so of us taking time out of our otherwise busy days and having one more committee to sit on to look into this corruption. Canadians deserve answers.

I am proud of our leader. I am proud of the team I am surrounded with here, and I am proud to stand up for all Canadians across this country to get to the bottom of this. I will be supporting this motion wholeheartedly.

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● (1235)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have listened to Conservatives speak on this motion, particularly the leader. The WE controversy is about a program. It is one of a multitude of programs that was proposed. In fact, the WE program does not exist. There was a recommendation by the public service for the government to accept the WE proposal. From what I understand and to the very best of my knowledge, I do not believe it continued at all, yet the Conservative Party wants to focus all the attention of the House on that issue.

I am wondering if the member can justify that. I know I would find it very difficult to justify the amount of energy and time that the official opposition is putting on this issue. I suggest it is about motives, and their motives have nothing to do—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, it would be nice if somebody else on the Liberal bench would ask me a question once in a while after I give a speech, but that is okay. I appreciate the member's intervention, such as it was.

I remember a movie that Leslie Nielsen was in. It was called *The Naked Gun*. He was trying to do crowd control after an explosion at a fireworks factory and his words to the camera and everybody facing him were, "Please disperse. Nothing to see here." Meanwhile, fireworks are going off everywhere in the background. This is exactly the problem we have with the Liberal government. If there is nothing to see here, what is there to fear from passing the motion?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, from the outset, since we arrived here almost a year ago, my colleagues and I have been making proposals.

The proposed committee will examine the situations that have occurred since the beginning of the pandemic. We will be able to learn valuable lessons and find some good solutions for all parliamentarians and parties from that.

I would like my colleague to talk about the lessons that the Conservatives would learn from this committee that we all want for the good of Quebecers and Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, I did not hear a question. It seems to me from the comments the leader of her party made that the Bloc Québécois will be supporting this motion because it is important. I know all parties in this House ought to be supporting this motion because we are parliamentarians. We are sent here to do this work. My job is to represent the people of central Alberta and her job is to represent the people in her riding in Quebec, but all Canadians pay taxes. All Canadians deserve answers as to where their tax dollars are being spent, and we deserve to be able to ask these questions.

However, more importantly, we deserve to have some answers. If the answers are not going to be found in the health committee, the

finance committee or the ethics committee, then we need to strike our own committee. It will be a committee with a specific mandate to order documents, and it will have the powers and authorities necessary to do it so we can get to the bottom of this and actually find out if there is nothing to see here once and for all.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to clarify a few things. It is not the same thing to say that what happened under the Conservatives with Bev Oda was just a \$16 orange juice. It was very clear that she lied, and the prime minister prorogued Parliament. That orange juice was a symbol of privilege that we see, whether it is of the Liberals or the Conservatives.

Why do the Conservatives believe that this committee needs to be chaired by an opposition member? The Liberals do not want a Conservative chair and the Conservatives do not want a Liberal chair. Could I propose that perhaps the member for Timmins—James Bay could chair the committee? We could actually get to work.

● (1240)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, when I asked the member for Timmins—James Bay whether he would even support this motion, he was equivocating on this. He was not even sure he would support the motion. It is pretty hard for me to stand here and say I am going to support the member for Timmins—James Bay to be the chair of the committee when he has not even committed to voting in favour of this motion.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

We see a debate take place today that necessitates some comments at the outset on the importance of democracy and the role of the official opposition within that democracy.

There is no democracy without a vibrant opposition. That much is true, particularly in the Westminster parliamentary tradition where the opposition, and especially the leader of the opposition, has an opportunity to engage directly with the government each day on matters of importance to the country. This is different from, for example, a presidential system where that direct engagement is less visible. It is one of the hallmarks of the parliamentary tradition that we have here in Canada and, of course, in Britain, where we borrowed the system from. I do not discount the importance of an official opposition. I do not discount the importance—

An hon. member: That is refreshing.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It is refreshing, and if we were to canvass the opinion of colleagues on this side of the House, my hon. colleague across the way would find that all of us feel the same way.

The opposition plays a very important role, and within that, opposition day motions play a very important role. This is especially the case during times of crisis. It is an opportunity for the opposition to have an entire day to raise matters that are meaningful, and to put forward ideas that actually matter and that have an impact on the direction of the country.

We are seized now, as a country, with COVID-19. It is important for us to think about the way forward and to engage in debate on that very important issue. It is the challenge and crisis of our time. Indeed, it is, without question, the biggest crisis of our time, and certainly the most important one we have faced as Canadians since World War II.

Sacrifices have been made by Canadians throughout the country. I think about the first wave in the spring. We all saw our constituents, and we all had those conversations. There were constituents who stayed home, who kept their distance from loved ones, and it has had a tremendous impact. We will tell our children, grandchildren and future generations about it when we get past this crisis, and we will get past it.

The virus did overcome us, but it did not defeat us. The economy has suffered its largest contraction since the 1930s, and unemployment has increased to levels we have not seen in our lifetimes. Those are the facts that we see on paper and the points we see recited in the business press and newspapers, on television and online. However, it has to be said that the challenges that have been endured and the sacrifices that have been made have been those of real, everyday people.

For individuals and businesses, I cannot properly put into words what they have gone through for their country. I talk to those individuals and business owners every day, and they have had enduring questions as we have passed through the first wave and are now in the midst of a second wave. It is important that the government continue to seize itself with these matters and with this large issue.

However, I am heartened by the fact that at least there is a blueprint, a very important and concrete one, which was established during the first wave, and that is the set of programs that have held the country up, both individuals and businesses. I am thinking about the Canada emergency response benefit, CERB, in particular, which has now transitioned to the Canada recovery benefit, CRB. I am thinking about the Canada emergency business account, CEBA, and the wage subsidy that has helped so many businesses.

We heard my hon. colleague for Winnipeg Centre talk about the CERB today. There were close to nine million Canadians who benefited from that lifeline, and that is a term I do not use lightly, because it was a lifeline for so many Canadians. It ensured they could still put food on the table and take care of their bills and other expenses. Of course, the government had to act, and it did so with measures like the CERB.

I have talked to countless business owners in my community who have benefited from the Canada emergency business account and, of course, a portion of that is forgivable.

• (1245)

CEBA was extremely important and was an idea that came in part from the work done at committees, committees that have an important role. I will discuss the role and potential of committees in a moment. Serving on the Standing Committee on Finance, as I do, is a tremendous honour. In the spring we had an opportunity to raise ideas directly to the then finance minister, the Prime Minister and members of cabinet on what was needed. CEBA was an idea that came out of that engagement, at least in part. Certainly the bu-

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reaucracy played an important role and has advised on this and helped to design programs, and its role cannot be understated.

The wage subsidy is a very successful program. I was thrilled to see in throne speech that the government decided to continue it well into 2021. Of course we await more details on that. We could be debating such matters, but unfortunately the opposition is seized with other issues.

I mentioned the public service's extraordinary work, particularly on the CERB and getting it out to Canadians in record speed. That needs to be underlined, along with all the other work it has done. I would be remiss, and I know all members, regardless of party affiliation, would agree, if I did not mention the work done in constituency offices by our incredible office staff. In my case it is Ryan Gauss, Josh Chadwick, Asiya Barakzai and Zheger Hassan who helped me in ways I will never forget in the spring during the crisis and now in the second wave. I know we all value our staff very much engaging with constituents and picking up those phone calls. There are record number of cases coming through our offices. In fact, in my office we have seen about a 350% increase in email and call volumes. I know other MPs will have similar stories to tell this House. It is something we have all seen. We continue to rely on our staff, who have been truly tremendous in this experience.

Have mistakes been made during the COVID-19 experience? Has the federal government made mistakes? It has made mistakes. How can one not make mistakes as a government when one is in the midst of an unprecedented crisis and flying the plane and building it at the same time, so to speak? The programs the government has put in place have never been seen before, programs like the CERB and all the other programs I mentioned. As one is moving at record speed, one is certainly going to make a mistake.

Is the WE Charity issue one of those mistakes? It is. I put that on the record before at the finance committee; other Liberal members have as well. The government has done well, but can the government do better?

What we see today is an opposition day motion that completely ignores the issues of the day. The Conservatives have presented a motion intended to paralyze the government at this most critical time. They proposed a committee that would serve their partisan interests, not the interests of Canadians. There is nothing wrong with reviewing spending. The government has proposed an idea that would lead to the creation of a committee that would do just that. It would review all COVID-19 spending in a non-partisan way. That is necessary. We do need that.

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However, what the Conservatives are pointing to is something quite different. They use the word “corruption”. I would caution my colleagues to be careful with the words they use. The word “corruption” implies something quite specific. It implies that members of the government are on the take and that there is some sort of agreement between members of the government and those who have been mentioned, whether it is with the WE Charity organizations and others, where payments are being received or something along those lines. Very nefarious actions are being pointed to that do not exist. Let us be careful with the words we use. I wonder if members would use the word “corruption” out of this chamber.

Of course the government is right to see this as a matter of confidence. We have seen the hypocrisy of the Conservatives when at the finance committee we could have looked at redacted documents and they turned down the idea of having public servants come to testify as to why documents were redacted. They did not want to hear from public servants.

It is time to return to the real work of Parliament. Let us have committees engage on matters of COVID-19, not some political theatre carried out by the Conservatives. We have so much work to do. We have legislation before this House on MAID, conversion therapy and sexual—

• (1250)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order.

The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was an interesting avoidance of the issue altogether from that member. He talked about health care workers and small business owners, as if they should be used as political cover for Liberal corruption.

When we use the word, we know exactly what it means. It is not a mistake when they design a program where a charity that has given hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Prime Minister's family gets half a billion dollars from the Government of Canada. It is not a mistake when Frank Baylis leaves this chamber as a Liberal member of Parliament and gets a multi-million dollar contract for ventilators. It is not a mistake when all this happens. It is corruption, as the Prime Minister has been found on multiple occasions to have breached the Ethics Code.

Does the member really consider those to be honest mistakes? Does he consider it to be an honest mistake that the WE Charity was chosen to create a program out of thin air and it just happened to be an organization that pumps the Prime Minister's tires and gives cash to his family?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned in my remarks, I do not dismiss the observation that the WE Charity issue was not handled well by the government. I do not dismiss that, but let us be very clear. When the member and his colleagues use words like “corruption”, it implies something very nefarious indeed. It implies that there is a formal agreement or informal agreement between organizations and individuals and government members where government members are on the take, as I said, receiving payment in return for political favour. That has not been estab-

lished, ever. I wonder if the hon. member and his colleagues would go out of this chamber and make that accusation. When they use words like “corruption”, they really have to consider what it is they are doing in this House. There is no substance to that accusation whatsoever. Yes, mistakes have been made. Corruption has not happened.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by the member opposite.

He spoke about the importance of a responsible opposition. Would a responsible opposition have turned a blind eye to the sponsorship scandal? I do not think so and I think that history has proven us right.

By creating this committee, we are acting responsibly because we are making it possible for the other committees to do their work while the special committee sheds light on a scandal that involves the Prime Minister.

Does my colleague opposite agree that we are able to chew gum and walk at the same time, as they say?

[English]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, of course we can do many things at once. At the top of the list ought to be work for Canadians on matters that they genuinely care about. I know in my own community, emails and phone calls on WE were in very small number and they stopped in the summer.

What Canadians care about is help for their families. They care about help for businesses. They want to know more details about what the government will do with the Canada emergency business account. They want to know more details about the Canada emergency wage subsidy. They want to know more details about rent and how the federal government will assist with rent.

The games being played by the opposition, and in particular the Conservatives on this, are tremendously disappointing and confined to the Ottawa bubble. Canadians care about their everyday lives.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Speaker, I really have to say that I find this shameful, what the Liberals are trying to do to cover up such a mess and using COVID-19 as an excuse to make sure they do not get caught with their hands in the cookie jar or misusing funds.

The hon. member stated that the motion today does not deal with the issues of the day. The Liberals might feel that, but on this side of the House we feel it is an issue, just like many Canadians are wondering why they are not being paid and yet all this money is being bailed out to the WE scandal. Even the Prime Minister has said he was not going to try to stop this when he prorogued government. He said that if the committees want to start up the investigation after Parliament returned that would be up to them, so that is what we are doing.

Does the member believe that threatening to call an election over trying to hide financial reports to parliamentarians is justified?

• (1255)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, I made it clear in my remarks earlier why I think the government is right to consider this a matter of confidence.

I would also add that the member's party, the Conservatives and the Bloc, at finance committee just a few days ago, stood in the way of Liberal members being in favour of having public servants come to the committee and explain why redactions on WE documents happened. They prevented that from going forward. We were open to learning more about redacted documents. We know that they are matter of confidence and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to follow my colleague's thoughtful remarks. I have had a certain amount of experience in this House, as members know. I have had the opportunity to observe opposition tactics over the years, some valid and some egregious. I would put this motion in the latter category.

I would describe this motion as a publicity stunt. What gave it away for me was the original title of the motion, which has since been changed in a kind of Conservative sleight of hand when they realized that maybe they had overstepped themselves a little. When I heard the title, it reminded me of how the Conservatives used to name bills in a previous Parliament. They would give bills sort of Orwellian names, intended to communicate for electoral purposes. I remember when the Conservatives brought in a bill that was really an exercise in voter suppression and called it the "Fair Elections Act." We know that the Conservatives like to engage in sloganeering, in how they name their bills and motions.

This is supposed to be Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. What is implied in the title of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition is the notion of constructive contribution and of constructive opposition, worthy of a Diefenbaker or a Stanfield or a Clark or, on our side, a John Turner, who recently passed.

This motion is profoundly disingenuous, because it really does not seek to scrutinize, broadly, the government policies and expenditures that have been implemented in response to the pandemic. Its intention is really to disrupt for some putative political gain, smack in the middle of the greatest crisis this country has faced since the Second World War. Canadians are not impressed.

Let us look at some of the basic facts about the WE controversy. My colleague just mentioned in his speech that there was no private financial interest in the agreement between the federal government and WE. There was merely a mutually shared goal of helping young people financially survive an unprecedented pandemic and build their careers through meaningful volunteerism.

What the opposition, which claims to be so transparent and noble, fails to tell Canadians is that the WE Charity is not permitted to turn a profit in its dealings with the government or with anyone else, and that is because it is a charity. To preserve its charity tax status, it has to operate as a non-profit organization.

The Conservatives, and, sadly, the NDP has done the same, have let people believe that this was a \$900-million contract for an orga-

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nization, when that in fact was not the case. The \$900 million was to be distributed on the ground amongst other organizations. The WE Charity was to be paid for administrative costs, which amounted to 5% of that amount of \$900 million, but saying it was to be 5% of \$900 million would not make many headlines. We know that is what the opposition is after here, headlines.

The Conservatives conveniently leave out the fact that the recommendation to use WE came from the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy had its reasons for recommending a third party and they seemed pretty obvious, namely it had capacity issues during a pandemic, when the energy, time and attention of public servants were highly focused on the task of designing and rolling out a series of unprecedented support measures in an unprecedented period of time, in an unprecedented health, social and economic crisis. Again, not the party of Diefenbaker, Stanfield or Clark.

Another reason why the bureaucracy was not equipped to do this particular job is that it simply did not have the organizational and digital infrastructure to mobilize Canadian youth quickly.

• (1300)

We know that the Prime Minister preferred using an existing government program and bureaucracy, the Canada Service Corps. That being said, this was by no means the first time the government had used third parties with robust established national networks to deliver support for Canadians. The United Way is one example. The Red Cross is another example. Food Banks Canada is a third example. Besides, one would think that the Conservatives, for ideological reasons, would welcome using third parties, because their refrain is that governments cannot do everything.

The government has proposed a constructive alternative to this misguided Conservative motion. We have proposed that the House appoint a special committee with the mandate to conduct hearings to examine and review all aspects of the government's spending in response to the pandemic. The committee would mirror the balance in committees now, which reflects the relative distribution of seats that Canadians voted for a year ago. The Conservative motion would single-handedly change the standard makeup of committees in this Parliament. Rather than have six members out of 12 for the government, it would reduce the government's representation to one-third of the members of the committee.

How did the Conservatives come up with this number? It boggles the mind. Why not two? Why not one? Why not leave government members off the committee altogether?

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The committee the government is proposing would conform to current party proportions, because that is how Canadians voted. The committee the government is proposing would have all the powers of standing committees and would free up all the other committees that the Conservatives are currently paralyzing in the midst of a pandemic. The government has also proactively suggested that the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Health and other ministers and senior officials would appear as witnesses from time to time, as the committee sees fit. The committee would also be given the mandate to take over responsibility for the issue of document redactions related to the July 7 motion currently before the finance committee. The committee would allow public servants the opportunity to explain their decisions, before trying to hold them in contempt.

A true fiscal Conservative would jump at the opportunity to create such a committee with such a wide-ranging mandate, but the Conservatives just want to let the opportunity go by and indulge in sloganeering, the lazy politician's pastime. Why are the Conservatives choosing this facile and empty road so often travelled by their party these days? It is because they do not have anything else to talk about. It is because the Conservatives do not have a credible climate plan that can serve, at the same time, to build a more resilient and sustainable economy. It is because the Conservatives do not have a child care plan to allow families, women in particular, to enter and stay in the workforce and contribute economically to this country. It is because the Conservatives do not have a plan for ensuring that our seniors are properly taken care of in long-term care facilities. It is because they do not have a housing plan. It is because they do not have a plan for the auto industry to transition to zero-emission vehicles.

The Conservatives just came out of yet another leadership contest. One would think they would have some ideas. What does one do as an empty policy shell? One plays a shell game. That is what we have here, unfortunately, but this is not the time for games or sleight of hand. People are suffering, businesses are hanging on and people are getting sick. The official opposition needs to start contributing something meaningful.

• (1305)

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, once upon a time, a member introduced a private member's bill in 2014 called the transparency act, which, among other things, called government documents public property. The same member in 2015 wrote an open letter to all Canadians, which said, among other things, "you expect us to...be honest, open, and sincere in our efforts to serve the public interest." The story in the *The Globe and Mail* was false. Who was this radical with these radical ideas of transparency? It was the member of Parliament for Papineau, the current Prime Minister and these gentlemen's leader.

How can they justify this embarrassing metamorphosis and the stunning hypocrisy of refusing to deliver documents and threatening an election, when their leader was so in favour of transparency a mere few years ago?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, the whole point of the committee the government is proposing is not only to have a wider mandate to allow the opposition to look into more issues, if they want to do the work, but also to provide the opportunity to

question public servants on how documents requested as a result of the motion of July 7 are delivered. It would be a prime opportunity, and I wish the hon. member would jump on it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, I think a more rational attitude is in order, because I am hearing words like "tactics" and "partisanship". Despite my colleague's indignant tone, I think that, as a lawmaker, he could help us shed light on this matter. All day, the Liberals have been telling us that we need to focus on dealing with the pandemic because that is what our constituents want. That is exactly the point of this motion: to let all the other standing committees ask the questions and do what needs to be done to deal with the crisis.

A special committee can most certainly examine the WE Charity scandal, so what is the problem? My colleague says that the term "anti-corruption" is insulting. Fine. This morning, the Conservatives suggested rewording it and creating a special committee on allegations of misuse of public funds.

Adjustments are already being made, and efforts are focused on collaborating with lawmakers first and foremost, not with supporters of the executive branch and the Prime Minister. In addition, the motion now specifies that this is not a vote of confidence, so it would not trigger an election if the government loses the vote. That would enable us to keep dealing with the pandemic, which is what all of our constituents want. What, then, is the problem?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, I would like to start by acknowledging that my hon. colleague is one of the least partisan members of the opposition. He and I served together on the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, and he has a habit of speaking out on matters of principle. I cannot accuse him of excessive partisanship.

At the same time, trying to convince Canadians that "tactics and partisanship" is not the motto of the opposition is a bit much. As everyone knows, that is how the parliamentary system works. I have been in opposition, and I know about the tactics and strategies.

There is nothing new about the Conservatives trying to test the boundaries. However, if they really have lost confidence, if Parliament really has lost confidence, if it does not believe this government is doing things right, if it does not believe in the solution that the government is proposing, namely an even bigger committee with a broader mandate, we do not know what else we can offer.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, at a time when we see the worst health and economic crisis, all Liberal actions have hit the heart of Canadians who are struggling, including those in my riding, where people are losing jobs and are even at risk of losing housing.

Why does the government continue to filibuster? Why does it not immediately stop withholding documents and release them so we can get on to the business of protecting Canadians?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, the committee the government is proposing would be a vehicle for all the kinds of things the member and other members of the House want, if they would put their tactics aside for this purpose.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

We are in the middle of a pandemic and Canada's economy has suffered more than most. In fact, the Canadian government has the biggest deficit in the G20. Out of 20 countries, it is the biggest deficit as a share of GDP. We have the highest unemployment rate in the G7, higher than the rate in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Germany and Japan. It is much higher, in fact. That is why I rise today: to implore the House to get back to the people's work.

The government has basically shut down the finance committee, which is necessary for responding to this economic calamity and Canada's poor economic performance, in order to cover up the release of blacked out WE scandal documents and to prevent questioning of government and other officials about the scandal. Not only did the Prime Minister shut down this place in August for over six weeks, during which Parliament was unable to do its work to fight for the Canadian economy and defend the lives and livelihoods of Canadians, but, when it came back here, it decided to cripple at least three parliamentary committees, namely health, ethics and finance, to prevent them from working on our pandemic response and repairing the enormous economic disadvantage that we face here in Canada.

Concerned with the destruction of small businesses, the loss of jobs and Canada's poor performance at the bottom of the pack, the Conservatives came forward with a non-partisan proposal that would take the WE scandal out of the finance committee and put it in a special stand-alone, investigative committee. Let finance do finance, let health do health and let this special committee examine this file. Let us get back to work for Canadians.

We expected that this would be a unanimous proposition given that the Prime Minister has claimed to be so concerned about the well-being of Canadians in this pandemic and economic shutdown. Instead, the Prime Minister has said the opposite. He said that if we investigate the WE scandal any further, he will bring down his own government and force an election in the middle of the second wave of a pandemic. Wow. By the way, he says he has nothing to hide. In other words, there is no secret, but Liberals are prepared to cause an election to prevent it from coming out. Nobody believes that. Thou doth protest too much, Prime Minister.

If he had nothing to hide, he would not have shut down Parliament in the first place. If there was nothing to hide, he would not be threatening to bring his government down today. If he did, we can only imagine what his campaign slogan would be: "Give me a majority so that no one can investigate me." That is effectively what he is asking for. In fact, what is ironic about his election threat is that he admits it has nothing to do with any policy agenda. He does not claim that there is some policy action for Canadians he would

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like to take but cannot because he is in a minority Parliament. He admits that he is able to do everything from a public policy point of view that he wants to do. It is just that he cannot tolerate the thought that one little committee might ask some inconvenient little questions about the affair that saw him and his family receive over half a million dollars from a group and then saw him intervene to give that same group a half a billion dollars.

All we want to do is ask a few little questions about that. We do not want to stand in the way of the government's policy responses. If they are meritorious, they will pass through the House of Commons. We do not want to stand in the way of a single, solitary parliamentary committee. Let them all do their work. Let us take this WE matter, which the Prime Minister finds so agonizingly distracting, and put it in a separate place, a safe space, where everyone can ask some direct questions and use the powers of Parliament to get some direct answers.

• (1315)

[*Translation*]

For some reason, the thought of being asked these questions sends the Prime Minister into a panic. The thought of the unredacted documents being made public is causing a crisis in the Liberal ranks. They are now threatening to call an election to prevent the truth from coming out.

That is not the behaviour of a Prime Minister who has nothing to hide. It is the behaviour of someone who has deep secrets and wants to stop the truth from coming out. He is prepared to shut down Parliament to stop the truth from coming out. Now he is prepared to call an election in the middle of the second wave of a pandemic just to bury the truth. That is the behaviour of a Prime Minister who has deep secrets to hide.

[*English*]

We can understand why he would be ashamed for all of this to be known. Here is a great social justice warrior who has gone around telling us how much he is concerned about the downtrodden. He tells us he is a big believer in redistributing wealth from those who have to those who have not. That is funny, because he has no problem taking money from charities, money that little kids donated with the expectation it would go to poor people in developing countries, and putting it into his own millionaire pocket.

His family are millionaires. There was an inheritance from his grandfather, who was a petroleum magnate. He made lots of money in the energy business and passed it down. We have a millionaire Prime Minister. One would think if he was such a social justice warrior, he would be giving money to charities and his family would be in a rush to hand that money out to those with less. No, he is the exact opposite of Robin Hood. He steals from the poor to give to the rich, especially to himself. Here again we have an example of that.

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Speaking of that, what kind of charity spends a half million dollars to pay an ultrarich and politically powerful family, or takes a multimillionaire who used to run a billion-dollar company on a \$41,000 all expenses paid vacation, when those little school kids thought they were raising pennies, quarters and loonies to help the world's less fortunate? Do members think any of them were told the money would be used to pay off the Prime Minister's millionaire family, or to take the multi-millionaire former finance minister and his family on luxurious vacations? Of course not.

This is not just an example of corruption but of gross personal hypocrisy. That is why the Prime Minister would prefer that we all just stop talking about it, and not just prefer. He is willing to shut down the function of government in the middle of a pandemic to force an end to this conversation. Where does that stop? Will it hereafter set a precedent that whenever a scandal gets too close to the Prime Minister he can simply put an end to Parliament and call an election, effectively banning opposition members from asking questions about how he used public funds to reimburse those who have paid his family? Is that the precedent we now set?

Are we really going to devolve to a point where a prime minister is a king and he slams his fist, says he has heard enough, wants no more questions, wants all investigations to cease and if they do not he will bring the whole place tumbling down? That is the precedent the Prime Minister seeks to create, but we will not be deterred. We were elected to hold the government to account, and we will do exactly that.

We will get to the bottom of this scandal. We will further propose key measures to ensure that no prime minister is able to enrich himself at the public expense the way the current Prime Minister has, and that accountability is once again the law of the land.

● (1320)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, in pursuing this matter, as a member of the opposition, I certainly agree that we want to get to the bottom of matters that are being covered up, but this motion smacks of the flavour of the day with the WE Charity scandal. I am much more concerned with the obstruction of justice in the matter of the SNC-Lavalin question, in which our former minister of justice was pushed to do things that were potentially an obstruction of justice. That does require a deeper investigation.

Does the hon. member for Carleton not agree with me that it would be more impressive if the official opposition stuck to matters that were potentially criminal, as opposed to those that seem to be chasing headlines?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, the member puts me in a very difficult dilemma: Which scandal do we choose from?

We had an obstruction of justice case where the Liberals threw the attorney general out because she would not help a corporate criminal get off charges. She had the courage to stand her ground and take that political demotion in order to preserve her principles. Yes, I do believe that it is a legitimate matter, and I ask other Liberal members to have the courage of the former attorney general.

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,

Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed my hon. colleague's speech, and I enjoyed the answer he just gave the House even more.

The Liberals are accusing us of partisanship, but what I am seeing is an opposition that is able to work together to ensure that a motion is acceptable to everyone and that we shed light on something that must be done. If we had not done the work on the sponsorship scandal, we never would have found out what was going on. Luckily, we did do the work. The same goes for the scandals under the Harper government and all the governments that have come through this House.

My question for my hon. colleague is the following. At the end of the day, does he believe that all the opposition parties will vote in favour of this motion?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

First, I would merely like to say that I was quoting a poem by Henry Longfellow. I did not write it myself. I want to be honest and cite the author.

With respect to the motion, I am certain that all opposition members who support government accountability will vote "yes", but, if there are any opposition members who support corruption and want to form a de facto coalition, I imagine that they will vote "no".

I find it interesting that the member for Timmins—James Bay is still in the House of Commons boasting that he wants to hold the government to account. Rumour has it that the member will be voting for corruption and cover-ups. I find that very ironic.

● (1325)

[English]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Sport), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am constantly inspired by my friendly colleague in the House, because, honestly, his humour and theatrics are truly inspiring. If I am here as long as he has been, I hope that I can emulate his theatrics in the House effectively.

Since we are walking down the path of history, I also have some prose in mind: He who has no sin should cast the first stone.

I was not in the House and, frankly, I was not paying attention to politics, but I do recall a time when there was a certain vanity video published by public servants, a misuse of public funds. Actually, one of the reasons I got involved in politics was that the former administration had a slew of allegations with regard to that, including being the only PM to be found in contempt of Parliament.

I do not want to be found in contempt of Parliament so I will not go on much longer, but I would ask my friendly colleague opposite from Carleton if he thinks we have spent too much helping Canadians over the last eight or nine months at the most difficult time in the history of the world, and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, the member was cut off before he could ask his question. He asked where we could have spent less money. To start, I would not have given \$200 million to a casino chain. There is an obvious answer.

I thank the member for his kind words about theatrics. The whole world is a stage, as Shakespeare said. His role on this stage is to defend the Crown in its crimes against the people, and here he is.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak in strong support of a motion put forward by the official opposition to establish a special committee to look into questionable COVID spending on the part of the Liberal government.

In a lot of ways, this should be a routine matter. This is hardly unprecedented in terms of establishing a special committee. There was, after all, the Accountability Act committee. In this Parliament, there is the Canada-China committee. In the last Parliament, I served as the vice-chair of the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying. These are all committees that were established to look specifically at certain issues.

Here we have questions about the misuse and abuse of taxpayers' dollars on the part of the government. We have multiple questions on conflicts of interest. We have questions of corruption going to the highest levels in the government, all the way to the PMO.

One would think that, in the interest of transparency and accountability, the government would be eager for such a committee to get to work. As my colleague, the member for Carleton stated, if the government has nothing to hide, then let us proceed. We have a Prime Minister who has famously said that sunshine is the best disinfectant. Why would the Prime Minister not want to let the sun shine in?

Let me just say that at the top of the list is the WE scandal. It started back in late June when it was discovered that an organization called the WE organization had received a half a billion dollar, sole-source contribution agreement. It was known at that time that there were links between the Prime Minister and his wife, and the Kielburger brothers.

The Prime Minister, however, said there was nothing to see. He said he had not benefited from the WE organization. His wife had a podcast, but that was all. It turns out that was not true.

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About two weeks later it was revealed that the Prime Minister's brother, mother and spouse had received more than half a million dollars in fees and expenses from none other than the WE organization. The Prime Minister said that he had no choice, that it was the civil service that recommended the WE organization receive this half-a-billion-dollar, sole-source contribution agreement. That turned out not to be true.

Indeed, the more we learn, the more questions arise. For a Prime Minister who said there was no political interference and no political direction, we learned that in addition to the Kielburgers just by coincidence enriching the Prime Minister's family, there had been multiple communications between the Kielburgers and the former minister of finance in the way of three emails and a telephone conversation.

● (1330)

We learned that there were multiple communications between the Kielburgers and officials in former finance minister Bill Morneau's office. Indeed, Michelle Kovacevic, a senior finance official, noted that the PMO was weighing in and that the Kielburgers and the finance minister were besties. However, the Prime Minister said that there was no political interference and he knew nothing. However, as the evidence mounted, the more and more it became clear that the Prime Minister's words were not worth the paper they were written on. The fact is that there was political direction. We know that.

Then we ask why there would be political direction to an organization that had never administered such a program before, that did not have the capacity to administer such a program before, that was in chaos at the time in terms of firing staff and the chair of its board and being in breach of its banking covenants. For an organization that was seemingly the only organization that could possibly administer this program, it is rather interesting that an organization with that kind of a record, which should have been at the bottom of the list, went to the top of the list.

The simple explanation is that there was a quid pro quo. The WE organization benefited the Prime Minister's family and in return it received sole-sourced contracts with the federal government. There were at least five such sole-sourced contracts prior to the big enchilada of the half-a-billion-dollar contribution agreement. That alarmed Canadians, and rightfully so. It raised a lot of questions.

I happened to serve on the finance committee with my colleague, the member for Carleton, who ably led the committee for the official opposition as we sought answers. In the course of those hearings, the government agreed to produce relevant documents. Then what happened? On the very day that 5,000 pages of documents were produced, the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament. The day that the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament was none other than the day prior to which all of these speaking fee documents were to be provided to the ethics committee.

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For a government that talks so much about caring for Canadians, about being so preoccupied with addressing the pandemic, the record of the government has been to obstruct, filibuster, shut down Parliament and now even to threaten an election to cover up its own corruption and it is prepared to do so even at the expense of the health, safety and economic vitality of Canadians during this unprecedented crisis. It is an absolute disgrace.

Canadians deserve answers. We need to follow the evidence and that begins by passing this motion.

• (1335)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member opposite served on the assistance in dying joint committee. I had the honour of serving on that committee as well. It was an example of the kind of collaborative work we were able to do in that Parliament. Now we find ourselves having to deal with the issue of medical assistance in dying again, ensuring that it conforms constitutionally with the recent court decision.

My hon. colleague went on at length about how disappointed and disturbed he was with the actions of this government. Does the member opposite and his party have confidence in this government and if not, why do they not want an election?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, I first want to acknowledge my friend, the member for Châteauguay—Lacolle. I certainly did appreciate working with her in the last Parliament on the special joint committee.

I do not think it could be said better than the way it was put by the hon. member for Carleton. Let the finance committee, the health committee and the justice committee do their work. We are about to undertake hearings with respect to the physician-assisted dying bill, which is expected to be passed by this Parliament.

However, let the special joint committee follow the evidence to get answers for Canadians, answers that Canadians deserve with respect to hundreds of millions of dollars that have gone out the door, that have raised serious questions about conflicts of interest, corruption and the general incompetence of the government.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Madam Speaker, my Conservative colleague is absolutely right.

The role of all members of the House is first and foremost to challenge the government, not to defend the Prime Minister at all costs. The role of a parliamentarian is to ask the government questions and to hold it to account. I agree with him—

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I cannot hear the translation. If we could get him to start over again, that would be great.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Could we check translation and ensure it is working?

[Translation]

The interpretation is working now.

The hon. member for Montcalm may continue.

• (1340)

Mr. Luc Thériault: Madam Speaker, I will try to repeat what I said.

I was saying that my colleague is right. A parliamentarian's primary role is not to defend the Prime Minister, but to hold the government accountable. Regardless of our political persuasion, our duty as parliamentarians is to hold the government to account. My colleague is right, and that is what we are debating today.

This opposition day, we are debating whether to create a special committee to examine a scandal, which should already be a given. We have to spend time on this here, when this is something the committees could look into and we have a pandemic to manage.

Could my colleague tell me why he thinks the other side of the House is calling this special committee a partisan tactic, when creating this committee is fully warranted as part of our role as parliamentarians?

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, the member would have to ask the government that question. This is really nothing more than about accountability. It is also about the Prime Minister keeping his word.

When the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament, he said that there would be plenty of opportunity to resume hearings for this issue of WE and other government spending to be taken up. When we on this side of the House, and all opposition parties, proceeded to do our jobs by seeking to follow the evidence, we saw three parliamentary committees hijacked. Now the government is trying to hold the House at ransom by threatening an election.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the questions I have with this is the fact that the Conservatives have put forward a motion to establish a new committee. Could the member talk a bit about how he thinks this committee could work any better, considering that the Liberals have time and again blocked committees already? How would this committee be any different? How would we have answers and not get blocked by the Liberals again?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, very simply, it would start with the co-operation of the NDP, which we have not always seen. It is important that we proceed to get answers and if the government wants to continue to block that committee, then it certainly reflects upon it and Canadians can judge for themselves.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge.

I join the debate today with a certain amount of disappointment that the official opposition is choosing to use today's motion, not to discuss the issues that matter to Canadians during this pandemic but instead to continue a partisan and unnecessary attack on the government. Those members could be using today's debate to promote an issue that would have a real impact on Canadians, but instead they have chosen an unfortunate and confrontational approach that is out of touch with the needs of Canadians.

Unlike the Conservative Party, our government remains focused on the issues that are affecting Canadians across the country, irrespective of their political leanings, just as we have since the beginning of this pandemic. We hope that in the future we will see more of the collaborative approach from opposition parties to adopting and improving measures that will have a clear benefit for Canadians, similar to what we as a Parliament were able to accomplish early during the pandemic.

Canadians today are facing a second wave of COVID-19 and that leaves people worrying about their jobs, the safety of their families and friends, and even just their day-to-day lives. Responding to those needs should be the focus for us as Parliamentarians to support them in their time of need. To that end, I would like to take my time today to look at some of the measures our government introduced to ensure the safety and continued prosperity of Canadians.

When the pandemic first came to Canadian shores, our government worked tirelessly to ensure that Canadians trapped abroad were able to return to the country. I wonder if members recall what those early days and weeks were like, when citizens in my riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle, and I know across the country, had been travelling across various parts of the world.

In our case, a group of school children were in Honduras when the pandemic hit. Lockdowns were happening and countries were closing their borders. We had to work urgently to get those young people back as well as many other travellers. I heard members of other parties say how much they appreciated the work of Global Affairs, the public servants, extra staff and call centres in getting Canadians back safely.

We worked with airlines and foreign governments to find ways to get Canadians home from far-flung regions around the world. It was a challenging and difficult process, but we were able to get the job done with the support of commercial airlines and partners.

In doing so, we had to ensure the safety of Canadians at home and required that those entering Canada had to self-isolate for 14 days upon their return. In the early days of this pandemic, people were wondering if that was necessary. It absolutely was. Today, it is a matter of course. It is well accepted by Canadians in the interest of public health. This policy remains important to this day as we attempt to flatten the curve of the second wave.

Along those same lines, we have continued to follow the best guidance of our doctors and scientists to protect Canadians, and I emphasize that fact. This is not a political or partisan point of view. This meant making some difficult choices along with our provincial and territorial partners, choices that would make it difficult for many Canadians to earn a living, making it a struggle to pay for their groceries, rent and everyday needs through no fault of their

own. I say these were choices, but in a sense they were the right things to do.

Having made the difficult but clearly necessary decisions to protect Canadians, we had to implement quick, agile policy to support those who would be most affected.

● (1345)

[Translation]

Knowing full well that the health of Canadians was at stake, our government had to find innovative ways to help all those who were affected. In March, we introduced the Canada emergency response benefit, the CERB. This was unprecedented.

As I said, earlier, Canadians needed to replace the income they had lost through no fault of their own. Through this benefit, Canadians who lost their source of income because of the pandemic were able to receive up to \$2,000 per month. I know that people in my riding really appreciated that. It meant that ordinary Canadians were able to maintain their purchasing power and keep the economy running at a basic minimum level.

Never before has the government reacted so quickly by implementing this type of program to guarantee that all Canadians received the help that they so desperately needed.

The CERB was essential for those who had lost their jobs, those who had to self-isolate and those who had to care for someone with COVID-19. Every day, my riding office received calls and emails from people who were affected not only by the loss of their job, but also by having to keep their children at home or by the illness itself. This financial support was critical.

We also recognized that the pandemic was having a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups in our society. We announced several measures to help the most vulnerable Canadians cope with the health and socio-economic effects of the pandemic, measures such as support for people experiencing homelessness and for women and children facing violence.

Kids Help Phone experienced a dramatic surge in demand, so we increased our support for that organization. We invested millions of dollars in food banks and other organizations to improve access to food for Canadians in need. In Châteauguay, Saint-Rémi and Mercier in my riding, people were very grateful for that. All these investments gave community organizations the support they needed to provide essential services to vulnerable and needy Canadians.

Together with the provinces and territories, we also announced up to \$3 billion to top up the wages of low-income essential workers. These people kept going to work every morning to make sure their neighbours, neighbourhoods and communities could get everything they needed. They showed up for work every day despite the risks associated with COVID-19, and Canadians were able to count on them.

Business of Supply

I could speak for another 10 minutes about all the programs we have brought in, but I would just like to mention a few. The Canada emergency wage subsidy was created to allow businesses to retain their employees. The deferral of GST payments essentially amounted to an interest-free short-term loan. We also made close to \$25 billion available to banking institutions to provide loans to small businesses in need. Finally, we launched a loan guarantee program for SMEs.

• (1350)

[English]

We announced early plans to support Canadian businesses as they scaled up production and retooled their manufacturing to develop made-in-Canada products that would fight against COVID-19. I would like to congratulate all those businesses for the good work they did right from the beginning, including those in my riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle, where farmers, manufacturers and transport companies stepped up the challenge.

The Conservatives are clearly deciding to put themselves before Canadians. This is a cheap political move. This motion is intended to paralyze the government and I do not agree with it at all.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member's statement really did not cover any of what Conservatives want to look at with a special committee. She is making the accusation that Parliament cannot chew gum and walk at the same time, that we cannot actually go about the business of governing as well as holding the government to account and making sure all the documentation related to the WE scandal comes to light.

We talked about Frank Baylis, a former Liberal MP, whose company received a sole-source contract. We know that the government used national security designations to hide the details of that contract.

Canadians have a right to know how their taxpayer money is being spent and whether it is being used to benefit Liberal insiders. Why will the Liberals not let the sun shine in? What else are they trying to hide?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question because it allows me to say exactly why I do not like this motion. The motion is trying to stop the government from doing its work and delivering the help that Canadians need. Its intention is to paralyze government work. The opposition is condemning public servants without allowing them to explain how they applied the law with respect to the redaction of the documents. We cannot let our committees turn into partisan tools aimed at forcing private citizens to release personal financial information. Where does this end?

I can go on further, and I am sure I will have the opportunity to do so.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is fascinating. We want to know what members think about the motion. Hon. members get 10 minutes to tell us what they think of the motion. That is why we are here today. The hon. member spent nine and a half minutes on the government's so-called

successes, when the opposition parties contributed to all the proposals adopted by the House. At the very end, the hon. member spent 30 seconds talking about the motion. This is just another attempt at avoiding the issue.

I would like her to explain how it would paralyze the government if we let all the other committees deal with their business and simply create a special committee to deal with the WE scandal. I want to know how this would paralyze the government.

• (1355)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, I thank the opposition member once again for his question.

I am only talking about the motion now because I wanted to use my time to talk about what matters to my constituents, and that is the work we are doing to fight the pandemic.

With respect to the committees, the motion will overwhelm the public service with unreasonable requests. They will have just 24 hours to produce documents, not counting what they manage to provide to committees. That is what I mean by paralyzing committees. This shows absolutely no respect for the work we do here.

[English]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to follow up on comments that have been made by our colleague now and the member for Winnipeg North, who have indicated that we are acting in a partisan way on this floor and do not represent Canadians. I would like the member to understand that every person on this side of the floor was voted here. We had the majority of votes in this country in the official opposition. Our fellow opposition members are also standing together in unity on this issue, we are certainly hoping and praying today.

The question for the member is this. Why does it become a partisan issue for the member when she does not want to deal with the fact that her government is out of line and is busted?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, I fully appreciate that every member in this House represents the constituencies that brought him or her here, which is why I call upon all members to work in a collaborative way. That is what Canadians expect of us now and what the provinces, territories, municipalities and organizations from every sector have done.

I would throw this question over to the member. I would like to know if the members and their parties have confidence in this government and if not, why they do not want to go into an election.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is great to see so many of my colleagues this afternoon, just before question period.

I would like to start my remarks before we stop for question period by saying that across this country, Canadians and their families continue to be impacted by COVID-19. We continue to see people unfortunately pass away due to COVID-19. The efforts by our government and the efforts by all our colleagues to provide feedback on how we can help Canadians in this very serious period of time, the most unique and extraordinary period of time that the world has gone through in many decades, should be the focus of efforts of our government, and they are. Those should be the focus of efforts of all colleagues across the House that we sit in, whether we are virtually, in our ridings, or back in Ottawa in the House of Commons.

Today, it is great to rise to speak to today's debate. I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

While the Conservatives focus on playing political games, our government continues to focus on the well-being of all Canadians, including those in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge. Rather than focusing on how the government and Parliament can work together to best support Canadians, the Leader of the Opposition put forward a blatantly partisan proposal, one, to me, that is not constructive in how we help small businesses, how we help workers who continue to be impacted by COVID-19; and how we continue to restart and regain momentum in our economy. We know, prior to COVID-19, we had seen the lowest unemployment rates in 40 years with over a million new jobs created and hundreds of thousands of individuals, including tens of thousands of children, lifted out of poverty.

The main objective of this motion is to paralyze the government at a time when the entire Government of Canada is focused on keeping Canadians safe and healthy. Simply—

• (1400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am going to interrupt the member. He will have eight minutes to finish his speech after question period.

[Translation]

We will now proceed to statements by members. The hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

BLACK ADVOCACY

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians have heard us say it before: Diversity is our strength. Last week in my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville, we celebrated Black history and the Black community. We were joined by the descendants of brave men and women who fled slavery through the underground railroad.

I am proud to represent passionate and tireless advocates who have worked to preserve these stories and valuable parts of our history: people like Dr. Bryan Walls and Anna Davis Walls, curators of the Underground Railroad Museum; Abby Watkins-Lewis, a lawyer and professor, Dave Watkins, a youth counsellor, teacher

and artist, and their good friend and fellow educator, John Solarski, who together founded and co-ordinated the African Diaspora Youth Conference; Peel Region's police chief, Nishan Duraipappah, and his constable Korissa Williams; City of Mississauga community development co-ordinator Orville Edwards and councillor Chris Fonseca. They are all leaders and positive change agents.

Our government has taken measures to eliminate systemic discrimination in Canada, because we know better is always possible.

* * *

GRANT MOFFATT

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, this summer Westman's residents lost one of our finest with the passing of Grant Moffatt. I knew Grant almost my entire life. We attended the University of Manitoba together as young farmers. He was a mentor to many and a friend to all. Grant loved his family and his community, and there is so much I could say about the man, but the one thing that stands out was his passion for his beloved Southwest Cougars hockey team, based in Souris.

For nearly 30 years he had been involved with the club and was the team's president and general manager. For many, they have only known the Cougars with Grant at the helm, and countless young hockey players and their families have benefited from his leadership. I want to thank his wife Connie and their two children, Todd and Pam, for sharing him with the rest of us.

May he rest in peace.

* * *

[Translation]

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Madam Speaker, October 10 marked World Mental Health Day, although the struggle for mental health is not limited to a single day.

[English]

This is especially true this year. In these times of pandemic, confinement and uncertainty, more people are at risk of suffering from a mental health problem.

[Translation]

To those who are struggling, know that you are not alone. Talk to your loved ones and make use of community supports. For example, the government has created the wellness together Canada portal, which has already helped 463,000 Canadians.

Statements by Members

Back home in Sherbrooke, we have some excellent organizations, like La Cordée, which are there for anyone who needs someone to listen. There is also the Association des proches de personnes atteintes de maladie mentale, a vital organization I have been very involved with that supports the loved ones of people with mental illness every single day.

Help is within reach. Speak up and do not wait until it is too late.

* * *

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, for the umpteenth time, dairy farmers called on the government to grant a simple request: that it keep its word.

We ask farmers to keep us fed, so the least we can do is support them.

The government needs to show them a modicum of respect, since they have been sacrificed in recent trade agreements. Mr. Speaker, a modicum of respect would be for the government to keep the promise it made in the throne speech.

Dairy farmers were not the only ones hung out to dry. Poultry and egg producers are still waiting for programs to be announced, more than a year after the amounts were set. Processors have been living in uncertainty and do not seem to be on the government's radar.

I am simply asking that the minister follow through on the commitments made. These people deserve our respect.

When will the government do something?

* * *

[English]

SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to acknowledge Small Business Week and recognize the incredible small business owners in my riding of Richmond Hill.

The pandemic has hurt our small businesses the hardest, and owners have shown incredible resilience by continuing to serve their communities. I want to highlight the effort of Aneal Swaratsingh, owner of Aneal's Taste of the Islands: a Caribbean restaurant in the heart of Richmond Hill. Aneal's restaurant has faced its challenges during the pandemic. Still, he has donated meals to the local peer support centre and is consistently serving the most vulnerable in our city.

Through programs such as the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency business account and the new Black entrepreneurship fund, we will continue to support our local small business owners, who are doing great work for their communities.

I want to encourage the residents of Richmond Hill, and all Canadians, to support their local small businesses this week and especially during the holiday season. Small business owners like Aneal make our nation strong. I thank them for their resilience, strength and services.

• (1405)

CARE WORKERS

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, most long-term care and seniors' homes in my riding of South Surrey—White Rock and across the country have done a great job keeping our seniors healthy and safe throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, but many others have been overwhelmed and severely understaffed. Shortages that existed long before the pandemic have been worsened by fatigue, infections and child care obligations.

Under the post-graduation work permit program, trained care workers can qualify for a path to permanent residency, but this program is not available to those educated at accredited private institutions with programs shorter than 900 hours, who learn the exact same curriculum in less time. We need these qualified workers, and they go to other countries.

I am calling on the Liberal government to show more compassion and practicality. Make the simple policy change: Allow all Canadian-certified care workers to apply for this program and get the trained staff we need. Thousands want to apply. We must do better by our seniors.

* * *

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month. While more people are surviving a breast cancer diagnosis than ever before, it is still the most common cancer and second leading cause of cancer death among Canadian women.

It is also a time to celebrate survivors. Strong women, like my friends Sue Slimmon and Val Rowaldron, kicked cancer's butt, and my sister Jill, who was diagnosed with breast cancer a year ago, has successfully gone through her treatment with grace, humour and the love of her family and friends. She is the strongest, most incredible person that I know.

My sister found a lump through a breast self-exam, so I encourage all women to do regular self-exams. Research is critically important for prevention and treatment and also the impact that the treatment has on our bodies and minds.

Jilly did it. I love her, and I am so proud of her.

GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE GROUP

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Great Lakes are a binational treasure and annually pump billions of dollars into our economy, create thousands of jobs, provide clean water to millions and support an ecosystem that is vital for thousands of unique plants, animals and aquatic species. They are a resource that Canada has not always fully supported; that is, until now.

Aside from the throne speech commitments to bolster the blue economy, our government's promise to establish the Canada water agency will turn the tide in favour of the Great Lakes' health and sustainability.

I am also pleased to share that the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group recently established the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Group with a mandate to focus on a triple bottom line: economic, environmental and social issues attached to the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence.

Canada is at the table, and as co-chair of this group, I can confirm that we are eager to work with all colleagues here, in the Senate and with our U.S. counterparts. I look forward to working to help keep the Great Lakes great, and I thank this government and the IPG for helping to lead the charge in this positive direction.

* * *

FIREARMS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, autumn is a favourite time of year in the Upper Ottawa Valley. It is hunting season. It is a time with friends and family that we look forward to. Sadly, the traditional fall hunt for many Canadians may be drawing to an end. We are under attack by our own government.

The latest plan to seize firearms is just another example of the federal government targeting the wrong people. Now we learn that the Liberal Party's gun ban will target the best-selling semi-automatic rifles in Canada. This will be done to federally licenced, daily RCMP-vetted firearms owners.

Millions of responsible, law-abiding firearms owners do not understand why the Liberal Party hates rural people in general and anyone who owns a firearm in particular. We have done nothing wrong, unlike the scandal-ridden Liberals.

To all the hunters out there, enjoy this year's hunt and may it not be the last.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

BRAYAN YAMBO AND DILAN YAMBO

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to draw attention to the impact of this pandemic on the most vulnerable in our society. Every day I see people in Hochelaga overcome challenges and be resilient, innovative and determined, especially twin brothers Brayan and Dilan Yambo.

Statements by Members

The Yambo brothers braved the cold to use the Internet connection outside the municipal library, which is closed because of the second wave, so they could take their courses at Collège de Maisonneuve. They are an example of the resiliency and perseverance shown by students. I am proud to represent them.

That is why our government will ensure that it maintains the social and economic safety net of all Quebeckers and Canadians in these difficult times and invests in the infrastructure required to connect families and small businesses to high-speed Internet.

To everyone who lives in Hochelaga, I know that we are now in the second wave. Let us continue to follow public health guidance and, above all, do not hesitate to contact me because I am here to help.

* * *

[English]

FRASERWAY RV

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today and highlight Fraserway RV, particularly the Lacombe location in my riding. I, like many Canadians, enjoy nothing more than getting in my RV and going camping next to a lake or in the woods to enjoy all the natural beauty our country has to offer. However, I rise today to highlight the good corporate citizenship of Fraserway RV. Recognizing that many Canadians are struggling to make ends meet this year and, with Thanksgiving quickly approaching, Fraserway RV decided to donate \$270,000 to food banks across Canada. This included a \$20,000 donation to the Lacombe Food Bank.

Over the past several months, we have seen businesses, community groups and individuals step up, stand out and really embody the saying that we are all in this together, and this is another great example. I want to thank Fraserway RV in Lacombe and all the locations across Canada for this generous contribution to their local food banks. This charitable action ensured many Canadians had a much better Thanksgiving than they otherwise may have had. Well done, Fraserway.

*Statements by Members***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, business leaders often talk about environmental, social and corporate governance goals and about corporate social responsibility. It is now time for them to show leadership.

Last week, leaders of the Canada China Business Council loudly applauded when a Chinese official demanded the release of Huawei executive, Meng Wanzhou, and when he blamed Canada for problems in Canada-China relations, but they remained silent when our government asked for the same treatment for Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor and clemency for Robert Schellenberg, who is on death row.

Business leaders should know that nothing is inevitable about China's rise. They should also know that Canadians are increasingly fed up with Beijing's belligerence, and so too are our allies. We are a nation slow to anger, but once pushed beyond our limit, history demonstrates that we, with our democratic allies, will push back and win.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there was the helicopter tour, billionaire island, and the finance minister's villa in Provence. Then there was the SNC-Lavalin scandal and circumvention of the Elections Act, and let's not forget that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner twice found the Prime Minister guilty, which is a historical first. The Liberals cannot help themselves. The latest Liberal scandal: a contract for their WE Charity friends.

Today the Liberals are asking us to sweep the whole thing under the rug without looking too closely or they will call an election in the middle of a health crisis. That amounts to holding Canadians hostage by abusing democratic institutions. We need to strengthen our health care system, save our SMEs, support our workers, help students and get to the bottom of Liberal scandals. The people deserve answers. What are the Liberals afraid of?

* * *

WARRANT OFFICER PATRICE VINCENT

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, October 20 is a sombre anniversary. Six years ago, Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent died at the hands of a terrorist who committed an act of unspeakable cowardice.

For Warrant Officer Vincent, the army was not just a job, it was a calling. The army was his entire life. He discharged his duty to defend freedom and democracy with strength and conviction for 28 years before finally facing the ultimate enemy in a place where he never should have had to face it: here at home.

As Remembrance Day approaches, of course I wish to honour Patrice Vincent's memory. More than that, I want to humbly thank him. My heart also goes out to his three sisters, his brother and his mother, all of whom are left with a void that no words can fill.

Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent is one of those heroes we can never forget. That is why I simply want to say: We will remember.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

NOVA SCOTIA SHOOTING

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, six months ago, the worst mass shooting in Canada's history tragically ended the lives of 22 Canadians in Nova Scotia. Victims' families rightly had questions and asked for a public inquiry. It was shocking when the public safety minister, backed by Liberal MPs from Nova Scotia, told them their losses were only worth an internal review. During immense grief that most of us can never imagine, families had to plead, protest and beg for months before the Liberals finally relented and agreed to a public inquiry.

In the rampage, Nick Beaton lost his pregnant wife, Kristen. About the Liberals' delays, he wrote:

Can [they] show a little bit of humility and just say, "We were wrong," instead of trying to take credit for doing something someone else did? ...I'm overwhelmed with the love this country has shown me and the other families, but I'll never understand why Liberals in positions of power have continued to add to our pain.

Today, the fight for a public inquiry continues.

Nothing can bring their loved ones back, but finally getting answers can help the families, their friends and their communities on their lifetime road to healing. It is long past due to respect the victims and their families, to show some compassion and to get on with a public inquiry.

* * *

FIREARMS

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I speak today in recognition of the countless lives that have been lost to gun violence.

In my own province of Quebec, no one will ever forget the horrors of the École Polytechnique massacre, in which victims were targeted solely because they were women. We were tragically reminded of these horrors again when, at the Quebec City mosque, the lives of six innocent people were taken solely because they were Muslim.

I am proud to be part of a government that has taken action by prohibiting assault-style firearms, but we need to do more. We need to introduce red-flag laws to empower communities, police, medical professionals and survivors of domestic violence to enable the signalling of an individual or identifiable group posing a threat. We need to keep investing in our border agencies to keep guns out of the hands of criminals by stopping the illegal smuggling of firearms into Canada.

Let us recognize and thank the participants of today's Day of Action to Prevent Gun Violence, and particularly Nathalie Provost, who continues her campaign to advocate for enhanced gun control.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has a pay-to-play problem. It is because the Prime Minister has expensive taste and powerful friends.

First it was a vacation on billionaire island. Then it was the special legal deal for SNC-Lavalin. Then it was speaking fees and taxpayer dollars for WE. Now it is Liberal donations for judicial appointments. We now know that the Prime Minister's top Liberal Alberta adviser has more say on who becomes a judge than the Attorney General.

How many more well-connected Liberals is the Prime Minister going to make taxpayers pay for?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we reformed the judicial appointments process, making it merit-based and creating independent committees to make recommendations on judicial appointments.

We will continue to look for the absolute best jurists across the country to step up and will continue to appoint people who reflect the great diversity of this country so that we have a bench that looks much more like Canada. We will continue to appoint the highest-qualified jurists, with a merit-based approach that we reformed after the Conservatives made it political.

[Translation]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our justice system must be impartial, but this government selects judges based on partisan, ideological criteria. It has one way of doing things for Liberal candidates and another way for everyone else. One of the justice minister's political staffers wanted to sound the alarm, but he was dismissed.

How many other Liberal staffers are afraid to tell the truth?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after all the Conservative partisanship, in 2016, we reformed our judicial appointments system, making it merit-based. We are working with independent committees to make decisions and recommendations. We will always choose the best people to work in our justice

system. We will continue to strive to have a justice system that truly reflects our entire country.

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, almost 20% of the judicial appointments in Newfoundland and Labrador are vacant. Now we know it is probably because the Liberals are having trouble finding donors in that province. The last appointment was made in March 2019. There is no shortage of great lawyers in Newfoundland and Labrador. Leaving this many seats open is creating real access to justice problems for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Is the Prime Minister holding up justice in Newfoundland and Labrador because he is still looking for his favourite Liberal donors?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after years of neglecting Newfoundland and Labrador, after years of a Conservative government that could not quite get nominations to the Supreme Court right, we were proud to nominate the very first Newfoundlander and Labradorian to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Our appointments to the bench are made with a merit-based process, and we draw from a broad panel of experts in order to get the right people to the bench across the country. We will continue to do so, and we will take no lessons from the Conservatives, with the way they did partisan appointments.

[Translation]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if we learned anything from the WE Charity scandal, it is that this government has a double standard, with one set of rules for the Liberals' friends and another for the rest of Canadians. This government's scandals are undermining Canadians' confidence.

When will the Prime Minister stop governing for his friends and start governing for all Canadians?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this pandemic, we have been focusing on helping Canadians. Yesterday, there were 2,400 new cases of COVID-19, and we will continue to focus on helping families, businesses, workers and grandparents. We will continue to focus on Canadians and keeping our commitments to them. We will continue to try to keep this Parliament running because now is the time to rise to the challenge for Canadians, not to follow the Conservatives into an election.

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have a trust problem with the Prime Minister. It is because he keeps looking after people who need his help the least.

Oral Questions

Canadians want to know what powerful friend he is protecting now. Whose name is beneath all the black ink on the WE documents? Who did he prorogue Parliament for? Who was promoting schemes that cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars? Who was he protecting when he instructed his Liberal MPs to filibuster for hours at committee? Who and what is the Prime Minister covering up with these latest threats of an election?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with what the Leader of the Opposition said this morning, with the motion he put forward in his own name and even with the question he is asking, he is demonstrating clearly that he has lost confidence in the government's ability to manage the pandemic. The question he has put before the House, which will be voted on tomorrow, is whether or not the government has lost the confidence of Parliament.

We believe we need to continue to work together in Parliament to deliver, which is why we are proposing a special committee to look into government spending. That is why we will continue to focus on Canadians, while Conservatives focus on politics.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the stress, suspense and tension have become unbearable. Will there be an election? That is the big question, but the government itself says that this is a vote of confidence. It is daring us. Either a deal has already been cooked up somewhere or the government thinks it will never happen, but either way, the government does not want to take the blame. Can the government just tell us what is what so we can all stop wasting our time? We have other things to do.

Does the Prime Minister want an election or not?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we do indeed have other things to do in the House. Every day, we work to deliver the goods to Canadians, to small businesses struggling because of COVID-19, to seniors in long-term care facilities who are worried, and to Canadians across the country who are concerned about our health care system, the public health situation and the future of their children.

That is why those of us on this side of the House are working so hard to deliver the goods for Canadians. That is what we will keep doing, and we hope the opposition parties will keep trying to make this minority Parliament work.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that sounds nice but is not very believable.

Someone who does not want to ride a bicycle should not buy a bicycle only to wind up pedalling. The Prime Minister does not want an election. Can he tell his neighbour to the left that it was a close call, but this is not a confidence motion, that a committee will be struck and we will get to the bottom of this WE Charity scandal because he prorogued Parliament to try to avoid that? It would be clear, we will not have an election, and we will do our work.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the Bloc Québécois, not us, that has been talking about an election for months now. We remain focused on the work we need

to do for Canadians. We will continue to deliver the goods every day, through the business subsidy, direct assistance to accounts and assistance that continues through the CERB, which has transitioned to EI. We will stay focused on Canadians and we hope the opposition parties will continue to work with us to deliver for Canadians.

It is up to the opposition to decide if they want an election.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are hiding behind the opposition to justify triggering an election in the middle of a health crisis. Instead of shedding light on the scandal with their friends at WE Charity, they prefer to hold the public hostage by abusing democratic institutions. That is irresponsible. Let's be clear: If the Prime Minister wants to call an election he can go see the Governor General any time he wants. If not, he can work with the opposition and set up a committee to give Canadians answers. People deserve to know the truth.

What are the Liberals afraid of?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have proposed a special committee to review government spending and investments. We are more than happy to make this Parliament work and that is what we are proposing. During this time of crisis, we will be working for Canadians. Yesterday, there were 2,400 new cases of COVID-19 and there are 22,000 active cases of COVID-19 in Canada. We will continue to focus on the current health crisis and economic crisis. We will be there to protect Canadians and deliver the goods and we hope that the opposition will do the same.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are in the worst medical and economic catastrophe in a century, yet the Prime Minister has stated his willingness to plunge the nation into a pandemic election, and all over the procedural wrangling of a committee. Seriously? This is the same Prime Minister who prorogued Parliament and monkeywrenched the work of our committees. If he wants to take advantage of the pandemic, he can go to the Governor General any time. He does not need to hide behind the opposition. Or he can show some maturity and let Parliament do the work we are all here for.

What is it going to be? Is he going to keep up the cover-up, is he going to let Parliament do the work or is he just going to go to the Governor General?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we want Parliament to work, which is why we have proposed a special committee to look into government spending in the exceptional circumstances of this pandemic. However, the Conservative opposition put forward a motion that very clearly outlines a fact the Leader of the Opposition himself admitted earlier today: He does not have confidence in this government to manage the pandemic.

Now the opposition parties have a choice. Do they want to make Parliament work and work for Canadians, or do they want to vote non-confidence and trigger an election? The choice is theirs. On this side of the House, we are going to keep working for Canadians.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a troubling pattern with this Prime Minister. When he is backed into a corner or does not get his way, he elbows, he bullies, he fires and he threatens. He is doing that again right now as his cozy relationship with WE is being exposed. He is threatening to plunge Canadians into an election during a pandemic.

It has been said that those with nothing to hide, hide nothing. When will the Prime Minister stop the threats, stop hiding and come clean with Canadians?

• (1430)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we proposed the creation of this committee where all members can ask questions, an important committee for important work.

What the Conservatives are doing is trying to jam the government. They focus only on their party. This is an ultrapartisan move that does nothing to serve Canadians. It just serves their own interests. It is irresponsible and they should be ashamed of it.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these Liberals should be ashamed of themselves. We are in the middle of a pandemic. Kids cannot go out for Halloween. People cannot visit their dying loved ones. Restaurants and small businesses are being shut down, but the Prime Minister must have his way and if he does not he is going to force everyone into an election. These are not the actions of an honourable leader. These are the actions of a self-serving emperor with no clothes.

Will the Prime Minister stop the cover-up, stop holding Parliament hostage and back off from his threats of an election if this motion passes? He should show some leadership.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in the middle of a pandemic. We are working hard for Canadians on health issues and on economic issues. We are asking for collaboration from all members of the House, yet the best thing they find to do is to come up with this ultra-irresponsible motion. The Conservatives got together, they thought they put their best brains together and they said, “Hey, this is the best way to help Canadians: Let us jam the government.” That is unacceptable.

The Speaker: I just want to remind hon. members that there are folks who are participating hybrid and we want to make sure that they hear everything, so we want to keep the sounds down. I know there is a bit of chatter and that is part of it, but some of the members have wonderful voices and they are very strong and they do carry quite well and we do not want them drowning out the person who is speaking.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they have absolutely nothing to hide and they are willing to bring themselves down to hide it. That is effectively the position of the government. The Liberals are prepared to defeat themselves in order to stop any

one from asking them questions about the Prime Minister's gift of a half-billion dollars to a group that gave his family a half-million dollars. We want to put all of this in one committee so that the rest of Parliament can work for Canadians' lives and livelihoods across the House of Commons.

What do they have to hide?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proposing the creation of this committee with members from all parties who can ask all the important questions and do the important work. We put that in contrast with what the Conservatives are doing at this moment, when people are suffering, people are looking for jobs and people are worried for their loved ones. The best idea, with all their brains around the table, that they came up with is a motion that wants to jam and paralyze the government. That is totally unacceptable.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about all the brains around that table over there. They tried to cover it up by shutting down Parliament, but then Parliament came back. They tried to cover it up by giving 20 hours of speeches, but then they ran out of things to say. Could any of the smart brains around the table come up with a better idea to cover it up? They said, “I know; let us call an election”. That is the best that they can come up with.

We have millions unemployed. We have lives at risk. We should be working for Canadians. Why are they trying to upturn all of that important work to cover up their scandal?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the aisle wants to give the impression he is an expert on everything. Let me quote something for him. It is that “the decision on what to reveal is made by non-partisan public servants, for whom it has long been a tradition not to reveal cabinet confidences. That has been the case going back to all previous governments of all party stripes.”

Who said that? It was the member for Carleton.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' federal gong show will never change. Term after term, it is always the same thing. They have no respect for our public funds. They have no respect for Canadians' money. In the midst of a pandemic, they took advantage yet again and greased the palms of their friends at WE Charity. Not only did the government fail ethically, but it also failed our official languages by having the program administered in English only.

Oral Questions

Why did the Prime Minister prioritize WE Charity over the French language?

• (1435)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why is the opposition prioritizing a completely partisan and irresponsible motion over working with the government to protect the health of Canadians, the health of our seniors and the health of our businesses? Why has the opposition chosen to play inappropriate petty politics rather than work with us?

We have reached out, and we are still reaching out. Let us work together for the well-being of Canadians, rather than playing petty politics.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from what I understand, the Prime Minister was in a rush to dole out money, but he was not in such a rush to help Quebec's aerospace industry, to support a long-term plan for green aluminum or to add the Davie shipyard to the shipbuilding strategy. The truth is that the Liberals were in a rush to help their friends and no one else.

How could the Prime Minister, who hails from Quebec, deliberately ignore francophones in Quebec and Canada?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government stands up for francophones every single day. It stands up for Quebecers, for Quebec industries, for the Davie shipyard, for our seniors and for our health care system.

We will stand up for Quebecers every single day. We will be there for Quebec during and after this pandemic, unlike the Conservatives, whose idea of doing the right thing and standing up for Quebec is to create a partisan committee.

ETHICS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals stand up for Quebec the way they stand up for the Davie shipyard, we are in real trouble.

The Bloc Québécois voted against the throne speech because the Bloc Québécois would not stand for an attack on Quebec's health care system. We were prepared to trigger an election over that. The reason the Liberals are ready to go to the polls is so that they can cover up their scandal. The Prime Minister will be the proverbial needle in the giant haystack of all the ethical problems the Liberals have built up. I believe that the NDP is listening to reason, and I assume the Conservatives will vote in favour of their own motion.

Is the Prime Minister having his bluff called, since he is struggling to get us to overlook his serious ethical blunders?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois does not have much credibility with regard to the confidence vote. It has been at least a month since the party said that it would vote against confidence motions in the government. It said that, if the other parties had as much courage, they would vote the same way. What is

more, the Bloc leader said that there would be an election this spring at the very latest. They are the ones who said that.

Now they are telling us that we are irresponsible because we are talking about confidence in the House. Well, that is how our system works. If they have confidence, then they should say so. If they do not, they should say that.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not have confidence in this government. I doubt it will last past the spring. That said, the government House leader is almost as bad as the Prime Minister. No one buys that argument.

The government is trying to either force an election or get us to overlook its ethical problems. If it does not want to trigger an election, the government House leader needs to stand up and say that we are right, that this should not be a confidence vote and that they will do what they were elected to do. He should tell us to have a good day, life goes on, and he will see us in the spring.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no unemployed Canadian looking for a job right now wants an election. No worried mother wants an election. No member of this government wants an election. The Bloc, however, is irresponsibly aligning itself with the Conservatives to try to topple the government. That is the reality.

They need to have the courage to take responsibility for their choices and the consequences of those choices.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for over 15 hours Liberals at the ethics committee have filibustered and blocked the production of WE documents. They have read the newspaper. They have given us a philosophy lesson and they have read letters. It has all been a little much. All of this is a desperate attempt to cover up corruption and hide these documents from Canadians.

What ever happened to sunlight and being open by default? When will the filibuster and the Liberal cover-up end?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in case I read this too fast earlier, I will read it again for my colleague. It states that "the decision on what to reveal is made by non-partisan public servants, for whom it has long been a tradition not to reveal cabinet confidences. That has been the case going back to all previous governments of all party stripes." Does my hon. colleague agree with his colleague over there?

• (1440)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there we have it. There is going to be no end to the filibuster. The Liberals are not going to end their cover-up. They will stop at nothing to prevent these documents from coming to light. Even in the middle of a pandemic, they want to plunge Canadians into an election.

The question is very simple. What are they so desperate to hide?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): I guess the Conservatives will stop at nothing to provoke an election, Mr. Speaker.

On this side of the House, we suggested the creation of a special committee, a very important committee to do an important job, that would allow all parties to ask important questions, call witnesses and do everything that is required from the opposition. That is our proposal. Why are they saying no? Why do they have to have this ultrapartisan committee to jam the government? Why is that so important to them?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members that it is one question at a time. I know there are a lot of questions members want to ask, but they can only ask one question at a time. When someone is answering or asking a question, it makes it that much more difficult.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why do we want this committee? Because Canadians are entitled to the truth. That is why we want to create this committee.

This summer, when the Liberals were in trouble, what did they do? They prorogued Parliament.

Now that they are in trouble, what are they doing? They are threatening to call an election if we do not side with them.

We will always side with the truth. Why is the government refusing to hand over all the documents related to the WE Charity scandal?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they will always side with the truth when the truth suits them. In fact, they decide what the truth is. If they like it, it is the truth; if they do not, it is not.

The fact is that we proposed creating a committee that will do some extremely important work, ask questions and enable the government to improve its programs. That is an extremely responsible thing to do.

We invite everyone to support this committee so we can do this work, because we want to keep working for Canadians, for our children, for our families, for our seniors, for our students and for our businesses. We are going to keep doing the job.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I listened to Radio-Canada this morning, I was reminded of the good old days in the Quebec National Assembly, with the Bastarache commission. The Bastarache commission revealed that the provincial Liberal government of the day had a system of using Post-It notes to identify friends of the Liberal Party who should become judges.

Oral Questions

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Liberals will always be Liberals, no matter which parliament they are in.

Can the Minister of Justice assure us now, in the House, that no Liberal Party faithfuls or cronies were consulted at any point in the judicial appointment process?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has taken significant steps to ensure that quality candidates who reflect Canada's diversity are appointed to the bench.

Let me be clear: I have never faced any pressure from anyone to appoint a judge. The decision to recommend a candidate to cabinet is mine alone.

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we put forward a simple motion. We asked the House to affirm the treaty and inherent rights of the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet people, which were affirmed in treaties, confirmed in the Canadian Constitution and upheld in the Supreme Court, but the Liberals voted no. They also refused to acknowledge that the Mi'kmaq deserve the full and equal protection of the law from violence and intimidation. They voted no to recognizing their failure to respect nation-to-nation relationships to accommodate the moderate livelihood fishery that has led to the crisis we are facing today.

My question is simple. Why?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite what the NDP say, our government is having nation-to-nation conversations with first nations. That is imperative because we have always said the Mi'kmaq have an affirmed treaty right to fish in pursuit of a moderate livelihood under the Marshall decision.

When it comes to safety, everyone in Canada deserves to be protected. That is why we are standing up and making sure the resources that the Province of Nova Scotia needs for the RCMP are there.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today serious alarm bells are ringing about Liberal partisanship in the Prime Minister's Office. The Liberals are treating judicial appointments like a basket of party favours for well-connected partisan friends. This smacks of the SNC-Lavalin scandal, where the PMO pressured the former attorney general, interfering with her office's criminal prosecution of that Liberal-friendly corporation.

Oral Questions

Partisan appointments can open the door for Liberals to lean inappropriately on judges in ways we can only imagine. Have they learned nothing from the SNC, Aga Khan and WE scandals? When will the Prime Minister learn that partisan appointments have no place in our judicial system?

• (1445)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that we put in a process for appointing judges, which removes the partisanship we saw with the previous government. We have judicial appointment committees in place across Canada. Those committees work hard to vet the candidates without any recourse to partisan political matters.

I take those recommendations, whether they are highly recommended or recommended, and we do further consultations. There is no partisanship in the names that I recommend to cabinet.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand today in recognition and support for our doctors. They guide us in preventing future illnesses and injuries and heal us when we are sick or injured. As medical professionals, they warn us about the dangers in our lives.

One issue they continue to warn us about is gun violence across Canada, but not everyone is listening. Conservatives have aligned themselves with a gun lobby that has plagiarized the American NRA's motto of "stay in your lane" and that bullies doctors who speak about the victims they have had to treat and the family members they have had to inform of losing a loved one.

Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness please inform this House what steps our government is taking to address gun violence?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I join the member for Cape Breton—Canso in remembering the lives of those who have been impacted by gun violence.

Since forming government, we have taken action by passing legislation that enhances background checks and helps law enforcement through better data collection. We have also delivered on our promise to prohibit tactical assault weapons, which have no place in our society, and we will continue to strengthen gun control by stopping guns at our border, preventing theft and criminal diversion, and introducing red flag laws.

We do not work for the gun lobby. We work for Canadians, and we will work relentlessly to keep them safe.

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HEALTH

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am tired of headlines such as this one: "Bureaucracy keeping dying Winnipeg man and his brother apart". It has been nine months since the start of the COVID crisis, and the Liberals only use shutdowns and a 14-day quarantine, which nobody can afford, as ways to address the pandemic. Countries around the world

have started to use rapid testing, and pre- and post-arrival testing as well, as ways to reunite families, but not Canada.

I want to review this failure and come up with a better path forward. We need to do that. That should be a non-partisan issue, but the Liberals are blocking the health committee. They are blocking everybody from being able to do this. Why?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we believe in science and evidence as the way through COVID-19 and the astronomical challenges it presents to Canadians from coast to coast. We will always put the health and safety of Canadians first and foremost in everything we do. That is why we take so seriously our responsibility to control the importation of COVID-19 at the borders.

We are working with partners, provinces, territories and researchers to understand ways we can manage the border effectively, with the primary goal of protecting the health and safety of Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the health committee would be a great way to review the science and evidence, yet the Liberals are blocking the review of this issue at every turn. It has been 10 days since we introduced a motion on this, and they keep filibustering it.

Right now, there are thousands of airline workers who know that a bailout is not going to save their jobs. They are seeing countries around the world implement pre- and post-arrival rapid testing as a way to sustain the jobs and keep people safe, yet we cannot review it at the health committee because they are blocking it.

It is like the government just does not want Parliament to be able to do its job. It is so arrogant, and it is so frustrating. Why?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will remind the member opposite that the health committee is free to study the issues it chooses.

I will tell everyone that, on this side of the House, as the government we have an important role to make sure that we use science and evidence in our decision-making on how we manage COVID-19, including at the borders. I want to thank my colleagues, particularly the provincial and territorial colleagues, who have worked so diligently with us to understand the important role that quarantine plays in our current response to reducing importations of COVID-19.

We will always rely on science and evidence to keep Canadians safe.

• (1450)

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency sent letters to hundreds of Canadians, warning them that there may be a problem with their bank account number and that there was a risk of fraud. Several MPs received complaints from constituents saying that they called the number given, but there was no answer. We tried to get in touch ourselves. As MPs, we have a direct number, but we did not get an answer either. Can the minister tell us what is going on?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. I would say that it is important to the Canada Revenue Agency that taxpayers are able to receive all the credits and benefits to which they are entitled. We continue to work to ensure that everything goes smoothly. Checks are being done. Our systems are experiencing high volumes of traffic right now, but the work continues to be done.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has been spouting the same platitudes for five years now. The problem of reaching Revenue Canada has been going on for five years.

When people receive an envelope marked Revenue Canada, they get a little stressed. When the envelope contains a letter that says that there is a problem and to call the number provided, but there is no answer when they call, naturally their stress level will go up. The pandemic has certainly created a little more stress and pressure, but even before the pandemic, there were problems contacting the department. I once tried calling 25 times, and no one answered.

Can the minister give a clearer answer to Canadians and say why, in five years, she has not been able to clarify the situation and increase the efficiency of Revenue Canada?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not agree in the least with what my colleague just said. During the pandemic, the Canada Revenue Agency has served more than eight million Canadians. It has ensured that people received the CERB. It is now responsible for ensuring that people receive the new benefits that have been put in place, including the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery caregiving benefit and the Canada recovery sickness benefit.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it pays to be friends with the Liberals. We saw it with WE Charity and now with the judicial appointment process. The Prime Minister's Office meddles in the process. It uses its infamous Liberalist database to check whether future judges are Liberal donors. Who is the PMO consulting to check up on the reputation of future judges? It is consulting Liberal officials and Liberal riding association presidents. The PMO checks to see whether future judges put up Liberal Party lawn signs at election time. What are the criteria for becoming a judge in Canada? Is being a good Liberal one of them?

Oral Questions

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, we implemented a transparent process for appointing judges that takes into account quality and diversity. I will be clear. I have never been pressured to appoint any particular person to the bench. The decision to recommend a candidate to cabinet is mine alone. I make the decision based on the quality of the candidate as assessed by the JAC, the needs of the court, and the diversity of the judiciary. There is no partisanship in my decision-making process.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, someone needs to talk to François Landry.

Last year, the Bloc Québécois called out the Prime Minister, who got caught checking whether future judges were good Liberal donors. It was noted at the time that 90% of total political donations made by new judges over the years were going to the Liberal Party. Today we learned that while the Bloc was expressing outrage, there were people even within the justice minister's office who were also completely outraged.

The judicial appointment scandal is like the WE Charity scandal. No matter where we look, why is it always the Liberals' friends who get all the sweet deals from this government?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what my colleague just said is simply not true. He knows that we appoint judges from all walks of life and of all political stripes. We have been very clear about the transparency of the process we brought in. I have appointed nearly 160 people since I became justice minister. We have appointed top-notch individuals across the country, and I am proud of the results.

* * *

• (1455)

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when COVID hit in March, Transport Canada made, in my opinion, the correct decision to allow BC Ferries passengers to remain in their cars rather than mingle on the upper decks. It is another way to fight the spread of the coronavirus, but late last month, right when the second wave was threatening to come upon us, it reversed that decision.

Will the minister commit to reviewing that flip-flop decision and do the right thing for British Columbians?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear on this. It is not a question of either-or, either deciding in favour of letting people sit in their cars because of COVID or forcing people to get out of their cars because of the concern for marine safety. It is both.

We both have a responsibility, as the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Health, to make sure that passengers onboard our ferries are safe from both COVID and the possibility of a marine accident.

Oral Questions

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, COVID has grounded our airline industry, and inaction by this Prime Minister ensures that it may never fully recover. However, Germany, Japan and Iceland have all implemented rapid testing, which shows that it is a safe, science-based alternative to quarantine. We are not saying to throw open the borders, but we are saying that rapid testing would get us on the pathway to economic recovery. Rapid testing reconnects communities, reunites families and gets Canadians back to work.

Other jurisdictions around the world are safely implementing rapid testing. With the airline industry teetering, what is this Prime Minister waiting for?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of maintaining appropriate health measures at the border is one that this government is seized with. As the member opposite knows, this is an issue through which all countries are struggling to find a path forward.

In fact, the blend of science around when quarantine can be released in partnership with testing is one that is being researched in Canada. We have a number of research projects underway and a number are almost ready to be launched. We will come back to the House with details when they are available.

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers in my riding have been calling me because they have not received their CEBA benefit loans yet. Their banks are still waiting to be told whether this money can be deposited into personal bank accounts, even though the government promised to act on this back in May. Many of these farmers have bills that are coming due at the end of this month, and they are unable to pay them.

Will the minister instruct the department to correct this technicality immediately?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for that really important question.

We want to assure all small businesses, particularly farming businesses, that, absolutely, we want them to get the important support of this loan. We will announce very shortly the process for them to get access to that loan.

The banking system in Canada does not have the same kind of due diligence for personal accounts as it does for business accounts, and we are working very hard with the over 200 financial institutions to make sure that we get this to these businesses right away.

* * *

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESSES

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to acknowledge Small Business Week and highlight the creativity and collaboration that small businesses have shown since the beginning of the pandemic.

In the riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle, leaders of businesses such as Usipro in Napierville, Ogilvy Equestrian in Léry, Pyro-Air in Châteauguay, and T-Clean in Saint-Rémi have put their shoulders to the wheel. They changed their operations in order to keep countless jobs. They retooled their production lines to produce masks, respirators and other equipment to help us deal with COVID-19—

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this being Small Business Week, I want to acknowledge the resilience of the businesses in Châteauguay—Lacolle. Starting and managing a small business takes a lot of work during a pandemic.

The second wave is forcing small businesses to roll up their sleeves once again. My colleague can assure businesses in Napierville, Léry, Châteauguay and Saint-Rémi that we will be there for them.

* * *

● (1500)

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the Liberals are hoping Canadians will grow tired of the WE scandal. Frankly, we are sick of hearing about it too. I would much rather stand here today and ask about the small businesses in my riding that are fighting to survive, but as an official opposition member, it is my duty to hold the government accountable.

Therefore, I rise today to ask this: Will the Prime Minister pledge to put an end to the barrage of roadblocks, redactions and delays, and let us do our jobs?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if they want to talk about other stuff, then they should ask questions about other stuff. It is that simple. Instead of being here today debating an ultra-partisan, irresponsible motion, we can be debating how we can help our seniors, how can we help our provinces and how can we help our businesses. Instead of doing that, no, they had this great idea of putting an irresponsible motion on the table.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we can see that the pandemic is an excuse for everything. The Liberals want to use it to hide their scandals and corruption.

They have been found out. What are they doing? They want to trigger an election. There have been quite a few scandals and close friends who closed up shop when they got caught red-handed with hundreds of millions of dollars. At present, the Liberals are throwing money out the window. My question is simple.

Where is this money going and is it being managed properly?

We can chew gum and walk at the same time. If the Liberals did not know it, we are informing them. That is what we want.

What are they trying to hide? Why not come clean with the powerful disinfectant that is the truth?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, they are saying that it is important to discuss many things that will help Canadians, but they always come back to the same thing, the motion they moved today. That is their thing. They are forcing Parliament to debate the motion rather than debating how to help seniors.

Seniors have suffered more than anyone during this pandemic. Thousands of people are currently looking for work. Parents are worried because schools are closed. That is what we should be debating today, not an irresponsible motion like this.

* * *

[English]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Sault Ste. Marie announced \$800,000 of FedNor funding to the company Skritswap last year. We know this company forwards its mail from Sault Ste. Marie, but that it is actually located in southern Ontario. It also has job opportunities and employees in B.C. and California, of all places. What is missing here is anything to justify the company receiving funding designated for northern Ontario.

Can the minister tell us how many jobs were created in Sault Ste. Marie as a result of this funding?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been there since the beginning of the pandemic, and even before, by making sure that we invest in people in northern Ontario, maybe through the RRRF program to protect jobs. We have protected thousands of jobs across Ontario, in particular in northern Ontario. We also invest in economic development to make sure we are creating new jobs. We know that northerners need these investments and we will be there to make sure we are there for them.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that COVID-19 has completely changed our daily lives and the many necessary measures to keep us safe are taking a toll on our mental health. The mental health crisis in our country is a silent pandemic for which there is no vaccine. We are constantly hearing warnings and concerns from medical professionals, and I hear concerns from my constituents, as well. I am seriously concerned about this. I introduced a motion to study the impact of COVID-19 on the

mental health and well-being of Canadians at the Standing Committee on Health.

Could the minister highlight our government's investments to support Canadians during these difficult times?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Newmarket—Aurora for his hard work on the health committee and in particular his leadership on this important issue. He is absolutely right. We have known that mental health and substance use issues are on the rise as a result of Canadians' distress around dealing with COVID-19. Very early on, we worked to establish supports for Canadians through the Wellness Together Canada portal.

On October 9, I was pleased to announce we will be investing an additional \$10 million in COVID-19 mental health and substance use service needs and delivery research. This will support 55 teams across the country to address specific mental health and substance use crisis needs resulting from COVID-19.

* * *

● (1505)

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are in the middle of a pandemic, the cold, wet weather is upon us and non-profit housing groups are still waiting to see how they can apply for the measly 3,000 units under the rapid housing initiative announced prior to the throne speech.

The government's own website says that information will be forthcoming. One month later, they are still waiting. Community groups want to quickly secure distressed housing before large capital funds can swoop in and take it to turn a profit. Liberals are now threatening an election because they want to hide from the WE scandal.

Enough is enough. Will the Prime Minister put the needs of the people first and get the housing built?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, only the New Democratic Party would consider a \$1-billion investment in rapid housing to be "insignificant."

We are proud of our response to the most vulnerable in this country. The \$1-billion rapid housing initiative will build new housing and convert existing buildings to house the most vulnerable in our communities; \$237 million for the reaching home program will go directly to communities as they respond to the needs of the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Business of Supply***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the consequences of not recognizing Mi'kmaq jurisdiction and implementing their treaty rights is another high-profile example of why we need an indigenous rights recognition framework.

Across Canada, there are literally hundreds of issues, most with limited or no profile, that require a coordinated and comprehensive federal approach. Like the DFO, in relation to fish, the Department of Finance continues to set policy that impedes rights implementation.

As a specific example and question, why does the government not support self-governing first nations raising property taxes under the First Nations Fiscal Management Act?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the work she has done on the recognition of rights.

We are moving forward as a government on a number of different fronts. In my particular case, it is in my mandate letter to advance the passage of UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That will present a first significant step in the recognition of rights, and from there we can move across the country and really advance the quest and path of reconciliation which we, quite frankly, are morally obligated to do in this country.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ANTI-CORRUPTION**

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, as I recommence, I would just like to wish everyone a great afternoon.

On the motion that the opposition brought forward on this opposition day, its main objective, as I stated prior, is to paralyze the government at a time when the entire Government of Canada, and frankly, all Canadians, are focused on keeping Canadians safe and healthy.

Simply put, the opposition cannot establish a committee looking into government corruption and at the same time claim it still has confidence in the government. We cannot have committees finding public servants in contempt without even providing them the opportunity to explain why they made lawful redactions to a small number of items within more than 5,000 documents released to the Standing Committee on Finance.

We cannot turn our committees into partisan tools to force private citizens to release personal information. Where does this end? We cannot have the Conservatives drowning the government in document requests with arbitrary deadlines designed to be impossible to meet, forcing public servants to drop their work on supporting Canadians during this pandemic.

I want to take a few moments to talk about the extraordinary work done by the public service these past few months. I think we can all agree that in these extraordinary times, no Canadian should have to worry about paying their bills, rent or putting food on the table, including those wonderful residents in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge.

Our government is unwavering in our commitment to support Canadians, our health care system and our economy. Allow me to outline and highlight some of the measures our government has taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been our focus, the government's focus, and our sole focus. This is where our efforts and time have gone to helping Canadians from coast to coast to coast. This is what Canadians elected us to do, what they expect us to do, and this is what we will continue to do.

Our government created the Canada emergency response benefit, CERB, to keep Canadians safe by encouraging them to stay home and help flatten the curve. As businesses closed, we knew we needed to respond quickly to support Canadians, and we did. Since March 15, nearly nine million people have received CERB. This is how families avoid financial crisis while keeping our economy afloat.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been difficult for Canadians and their families, and frankly, these individuals are our friends, our neighbours and for some of us our family members. Even though employment is on the rise and many Canadians have returned to a full work schedule, others are still facing job insecurity or struggling to make ends meet.

As COVID-19 cases increase across the country, our government's priority is to ensure all Canadians have the resources they need to weather the second wave of the crisis. To continue support for Canadians while promoting economic recovery, we introduced further measures that encourage people to return to work and help those who have work but may still need some support due to COVID-19.

These measures include flexibilities to the EI program that will allow more Canadians to qualify and receive a minimum of \$500 per week for at least 26 weeks; an EI premium rate freeze for the next two years for our small businesses, which will benefit employees and employers as it prevents the rise of EI premiums during a period of economic recovery; and the Canada recovery benefit for self-employed workers and workers not eligible for EI. Over 600,000 Canadians to date have applied and are now receiving the Canada recovery benefit. They are not alone and we will not leave them alone; we have their backs.

Other measures include the Canada recovery sickness benefit for workers who are unable to work because they are sick or must self-isolate for reasons related to COVID-19, as well as the Canada recovery caregiving benefit for eligible Canadians who have been unable to work because they need to care for a child or family member. Combined, these measures will help to ensure the health and safety of Canadians while protecting the businesses where they work.

Let me now turn to support for students. Shortly after the CERB was created, we followed up with the Canada emergency student benefit. With many young Canadians facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of COVID-19, whether having recently graduated and looking forward to starting their career, or still in school and counting on summer employment to pay tuition, our government had their backs. The CESB supported students and recent graduates who are not covered by the CERB in order to ensure they could continue their studies and pay their tuition. I am proud to report that over 700,000 students were assisted by the CESB.

From May to August 2020, the CESB provided a payment to eligible students of \$1,250 for each four-week period, or \$2,000 for each four-week period if one had dependants or a disability. We also helped students gain valuable work experience and serve their communities by making temporary changes to expand the Canada summer jobs program, which employs 70,000 young people each year in quality jobs in our communities.

We did not stop there. The government also introduced further measures to benefit students. This includes a six-month, interest-free payment moratorium on Canada student loans or Canada apprentice loans for all students, including graduate students.

● (1510)

Canada student grants were doubled for all eligible full-time students to up to \$6,000 and up to \$3,600 for part-time students. In addition, the Government of Canada increased existing distinctions-based support for first nations, Inuit and Métis nation students pursuing post-secondary education. We extended expiring federal grant research scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships.

These supports have helped young Canadians get through this crisis and have helped play a central role in ensuring Canada emerges from these challenges stronger than ever.

Just as our young people are key to our future, we owe our elders, our seniors a great debt for everything they have done in our past. They have sacrificed much to build this great country.

Many Canadian seniors have faced significant health, economic and social challenges due to COVID-19, isolation being among the most that I hear of from my seniors. They built our country and they have needed our help. Our government took action to provide seniors with greater financial security and gave them the help they needed during this crisis: issuing a one-time tax repayment of \$300 for those who are eligible for the old age security pension; a further \$200 for those who are eligible for the GIS or the allowance for the survivor, worth \$500 for seniors who receive both; supporting new community-based projects to improve the quality of life of seniors and reduce social isolation through the new horizons for seniors program; ensuring the most vulnerable seniors continue to re-

Business of Supply

ceive the benefits they depend on by temporarily extending GIS allowance payments if their 2019 income information has not been assessed.

As we go through this unprecedented challenge, our government will continue to be there for seniors, and not only seniors but Canadians living with disabilities.

I encourage all Canadians to file their taxes so they can receive the benefits and credits they deserve, including our seniors.

There is support for Canadian seniors living with disabilities. We know this pandemic has deeply affected the lives and health of all Canadians and disproportionately affected Canadians with disabilities in particular.

From the beginning, we have taken a disability inclusive approach to our emergency response to ensure Canadians with disabilities get the support they need. We announced a one-time payment of \$600 for persons with disabilities to address these expenses. This payment will go to valid disability tax credit certificate holders, which includes parents with children or dependants with disabilities, seniors, veterans and many other Canadians who we know have costs associated with severe and prolonged disabilities. We are confident that this measure along with the other investments will greatly benefit Canadians with disabilities across the country.

We all benefit when everyone can participate equally in our economy and our society. We as a government have long stated that diversity is our strength, but I would argue that inclusivity is even more important.

This is just a snapshot of the hard work our government has done to support Canadians in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the Conservatives want to formalize their inquisition through a so-called—

● (1515)

The Speaker: I am going to have to cut it there.

Questions or comments, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

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Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have enormous respect for my hon. colleague. I almost thought I was listening to part of his filibuster from earlier this week. It is the unwillingness to address the issue of what has been disrupting work at the ethics committee that has been concerning me.

We did reach out to the Liberals at the ethics committee to try to break the logjam. We said that we would not ask for documents relating to Margaret and Sacha Trudeau out of respect for the family and we would focus on the Prime Minister. However, the Liberals continued to talk the clock out, so we have gotten no further. My sense from the Liberals is that they are not serious about working with our committees to get answers to which Canadians have a right.

We have tried and reached out in good faith to find solutions so we can move forward. Are the Liberals going to continue to obstruct, interfere and even threaten the Canadian people with an election in order to avoid basic questions of accountability on this scandal?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for his movement on the motion. It was my very big concern, and I stated this many times and will continue to state this, that the Conservatives were overreaching on their motion to investigate non-public office holders and to look at investigating the mother and the brother of the Prime Minister. I thank the member opposite for acknowledging that.

I look forward to the next ethics committee and to continuing to work together to find a solution to move forward. That is the focus of the ethics commission. My focus here and in my riding is to continue to do the great work to serve Canadians and those impacted by COVID-19.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are trying to present this in a way that if we do not ask a question about COVID-19, we are failing Canadians; if every motion we move at a committee is not about COVID-19, we are failing Canadians; if every question on the Order Paper or every single activity that we perform in the House is not related directly to COVID-19, we are somehow letting down Canadians.

What would that member's response be to the WE scandal?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: It is not a scandal.

Mr. Mark Strahl: It is a scandal. The member Winnipeg North heckles. He does not get enough chance to talk in the House, I guess. However, it is a scandal. The program that was created by the government no longer exists because the Prime Minister has admitted his mistake. He has talked about how he should have recused himself. The former finance minister has quit and gone onto other things.

What should the response of the opposition be, if not to raise a motion to demand answers and accountability on behalf of all Canadians? Should we just sweep it under the rug and give the Liberals a free pass on their corruption?

• (1520)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, the response from the opposition should be to work together with the government to put to-

gether a committee to look at the COVID-19 investments we have made for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really important for us to recognize that as parliamentarians on all sides of the House we all have a responsibility to reflect on the priorities that Canadians have today. Combatting the coronavirus and the pandemic, providing for the health and well-being of Canadians and looking at the economy and the things we can do to improve it are the priorities of my constituents.

I wonder if the member, like myself, gets a sense of frustration because of the obstructive attitude, particularly from the official opposition.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, what I have heard from many residents is the overreach the Conservatives have undertaken in pursuing investigations into the Prime Minister's mother. I find it abhorrent and wrong. I am glad the member for Timmins—James Bay has brought forward an amendment to our motion at the ethics committee to remove that element.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to address the House. It is also a pleasure to be back in Ottawa to participate in the debate, after being away for a few months in my riding, doing work on behalf of my constituents who had been impacted by COVID-19.

I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Lethbridge.

The day is developing in an interesting fashion. For anyone watching, this is a day that is specifically allotted to the official opposition to choose whatever matter it wishes to bring before the House for debate. The idea that this is somehow hijacking Parliament or that we somehow are not doing our jobs by bringing forward a matter that we consider to be of importance to Canadians is outrageous. We are doing our jobs. This is a day that the government provides to the opposition to bring forward a matter that it believes should be addressed by the House. Therefore, we will take no lessons.

Repeatedly today the Liberals have been saying to the Conservative opposition that we should do whatever they are doing. They want to know why we are not working with them to come up with programs that benefit Liberal-friendly firms. They want us to step aside and let them railroad all over Parliament. When the Liberals shut down Parliament and prorogued it for weeks, they wondered why we did not agree with them. Why do we not all become Liberal members of Parliament and just embrace the government's agenda? That is what the Liberals are asking us to do today.

We have been working with the government on COVID-related matters for months. In fact, I was part of a group that sat down with leadership from all parties to discuss how we would go forward and govern ourselves during this pandemic. In good faith, we allowed for Parliament to take a break because we did not know what the pandemic would bring.

What was the response from the Liberal government? After that act of good faith and after working together to put the safety and security of Canadians first, what did the Liberals do? They tried to jam a bill down our throats that would have removed the power of Parliament until December of 2021. That was the Liberal response to working together.

Forgive me if I do not just stop doing my job as a member of the opposition and give the government a blank cheque to do whatever it wants. We have seen what it will do with it. The Liberals are asking us to just work on COVID-related matters.

The WE Charity scandal was borne out of an attempt to rush money out the door and do it in a way that benefited a Liberal-friendly charity. Charities all over the country are suffering right now. Their donations are down. They do not know how they will make ends meet. The people who they serve are not getting the same level of support.

However, not all those charities have paid half a million dollars to the Prime Minister's family. Therefore, they did not get a half-a-billion program designed by themselves from the government.

The fact that the program has now been abandoned in its entirety tells us that it was a complete and total failure. If the government actually believed in the program, it would have stuck it out. It would have stuck with WE and continued down the road of a completely flawed program that did not serve the people it was intended to serve, but rather served people who had served the Liberal Party through the Prime Minister's family. It also produced some fantastic propaganda videos for the Prime Minister in the past and pumped his tires wherever it could. It was a Liberal-friendly charity that got Canadian taxpayer dollars. That is what we are talking about today.

The motion we are talking about today calls for the creation of a parliamentary committee so the Liberals will finally stop blocking the work of the finance committee, the ethics committee and now the health committee. Right now they are blocking any attempts to get work done at those committees. They have been talking non-stop for days to avoid votes coming to the floor at those committees.

• (1525)

Why would they do that unless they were afraid of what those motions call for? The motions call for the production of papers for documents that had previously been agreed to be released, before the Prime Minister shut down Parliament just days before those documents were set to be released. It was supposed to be for a historic reset. The Liberals needed time to get the brains around the table, as was said in QP today, to come up with a new plan that would launch Canada into the new reality that we would face in COVID-19, post-COVID-19 or a "living with COVID-19" world.

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What did they do instead? It was just a rehash of things they have not delivered on over the last five years. There was no grand vision that was launched. There was no reset. It was just a rehash, a warming over of previous Liberal promises that have not been delivered on. Liberals prorogued Parliament to prevent those documents from coming forward. However, the Prime Minister said it was just temporary and that, when Parliament came back, if parliamentarians wished, they could ask for the information again. This was not shutting down investigations; it was just a little delay.

Of course now they have switched tactics and will not allow votes to come forward at those committees, which has prompted us to come forward with this motion.

What is the response to a motion to create a committee? The response is that before they let that happen there will be an election. That is what we are hearing today from the Prime Minister. He bragged about it today. The House leader was similarly threatening to plunge Canadians into an election over the creation of a committee and the release of documents that have been previously ordered released.

These are the reasons the government is giving for threatening an election. What the Liberals are really doing is threatening members of Parliament. They are threatening members of Parliament by saying, if we vote for the creation of this committee, if we vote to have these documents released as was previously voted on and agreed to by all parties, it is go time. It is time for the election. It is time to get signs out, go door knocking in a pandemic. It is "we will stop at nothing". The ultimate nuclear weapon in a minority Parliament is to threaten an election.

The Liberals have done it to protect the Prime Minister from whatever is in those documents. I do not know what is in the documents. Canadians would like to know. The motion calls for the documents to be examined in camera. The Liberals are threatening an election over letting 12 parliamentarians see documents and not be able to talk about them in public. That is enough to threaten an election.

Conservatives will not be intimidated. We will do our jobs. We will talk about the pandemic and, quite frankly, I resent the use of health workers, small businesses and the people in my community to suggest that if we bring forward this motion to demand accountability, somehow we are not supporting them during COVID. What a ridiculous assertion.

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To use health care workers, who did not have PPE at the beginning of this crisis because of the inaction of government, to say that the Liberals are standing up for health care workers and if we vote for this motion, we are not, that is outrageous. To say about small business owners, who are hanging on by their fingernails because the government failed to secure the borders early enough because the government gave bad advice from the start, that somehow if we vote for the creation of a committee we are voting against those small business owners, that is outrageous.

My constituents will not allow the COVID-19 pandemic to be used as a fig leaf to cover up Liberal corruption. I am tired of hearing it. I have heard it all day long. If we do not talk about that every moment of every day, stay tuned. We have another day that is allotted to us to talk about the issues we wish to raise later this week, and not by obstructing the work of the House.

If the government does not cause its own defeat over this motion, we will talk about the failures of the government on COVID-19. We will talk about where we have worked together, but what we will not be is intimidated into silence, into sweeping Liberal corruption under the rug simply because that is what the government wants to threaten us with, saying there will be an election if we vote in favour of a committee. What a ridiculous thing. We are here to work for Canadians, but we are not here to turn a blind eye to Liberal corruption.

We will be voting in favour of this motion and so should all members of Parliament who actually want to get to the bottom of the WE scandal and the Liberal corruption in it.

• (1530)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have known the member for some time, not terribly well, but I respect his role in the House. I certainly respect the role his father played in the House, serving in the capacity of Speaker for a period of time.

I am surprised, however, that a few times today the member put on the record something that he must know to be a simple mistruth, which is that \$500 million did not go to the WE Charity organization. That money was for students. There was \$43 million that was going to go to WE from the government for administering the program, and that money was going to be reimbursed. I am not saying that the government did not make mistakes on the file. It did, and I said that earlier today.

Why is the member not putting facts on the record and allowing hyperbole to guide his rhetoric here today?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that parliamentarians agreed to have certain documents released to the committee prior to the Prime Minister's coming in with the hammer and proroguing Parliament for no reason, in the middle of a pandemic, when the CERB was about to expire and when other matters needed to be considered by this Parliament.

All parliamentarians on those committees had agreed that those documents should come forward. The Prime Minister prorogued the House and said they could pick it up again when we came back in September. Of course, the Liberals will not allow for that to happen. Therefore, they prorogued, they bought some time, they have

tried to get it off the national radar, and now they are blocking those documents from coming forward. There is no hyperbole in that. It is clearly laid out in the motion.

Unless they have something to hide, these members will vote in favour of the creation of this committee and release the documents.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Conservative colleague for his speech, and I have a question for him.

This summer, as a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I had to travel to Ottawa to urgently study the impacts of the pandemic. We were supposed to send a letter to our minister, then study what has been done this fall and report back.

Women have been particularly affected, and as my party's critic for seniors, I can say that the same is true for senior women. This morning in committee, I managed to get a priority motion passed that will allow our committee to pick up where we left off with our work this summer, so that we can continue working on mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on women and senior women.

Then we have this government playing games, threatening to trigger an election that would once again put all our work on hold smack in the middle of a pandemic. This is urgent.

Why not examine the WE affair, agree to this committee and let us continue our work as parliamentarians? This is how we look after people.

• (1535)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I think it is a good one, because the government no longer seems to care about committee work.

[*English*]

No work is acceptable to the government anymore. Government members will not accept any work plan. They are filibustering every committee. They are shutting down the health committee now. They are shutting down the finance committee. They are shutting down ethics. They are standing in the way of the work of the status of women committee, and they have the audacity to say that we are the ones causing the problem.

I would say to them, on the WE Charity scandal, along with all of the other scandals that involve COVID-19 spending that has benefited Liberal interests, to get it out of those other committees and put it in a special committee. We can consider it there, and let status of women, health, finance and ethics get on with the work of the nation.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, this WE scandal does need to be looked into. We did not like the program when it was announced. We did not think it was fair to be giving the equivalent of \$10 an hour to students for volunteering for non-profits.

In my riding, we were short \$500,000 in the Canada summer jobs program. When this unfolded in July, I immediately sent letters to various government ministers, saying that these funds should go into the Canada summer jobs program so that we could help students and non-profits through this pandemic. What does the hon. member think happened to that \$900 million that was supposed to help students and non-profits? We have students who did not get the summer jobs they needed, who are now in a position where they are financially strapped and who are paying tuition fees that are extremely high. They need help.

What does the hon. member think should have been done with that funding?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, that is what made this thing so unbelievable. For the government to say that the public service was unable to deliver a program for students, when there is already a program that exists to deliver job experience for students, is outrageous. We all participate in that program every year, the Canada summer jobs program.

The Liberals said it could not be done by public servants, and then they picked an organization that could not operate in French. It could not deliver a national program. It is an absolute joke that they think we are going to swallow, hook, line and sinker, their line that the public service said they could not do the job and demanded we give it to WE, and WE just happened to give the Prime Minister's family half a million dollars.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 338 of us sit in the House of Commons as elected representatives. We have been given the voice of the Canadian public. We occupy a place of sacred trust. It is not our right to be in Parliament but rather our privilege, and it should be stewarded as such. It is a tremendous honour.

Sadly, this summer we learned that the Prime Minister gave \$912 million to the WE Charity Foundation. He gave the money to it in the name of running a youth grant program. This seemed innocent at first, but upon closer examination it was found that the Prime Minister and a number of his ministers enjoy close ties with the co-founders of this charity. In fact, almost half a million dollars have been funnelled through WE to the family members of the Prime Minister and his former finance minister. This is a classic case of using one's position of power to reward friends.

What this ultimately comes down to is trust. Canadians want to know that the government is stewarding the trust that has been placed in it. Canadians rightly want to know that they are not being misled, deceived and taken advantage of by those who they have elected to represent them in the House of Commons.

What the Conservatives are proposing today is that a special committee be set up to look into this matter. The proposed committee would examine the misuse of taxpayers' dollars during what the Liberals, by their own admission, are calling the worst crisis since World War II.

One of the Prime Minister's campaign promises in the last election had to do with strengthening Parliament and public institutions. In fact, on the Liberal Party website it says, "Parliament works best when its members are free to do what they have been elected to do:

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be the voice for their communities, and hold the government to account." It goes on to promise that Liberals will take steps to strengthen Parliament. We are giving the Prime Minister and his members an opportunity to do just that. We agree with the Prime Minister that trust does need to be restored in this Parliament, and one of the best ways to do that is to bear in mind his own advice: to let the sunshine in.

Before entering public life, in one of the leadership roles I carried, I had the responsibility of managing bank accounts and signing cheques. When I assumed the role, only one signing authority was necessary. I insisted on having the process changed so that two signing authorities were required. Why did I do this? I wanted it to be done this way for two reasons: one, it held me accountable by ensuring that a second person would see the amount that I was spending and what I was spending it on; and two, it protected me from being perceived or accused of wrongdoing. I had nothing to fear because I had nothing to hide, but I had a lot to gain from the extra element of accountability and the protection that was granted by adding a second signing authority.

Similarly, if the Liberals have nothing to hide, then the establishment of this special committee should be welcomed. In fact, it should be wanted. It would simply affirm what the government claims to be true: It would increase public trust and would make us, the opposition, look ridiculously silly if the Liberals are in fact telling the truth.

The Liberals would have the opportunity to watch their numbers grow. The polls would rise and they could call an election. Things would be great for them. Unfortunately, if things are false or not as they claim, they do in fact have a lot to fear. This would explain why they are trying to shut this down. They keep fighting us. Could it be because they are guilty?

The Liberals continue to utter the mantra "nothing to see here", yet they have spent dozens of hours filibustering at committee meetings. They have put their thumbs over the camera to pretend there is a technical glitch. They have gone as far as to shut down Parliament during most of August and September, when the Prime Minister prorogued it, and now they are threatening to force an election should we continue to push for a special committee. This scandal must be really bad if they are willing to go through this much work and effort.

In August, when the Prime Minister shut down Parliament to block investigations into his scandal, he claimed, "When Parliament resumes in the fall there will be ample opportunities to continue to ask whatever questions committees or members want to continue to do," yet we see the exact opposite happening. This is a massive cover-up, but it makes sense. This is not the first time the Prime Minister has been caught in a breach. It is not the first time that he has taken advantage of Canadians.

Business of Supply

• (1540)

The Prime Minister is facing his third investigation by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner in less than five years. This is unprecedented. No other prime minister in Canada's history has ever been convicted of an ethics violation, let alone being found guilty of two and under investigation for a third time.

With regard to the WE scandal, there are a few things we know for sure. The Prime Minister's mother, wife and brother have received almost half a million dollars from WE. We know the charity was to receive \$912 million from the Prime Minister to administer a youth grant program. We know that \$43.5 million of that was to be kept at the WE Charity Foundation for administrative costs. The rest was supposed to be issued directly to young people. We know the Canada student service grant was announced on April 22. We know someone from the Prime Minister's Office spoke with WE about its proposal on May 5, which also happened to be the same day that WE was allowed to start charging expenses for administering the program. We also know that cabinet did not actually approve this proposal until almost 20 days later, on May 22.

Something smells fishy. It doesn't quite add up. Why was the WE Charity assured it could start charging expenses and spend taxpayer money for a program that was not even approved yet? That is odd, right? Could it be because the Prime Minister was doing a favour for his friends, who had done numerous favours for him in the past? This is one of the reasons we need this committee. We have important questions. Canadians have important questions, and they need them answered.

Winston Churchill famously said, "The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is." The Liberals can fight as hard as they want to keep the truth hidden. They can shut down Parliament, try to change the channel and filibuster for dozens of hours. However, here is the thing. The truth always comes out. It always reveals itself.

The Liberals continue to accuse us of being out of step with Canadians because we are calling for this study and are not solely focused on the pandemic. This is an incredibly egocentric thing to say. Suggesting that Canadians are only concerned with COVID-19 and could not possibly simultaneously care about something like ethics, morality or the strength of democracy is extremely naive, paternalistic and condescending of the government.

Let us put aside the Liberals' folly for just a moment. Let us consider the fact that the WE scandal is currently being investigated by three different committees, including the finance committee. Setting up a special committee dedicated solely to the WE investigation would allow other committees to return to their important work, with a strong focus on helping Canadians get through the pandemic and look after their livelihoods. In other words, if the Liberals truly want Parliament to focus its time and energy on responding to COVID, they should vote yes for the formation of this special committee. That is unless the Liberal virus known as corruption is more dangerous than the COVID virus.

The Prime Minister said it well when he said that the best disinfectant is to let the sun shine in. Why is he so afraid to let the special committee come together? Why is he afraid of having his decisions examined? Why is he afraid of being held accountable? What

is the Prime Minister covering up? The answers to these questions lie within the formation of this committee. It would allow the other committees to get back to their important work and serve Canadians well while simultaneously getting to the bottom of the WE scandal.

• (1545)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, five years ago I would have said the priority of the Conservative Party was to look for ways to talk about ethical issues that discredit the leader of the Liberal Party. Even when he was the leader of the third party, the Conservatives went out of their way to discredit him.

Absolutely nothing has changed. One would think that during a worldwide pandemic, the Conservatives would maybe put the brakes on this for a little while and start dealing with the priority of Canadians, which is the health and welfare of Canadians and our economy. Instead, they want to talk about a scandal that is not a scandal. I would welcome a discussion or debate on this with a university class of the member's choosing. I do not quite understand why even during a pandemic they do not see the value of putting their five-year-long ethical question on hold.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, it is rich of this member to once again assume that he knows exactly what the needs and desires of Canadians are, and to tell them. He is telling Canadians that they are not interested in this scandal. He is telling Canadians that they are not interested in accountability. He is telling Canadians that they are not interested in morality, ethics or the protection of democracy. The member is telling Canadians what they are interested in and what they are not interested in. That is inappropriate. He has the responsibility to listen to what Canadians are saying, rather than to dictate to them where their interests should lie.

The vast majority of emails, phone calls and social media comments that my office has received have to do with the WE scandal and holding the Prime Minister to account. I will continue to do so.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a very simple principle: when a person has nothing to hide, they generally do not hesitate to open their books or disclose information. When a person has nothing to hide, they let others check the evidence.

That is not what is happening here. The government is prepared to force the country into an election when we are going through the worst crisis since the Second World War, or so they say.

What we know right now about the WE Charity scandal is enough to horrify anyone who has the slightest bit of respect for the notion of ethics. We could write a soap opera with what already know about the WE Charity scandal, but we would probably be sent back to the drawing board because the story would not seem credible. It would be too far-fetched.

If we begin to extrapolate the reasons why the Liberal government does not want us to dig any deeper into the WE scandal, what might we find? We are extrapolating, talking. We are trying to imagine what could be worse than what we already know.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

• (1550)

[*English*]

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has raised an excellent point: If they have nothing to hide, they have nothing to fear. There is no reason the government should not be voting in favour of this motion today. In fact, if the Liberals are truly concerned about allowing committees to get back to their important work, if they are truly concerned about making sure that Canadians are served well through the pandemic, then they should allow this special committee to form so that other committees can continue forward with the things they need to concern themselves with regarding the pandemic. We can set up one committee to focus on the WE scandal and allow other committees to focus on the important work that they are doing within the House of Commons. It is that simple.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want my colleague from Lethbridge to use the last few minutes of her time to address the ridiculous position the Liberals have taken in claiming that the government does not have the ability to deal with this one little parliamentary committee and that Parliament does not have the ability to conduct numerous studies at one time. I have asked this before, but I would ask my colleague from Lethbridge to elaborate on what she believes the Liberal government is trying to hide.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, when this pandemic first struck and became an issue, one thing the Conservative members pitched to the government was to form a wartime cabinet of sorts. Borrowing what had been done in history, we wanted to bring all the parties to the table, with members to represent them, and have a conversation about the best response to COVID-19. We felt this would serve Canadians well. It would put more minds together, and we could work as a collective for the well-being of the Canadian public. At the end of the day, of course it would be up to the government to make final decisions, to put forward policy and to implement spending, but at least it would give us an understanding of one another's perspective and would enrich the decision-making process. Unfortunately, the Liberals wanted nothing to do with this. They squashed our voices and put us in a corner.

My point is this. We have always been willing to work with the government to serve Canadians well throughout this pandemic, and time and again we have been shut down. Once again we find ourselves happy to work with the Liberals by putting aside this special committee so that other committees can get to work, and once again the Liberals are threatening us.

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Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Western Economic Diversification Canada) and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change (Canada Water Agency), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Glenarry—Prescott—Russell.

When Parliament was recalled last month, our government presented a strong plan to support Canadians during the global pandemic. Our main focus has been, and continues to be, how to best help and protect Canadians through these very difficult times. The last few months, I think everyone will agree, demonstrated the extraordinary work Parliament can achieve for Canadians when parliamentarians work together. We are now well into October, and our government is working very hard to ensure that we are doing everything we can to protect Canadians from the COVID-19 virus. This has been our priority since the start of the pandemic and it continues to be.

Unfortunately, under their new leader, the Conservatives want to play politics and carry on their inquisition, and before I argue why the motion presented by the leader of the official opposition is irresponsible, I want to take a moment to look back.

When it became obvious back in March that COVID-19 was a serious crisis, our government rapidly refocused efforts on providing help as quickly as possible. We took an all-hands-on-deck approach, because we knew that the health and safety of Canadians were at stake. I am sure colleagues on all sides of the House will remember how many emails, phone calls and other communications we received from folks in our communities who needed help, and fast.

When workers told us they had suddenly lost their jobs, we provided the CERB within a matter of weeks, which provided direct income to over 277,000 Manitobans, alone. When seniors said they were having challenges making ends meet due to additional costs, we listened to them. Over 14,000 seniors in my community alone received a tax-free top-up to their OAS and GIS payments. When parents said they were struggling to provide for their children, we immediately provided a top-up to the Canada child benefit. I know that for over 18,000 families in my community who received this benefit, the additional top-up in May meant that they could make it through to the next month. When small businesses came to us and said they were hard hit by the pandemic, we acted very quickly. Over 18,000 businesses in Manitoba received access to the \$40,000 CEBA loan, as well as the wage subsidy and other business programs. This financial support meant that local business owners could keep the lights on, pay their employees and support their own families.

Each one of us who fills a seat in the House of Commons came here to fight for the best interests of our communities. I know that the folks in my community are worried about their jobs, their health and the safety of their loved ones. They want to know what parliamentarians are going to do to make sure we get them to the other side of this pandemic. I am not convinced the Conservatives are focused on the pandemic.

Business of Supply

● (1555)

We recognized the financial impact of doing what needs to be done, all while knowing that doing less would cost more. That is why we agree that a special House of Commons committee, dedicated to studying COVID-19-related investments, should be established. Adopting the reasonable motion the government House leader put forward on Sunday night would achieve this. This special committee would help to ensure that other standing committees could do their work and focus on the issue that truly matters: COVID-19. Unfortunately, the motion for a special committee, put forward by the leader of the official opposition, would not accomplish this.

Rather than focusing on how the government and Parliament can work together to best support Canadians, the Leader of the Opposition put forward a blatantly partisan proposal. Its main objective is to paralyze the government at a time when the entire Government of Canada is focused on keeping Canadians safe and healthy. If this is the Conservatives' priority, one has to wonder if they are taking the pandemic seriously at all.

Their caucus has used uncertified tests. There are stories in the media about them not practising physical distancing in the antechamber. There is even a picture from an event with the Leader of the Opposition wherein people are unmasked, and just days ago he claimed he was immune to COVID-19. We know that is not a fact. It is very disappointing to see this lack of seriousness on their part, and Canadians are watching. Canadians are watching because we are in the midst of a second wave. They want their politicians to be leaders now, but we agree that does not mean that Parliament cannot perform its usual practices of holding the government to account, and that is why we have proposed a reasonable, responsible alternative to the Conservatives' ridiculous motion. There is a reasonable path forward.

● (1600)

The committee would mirror the balance in committees now. The committee would have all the powers of a standing committee, as provided in the Standing Orders. This would free up all the other standing committees that the Conservatives are jamming up with their inquisition. We have also proactively suggested in the motion that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health and other ministers and senior officials would appear as witnesses from time to time as the committee sees fit.

The committee would also be given the mandate to take over responsibility for the issue of document redactions related to the July 7, 2020, motion currently before the Standing Committee on Finance. I think most reasonable people would agree that this is a reasonable way forward and that is what Canadians want.

We cannot turn our committees into partisan tools to force private citizens to release personal financial information. Where does this end? My opposition colleagues can continue down this road if they so wish, but I doubt that Canadians will follow.

In conclusion, I think all members would agree that there is so much more work to do. Our government has procured tens of millions of pieces of PPE, secured millions of rapid tests for deployment to the provinces, and is working to revamp and overhaul our

aged EI system. This pandemic exposed holes in our social safety net, shining light on the need for reforms and the need to rethink how we protect the most vulnerable in this country. That is what our government is focused on.

We are focused on the path ahead and guiding Canadians through the second wave of COVID-19. We are focused on the challenging economic recovery before us. We have already seen a rebound; however, we know there are tens of thousands of businesses and many Canadians who still need our help. That is where the priorities of Parliament need to lie. Our focus is forward on the problems facing our country and finding the solutions to fix them.

We do not want an election. Canadians do not want an election. We have important legislation before the House, as hon. members will know. I invite my opposition colleagues to get serious and consider the proposal that our government House leader has put forward.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take exception with a number of things that my colleague from Winnipeg South and parliamentary secretary said. He is saying that the government does not want an election, yet the Liberals are claiming that this is a matter of confidence. The motion clearly states that it is not, in the opinion of the House, a matter of confidence. There is nothing in the parliamentary committee we are suggesting that would stop the work of government, or of carrying on all of its different COVID-19 responses and programs.

The parliamentary secretary says he does not want an election, yet the Liberals are prepared to go down in a ball of flames, in a great ball of glory, over this motion to bring about a committee to look at accountability and transparency. I am looking forward to this coming to an election. I am ready to go and will personally spend time campaigning in Winnipeg South explaining to the constituents in Winnipeg how their Liberal members stood here and covered up this scandal.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman to Winnipeg South to campaign if he wishes. Of course, I am hoping there will not be an election. I have heard the official opposition all day talking about a lack of confidence in the government and now saying why this should not be a confidence motion. I think the Conservatives are talking out of both sides of their mouths.

I want to go back to what the member for Chilliwack—Hope said. The Conservative Party is very famous for its games. We will remember the 36-hour voting marathon, another 20-hour marathon and obstruction at every turn. They want to do this again, and really paralyze Parliament. We are just not going to stand for it.

*Business of Supply**[Translation]*

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I should preface my remarks by saying that I feel like the Liberals are ready to trigger an election. When I hear the list of all the programs and all the achievements, it sounds like an election speech. On top of that, Liberal Party financing is guaranteed by the wage subsidy, let's not forget.

I would remind the House that all the programs created as part of this crisis are not only the product of the current government; they are the product of all the members who stepped up, worked together and even improved the measures brought in. The credit does not belong to the Liberal government alone.

I have two questions. Why was Parliament prorogued on August 18? The answer is that there was no good reason, considering the situation and the crisis we were in. It was for just one reason: to sweep the WE scandal under the rug.

Why does the Liberal Party not want to create this special committee to get to the bottom of the matter? What does it have to hide?

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid: Mr. Speaker, we have heard members on all sides of the House talk about this unprecedented time, a health and economic crisis of really unprecedented proportions.

The member talked about the need for collaboration. We have seen that, but we have really seen it break down with this motion. We have seen a bit of an unholy alliance, if I can say that, with the Bloc, the NDP and the Conservative Party uniting with a very unreasonable motion that will actually prevent us from collaborating and not enable us to get things done for Quebec, Manitoba and the entire country.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House to speak to this bogus motion.

This morning I got up and took some time to visit with young entrepreneurs because this is Small Business Week. Their business is called Kyan Cuisine. Our government's support was very important to them. Their revenue plunged because of COVID-19. Their products were on supermarket shelves, but, unfortunately, they had to adjust. They got help from a program that got money out the door to community development corporations across the country, including the Prescott-Russell Community Development Corporation, the PRCDC. I want to congratulate John Candie and the PRCDC team in my riding, who are doing excellent work to support our businesses.

They were able to do it with the \$20,000 they received, which enabled them to regroup, go digital, create a website and reach new customers. This morning, I was happy to hear that these young entrepreneurs can keep earning a living and meeting a really important need in our community.

[English]

About a month and a half ago, the Conservatives had their leadership race and I thought we were going to hear a different tone from them. I thought we were really going to hear a different tone from what the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle demonstrated in the House of Commons. However, I can see that the Conservative Party of Canada is dead. I heard the Leader of the Opposition mention he wants to take Canada back. He took the Conservative Party way back, way back to the nineties of the Reform Party and the Canadian Alliance. That is what that particular party on the other side of the House has become.

Am I the only one who views this Tory supply motion as wanting to set up a McCarthy House committee that has absolutely no value and no purpose to serve Canadians? It is trying to perhaps go after the Liberals the way the former McCarthy committee tried to go after American values in the U.S. a few decades ago. That particular committee would be a witch hunt. It is a drive-by smear, and that has to stop. Do not take my word for it. Take the words of Kory Teneycke, a former Conservative, who continues to hate Liberals, who wrote a pretty good article about the drive-by smears that the leader of the official opposition and all members of the official opposition are doing on people who said yes to serving Canadians.

When will it be enough for the official opposition? When will it be enough? They will not take the word of the Ethics Commissioner who, by the way, denied the request from the member for Carleton and the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. He said that their drive-by smear of the chief of staff and her husband had absolutely no merit. What was put in this motion is the same damn thing. They put the same request in the motion, so tell me how this is not a drive-by smear.

Listening to the official opposition, it is as if there was zero accountability that happened during the summer. Just before we were prorogued, 5,000 documents were provided to the committee. They went through it. They even created a website. Then the Prime Minister appeared before that committee.

Again, do not compare the Prime Minister to the Almighty; compare him to the alternative. All of the members who were sitting in the House almost seven years ago, when they were asked to pass a motion in the House to have the former prime minister appear before a committee, what did those members who are now the official opposition do? They voted against it. That is a true lack of transparency. This side of the House and the Prime Minister believe in transparency and appeared before the committee, something that the Conservatives would have never done in the 10 years in this place they were on this side of the House.

We have the Prime Minister who appeared before the committee. We have multiple ministers who appeared before the committee. We have ADMs, deputy ministers and a bunch of witnesses who appeared before the finance committee, and still to this day it is not enough. Now what we are seeing is that they are proposing this witch hunt committee proposal, which makes absolutely no sense and goes after innocent people who have zero business in this affair. I will not let this happen and I will be voting against this particular motion because it makes absolutely no sense.

Business of Supply

• (1610)

We know that, as soon as the WE affair started to make the news, the leader of the Bloc Québécois came out and said that the Prime Minister needed to resign, that there was corruption and that they were sure of it. It was the same thing for the leader of the official opposition. He said that the Prime Minister needed to resign and there was corruption happening.

Corruption is a Criminal Code offence, and if they have evidence, they can submit it to the RCMP. They will do their job. In fact, both parties called the RCMP and to this day we are still waiting for charges. We are still waiting to have people go to jail. For the only member of Parliament who went to jail, it was not a parliamentary committee that decided whether that particular member of Parliament should go to jail; it was the cops. It was a Conservative member of Parliament, and they should be ashamed of that.

I have advice for the Leader of the Opposition and the advice does not necessarily come from me. It comes from health officials across Canada. It is a simple piece of advice to just wear a mask when he cannot physically distance himself. Time and again, and my colleague the parliamentary secretary mentioned a few examples, the Leader of the Opposition was taking pictures without physically distancing. Again, this weekend, we saw him with Mr. Kenney, who is no longer in the Ottawa bubble. Therefore, he should wear a mask. He is the leader of the official opposition and he is supposed to lead by example. If he wants to be Prime Minister one day, he should lead by example.

When folks are talking to me in the riding, they want to know that we are there for them in times of need, especially in times of COVID-19. The wage subsidy has been a great program to support our businesses, as are the allocations that I have mentioned previously with regard to supporting our businesses.

[Translation]

In terms of funding for businesses, the Canada emergency wage subsidy helps our entrepreneurs who need to reinvent themselves and go online. I am thinking about the restaurant industry needing help to get through this second wave we are sadly in the middle of. I was hoping to debate a motion today that would offer a way to help our businesses across Canada. I think it is important to support them in order to help them get through this crisis and ensure their ongoing presence in our urban centres.

I will close by simply saying that I am extremely disappointed in the opposition members. I am not surprised. I have been here for five years, but I have been watching them for more than five years. What was true in 2006, 2008, 2010, 2015 and 2019 is still true today. Opposition members are behaving in the same irresponsible way they always did and are bringing partisanship to a whole new level. It is pure partisanship like in the days of the Reform Party and the Canadian Alliance in the 1990s.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to that rambling diatribe about how evil Conservatives are.

At what point did the government become so small under this party that it cannot handle an extra committee, one that is just ask-

ing for some documents that the Liberals have filibustered away since Parliament resumed? How can the government be so incompetent that it cannot have a special committee set up and still run all the programs and benefits that go to Canadians? That is what the Liberals are saying. They are saying they cannot do both.

When did the government become so incompetent under the Prime Minister and the member?

• (1615)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, it is a great comment, but I completely disagree with the comments he has made. Listening to that particular member talk again, it is as if the government has provided absolutely zero testimony to committees on this particular affair. It is as if the government provided zero documents. They already have 5,000. I will remind the member to look at the website. If he cares so much about the documents that were released and the particular rules that govern the disclosure of those documents, perhaps he should just ask the member for Carleton to educate him on with that disclosure act is.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our Liberal colleague gave a speech in which he was the champion of side-tracking the debate.

He talked about the face covering of the leader of the official opposition. He talked about American McCarthyism. We know it was an absolutely unfounded speech.

From 2017 to 2020, the WE Charity received \$120,000 for five contracts with the government and \$5.2 million in subsidies and contributions. Is there a justification for giving that much money to an organization that is very close to the Liberal government?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, the members of the opposition are making unfounded allegations.

In early July, without even knowing the facts, the leader of the Bloc Québécois accused the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party of being corrupt. If we are corrupt, then all they have to do is send their evidence and testimony to the RCMP and let it do its job.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a bit surreal to watch the Prime Minister threaten an election if there is a committee struck to look into government corruption, all the while maintaining he has nothing to hide. The NDP is committed to ensuring that we have oversight and accountability. The Liberals seem to think filibustering and delaying is somehow going to be able to hide what they are trying to hide from Canadians.

I am curious if the member across the way thinks that threatening to go to an election makes it look like they have nothing to hide.

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Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, I have lots of respect for my hon. colleague, but again, I am listening to the opposition saying that we on this side of the House have zero accountability. I was on a government operations committee that looked at all procurements during COVID-19, and the House leader has proposed an alternative to look at all COVID-19 spending. Why does the NDP not get on board?

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know why the WE money, this \$900 million, did not go to students and to non-profits. It could have gone to the Canada summer jobs program, where students would have been paid at least minimum wage, rather than \$10 an hour, which is what the volunteer program did. What happened to that \$900 million? How is the government working to help students and non-profits now?

I put the suggestion in as soon as the WE scandal broke. I sent letters to ministers saying to put that money into Canada summer jobs. I could spend a couple of million dollars in my riding right away on people who need work and non-profits who need workers. What happened to the money?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, it did not get spent.

On the issue of supporting students, the CSSG was just one way that we could have supported students, but obviously we had the student CERB, which helped thousands and thousands of students across Canada.

With regard to the Canada summer jobs program, I will remind each member who stood here in May complaining and asking where the Canada summer jobs program for students was and why it was not being approved fast enough. I would invite the member to look at the non-partisan public servant testimony at committee this summer, in which they provided answers as to why they chose the WE Charity to deliver the CSSG.

• (1620)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

Canadians are rightfully concerned about what is going on in this place right now. This morning they woke up to hear the Prime Minister and the Liberal House leader say that if this continues in Ottawa, they are going to force an election. What is so egregious that the evil opposition parties have come together to do? It is to demand accountability and transparency.

The Prime Minister has effectively said that if parliamentarians support accountability and transparency, then Liberals do not believe they support the government. I can tell the Prime Minister this. Conservatives do not support corruption and, therefore, we do not support his government. However, I believe that Canadians deserve to know what the government has been up to before they are expected to cast their ballots. I believe that very strongly.

The Liberals are heckling me because they do not want Canadians to find out what has gone on. As a matter of fact, I had the privilege of sitting on the ethics committee and before the Prime Minister broke his promise and prorogued Parliament, the ethics committee was hours away from receiving these WE-Trudeau documents. It was hours before he prorogued Parliament. When he prorogued

Parliament, it shut down all of the investigations into this matter. It shut down—

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member has been here long enough to know that we do not name members by their given names, but by their ridings or titles.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary. This came up earlier when this subject happened to be before the House. We must keep in mind that the family name in this case applies to other family members, other than those who happen to be members of the House. I do ask hon. members to be specific when they use that name, perhaps, to ensure it does not apply to hon. members, in this case the Right Hon. Prime Minister.

The hon. member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. That gives me an opportunity to clarify because the Liberal members across the way seem to be somewhat confused. It was the family, not just the Prime Minister, who received a benefit from the WE organization.

As a matter of fact, having had the opportunity to pause and reflect on what exactly went on, we are talking about half a million dollars that flowed to the Prime Minister's family. I hope that clarifies it for the members opposite. If that is helpful, I am happy that I have had the privilege of reminding them.

Not only did the Prime Minister prorogue Parliament to shut down the release of these documents, but since Parliament came back after prorogation was over, the Liberal members of Parliament have been sent to committee after committee after committee to humiliate themselves by filibustering hour after hour after hour to ensure that committees can never go to a vote so these documents come forward.

As a matter of fact, we are in a minority Parliament and that is the right of minority Parliaments, to come together as opposition to demand the documentation the same way the government, if it had a majority, would have the right to resist. The Liberals are using this tool of humiliation. They are humiliating their new members by telling them to go into these committees and read out textbooks and letters they have been sent by ministers.

As a matter of fact, at the ethics committee, Liberal members were sent in there and the parliamentary secretary was sent in there, as well. Of course, that is another broken promise by the Prime Minister. When he was elected, he promised that he would never have parliamentary secretaries sitting on parliamentary committees. He broke that promise. What did the parliamentary secretary read into the record? Instructions from the Liberal House leader as to what the ethics committee should be doing. Can members imagine a situation where the Liberal cabinet is trying to direct parliamentary committees?

Business of Supply

Having had prorogation, having humiliated themselves at committee and having the possibility of these documents finally coming forward because the House might rule they should, the Prime Minister is saying they will stop at nothing to ensure these documents never come forward and we will have an election to stall these documents from ever being released.

The Prime Minister is right when he says if opposition members believe in transparency and accountability, then they do not support our government. He is right. We do not support this type of behaviour. This is a democracy and we will continue to fight for it.

Do members remember when the Prime Minister, before he was the Prime Minister, used to talk about his ideals, like sunlight being the best disinfectant? I can tell members that it is time for some sunlight on these documents because the infection of Liberal corruption needs to be disinfected. It just gets worse if Liberal members do the dirty work of their Prime Minister and continue to cover it up.

Do members remember when the Prime Minister used to say they would be a government that would be open by default? All of what has gone on since prorogation has been an effort to cover things up, to ensure that things are not open and that Canadians can never see what happened with regard to the scandal.

The Prime Minister keeps saying that there is nothing to see here. In fact, the parliamentary secretary to the House leader of the Liberal Party just said if we do not get what we want, then we are just going to do this one thing, but that is what the Prime Minister is saying. If he does not get his way, he is going to force an election. That is exactly what he is saying.

• (1625)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

According to Beauchesne's, one is not allowed to impute motives. The member just finished indicating something I just did not say, so I would ask him to quote me accurately if he is going to quote me.

The Deputy Speaker: That is the impute motives reference. The parliamentary secretary is not incorrect about that. That usually connects up with issues around unparliamentary language, so he is about 70% there in terms of that comment.

I did not hear any unparliamentary language in this case, but I do see what has exchanged here as probably in the category of debate. I do not think that is a point of order.

We will go back to the hon. member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie.

• (1630)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals intend to continue to debate these facts but some things are not debatable, including when this scandal first broke and the WE organization said that it never pays speakers. Then the Prime Minister said to trust him, that all was good here and that we should listen to WE. I recall him saying that we should listen to WE.

Then when the documents started flooding in, we found there were massive contradictions between what the Prime Minister said

and contradictions with regard to what WE said. What we found out was that the Liberal finance minister had received a luxury vacation from this charity in the amount of over \$40,000. I do not even know what kind of holiday he was having for \$40,000. Good for him, I suppose, but what kind of charity offers a multi-millionaire a \$40,000 vacation?

My community has been involved in school fundraisers for the WE Charity. If the moms and dads who were collecting bottles in my community to support the WE Charity found out they were financing a \$40,000-vacation for a multi-millionaire Liberal finance minister, they would be shocked.

Then we found out that the Prime Minister's family had received around half a million dollars in fees for speaking engagements, whatever it was, as the story continues to change as to why they were paid. All we know is they were paid. Of course, at the same time, WE was producing ads that were glowing of the Prime Minister and ads to promote the Prime Minister.

Now the Liberals say we cannot have a special committee to review all of this. We cannot do that. Why can we not do that? They say it is because it will paralyze Parliament. Let us just remember that no minister, not the Prime Minister, no bureaucrats, sit on committees. It is all just regular members of Parliament, none of whom have ministerial responsibilities, so we can probably have 12 members sit on a committee without paralyzing Parliament.

What is the Liberals' solution, their counter to this proposal? Instead of setting up a special committee that gets documents, they would like to set up a special committee that does not get the documents. That is their solution, and that would ensure we did not paralyze Parliament if we had a different special committee that did not get the documents.

We are going to continue to demand those documents. The Prime Minister has been found guilty of ethics violations time after time. I suspect very shortly it is going to be another time; the first prime minister in Canadian history. The Prime Minister was found guilty of interfering with a litigation with a court case, later firing his Attorney General because she would not go along.

It is interesting that none of those scandals resulted in the Prime Minister threatening an election to make sure that they never came to see the light of day. What is in these documents that he would go to the extraordinary length of proroguing Parliament, embarrassing all of his members who are being sent to committees to filibuster day after day and hour after after hour, or now threatening an election to ensure those documents never get released? I am going to make sure I do everything in my power to make sure those documents are released.

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Public Service Renewal) and to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague on his voice. It was a very passionate speech. Unfortunately, it was full of errors and mistruths.

Having said that, I want to ask the member a question. We are in a minority government. Does the member not realize that the opposition parties also have a responsibility and their actions will have consequences?

If the opposition sticks to the fact that it has no confidence in the government, it will lead to an election. What holds more accountability than an election? We do not want an election, but the actions of the opposition have consequences. Does the opposition have confidence in the government or not?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I do not want it to be a secret to anybody that I do not have confidence in this government. There is a constitutional responsibility of the opposition to hold the government to account. That is a time-honoured tradition, but it is also a fundamental of any democracy.

If the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister would suggest that holding the government to account would shut down Parliament, well, they have done it before. I guess this is the way they operate. It is good to have it on the record that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister is suggesting they will continue to do that.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his speech. I have to agree that sunlight is needed right now to shine light on the Liberals' unethical behaviour, and on the fact that they are trying to avoid oversight and accountability by filibustering, proroguing Parliament and, now, threatening an election.

The NDP proposed a special committee that would get documents, but it did not have a few of the things that the Conservative motion has. Some of these things make it look like the Conservatives are more interested in scoring political points than in getting to the truth.

I am curious why the member thinks it is important to ask for information from private citizens, who may have done nothing wrong, and why he thinks the committee needs to be chaired by an opposition member.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, starting with the last question first, I believe the committee should be chaired by an opposition member because of what we saw at the finance committee. We had a Liberal chair shut down the committee simply so the committee could not do its work. We want to ensure that does not happen.

I am also very interested to hear from the NDP member. I know she wants to find out what the truth is. I am willing to work with all opposition parties, and to work collaboratively. Of course, today, we have made amendments we felt would be necessary to gain the NDP's support. I know there is strong support within all the parties, within the NDP, the Bloc and the Conservative Party, for finding out the truth. Unfortunately, it is only the Liberal Party that keeps filibustering to keep us away from the truth.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the question that is always swirling around in my mind is why, if it has nothing to hide, is the government not being open and transparent?

Business of Supply

The government keeps repeating that it does not want to trigger an election and the opposition, with this motion, is forcing the government to make this a confidence vote.

I want to ask my colleague if he agrees that we could get to the bottom of the WE Charity scandal by creating a committee and continue to serve Quebecers and Canadians in the context of the ongoing crisis.

In his opinion, are the Liberals the only ones who think that we are incapable of chewing gum and walking at the same time?

[English]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, it seems it is only the Liberals who believe that we cannot walk and chew gum at the same time.

I believe that to ensure Canadians get the help they need, the government needs to be held accountable. We have seen unprecedented spending over the last number of months. Never in Canadian history have we seen this kind of rollout of billions of dollars. Then we started to see the trickle of allegations of supporting or giving contracts or money to Liberal friends.

I believe that if Canadians are going to have trust in this government, they need to see there is accountability and transparency. They need to see that government members are held accountable when they break the rules and when they give money to their friends that they should not be giving.

Now, if the Liberals believe that they can continue to go down the road without transparency and accountability, I think Canadians will render a judgment at some point to say that it is unacceptable.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I was a junior air force officer, my first posting was as the procurement officer for 19 Wing Comox on Vancouver Island. I was responsible for everything that was bought or leased on the base. In other words, anyone working on the base who needed something had to get it through me.

My decisions were not arbitrary or made on a whim. Before I was assigned the job, I spent many months in training as a military logistician, studying over 20 volumes of the Canadian Forces publication 181, supply manuals, defence procurement policies, the Financial Administration Act and many other related documents. There were processes and procedures for everything. Just to obtain approval to procure a commercial coffee maker required 10 signatures on a material authorization change request, or MACR for short. Those 10 people included the base commander, a squadron commander, a flight commander and me, just to name a few.

Business of Supply

This bureaucracy was tiresome to be sure, but it was essential to upholding that no one, not even the base commander, could use military funds, and by extension public money, to, for example, pay for an outrageously expensive coffee machine purchased sole-source, which happened to include a million-dollar administration fee for someone's husband. There was no room for misconduct.

As officers, we endured the necessary piles of paperwork to ensure that tax dollars were spent wisely and to preserve the honesty and integrity of the organization and everyone in it. If these were the high standards to which a junior air force procurement officer is held, should they be any less for the highest office in the land?

Let us talk about the Prime Minister and his pattern of behaviour of breaking the rules, giving money to his friends, using Liberal members to cover it up and firing anyone who dares to stand in his way. Let us talk about the Prime Minister's pattern of corruption.

His first transgression was the gift of an all-expenses-paid Christmas vacation for him, his family and his friends to an island in the Bahamas. The rules require that members of Parliament disclose any gift over \$200. The Prime Minister was found guilty of breaking the Conflict of Interest Act. He apologized. Seamus O'Regan, a minister of the Crown who joined the Prime Minister on this trip, never disclosed the vacation as a gift.

Then came the SNC-Lavalin scandal. SNC was charged with fraud and corruption, and was seeking a way to get out of facing the full consequences of breaking the law. It looked to our Prime Minister to use his powers to circumvent the law and tip the scales in SNC's favour. A justice minister stood in his way and upheld the rule of law. For her efforts, she was fired as justice minister and thrown out of the Liberal Party. There was no place in the Liberal Party for honourable actions like that. The key adviser and friend to the Prime Minister, Gerry Butts, resigned.

• (1640)

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on point of order. Unfortunately, we seem to be running into the same issue where hon. members are using the names of members of Parliament when they should be referring to their ridings or titles.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his attention to the debate. Indeed, I think the hon. member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill referred to the Minister of Natural Resources by his given name as opposed to his title. She could also use his riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

We will go back to the hon. member, who I would ask to avoid the use of given or family names.

The hon. member.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, the head of our non-partisan, hard-working public service chose that moment to retire. Liberal members on the House of Commons committees attempting to investigate shut down all attempts to get to the truth.

The Prime Minister was found guilty of a second ethics violation, but this time he showed no remorse. He had no intention of acting differently. He refused to apologize and instead doubled down, trying to convince us that it was okay to break the law for

the right reasons, like helping his corporate friends escape the long arm of the law.

The Prime Minister has again used the powers of his office for personal gain. The Prime Minister attempted to award the WE Charity a \$912-million government contract, \$912 million in taxpayer dollars, in a closed, directed, no competition selection process. During a pandemic that has millions of Canadians struggling to pay their bills, our Prime Minister attempted to give hard-earned tax dollars to an organization to do what exactly?

For starters, an administration fee of \$43.5 million would be pocketed directly by the WE Charity, a charity that just happened to have paid the Prime Minister's family and the family members of other members of his cabinet significant sums of money. Once again, the House of Commons committees investigating were stonewalled and then ultimately shut down when the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament, leaving Canadians with no government at all.

For a third time, the Prime Minister is being investigated for ethics violations.

However, this is not just a story about the Prime Minister. It is unfortunately much worse than that. The Prime Minister's actions send a message to others who would seek to break the rules, cheat and take advantage of their positions of power for personal gain. It gives them permission to put their personal agendas before the best interests of the country. It becomes a culture of acceptance of corruption, because, after all, if the Prime Minister can do it, why should they not?

For example, the former finance minister, Bill Morneau, was investigated for conflict of interest violations for a corporation that held a French villa that he forgot to disclose. He was also investigated for failing to put the shares of his company in a blind trust and then introduced pension legislation changes that would benefit corporations like his. Morneau also forgot to disclose or pay back the all-expenses paid \$40,000-plus vacation that WE Charity gave him and his family. Yes, that is the same WE Charity. Coincidentally, two of his daughters have worked extensively with WE. Morneau was about to be investigated for ethics violations but instead resigned as a minister and a member of Parliament.

The list goes on. What about when the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs broke the law when, as fisheries minister, he approved an Arctic surf clam licence to the company his wife works for; or when the \$84 million contract to administer the Canadian emergency commercial rent assistance program was out-sourced to the company that PMO chief of staff Katie Telford's husband works for?

What about the former Liberal Raj Grewal who allegedly received \$6 million that he did not disclose to the Ethics Commissioner? Documents also claim that he solicited funds by deceit, falsehood or other fraudulent means in connection with his duties of office as a member of Parliament.

These are just the cases that have been uncovered. Like the tip of the iceberg, if this is the pattern of corruption that we can see, we can barely imagine the magnitude of what has not yet come to light or what the government wants to ensure never comes to light.

House of Commons committees are Parliament's version of the military's MACR, from a junior officer's time all those years ago. Committees are our checks and balances. The purpose of committees is to investigate and to problem solve. Committees hold governments to account, identify where they have failed. Committees are the work that members of Parliament get paid to do to deliver fair, equal and improved services for Canadians.

The Liberal members are shutting down committees. They are working to keep the full extent of the Prime Minister's transgressions hidden. They are determined to keep Canadians in the dark. Liberal MPs are complicit in the cover-up.

• (1645)

When the government acts this way, breaking the law, circumventing rules and processes, shutting down committees and refusing to release documents and completely redacting the ones they do, it sends one clear message. It is not acting in the best interests of Canada and it is not putting the needs of Canadians ahead of itself.

I was not raised to turn a blind eye to such behaviour and my constituents in Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill have not sent me here to turn a blind eye. The citizens of the country did not elect the Prime Minister to use the powers of office for his own gain and Canadians did not elect members of Parliament to help him cover it up.

During this pandemic billions of dollars are being spent. We need a special House of Commons committee to investigate how they are being spent. We need the facts. We need to uncover the truth. We need to know how bad it is and we need to fix it fast.

Canadians deserve honesty and transparency. When will this culture of corruption stop? When will we say enough is enough?

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was particularly interested when the hon. member talked about her role as a junior military officer. I want to thank her for her service to our country and the important work she did, in her words, as a bureaucrat, going through the bureaucracy and following the rules to the tee.

Business of Supply

Based on that comment, I would like to give her a quote from the hon. member for Carleton, who said, "the decision on what to reveal," with respect to documents, "is made by non-partisan public servants, for whom it has long been a tradition not to reveal cabinet confidences. That has been the case going back to all previous governments of all party stripes."

Why was her work as a public servant good with respect to dealing with bureaucracy and why is she standing by while her other party members impugn the work of our non-partisan public service with respect to the redaction of documents?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, I am very saddened to hear that my hon. colleague has misinterpreted what I said to such a grave extent.

It is the Liberal members on committee, the cabinet ministers and the Prime Minister who would use government funds, taxpayer dollars, to their personal gain and then work tirelessly to ensure that no transparency and none of that information can come to light. It is that pattern of behaviour and a culture of acceptance that their personal gains are above those of the Canadian interest. That is what members of Parliament have a responsibility to investigate and that is why this special committee is so needed.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I want to say a word here, and I think it will be clear where I am going with this: *samfundssind*. This word comes from the Danish language council. The Conservatives just talked about serving people. The Liberals claim to be willing to call an election if they no longer have the confidence of the House, but that they want to focus on serving the public.

This Danish word represents the idea of having confidence in institutions and putting society's interests above one's own interests. Denmark currently has one of the best records in the world on health and its management of COVID. This is because the government has prioritized making its institutions transparent. It has also prioritized combatting corruption. NGO Transparency International gives Denmark top marks.

There is a direct correlation between the public's trust in a government and its willingness to comply with the government's health measures. I think that this relationship of trust has been broken. We must prioritize public trust in the government, but the public is skeptical.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and comment.

Business of Supply

It is very important for a government to have the confidence of the people, the citizens.

[English]

As someone of Danish heritage, I absolutely concur. I and have been able to understand and keep very close tabs because we still have family in Denmark. Their commitment to the transparency of government and to doing what is in the best interests of the public over and above their own personal interests has been instrumental in positioning them for success in the pandemic. As well, the military has a conversation, one that I have always lived by, service before self.

All we as members of Parliament, who are entrusted with the sacred responsibility of our citizens, are doing in this place is to honour that trust, hold the government accountable and ensure the—

The Deputy Speaker: There is time for just one last question.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have said that the WE scandal is the dumbest political scandal in history. I think the only thing dumber is the government's response.

We will not participate in a Liberal-run committee because we have participated in Liberal-run committees and we have seen how they have shut down our work. They shut down the SNC-Lavalin inquiry. They shut down finance. However, the idea that they can threaten us with an election to make this go away is really preposterous.

I have work to get done at ethics committee. I was willing to share it with the committee, but we will do this work one way or the other. I offered to pull off, as friendly amendment to get the Liberals to work with us, on the Prime Minister's family. We offered to change that amendment. The Liberals talked the clock out.

If the Liberals do not show good faith, we can still go back to our committees. We can still demand documents, which we are willing to pull back on in order to get them to work. We will get this information one way or the other unless the Prime Minister decides to go to Rideau Hall. That is the only way he will stop our work. Whether they have a committee or not, our committees will do the work.

What does my hon. colleague think the Liberals are up to in thinking they can intimidate us into not getting answers?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, I would not begin to imagine what the Liberals could possibly be up to.

Ultimately, we are here with the responsibility to investigate these matters. They are demonstrating a pattern of behaviour that circumvents all of the rules that we have in this place so that they can predetermine an outcome. We need a special committee just to ensure we get the information we need. We need to have a special committee chaired by an opposition party member so we can ensure that committee processes and procedures are upheld and not circumvented, as the Liberal members of Parliament are doing at committee.

It is egregious, devastating and depressing that our only ability to do the job we need to do in this crisis as members of Parliament is by proposing a special committee, and the Liberals are threatening an election if we are successful.

• (1655)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate and giving the floor to the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord, I wish to inform the House of the following.

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Calgary Centre, Natural Resources; the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, The Environment; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Public Services and Procurement.

Resuming debate.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Saint-Jean.

I think that the government is scraping the bottom of the barrel today. The Liberals told us that it is too bad if we, the men and women of the opposition, do our job because they will not allow that to happen. They will trigger an election and say that it is our fault. I think that is rather shocking. Investigating is the opposition's job, and we are going to do it. We did our job all summer and we will continue to do it.

According to the Liberals, we are going to paralyze Parliament if we form a special committee to study WE Charity. The opposite is true. We are proposing this solution to avoid paralyzing Parliament. My colleagues across the way may not have noticed, but Parliament was paralyzed all summer. All summer, four of the House's standing committees had quite a lot on their plate. They had to drop all their other work to investigate WE Charity. There was the Standing Committee on Finance, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, and the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Four committees were working on nothing but the WE scandal to try to get more clarity.

We started up again in September. The Prime Minister had prorogued the House in August, and we started working again. To us, it made no sense. These committees have work to do. Nearly \$343 billion has been spent on COVID-19 since the spring. The Standing Committee on Finance and the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates are going to have to look at that at some point. We felt there needed to be an efficient, logical approach. We are not paralyzing the work of the House. We are creating a separate special committee. That way, the other committees will be able to continue doing their work. That is what we are proposing. We are not proposing to paralyze the House. We want it to work better.

Their other argument is that we are in a pandemic. Since everyone is sick and losing their job, it makes no sense to study the WE scandal. That is like saying we have to let them rifle through the pockets of sick people lying in hospital beds and take their wallets without telling them, and they will take care of those wallets. Enough already.

Quebeckers who are sick and losing their jobs still pay income tax. The money this government is spending is their money. These people may be entitled to a doctor, but they are also entitled to MPs who take care of business and make sure that this money is managed properly.

That is our job. It is not only our right, but our duty, to investigate WE Charity. It would be irresponsible to let these scandals go on without taking action. We will do our job. We must be all the more vigilant now that people are so vulnerable. Many people have COVID-19 or have family members with COVID-19. People have lost their jobs or businesses. Bars and restaurants are closing down. People do not know where to turn. People are sick and need money. Most of all, they need MPs to do their job.

The government will not weasel out of the WE Charity scandal. God only knows what a fix we would be in had we not taken action, but the government will not get away with this. What is the government trying to avoid? Is it trying to avoid a thorough analysis and examination of WE Charity, or is it trying to prevent the opposition from taking a close look at everything else?

The \$343 billion that has been spent is not peanuts. By refusing to strike the special committee, is the government trying to force us to examine WE Charity in the four standing committees, to prevent us from looking into these matters? Make no mistake, we are going to study this, but by forcing us to spend committee time studying WE Charity, is the government trying to distract us from something else, like what happened with the husband of the Prime Minister's chief of staff, or what happened with the purchase of ventilators? The Liberal motion mentions a few scandals, but that list is nowhere near exhaustive. There are many more. Is that what they are trying to avoid?

If we had not done our work and looked into the WE Charity scandal this summer, the folks at that organization would still have millions of dollars in their pockets, either paid out or reimbursed.

• (1700)

I think it was roughly \$30 million. They had a \$43-million contract to manage about \$900 million in student grants. The \$43 million would now be in the pockets of WE Charity. God knows whose pockets the \$900 million would be in, because God knows how it would have been managed. The \$40,000 that finance minister Morneau repaid to WE Charity the morning that he testified would still be in the pockets of the Morneau family.

The Prime Minister still would not be aware that he was in a conflict of interest. He would still believe that the ethics rules apply to everyone except him. The work we did this summer made the Prime Minister realize this. I was watching him today during question period, and I think that he gets a little more embarrassed every day.

Business of Supply

As I said at the start, the government is scraping the bottom of the barrel. All it can say is that it is too bad, but that if we keep hounding it, if we keep tabs on what it does, if we keep making sure it does not reach into everyone's pockets and hand out the money as it sees fit, it will call an election and then say that it is our fault.

Our Prime Minister is starting to look a little worn out.

Not so long ago, my leader wondered if the Prime Minister still had the focus to run the government. I do not think he did then, and today, I am sad to say that I do not think this government is run by a Prime Minister who is prepared to lead properly. The scandals keep piling up. It is never-ending. First there was the Aga Khan, then SNC-Lavalin, and now the WE scandal, not to mention the husband of the Prime Minister's chief of staff. Gerald Butts, principal secretary to the Prime Minister, was forced to resign. Everyone is being forced out.

I must reiterate that the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament in August. When he was being held accountable and being forced to hand over the information and documents we requested, he decided to drown us in boxes of documents. He sent us 5,000 redacted documents, which is a whole other story, and prorogued Parliament the same day. A few days before that, the then minister of finance resigned. This all happened at the same time, practically the same week. A finance minister being forced to resign is a big deal.

The government prorogued Parliament and sent over 5,000 pages of redacted documents. I looked at those documents. They were as clear as mud. They were not dated or signed. Any old thing was put down any old way. It is a lot of work to try to understand them.

I saw that a few times in my career as a lawyer. Judges imposed penalties for that sort of thing. When one side was required to produce documents, it had to be done properly. They could not just produce any old thing, any old way, in an attempt to overwhelm the other side. That is what happened this summer. As I was saying, the government is scraping the bottom of the barrel today. It is threatening us. As though prorogation were not bad enough, now the government is saying that it will force an election and say that it is our fault. That is irresponsible. We will not let the government get away with that. We will do our job. We will stand up. Regardless of what the Liberals decide to do, we will vote in favour of a special committee to study the WE Charity scandal and any other scandal related to the management of the COVID-19 crisis.

Business of Supply

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few years back the position of the Ethics Commissioner was established. It was under Stephen Harper. I suspect that if we were to look at many of the scandals at the time, like the opting in and out scandal or the Senate scandal, numerous issues could have been filed to the Ethics Commissioner. There is no doubt about that, but the position of the Ethics Commissioner is relatively new. It is a positive thing. As opposed to listening to the biases that come from the opposition on the issues of ethics, we have an Ethics Commissioner.

The Ethics Commissioner has not said anything in terms of what has come out of this WE issue. The opposition called it a scandal even before the Ethics Commissioner reported on it.

Does the Bloc have any confidence in the independent offices of Parliament?

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Speaker, this is our job and, as I said, we will do it.

Based on what my colleague opposite said, the Liberals are acting like someone who gets pulled over on the highway for driving 140 kilometres per hour and tries to tell the officer that plenty of other drivers were going just as fast. What an excuse, right? Were the Conservatives involved in scandals in the past? Maybe, but that is not what we are talking about now. We are talking about doing our job.

If my colleague across the way were sitting on the opposition benches, facing a Conservative government that did what the Liberal government did, I am sure he would be the first to rise in the House and say he would not let them get away with it. He should have done so back then to the Conservative government. We will do it now to his government.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I ask my colleague a question, I would like to share a troubling situation that happened in my northern riding.

The Mathias Colomb first nation learned from media reports that tents had been produced for it, but they were not what the first nation had specifically requested from the department. Once the matter was made public, we learned that a well-connected Liberal was linked to the company in question. He has since stepped down, fortunately, but the money has already been spent and we are still waiting for answers. This is another example of public funds being mismanaged, which has real consequences for a very vulnerable community like this remote first nation in my riding.

Does my colleague think that this example, like so many others, reinforces the urgent need for a committee tasked with examining how this government spends public money in first nations and across the rest of Canada?

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right to bring that up. As I was saying earlier, there are many other matters that

need the attention of Parliament and its various committees. That is why we want a special committee to look into the WE Charity scandal.

What happened with these indigenous communities is indeed scandalous. I have a lot of sympathy for people in these terrible situations. We will have to deal with this. Back during the 2015 campaign, the Prime Minister said that he would review the Indian Act because it was wrong. Here we are in 2020 and nothing has been done. The Prime Minister continues to claim that the provinces should manage things differently and that such-and-such aspect is worrisome, he sheds a few tears, he presents some apology, and so on and so forth. However, he has yet to touch the Indian Act.

My colleague is right to raise this issue. Government relations with indigenous peoples are in need of review, which is why we must study the WE Charity scandal in a separate, special committee.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are saying that, right now, it is important to address COVID-19-related issues, and that that is what Canadians and Quebecers are calling for. They are also saying that, in the interest of time, we need to give priority to managing the crisis rather than to creating a committee. It is so important for them to dedicate all of their time to COVID-19 that, strangely enough, they are telling us that they would rather spend more time on an election than in committee. That seems rather ridiculous to me. They are giving us a choice. They are asking us to choose between the committee and an election. Obviously, the Liberals would rather force an election than create a committee.

It is either one of two things: either the government is going to seek a confidence vote or it is such a bad poker player that its bluff is not believable. In the end, all the government really wants is an election. That is what we understand since, for the past three weeks, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons has not stopped talking about an election. Even when we talk to him about machine guns, he responds by talking about an election. The government wants to force an election, but it does not want to take the blame for it.

We may have to consider a third option that I feel was not covered in the debate. Essentially, maybe the motion is really bad and we should vote against it. However, I did not hear a single government member explain why the motion is bad and why we should not vote in favour of it.

Since there has been no debate on the substance of the motion, I will get the ball rolling because it is always nice to know what we are voting on. It is important to remind ourselves of that from time to time.

I will go over each clause of the motion briefly.

Here is the first part of the motion:

That the House:

(a) note that the WE Charity scandal has preoccupied Parliament since the Canada Student Service Grant...was announced...the outstanding and unanswered questions only became more numerous and increasingly serious;

This part is about simply taking note. The media have reported on this so extensively that there should be no problem including it in the motion.

The motion continues:

- (b) further note that several other scandals and potential scandals have come to light more recently in the context of government expenditures related to the COVID-19 pandemic response, including, but not limited to,
 - (i) the awarding of contracts to the employer of the Prime Minister's chief of staff's spouse...
 - (ii) allegations of lobbying by the Prime Minister's chief of staff's spouse...
 - (iii) the acquisition of ventilators, which did not have regulatory approval for use...

It is a long list. However, since this is all public knowledge, I do not see why including it in the motion would be an issue. I do not think that is the problem.

Again, the motion continues:

- (c) acknowledge that the Prime Minister's abrupt decision to prorogue Parliament intensified the need for parliamentary accountability;

This morning the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was saying that the prorogation was not so bad since it was an unusual session and we sat during the summer, and in fact that this summer we sat for more days than the number of days during which the House was prorogued.

They are not looking at the problem through the right lens. It is not the number of days that count, especially since there was only one COVID-19 committee and most of the time the sittings were irregular. The important thing for them was to shut down the committee and to stop talking about the WE Charity. To me that makes it even more important to include it in a motion.

I will continue reading the motion.

- (d) believe that, to ensure that the work required to achieve this accountability does not interfere with the ordinary operations of the House's network of committees, a special committee with a dedicated mandate should be established; and

I see no problem in creating a special committee. In fact, just this morning they even suggested creating a committee.

I now return to the motion:

- (e) therefore appoint a special committee on anti-corruption...

Some people may not like the name, but that is all right because an amendment was moved to change the name. The committee's name was changed. We should not throw out the baby with the bath water.

This committee must examine and review:

- (i) all aspects of the CSSG...
- (ii) the assorted relationships between WE Charity, including any of its affiliated or related organizations and the Kielburger family, on the one part, and the government and ministers...
- (iii) all aspects of the CECRA program, including its planning, development, establishment and implementation,
- (iv) all aspects related to the allegations of lobbying by Rob Silver...
- (v) all aspects related to the acquisition, purchase and regulatory approval of ventilators manufactured by...the Baylis Medical Company,

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(vi) any other matter connected to the government's COVID-19 pandemic response measures that any standing committee of the House may request the committee to investigate...

In reading this, I want to say that we are not really talking about a mistake here and there but a whole string of mistakes. It is one more reason for the committee to specifically study these issues.

• (1710)

Then, in subparagraphs (vii) to (xvi), we get into the details and the makeup of the committee. No problems there, since that is generally how committees work.

Subparagraph (xviii) states that the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth may be ordered to appear as witnesses. This is why the government says that if this committee is created, it will take up so much time that the government will not be able to focus on managing the crisis, which is the priority.

The government seems to think that the committee would be calling all of these witnesses five days a week from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. It is reasonable to expect that there will be time limits placed on witness appearances in committee.

I would hope that the country will not fall apart if the Prime Minister steps away for two hours. Otherwise, I hope no one on the government side gets COVID-19.

The motion then talks about the documents that must be produced. It talks about an unredacted version of the 5,000 pages that were already submitted. It says that that information will be considered in camera, which seems like a perfectly acceptable compromise to me. For us to do our job as parliamentarians, we need a complete picture of the situation. When a quarter of the information is redacted, we miss out on context and information. We found some interesting things in the 5,000 pages we received, even though they were redacted. I am sure the parts we cannot see would have interesting things in them too. As MPs, it is our job to ask questions.

The motion demands a copy of all records at Speakers' Spotlight, including WE Charity events held over the summer. Actually, it is fine if we do not get the records, because we already know about the speaking appearances of members of the Prime Minister's family. He knows about them too. The important thing is that, even though he knew, he did not recuse himself. We could have decided to go ahead with the committee minus that part, and everyone would have been happy.

The motion calls on the government to provide all memoranda, emails, and documents relating to prorogation. There is a Standing Order stating that if a government prorogues Parliament, it must provide reasons for its decision. This point would be difficult to oppose, since it is asking for something that is already required pursuant to the Standing Orders.

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Lastly, the motion calls on the government to provide a complete accounting of all communications between the government and any organizations affiliated with WE Charity, which seems completely logical and reasonable to me, in the context of studying a scandal that we have been dealing with for several months.

I do not see anything in the motion that would warrant someone putting their neck out, saying that they will not vote in favour and urging others to vote against the motion because it is so terrible that it needs to be a matter of confidence. There must be something else there.

Simply put, the government is telling us that it has so much to do to take care of the pandemic that it does not have time to be accountable. The government does not want to be told to do two things at once. It does not want to be told to manage a crisis and be accountable at the same time. According to the government, that would be impossible because it is so focused on managing the pandemic that it cannot answer questions.

If we take that argument to its logical extreme, the government is basically saying that a crisis is the perfect time for it to throw all the ethics rules out the window, because it cannot do two things at once, namely be accountable and manage the crisis. That is rather worrisome. In the best-case scenario, the government has something to hide and does not want us to find out what. In the worst-case scenario, the government is completely incompetent because it is incapable of doing two things at once.

In closing, I would like to remind the House that ethics is the art of doing the right thing even when no one is watching. This seems to be a problem for the government. It needs to have someone looking over its shoulder to make sure it does the right thing at the right time. That is our role as parliamentarians. We will not stop saying that when there is nothing to hide, nothing is hidden.

I get the impression that the further we get into this debate, the less it will be about creating a committee that will undermine confidence in the government. I suspect it is what this committee will discover that will undermine confidence in the government.

• (1715)

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech. I have two questions for her.

First, does she acknowledge that, according to House rules on normal committee membership, six of the 13 members must be Liberal? According to the Conservatives' proposal, six of the 15 members would be Liberal MPs. Maybe further down the line, there would be three Liberal members. Would she be okay with not having a Bloc Québécois member on the committee? This proposal does not follow the normal committee rules.

Second, the committee chair is usually a Liberal MP. This proposal stipulates that neither the chair nor the first or second vice-chair shall be Liberals. The party with the greatest number of seats in the House would be entitled only to the third vice-chair position. Again, playing by the Conservatives' rules, there could be committees that exclude a party represented in the House. What is the hon. member's position on these changes to committee membership?

• (1720)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, never mind changing the composition of a committee, I am surprised that this is the first time I am being asked questions about the content of the motion.

The Liberals are so opposed to this motion that they did not stop to think about how it could be improved and made acceptable to all members of the House. We were never even offered that opportunity. From my understanding, the Conservatives were not offered any opportunity to negotiate on anything the Liberals could not quite swallow. They are trying to bury this. They say that when people want to drown their dogs, they claim the dogs have rabies. All of a sudden, the Liberals find something, because I talked briefly about the content. They found something that will not go over too well. They have never, ever tried to improve this to make it an acceptable motion. This shows that there was never any intention to create such a committee, period.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in my riding have been contacting my office to say they are struggling with the transition from CERB to EI, or to the other benefits. Some of them have been without income because the government prorogued Parliament, shutting it down when Canadians needed the government the most. Some were not able to reach the CRA this weekend because of scheduled maintenance. The Liberals do not seem to have planned ahead to take care of these people, and I can only imagine how worried my constituents are to hear the Liberals threatening an election only a year after the last election and in the middle of a pandemic.

What does the member think? How can the Liberals stand behind this kind of lack of accountability, secretiveness and what is looking more and more like corruption from a government that is working for wealthy and well-connected friends when Canadians just want them to be working for Canadians?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent question.

That does indeed reveal just how much the government has been talking out of both sides of its mouth since the beginning of the pandemic. The Liberals keep telling us that it is important and a priority for them to do what Canadians want, in other words focus on managing the crisis, but the first thing they did was prorogue Parliament, before threatening to close it for good and call a general election.

How can we take care of our people if we do not have the chance to do our work properly? That also involves using our system of checks and balances, which helps verify what is happening on the government side and forces it to be accountable. Again, they are trying to stop us from doing that.

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who has been very passionate and even taught us a few things during her speech.

We know that the important thing during a crisis, a health crisis or any other, is the public's trust in their government. For example, the economic programs that were put in place created a bond of trust between the public and the government.

However, does my colleague not think that the way the government is currently behaving has broken that bond of trust with the public?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I think that this trust has unfortunately been broken. It happened with every scandal that popped up like mushrooms over the summer, and we expect to see others.

Although we may not re-establish this trust, we can at least ensure that there will be no other such problems in the future. This requires us to be a little scrupulous and to search through government documents to see what was done and prevent this from happening again. In the end, we can make the government feel some shame for what it did.

However, this cannot be done in the context of an election. We must be able to work in committee to shed light on all of this and to ensure that, in future, the money is well spent and goes to the right place as quickly as possible.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be splitting my time today with the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

I am happy to speak in this debate today. I am happy to speak period, because we do not know when the Liberal government is going to prorogue Parliament, suspend Parliament or call an election to stop parliamentarians from having a voice.

I am saddened, however, to be debating this specific motion, a motion to create a committee to examine the ongoing corruption of the Liberal government. Canada is in its second wave of COVID it seems, but we appear to be in our sixth or seventh wave of Liberal corruption. Let us review some of the items at hand.

The company of the husband of the Prime Minister's chief of staff was awarded a huge contract to administer the failed rent subsidy program. Let that sink in: \$84 million was given to a company for which the husband of the Prime Minister's chief of staff was a senior executive. The Liberals will say that Katie Telford recused herself from the discussions, but anyone who has worked in the private sector, or even within government, knows that this is a false claim. She can recuse herself on paper, but the reality is that people working for her, people working in the government and people working below her will know she is in power, and their jobs and livelihoods depend on her. They are not going to step in the way. They are going to be influenced by her position.

Furthermore, her husband repeatedly lobbied the office of former finance minister Morneau to make tax changes to the wage subsidy program, changes that would have benefited his company and a few other companies. He was not a registered lobbyist, but he used the power of being married to the Prime Minister's chief of staff, who is basically the most powerful, unelected person in this country. Her husband used that power to lobby the finance minister's office.

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Staff of the finance minister's office said they were very uncomfortable when dealing with them because they knew he was Telford's husband. This goes back to my comment that she recused herself. People in a position of power like this cannot just wash their hands by simply saying they recuse themselves, as very clearly shown by comments made by the former finance minister's staff.

We asked in the House, because we heard rumours, whether the husband of the Prime Minister's chief of staff personally lobbied the PMO. Did we get an answer? Of course not. It was a simple yes-or-no question. The very fact that the Liberals would not answer it leads us to conclude that he was involved and did do that.

Another issue at hand is ventilators. Former Liberal MP Frank Baylis received a contract for about a quarter of a billion dollars to build ventilators that, by the way, are not approved by any jurisdiction in Canada. Ventilators that normally cost \$1,000 to \$5,000 now somehow cost up to \$24,000 each when being made by a Liberal. Again, they were not approved by any jurisdiction in Canada.

No doubt the Liberals would stand up and tell us not to worry, that this has since been approved. I find it remarkable that they can grant a contract worth a quarter of a billion dollars to buy unapproved ventilators, but at the same time have been repeatedly refusing to approve rapid testing kits for Canada. There is a special deal for a Liberal, but for rapid testing kits to get employees working and to protect seniors, no, let us not jump the gun; we cannot approve those. Perhaps if Frank Baylis's company would make rapid testing kits, we could get them into Canadians' hands.

It does not stop there with him. When he was on the industry committee, his company bid on a contract for a \$400,000 grant. His company received that contract about a month and a half after the last election. The Liberals will say not to worry; he was not a member of Parliament at the time. However, when the contract was made available or posted for tender, Frank Baylis's company bid on the grant while he was on the industry committee.

● (1725)

Guess who had posted the grant and was deciding the grant. It was Industry Canada. We had a Liberal MP on the industry committee bidding on business being decided on by Industry Canada. This is the same Liberal MP who would have sat on that committee and voted yea or nay on the estimates for that department and whether it received funding. It is also the exact same Liberal MP who berated government employees about not making enough federal money available for research grants, the same grant his company eventually got, further lining the pockets of Liberals, the \$400,000 for Frank Baylis.

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There are other items.

There is the famous WE scandal; \$900 million given to friends of the Liberal Party, sole-sourced of course. We all know WE was in financial trouble. Who comes in like the cavalry? It is the Prime Minister and the Liberals with \$900 million of taxpayer money. This is the same WE that paid for that very cringeworthy election-style video for the Prime Minister a few years back; the same WE that paid the Prime Minister's mother tens of thousands of dollars in speaking fees and expenses; the same WE that paid the Prime Minister's brother tens of thousands of dollars to appear; the same WE that paid well over \$100,000 to the Prime Minister's wife. Over a half a million of fees was paid out to the Prime Minister's family.

It is the same WE that gave a free vacation worth \$40,000, violating ethics rules, for the former finance minister. Of course, Bill Morneau said that he forgot, that he did not see the invoice. Maybe it was sitting at his French villa and he got around to it later. It is the same WE that employed the finance minister's daughter, keeping in mind that the former finance minister and the Prime Minister were at the cabinet table when this money was approved. It is the same WE that gave non-stop promotional appearances to the Prime Minister.

Since then, we also now have the Liberals spending over 20 hours in various committees, blocking the release of various documents regarding the WE scandal. What it is about the Prime Minister and his government that leads to such non-stop corruption?

We had the Vice-Admiral Norman affair, where the former Treasury Board president, Scott Brison, interfered with a contract on behalf of the Irving family in order to scuttle a deal between National Defence and the Davie shipyard. It was not enough for Brison and the Liberals just to interfere with that contract; they went out and destroyed Vice-Admiral Norman's life. Imagine giving 38 years of his life to the defence of his country, just to have the Liberal government destroy his life merely for granting a contract.

We had the clam scam, where the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada directly interfered to give a lucrative clam deal to a paper company owned by a family member. Just to spread the corruption around, the company was also partly owned by a former Liberal MP and the brother of the current MP for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook.

We had the famous billionaire island visit, where the Prime Minister received a quarter-million dollar gift, basically from a lobbyist.

We had Liberal Raj Grewal using his role on the finance committee to lobby for rules to change investigations into legal gambling activities.

We had Lav scam, where the government interfered in a judicial process to grant special favours to a company being investigated for corruption.

It saddens me that we need a committee such as this to investigate corruption, but it is necessary for Canadians to have confidence in the government, confidence in the political process and confidence that elected officials will do what is best for Canadians, not just for well-placed Liberal hacks.

• (1735)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think the member illustrated very clearly the differences. As a government, we want to be able to continue to focus on what is important and the priorities of Canadians. The Conservatives, for the last five years, have been solely focused on the issue of ethics. That is it.

There is a very good chance that there were some Liberals who received the CERB payment. Are the Conservatives going to go to those individuals who are Liberals and received CERB, because maybe they had a sign on their lawn? Maybe a business received the wage subsidy because it needed the support, and it might have been identified as Liberal. Whether for Conservatives, New Democrats or Greens, as a government, we were there for all Canadians in every way, and in a tangible way. No, it has not been perfect, but the Conservatives' pure focus is one of disruption of this chamber, and one of causing much frustration in dealing with one issue and one issue alone: ethics.

I wonder if the member could tell the House if he would be prepared to put some of the character assassination to the side during the pandemic so that the Conservatives, as the official opposition, could spend some time dealing with the pandemic.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I would like to tell my colleague that, just because there is a pandemic, it does not give rights to the government to be corrupt. This is a basic part of one's soul: whether one is honest or corrupt. A pandemic does not give the Liberal government the right to reach into the pockets of taxpayers and spread taxpayers' money around to their hacks and Liberal-connected people. It is disgraceful that the member would stand here and talk about ethics as if it is not an issue: "We do not need to be ethical. Look, there is a scandal. Oh, look away." The member should be ashamed of himself.

We will stand for what is right. We will stand for truth. We will stand for ethical actions: not for corruption and not for covering up the corruption of the Liberal government.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague just talked about it. I believe that we need to remember the role of the opposition, whether or not there is a crisis. I would like him to comment on that.

It is because of the hard work of the opposition and the Bloc Québécois among others that the Liberal sponsorship scandal was discovered. It is important to condemn what happened in the sponsorship scandal. The role of the opposition is important and even more so in a context where the Liberal government seems to forget that it has a minority. Canadians gave the opposition a mandate to oversee the conduct and actions of this government. They did not have enough confidence in the government to give it a majority.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about those two points.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, we have seen this repeatedly with the current government. Whenever it is challenged or caught, it likes to change the rules, and it is trying to do that now. If it does not like the Standing Orders of the House, it tries to ram through changes unilaterally without consultation with or the agreement of the other parties. If it does not like the House rules, it tries to change them. If it does not like investigations, it prorogues Parliament to stop them. If it does not like the debate, it threatens an election. None of this serves Canadians. Every action by the government serves one purpose, which is to serve the Liberals, not Canadians.

• (1740)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. I think the overreach the Conservatives are making with their motion is identifying that they are going after corruption and then naming people who have not been found guilty of anything. I know Frank Baylis. He is a well-connected Liberal. Whether or not this deal was right or wrong is something that belongs at committee, because we certainly need to get an answer. However, the idea that this was an act of corruption, and naming Frank Baylis in a parliamentary motion, I find very concerning as we do not have the evidence. It is the same with Rob Silver. I am very concerned about the calls he made. Personally, I think it stinks to high heaven, but the Ethics Commissioner said there was nothing wrong. For Parliament to say that these were acts of corruption, before we have done the investigation, to me is a serious mistake.

The one thing I have really been struck by is the dead silence from the Conservatives on the fact that I called for an investigation into David MacNaughton, and he was found guilty. David MacNaughton, who is a top Liberal insider and good friend of the Prime Minister, was found guilty. He works for a very powerful American company, Palantir, and is not being looked at, yet he had meetings with the Deputy Prime Minister, he had meetings with—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to give time to the hon. member for Edmonton West for a very short comment.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I appreciate where my colleague was going with this and I understand his concerns, but it is important that we have an opportunity to bring some of these issues to light. We have seen the Liberals shut down the ethics committee, the health committee and the finance committee. It is clear that any opportunity to look at any of their ethical breaches is going to be met with rule changes, election threats and filibustering. We need a committee to investigate these issues.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Speaker, every time I give a speech in the House about a bill or a motion, I always rise to say that I am pleased to speak to a particular subject. Today, however, I cannot say that I am happy to speak. These are strange times we are living through.

This is the first time, in the history of the Parliament of Canada, in 150 years, that a government, regardless of stripe, has turned a general-interest motion into a confidence vote.

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This motion is simply about creating a committee. It is not a confidence vote on a budget. All we want is a committee. The government is turning this situation into a confidence vote, knowing full well that this is a very bad time to trigger an election. There is a pandemic that we need to manage. We are here, debating in Parliament, but we cannot forget about the virus or forget that we are in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis.

We need to get back to basics and come back to the reason why we have a motion before us today, one that is very detailed and comprehensive, clear and true. That is the very serious problem facing our Liberal friends. They know full well that we are right, that the opposition parties—and I thank my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois for working with us on this issue—are not doing this just for fun or to waste time. We are not here to have fun.

We are very serious in our approach and we need to manage the decisions made by a government that is always up to something fishy. It never stops. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government even said so himself earlier when he mentioned that the Conservatives have been talking to them about ethics for five years. There must be a reason for that.

Why have we been bringing up ethical problems for five years? It is because the Liberals create ethical problems. There are two reports with the Trudeau name on them. A third is coming, which will likely be entitled “Trudeau III”. We are not making this up. These reports exist. They are there. These are the facts. Right now—

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the member does have a right to reference the report but not to reference a sitting member's name.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am taking note of that. We will monitor the use of terms and names.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: There are already two reports bearing the Prime Minister's name and a third is on its way. I did not pull this out of thin air. These are facts.

There is one thing that bothers me. I am hearing the comments of people who live outside the Ottawa bubble, Canadians, Quebecers, people who write to us and who watch at home. These people do not understand how this works.

To explain this to them in simple terms, what we are doing now is akin to a police investigation. We are gathering documents, asking questions, calling witnesses and questioning them. We did this in various committees, such as the finance, ethics and health committees. These committees are like separate police forces that are each conducting their own investigation.

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What we are asking for is the creation of a temporary anti-corruption unit, to compare it to another existing organization that we are familiar with. The work of this unit would be to conduct this investigation because we are dealing with facts, facts that all of my colleagues have been talking about since the beginning of the day and that are set out in the motion, and they pertain to the WE Charity scandal, the relationship between the Prime Minister's family and the Kielburgers and what happened with Frank Baylis.

We have evidence, but we do not have enough information to take this any further. Obviously that is why the government is threatening to force an election. It does not want us to get to the bottom of things.

We are essentially telling the Canadians watching us, listening and trying to understand, that we are simply detectives trying to do our jobs. However, right now we understand the frustration that investigators feel when they encounter obstacles in their investigation or when they reach the end of the investigation only to find that no charges can be laid. All we want is the truth. We have enough clear elements here to justify what we are saying.

Earlier I heard the government leader tell Radio-Canada that we just want to shut down government operations. That is completely untrue. On the contrary, we want to free up the other committees so that they can continue their work, since there are votes to review and work to be done. This is work that we want to do, and that everyone wants to do.

We tend to forget that we are in the midst of a pandemic. There are not many of us here in the House, because we cannot all be here. There are empty benches around me, but there are 338 MPs. There are plenty of people available to deal with committees, and creating a new committee with 12 or 15 members would not pose a problem.

Some members are getting bored. They have been at home for six months now, waiting for this to pass. We could give them some work on this committee and no one would complain because that is why we are here. The questions the new committee will ask are the same ones the other three committees have already asked. We are proposing to put everything under a single umbrella, which is more efficient and faster and will help us get to the bottom of this, get our answers and close the case.

However, the government is well aware that it is in trouble for the umpteenth time. It has been in trouble for five years now, and it knows that. One day Canadians are going to hear this, they are going to see us and realize that the Conservatives and the Bloc were right, that those guys are really crooked and this has to stop.

The thing is, there is a pandemic and we all agree that we do not want a general election. If not for the pandemic, I would want to hit the campaign trail to put an end to this. However, we are reasonable, although that does not mean we do not want the truth.

We want to get to the bottom of things for Canadians' sake. Canadians are watching us, and we do not want them to think we are a bunch of clowns they are footing the bill for in Ottawa. That is not what they want.

People know that billions of dollars are at stake and have gone out the door and that there is patronage involved and so on. It is a lot of money. People pay their taxes every year, they send in their tax returns, and they know it will cost them a bundle. These people hope the money will be distributed intelligently, efficiently and for the right reasons, not to help out friends.

The Liberals have been doing this for a century. Every time the Liberals are in power, there is always a story involving their pals.

● (1745)

Even though I was not here at the time, I watched it unfold, like every other Canadian. We see this, and it makes us think of the sponsorship scandal and everything else.

There is a pattern with the Liberals: when they do something like this, they act like it is normal and not so bad. If a Conservative, Bloc or NDP MP had done the same thing, a storm would descend on them and would not stop until they were totally annihilated. When the Liberals do these things, it is not so bad. The parliamentary secretary says that we have been talking about ethics for five years and that it is time to put ethics aside because it is not important. The Liberals basically do not care about ethics.

On our side of the House, ethics are important, especially when it comes to managing public funds. We currently have a serious problem when it comes to the management of public funds, contracts and money handed out to friends. We simply have to get to the bottom of this.

This motion was not presented to force a confidence vote, but rather to organize Parliament's work, to efficiently create a committee that will finish off the investigation started by three or four other committees and produce a report. If, in the end, the report states that the Liberals did a good job, so much the better for them. If, however, the report states that the matter was botched and that the criticism is deserved, they will have to pay the price. That is all. We are just doing our job.

● (1750)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have to admit that I am flabbergasted. I heard the Conservative member say that there are members on his side of the chamber who have been twiddling their thumbs. I cannot believe my ears.

We in the Liberal caucus work 24 hours a day to support business owners, charities and families in need. We are in the midst of a pandemic. We should all be working in our ridings for our constituents.

I would like to know why the Conservatives do not agree with our proposal to create a committee that would examine all spending during the pandemic and that would be representative of all parties in the House.

They are proposing a committee that can study a whole host of issues and that does not adequately represent all parties in the House. I do not understand why the Conservatives will not accept our proposal to create a committee that could study all of our government's spending.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I agree that all members are working in their ridings to help their constituents. However, we have always had 25 weeks a year in Ottawa to do our parliamentary work. Whether we do our parliamentary work remotely or in person nowadays does not matter. There is a lot of time available for that even though we are working to help our constituents.

Our motion is different from what the Liberals are proposing. The Liberals are proposing something much broader to study all spending, and that should definitely be done.

However, what we want to do is specifically to examine the WE scandal, the Frank Baylis affair, and what happened with the husband of the Prime Minister's chief of staff. These are specific issues with some clear evidence, but some of the information is missing and the documents are redacted. That is what we need.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, tomorrow is October 21, and I do not need to remind my colleagues what happened on that date last year.

I simply want to point out that it has been one year since the election and the government has yet to present a budget. We trusted the government with the extraordinary spending, since there were extraordinary circumstances. We trusted that these measures needed to be implemented. We even expanded and improved them. I think an apology is in order today.

Today's debate has to do with a committee that would keep looking into the WE scandal. The government does not want to debate the substance of the motion. It would rather talk about an election, which has nothing to do with this motion.

The purpose of the motion is to pick up where we left off. The debate on WE Charity is urgent and necessary, but the Liberal government wanted to put an end to it. We need to resume debate on this matter, and we owe it to the Quebeckers who were outraged about how this played out. We also owe it to all of the parliamentarians who need to get back to work. The Liberal government decided to suspend operations on August 18, in the hopes that this matter would be forgotten and to remind everyone that Canada is in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic is serious, but not so serious that we cannot debate creating a special committee to get to the bottom of the WE scandal.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her statement.

What matters is that we all agree on one thing: We need to get to the bottom of this. That is actually why the government is threatening to call an election. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, much like my colleague, I was surprised by what our colleague said. He said that MPs who are at home because of the pandemic are not doing anything. My colleagues and I are all working very hard. I was therefore surprised to hear my colleague's comments. I do not think members are working any less than they usually do.

Business of Supply

My question is simple. The Parliament of Canada established the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to conduct independent investigations. Members of Parliament do not investigate one another. Canadians trust that office.

Why not simply let the commissioner's office conduct an independent investigation and let members take care of the other issues that affect all Canadians?

• (1755)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

In Canada, we are lucky to have an Ethics Commissioner who has submitted reports on the Prime Minister on several occasions. Another one will be released shortly.

The work of the Ethics Commissioner is to verify matters of ethics. On our side, our work is to dig in and ask questions that go beyond the mandate of the Ethics Commissioner. That is the work we do in committee and in the House of Commons. This allows us to ask more in-depth questions.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today at a time when millions of Canadians are struggling. Instead of discussing ways to help those Canadians, we are quibbling because the Conservatives want to create a partisan committee for political gain.

We have been transparent from day one. We provided the requested documents and key witnesses testified. We have collaborated throughout the entire process.

[English]

Last Sunday, 48 hours ago, we shared with opposition members a reasonable proposal for a serious committee to study all expenses related to COVID-19. One thing is clear to us all: The ball is now in their court.

Does the opposition realize that we are in the second wave of this COVID pandemic? Does it understand what is happening? More than 9,000 Canadians have lost their lives to this terrible virus. For the families and friends of these thousands of people, the impacts of this pandemic will stay with them forever. For those who have lost loved ones, 2020 will be remembered as an especially painful year, and we mourn their loss.

There is nothing in the motion put forward by the official opposition that we are debating, because they are forcing us to debate it today, that acknowledges this harsh reality. There is nothing. Conservatives are not talking about what Canadians are facing. It is pure politics.

Business of Supply

It will be one year tomorrow, actually, since Canadians made their decision in an election about what they wanted in Ottawa. They elected a minority Parliament. They wanted MPs to collaborate and work together. They grew tired of political games and wanted MPs from all parties to work together on things that matter, the things that are important to Canadians. This became even more important when the COVID-19 pandemic hit earlier this year. Beyond the tragic impact on the health of Canadians, the economic consequences of the pandemic have been devastating for Canadians. Millions have lost their jobs.

People in their own communities need the government and this Parliament, as it is not only the responsibility of the government but of all parliamentarians, to stay focused and provide the supports they need. I can say that this is what we are doing on this side of the House.

Today we are seeing that the Conservatives do not care about that. They have shown that they do not care about it. They have turned their backs on Canadians. They do not care about working together to find solutions to the many challenges in this crisis. The only thing they care about, as they have shown today, is political games. The motion has absolutely nothing to do with asking serious questions on government policy in the middle of the pandemic. It is a self-serving political game. The Liberals have made it very clear that we will oppose it.

● (1800)

[Translation]

While the opposition is engaging in extreme partisanship and keeps making completely unfounded allegations, the government's job is to protect the health and safety of all Canadians, particularly the most vulnerable.

I am thinking here of the most disadvantaged members of our society, of those who have trouble making ends meet and of women, who often have to juggle many family responsibilities. That is not to mention young families and seniors, who have had it particularly rough in recent months.

In such circumstances, and as Canada goes through an unprecedented crisis, we must work together. It is our duty as a responsible government, but it is also the responsibility of each opposition member.

We must work together, particularly during this pandemic. That has been our government's approach throughout the pandemic and that has not and will not change. Our hand will always be outstretched. We are always ready to work with the opposition parties. That is not just talk. In recent months, we have made Parliament work by working with the opposition parties to implement practical measures to help Canadians. Since I am sure my colleagues are itching to hear what those are, I will take this opportunity to mention a few of them.

In March, we introduced the Canada emergency response benefit. This benefit helped Canadians in need to pay rent, put food on the table and clothe their children. We created this benefit together with the opposition parties; it was a lifeline we put together quickly to help those who really needed it. We were able to help millions of Canadians who lost their jobs, who were quarantined or who were

taking care of someone with COVID-19. Our actions also helped working parents who had to stay home without pay to care for their children.

Now that the workers who lost their jobs are transitioning to employment insurance, the government has implemented other measures to help all Canadians, to help those who need it.

For people who need a helping hand, we created the Canada recovery benefit and the Canada recovery sickness benefit. Each of these was created because we found a way to work together. A minority government needs the support of at least one opposition party, and we have always managed to get it. At times, we have even gotten everyone's support. The last time we held a vote, all parties voted in favour of the government's proposed measures.

Let us not forget that, with the support of the House, we created a wage subsidy program to help businesses keep their employees on the payroll despite reduced demand for their products and services.

Also, and I am sure this will interest our opposition colleagues, we created the Canada emergency business account to provide interest-free loans to help businesses pay the rent and cover other major costs since the pandemic started.

Those are just a few examples of the measures the government has introduced to help Canadians get through these very trying pandemic times.

I am going to say this because I want to be very clear: We were able to do all that because we worked with the opposition parties. As a minority government, we needed the support of one party or another, or several parties, and managed to get it for the well-being, health and safety of Canadians.

● (1805)

The repercussions, whether economic, environmental or social, continue to evolve. The repercussions of this pandemic are far from over. All of this presents a huge challenge for the government, as well as for the opposition parties, which have a duty, under a social pact they entered into with their constituents, to work responsibly in the House. They have the same duty as the government.

What we are discussing here today is extremely important and serious. So much needs to be done. We have learned a lot about what works to protect the health and safety of Canadians and what we can do to help them get through this pandemic together. That is why the throne speech, which was eagerly read by all members of the House, outlined a number of measures to help Canadians as part of a very ambitious plan.

I would like to list a few of the priorities set out in the Speech from the Throne, especially those that address the pandemic. I am certain that the government's efforts, especially those made as a result of the throne speech, are of interest to my colleague. For example, the government will help the provinces increase testing capacity, continue to quickly ship PPE across the country, provide these tools to all provinces, work with the provinces and continue our direct financial support for businesses that need this help.

Men and women established these businesses. I have the greatest respect for these builders who are going through very tough times. We are there for them and the Speech from the Throne clearly sets out what we want to do.

We could have been debating all that and the number of things directly related to the pandemic and the government's ability to meet Canadians' needs during this pandemic. No, today we are debating an ultra-partisan motion, courtesy of our Conservative friends, a motion deemed to be irresponsible by many. That is definitely what the government thinks of it, and it is not alone.

[English]

Today's motion by the Conservatives would establish a special committee with the clear purpose, and only one purpose, of paralyzing the government. That is it. That is the only purpose, and they know that. The Conservatives are having fun and laughing about how they are going to jam up the government and how they are going to paralyze the government. That is what the Conservatives are trying to do in the middle of a pandemic. That is exactly what they are trying to do in the middle of this pandemic.

It is not a serious attempt to do serious work. It is a political inquisition. That is all it is. That is it. That is all. That is what it is. We will have none of it.

The motive is obvious. The Conservatives are trying to create scandals where there are none. They are trying to smear the reputations of good people. It has nothing to do with asking responsible questions about government policy in the middle of a pandemic. There are all those questions they could ask about the efforts of the government and how we could help Canadians. No, the Conservatives are too busy with partisan politics and trying to create this committee. They are very busy.

● (1810)

[Translation]

Earlier this week I made a reasonable proposal to the other parliamentary leaders to try to break the impasse we are in. We propose creating a committee to review all COVID-19-related spending. That would allow hon. members to put politics aside and work seriously for all Canadians. Why not?

It is a responsible and reasonable proposal. It is serious work. In that committee, hon. members from all parties would scrutinize the COVID-19-related programs, as any serious committee would do. Some hon. members prefer to use committees to give themselves outrageous powers that exceed all the limits of power granted to committees to lead their inquisition, which they have been salivating over from day one.

Business of Supply

A committee like the one we are proposing would allow the opposition to share their comments and suggestions on the programs we have put in place. We have had some hits and misses. We can debate and discuss those. This would allow the government to make changes to existing programs. We can always improve what we are doing and the opposition can contribute to improving the programs that help all Canadians. We are totally open to discussing this in that committee. We are open to listening to their suggestions, as we have been doing from the start and will continue to do.

[English]

The work of the special committee that the government is proposing would clearly demonstrate to Canadians that the government and opposition parties are working together in a constructive and effective way. I think it is a fair proposition. I think we can work together in that committee, but I have a feeling that they will not support it because it is not partisan enough. It is too responsible. I think Canadians would like to see members of Parliament working together in a committee to see how we can improve things. Personally, I think our proposal is the best path forward for this Parliament: not for the government, not for the opposition but for Parliament.

I said today that if the Conservatives' proposals pass, it will raise serious questions about whether the House continues to have confidence in the government. This is extremely serious. The words that I chose were not written lightly in the letter I sent to my colleagues. It was important for everyone from all parties to understand that there could be significant political consequences if their ultra-partisan, irresponsible motion passed. It is a serious moment for the House, and this morning I had the opportunity to be even more clear. The government considers this motion to be a matter of confidence. It is a confidence vote. The truth is simple. Members of Parliament cannot establish a new committee with sweeping powers to investigate government corruption and at the same time claim they still have confidence in the government. It is one or the other.

We all know that, and I hope we can find a solution to all work together for the benefit of all Canadians.

● (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[Translation]*

Pursuant to order made on Wednesday, September 23, we will not call for the yeas and nays. As a result, if a member of a recognized party present in the House wants to request a recorded vote or request that the amendment be passed on division, I invite them to rise and so indicate to the Chair.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would request a vote.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Wednesday, September 23, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 21, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to call it 6:30 p.m. at this time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, on October 6, I asked this government if it would ban the destructive practice of gas fracking in Canada. In his response to my question, the Minister of the Environment stated that the government will exceed its 2030 emissions targets. It is important to point out that the current 2030 targets are woefully inadequate. Exceeding a target that is too low is not a win; it is a failure.

The minister also stated that the government has introduced regulations to reduce methane emissions. I appreciate the acknowledgement that the federal government has a role in regulating the extractive practices of the energy industry. This is especially true when those practices poison aquifers and airsheds and release climate-destroying pollutants into the atmosphere.

Fracking is a process for extracting methane that cannot be controlled. Reducing methane emissions at the wellhead does not make fracking a safe and acceptable practice. Fracking leaks toxic chemicals into aquifers and groundwater, releases pollutants into airsheds, releases methane into the atmosphere and increases seismic activity and earthquakes.

Methane is not a transition fuel. It is a climate change accelerator. When methane is leaked into the atmosphere, for the first 20 years, it is 80 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO₂. The

practice of fracking poses a direct and immediate threat to our future and the future of our children and grandchildren.

Using chemical fingerprints, researchers have linked the significant spike in methane emissions to the boom in shale and oil and gas fracking. This spike is linked to the accelerated pace of climate change. An estimated 30 million abandoned oil and gas wells around the world are leaking methane. Methane leaks represent as much a threat to climate change as burning coal to generate electricity. The provinces are not talking about new coal plants. Why are they so fired up about gas fracking?

Many jurisdictions that are serious about climate change are banning fracking and the installation of natural gas in new neighbourhoods and buildings. They know that methane is a climate killer.

After climate change, water and air pollution represent the biggest threat to human health from fracking. Fracking uses huge amounts of water and creates massive amounts of toxic waste water. People who live near fracking operations have had their wells poisoned, leading to increased disease in humans and animals. Fracking releases poisonous hydrocarbons into airsheds, representing another serious health threat.

Fracking has been shown to increase earthquakes. In northwest B.C., fracking in the vicinity of dams on the Peace River is putting the integrity of those dams at risk. The increased seismic activity could lead to the catastrophic failure of the W.A.C. Bennett Dam, the Peace Canyon dam, and it threatens the integrity of the Site C dam, which is under construction on geologically unstable ground. Ironically, the Site C dam is being built to provide cheap, subsidized power to the fracking industry and the LNG industry, which, if continued, could lead to the failure of that dam or a cascading failure of the dams upstream.

Ideally, we should have legislation that regulates against illogical decisions, such as building a dam in a geologically unstable area to support an industry that causes earthquakes, but we cannot regulate for common sense.

Any government that is serious about arresting climate change and protecting the health of its citizens would ban fracking.

● (1820)

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[English]

We recognize that methane is a potent greenhouse gas. We also know that taking action on methane emissions is one of the lowest-cost actions to reduce greenhouse gases. With this in mind, and the understanding that regulation of shale gas production is mainly a provincial and territorial responsibility, we have worked together with provinces and industry to finalize national methane regulations. These regulations came into force on January 1, 2020, and require resource developers to eliminate temporary venting during well completions after hydraulic fracturing operations.

On Canada's emissions, we are making important progress. In December, the Government of Canada announced a commitment to exceed Canada's 2030 emissions reduction targets and chart the path toward achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Canada's most recent national report on climate change progress to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the fourth biennial report, demonstrates that the government has made excellent progress in implementing Canada's national climate plan, the pan-Canadian framework.

For example, this report predicts that in 2030 Canada's GHG emissions will be 227 million tonnes below what was projected in 2015. This is a historic level of emissions reductions, and our energy sector is a significant contributor to our national economy. In light of this and the challenging economic circumstances facing the sector and the regional economies dependent on it, the Government of Canada is providing funding to sustain workers in the energy sector, while cleaning up the environment. This includes up to \$1 billion to the Government of Alberta to support the province's work to clean up inactive oil and gas wells across the province, up to \$400 million to the Government of Saskatchewan to support work to clean up orphan and inactive wells across the province, up to \$120 million to the Government of British Columbia to support work to clean up orphan and inactive oil and gas wells across the province, and \$200 million to Alberta to ensure that the Orphan Wells Association is well-funded to support its work to clean up orphan oil and gas sites across Alberta. The OWA will fully repay this amount.

[Translation]

Fighting climate change does not mean that we need to immediately shut down Canada's energy sectors. Rather, it means that we need to develop Canada's natural resources in a sustainable and responsible way and protect workers with key green investments.

• (1825)

[English]

Mr. Paul Manly: Madam Speaker, the methane budget is spent. We have already released too much of it into the atmosphere and we must act now to stop these emissions, not just lower them. For all the reasons I have outlined, many jurisdictions around the world have either placed moratoriums on fracking or banned it outright, including France, Germany, Bulgaria, Scotland, the United Kingdom, Tunisia, the State of New York and the State of Vermont, and the list keeps growing.

The idea that exporting fracked gas to China will help them lower emissions has been exposed as an outright lie. When will the

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Canadian government study the research and stop supporting this fallacy? It is time to ban fracking, because the only thing we should be accelerating is our transition to renewable energy. Our children and our grandchildren deserve nothing less.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

[English]

Canada's methane regulations will help protect the health of Canadians by improving the air we breathe. Emissions of harmful cancer-causing air toxins and smog-forming pollutants that are often found with methane emissions will be reduced. Common air pollutants emitted from oil and gas production are volatile organic compounds, which are linked to a variety of serious public health effects, including lung problems, asthma attacks and early death resulting from respiratory and cardiovascular complications, and that is why we are taking action.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I address the House today as a follow up to a question I asked two weeks ago with respect to the dithering of the government, while Canada's oil and gas industry, our nation's pride, continued to face headwinds largely as a result the global pandemic, but also realistically as a result of the government's bias toward the industry and its workers who had largely provided for this nations' prosperity for the past several decades.

On March 25 of this year, at the beginning of a pandemic whose effects were multiplied by an—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry, but the member's connection is breaking up.

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, I believe you can hear me now.

On March 25 of this year, at the beginning of a pandemic whose effects were multiplied by an ill-timed global oil price war between large state-owned enterprises half a world away, the then minister of finance and the Liberal government proclaimed that support for the industry would be provided not in days or weeks, but in hours.

Clearly, that proclamation was over-promising and under-delivering. Nearly seven months later, the oil and gas industry continues to face the onslaught of temporary drastic reductions in demand for its resource amidst the world's supply that is robust for the near future. Were the situation to be a new structural scenario for the world energy industry, it is certain that state-owned enterprises would know and would cease further development of their assets.

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Let me provide clarity. Despite some European producers, this is not the case at all. The Middle East sees robust demand for its oil resource for the foreseeable future, going out 30 to 40 years. The world needs energy and it will still need the energy intensity provided by hydrocarbons for which the world has, as of yet, no close competitor, particularly with respect to transportation fuels.

I know parties will quarrel that this is a sunset resource. An energy-educated person will tell them to give their heads a shake or to get an actual education in how energy is produced and which energy sources have environmental footprints. To be clear, every energy source has an environmental footprint.

At this moment, we, Canadians in particular, are betting that the environmental effects caused by greenhouse gases are worse than those produced by other energy sources, as in the soot and greenhouse gases produced from a burning biomass or as in the full scale build out required for an electricity grid that currently has no replacement source of electricity here or around the world.

Damming all the rivers in the world will not replace the energy we use and has its own environmental impacts. The steel, aluminum, concrete, copper, nickel, aggregate, rare earth metals and construction industries, all heavy on emissions, will free us from our power needs. We are deluding ourselves. The government is a cheerleader in this pretense.

Sometimes we get to see some sense of reality emerge when the vanity of the slogans we have heard for five years meet up with the wall of reality. Such seemed to be the case early in this pandemic. The government seemed to indicate that, yes, this industry, the world's environmentally leading oil and gas extraction industry, heavily regulated to ensure it meets the exacting environmental standards of Canadians, would withstand the economic downturn. There was the short pause of attacking the industry with obfuscation and opaque regulations and indeterminate timelines for decision-making when the government might need to admit how important this industry is to Canadians, and to the world, particularly with respect to our environmental practices.

Believe me, for a country that produces less than 5% of the world's oil supply, we lead by example, environmentally and with respect to society's outcomes. Show me industry participants around the world whose practices are as sound, as transparent, as responsive and as progressive as the Canadian oil and gas industry. There are none.

● (1830)

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an important question. We all know Canada's resource sector workers and suppliers have been hard hit by the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nowhere has this been more pronounced than in the petroleum sector, where producers have faced the added challenge of record low prices caused by the dual impact of a price war and a collapse in demand.

The success of Canada's energy sector is critical to the successful restart and recovery of the economy, and that is why our government moved swiftly last spring with more than \$2.5 billion in direct

investment in the industry to create and protect good jobs while strengthening the industry's environmental performance.

This new funding includes more than \$1.7 billion to clean up orphaned and inactive oil and gas wells in the three western provinces, which will create an expected 5,200 jobs in Alberta alone and provide lasting environmental benefits. We have also launched a \$750-million emissions reduction fund to lower greenhouse gases and, in particular, methane emissions in Canada's oil and gas sector. This new fund includes \$75 million to help the offshore industry in Newfoundland and Labrador create and maintain jobs through pollution reduction efforts.

Just last month, the Minister of Natural Resources announced a further investment to support jobs and ensure a sustainable long-term, low-emitting future for the province's offshore oil industry. At the same time, we expanded credit and liquidity supports for mid-market companies through the business credit availability program and established the large employer emergency financing facility, or LEEFF, to assist Canada's larger companies. We have also taken action to directly sustain workers in all sectors through the Canada emergency wage subsidy. For oil and gas workers in Alberta, this crucial support meant sustaining 60,000 jobs at the height of the crisis.

Our government has consistently said that the success of Canada's energy sector is critical to the successful restart and recovery of the economy, and our unprecedented efforts during this challenging time reflect that. This pandemic has reminded us of the power of individual choices and collective will. Governments at all levels, regardless of political stripes, are working together to ensure all Canadians have the vital protection and support they need when they need it most.

Our government will continue to pursue all avenues to ensure Canada's energy sector continues to be a key source of good jobs that support a strong economy in Canada. We are supporting workers. We are supporting families, and we are supporting all Albertans and all workers in the energy sector.

● (1835)

Mr. Greg McLean: Madam Speaker, hundreds of thousands of oil field workers have lost their jobs in the last five years, and that has impacted their families. More than half a million more Canadians and their families are nervously watching during a pandemic as their government continues to act nonsensically toward their industry, seemingly indifferent to global realities or the effect its inaction will have on the families, lives, futures and health of Canadians.

These Canadians, bewildered by the insouciance of the Liberal government, are questioning, in ways they have never questioned before, the way this country makes decisions. These workers and this industry, which collectively contributed over \$200 billion to Canadian social and economic development over the past decade and contributed to the world's environmental advancements, are now having their concerns swept aside. At this time this industry's prosperity, and a transparent and open democracy, such as Canada has been, are paramount for how the world emerges from a great pandemic. We need something better.

We see in this field the government choose, by both its actions and inactions, to be to the benefit of other countries that do not meet the standards to which we aspire, or in the this government's case, to which we pretend to aspire.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Madam Speaker, I am always pleased to have the opportunity to explain the ways in which our government has supported and will continue to support energy workers.

[English]

We have taken extraordinary measures to support workers in the energy sector because we know these are extraordinary times for families right across the country, especially in our oil and gas industry. That is why since forming government and over the last eight months, our government has put in place the measures that I highlighted earlier and has approved good projects that will be built so we can support Alberta's workers. We understand that by supporting a strong economic recovery, particularly in our energy sector, Canadian businesses will continue to attract investment in good projects that support environmental and social priorities and create jobs for all Canadians.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, as the member of Parliament whose riding includes Garrison Petawawa, the largest army base in Canada, I am concerned with the health and well-being of each member of the Canadian Armed Forces. I am similarly concerned with the people employed at Arnprior Aerospace, who work in the aerospace industry and supply our military with the tools to do its job.

Earlier this month, I asked the Minister of National Defence an important question regarding Canadian jobs, procurement and protecting the lives of our women and men in uniform. Canada's aerospace industry and its value chain contribute more than \$20 billion in GDP and 160,000 jobs to the Canadian economy annually. In my Ottawa Valley riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Arnprior Aerospace is a leading aerospace manufacturer. It has the capacity and skill sets to supply quality products to companies like Boeing and others.

As the Canadian government considers bids for the next generation of fighter jets, the Prime Minister needs to stand up for Canadian jobs. Canadian workers and taxpayers want the government to publicly commit to disqualifying bidders that take business away from Canadian companies like Arnprior Aerospace during these difficult economic times. Canadian taxpayers are opposed to funding manufacturing jobs in Mexico or elsewhere, which is what

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some fighter jet aircraft bidders will do unless they are told no. Canadians deserve much better.

If the Prime Minister cared about the lives of the women and men serving their country in uniform, particularly as we approach Remembrance Day, he would admit to Canadians that his defence policy is a scam. "Weak, Insecure, Disengaged" is the appropriate name of the Liberal government defence plan unveiled in 2017. While it announced billions for Canada's military over the next 20 years, who will be in the chamber 20 years from now to remind Canadians of another broken Liberal promise?

It is important to remind Canadians that the jet fighter replacement program dates back to 1997, when Jean Chrétien was prime minister and the decision was made to join with our allies in the joint strike fighter program. That would have seen Canada replace our aging fighter jet fleet with the fifth generation F-35. It is ironic that when the government attacks the former Conservative government over fighter jet procurement, it is in fact attacking Chrétien and his government's choice for a replacement fighter jet, a decision the previous Conservative government honoured. Here we are 23 years later.

This was not the first time a Liberal government has used military procurement as a political football to kick around. Remembrance Day is a tough time for the families who lost loved ones during the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. They do not forget that it was the decision by the Liberal Party to use military procurement, in this case replacing aging helicopters, during the 1993 election that meant our soldiers lacked strategic lift to avoid roadside bombs. The Chrétien Liberals' decision to cancel the Sea King replacement helicopter, the EH-101, was a cynical political act to get elected on the backs of the women and men who serve their country in uniform.

I remember the faces of the soldiers who died when their convoys drove over the roadside bombs. When the Liberals took office in 1993 and cancelled the Conservative order for replacement helicopters under circumstances like the F-35 debate, they paid \$478 million in penalties and set off a 20-year delay in finding a replacement helicopter. That does not count the lives we lost as a result.

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• (1840)

Mr. William Amos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry (Science), Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me start by saying that we obviously recognize Canada's aerospace industry as an engine for innovation, economic activity and high-skilled employment. The aerospace industry contributes \$25 billion to Canada's GDP and over 210,000 jobs to our economy. It is ranked number one in terms of research and development among Canadian manufacturing industries. Its footprint is national in scope, with important aerospace clusters in every region of the country.

The aerospace industry is export-driven, with approximately 70% of total production exported, and Canadian aerospace firms, including small and medium-sized enterprises, are well integrated into global supply chains.

I really appreciate the question posed and the comments made by the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, because the Canadian aerospace manufacturing sector, with businesses like Arnprior Aerospace, creates good jobs for Canadians in the Ottawa Valley, in my riding of Pontiac and beyond. I am a neighbour to the member's riding, so I understand quite well how important this is to her constituency.

Our government is engaged with industry and has been proactive in promoting Canada's aerospace sector. We have been successful in securing strategic investments in advanced technologies, driving innovation and maintaining highly skilled jobs in Canada.

We are going to continue to attract and support new, quality investments in the aerospace sector. For example, we announced nearly \$885 million in funding to support the aerospace and space industries through innovation programs. With regard to procurement, we are continuing to engage with Canadian industry on upcoming defence procurement programs to help drive investments in Canada's key industrial capabilities through the industrial and technological benefits, or ITB, policy.

The ITB policy allows the federal government's significant purchasing power to support Canadian companies and their workers. Through this policy, our government leverages major defence and Coast Guard procurements to create jobs, drive innovation and foster economic growth all across Canada.

When a company wins a defence contract, for every dollar that it receives, it is required to reinvest a dollar back into Canada's economy. What does that look like? That reinvestment means that Canadian small and medium-sized businesses, which make up nearly 90% of the firms in Canada's defence industry, have opportunities to do business with prime contractors. These are business opportunities that can translate into long-term and sustainable work that is directly related to specific defence procurements. It is work that helps these businesses integrate into the global supply chains of aerospace and defence multinationals, and work that helps build and strengthen the strategic partnerships between Canadian business and Canada's research community to advance Canadian innovations.

One recent example of our government leveraging successful industrial outcomes through procurement was the arrival of the first

aircraft of Canada's future fixed-wing search and rescue fleet. This project has created hundreds of new jobs for Canadians. The CC-295 contractor, Airbus Defence and Space, continues to make investments in the Canadian aerospace and defence industry through the ITB policy.

Strategic work packages directly related to the aircraft are providing Canadian companies the opportunity to participate in global supply chains and create high-value jobs in aerospace manufacturing, simulation and training, propulsion, and in-service support sectors.

The success of the ITB policy is concrete. It touches many small and medium-sized businesses from coast to coast to coast. The 2020 annual report on the impact of the ITB policy shows that, from 2014 to 2018, more than 400 small businesses leveraged over \$3.4 billion of ITB commitments as a result of active contracts—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, for the sake of women and men who live with procurement decisions, I ask the Liberals to please not play with people's lives.

Arnprior Aerospace is a world leader in aerospace. It is a good source of jobs in my riding. As the government considers bids from companies, including Boeing, for the fighter jet contract, the Liberal government needs to send a clear, unambiguous signal to all fighter jet bidders that any company that takes business out of Canada, or uses the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to shut down jobs in Canada, will not be considered for this nearly \$20 billion contract.

• (1845)

Mr. William Amos: Madam Speaker, it really is important for the Canadian public to understand just how strongly the aerospace sector is supported through this ITB policy. It really does go directly to the member opposite's question.

The 2020 annual report on the ITB policy clearly indicates that over 360 Canadian small businesses are scaling up through supplier development opportunities and over 220 small businesses are supplying goods and services directly related to procurements. Finally, over 25 Canadian small businesses have expanded their collaborative R and D networks as a result of ITB investments, enhancing their capacity for innovation.

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Going forward, our government is committed to ensuring that our men and women in uniform have the tools they need to protect Canadians and that Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises get the opportunities they so richly deserve to help continue building the aerospace sector. We are going to keep doing that through our federal purchasing power. We are committed to—

Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:46 p.m.)

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