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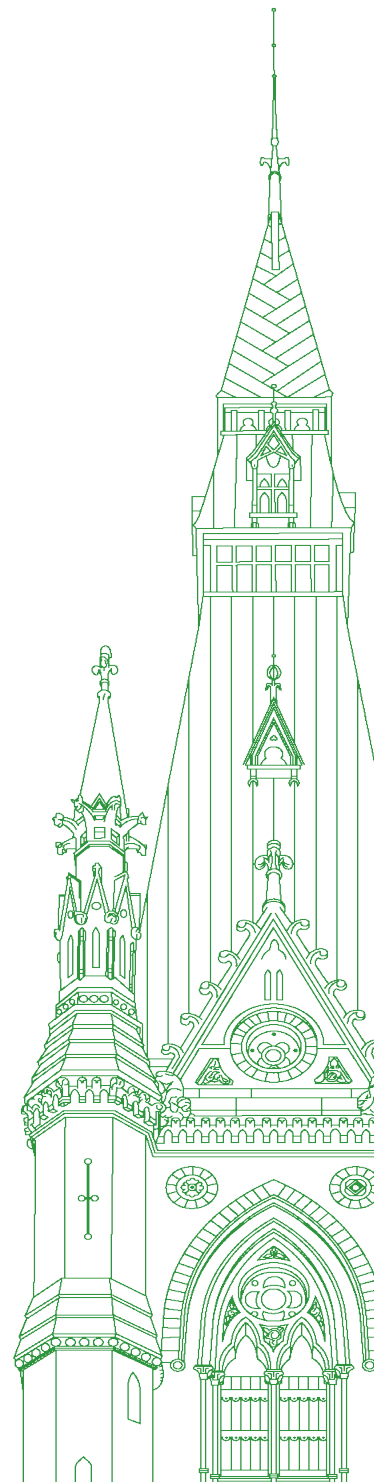
Standing Committee on Finance

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 001

Thursday, October 8, 2020

Chair: The Honourable Wayne Easter



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• (1535)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Evelyn Lukyniuk): Honourable members of the committee, I see we have quorum.

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, cannot entertain points of order, nor participate in debate.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party. I am ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Chair, the Liberal side wishes to nominate the honourable Wayne Easter.

The Clerk: Thank you.

It has been moved that Mr. Easter be elected chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

I declare Mr. Easter duly elected chair of the committee.

You may take the chair.

The Chair (Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.)): Thank you, all. It should be interesting times going ahead. Certainly, thank you for your support.

I welcome the new members to the committee. Pat Kelly has been on the committee before and has often served as associate to Tamara Jansen. Welcome.

Ted Falk has been around for a little while, too. Ted, it's good to see you here as well. Welcome.

I welcome the new clerk, Evelyn Lukyniuk. As everyone knows I'm a real name pronouncer, so I hope I got that right.

Before we go to regular proceedings, is there basically consent to go to the nomination of vice-chairs?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, I'll turn it back to you.

The Clerk: Thank you.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition. I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): I nominate Pierre Poilievre as first vice-chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Kelly that Mr. Poilievre be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Seeing none, I declare the motion carried and Mr. Poilievre elected vice-chair of the committee.

We may now proceed to the election of the second vice-chair. I'm prepared to receive motions for the election of the second vice-chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Clerk, I would like to nominate Gabriel Ste-Marie as the second vice-chair of our committee.

The Clerk: It was moved by Mr. Julian that Mr. Ste-Marie be elected second vice-chair of the committee. Are there any further motions?

I declare the motion carried and Mr. Ste-Marie elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, now that the election of vice-chairs is through, I wonder if I could put forward routine motions.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, are we done with the vice-chairs? We are complete?

The Clerk: Yes, we are done. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Clerk.

We'll go to routine proceedings.

Go ahead, Peter.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great to see colleagues again, and I'm looking forward to working with new colleagues along the way.

First of all, on analyst services, I move:

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

I don't see any dissent. The motion is carried.

Go ahead, Peter...Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, Peter is fine, too.

The second routine motion to be introduced here is for the subcommittee on agenda and procedure:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five (5) members, namely the Chair and one member from each party; and that the subcommittee work in a spirit of collaboration.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: For further clarification, it's one member from each recognized party.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Peter Julian: That's probably a friendly amendment.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: If Mr. Julian wants to emphasize that the NDP is indeed still a recognized party, that's fine with me.

The Chair: Are we all agreed to the friendly amendment?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: This routine motion relates to meetings without a quorum:

That the chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including two members of the opposition and two members of the government, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.

• (1540)

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: If Mr. Fragiskatos is saying that in the case where we are travelling across the country for pre-budgetary hearings that it start regardless, then I would agree. I'm not sure I want to give a blanket ability outside the parliamentary precinct, but I believe what he's proposing is in the case of pre-budget hearings where it does make sense. Outside of the parliamentary precinct during pre-budgetary hearings, I would support that if he accepts it as a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

I am not sure what other committees do in this regard, but we only travel for pre-budget anyway.

Are you okay with that, Peter?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I am.

The Chair: Mr. Julian is basically saying that when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct on pre-budget hearings that the meetings begin. Are we okay with that?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Yes, that is very much in line with what we had in the previous session under the same routine motions for this committee.

The Chair: All those in favour?

There's no one opposed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: This relates to time for opening remarks and the questioning of witnesses:

That witnesses be given five minutes—

—which was previously 10 minutes in the last session—

—for their opening statement; that, at the discretion of the chair, during questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows: First round: Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party; For the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for questioning be as follows: Conservative Party, five minutes, Liberal Party, five minutes, Conservative Party, five minutes, Liberal Party, five minutes, Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes and New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes.

The Chair: I see Mr. Julian first, and then we'll go to Mr. Poilievre and then Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Peter Julian: I don't have any problem with the time allocation, but what procedure and House affairs has adopted, and what committees are being urged to adopt is for the second round. The first round is fine. The second round would actually be Conservative Party five, Liberal Party five, Bloc two and a half minutes, NDP two and a half minutes, and then Conservative Party five, and Liberal Party five.

That would be the amendment I would propose to Mr. Fragiskatos. That's what procedure and House affairs has adopted. Hopefully, it'll be a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Just to be sure I got this right, the first round would be as is, six minutes. The second round would be Conservatives five, Liberals five, Bloc two and a half, NDP two-and-a-half, and then into the next round starting with Conservatives five and Liberals five.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, we'll leave it at that.

Mr. Poilievre, you had your hand up.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Before I speak, can I just confirm, has Mr. Fragiskatos accepted that friendly amendment?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have not, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay, so you're going onto another issue.

Is there a discussion on the amendment as proposed by Mr. Julian?

We'll go to Mr. Ste-Marie and then Ms. Dzerowicz.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to raise the same point as Mr. Julian. I will support his amendment, as agreed to by the whips. I believe this is the way the committee should proceed.

• (1545)

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Dzerowicz, are you speaking to this amendment?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Yes.

I just need to understand why the proposed change, Mr. Julian? Things went so swimmingly in our first part of the year. Everything went well.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: The reason that procedure and House affairs adopted that format—even though the third and fourth party have much less time—the way the rotation worked, they are suggesting this and committees are adopting it this way for the second round to ensure that those two and a half minutes actually make it. If you put it right at the end, it's doubtful that the second round actually could be completed, whereas this way, the third and fourth party actually get a second way to ask questions. That's why procedure and House affairs proceeded this way. It's basically a supplementary round for things that come up.

That's why it was proposed by procedure and House affairs. That's why other committees are adopting it that way. We've already seen a number of them over the past. I don't think finance should be an outlier. We deal with very important issues, so having that supplementary question can make a difference, even if it's only two and a half minutes.

The Chair: Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My understanding, Mr. Julian, is that the chair can be empowered to shorten the time to ensure everybody gets two rounds. I think it was traditionally done so that the government party gets first crack at the second round and then the leading opposition gets second crack. I believe maybe PROC, for some reason, specifically decided to agree to this, but I'm not sure that all other committees are going to follow suit.

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Peter Julian: The ones that have so far, yes, they have.

You can certainly talk to your whip about why procedure and House affairs recommended that format. I'm sure it came through discussions.

My point is that if procedure and House affairs is recommending it, all parties agreed to it for procedure and House affairs, and other committees are adopting it this way, why would finance then put the third and fourth party possibly without the ability to ask any supplementary questions? In a minority Parliament all parties have to work together. That's why procedure and House affairs is strongly recommending the format that I proposed.

I'm sure Mr. Fragiskatos was aware of that as well.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, Mr. Julian has made it seem that the endorsement from PROC was a unanimous one. It was not.

This is an independent committee. Committees are masters of their own destiny, as we all know. This was—and when I say “this was”, I mean what I originally suggested a few moments ago prior

to Mr. Julian seeking to put in place a friendly amendment—an approach that we followed in the previous session and it worked quite well. Everybody had the ability to be given time. Time was allocated very fairly under your leadership, Mr. Chair. I really don't see why that would be a problem henceforth.

I think that what was originally suggested, with due respect to Mr. Julian and Mr. Ste-Marie, is completely fair. I'm not sure why they want to keep pressing this point.

The Chair: All right, there doesn't seem to be an agreement.

Is there any further discussion? Then we'll have to go to a vote on it.

We'll have Mr. Ste-Marie, and I think Mr. Poilievre wants in.

Gabriel.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would say to Mr. Fragiskatos that, so far, it hasn't worked very well. During the consultations regarding COVID-19, my colleague Peter Julian and I were given our first two-and-a-half-minute slot. However, because there were so many guests and witnesses and we were discussing very important issues, it was not uncommon at the end of the meetings, if we were lucky, that we could only get a short question because the chair didn't have time to give us our second two-and-a-half-minute slot.

What is being proposed and what has been passed in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs aims to finally secure those two and a half minutes, as my colleague Mr. Julian says. In my opinion, it is not true to say that it has been working well and that, so far, it has been fair. Committees are independent and can determine their own procedures, but sometimes their operation can be cumbersome, lengthy and painful.

• (1550)

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

I do think, unless I see agreement, we will have to go to a....

Oh, sorry, Mr. Poilievre. Go ahead.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I gather the only difference here is that in the second round, the Bloc and the NDP would split five minutes right smack in the middle of the round. Do I have that right?

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: That is effectively the only difference versus what we have right now.

I just want to make sure we understand what we're voting on here. Under Mr. Fragiskatos' motion, the first round is six minutes for the Conservatives, the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP. The second round is five minutes for the Conservatives, five minutes for the Liberals, five minutes for the Conservatives, and five minutes for the Liberals. The third round is when the Bloc and NDP get their last opportunity to speak.

Is that what Mr. Fragiskatos is proposing?

The Chair: Well, following that we're back into Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal. I believe when we've had time, we've brought in the NDP and Bloc after that. It's basically up to the chair, but in the third round normally we're back to the regular order as in the first round, only with less...and often we split that down to three minutes instead of five, depending, in trying to get everybody in.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The difference, Mr. Poilievre, is that if we lose the five minutes, as we often do when we're doing our rounds, in the case of Mr. Fragiskatos' proposal it would be the Bloc and the NDP that would lose their supplementary question. If we lose that five minutes, there's no possibility for two of the three opposition parties to ask supplementary questions. With what I'm proposing as an amendment, every party gets supplementary questions. If we lose that five minutes, it's the government who chairs the committee, and the chair intervenes quite often. The Liberal Party will have several rounds before that.

It's a difference of equity. Either the government loses the five minutes or two of the three opposition parties lose the five minutes. That's actually a pretty substantial difference, I would suggest. That's why procedure and House affairs has made the recommendation, which I believe we should follow.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Peter, just to clarify, you're saying that under the Fragiskatos model that we followed before, the Bloc and NDP only get their two and a half minutes after the first two rounds are completely finished, and only if the chair finds there's time for that to happen.

Mr. Peter Julian: If we're doing an hour-long hearing, depending on the number of witnesses, and we lose that last five minutes from the second round, with the Fragiskatos proposal it's two of the three opposition parties who lose that opportunity also for a supplementary question. Under my proposal, it may mean that the government gets one fewer round, but they will have had several rounds earlier.

That's the difference. It's whether you believe the government should basically override, if we have to lose five minutes, or if the two opposition parties should be able to ask supplementary questions in that same time.

The Chair: Ms. Dzerowicz, do you want in on this one?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I just want to point out a few things. I love that we're calling it the Fragiskatos motion or method. It's great. I think we should trademark it.

My understanding is that this is just the traditional format that has always existed. My sense is that it is because the governing party tends to have first crack and then the leading opposition party has the second crack in the third round. I think it really is just because we have a majority rules government and that's the format that has always existed.

I know that Mr. Julian has pointed out a number of times that PROC has approved it. I will tell you that the Liberal members did not support it. It did not receive unanimous support. It was not meant to be seen as setting a precedent for all the committees.

Those were the two points I wanted to make, Chair.

• (1555)

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos, then maybe we'll have to go to a vote.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the call for a trademark.

Perhaps I'll be accused by my colleagues across the way for being quite rigid here, but I still fail to see and have not heard a compelling reason as to why we can't follow the convention from the previous session which worked very well, Mr. Chair. Why can't we leave it in your very capable hands to make sure that two rounds come to completion?

In the previous Parliament, I don't recall one single time where opposition members complained about not having fair time. This was a committee that dealt with some very challenging issues as far as COVID-19 and the economic response was concerned, and of course we dealt with WE Charity. As we all saw, the opposition was very able to raise issues in any way they wished.

We have an existing format that worked well then. Suddenly you come here and now propose a change. It's not about anything that I proposed. I appreciate Mr. Julian and Mr. Poilievre characterizing this as the Fragiskatos approach or structure or whatever they called it. It's not about me here. I think we have a tradition that we followed on this committee. Why not simply continue with that?

It's a bit perplexing, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I see Mr. Poilievre has his hand up, too.

I was going to go to you, Mr. Julian, for the last word, so I'll go to you, and then to Mr. Poilievre and Ms. Jansen. Hopefully then we can go to a vote.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fragiskatos has put a very eloquent argument forward for my amendment, which is that you, Mr. Chair, do have the ability to ensure that government members get that final question in. That's terrific.

I think the third and fourth parties have very clearly spelled out that they believe they need to have that guarantee of a supplementary question. Mr. Chair, as you know, the reality is that often you're not able to provide that, so you're very effective in juggling things. If Mr. Fragiskatos believes in what he just said, he should vote for my amendment. Then we can lock in what procedure and House affairs is recommending we do and what other committees are doing as well, in the interest of fairness in a minority Parliament.

The Chair: I'll go to Mr. Poilievre and then Ms. Jansen.

Before the vote on the subsequent rounds, I'm going to ask you, Mr. Julian, just to explain to me where we are on that, so at least I understand whichever way it goes.

Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I appreciate Mr. Fragiskatos' humility and modesty in turning down the namesake of the motion, which we tried to ascribe to him. That appellation, I think, is something he could have been proud of and even advertised amongst his constituents: that he has created and invented a procedural innovation at a parliamentary committee. Not many Canadians can say that.

On to the substance of the matter, I think that there is nothing wrong with giving our two opposition compatriots—I hope the Bloc doesn't mind being called a compatriot—an extra two and a half minutes each. I know that the Liberal party would be charitable enough to grant that. The argument that the Fragiskatos model is more established would suggest that we can never improve, but a wise man once said that in Canada, better is always possible. I think there is some room for improvement.

We hope that the NDP, in using that 2.5 minutes, won't simply serve Liberal purposes with it. We are trusting that they will honour their constituents who voted for an opposition party when they elected New Democrats in some of the ridings of the country. We know that they will be mindful of that when they speak out, because we certainly don't need anymore fealty to the government from opposition parties.

I'm inclined to vote in favour of that amendment from Mr. Julian. Hopefully, it will lead to an even more productive finance committee in this Parliament than the one that preceded prorogation.

• (1600)

The Chair: All right, we have Ms. Jansen and then Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Falk, was your hand up? You were just waving papers.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): I was wondering if it's possible that we raise hands rather than waving at the cameras. It feels very disorganized because people are waving. It's difficult to work like that.

The Chair: You can use that little hand thing if you like. The problem here is that I'm working from a small screen, on a Surface Pro.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I'm just wondering if we could use that as a regular way of doing business. It's a bit confusing when people are waving and I'm looking at the list of hands and they're not up. I just think it will ensure that everybody is given the right turn in the right order.

The Chair: We can do that.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): I have a question for Mr. Julian.

During your presentation for the proposed amendment, you indicated that there was a precedent set, more or less, that committees are being encouraged to adopt. I'm curious if there's been any movement or discussion around the practice that committees have adopted where the chair is a member of the opposition and whether, in those circumstances, to meet the suggestion that the chair could accommodate, the same precedent would apply within this case, given where we are in Parliament with the Conservatives last in the round that we're discussing. Has that been discussed in other committees?

The Chair: Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I don't actually know the answer to that question.

What we're proposing here doesn't have the Conservatives last in that second round. It has the Liberals last in that second round. For subsequent rounds it would be the same. I think the chair was asking that question earlier. It would be the same for subsequent rounds if we were going for a two-hour session. It would be Conservative for five minutes, Liberal for five minutes, Bloc for two and a half minutes, NDP for two and a half minutes, Conservative for five minutes and then Liberal for five minutes.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Chair. I'm still trying to figure out where the “raise hand” function is. I've used it a few times on Zoom, but that's why I interrupted there.

I think that Mr. Fraser's question is a very relevant one. I'm not sure if Mr. Julian understood it, with all due respect to him. As I understood him, Mr. Fraser was talking about what happens in cases where the opposition holds the chair if, as in our case and most committees' cases, a Liberal chair is in place.

What Mr. Julian is calling for here, and one would assume in other committees, is that the Liberals finish off questioning. In cases where the opposition is in chairmanship, is he also calling for the opposition, in the form of the Conservatives, to wrap up questioning there, too?

Mr. Peter Julian: It's a red herring. I don't have the answer. I'd prefer to go to a vote, Mr. Chair.

• (1605)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, I would remind my honourable colleague that he is helping to establish a bit of a precedent. I'm not sure it's a precedent that he would be entirely comfortable with.

The Chair: We're ready for the vote.

Did I see you shaking your head, Mrs. Jansen?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I'm sorry, but I do still see hands up.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Chair, I had my hand up.

I don't want to debate this too much further, but Mr. Julian's point is correct. It's a red herring in terms of us setting a precedent for an opposition-chaired committee. That will be a question for opposition-chaired committees to determine.

I also agree with Mrs. Jansen that just for order on this, monitoring the participants' hands up would be an orderly way to keep a speakers list.

The Chair: Are we ready for the question?

Madam Clerk, perhaps we could turn to you, on the amendment by Mr. Julian.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We'll go on to the next motion. That will be the new order.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, the proposed routine motion here is on document distribution. It is as follows:

That only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the committee only when the documents are available in both official languages and that witnesses be advised accordingly.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Peter.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: The next routine motion is on working meals.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: On a point of order, did we vote on the original motion as amended?

The Chair: No, we didn't. We'd better do that.

Thank you, Julie.

We'll go back a step and vote on the original motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Okay, now we're on working meals.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, the motion reads as follows:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

• (1610)

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is travel accommodations.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Chair. The motion reads:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two representatives per organization; provided that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the chair.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Next is access to in camera meetings.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: On access to in camera meetings, Mr. Chair, the motion reads:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each Committee member be allowed to have one staff member at an in camera meeting and that one additional person from each House officer's office be allowed to be present.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm looking at the raised hands and there are three raised hands. Are they because there are questions, or is it...? I know in my case I've raised my hand because I would like to present a motion after the routine motions are over, but I don't know whether that was the appropriate thing to do.

The Chair: I have three requests following the business: one from Ms. Dzerowicz, one from Mr. Julian and one from Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Peter Julian: On a point of order, my hand was up first, so I just want to remind you of that, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I think my hand was up first, Mr. Julian.

The Chair: We'll argue about that later. Let's get back to the routine proceedings.

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, if it's helpful, I think I did see Ms. Dzerowicz's hand go up first, but in any case, as you said, we can discuss that in a moment.

This is the second-last motion. It relates to transcripts of in camera meetings:

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the Committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the Committee or by their staff.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now, we'll go to some motions.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, as you know, this one, on notice of motion, is a lengthier one, so just bear with me here:

That a 48 hours' notice, interpreted as two nights, shall be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that (1) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. (EST) from Monday to Friday; that (2) the motion be distributed to Members in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said notice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour; and that (3) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day and that when the committee is travelling on official business, no substantive motions may be moved.

The Chair: Is there discussion on this one? I see none.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Peter Julian: Point of order.

The Chair: I do have the three other motions on the screen. Mr. Julian's hand came up first. I was informed first by Ms. Dzerowicz.

Mr. Fraser, you have your hand up too.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I do, for a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Peter Julian: My point of order, Mr. Chair, is that with the “raise hand” function, you can actually see the order in which people raise their hands, so all members of the committee can see that I'm first up after the routine motions.

• (1615)

The Chair: I'll be honest with you, Mr. Julian, that I haven't figured this system out yet and I lost you once. I'm going to go offline and try to figure this system out when this meeting is over.

There is a point of order from Mr. Fraser first, if it's a point of order.

Mr. Sean Fraser: It's actually on the same point of order, Mr. Chair, about going through the “raise hand” exercise, which I think could be a good practice, though one we're not used to. I thank Mrs. Jansen for the suggestion.

I used the “raise hand” function myself to make a previous comment when I posed a question to Mr. Julian. After I had asked that question, I saw that Ms. Dzerowicz had her hand up as well previously. They were both cleared. I didn't clear it myself. I'm curious to know whether the chair or someone else has the ability to do that. Both of ours were removed and Mr. Julian used the “raise hand” function subsequent to that.

What I don't know is whether Ms. Dzerowicz's initial hand raise was for her intended motion or for a comment she was making in the previous debate.

It's obvious this is not a rule that existed. We don't really know how to work this, but I thought I would offer my own testimony, I suppose, because I checked when Mrs. Jansen said we had to lower our hand and mine had already been lowered.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Can I just answer the—

The Chair: I'm going to let Ms. Dzerowicz come in here, because I was informed by Ms. Dzerowicz first by the old way of doing things, and now we're into a new way of doing things.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz, and make your point, and then we'll have to make a decision here on which one we're going with. I have Mr. Julian up as well. I want to be fair.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

To be after routine motions, I did raise my hand. Then Ms. Jansen mentioned we should raise and drop and raise and drop. I think there was a bit of a use there of the raise and drop. And then I put it back on again, and then—this is to Mr. Fraser's comment—I think it was taken down. I think I had spoken, but whoever took it down didn't understand that I was trying to raise my hand to speak as soon as the routine motions were over.

It's unfortunate that we're left where we are here, but it was very genuine. I actually had it up for the most part even before anybody

else was putting up their raised hand, and then I think it was eliminated when we were going into the raised hand and dropping hand. Once I noticed it was eliminated, I put it back up right away, so I've been there from the beginning.

The Chair: I really see no reason why we can't deal with all three.

We have committee time till what time, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: The notice of meeting per se says 5:30.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we're talking about the “raised hand” function, which as far as the efficiency of meetings is concerned could prove to be a very valuable tool. However, where in the Standing Orders, where in the very good text that all members of Parliament are assigned when they become MPs, in the chapter on committees, does it say anything about the Zoom “raised hand” function? That sentence has never been spoken in committee before, Mr. Chair, which proves the point that we can't make rules on the fly, as Mr. Julian is trying to do.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: A point of order.

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Poilievre, I'll hear you, but getting to the first motion as quickly as possible and then maybe dealing with all three is where I'm trying to go.

Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I'm sure our constituents would be very proud to see us dealing with this important matter of state. I'm reminded that the definition of a committee is a group of people who by themselves can do nothing and who together agree that nothing can be done.

The Chair: I don't believe that is a point of order.

I am going to go to Ms. Dzerowicz first, then Mr. Julian and then Mr. Poilievre.

Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to present a motion on pre-budget consultations.

As Mr. Poilievre said, those witnessing us today will probably find this to be a very important motion for us to be presenting.

I do have it translated into both languages and my staff should be sending this over to the clerk as we speak. I'm happy to read it in French as well.

[Translation]

I can speak both languages. In addition, it allows me to practise my French.

[English]

It goes as follows:

That, pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 83.1, the Standing Committee on Finance begins the Pre-Budget Consultations 2021 on Tuesday, October 13, 2020, and that

- a) the Deputy Prime Minister and departmental officials appear before the committee;
- b) the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the first session of the 43rd Parliament on pre-budget consultations be taken into consideration by the committee in the current session;
- c) the committee allow witnesses to change their testimony if they feel so obliged based on the rapidly evolving situation around COVID-19;
- d) each party submit a preliminary witness list no later than 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 14, 2020;
- e) each party submit a final witness list no later than 6:00 p.m. on Friday, October 16, 2020; and
- f) the committee request permission from the House to table its report on Pre-Budget consultations no later than Tuesday, December 8, 2020

I wonder—

● (1620)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Point of privilege, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There is no point of privilege, but go head.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: There is a point of privilege, and I gave notice to your office that I would be raising one.

The Chair: Yes, you gave me notice a little while ago. I have three notices of motions: one from Ms. Dzerowicz, one from Mr. Julian and one from you.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: My point is with regard to the breach of privilege that the government has carried out with respect to the finance committee. I do have the floor, and this is in order.

The Speaker has referred this matter back to the finance committee for it to be dealt with here. This is the proper forum, and privilege is the proper point under which it should be raised. So it is a point of privilege, and that grants me the floor to raise it.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Point of order—

I think that is out of order.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I will proceed. Points of privilege take precedence over points of order.

The Chair: They do take precedence, Ms. Dzerowicz, so we will allow it to go to the point of privilege, I believe.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: But is the point of privilege actually a point of privilege?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, it very much is.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Well can we maybe have the clerk define that, as opposed to the person who is raising the point of privilege?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: If I may, it's impossible for the clerk to rule on whether it's a point of privilege until the clerk has heard the point of privilege.

The Chair: Okay, let's hear your point of privilege.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

This committee, prior to prorogation, required that the government provide a series of documents in relation to the WE scandal. That request was very specific. It included a long list of items that would be required to fulfill the motion.

The motion specified that it would be the law clerk of the House of Commons who would be responsible for redacting any documents that were necessary to redact as a result of national security, cabinet confidence or any other legitimate purpose.

As you can appreciate, Mr. Chair, members of the committee were extremely disappointed and shocked to see that the documents submitted to the law clerk of the House of Commons were pre-redacted. Members of the government had covered up hundreds of sentences and at least dozens of pages through redactions, with black ink on page after page after page.

The Prime Minister promptly prorogued Parliament before this matter could be addressed at this committee, preventing me from bringing this motion then. Thus, I am bringing it forward now.

The member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands, Michael Barrett, raised a point of privilege on the floor of the House of Commons in respect of this matter. The Speaker responded by saying that the matter had to be raised at the aggrieved committee, which is this one.

This represents a breach of the privileges of parliamentarians to receive any and all documents that the committee requests. Parliamentary privilege is absolute. The government does not have the right, in our system, to withhold information that Parliament has requested.

I note that the original request was extremely generous towards the government, in that it provided a mechanism for the law clerk, who is bound by solicitor-client privilege, to remove or redact any information that would violate the government's right to cabinet confidence, protection of national security, commercial sensitivity and personal privacy.

We have a respected legal team. We have, simply put, a lawyer for the House of Commons whose job it was to carry out that work. The law clerk has informed the House that the office of the clerk was prevented from doing that job by the government's decision to do the redactions before the documents were ever handed over.

As remedy, I have a motion that I wish to introduce into the record for committee members to vote upon. Let me begin reading it.

That the Chair be instructed to present the following report to the House forthwith, provided that dissenting or supplementary—

● (1625)

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, before you go to your motion, I want to have this straight, because if it's a point of privilege, I have to allow it and go to the motion. But your point of privilege, if I understand what you said, is that you're saying the request that the finance committee made for documentation in the last Parliament was not abided by as we had requested that it be abided by. Is that what your point of privilege is?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, and thus the privilege of committee, which is a privilege of Parliament, was breached. The government breached the privileges of committee, the committee being a creature of Parliament, and thereby breached the privileges of parliamentarians. That is the basis for my point.

The Chair: Okay, but what I need to know, before I rule for or against the point of privilege, is this: What part of the motion are you saying wasn't adhered to?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The documents requested were redacted before they reached the law clerk, and therefore Parliament's unlimited ability to acquire documents from the Government of Canada, or any other entity for that matter, was breached.

The Chair: And your evidence for this is what the law clerk said?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Furthermore, my motion actually contains additional evidence that will be read into the record formally, as soon as you allow me to continue.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Could I have point a order?

The Chair: No, you can't.

Can we suspend for two minutes? I want to confer with the clerk on this one; I really do.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Well, no, I don't think there is unanimous consent to suspend the meeting.

The Chair: Well, I can suspend the meeting and confer with the clerk, so I am going to do that. I want to be sure I am on safe ground with where I'm going here. I don't want to deny your motion if it shouldn't be denied, and I want to approve it if it should be approved under the rules.

I am going to suspend for two or three minutes and talk to the clerk.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

The Chair: The meeting is suspended for a couple of minutes.

• (1625) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1630)

The Chair: All right. I will allow the motion. Go ahead.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It reads as follows:

That the Chair be instructed to present the following report to the House forthwith, provided that dissenting or supplementary opinions, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(b), shall be filed with the Clerk of the Committee within 24 hours of adoption of this motion.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, could you slow down a little? We do have to write this down.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Absolutely. I'll be happy to provide the motion in writing to your office thereafter so that you will have a copy. My staff is in the process right now of emailing it to your team and to the clerk so that you will have a copy.

The motion continues as follows:

The Standing Committee on Finance, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), has agreed to report the following.

Standing Order 108(2) empowers your Committee—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It continues:

“to study and report on all matters relating to the mandate, management and operation of the department or departments”—

The Chair: I can't take a point of order until we get through the motion, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Go ahead with the motion.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I will have to reread that sentence, then:

Standing Order 108(2) empowers your Committee “to study and report on all matters relating to the mandate, management and operation of the department or departments of government which are assigned” to it, among other things.

Additionally, on May 26, 2020, the House adopted an order of reference permitting your Committee to meet virtually to consider matters “related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters” and empowering it, “in relation to [its] study of matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic”, to “receive evidence which may otherwise exceed the [committee's] mandate under Standing Order 108”.

• (1635)

[Translation]

On July 7, 2020, the committee held a virtual meeting. It adopted the following motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee order that any contracts concluded with We Charity and Me to We, all briefing notes, memos and emails, including the contribution agreement between the government and the organization, from senior officials prepared for or sent to any minister regarding the design and creation of the Canada Student Service Grant, as well as any written correspondence and records of other correspondence with We Charity and Me to We from March 2020 be provided to the committee no later than August 8, 2020; that matters of cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request; and that any redactions necessary, including to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons.

[English]

On or about August 8, 2020, several deputy heads of government departments provided the Clerk of your Committee with documents in response to the order for document production. These documents were, in accordance with the order, referred to the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel for review and redaction.

On August 18, 2020, the documents were released to the members of your Committee. The Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel also wrote to the Clerk of your Committee stating, in part:

the letters and documents indicate that the departments had also made redactions to protect personal information in accordance with the Privacy Act, to protect third party information and information on the vulnerability of their computer or communication systems, or methods employed to protect their systems. These latter grounds for exemption from disclosure are contained in the Access to Information Act..

Upon reception of the documents on August 9, 2020, you provided them to my Office so that we could make the necessary redactions to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents, as well as public servants as contemplated by the production order. However, as mentioned above, the documents had already been redacted by the departments to protect personal information and on other grounds. As my Office has not been given the opportunity to see the unredacted documents, we are not able to confirm whether those redactions are consistent with the order of the Committee....

It goes on:

As mentioned above, the departments made certain redactions to the documents on grounds that were not contemplated in the order of the Committee. We note that the House's and its committees' power to order the production of records is absolute and unfettered as it constitutes a constitutional parliamentary privilege that supersedes statutory obligations, such as the exemptions found in the Access to Information Act. The House and its committees are the appropriate authority to determine whether any reasons for withholding the documents should be accepted or not.

[Translation]

Parliament was prorogued on August 18, 2020, preventing your committee from meeting to study the documents and the government's failure to comply with the July 7, 2020 order.

A question of privilege was raised in the House on this matter at the beginning of the new session of Parliament. In his decision of October 1, 2020, the Speaker of the House said:

As of today, it is not possible to know whether the committee is satisfied with these documents as provided to it. The new session is now under way. The committee, which has control over the interpretation of its order, has an opportunity to examine the documents and decide what to do with them.[...]

Given these facts and circumstances, it is my view that this is a matter for the committee to consider. If it believes that its privileges have been breached or has any other concern with respect to the situation, it can report to the House.

[English]

At its October 8, 2020, organizational meeting, your Committee considered the government's response to the July 7, 2020, order.

Your Committee has concluded that the government's response failed to comply with the order, and, accordingly, wishes to draw the attention of the House to what appears to be a breach of its privileges by the government's refusal to provide documents in the manner ordered by the Committee.

Your Committee, therefore, recommends that an Order of the House do issue for 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 documents shall be laid upon the Table within one sitting day of the adoption of this Order.

That, Mr. Chair, is my binding motion.

Having concluded the filing of that motion and having instructed my staff members to provide your and the clerk's office with a full copy of it in order to ensure rapid precision in its recording, I will state the rationale for the motion very briefly.

We asked for documents. The documents were blacked out. We have the right to see those documents unredacted. We have a law clerk, a lawyer, who represents all of us, who has the ability, the expertise, and the confidence of this committee and our House to determine what we should and should not publish. That is the role of Parliament. My motion is now before the committee.

I look forward to our going to an immediate vote on it.

● (1640)

The Chair: I have to go back to a point of order by Mr. Fragiskatos, and then I need a clarification from you on your motion.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have a point of order. I had to wait until Mr. Poilievre was done reading the motion.

What's your point of order?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm having a difficult time understanding the substance of Mr. Poilievre's motion.

The reason for that is that we're in a new session of Parliament. Since this is our first meeting, there has not been, by definition, a motion adopted to review any documents. There haven't been, as far as I know, documents received by the committee. The clerk has not received a relevant letter.

The member, Mr. Poilievre, talks about a breach of privilege, which the Speaker did not find on the matter that he raises. When such issues come up, Mr. Chair, even in a case of a point of privilege, they go to the—

The Chair: I think, Mr. Fragiskatos, you're more into debate than a point of order. The motion is debatable. I'll allow those points to be made in debate.

However, before I get into debate, Mr. Poilievre, I just want to be clear so I understand it. Here in your motion, you say at one point—and for committee members, the clerk has now sent that motion to members on their units, so you should have it—that the documents be unredacted. You mean unredacted as they go to the law clerk, because there have been some motions floating around, which I've seen here and there, that basically said cabinet documents, etc., unredacted.

Maybe I can explain it this way. You're saying that the original request, after the finance committee met, was that the documents that would go to the law clerk be unredacted and that the law clerk could make the decision regarding what's redacted and what is not. Is that correct?

● (1645)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I will quote directly from my motion so that you don't rely on a secondary interpretation of it. It says in the final paragraph:

Your Committee, therefore, recommends that an Order of the House do issue for 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 documents shall be laid upon the Table within one sitting day of the adoption of this Order.

Therefore, with the possession of these documents, the committee then can have the clerk remove any information that would violate personal privacy or national security rules, though I suspect there is no such information, and then the rest can be made public.

The Chair: Okay. The motion is debatable.

Please raise your hands, because I still haven't figured out this hand thing. My apologies for that.

I have Mr. Fragiskatos first, Mr. Julian second, and Ms. Dzerowicz third, and we'll go from there.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Pat Kelly is next.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The motion makes reference to the Speaker's ruling on October 1, but it neglects to mention the part of the ruling that said "the Chair cannot"—cannot—"find that there is a prima facie question of privilege". That, I think, is a very relevant point in addition to everything I raised earlier. There was a bit of commotion there, so I'll repeat what I said: We are in a new session of Parliament. A motion has not been adopted to review documents. The committee has not received relevant documents. The clerk has not received any relevant letter.

I would also remind the member, who's an experienced member, that these matters, as we know from the guidebook on parliamentary procedure specifically relating to the conduct of committees, are issues to be taken up by the Standing Committee on Procedure, the PROC committee. I think that's a highly relevant point. I would point my honourable colleague to a relevant section in the chapter on committees and also relating to questions of privilege. It says as follows: "If the Speaker finds there is a prima facie breach of privilege"—again, he did not find it in this case, but the text is making a general point—"the member raising the question of privilege is asked to move a motion, which is debatable, usually requesting that the matter be examined by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs."

That is the convention, Mr. Chair. Mr. Poilievre wants to bring these matters to the finance committee. Again, I made this point many weeks ago, when we were meeting in the previous session. Canadians are deeply anxious right now about COVID-19 and its economic impact. I think that's where our focus ought to be. We are again today embroiled in a debate over documents, over technical matters. I'm not dismissing the substance of those. As I put on the record many times during the WE hearings that we had, I thought serious questions had to be asked of the government. I asked, along with other Liberal colleagues, very serious questions of the government. We did not hide from that responsibility or shirk that responsibility. However, I worry that here again too we have given in, or could be giving in, to a tendency to look at matters that are not specifically relevant to the committee on finance. We need to begin to think about the pre-budget deliberations that are going to, or ought to, seize this committee. In fact, that is a responsibility of the committee if we follow the Standing Orders.

I think colleagues around the table will hold that same view. If they wish to raise their perspective on this matter, on the matter of pre-budget deliberations, I would welcome that. It would be great to get that on the record. I think it's a very relevant point. I know that a number of stakeholder organizations have expressed a deep interest in letting this committee know about where the country ought to go, where the federal government should go and what advice this particular committee should provide to the government on economic matters going forward.

For all these reasons, Mr. Chair, I have a tough time understanding the special relevance of the motion introduced by my honourable colleague. He knows conventions very well. I think it would have been more instructive and appropriate for him to raise these matters, or rather for a Conservative member to raise these matters, in the PROC committee.

I'll leave it there for now, Mr. Chair. I'm glad I had a chance to put my views on the record.

• (1650)

The Chair: Okay.

I will find the hand function before the next meeting, Ms. Jansen.

Next on my list are Mr. Julian, Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Kelly, Ms. Jansen and Mr. Fraser.

Do any others want in? Ms. Koutrakis and Mr. Poilievre do, hopefully to wrap it up. Then we'll go to a vote.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate being recognized.

I will start off by giving the committee a notice of motion. The notice of motion is for a subsequent committee meeting:

That, in light of troubling allegations of misuse of public funds by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, 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, including, but not limited to—

An hon. member: Chair, a point of order.

An hon. member: A point of order.

The Chair: If I could—

Mr. Peter Julian: It continues:

the Canada Student Service Grant, the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program, and the procurement of personal protective equipment:

The Chair: Mr. Julian, we're in a debate on the motion that is before us—

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, and it is absolutely in order to read a notice of motion, Mr. Chair, as you know. So I'll just complete that and then I will speak to the motion.

The Chair: Okay, but the points you're raising with your motion relate to the subject we're on?

Mr. Peter Julian: No.

Well, yes, it's a notice of motion that—

The Chair: If it relates to this debate, you're on and you're basically suggesting whatever, and that yours is better. Okay, let's hear it.

Mr. Peter Julian: It continues:

(a) that the committee be composed of 11 members, of which five shall be government members, four shall be from the official opposition, one shall be from the Bloc Québécois and one from the New Democratic Party;

(b) that 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;

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

(d) that 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 November 15, 2020;

(e) that the Clerk of the House shall convene an organization meeting of the said committee for no later than November 20, 2020;

(f) that the committee be chaired by a member of the official opposition;

(g) that notwithstanding Standing Order 106(2), in addition to the Chair, there be one vice-chair from the government, one vice-chair from the Bloc Québécois and one vice-chair from the New Democratic Party;

(h) that 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 that 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;

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

(j) that the committee have the power to authorize video and audio broadcasting of any or all of its proceedings;

(k) that the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, and other ministers and senior officials be ordered to appear as witnesses from time to time as the committee sees fit;

(l) that the committee report no later than February 15, 2021.

Mr. Chair, on the point of privilege, it is very clear the direction we've received from the Speaker. He stated on October 1 that this committee, the finance committee, which has control over the interpretation of its order, has an opportunity to examine the documents and decide what to do with them. As you have stated, this motion of privilege is in order and I'll be supporting it.

• (1655)

The Chair: Ms. Dzerowicz is next and then Mr. Kelly.

Ms. Dzerowicz, you may speak on this motion.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Just to be clear, we're debating a motion read after a point of privilege after I introduced a motion. So I feel we're several levels down.

The Chair: No, the motion relates to the point of privilege. When a member makes a point of privilege, if the point of privilege is allowed, we're obligate to allow the member to move a motion related to that point of privilege. Once this is out of the way, we will go back to your motion.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: All right.

The Chair: But we will have to make a decision on the motion that relates to the point of privilege.

So, on Mr. Poilievre's motion related to the point of privilege, you're on.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to also reiterate that we have prorogued. We have just reconstituted our committee today. We have you as chair, and we have vice-chairs. My understanding is that we as a finance committee have not accepted the documents that were indicated by Mr. Poilievre. I don't think there is any question of privilege that should be considered at this point.

I want to indicate that there was a substantial amount of time allocated to looking at the CSSG and the WE situation. It was important for us to do. It was important for us to make sure that we validated whether there was any money misspent or wasted. We've confirmed and proven that was not the case. We have also eliminated a number of the myths that were promoted by the opposition throughout the summer, including that the Liberals were giving money to their friends. That was completely not true. That the Prime Minister or the ministers had picked WE intentionally was not true, and that was confirmed by a number of our very senior leaders and bureaucrats within the government. There were a number of other things that we completely dispelled throughout the

many hours during which we actually looked at this particular motion.

I don't know why the opposition would want to bring this back onto the table. I agree with my colleague Mr. Fragiskatos that we as the finance committee have an obligation to hear from stakeholders on pre-budget consultations. I don't know why this would not be the absolute number one priority for all of my colleagues in opposition on this committee. It's my understanding that almost 800 submissions have been made. To my understanding, the number of submissions made is historic. There are many people who are very anxious to present to our committee.

I know many of them have called our offices. I know many of them have ideas on how we can ensure that Canada has a competitive economy going forward as we come out of this pandemic. They have ideas on how we can attract more direct investment, how we can accelerate growth and how we can invest in productivity-enhancing capital, many ideas.

I know they want to make sure that, after they've heard about the Speech from the Throne, after they've heard about our vision and our direction and what our goals are moving forward, there are a number of specifics they want to be able to provide to us in terms of information, in terms of things they think we might have missed. They have ideas about how we can implement the specific commitments we've outlined in the Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Chair, I truly believe this is where we should be focusing our attention. I'm very disappointed with our opposition members that this is not what they want to be focused on. We also know there are many industries that are disproportionately impacted by the COVID pandemic. We need to hear from them. While I'm hopeful that our government has plans under way to help them in the interim, we need to hear from them on how we can help them pivot after this pandemic.

We also know there are a number of industries that are in transition. We heard an announcement by Premier Kenney last week about new industries that Alberta wants to be transitioning into. I think there are many who want to relay to us the kind of support they'd be looking for and that they need in the transition. The world is changing. We will have changed after this pandemic. We all want to be getting the very best ideas and providing the platform that's needed so that we can hear back from stakeholders, whether our industries, our companies or our non-profits, about how we can get Canadians and Canada back on track to succeed in a more sustainable and equitable way.

Mr. Chair, I'll end there.

• (1700)

The Chair: There will probably be other opportunities to come in.

We have Mr. Kelly, followed by Mrs. Jansen.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Both of the interventions we've had from the governing party members have really not addressed the question of privilege raised by Mr. Poilievre. Both spoke at length about the necessity of this committee dealing with COVID response measures, for example. That's a bit of a rabbit hole to take away from the motion itself.

I'm going to go there and point out that the questions raised by the WE debacle are very much questions of COVID response measures. The government had announced these measures as part of its COVID response, and Canadians need to know the extent to which corruption and the rewarding of friends have extended into its COVID response measures. This is an important question.

This question of privilege is directly tied to how the Government of Canada addresses the COVID emergency. When we are talking about the disruption of the absolute and unfettered privileges of a committee to examine and receive evidence, this is not something that can simply be shrugged off because the government and its caucus members on this committee would simply rather talk about something else.

The Speaker, in his ruling, referred the matter back to this committee, and this committee is going to consider this. I wanted to make that point quite clearly. These issues are all tied together. For Canadians who want and need their government to look at the emergency response measures, the manner in which money is put out and the lengths to which the government would go to deny a committee the evidence that it needs to examine this matter cannot just simply be shrugged off. This committee is an appropriate place to have this discussion.

The Chair: Next is Mrs. Jansen, followed by Mr. Fraser, Ms. Koutrakis, Mr. Poilievre, Mr. Ste-Marie and Mr. Falk.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Coming from the health committee, I want to give an example. We had a very similar situation there. I know Ms. Dzerowicz is wondering why we would be doing this. It's because the Liberals had started making it a norm to hide information. They did the exact same thing. They redacted before it went to the law clerk. We're in the middle of a pandemic. We want Canadians to trust us. If we want Canadians to trust us, then we need to be transparent with our information.

Mr. Trudeau consistently says he wants to be transparent. In December 2015, he said, "We are committed to open, honest, transparent government." On April 3, 2019, he said, "We believe strongly in the importance of access to information and transparency". On May 1, 2019, he said, "Under my leadership, we have raised the bar on transparency." On June 10, 2020, he said, "We will continue to demonstrate openness and transparency." On June 16, 2020, he said "Mr. Chair, throughout this unprecedented pandemic, we have been open and transparent about all of the measures we've put forward."

I said the same thing at the health committee. This is not transparency when you redact and you do not allow parliamentarians the privilege of seeing the documents as they were written. There appears to be secrecy that absolutely needs to stop if we want Canadians to trust that we are doing our very best for them. We have got to support this motion.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Jansen.

Next is Mr. Fraser, followed by Ms. Koutrakis.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll cut to the chase.

I don't really care what information gets shared if it's within the rules. I do want to get on with the pre-budget consultations. It's my view, after having looked at Bosc and Gagnon's interpretation of privilege debates before committees, that we don't actually have the authority to consider this as a point of privilege.

I don't intend to take too much time. It will take me a couple of minutes. I'll read the relevant section where it discusses specifically matters of privilege raised before committee.

Unlike the Speaker, the Chair of a committee does not have the power to censure disorder or decide questions of privilege. Should a Member wish to raise a question of privilege in committee, or should some event occur in committee which appears to be a breach of privilege or contempt, the Chair of the committee will recognize the Member and hear the question of privilege, or, in the case of some incident, suggest that the committee deal with the matter.

Mr. Chair, I would suggest that you've carried out that portion of your duty by allowing Mr. Poilievre to make his motion.

I'll continue with the language:

The Chair, however, has no authority to rule that a breach of privilege or contempt has occurred. The role of the Chair in such instances is to determine whether the matter raised does in fact touch on privilege and is not a point of order, a grievance or a matter of debate. If the Chair is of the opinion that the Member's interjection deals with a point of order, a grievance or a matter of debate—

Here's the key part:

—or that the incident is within the powers of the committee to deal with, the Chair will rule accordingly giving reasons. The committee cannot then consider the matter further as a question of privilege.

The remaining part of the argument has actually already been made by members of the opposition. Mr. Poilievre, I believe, pointed out the good work of the parliamentary law clerk and counsel, who previously indicated in the letter that was referred to—I'll read from that letter if I can bring it up here momentarily—that:

In the circumstances, it is for the Committee to determine whether it is satisfied with the documents as redacted by the departments.

Further, both Mr. Kelly and Mr. Julian correctly pointed out that the chair in the House, who is master of this committee, save and except in its own uncertain circumstances, has actually referred this matter specifically to the committee.

Under my interpretation of the plain language explanation outlined in Bosc and Gagnon, you are required, Mr. Chair, to determine that this is within the power of the committee and not to be the subject of a report subjected to the House.

Moreover, Mr. Chair, should you not accept my argument, I would like to propose a simple amendment to Mr. Poilievre's motion. I would propose that, at the bottom of the motion, we add the words, "and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests a government response to the committee's report."

However, that's only required should you find against my argument.

The Chair: I've already allowed the motion.

You can always challenge the chair as well, but your amendment is in order.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm not sure that your allowing the point of privilege and motion to be put is conclusive in the present instances. I believe that you were correct to allow the motion to be made and to have it be debated. Having had the debate, I believe you would be entitled to find—and, in fact, are required to find—that if the issue of the redaction of the documents is within the power of the committee, then this can't be heard as a point of privilege.

That's my interpretation of Bosc and Gagnon. It doesn't take much interpreting; that's actually what it says.

● (1710)

The Chair: You and I will have a debate here.

What you're suggesting, then, Mr. Fraser, is that the issue of whether the documents were redacted beyond what the committee requested—or improperly redacted—is within the authority of the committee and should not be a point that is going to the House. Is that what I'm hearing you say?

Mr. Sean Fraser: That's precisely the point.

The rule says that if it's within the power of the committee to deal with—and I'm paraphrasing here—then the point of privilege must be dismissed. The committee would be free to deal with the substance of that issue in due course. However, in this instance, we have both the letter from the law clerk and the direction coming directly from the Speaker of the House of Commons that, in fact, this matter should be dealt with by the committee. That direction should prevent this committee from going through the exercise of finding that there should be a report submitted for the House to then consider.

The whole point of both the Speaker's and the law clerk's directing the issue to the committee is for the committee to deal with it, not for the committee to bring it back to the House.

There's a reason that these rules exist. This is not procedural trickery. We're actually trying to have the right group or person make the right decision. In this instance, the committee should be empowered to find whether the redaction complied with the order that has been issued by the committee. According to Bosc and Gagnon's description of the rule, you should be required to find that this is beyond what should be permitted through a motion that's been debated on a point of privilege.

The Chair: We're going to need more information from our own clerk to get into that kind of discussion, I feel.

Where are you suggesting we go, that we leave this with the committee, that the committee would hold the meetings, get the original request, the original documents, the orders from the Speaker, and then make a decision as a committee as to whether what we had asked for was abided by?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Chair, I don't think that's quite what has been suggested. I believe it's already been made clear by the Speaker that this is a matter for the committee to determine. If the com-

mittee does not believe that the government complied with the order, then when there's an opportunity for us to have that debate, we can do so.

My point is that using a point of privilege to effectively jump the queue is not permitted under the rules of the House of Commons. I think there was an attempt by Mr. Poilievre to put this on the agenda, knowing that there was a motion coming forward to conduct pre-budget consultations. In fact, the rules have contemplated this specific kind of use of procedure and do not allow it, unless it's a true point of privilege and not instead something that the committee is empowered to deal with.

When both the Speaker and the law clerk have indicated that this is squarely within the powers of the committee to deal with, I think the conclusion is obvious.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, can I just ask a question of Mr. Fraser to determine whether or not—

The Chair: Yes, you can ask a question.

I think Mr. Fraser made an interesting point, but we're into it now.

Go ahead with your question to Mr. Fraser. I'll hold the order for others.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Fraser, are you saying that the Speaker referred the matter to the committee but he did not want the committee to refer it back to the House? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm saying that both the Speaker and the law clerk indicated it is within the power of the committee to deal with this issue. I'm saying that Bosc and Gagnon says that what is within the—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: No. To be clear on that, though, are you saying that the Speaker indicated that, because it's with the committee, it should not be reported back to the House? I'm just clarifying.

Mr. Sean Fraser: No, I don't believe the Speaker made that ruling.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The Speaker is all right with us reporting the matter back to the House, then.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Chair, I don't think they've specifically made that...either. I think they've—

● (1715)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Actually, they have. I'm quoting the Speaker now: ““If it believes that its privileges have been breached or has any other concern with respect to the situation, it can report to the House.”

I'm quoting from the Speaker. You're quite wrong. The Speaker did rule on that matter, and I am acting in accordance with his ruling.

The Chair: We're going to go back to the list.

I believe that Mr. Fraser is right. I don't have the right to rule on the question of privilege, and I don't intend to, but we do have the right to debate the motion and report back to the House.

I'll go back to you, Mr. Fraser, unless you're complete. Did you not make another amendment at the end of your remarks?

Mr. Sean Fraser: I proposed an amendment to the motion as well.

The Chair: If we didn't overrule the privilege point...

Go ahead. What's the amendment, so that we have that, and we'll see where that goes?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Certainly, Mr. Chair. Let me just bring up the simple language again.

I've already moved the amendment to Mr. Poilievre's motion, that it simply add the language "and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests a government response to the committee's report."

The Chair: Okay. Would that be a friendly amendment, by chance, Mr. Poilievre?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It would not.

The Chair: We are on the amendment, and I see that Mr. McLeod's hand is up to speak.

I'll go back to my list and then come to the amendment.

Ms. Koutrakis.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Where do I begin? At the risk of repeating what many of my colleagues have already said, as per the Speaker's ruling and as of today, it is not possible to know whether the committee is satisfied with the documents it was provided. The new session is now under way. The committee, which has control over the interpretation of its order, has an opportunity to examine the documents and decide what to do with them.

On September 23, the House adopted an order setting out a specific procedure to re-establish committees, including the Standing Committee on Finance. Given these facts and circumstances, it is my view that this is a matter for the committee to consider. If it believes its privileges have been breached or has any other concern with respect to the situation, it can report it back to the House.

For these reasons the chair cannot find there is a prima facie question of privilege. We have not received the documents. The documents were released on August 18, which was the same day Parliament was prorogued. As a consequence, the committee could not sit, could not review the documents nor report to the House, so the documents have not been reviewed by the committee.

All Canadians are watching us. We're in the second wave of COVID. They're concerned about their families. They're concerned about their health. The finance committee has very important work to do. As my colleague, Ms. Dzerowicz, mentioned earlier, we've received just south of 800 requests to appear before our committee. There is a deadline to report to the House.

I can't believe, and I'm disappointed actually, to see that parliamentarians who were so hard at work throughout the whole summer... In the previous session, this finance committee did very important work, and we received a lot of relevant comments. It's time to start working on the very important work we have before us,

without getting caught up in points of privilege and technical issues.

The average Canadian is looking to us for leadership. They're looking to us for solutions. They're looking to us to help them through this difficult time. They're looking to us to come up with recommendations on how we're going to recover from this terrible time.

I respectfully request that everybody around this table, including colleagues on my side of the aisle and all my colleagues around the table, do the important work Canadians have asked of us. It's time to move on. It's time to stop trying to trip each other up over technicalities and get to the real work that Canadians are expecting from us.

• (1720)

The Chair: In order for me to be proper on this, we really need to debate the amendment before we come back and make a decision on the proposed amendment.

If I could have Mr. Fraser read the amendment again, I'll take a speakers list on that, or we'll go to a vote on the amendment and then come back on the motion as amended.

It was basically that the government report back to the committee. Is that right?

Mr. Sean Fraser: It was, yes. That's effectively the proposed amendment.

The Chair: Is there any discussion on that, or are we going to a vote on the amendment?

Mr. Poilievre wouldn't take it as a friendly amendment, so we're going to have to debate it.

Mr. Sean Fraser: The reason for the proposed amendment is with regard to the accusation that the government's conduct violated members' privileges. It would be appropriate, in our parliamentary democracy, to give the government an opportunity to respond to those allegations.

The Chair: Any further discussion?

Seeing none, we'll vote on the amendment.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Going back to the list on the original motion, we have Mr. Poilievre, followed by Mr. Ste-Marie, Mr. Falk and Mr. McLeod.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It feels like we're back in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Let's start with the circular logic. The Speaker of the House received a point of privilege about the cover-up of these documents. He said he couldn't deal with this and that it should be sent to the committee. Here we are at committee, and now Liberal members are arguing that the committee can't deal with this and to leave that with the Speaker.

In Orwell's great work, these loudspeakers used to yell out to get people into the rhythm of circular thought and confuse them. The poem they would repeat over again was:

Under the spreading chestnut tree
I sold you and you sold me:
There lie they, and here lie we
Under the spreading chestnut tree.

Here we are, under the spreading chestnut tree, listening to the circular logic of Liberal members who try to bounce this issue back and forth, keep it out of everyone's hands so that it's nowhere and nothing. We want the truth, and we're going to pursue the truth.

Speaking of the truth, the second argument of our Liberal colleagues here is that the truth no longer exists because of prorogation. Not only did prorogation shut down the debate, but it erased history. Now they are telling us there never were any documents, they didn't exist, the committee never received a thing, and what are you talking about? That page of history has been erased by the ministry of truth. The officials there went through and erased that out of existence. There have been no documents. There is no WE. The Kielburgers, we don't have any record of their existence. "Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth."

That's what we have before us right now.

Mr. Chair, if you are still with me here in the real world, I think you will agree that we did receive documents, they were covered in ink, they did not respect the will of this committee, and a breach of our privilege has occurred. It is now only up to us to report it to the House, where it can be voted upon by members and ruled upon by the Speaker. Let us go forth and do our job. Let us put an end to the circular logic, the erasure of history and the silly games played by the members of the governing party.

● (1725)

The Chair: Next is Mr. Ste-Marie, followed by Mr. Falk.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, these are a critical times.

The pandemic is having unprecedented health and economic consequences.

Millions of people and hundreds of thousands of businesses are experiencing great difficulties and we have a duty to listen to them and ask the government to better adapt its programs.

All the members of this committee are convinced of that. This is our *raison d'être* and this is what we do.

It's not just the job of Liberal MPs to do that.

At the same time, because the government is managing programs of unprecedented magnitude, it must be trustworthy.

Did the government act ethically, beyond all suspicion, to avoid creating doubt in the population?

This is another issue that is crucial and essential. It is our duty as committee members to address it. We have asked the government to provide us with documents, and they have provided us with documents that have been redacted and censored. Hence the motion of privilege that has been moved by our colleague Mr. Poilievre, which is entirely appropriate and which I will be supporting.

Will the committee suggest, as Mr. Julian asked earlier, that the House be asked to create a special committee to continue to shed light on the We Charity scandal?

I would like us to move and adopt this motion so that we can look at the pre-budget consultations and continue to hear from stakeholders on the economic impact of COVID-19.

All of this is essential, but we must not forget—this is really important—that the government must be trustworthy and beyond suspicion. This includes the documents we ask for. We want it to provide them to us, not redacted or censored.

That is why I fully support the motion presented here by our colleague Mr. Poilievre.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

We'll hear from Mr. Falk, Mr. McLeod, Ms. Dzerowicz and then Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I, too, want to draw attention to the fact that we are in a time of COVID and that this committee was seized with very important work. It's certainly part of the mandate of this committee to explore whether government monies, whether the funds allocated for specific projects, were properly dispatched and whether there was any corruption involved in the dispatch of those funds.

The committee made a request of the government to provide documentation. The government didn't respond in good faith. In fact, the government tried to hide the truth. It's incumbent upon this committee to get to the truth.

A point of privilege was raised in the House. On October 1, the Speaker made a ruling that this committee needed to deal with the point of privilege. A point of privilege was made. Mr. Chair, I think you've recognized that. A subsequent motion was made that this committee continue on its quest for truth and ask to see a copy of those unredacted documents presented to the committee in the time frame of one day.

I am going to be supporting the motion. I think it's the right thing for this committee to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1730)

The Chair: We go to Mr. McLeod followed by Ms. Dzerowicz.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to point out that I'm not having much success using the robotic hand to wave at you. I keep pushing it and it doesn't seem to work. I had to do it the old way and use my own hand to get your attention.

I also want to say welcome to all the new members who have joined us. It's good to see some new faces around the table. Some are not so new, but welcome.

It looks like we're back in business with the finance committee. We've spent the last two hours talking about rules and procedures and documents, and about what's not a document and what should be on the table. Of course, we're in the middle of a pandemic, and COVID-19 should stay at the forefront. We also need to do the budget consultations. That can't be pushed to the sidelines. We've had many, many submissions made on pre-budget consultations. I don't want to lose sight of that.

I think people who are watching us are probably assuming that in the last session we had an opportunity to sit down and really analyze the documents, the response that the government made on the request for the WE Charity issue. I think it should be clear that our committee at that time, during that session and now, since it is our first meeting, has not had the response tabled, put in front of us as a committee, where we walk through it, analyze it, make comments and where we see things that are redacted that maybe shouldn't have been or anything of that nature.

In my opinion, that step is important. I think Pat Kelly indicated that a lot of this is tied to what the government response is. Well, let's take a look at what the government responded to. We did pro-rogue. That, of course, throws a twist into what this means. Pro-rogued means that all committee work and everything on the table comes to a standstill.

I think the motion, the point of privilege, is premature. I don't think we have taken the necessary steps to make a full assessment of what was provided. We have some new members. It's unfair to them to be voting on something where they didn't have an opportunity to really have a good number of sessions to get together and really get into the detail of this. If there's going to be a forensic look, then let's do it together as a committee. That's my point. I think we jumped a couple of steps ahead of what we need to do. I hear what the Speaker has said, that he can't deal with it and it has to go back to the committee, but how can the committee make a determination about documents that were really not formally discussed in this committee at this point?

Those are my comments, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLeod.

Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Fragiskatos and then we'll have Mr. Julian. Hopefully, that will wrap it up.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, I'm going to start where Mr. McLeod ended off.

A key point is that we at finance committee can't assess what we have not yet received. That's the first point.

The second point is that I have heard a couple of comments from Mrs. Jansen and other members of this committee about transparency. I will tell you those are not just quotes about us being transparent. I think we sometimes have a bit of a short memory and the pro-rogation might have shortened our memory even more.

There was an enormous amount of transparency around the dollars we have spent through this COVID crisis. There was an extraordinary effort by our former minister of finance to ensure that we had a biweekly report on every single dollar that we spent. It was given to us every two weeks. On top of that, our minister of

finance came before this committee to answer any questions about the spending. Then we had government officials stay an extra hour, which was extra time to answer even more detailed questions.

There has been accountability. I don't want any Canadians listening to think that the federal government has been spending upwards of \$300 billion with zero accountability. There has been a lot of accountability, and there will continue to be. It will be accountable; it will be transparent, and it is a huge commitment of our government. It's not just in words; it's also in action.

I will also say that we gave a lot of time to the Canada service grant matter. There were some very legitimate questions about whether or not there was wasting of money and whether there was any attempt by certain government leaders to select WE Charity on the side. There were some legitimate questions about why WE was selected.

An extraordinary number of hours were spent on answering those questions. We brought senior bureaucrats before this committee. For a historic moment in time we brought the Prime Minister of our nation before this committee.

We have heard very clearly—it is documented in the record of this finance committee—that there was no money wasted. It all came back. There was no money misspent. Even in the agreement that was signed with WE Charity there was no way for them to profit from it.

It was also very clearly stated that the Prime Minister and the ministers had zero hand in selecting WE Charity. We heard from the Clerk of the Privy Council, Ian Shugart. We heard from Rachel Wernick and we heard from Gina Wilson, who are both very senior bureaucrats within our civil service. We also heard from the Kielburgers under oath that none of the ministers, nor the Prime Minister, nor anybody, directed anyone to pick WE.

We responded to every single point that was brought forward. It was responded to. It is documented and it remains as part of the official record.

Did we behave in an ethical manner? I believe that the people who should make that determination are not a partisan committee such as ours. A couple of very important people, who are independent, highly competent and outstanding public servants, are looking into this matter. Can I please remind everyone that we have the Auditor General looking at our finances and how we are spending it; it's an independent person who is doing that. We also have the Ethics Commissioner looking to see whether or not any unethical actions were committed on behalf of our Prime Minister as well as our former minister of finance, or anyone else.

On the issue of the redaction, it seems like what has come up in the last go-round is that there is a desire from some members for us to convene another special committee, external to this body, to further investigate the WE Charity matter. I think this may be a good idea. If there is a group that believes this needs to be looked at even further, my humble and personal belief is that there is not one person who has approached me over the last few weeks who has any more questions about the WE matter right now.

• (1735)

What people care about right now is their kids going to school, keeping them safe, having a safe Thanksgiving, being able to continue to keep their jobs, and somehow being able to give someone a hug after this.... That is the hope. That is the stuff they care about right now. If there is a desire for a special committee, that is something that needs to be decided outside of this committee.

At committee, I proposed a motion to begin pre-budget consultations, which is what Canadians want us to focus on. They want us to focus on how to restart our Canadian economy in the best way possible, and to listen to over 800 groups. People are knocking at our door and saying they have some really great ideas. They want to make sure we have the information we need, so we can not only restart our economy in the strongest fashion possible but also build a better, more equitable, more sustainable future for our country.

I will leave it at that. I really hope we can get back to my pre-budget consultation motion, and back to work on what Canadians are asking this committee to focus on.

• (1740)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz. Hopefully, we will get back there.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Ms. Dzerowicz raised a pertinent point toward the end of her comments when she talked about special committees. I would just advise all members, as I am sure they know, that anything relating to the creation of a special committee cannot be decided upon by a committee. That is a matter to be decided on by the House. That is really critical in case colleagues in the opposition are contemplating that. Again, it's not about trying to avoid difficult issues, but from a procedural perspective, any discussion of a particular focus through a special committee needs to go through the House.

I again refer to Bosc and Gagnon. As we just heard, matters of privilege raised at the committee level are difficult, and it is difficult for me to understand the relevance of Mr. Poilievre's motion. I will read directly from the text itself. With respect to matters of privilege being brought forward at the committee level, it reads:

Since the House has not given its committees the power to punish any misconduct, breach of privilege, or contempt directly, committees cannot decide such matters; they can only report them to the House. Only the House can decide if an offence has been committed.

It continues:

Most matters which have been reported by committees have concerned the behaviour of Members, witnesses or the public, or the disregard of a committee order. Committees have reported to the House on the refusal of witnesses to appear when summoned; the refusal of witnesses to answer questions; the refusal of witnesses to provide papers or records; the refusal of individuals to obey orders of a committee;

—and it gives other examples.

We are going around and around discussing a matter that has been brought forward on a question of privilege. Again, the committee cannot examine what it has not seen, and we are in a new session of Parliament

I put this to you, Mr. Chair, and to my colleagues on the committee, that we're not in a position to be debating these matters. The motion introduced by Mr. Poilievre is of questionable relevance for all the reasons outlined.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to speak?

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, I have to say that I disagree with my Liberal colleagues on virtually every interpretation they have tried to put forward in terms of what privilege means and what committees are supposed to do to deal with that. It's almost like there needs to be a remedial course on rules of order.

The reality is that the Speaker gave to the committee the ability to report back on this question of privilege. That's point one. We have that responsibility to choose to report or not. That's the committee vote. I think the majority of committee members have said that they believe privilege was breached. That is sufficient to report to the Speaker and to report to the House.

Also, we have had a number of months now to look through the documents. I've looked through the documents. There is no doubt to my mind that over a thousand pages that have been completely or substantially censored is simply inappropriate for any committee.

As members of this committee, we have a number of responsibilities. It's true that we wear a number of hats. However, one thing that is foremost, and that should be foremost in the minds of every single committee member, is the importance of maintaining our parliamentary institutions. Committees have the right to request documents, and the government does not have the right to intervene and censor those documents, particularly when a motion directs that any redaction that takes place takes place through the law clerk. We have a responsibility to report to the House and a responsibility to say that this was a breach of privilege. There is no question. I think we will find that the Speaker will take a report from this committee very seriously, and I think we will see the interpretation that he makes based on parliamentary precedents.

My final point is this. A number of members have indicated that they are supportive of the idea of a special committee to investigate allegations of misspending. I'm very cheered to hear that. I just gave notice of motion, and I will be bringing this forward forthwith so that we can put in place a special committee.

Now, how does that happen? Mr. Fragiskatos is absolutely right. We report to the House. The House will have a concurrence debate, and a majority of the members of the House of Commons will decide whether or not that special committee is put into place. It's two stages. We have now given notice of motion. Hopefully at our next meeting we will be able to have that debate, make that decision and then report to the House. That would be important to do what Ms. Dzerowicz has talked about, which is to get to the pre-budget hearings as well. I would say, though, that we would be doing pre-budget hearings now if it weren't for the fact that the Prime Minister prorogued this committee and prorogued Parliament back in August. We would already be doing that.

That's all I have to say. I will be supporting, of course, the motion of privilege. It's defending our committee responsibilities and rights.

• (1745)

The Chair: I do not have any other speakers on the list. The—

An hon. member: Go to the vote.

The Chair: We will go to the vote. I just want to read the two points at the end:

Your Committee has concluded that the government's response failed to comply with the order, and, accordingly, wishes to draw the attention of the House to what appears to be a breach of its privileges by the government's refusal to provide documents in the manner ordered by the Committee.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, there are a couple of speakers.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: We're prorogued. It's too late.

An hon. member: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Just hold on:

Your Committee, therefore, recommends that an Order of the House do issue for 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 documents shall be laid upon the Table within one sitting day of the adoption of this Order.

Did I miss someone on the speaking list?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: No. The speaking list was exhausted. We're in voting. It's too late.

The Chair: No, I didn't call the vote. I was reading the motion.

Mr. Sean Fraser: On a point of privilege, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: It's not a point of privilege; at this stage it might be a point of order.

Mr. Sean Fraser: In any event, it may come back to the "raise hand" function we discussed. I see there are currently five hands up on the list, if you weren't monitoring that. I know that some members, after Mrs. Jansen's suggestion at the outset of the meeting, have been using that function.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I wanted to be sure people knew what they were voting on, if we get to the vote, because it's been a long while since people heard the meat of the motion.

I do see Mr. Sorbara.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order.

The Chair: What's your point of order, Mr. Poilievre?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The meeting cannot be adjourned until there's a vote. The opposition will not grant consent to adjourn, thereby ensuring that no matter how many speakers we have, there will be a vote before we adjourn. I just wanted all members to get their coffee and get comfortable, because we can be here for as long as they want to talk.

The Chair: From the chair's point of view, I do want to go back and deal with Ms. Dzerowicz's motion, even if it's at midnight.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It probably will need to be.

The Chair: Mr. Sorbara, we have you first.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Chair, first of all, it's great to be back with my colleagues on the finance committee. I remember this from the summertime.

Pierre, it's nice to see you again. It's always a pleasure.

Mr. Chair, it's always a pleasure.

I see Mr. Kelly there, MP Kelly, and many good friends, so hello to everybody. There's Mr. Julian. It's wonderful to see everyone.

I do have a question. I've been following along this afternoon. This is my second committee of the day, so it seems that a lot of procedural things have been going on. We've made some headway in some committees, and in some committees it's sometimes like making sausages. You love eating the sausage, for those of us who like to eat sausages, but in order to get there, it requires a little work and effort, that's for sure.

I do wish to ask the clerk this. Is the committee in possession of or in ownership of these documents?

• (1750)

The Chair: Madam Clerk, can you answer that question? I can't.

The Clerk: Right now, in the 43-2 session, the committee does not have the documents.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: What are the implications of not having these documents? Wouldn't it require a new motion to be put forward, or something to that extent, to obtain these documents? It's not like you can just go out to the next room and pick them up.

The Clerk: A motion could be adopted by the committee to have the evidence from 43-1 brought forward to 43-2.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Okay. I just needed to clarify that the clerk is not currently in any sort of position to have these documents and does not have these documents.

This leaves me, in listening to this conversation today...and I do believe in transparency and accountability on all levels. Obviously one of the reasons I ran to be in politics and to be a public servant is that I believe in representing my constituents to the best of my ability and obtaining all the answers I need to obtain.

Having participated in the proceedings in the time we spent over the summer, a lot of information came out. I believe a lot of information came out that the Prime Minister's Office did a lot of due diligence on the Canada service student grant. It asked a lot of very, very tough questions, a lot of secondary questions, I would say. Where I worked in a prior life we would say it was a "data room". You went through the data and you answered and made some tough questions and looked at things from top to bottom.

The impetus for this committee, I believe, is to really get at these documents that are related to the pre-budget hearings, to start looking at that. That should be the focus for the committee, to look at the submissions from all of these organizations from coast to coast, at the submissions from our wonderful energy sector, how we can ensure a competitive energy sector as we move forward in Canada, whether it's in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland or northeastern B.C.

I grew up in Prince Rupert, where we have the grain elevator and coal port. Also, Pembina has a facility there. AltaGas has a facility there, exporting liquefied—what are they—the secondary condensates, the secondary derivatives. There are a lot of good things happening in our economy.

At the same time, we need to ensure that we remain competitive. The world is changing and innovation is driving that. The onus is on the committee members to continue on that track even more so. We've seen across the world, in developed and developing countries, fiscal policy, monetary policy working to support our economy, support Canadians.

I reference this, and I'm understanding that there's been some noise about forming a special committee, in terms of looking at programs that were put in place. This takes me back to a conversation I had with the committee when I sat in a few months ago when they were looking at investments we were making in the corporate sector. I brought up one sort of investment that we made in Mastercard, creating several hundred high-tech jobs in Vancouver, and how it was important for us as a government to partner in that.

Fast forward to today, and I don't think any of the opposition MPs would complain about or object to the investment made by the Province of Ontario and our government into the Ford motor facility in Oakville, Ontario.

I look today to the pre-budget submissions we've garnered here on committee, and the number of ideas and suggestions is incredible. I look at the programs we've put in place, which have been referenced by our opposition members, and suggestions that have come from constituents across this country, coast to coast, not just public servants, not just elected officials. I look at the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the regional relief recovery fund. I look at all of those programs and how we've supported business—the Canada emergency business account—and how we continue to support businesses.

As a finance committee, we need to go through those submissions to now, in this recovery phase, move forward. I think that should be the focus of the committee. Nonetheless, if there are questions asked on what this government has done in the last seven or eight months for Canadians, again from coast to coast to coast, I'll be very happy to participate in that endeavour. I'll be very happy to point out how we've helped Canadians receive benefits of \$2,000 a month on an advanced basis, and how we transitioned the income support system we have here in Canada, the recovery benefit on the EI side, the sickness benefits.

• (1755)

As someone who's an economist and has worked in the financial markets for 20-some years doing many things, I'm very pleased to

see what our government has done not only in terms of the supports on the income support side but also in terms of making sure our economy is competitive and moving forward in the right way.

Mr. Chair, with regard to the motions today, first going back to what Mr. Poilievre was referencing this afternoon, I always find Mr. Poilievre to be a very eloquent individual from whom I learn quite a bit and for whom I have a great deal of respect. We're friends and so forth, and I always wish him the best in all of his endeavours, but sometimes I think that the focus needs to be on what everyday Canadians are thinking and experiencing and what their worries are when they go home to their families at night.

Their worries are about where we are going with this economy and how all levels of government can work together. We're seeing that happening with the Ontario government headed by Premier Ford and our Prime Minister and our Deputy Prime Minister all working together with our regional partners and our municipal partners. We continue to do that. That's what the focus should be for the finance committee. It should be how finance committee members can generate ideas to move this committee forward, drive the economy forward and create those good middle-class jobs, independent of sector.

It doesn't matter to me where we create those jobs, but we need to be creative and we need the private sector to grow. We need them taking risks and we need them investing. We need to ensure that those conditions are present in this economy. Yes, we have opened up our fiscal firepower to assist Canadians and assure Canadians that we've built a bridge, and we've solidified that bridge until we come out of COVID, but we are seeing the second wave, Mr. Chair, across the world, whether it's Europe, the United States, or Southeast Asia, and we need to prepare for that. Our testing is ramping up today in the province of Ontario. There were 48,000 tests completed. We are doing that. We are working expeditiously. Obviously we are in a brave new world. That's why you're seeing this fundamental co-operation.

I keep referencing that, Chair, because I think the committee, in its endeavours over the next few months.... I've done pre-budget consultations, I believe, for five years in a row on this committee. I enjoyed every single minute of it, because I got to travel the entire country and see it from coast to coast to coast, and I say literally from coast to coast to coast, because we did go up to see Deputy McLeod, and I want to congratulate him on becoming a grandfather; that's awesome. We did go there and listened to those stakeholders. It's important that we continue as a committee to do that.

Now, if the opposition members—and I don't blame them, since that's their job—wish to ask other questions and focus on things that Canadians are not focusing on, that's their prerogative, and they make those decisions.

I am an MP who tries to work across party lines, chat and have conversations with all members of Parliament. I see Ms. Jansen.

Ms. Jansen, you seem to be on my screen. It's like you're looking at me right now. It's kind of weird. Everybody else has gone, so I'm not sure what's gone on, but you seem to be there. I tend to work well with everyone. I think that's what this committee does.

Mr. Chair, I can go on for a while longer, but I'm hoping that we can continue this conversation. I would like to suggest that we suspend for five minutes, Mr. Chair. Would that be all right?

The Chair: I'm thinking of that because I need a washroom break, to be honest with you. I'm going to suspend for about eight minutes.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I would be happy to take the chair.

The Chair: No, we will suspend for eight minutes—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I don't mind.

● (1800)

The Chair: —and come back to the next speaker.

I know you don't mind, but I remember one time when my lights went out, Pierre.

With that we will suspend for eight minutes.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: I can recommence when we get back, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No problem. We're suspended.

● (1800)

(Pause)

● (1825)

The Chair: We'll reconvene.

I want to make sure everybody is on. Do I have everyone? Okay.

I've had a little break. I've also had some communication with the clerk. There is some question about whether the motion is procedurally in order. I am going to have to get further advice from some of the clerks to find out where we're really at technically.

With that, I'm suspending the meeting until further notice—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order—

The Chair: The meeting is suspended.

I officially call the meeting to order.

We are now resuming the meeting that started on Thursday, October 8, of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. The committee is continuing the consideration of committee business.

Today, we are going over a few things in case we get rusty, since we haven't been at this for a while. Today's meeting is taking place by video conference, and the proceedings will be televised and made available via the House of Commons website.

I would like to mention a few rules. Interpretation will work much like a regular meeting. You have the choice of floor, English or French. It's critical, to get the best sound for those doing the interpretation, that members wear their headsets. If you plan to alternate from one language to the other, you do need to change the interpretation channel to the language you are speaking. It may be

best to pause briefly when you're switching over to give the interpreters time to catch up.

I know all members knew these points in the spring, but as a refresher, all comments should be addressed through the chair. Should members need to request the floor outside of their designated time, for questions or comments, they should activate their mike and state they have a point of order.

If members wish to intervene on a point of order that has been raised by another member, they should use the “raise hand” function. That will signal to the chair and the clerk your interest to speak. In order to do so, you should click “participants” at the bottom of the screen. When the list pops up, you see, next to your name, that you can click “raise hand”.

Please mute your mike when not speaking. If technical problems arise, like audio, translation or other, please advise me, and we will wait until that is resolved.

I will now turn to the suspension of the meeting. There was some confusion over this. You will recall I stated on Mr. Poilievre's point of privilege that there was a procedural technicality with his point, and the motion following his point.

We suspended for a few minutes, and I did not get complete clarity on what was really an unusual development to a great extent related to the fact that this is a new session of Parliament. I'll get to that in a moment. The meeting was not adjourned, as some implied, but was suspended by the chair. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, page 1098, states:

Committees frequently suspend their meeting for various reasons, with the intention to resume later in the day. Suspensions may last a few seconds, several hours, or span even more than one day.

On the question of privilege, some people have asked me, “How can you interrupt a motion and go to another motion?” When you're discussing a motion, the question of privilege does take precedence, and the chair has an obligation to deal with that. The chair, under parliamentary procedure, must hear the point. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, page 1060, states:

If a member wishes to raise a question of privilege during a committee meeting, or an incident arises in connection with the committee's proceedings that may constitute a breach of privilege, the committee Chair allows the member to explain the situation. The Chair then determines whether the question raised in fact relates to parliamentary privilege. If the Chair determines that the question does relate to parliamentary privilege, the committee may then consider presenting a report on the question to the House. The report should:

clearly describe the situation;

summarize the facts;

provide the names of the people involved, if applicable;

state that there may be a breach of privilege; and ask the House to take such measures as it deems appropriate.

Ordinarily, presentation of a report to the House is a prerequisite for any question of privilege arising from the proceedings of a committee.

Mr. Fraser did raise a point from parliamentary procedure during the discussion, but he didn't challenge the chair on that point.

It's not in the rules, but running through my mind at the time was the problem that a point of privilege could be used to jump the queue on motions.

You'll recall at the beginning of the meeting that I stated the order of motions would be Ms. Dzerowicz's motion on pre-budget consultations. We operate under a standing order of Parliament that we must do those in the fall and report by December. That's an obligation for the committee.

I spoke with Mr. Julian and I told him I would have his motion dealt with second at the committee, as the proposals came forward. His motion was on privilege and documents as well. Mr. Poilievre's staff emailed me to say that Mr. Poilievre would be putting a motion. It didn't say it would be a point of privilege. That was the way the motion came to me.

My thinking was to get to the pre-budget consultations, so that our staff, the clerks and others, could start the process and line up witnesses and meetings while we continued to discuss these other issues.

Finally, the reason I said that the motion had a technical procedural problem related to the fact that we're in session two of the 43rd Parliament and there was prorogation of session one.

On prorogation, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, pages 975 and 976 reads, "as soon as Parliament is...prorogued...parliamentary committees (with certain exceptions) lose their orders of reference, mandates, powers and members." All studies undertaken by committees lapse.

Also in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, page 977, under the topic "Resuming Proceedings in a New Session", it states:

Standing and joint committees that wish to resume a study they initiated themselves can do so by...adopting a motion to this effect...

If occasion arises and they consider it appropriate, committees that have the power to do so may re-adopt orders for the appearance of witnesses or the production of papers.... It is quite common for the House or a committee to adopt an order stating that evidence heard and papers received in a preceding parliamentary session be taken into consideration in the new session.

That leaves us with the current motion from Mr. Poilievre on his point of privilege. It doesn't technically have the evidence to make his point, because the evidence doesn't have a motion in it and there hasn't been a motion to bring that evidence forward from the previous session. Therefore, the Speaker could kick it back to us and say that the evidence isn't there.

I see Mr. Julian shaking his head, but those are the facts of the matter. We all know, those of us who were on the committee, what it means, but technically that's where we're at.

I'm going to go with a couple of options.

I'm going to rule the current motion as written out of order and ask Mr. Poilievre to bring it in order by putting in an amendment or bringing it back with a proposal to bring forward that evidence

from the previous committee. However, I would rule it out of order as written.

I think that these are the options. Mr. Poilievre can take the motion back, sit in position three, and we'll go back to where we were, with Ms. Dzerowicz's motion first, and then come through the line and deal with his motion as amended. He could challenge the ruling of the chair. We'll see where that goes. We would have to deal with it in that respect.

I'll give members a moment to think about that. As I said, as written, I have to rule it out of order. It can be fixed, and I would suggest that Mr. Poilievre bring it back later in the meeting.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, given that I continue to have the floor—I had the floor when you suspended the meeting—you have now suggested an amendment and I accept that suggestion. Therefore, the evidence that you require is considered amended into the motion. We can continue taking a speaking list on that premise.

The Chair: That is, if we get there. The next witness speaking—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: No, sorry, I do have it, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, you don't.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I move a motion to challenge the chair. I challenge chair.

The Chair: That's fine. That's what I was going to suggest. To go that way, you have to challenge the ruling of the chair.

I'll ask the clerk to take a vote on the ruling of the chair.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: It makes me procedurally happy that we're back in procedure.

Mr. Poilievre, the next speaker on the list is Mrs. Jansen. I think we were going to her, but I do believe you had the floor. You should also move the appropriate amendment at the appropriate time, when you get a chance.

The floor is yours.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If there is any confusion about what documents the committee is referring to, I am going to have my staff send a specific reference to the clerk electronically. We will give that body of evidence an official name that is identifiable and recognized by the committee so that there is no confusion about the documents in question.

As you know, Mr. Chair, committees can receive evidence in a variety of ways. Sometimes it's through documentary submission. Sometimes it's through testimony. Sometimes it's just through acknowledgement of what's happening in the world. For example, a committee can publish a report and include in that report observations made from what's in the public realm. It doesn't need to be formally submitted in the process of the committee for the committee to be aware of its existence.

I will make sure that you have a reference to the documents. As you correctly pointed out, we all know which documents we're referring too. On that basis, we will clarify.

I now cede the floor to Mrs. Jansen, who I believe is next on your list.

The Chair: Before you start, Mrs. Jansen, could we establish a speaking order here?

You can click on your speaking order as we roll along here. The clerk can notify me who's next, maybe by email.

Mrs. Jansen, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I was very concerned about the fact that this exact process happened at the health committee. We made the exact same type of request. We wanted to get documents that were unredacted and that would then move to the law clerk for redaction. When we received those, what we actually got were documents that had been redacted by staff and had so much missing. How do we, as parliamentarians, do our jobs if...?

The interesting part about that was that the original argument against getting any of the documents was that, in a pandemic, the staff were incredibly busy—too busy to collect up documents for the committee. When we saw that the staff had been tasked with not just collecting the documents but redacting them, we were very shocked. To see the way that these documents were redacted for this committee was absolutely shocking. I mean, it's almost like they did it in health and they doubled down in finance.

Last week when I was speaking and I was interrupted, I was shocked again by the process. I've been elected to come to this place and to serve the citizens of my riding. It's shocking to see how we are cut off. The information is not given. We're basically told that, sorry, we have to stop; we're done here.

At this point in time, I'm going to yield the floor for the time being because I'm trying to wrap my mind around how it is that we find ourselves in a place like this. Our inability to actually be able to see any of the information is very shocking.

I yield the floor to my colleague, Mr. Poilievre.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre is not next on the list. The next on my list thus far is Mr. Julian first, followed by Mr. Fraser.

I do hope that people have Mr. Poilievre's motion in front of them. If you don't, notify the clerk and she can certainly see that you get a copy of that motion.

Mr. Julian, the floor is yours.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I appreciate the committee ruling the way it did. I simply disagree with the ruling that you gave, Mr. Chair, with respect. I find you largely fair in what is often a difficult environment. The reality is that there is no doubt this is a breach of privilege. Given that every single member of this committee voted for the NDP motion in July asking for the documents, every single member should be supporting this motion of privilege.

If the committee had ruled otherwise and had upheld your decision, Mr. Chair, I had a privilege motion that had been vetted by the table and I would have brought that forward. We simply can't sweep this under the carpet. We have to deal with this. We have to pass this motion for many reasons. It is outrageous that over 1,000 pages of the documents we asked for were wholly or substantially redacted—in other words, censored—so that a committee in a democratic parliament has actually been denied access to information that the committee requested. It's pretty outrageous and that's why the motion of privilege is so important.

Second, the fact that every single member of this committee agreed to the motion means that we have a duty to uphold the responsibilities that come from making that decision as a committee.

Third, Mr. Chair, the Speaker has asked us to bring a report back. This is something that we cited a few days ago, but it bears repeating. The reality is that when the Speaker ruled, he said that the committee of finance has the ability to rule and bring this back to the House of Commons. For the moment, he was not able to rule when this was raised in the House of Commons prior to the committee being reconstituted, because he said it's not possible at this point to know whether the committee is satisfied with these documents, as provided to us. The Speaker says he doesn't know whether or not the committee actually agrees with the substantial censorship that took place.

We have a duty as a committee to report back and clarify to the Speaker that we are not satisfied with over 1,000 pages being substantially or wholly censored. We have a responsibility to pass this motion and to move on.

I believe firmly, Mr. Chair, that the Speaker will see this as a clear violation of privilege. We have a responsibility to move forward quickly on this. I hope that my Liberal colleagues, who seemed to want to delay a decision on this matter last week, will move promptly, so that we can have a vote, refer the proper report to the Speaker and then the Speaker can make the ruling and the House of Commons can make the decision about privilege.

This is an important matter. We shouldn't be spending a lot of time on it. We should be moving forward.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order.

The hands have to be removed again once you're finished speaking. Normally the speaker can do it themselves.

The Chair: Thank you. I don't think I can. I'm not sure.

Good. Mr. Julian removed his.

We have Mr. Fraser, followed by Mr. Gerretsen, followed by Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your suggestion that we should have the clerk circulate the motion would be helpful. I don't have the written copy of Mr. Poilievre's motion in front of me. Madam Clerk, if you wouldn't mind circulating that, it would be helpful.

One thing I wanted to raise—and, Mr. Chair, you got into this during the onset of your remarks—was the nature in which the various points were made and the order in which we've been dealing with things. Obviously, the first motion on the table was for Ms. Dzerowicz to move forward with pre-budget consultations, which will be required to table a report should we choose to do pre-budget consultations several sitting days before the House rises. There is an urgency to it.

In my view, and respectfully, I think there are committee members who take a different point of view. Mr. Poilievre's point of order, in my opinion, was an attempt to jump the line in order to have this matter dealt with in advance of Ms. Dzerowicz's. You correctly pointed out that a point of privilege would take precedence in the order of discussion.

There are two points that I will make, the first quickly because we got into it during our last meeting. The second I'll try to flesh out a little.

The first really touches upon the—

The Chair: I hate to interrupt, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Falk, just in case somebody comes into the room yelling at you or something, note that your mike shows as open, on my end.

Mr. Ted Falk: I think I have it muted on my device here.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: If anybody walked into Ted's office, I don't think they'd be yelling at him. It's quite all right.

The first point is just to reiterate the question about whether there is in fact an issue of privilege to be dealt with.

My view upon reading the section immediately following the portion you quoted from Bosc and Gagnon is that because the committee has the ability to deal with this grievance or issue in another way—namely by reaching out to the government and saying we're not satisfied and that we can do this a different way—I think we have the ability to deal with it that way. It would make it not a point of privilege but instead an ordinary motion of the committee or a point of debate or grievance, which would negate the possibility of this committee's hearing a point of privilege.

If, however, I am incorrect on that particular issue, I don't view this to be a violation of the committee's privilege. There may be issues concerning the disclosure of documents we want to prod further into, but following the adoption of the motion in July at finance committee, the motion gained—to speak to Mr. Julian's point—significant support from all parties. Public servants got to-

gether to work really hard to gather relevant documents. They provided the committee with literally thousands of pages.

The motion adopted by the committee stipulated:

that matters of Cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request; and that any redactions necessary, including to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons.

Later I'll get into who was responsible for dealing with which aspect.

Exemptions were, in this instance, applied by our professional and non-partisan public service. The deputies at ESDC stated in their transmittal letter that the approach adopted was to disclose as much information as possible within the scope of the committee's motion.

No exclusions were made on the grounds of national security. A substantial amount of information that would normally fall under cabinet confidence was provided to the committee in keeping with public disclosures made by members of the Queen's Privy Council of Canada. Information that would fall under cabinet confidence but that was not related to the Canada student service grant request and, therefore, was not relevant to the committee study was in fact withheld. This was reiterated in the transmittal letter sent to the committee by relevant deputy ministers.

The motion clearly states that cabinet confidence should be excluded from the request. That's as clear as day in the way it's written. When I read the motion as it is written, it doesn't say that those particular exemptions should be made by the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons. Cabinet confidences were never in fact requested by this committee, so there would have been no duty upon the government to disclose them—which is obvious: I think we all want to protect cabinet confidences.

As outlined in the other transmittal letters to this committee, departments are obliged to protect personal information under the Privacy Act, unless the individuals to whom that information relates consent to its disclosure or disclosures otherwise authorized in certain specified circumstances, or the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs any resulting invasion of privacy.

Information that would have constituted personal information was released in certain instances when these documents were disclosed, wherever it was determined, including by the Clerk of the Privy Council, that the public interest outweighed the invasion of privacy.

The clerk also made the decision, as was communicated in his transmittal letter, that for personal information in certain instances, such as the names of a public servant's family members and the phone numbers of employees at WE who were not Craig or Marc Kielburger, the public interest did not in fact outweigh the invasion of privacy in those circumstances.

The deputy minister of finance, for his part, noted, “The type of personal information that remains protected consists of the identity of unrelated third parties where their opinion or view relates to an unrelated matter to this inquiry, as well as personal e-mail addresses and phone numbers.”

The deputy minister went on to note with respect to page 190 and pages 194 through 213:

...further to consultation with the originating stakeholder, authorization to disclose this information was not given as it constitutes personal information as defined under Privacy Act. Furthermore this information is considered proprietary to the third party. The contents of this information is not relevant to the funding agreement or the Student Grant Program therefore, it has been severed in its entirety.

Additionally, the transmittal letters from the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Department of Employment and Social Development note that a limited waiver of solicitor-client privilege was issued because they believed it was in the public interest to do so.

The question of parliamentary privilege is not a black and white question. Committees no doubt can request what documents they wish, but they can't compel their disclosure. The public servants who have custody of these documents have a duty to hold in confidence some of the information that comes into their possession in the course of their duties. There is legislation that binds them.

As outlined in the document “Open and Accountable Government”, a natural “tension” exists “between that obligation and the request of parliamentarians for disclosure of that same information” that the public service feels the need to protect. They further note in that document that, “In practice, officials should endeavour to work with Members of Parliament...to find ways to respond to legitimate requests for information...within the limitations placed on them.” This comes back to my earlier point that I think we can engage in a conversation with government, rather than jump to a question of privilege before the House.

Members of the committee should also note that in 2010, the previous government reaffirmed the long-standing principle from 1973 governing the production of documents as part of their response to a report to the public accounts committee at the time. Those principles include criteria under which documents should be exempt from production, which, of course, include cabinet documents and those that include Privy Council confidence. Cabinet confidentiality, for what it's worth, is not some label you stick on something to prevent disclosure of documents. It's fundamental to our system of parliamentary democracy. It allows ministers to have candid conversations and, when appropriate, to shift their minds and be persuaded by others. It's essential that these deliberations remain private. That's recognized by the privy councillors oath. The Supreme Court of Canada has affirmed the importance of cabinet confidentiality. In fact, the court noted that judicial independence, parliamentary privilege and cabinet confidentiality all contribute to the ability of each branch of government to perform its respective role without undue influence. It's a natural tension.

On personal information, while parliamentarians are not subject to the Privacy Act restrictions, it does apply to the government institutions from which the committee sought information. This also creates tension. Providing unredacted personal information, even to the law clerk, would consist of a disclosure under the relevant legis-

lation. As such, it requires the care and attention afforded to it by public servants. This personal information might lawfully be disclosed under certain scenarios, including when the individual at issue authorizes the release of the information and when the public interest clearly outweighs the privacy implications, as was the case, as referenced previously, in this instance.

Additionally, the information could be released for the purpose of complying with an order by a body with the jurisdiction to compel that information, but we made it pretty clear previously, as I think everybody would agree, that a House committee doesn't have such jurisdiction, so it doesn't fall under that scenario.

With all of this in mind, I find it important to note that the committee's motion asks the law clerk to make redactions in relation to information about public servants above and beyond what the government, in fact, made. These are redactions that officials did not make and would not have made in accordance with the Access to Information Act. Despite what's being suggested, this isn't a breach of our privileges as committee members.

The opposition seems to be claiming that the only option in front of this committee right now is to report the matter to the House. With great respect, I don't view that to be correct. The committee has not yet asked the government for the information that public servants applied exemptions to—and that are outlined above, in the remarks I just gave—under very narrow and specific grounds. For example, if members of the committee want information pertaining to family members of public servants, they could ask, but we haven't done that as a committee. Parliamentary privilege in no way, shape or form absolves the government of its obligations to protect personal information and cabinet confidences. In fact, the motion we put forward specifically excluded a request for cabinet documents. Despite this, the public service made a serious effort, and I would say a sincere effort, to provide as much information as possible.

In light of this information and the examples I've used, this doesn't appear to be a breach of privilege, let alone raise a matter of privilege at all.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fraser.

We will turn then to Mr. Gerretsen. Next up will be Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak.

I have a lot to talk about when it comes to this motion specifically, and I have quite a bit to offer. I'm really interested in hearing what some of the other members have to say before commenting on that. I guess I'll defer talking about that until a little later.

What I really want to talk about right now, Mr. Chair, was what we just witnessed, and that was a successful challenge of a ruling from a chair. To start with, I believe that you handled that in an extremely fair way. You pointed out the problems with the ruling, which no doubt came from discussions that you had off-line with clerks and people who understand the rules even better than somebody like you who has been around for a long time. I mean that will all due respect.

The reality of the situation is that you didn't just make a ruling. You also provided an avenue for how the motion could be corrected. I find it extremely troublesome that we are now on to the second time in a committee that members of the opposition, not happy with an outcome, decide to challenge the chair. It does a massive disgrace to the institution that we have, the procedures that we have and the parliamentary establishment from where we've come.

I saw Mr. Julian shaking his head the entire time that you were making that ruling. Then, when Mr. Julian went to speak, he didn't once address a procedural problem with your ruling. In fact, he just went on to say why the motion was important to pass. That's fair enough.

Mr. Chair, you gave an avenue as to how we could get in order and put the motion in order. Mr. Julian should have taken the lead of Ms. Blaney in the PROC committee, the other time that a challenge occurred, where she too had a difficult problem in terms of wanting to see the motion passed, but she understood that the content of it was out of order. It's unfortunate, Mr. Chair, that Mr. Julian could not bring himself to see the same way Ms. Blaney did.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. That personal attack, sir, is absolutely inappropriate. The member should know that I am well versed in parliamentary procedure, and I simply disagree both with his comments and also with your ruling.

The Chair: I think that's basically a debate.

Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead on your point of order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, I fail to see how the point raised by Mr. Gerretsen constitutes a personal attack. If we can't engage freely in debate—

The Chair: I think both your points, Mr. Fragiskatos and Mr. Julian, are not real points of order.

I'll go back to Mr. Gerretsen and continue the debate.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I offended Mr. Julian I want to take the opportunity to say I can understand how he would be offended by that. There's probably a little bit of truth to what I'm saying that's getting to him and he feels the need to lash out against that. I understand that, but Mr. Julian perhaps should have consulted a little bit more and thought about this a little bit, or, when it was his turn to speak to it, he could have actually taken the time to tell us why he thought it was procedurally incorrect. He didn't. All he did was tell us why the motion was so important to pass.

That's why I started this off with my introductory comment by saying that you did an incredible job as a chair of not only ruling it out of order.... You could have just left it there, but you provided a path and an avenue to make this motion in order. Rather than take

you up on that offer, which would have been extremely easy to do, the opposition members of this committee chose to instead use it as an opportunity to overturn your ruling.

In my opinion, that shows a fundamental lack of understanding of the importance of the chair's position and what the chair is supposed to do. Much like the Speaker, they're getting their information and they're making a ruling based on where, procedurally, things are deemed to be correct and incorrect. Ms. Blaney was able to see that in the PROC committee. She did take a lot of heat for that in the media. I imagine that Mr. Julian was concerned about the same thing. He was worried that even if it was procedurally correct, if he went down this road he'd end up looking like he was trying to support a cover-up or something like that. I understand politically why he did it. It makes perfect sense.

It's extremely disappointing to see that not just Mr. Julian—I know I'm picking on him a little bit now and I don't want to hurt his feelings as I clearly did a few minutes ago—but all members of opposing parties here would use the opportunity to challenge the chair to advance a political objective. That's exactly what they did and it's extremely discouraging to see that.

As most members know, I've only been a member of Parliament for about six years now. Before that I was involved with our city council here in Kingston. I was a city councillor and I was the mayor. At times I was in the position of having to vote on a challenge of the chair and on the receiving end of being challenged. I can honestly say that I cannot remember a time when there was a challenge that was successful. At the end of the day most members understood that the chair's job is to use the information and the advice that they receive from their clerks in order to make the best decision on behalf of the committee.

What we see today is that all members of the opposition, despite the fact that the chair laid out the reasons very clearly and the chair provided an avenue and a path to make it procedurally correct, still voted to dismiss the chair's ruling because they're motivated purely from a political agenda.

I don't know if we're going to see more of this, quite frankly. I don't know if it is indicative of parliamentary process that this happens quite a bit. This is my first time being in a minority Parliament situation, where I'm actually getting to see this unfold, but I can say that in all my years of being involved in politics and sitting around not-for-profit boards, committees and council tables, I've never seen people use a challenge of the chair in such a politically motivated way, especially when you have a chair who takes the opportunity to not only explain in detail but also provide avenues and paths to get out of this later on.

Like I said at the outset—and I have a lot more to say on this—there's a great deal to be discussed in this. I will definitely come back to it.

At this time I really want to address this point. I really find it discouraging to see members do this, especially after being on the PROC committee. There I witnessed the NDP standing up for parliamentary procedure the way that chairs are supposed to engage and the way that procedure is supposed to be interpreted, not using procedure for political motives.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Kelly, the floor is yours, followed by Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There were some interesting comments from both of the last two speakers. The curious part here is that Mr. Fraser pointed out the urgency of getting on to the business of Ms. Dzerowicz's motion. Nobody denies the fundamental role of this committee on pre-budget consultations, so we do wish to get to that. It's curious that in the last meeting we listened to lengthy filibuster speeches from the other side, which had the effect of delaying getting to this other business. It really was a bit rich coming from the governing party members on the committee to suggest that it's the opposition that doesn't want to move on to those pieces. It's important business that we need to get to.

I noticed in Mr. Gerretsen's speech he said that to support the motion of the chair might have made one look like they were participating in a "cover-up"—his words to describe what's at play here.

To the point, and your ruling on this, Mr. Chair, I am prepared now to fulfill the remedy that you had proposed to us. I will move an amendment to Mr. Poilievre's motion that the motion be amended by adding, after the word "That", where it first appears, the following: "the evidence heard and papers received by the committee during its study on government spending, WE and the Canada Student Service Grant, during the first session of the 43rd Parliament, be taken into consideration by the committee during the current session and, accordingly".

If we make that change, that would bring us into order per your ruling. I move that amendment. I understand that the clerk likely has that from us.

The Chair: The amendment is in order, Mr. Kelly.

We have a point of order from Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Could Mr. Kelly clarify? He said beginning with the word "that". Which paragraph is he talking about? Could he be more specific about where he's looking?

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'm sorry. I might need a moment to put these together. I'm looking at different screens right now.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'd like the paragraph and the line, please.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'll need a moment to place that.

The Chair: You can take the moment, Pat.

Mr. Pat Kelly: It's where it first appears. It's the first "that".

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Can you repeat that one more time? I'm sorry.

Mr. Pat Kelly: It's where it first appears. The amendment would be added after the first "that" in the motion.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: With all due respect, Mr. Kelly and Mr. Chair, it's a long motion and therefore—

Mr. Pat Kelly: It's in the first paragraph, where it first appears.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I just want to know, if we're on an amendment now, are you going to set the existing speakers list aside and then start a new list? How does that work?

The Chair: No, I will work from a new list on the amendments and then come back.

Mr. Gerretsen, is your hand up a second time?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'll take that down, sorry.

The Chair: If people can take their hands down and then put them back up, I will need a new list for the amendment.

Mr. Kelly is this in the first line that starts, "That the Chair be instructed to present the following report to the House forthwith, provided that"? Does the amendment go in there?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order.

I'm looking for certainty as to whether or not a French text has been provided.

The Chair: I'll have to ask the clerk about that.

Madam Clerk, I think Mr. Poilievre's office is sending you the amendment in both official languages. Do we have that yet?

The Clerk: Yes, we received it in English and I'm just turning it into French.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: The amendments...?

The Clerk: Yes, the amendments.

The Chair: Could you get that to members as soon as possible.

Is that it for your point of order, Mr. Fragiskatos?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: That answers the question I had. Thank you.

The Chair: The amendment is on the first line, at least in the English text. The amendment would go in after "provided that".

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

When will the committee receive the documents, if this motion is passed, in their digital binders? Will committee members be given time to review the documents to see if they do in fact meet the original production order?

The Chair: I don't see that as a point of order at this time, but I think it's a sensible question to maybe ask the clerks and the parliamentary procedure people at some point. I know what Mr. Poilievre's motion states in various places in terms of times. We need to make sure with the parliamentary procedure people that this is in fact doable. I think it's a legitimate question at some point in time to someone.... I'm not sure who. I guess it's the parliamentary procedure people.

Is there anybody who wants to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: If I may, I want to be clear. When you repeated the motion I'm not sure you got it in the first place. It's under the first "that."

It is "That" and then the amendment follows: "That the evidence heard and papers received by the committee during its study on government spending, WE and the Canada Student Service Grant, during the first session of the 43rd Parliament, be taken into consideration by the committee during the current session and, accordingly, the Chair be instructed to present...." It goes on from there.

The Chair: I did say it in the wrong place.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. Can you read the whole paragraph please with that amendment included just so I can make sure that I have it right? I'm so sorry, but I want to make sure that I have it right.

The Chair: On the motion, Mr. Kelly, could you perhaps count the paragraphs down on the motion, what paragraphs it is you....

Mr. Pat Kelly: You had it right, Mr. Chair. It's in the first paragraph.

The Chair: Okay. If you could read that whole paragraph with the amendment in it might solve our problem.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'm having trouble juggling with this, Mr. Chair, but you have it correct. I think the clerk has it. If there are any questions about that they can go through the clerk.

The Chair: Okay, but you do have the wording...?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kelly is a new member and one I have a sincere respect for, but I think he knows better than to ask the clerk for clarification on his proposed amendments. He was asked a very clear question to read the amendment that he's put forward. It is Mr. Kelly's amendment. Therefore, I think we need certainty and clarity from Mr. Kelly. To put the clerk in what would be a political position would be grossly unfair and very inappropriate.

Mr. Pat Kelly: That's not what I—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

I do think it's reasonable to have the entire paragraph read out. It is absolutely normal that we ask the clerk to do that. As long as I've been in Parliament, we've asked the clerks to make sure that the table has the correct amendment in the correct place, so I think having the clerk read out that paragraph is absolutely legitimate so that we can all note it and write it down. It is something that we normally ask of the clerk.

The Chair: That is fine.

Madam Clerk, are you in a position at this time to be able to read the whole paragraph with the amendment in?

Mr. Ted Falk: I'd be prepared to read it into the record.

The Chair: Okay. Then we'll go to Mr. Falk and then we'll come back to the clerk, if she has anything to add.

Mr. Falk, go ahead.

Mr. Ted Falk: The first paragraph will now read, "That the evidence heard and papers received by the committee during its study on government spending, WE and the Canada Student Service Grant during the first session of the 43rd Parliament be taken into consideration by the committee during the current session and, accordingly, the Chair be instructed to present the following report to the House forthwith, provided that dissenting or supplementary opinions, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(b), shall be filed with the Clerk of the Committee within 24 hours of adoption of this motion."

That, sir, would be the first paragraph.

The Chair: Thank you. I think that's very clear.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I don't mean to continue to raise points of order. I do so whenever I notice something important that needs rectification; let's put it that way.

This is a bilingual country. The federal government operates in a bilingual fashion. This is an important issue, and I think that we need to hear, as a committee, the amendment read in French as well.

The Chair: Can somebody read the amendment in French?

Mr. Ste-Marie, do you want to read—

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

With all due respect to my colleague Mr. Ste-Marie, this is a Conservative motion and not a Bloc motion. I think it would be more appropriate that the French translated motion be read by one of the Conservative members.

The Chair: I'll go to Mr. Kelly next and then Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Pat Kelly: This motion was made at a committee, and a motion may be made in either official language. I did make the motion in English. Mr. Fragiskatos is absolutely correct that we must ensure that all members—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There's a point of order on the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's a point of order to what Mr. Kelly is saying, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: He has to finish his point of order first, and then I have Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I trust that there was interpretation when I made the motion. If the question to either Mr. Ste-Marie or anybody else on this committee is whether or not they received interpretation when this motion was made, then fair enough, but I understand interpretation was working and that my amendment was interpreted. It was read.

We had it reread by Mr. Falk. I would ask the clerk or an interpreter if there was an interpretation problem. That will ensure that all members understand the motion, but this motion was made at the table, it's in order and the interpretation service is there to ensure all members understand the motion.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Okay. I'm not sure whether Mr. Ste-Marie was on a point of order or not. I'm taking the point of orders in order.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I have some terrific news. I do have the French version here and I understand the clerk's office is sharing it with everyone. I gather that will make all members extremely happy. I am happy to read it.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, I'm going to Mr. Ste-Marie first, because he was up first, then Mr. Fragiskatos and then Mr. Gerretsen and then you.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Okay, but just so you know, we do have the translation.

The Chair: We hear you.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Everyone does. Everyone has the translation.

The Chair: Mr. Ste-Marie has the floor.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the folks from interpretation services. They are doing an extraordinary job.

With respect to what Mr. Poilievre just added, I would also like to remind everyone that Madam Clerk emailed us the amendment in both official languages. So we all have it. In my opinion, we don't need to read it out in French again, given that we have an official version in both languages.

Mr. Peter Julian: Point of order.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos is next.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Point of order.

[English]

The Chair: I have a whole bunch of points of order here. Next was Mr. Fragiskatos. I think Mr. Poilievre has made his point. Mr. Fragiskatos is first and then Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I meant what I said earlier about Mr. Kelly. I do remember when he served on the committee as a member. I remember pre-budget deliberations that were carried out a couple of years ago. I travelled with him. I do have respect for him. I will overlook the fact that he mispronounced my last name and I hope his Greek constituents would extend the same courtesy.

The Chair: I don't think—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'll leave that aside. Much more important is the fact that this committee ought to embrace bilingualism.

The Chair: Okay—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Kelly, running around and making technical arguments about what the interpreter said doesn't suffice. It's surprising to me that the Conservatives have not—

The Chair: That point has been made, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: —forwarded the French text with the amendment in English.

The Chair: I'm going to Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If the Liberals are saying that an English-speaking member must read his motion in French and French-speaking members must read theirs in English, we are setting a very disturbing precedent. That's not what the principle of bilingualism is about.

The principle of bilingualism is about having interpretation and distributing written materials so that everyone understands. I am very concerned to see Liberal members insisting that members are required to speak in the language that is not their own. That's not what the principle of bilingualism is about.

I really hope they will stop making this kind of argument. It is extremely disturbing.

[English]

The Chair: We are back on the amendment. The discussion is on the amendment and we will eventually get to a vote on the amendment.

The only list I have is on the original motion. Is there anyone to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, I'll speak on the amendment.

The Chair: I'll take the point of order first and then Mr. Poilievre on the amendment.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm just confused. Are we supposed to be raising our hands right now? Are the hands raised in Zoom on the amendment or are they back on the main motion? How are you expecting us to raise our hands for the amendment part when there are already hands raised for the motion part?

The Chair: Unless Ms. Jansen knows more about these raised hands than me, the ones that are up are on the original motion. I will just take the hands as I see you raise them like this on the amendment.

First up on the amendment I have Mr. Poilievre, and if somebody could give me a show of hands who wants to go next, we'll go with that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I think we want to listen to what he has to say first and then we'll decide.

The Chair: I have Mr. Poilievre and then Mr. Fraser on my list so far. Keep your hands up when you're putting them up because I have a very small screen.

Mr. Poilievre, go ahead, on the amendment.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, in the spirit of Parliament and co-operation, we have assuaged your concerns, Mr. Chair. You have claimed that the committee does not know to which documents we are referring because those documents were submitted to the chair in a prior sitting of Parliament and prorogation has erased our collective memories.

This amendment simply refreshes the official memory of the committee, so that now we all remember those documents that you ruled were forgotten. Now, just to show how willing we are to co-operate and collaborate with Liberal members who are suffering from procedural and documentary amnesia, we are refreshing your memory, their memory and the corporate memory of this committee. Therefore, I am proud to support this amendment, which makes it a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Okay. That's your point. Mr. Poilievre, you didn't quite catch my ruling entirely.

My concern is not about those of us who are on the committee. I don't think any of us has forgotten. If the original motion gets to the Speaker, however, I expect that without the documentation there, he'd look at me if I ran into him in the corridor and say, "What are you folks doing on the finance committee? You didn't provide me with the documentation from which to make the point of privilege." That was my concern, not forgetting that if this gets to the Speaker, then he has to rule.

Go ahead.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Now everyone's memories have been refreshed and it's all clear what documents we're talking about, so I think we'll get unanimous support for this newly amended motion.

The Chair: I think we're on a roll.

Mr. Fraser is next. Who wants to come after him? I see Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's perhaps a good segue. This really builds upon the point that my colleague, Ms. Koutrakis, made a few minutes ago. It's one of the things that I'm trying to figure out from a technical point of view. You initially ruled that we don't have the documents, and I made the suggestion that this could be remedied. As it stands officially now, the committee doesn't have documents in its custody, and that's the shortcoming that the proposed amendment seeks to remedy. When I see what's taking place with the motion from a very technical point of view, we're now being asked to adopt a series of documents into the evidentiary record and simultaneously

pass judgment that we're not satisfied with them, more or less, and to move forward with the argument as it stands on a point of privilege.

Mr. Chair, is it your opinion—or perhaps you've taken advice from the clerk—that we actually have the technical ability to do that? Even having passed a motion, we would still be passing a main motion that would precede the adoption of the evidence on which the motion is based. That's a very roundabout way of saying that I don't think including the amendment in the main motion solves the original problem of the committee's still passing judgment on a series of documents that we technically don't have.

I'm wondering if you could explain the workability of the proposed amendment, given the fact that we're still going to be in the same position we faced at the outset of this meeting.

The Chair: My objective is to chair the meeting and to try to stay out of the discussion, but I did raise that point myself: whether the time frames within the motion could be met.

Somebody—maybe within the clerk's office—may be able to answer that question. I do know, and I think all of us who were on the previous finance committee know, that not quite all the documentation got uploaded to the digital binders before prorogation took place. It happened fairly shortly before prorogation, and that may be a problem. It's a question that I can't answer, and I just put a flag on it because in the motion, when we bring those documents forward, there are certain time frames within 24 hours of the adoption of this motion. I just want to raise a flag that this may or may not be possible by the parliamentary people who deal with this issue.

I just don't want us blaming them if it doesn't get done within the 24 hours because it may not be technically possible. That was why I raised the point.

Back to you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: What I'm still not clear on.... Frankly, I wasn't expecting, before Parliament resumed, to revisit considerations of the government's compliance with the document production order that I was supportive of back in July. I'm going to find myself in a bind where we agree that everything gets adopted. Practically speaking, if I'm going to go through the documents and determine whether there has, in fact, been compliance with what the committee asked for, I'm more or less being asked to pass judgment on the sufficiency of the redactions made for documents that I do need an opportunity to revisit if this committee is going to pass both this amendment and the main motion.

There's a further issue on the specific subject of the amendment. You mentioned just a moment ago that some of the upload of documents may have been interrupted by prorogation. I'm curious. I think the proposed amendment reads, "That the evidence heard and papers received by the committee", etc. I'm curious if we can gain clarity specifically on how the interruption of any upload would be impacted if we're dealing with evidence heard and papers received.

The Chair: I can't answer that question until this motion is either passed or lost and we talk to the clerk of the committee and others who would be involved in terms of the documents that were uploaded in the last session, and where there might have been a shortcoming in terms of those documents being uploaded. I can't answer that question.

It will be a bridge we have to cross. I understand your concern about not having the ability to compare them. It is an issue that I, as chair, can't answer. I have to deal with what's before us.

Mr. Fraser, do you want to add anything further? Then we'll go to Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I don't at this time. I'll have you go to Mr. Gerretsen. It's fine, thank you.

The Chair: I don't know if the clerk or the analysts have anything they can add on this. I would welcome their interventions if they want to give people clarity on the document upload.

Did anyone else in the queue put their hand up on this amendment? The last one I see before we go to the question is Mr. Gerretsen, but there's ample time to come forward if you want to speak.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's reassuring to hear Mr. Poilievre speak of the spirit of collaboration right after challenging the chair.

Where we effectively ended up with this amendment is the advice that you gave to the committee at the beginning in terms of how this motion could have been done in a way that was procedurally correct. For those procedural nerds who are paying close attention to this right now, what we've just witnessed was a full 180 from the committee. First, all opposition members challenged the ruling of the chair, and were successful in that, and then they came back and did exactly what the chair was recommending that they do. That would leave anybody watching this to conclude that the motive for challenging the chair was none other than a political motive to, in some way, have some vindictive purpose served in showing that they could challenge a ruling from the chair. The very position of a chair is supposed to be extremely and completely non-partisan, in which case I think, to what Mr. Julian said earlier, this chair does a very good job of being fair.

We've now seen this committee move an amendment, which we're talking about right now; it does exactly what the chair recommended doing in the beginning. Rather than take the ruling from the chair and then bring forward another motion, which is exactly what ended up happening through an amendment, the committee chose to overturn the ruling of the chair. I think that speaks volumes in terms of the political motive of the opposition on this committee using procedural tools to advance those political objectives.

I have no problem with the amendment, because the amendment seeks to do what the chair was suggesting we do at the outset, and that is to make sure that the documents required for this motion are brought over from the previous session of Parliament. And that's what we're seeing right now. I think it's extremely important to point that out because at the end of the day, this comes down to this whole issue of WE. It's about inflicting as much political damage as

possible with a complete disregard for any collateral damage that might happen in the process, as long as it creates absolute political carnage around the Prime Minister and other members of Parliament as much as possible. That's really what this comes down to.

The amendment we're seeing right now...which by the way was introduced by Mr. Kelly, but then suddenly Mr. Poilievre had the French version and there was some confusion as to whether or not Mr. Kelly knew what the amendment was really all about, and he was all over the place with it, and then Mr. Poilievre jumped in and said he had the French version right here. This just underscores the fact that this is politically motivated. This entire charade is politically motivated.

I see Mr. Julian shaking his head. By the way, Mr. Julian, thank you for keeping your camera on when you're not speaking, unlike Mr. Poilievre, who does the equivalent of hiding under the table in a committee room by shutting off his video as soon as he's done talking. I appreciate your at least staying on. It's always nice to have the audience.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, Mr. Gerretsen has the right to his opinions, but he needs to treat all members of Parliament with respect. I find his comments immensely disrespectful. He can make his point without personal insults or attacks.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order.

The Chair: The point has been made.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I made this comment earlier, when Mr. Julian raised a point about personal attacks, which I disagreed with. I disagree here, too.

I think Mr. Gerretsen puts his finger on a very important issue. I see that Mr. Poilievre is missing. I see Mr. Kelly is thankfully back at the right moment. Either way, I want to remind all colleagues, Mr. Chair, that it is expected that we be on screen during virtual meetings.

Let me quote directly from the Speaker, Mr. Chair. His findings ought to guide how we carry out business at the committee level.

On September 24, Speaker Rota said, as follows:

Before we continue, I want to take this opportunity to remind hon. members, as we get into something new, that the members in the House have to stand to be recognized, which has been done for years. I would ask those at home to please turn on their cameras...

—those at home being members of Parliament, of course—

...well in advance and not wait until the last second. That is their way of standing up remotely. It makes it easier to deal with any technological problems that we may incur as we go on.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I have a point of order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: This applies to committees as well, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You're next, Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's interesting that Mr. Kelly has now chosen to join the meeting and offer an opinion through a point of order. Mr. Poilievre is still missing, and all Liberal members have been here throughout. I'll give that courtesy to Mr. Julian as well and Mr. Ste-Marie. They've been here throughout. They have not disappeared.

The Chair: Mr. Kelly, go ahead.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Chair, first of all, this is debate.

Second, I note he's singling me out for maybe 90 seconds or so of being off camera.

Third, Mr. Gerretsen is way off topic. I ask you to keep members in order. Let's finish the debate on this and get to a vote on it.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Do I still have the floor?

The Chair: This is a point on relevance.

You still have the floor, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

I am actually extremely to the point, Mr. Kelly. If you had been paying attention, you would know that.

I'm explaining why this amendment that you've put forward is problematic, in the sense that you ruled against the chair when he offered to you to use an opportunity to accept his ruling and bring forward another motion that covered this. You challenged him, you won the challenge, and now you're coming back and bringing forward the exact same amendment. That points to nothing more than political motive in challenging the chair. The chair is there to exercise the procedure, to make sure procedure is followed in a committee and to use their best judgment in an impartial way. Mr. Julian said in his comments earlier that this chair does a really good job of that.

You didn't like the ruling, and you challenged it. You don't challenge the chair because you don't like the ruling; you challenge the chair because you think that they've done something procedurally incorrect. It is something, Mr. Kelly, that you and the rest of the opposition are not grasping—

The Chair: Are we ready—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Excuse me, I still have the floor. I have a lot to say, okay?

The Chair: Okay, I was just going to ask whether we were ready for the question, but you have the floor.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, we're not ready for the question yet.

I want to address Mr. Julian's point.

I'm sorry if I'm coming across in a way that you're interpreting to be disrespectful. I have a lot of respect for you. You have served many years in the House, and I respect that. I respect when you get up. You and I probably see eye to eye on more issues than you realize when it comes to things like basic income and a lot of other issues. I'm sure that we do. But I think, respectfully, you're interpreting my explaining the situation clearly in a way that maybe is getting under your skin. Tell me that I'm procedurally wrong. Tell me

what is wrong with what I'm saying and the way I have addressed this.

I have just laid out exactly what happened—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I know, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Gerretsen. Mr. Julian has a point of order. I have to allow that.

Mr. Julian, you have the floor on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your ruling, of course, was that the motion of privilege be disallowed. The only way to actually get it through the amendment—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: This is debate—

Mr. Peter Julian: —was to override the chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, he should put up his hand and he should debate me. He has an opportunity to debate me.

The Chair: Hold on, Mr. Gerretsen—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: With his vast experience, he knows this better than anybody on this committee, maybe with the exception of you, Mr. Chair. He knows he's debating right now.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, order. I will determine whether it's a real point of order or not, in a moment.

Mr. Julian, let's hear you.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Overruling your decision allowed for the amendment, which Mr. Gerretsen now says he supports, so let's have the vote.

The Chair: I'll go back to Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: If you want people to take your word, Mr. Julian, then at least raise a legitimate point of order. That wasn't a point of order; you were trying to respond to what I had to say, and you're doing it in a way that you're just trying to throw one-liners out there. Do you know who does that a lot? Donald Trump. Somebody says something and he just goes, "Wrong". You don't have to justify what you had to say there; you're just throwing out things, saying "Wrong" and you're not justifying it. Get on the speakers list and tell me why I'm wrong; that's what I'd ultimately like to hear.

Nonetheless, I just want to say, and this is what I have been saying.... Multiple points of order have been raised because apparently people are offended by the way I talk to them, but then we shouldn't take offence from what this committee witnessed towards the end of its last meeting before it was suspended. I am trying to get at the point that the chair quite clearly laid out a path to putting forward a procedurally correct motion. The majority turned that down and then basically, through this amendment—Mr. Kelly, that's how I'm addressing this point—are trying to come back and do exactly what the chair said, but you ruled them out of order in the first place. I think this is a slap to the parliamentary institution and the democratic procedure that we have, the manner in which all opposition members, not just Mr. Julian, conducted themselves on this.

The Chair: I have Mr. Julian and Mr. Fraser. I'm not sure whether you're on the main list or this list. Mr. Julian, you were on the main list originally, I believe. Your hand is up here; I'm just wondering whether you're on the amendment.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, I am, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: As am I, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have Mr. Julian first, and then Mr. Fraser.

Just to indicate to committee members, the clerk sent me a note, in case anyone wants to have a look at it. The documents and evidence from the previous session are still on the finance committee's public website. I'm not 100% sure, Madam Clerk, whether all the documents were uploaded or not.

The floor is yours on the amendment, Mr. Julian, and then Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Again, for folks who might have listened to Mr. Gerretsen's very wildly inaccurate interpretation of what's happened at the committee.... As you know, Mr. Chair, you made an interpretation that did not allow us to amend the motion, and that's why members of Parliament decided to overrule your decision, because otherwise we wouldn't have been able to amend it. We have now heard from a number of members of Parliament from all parties that they support the amendment; they now support the motion.

I think the logical conclusion is, rather than continuing this filibuster, which I think has been very unfortunate, particularly with the personal attacks I've heard.... I don't think that's appropriate. In any committee and in Parliament, we should be treating all members with respect, even if we disagree.

Given all of that, I call the question, because obviously all members now agree with the amendment, and agree with the motion. We should proceed to the vote.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, Mr. Julian is assuming a lot.

The Chair: I still have others on the list to speak.

I'm going to Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't want to sound like a broken record, but I keep getting hung up on what evidence is actually before the committee. Look, maybe I'm stuck in my previous career as a litigator, but the evi-

dence that actually makes it formally on the record is what can be considered. This amendment tries to adopt the evidence that was before this committee in the previous Parliament. I have great difficulty around the subject of what evidence is actually before the committee, or what's purported to be before the committee, should this amendment pass.

I actually question whether it's in order, given the nature of the evidence that was actually placed on the record previous to prorogation. Frankly, if I'm going to be put in a position to pass judgment as to whether my privilege has been violated or if the government has complied with a document request from this committee, I think that ask, in and of itself, would violate the privilege of members who have not received all the documents but who nevertheless have to make a finding that the government did not comply with the order.

I would ask for your guidance as to whether an amendment that contains such uncertainties is properly in order or is, in and of itself, a violation of privilege on the basis that we're going to be asked to make a finding about information that we have not received.

The Chair: Does that exhaust our list now? Can we go to the question?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: No, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I notice that Mr. Poilievre is still absent, in contravention of what Speaker Rota made very clear to all of us on September 24. I'll overlook that in a spirit of cordiality, if you want to put it that way, or any other way that Mr. Poilievre was talking about earlier, but he is still not here.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's because he's like Polkaroo: He just pops up every once in a while.

The Chair: I have Mr. Julian on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: On a point of order, Mr. Fragiskatos has a lot of experience. He knows that in the House, as in committee, you cannot point out the absence or the presence of members of Parliament.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: A point of order—

Mr. Peter Julian: When we look at the Speaker's ruling that Mr. Fragiskatos quotes, that is for electronic voting. I don't want the public to be misled by him trying to extend an interpretation on electronic voting to committee hearings or House hearings.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order.

The Chair: We have Mr. Gerretsen on a point of order, and then we'll go back to Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On the topic of trying to extend things from one area to another, Mr. Julian is doing the exact same thing by suggesting that you cannot point out somebody's absence in a committee. That is absolutely incorrect. You can call them by their first name or last name, as he just did with Mr. Fragiskatos. It is not the case that you cannot point out somebody's absence.

I mean, I'm certainly in favour of Polkaroo showing up again, because he's been absent for a little while. It would be great to see him back on the screen.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, I am going to tune you up a little bit. I don't believe we should call people names other than their actual names.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: He was a lovable character from my youth. He was from *Polka Dot Door*.

The Chair: That may be true.

Mr. Fragiskatos, continue your remarks.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would go back to the point raised by Mr. Fraser. I think he raised something incredibly important. How are we, as committee members, going to look at this in a meaningful way and a serious way? We haven't received all the documents, and therefore nothing is really reviewable here. In fact, if you want to extend the idea further, it's hard to see how there are no questions of privilege being raised here if we're being forced to vote on this.

For all these reasons, Mr. Chair, I have a real challenge with where the amendment wants to take us.

The Chair: Okay.

We're ready to call the question on the amendment.

Madam Clerk, I will go to you to take the vote.

Keep in mind that this is a vote on the amendment to the original motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order.

Could we have that read out again, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes. I would ask you, Madam Clerk, to read out the amendment as inserted in the paragraph, and just quote the amendment when you get there. It reads better that way.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, just as a point of order, was this supposed to be available on the website at this point? There is nothing there right now.

The Chair: No, it's only at committee. It hasn't passed, so it wouldn't be on the website.

Madam Clerk, could you read it, please?

The Clerk: The amendment by Mr. Kelly reads, "That the evidence heard and papers received by the committee during its study on government spending, WE and the Canada student service grant during the first session of the 43rd Parliament be taken into consideration by the committee during the current session and, accordingly". And then we would go back to the first paragraph from the motion by Mr. Poilievre: "that the chair be instructed to present the following report".

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Are you complete in your reading there, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Fragiskatos, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, nothing has been received. There are no documents on the website. I know it was mentioned before that there are no documents on the website. I looked at it just now, so it's hard to see how we're proceeding here.

The Chair: We may have to get clarity on this. I think the clerk has indicated that the documents and evidence are still on our public website, so we will have to look into that—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Point of order.

The Chair: —to make sure they are. We are on the question—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Point of order.

The Chair: —at the moment.

Ms. Dzerowicz, go ahead on a point of order.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Is it possible for the clerk to maybe take a moment to find the link and perhaps ensure that we have it?

The Chair: We'll do that following this vote, because it really amounts more to the original motion that the documents be available.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: On another point of order, Mr. Chair, would it be possible for us to suspend just for a few moments for the clerk to be able to do that?

The Chair: That is possible, if that is your wish.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: No, that's not the committee's wish.

The Chair: No, it is.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, that would make me comfortable. I think that would bring assurance to the issue.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I note that Mr. Fragiskatos's comfort is not part of the committee's mandate.

The Chair: We will suspend for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

It's great to see Mr. Poilievre back, but proper procedure is part of the committee's mandate. We need assurances on whether or not the documents are on the website.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: This is publicly available information. This is not proper procedure.

The Chair: Gentlemen, we're going to try not to get into an argument here over the virtual lines at the moment.

We will suspend—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We will suspend for five minutes—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Point of order.

The Chair: —and would the clerk check if the documents and evidence are still on our public website and make the link available, please.

We are suspended for five minutes. We will be back at exactly 13 minutes to one, your time.

• (1240)

(Pause)

• (1245)

The Chair: If we could gavel ourselves back in without a gavel, we're away. I see members are starting to pop up.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Wait until members come on, Mr. Poilievre.

I'll make one point first. The clerk of the committee sent an email. You should have it in your system. It says:

Members of the committee:

Please find below, the link to the documents from the Committee Government Spending, WE and the Canada Student Service Grant that are available on the Committee website, from the 43rd Parliament, 1st Session:

The link is below that.

Mr. Poilievre, please go ahead with your point of order, and then we'll go to the question.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you.

There is no implied consent to, at any point, move to adjournment. I just want to make sure that's clear. A vote would have to be held before an adjournment were to happen.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: That is a point of information. I recognize that, thank you.

On a point of order, go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Sorry, there is one thing I'm still not clear on. I received the email, and it looks like it has links to the various meetings we've had. I haven't seen, on a quick scan through the links in the half a minute or so I've had to look at it, whether my concern has really been addressed around formal receipt by this committee of the documents that the government had disclosed, in response to the committee member.

I'm curious if you or the clerk can confirm whether the total disclosure was formally made, because that's unclear to me. I'm not trying to be tricky. I don't enjoy the idea of voting on documents that I don't know we have. If you could still clear that up for me, I'm still searching for that information.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: You've had the documents for two months now.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, can you respond to that? Are the documents there on that link?

The Clerk: The documents that are available on the House of Commons committee website for the finance committee are all the evidence heard from the 43rd Parliament, 1st session and also the documents that were tabled with the committee.

The Chair: Through that link, the documents asked for by the committee that the law clerk redacted are available on that site. Is that correct, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: The redacted documents are on the website.

The Chair: Okay. Immediately prior to prorogation, I don't think they had all been uploaded. They are all there now, I assume.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I would like to get an answer from the clerk.

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I am still struggling to see the documents. I don't know where they are.

I also call the attention of colleagues to parliamentary procedure and practice. We're being asked to make a decision here through a vote. We're being asked to put forward a view when papers and records are not present and made available to us. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* specifically mentions that questions of privilege arise on matters of papers or records that need to be made available in order for members of Parliament to come to a decision.

We don't have access to those papers or records. Therefore, I think there are issues of privilege that are present here. I think it is incumbent on us to look at this more closely.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I think we're into debate here, but go ahead.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Just for the information of Canadians watching, these are documents that Mr. Fragiskatos, Mr. Fraser and all members of the committee have had since summertime. If they've lost those documents through carelessness, the clerk might do them the favour of re-emailing them the same documents. Let's be clear. These are documents that they know about and that they've possessed, albeit blacked out by their own government. They know exactly what documents we're referring to.

I would ask them to send an email to the clerk and say, "Hello, Madam Clerk. We've lost these documents that you gave us all these months ago. Would you please help us rectify our error and send them again?" That way members of the Liberal side can be up to speed on the documents that they've possessed for the last couple of months.

The Chair: I heard a point of order from someone else.

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: For the record, I don't see how Mr. Julian finds what I said offensive but not what he said offensive, especially since he's been doing all the heavy lifting for the Conservatives today.

In any event, I don't have the documents. I wasn't here in the summertime on this committee. I'm new to this committee.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Do your homework.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: My homework? You just introduced this amendment. I'm supposed to do my homework—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Read your briefings. It's not my job to brief you.

The Chair: Okay, folks—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, this information is based on an amendment that Mr. Poilievre gave to Mr. Kelly to bring forward only 45 minutes ago.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Do your job.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It doesn't even make any sense. I certainly was never given these, Mr. Chair. It would be great if you could make sure that all members of this committee.... I know Mr. Samson is here as well. I don't know if he has these documents. Maybe he wants the documents.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: There's no hand-holding. You're an adult. Do your own job.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, I think it would be incumbent upon you to ensure that those are delivered via the clerk.

Thank you.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order.

When you shut the meeting down, I tried to say I have the documents and I'm also new. Perhaps somebody should have done their homework.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Someone's on the ball.

The Chair: I believe, according to my information and the clerk, this went to all members. It says to please find below the link to the documents from the committee, government spending, WE and the Canada student service grant that are available on the committee website from the 43rd Parliament, first session.

There is the link. I would encourage members to look at that website and see if they are satisfied. I do hear that some believe that they don't have access to the redacted documents by the law clerk. Just check on that to see if you're satisfied.

Mr. Julian, your light came up there. I'm not sure whether you're trying to get in or not.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't think I have anything further to add.

The Chair: Are we now ready for the question?

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

With respect to some of the interventions that have been made, there is a key point that I've referenced a few times that is still unclear to me, not having had time to review the links that were sent out and only becoming aware of the proposed amendment during this meeting.

The hitch that I'm running into is this. There was an abnormality in the disclosure process because of the timing of prorogation previously. I'm unclear about whether the documents that have been circulated by a link—which I had trouble finding on the public website; I don't know if that's exclusively an internal link, in which

case we wouldn't have seen them here—are identical to those that were formally disclosed to the committee before prorogation.

The amendment discusses papers and evidence received by the committee, or something to that effect. I'm not clear on whether the documents available at the link provided can be accurately compared to ensure that they're the same documents that are being proposed to be adopted before this committee now.

I don't know, Mr. Chair. I doubt you have that information on hand.

Madam Clerk, I'm wondering if you can confirm that the documents you circulated by link are in fact the same ones that were uploaded. David Gagnon, I believe, indicated the uploading of the documents couldn't formally be completed because of the timing of the prorogation.

I'm aware there are many documents. I've reviewed thousands. I'm unclear on which set of documents we're voting on, which is really the source of my difficulty with the proposed amendment.

The Chair: For the information of the new members here, David Gagnon was the clerk for the committee in the first session of the 43rd Parliament. Evelyn is now our clerk.

Can you respond to Mr. Fraser's concern, Madam Clerk? I don't want to put you on the spot. If you can't, we'll have to raise the question with somebody at the centre of the parliamentary bureau there to answer for us at some point.

The Clerk: The link I shared with the members is the link that Mr. Gagnon had shared with me when I took over the committee.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm still unclear. I appreciate that you weren't engaged before this session began, Madam Clerk. Did Mr. Gagnon provide any information to you about whether the links prepared were the same documents that, in fact, were formally put on the record for this committee?

The Clerk: That was my impression, yes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I really don't mean to be difficult or to put you on the spot. Do we actually know that or is it just an assumption based on the conversation you had?

The Chair: Madam Clerk, I don't want to put you on the spot either.

Go ahead.

The Clerk: That is the link I received. Whether other documents exist I would not be aware.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay.

One of the reasons I raise it, Mr. Chair... I clicked one of the links. I'm trying to scan this in real time. I don't even see something as basic as the transmittal letters that were included in the correspondence that, in some instances, actually explain the nature of why certain redactions would have been made. I feel like we're dealing with two separate evidentiary records, potentially. One has been submitted through a link, very kindly, by our clerk just minutes ago. Madam Clerk, please accept my apologies; I do not mean to put you on the spot or ask for information that would be nearly impossible to have front of mind.

I still am struggling with the fact that, when we're talking about the papers and documents received, that's going to mean something. A person is going to interpret that as something. I don't have confidence, upon a quick review, that the information that you just shared with us through those links, Madam Clerk, actually matches up with the evidentiary record that was before this committee in the first session of the present Parliament.

In the absence of that certainty, I can't know specifically which documents are in or out so I can compare them with the motion to determine whether the redactions were made in an appropriate way to comply with the request of this committee. Is there a potential path forward that you see that would allow us to actually confirm that the documents we're about to vote on—which are the subjects of the present amendment to the main motion—are what certain members of this committee are saying they are?

The Chair: I'll go to you again, Madam Clerk. I don't know whether we have to bring in the others from the parliamentary branch or not. I don't really want to put you on the spot, but answer as best you can.

I believe Mr. Poilievre wants in as well.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The documents in question are very clear.

The amendment you have basically refers to the conversations around WE Charity and the Canada student service grant that happened in the 43rd Parliament. It doesn't say anything about what's on a website somewhere. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] website or web link. There's nothing in the motion that deals with a website or a web link. It deals with the record, which is permanently crystallized into parliamentary history from the 43rd Parliament.

It is very clear what the documents are. They are published. They are contained in something called the blues, which members should be familiar with. The documents were turned over to this committee. At that time, there was a record of receipt of those documents and transmission of those documents to all committee members.

All of that is in existence. Whether or not the clerk has put them on a website somewhere or whether there is a web link where Liberals can go and find it is absolutely irrelevant to this debate. The documents and the testimony are now permanent matters of public record. That is what the amendment refers to. When this motion is reported to the House of Commons, then the Speaker and all MPs will be able to refer to those records. There is no confusion about that.

I find it a little bit embarrassing. I feel badly for my Liberal friends who kind of embarrassed themselves by saying they haven't done their homework on what happened only a few months ago right here in this committee prior to prorogation. To say that they are oblivious to those conversations or that they have been unable, in the six or seven weeks since, to pull up those documents and look at them is kind of embarrassing. Use the basic rule that you come prepared.

Ms. Jansen, who is a new member of this committee, seems to be more informed than Mr. Fragiskatos and Mr. Fraser, who are completely oblivious to what happened right before their eyes in committee meetings they attended. I'd like to congratulate Ms. Jansen for—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. This is the example of a personal attack—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I'm in the middle of a point of order.

The Chair: We're already into a point of order. We'll get to you next, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I'm merely pointing out what Mr. Fragiskatos has admitted. He has admitted that he is unprepared and that he has no idea what happened in meetings that he attended. That is the very basis for his argument that he can't vote.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. It's another personal attack. It's completely unacceptable.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: If he and Mr. Gerretsen are confused, then that is a matter of poor preparation and not a matter of parliamentary procedure. We can't hold everybody's hand because they haven't been able to do their homework. Canadians expect a high level of competence from their committee members. That's why they send us here. That's why parliamentarians get paid. If they can't do their homework, maybe they should call up their whip and ask to be replaced by someone who can.

Ms. Jansen has demonstrated she can show up to work prepared, so I ask that all members of the government side follow her example.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have Mr. Fragiskatos on a point of order.

I believe we're straying from the discussion.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. I will keep it focused. It is long-standing practice, not just in Canadian parliamentary tradition, but Westminster parliamentary tradition writ large that, as a basic way of engaging in debate, members have to be collegial. Mr. Poilievre brings this point up about collegiality when it suits him, but all too often goes on the attack.

I'm not insulted personally, but I think it establishes a negative precedent. He went after me and said that I haven't been prepared. I've been prepared for each meeting.

He went after Mr. Fraser as well. Mr. Fraser is modest and won't speak about himself. He's one of the first MPs that I met after being elected in 2015. I know he takes the job extremely seriously. When Mr. Poilievre attacks my friend Sean Fraser, I have to stand up. He's done it to other members at this committee as well, not just on the Liberal side, but throughout his tenure as a finance committee member. He has gone after each member of the committee. He has heckled and thrown insults. It's not becoming of what an MP is all about. We have to keep in mind that, yes, we will agree and disagree, but when we disagree, we must do so reasonably. It's very unfortunate that Mr. Poilievre has decided to engage members in that particular way. I'd call your attention to it, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Pat Kelly: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, please, call the question.

The Chair: I do have Mr. Gerretsen first on this point, and then Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, I just want to say that, although Mr. Kelly would love for Mr. Poilievre to have the last word on that, I would like to weigh in on that as well.

I am a new member to the committee. He was trying to insult me by saying that I should have done my homework. I would have had no way of knowing that the Conservatives were going to bring forward this particular amendment to a motion. Therefore, there's no way that I could have been able to somehow in advance try to figure out what they were doing.

Mr. Poilievre criticizes members of this committee for not being prepared and perhaps doing other things. I'll be the first to say that I was doing something else, Mr. Chair.

I'm not sure if Mr. Poilievre is aware, but there's a global pandemic going on right now. We are in the second wave of it. Canadians are looking for assistance. I've pulled staff from my Ottawa office back to my Kingston office to assist members of my community, my constituents, in accessing a lot of the programs that they need right now, stuff that they rely on and that they're looking to the federal government for.

I apologize to Mr. Poilievre if I wasn't paying attention when he was grandstanding and waving papers around in the air trying to get attention from the media. Some of us were back in our constituencies actually helping Canadians who are looking for help right now, who are looking to access programs like CERB, and small businesses that are looking for—

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I was doing the same thing and was able to prepare my homework.

The Chair: We're already on a point of order, Ms. Jansen.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Call the question, Mr. Chair. This is a delay tactic.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No. I think it's—

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen and then Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's extremely germane to the discussion, Mr. Chair, because what Mr. Poilievre is accusing members of this committee of doing is basically of not doing the work that he deems to be so important, which apparently is predicting what his next move will be so that we can properly prepare for it.

On the contrary, I would argue that most members of this committee—and I would put my Conservative, NDP and Bloc colleagues into that as well—are working on behalf of their constituents. I have small businesses in my community that were looking for access to the wage subsidy for their small businesses—businesses that are literally about to close.

For some reason, Mr. Poilievre feels as though the most important thing for Canadians right now is to get in front of a podium and grandstand and wave around papers, as though that's the only thing Canadians care about right now.

Mr. Chair, I do sincerely apologize to him and to the other colleagues on this committee that I did not somehow anticipate what their moves were going to be so that I could magically prepare for them, because I was caught up doing other things on behalf of my constituents while we're in the second wave of a global pandemic.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Fraser. Then I'll go to Ms. Jansen, and then we'll call the question, hopefully.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With respect, the accusations Mr. Poilievre is lodging don't really bother me. However, one of the things I'd like to draw attention to is that no one—including him, with his criticism of my request for clarity on this—has actually clarified the one piece that I keep repeating. The issue here is that there are different batches of documents that we are talking about.

I understand that some were disclosed on USB keys to critics of different parties. I understand that some have been uploaded to the website. I also understand that there was a very specific and unique thing that happened during the upload of the documents, which was prorogation.

This is not a matter of not having done homework. I've been able to look at many of the documents that, in fact, I expect are the subject of the proposed amendment, but I don't even know how we can consider the amendment in order if it doesn't make clear which documents we're actually looking at.

Perhaps because I was paying attention, both at the meetings and to the various pieces of correspondence that have come through to committee members, I would say that the unique piece is whether the documents that the motion is actually going to further adopt are effectively an incomplete version of the disclosure, because of the timing of prorogation. If that is the case, obviously the right approach would be to ask the government to please table the full disclosure of documents as it was asked to do. Then we would presumably have an opportunity to look at those documents, compare them to the request we've made, and make a determination at that time as to what is appropriate.

Perhaps Mr. Poilievre is choosing not to understand that particular point, but the issue at play, from my perspective, is the fact that the amendment does not make clear to me whether we're dealing with all the documents the government had intended to disclose because of the very particular nuance around the prorogation at the time they were being uploaded.

The Chair: Next is Ms. Jansen, and I believe that is the end of my list.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I'm good, thank you.

I just wanted to remind Mr. Gerretsen that I was doing all the same things. I was out there, got my flu shot and went to Thanksgiving dinner. All of that helped businesses. I also met with veterans at the Legion and got ready for the meeting.

That's our work. That's our job.

The Chair: I guess we're ready for the question. Madam Clerk, I wonder if you could call the vote on the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Pat Kelly: The vote was called. There are no points of order—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I said that I would not bring up points of order unless—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The vote is already called. We're in the vote—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: —the issues were important. The point of order was recognized.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's not true. The clerk has not started the roll call yet, nor has the chair read out the motion, so technically it hasn't begun.

Mr. Chair, a point of order right now is completely in order.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll continue.

As a member of this committee, I do not believe—and I think my Liberal colleagues would echo my reservations—the points that Mr. Fraser and other Liberal members have brought up here have been dealt with. I understand that certain members in the opposition want to move towards a vote; it sounds as though they're unanimous in that on the opposition side. However, I still think we have not dealt with the matter that has been raised before the committee, which, as I stated in my remarks, based on what we find in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* by Bosc and Gagnon, are questions that hinge on and relate to privilege—

Mr. Pat Kelly: This is debate, not a point of order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: This is not debate. These matters relate to privilege as well.

Mr. Chair, with all due respect, we have not dealt substantively and meaningfully with the issue at hand.

The Chair: What I can say on that is what both the clerk and I have indicated on the message, that the documents in evidence are on our public website and the link has been sent to members. You will have to determine whether that's adequate or not.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, on a point of order—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos on a point of order, and then Ms. Dzerowicz.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, perhaps it could offer some guidance to our decision-making and I suggest very humbly that we look at whether there's a precedent for this particular situation.

I'll turn it over to Ms. Dzerowicz.

The Chair: Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, my point of order is that I think Mr. Fraser made some very good points in terms of there being some information on a memory stick and some information that was part of the link. I wonder whether it's possible to perhaps have the clerk address that specifically. If it's appropriate to be able to do so, I'd love to hear from her in terms of whether there are indeed different bits of information in different places. I do think what my colleague Mr. Fraser has raised is a very important question of privilege for all of us.

The Chair: I have a note. I think I did say "on the public website". The documents are on Our Commons website through the link that the clerk has sent.

Ms. Dzerowicz, do you want to rephrase your question to the clerk? I didn't quite get the context.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Absolutely.

I'll probably just bring it to the point where we've raised a few things.

One is that I would like to know whether all of the information that was submitted, I believe the 5,600 pages, and the transmittal letters, as well as anything that was on memory sticks, is all provided to us as part of the information that was sent to us via a link within the last hour.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, I'm not sure again whether we're putting you on the spot.

The Clerk: Only certain documents get posted on our website. Items such as correspondence usually would just stay in the clerk's office, but they are available for the public to consult. Any confidential documents would be circulated to MPs during one session and not posted on the websites.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Specifically for the transmittal letters, because they are critical in terms of us understanding what was redacted, what was included, and why it was included or not included, would you be able to confirm whether the transmittal letters are actually part of the documents we have received?

The Clerk: I do not know if they were included in that link.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Chair, on a point of order—

An hon. member: On a point of order—

The Chair: I see Mr. Fraser and Mr. Samson, and I heard someone else.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Ms. Dzerowicz has perhaps articulated the point more accurately than I have. I'm scanning these sheets as we go. I can't find.... I've been looking for the transmittal letters because the purpose of their inclusion was more or less a covering letter to explain whether and to what extent and reasons certain portions of documents would have been redacted. If we know that those documents are not in the documents that we're about to adopt, then we will know that we need to engage with government to encourage them to re-disclose the full package of information on the committee's record.

I don't think it would be a violation of privilege, which is not for this committee to find, but it strikes me, Mr. Chair, that if we know that the documents referred to in the amendment have not been fully disclosed on the record for this committee because they're not on the website that contains the evidentiary record, I'm curious as to whether the proposed amendment could be construed as being in order if we know, in fact, that the documents referred to do not reflect the complete version of the documents that the government disclosed to members but is not before the record on this committee.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I appreciate the opportunity to make my point of order.

I've been listening now for about half an hour and I'm very disappointed with the opposition trying to let Canadians think that we are not prepared.

Let's be honest with what's happening here. This is an amendment that was just put up in this meeting. How can you be prepared for an amendment about documents? Now the question mark is that you're asking me to vote on an amendment about documents that may or may not all be there as they should. Now I'm listening to the opposition say, "Oh, I did all my reading; I was prepared. I did all my other work."

Listen. Let's be honest with Canadians here. We are not expected to vote on something that we.... I'm not. How can I vote on something when I don't know for sure those are actually the documents?

Then I have to share this as well. I've been listening in the House of Commons now for a number of weeks since we started again. All they talk about in the media is budget, budget, budget, budget. Let's get to the budget. Where's our budget? We have a standing order that clearly indicates that, as soon as Parliament took over in September, we have to be working on this budget, doing pre-budget consultations. I've been—

Mr. Pat Kelly: I have a point of order. This is just debate, Mr. Chair. It's time to call the vote. This is not relevant to the motion. It's not relevant to the debate on the motion. Call the question, Mr. Chair. Restore order.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We cannot respond to those documents unless we move forward on them. Mr. Julian, with all due respect, has brought some very important points to the table in the House of Commons about tax inequalities and tax evasion. I enjoy when he shares his perspective on tax evasion, but he's not talking about that.

We're never going to get to those points unless we move on to what is important for this committee, and that is pre-budget consultation, as the standing order clearly indicates.

The Chair: You are straying considerably from the amendment, Mr. Samson, but I think—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Nonetheless, it's very true.

The Chair: —the question really is.... I don't know whether, Madam Clerk, you have to contact somebody in the parliamentary branch there, but I believe what members are asking—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just a moment. Can somebody give the assurance that all the documents that the committee asked to be uploaded to the website prior to our digital binders—I guess that's the proper word—prior to prorogation, including the transmittal letters, are there in that link.

I think that's what members are asking.

Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I think, Mr. Chair, you suggested something there that could provide guidance. I have enormous respect for all public servants, including those who perform the role of clerk. The clerk is incredibly able. Otherwise, she would not be tasked with being the clerk of probably the busiest—and with due respect to many of my colleagues serving on other committees, the most important—committee on Parliament Hill, or if not the most, then one of the most important. This is particularly so now, as we deal with the challenge of COVID-19.

Your suggestion a moment ago that perhaps the clerk could go back and confer with other parliamentary colleagues on the matter could be a useful suggestion.

I also think we have to be remarkably careful here when we see a mention, in what basically counts as our guiding bible, if you want to put it that way—*House of Commons Procedure and Practice*—making very clear that matters of privilege do relate to papers and to records.

When those papers and records are not present and accessible, then issues of privilege arise, in my view.

I think Mr. Samson also put a very good point forward when he just spoke, saying that—

Mr. Pat Kelly: This is repetitious, Chair.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: No, it is not, Mr. Chair. I said before that I have enormous respect for Mr. Kelly, but I wouldn't want to accuse him of violating my privilege by interrupting me on a very important point of order as an MP.

I'll continue, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's too late. You've already said it.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: He already did it, but I'm going to ignore it in the spirit of collegiality, which Mr. Poilievre so ably talked about before.

By the way, I still see his absence here at the committee.

We need assurances. We need certainty—absolute certainty—that we are seeing the documents we ought to see as they've been put forward. We can't play guessing games, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fraser talked about that; Mr. Samson talked about it as well; Ms. Dzerowicz raised this point earlier. I do not believe that we're ready to move forward to a vote here until all of these issues have been looked at thoroughly and analysis has been exhausted on the matter.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have another point of order to add to that, Mr. Chair, if I may.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you.

Just in line with what Mr. Fragiskatos has said, I wonder whether voting on this motion is in order, when we don't know that we have the full document. I think that's really what I'm left with.

The Chair: Assumptions can be a problem. I'm operating under the assumption that the information that went to the digital binders and the documents in the transmittal letters are as the clerk maintains. Whether or not we've seen them, we certainly expect them.

I'm going to suspend for five minutes so that I can talk to the clerk on the side, because we need assurance that this information is available now or is readily available. I'll suspend for five minutes and will call you, Evelyn, offline.

• (1325) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1335)

The Chair: Okay. There's nothing like saying that life is complicated.

In any event, from the clerk's point of view in discussions, the committee will see exactly what they saw in session 43-1. They're restoring the e-binders. They will be brought forward and made available to this session. Part of the problem here is that if we want to see the evidence from session 43-1, we really don't know that evidence until we ask for it. Certainly, some of us who were on the previous committee have seen that evidence. That is the link that was available prior to prorogation. Everything that was available to the committee in 43-1 is there.

I don't have an answer on it. I don't think all the evidence was in the digital binder on the documents at the time of prorogation. I know that David went a few hours after prorogation to try to get it in the digital binders.

So I can't answer on that question, but basically what I can say is that the committee will see exactly what they saw on session 43-1. This amendment is asking for that evidence. As I said at the beginning of the meeting on my order, the Speaker would definitely need that evidence in order to make a ruling.

That's where we're at on the amendment. I know there may be some objections to that—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: A point of order.

The Chair: —and I'll go to Mr. Poilievre's point of order, but that's the best I can tell you at this time. The transmittal letters and

some 5,000-plus pages of documents should be in that e-binder that was in the last session.

Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Can you clarify where the e-binder was mentioned in my amendment?

The Chair: No, the e-binder wasn't mentioned.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It wasn't. Oh, good. So then that's irrelevant to the debate.

The Chair: But I think in fairness, Mr. Poilievre—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Poilievre should do his homework if he doesn't know what his motion says.

The Chair: Hold on.

The clerk could restore the e-binder and make available all evidence that was in the last session and bring it forward to this one as well.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: To end my point of order, so what part of that evidence has not been made public yet?

The Chair: I might have to ask for clarification on this from the clerk, but I think all of that evidence was made public in the last session.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you.

The Chair: I believe that to be true—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Good. That settles that.

The Chair: —but we need that evidence to go to the Speaker as per this motion as well.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: To conclude my point, that's great. All the documents are public, and the Speaker, therefore, can acquire them. If he needs someone in the clerk's office to point him in the right direction, that can happen too.

Thank you very much. Let's go to the—

The Chair: Are we ready for the question?

Mr. Sean Fraser: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Fraser.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm still—

The Chair: Mr. Fraser and then Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Chair, I apologize for coming back to this. I understand that there are documents in an e-binder that should correspond to what the committee had on record. I understand from your explanation following the recent suspension of this meeting that there is an ability to provide whatever was provided at the time the first session of the current Parliament was prorogued.

The question I still don't understand is whether the complete disclosure package that the government did in fact provide to members of this committee is actually included in what this committee will have.

This is not some nuanced technical point. One reason I'm concerned about it is that, upon a review of the documents that the clerk directed us to during suspension, I remain unable to locate the transmittal letters. I suspect that other things that were disclosed by the government are in fact not going to be made available.

Having incomplete disclosure, particularly....

I keep drawing your attention to the transmittal letters because those are the documents that explain why certain portions of documents were redacted. For example, they may have included information about the family members of public servants or just a list of email names of public servants who had personal information.

It seems foolhardy for us as a committee to demand production that we know or expect is incomplete not because the government chose not to disclose information but because it may not have been fully uploaded.

Is it possible to have someone do a comparison of the documents that were in fact provided to committee members directly—say, by the USB keys—and any information that would—?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Ms. Jansen, I have the floor.

Mr. Chair—

The Chair: We can't have a point of order when there is a point of order on the floor, so I will go to you next, Ms. Jansen.

This is point of order day for sure in finance committee, I can tell you that.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you.

To finish my point, Mr. Chair, it would be very helpful if the clerk could do a comparison to ensure that we're not on a fool's errand here, demanding production that we know will be incomplete because we know it wasn't properly uploaded.

Is it possible for the clerk, perhaps, to do a quick review of the two sets of documents to ensure that the same number of pages are in each, for example, so that we can verify that we are looking at a complete body of information?

What I would love to avoid is setting the stage for a false accusation that the government failed to meet the order or request of this committee, when in fact they did their best to but, due to a technical reason during the timing of the upload, the complete package wasn't put on the table.

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to go to Ms. Jansen's point of order, but to your point of order, this may be something to think about. You can put an amendment to the amendment to ensure that the documents include transmittal letters, if that's a huge concern.

Ms. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Given that it has been established that everything was made public and that Mr. Fraser is talking about a fool's errand, I think most Canadians watching this—if anybody is still watching—would probably consider this committee meeting to be the fool's errand he is talking about.

It's really time to take a vote. Let's get on with it so that we can get on with business.

Mr. Sean Fraser: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: I can't take a vote until the committee allows me to take that vote, Ms. Jansen. That's the problem.

Mr. Fraser, you have another point of order.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Sure. It's related to a comment you just made.

My concern is not solely the presence or absence of transmittal letters. That's one concern, and it's a serious one. The bigger picture concern I am worried about, when looking at this motion, is that I know certain documents were made public. What I want to ensure is that all the documents that the government disclosed are part of the record.

No one has been able to clear up for me whether the documents that are the subject of the proposed amendment to the motion we're currently debating actually mirror the documents that the government provided. If we are not talking about the same set of documents, then of course the government will have failed to meet the request of this committee, but it wouldn't be because they chose not to disclose information.

You suggested it might be by amendment of the amendment, but is it possible to have someone, before we take a vote on the existing amendment, actually confirm that the two packages are identical?

The Chair: The only person I could ask that is the clerk, who may be in communication with the analysts. Do you see a—

Mr. Sean Fraser: Can you make that request, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: We're talking about 5,000 pages here plus. Could the clerk and the analysts take five minutes to look into this, and we'll come back to it?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: No, we're not going to suspend again to run on a fool's errand, as Mr. Fraser—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's not a point of order.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: —improbably gave it the appellation.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's not a point of order.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: We are now ready to vote.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's not a point of order.

The Chair: It's really—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It's now time to go to the vote.

The Chair: I think, Mr. Poilievre, it's really not. I don't have to move to vote.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Motion to challenge the chair. Challenging the chair. I'm challenging your ruling.

The Chair: I can't move—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Motion to challenge the chair. I'm challenging your ruling.

An hon. member: On what? I don't know if there was a ruling to challenge.

The Chair: There wasn't a ruling, Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Your ruling is that you can't move to a vote, and I'm challenging that.

The Chair: I can't move to a vote until there's satisfaction among committee members to move to a vote.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I challenge that ruling.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's not a ruling.

A point of order.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I challenge that ruling.

The Chair: I am going to ask the clerk and the analysts to meet for five minutes, come back with as best an answer as they can give us, then maybe we can get to the vote. I have no other choice but to do that.

Take five minutes, Evelyn and the analysts, to see when you can come back to us with.

The meeting is suspended for five minutes.

• (1350) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1405)

The Chair: We'll come back to order.

Madam Clerk, have you a response to what we asked you to look into?

The Clerk: Yes. In that link to the documents that were shared with the committee members are the documents that were sent from the department. They do not include the transfer letters, those were separate files, and the letter from the law clerk, but all the other documents that were transferred as part of the request are in that link.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: I see two hands up. I first have Mr. Gerretsen and then Mr. Fraser.

Go ahead.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I would like to move an amendment to the amendment, Mr. Chair, in light of the fact that we heard this information.

My amendment to the amendment would be at the end and would read, "and further that the clerk of the committee do a complete analysis of the documents provided to the committee by the law clerk and compare them to that which was provided to members by the government."

The Chair: Can you roll that by me again? I'm not sure it's in order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have it in French, and I can forward the French text as well to the clerk. Maybe my staff could do that right now.

I will read it again more slowly so everybody can take that in. This would be an amendment to the amendment, Mr. Chair, to follow what is currently proposed. It reads: "and further that the clerk of the committee do a complete analysis of the documents provided to the committee by the law clerk and compare them to that which was provided to members by the government."

The Chair: I have to find the original motion.

I believe the amendment to the amendment is in order. We're on that. It has been moved.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair; and thank you to any staff involved with the comparison.

One of the things that's really important is that the transmittal letters in particular are included in the package of documents that will find its way for consideration by the committee.

You'll recall the original motion back in July that, again, gained support from both sides of the aisle, which said:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Committee order that any contracts concluded with We Charity and Me to We, all briefing notes, memos and emails...from senior officials prepared for or sent to any Minister regarding the design and creation of the Canada Student Service Grant, as well as any written correspondence and records of other correspondence with We Charity and Me to We from March 2020 be provided to the Committee no later than August 8, 2020;

This next part is key to the importance of the transmittal letters, and forgive my taking a bit of time to get there, but this piece is important:

that matters of Cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request;

Before I read the rest of the motion, I think it's important for it to sink in that the government was not requested to give documents that touched on cabinet confidence or that compromised national security.

It went on to say:

and that any redactions necessary, including to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons.

I argued earlier in this meeting that it doesn't relieve the non-partisan public service of their obligations to comply. In any event, I'll set that argument aside for now.

The point here is that, for items that are not relevant to the committee or motion request for documents that were redacted by the professional public service, those redactions took place for good reasons. They may have involved items that were on the agenda of a cabinet meeting, the cabinet meetings in fact, perhaps, that the Prime Minister and his chief of staff testified to at the finance committee in the previous session; matters of national security and sensitive procurement that could hurt the government's ability to act in the national interest; or matters that, if released, could be damaging to Canada, which is frankly what we're trying to avoid the disclosure of under ordinary circumstances.

I am always in favour of protecting our national reputation and our national security before anything else and allowing government to make decisions knowing that they can have, in certain circumstances, confidential conversations.

In my view, the redactions that I've seen strike the right balance between releasing relevant information as the committee has requested and protecting cabinet confidence, which, again, this committee did expect would be respected.

In the Privy Council Office document release that the clerk circulated today, there is a synopsis of a cabinet meeting. Frankly, it's an extraordinary document, when you think of it, that would rarely be released. I don't think previous governments would have allowed that type of document disclosure of things that should be subject to cabinet confidence. The synopsis here of an entire cabinet meeting has been made public, though there are obviously items that are protected by cabinet confidence.

Items that related to the Canada student service grant were still disclosed. I don't know what other topics were discussed. There could be national security issues—we'll never know—and cabinet confidences that are not related to any of this ought to be protected for good public policy.

This was determined by the Clerk of the Privy Council, in reference to my point, in his transmittal letter specifically. These transmittal letters give context to the documents to explain precisely why certain things were redacted or not redacted.

Frankly, there are reasons that documents such as this are not normally public until long after a government's mandate has come to an end. Ensuring the confidence of cabinet deliberations is essential to peace, order and good government, which our colleagues often reflect upon publicly in their comments.

These confidences are essential to the operation of responsible government, yet in a rather extraordinary move the Clerk waived privilege on sections of this particular document as they related to cabinet discussion on the Canada student service grant. These confidences are amongst our country's most protected information. Here it is for everybody to read.

If opposition colleagues want to view documents that are subject to cabinet confidence, they should form government and be appointed to cabinet and they will have their access to cabinet confidences there, and frankly, I would defend their right to have those confidences, even in opposition.

Until then, Mr. Chair, the release of this relevant cabinet information as it relates to the Canada student service grant is going to have to suffice.

Through the PCO release, once again, what do we actually find redacted? It's a personal phone number of a staff member, an item that never would have been released in an access to information request. I think that kind of protection is important and necessary.

To conclude the point in support of the subamendment, the transmittal letters we now know were not included amongst a few other documents that were just referred to, and are not actually captured by the motion. It's difficult to imagine how we can determine the appropriateness of disclosures made by the government when we simply accept the documents but purposefully exclude the government's explanation as to why certain redactions may have been in place. As such, I would be supporting my colleague's subamendment that he's placed before the committee.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Jansen is next on my list.

The amendment to the amendment is the issue we're on now. We'll have a vote on it, then get to the amended motion, or not, and then to the original motion.

We're on the amendment to the amendment.

Ms. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Yes, thank you.

I find it very, very interesting how we were talking about how very important it was. The Liberals wanted us to get moving on to the next most important item of business. Mr. Fraser is actually putting a motion forward that is going to ensure that it takes weeks for us to go forward, when we know that all of these documents are already public.

Regular Canadians are going to say, "This doesn't feel like openness and transparency to me."

Again, as I say, it's going to take weeks. Can you imagine how long this is going to take?

The clerks have all been working hard and doing their job. We know they're very competent. We're very thankful for the work they do. This amendment as it stands just boggles the mind. This absolutely stands in the way of our getting anything done.

Just so you know, regular Canadians who don't talk lawyer-speak are going to be quite shocked at this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Jansen.

Ms. Dzerowicz, and then Mr. Gerretsen.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I will be supporting my colleague's amendment to the amendment to the original motion. I just wanted to respond to Ms. Jensen's comments.

Let Canadians be very clear. I put a motion on the table for us to begin pre-budget consultations. During an unprecedented pandemic, I can assure you that if there's anything that's wasting time, it is the original motion that was actually proposed by the opposition. It is not us.

If you can wave a magic wand, Ms. Jansen, and get us right back to the pre-budget consultation, I think that is where we're raring to go. We know that Canadians want to talk to us. Canadians want to share their ideas. We know that economists want to provide some advice on how we create a competitive environment in Canada.

How do we best restart the economy so that we can support our businesses moving forward?

How is it that we can make sure that we continue to support those industries that are most impacted: tourism, arts and culture, hospitality?

I can unequivocally tell you that it is not us who is wasting anybody's time. It is the original motion that was put before us. I will tell you that there is a motion that I read first. It's on the table. It's on pre-budget consultation. We were ready to start it at our last meeting.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have Mr. Gerretsen, then Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I think I was next in line there.

The Chair: No, the names that come in are from the clerk.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: My hand has been up.

The Chair: What I've seen from the clerk is Mr. Gerretsen first, then you, Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, I would very much enjoy hearing what Mr. Poilievre has to say. I would be willing to let him go first, if I could follow.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll let Mr. Poilievre go first, then Mr. Gerretsen.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I thank my distinguished colleague for that concession.

I heard Ms. Dzerowicz's comments, and I couldn't agree more. Let's get on with the rest of the committee's business. I totally agree. I want to move right to her motion. If we could just vote on the motions before us, we could probably get through the votes on the two amendments, plus the main motion in about five minutes. I'm happy to actually stay and discuss her motion as well. We could easily get through it all today.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: What's your point of order?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Is Mr. Poilievre saying he is withdrawing his original motion and going right to the pre-budget consultation motion?

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre will be able to answer that.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: That's what I was proposing.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: No—with a minor tweak, which is that we would just vote on these motions that are before us right now

and then we'd go right to your motion. If you're really interested in....

Mr. Chair, we're in a pandemic. Canadians are suffering. They've lost livelihoods. Some have lost their lives. Let's get back to work on that. Let's vote on these motions, so we can get them out of the way and get back to discussions on how we can rebuild Canada's economy. Let's do it now.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Gerretsen and then Mr. Julian.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Here is the problem with what Mr. Poilievre just said. He is basically saying, Mr. Chair, that he recognized that Ms. Dzerowicz's motion was on the floor, but didn't like the fact that we had to deal with hers, so he tried to use some procedural moves in the last meeting to jump ahead of her so we would just vote on his motion to get it out of the way, and he is happy to go back to hers.

If he can't see the problem with that, Mr. Chair, then I think he really needs to reassess his participation in this committee. It is not all about him. Maybe it is just about him on the Conservative bench, because he seems to be running the show there, which is very respectable, and his soldiers are doing a great job on his behalf.

The reality is that there was already a process in place with Ms. Dzerowicz's motion and Mr. Poilievre tried to jump ahead of it. Now he is trying to use the rationale of us voting on it to push it out of the way and then we can go to her motion, as long as what is important to him is dealt with first. I find it extremely unfortunate that he has chosen to go down that road. If he has an issue with members of the Liberal caucus taking a position on that and being offended by that, I would assure him it is a legitimate position, in my opinion at least, for Liberal members to be taking.

That is how I end up supporting the fact that maybe it is in the best interest for Mr. Poilievre to withdraw his motion, to get in the queue where he belongs and let his motion come forward properly. I believe that even Mr. Julian had one in between the one that was on the floor and his, but somehow he is the most important asset to this entire committee and the parliamentary process write large and therefore his issues should be dealt with in great haste.

I'll just go back to the amendment we are discussing, which is my amendment to the amendment, Mr. Chair. I want to emphasize why these transmission letters are essential.

It's already a rare occurrence that cabinet confidences of a sitting government are released. The clerk took the extraordinary step to release all information as it relates to the CSSG while also maintaining that he would protect necessary and unrelated cabinet confidences. He detailed that process, as did other deputy ministers in their transmittal letters. Everything present here has been done in the spirit of that promise while respecting the committee's motion for information.

Let me give some examples of that. In the PCO release we have a summary of a full cabinet meeting. The discussion could have been related to a vaccine or PPE procurement, national security or other matters. A cabinet document such as this is rarely, if ever, made public. Cabinet confidences unrelated to the Canada student service grant are redacted per the terms of the motion adopted by the committee. Keeping with the spirit of this committee's motion, the CSSG items in particular were visible.

The second example of this is in a PCO release. We have a second cabinet note, Mr. Chair, where the document is redacted. It is the latter cabinet meeting in May of 2020. The CSSG implementation was discussed and is unredacted as ordered by this committee and agreed to by the Clerk of the Privy Council; however, the rest of the information is still redacted as it falls under cabinet confidence. Again, we do not know what the topics of discussion were. There could have been talks related to national security matters, legal discussions that are under solicitor-client privilege or key discussions related to further personal protective equipment and vaccine procurement that would have put our competitiveness at risk if released.

Mr. Chair, in conclusion, I think we have demonstrated, in an exhaustive manner, that the redactions the opposition members have been turning into political theatre are, in fact, in line with the motion that they proposed at this very committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen. It was really nice of you to get back to the amendment. That's where we all should be.

Just before I turn to Mr. Julian and then Mr. Samson, Mr. Ste-Marie, if you do want in, you're probably going to have to wave both arms, because you're nearly in the dark there. I don't want to miss you if you want in.

I'll go to Mr. Julian and then Mr. Samson.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

From the very beginning of this meeting, we've seen Liberal members try to find technicalities to try to delay what is very clearly a breach of privilege and to deny the instruction that we've received from the Speaker. The Speaker asked to find out whether the committee is satisfied with the documents as provided to it. The documents have been provided to the committee, and with slight exceptions, all of that information was available in August in the public domain. The media were very clear in reporting both the law clerk's letter and all of the other details relating to the massive censorship of these documents.

This search for a technicality I find very disturbing. This meeting now has gone on, according to the House of Commons website, for 180 hours. I know we've been suspended for much of that time, but basically, government members of Parliament have been delaying for 180 hours a clear question of privilege that we have to decide upon as a committee and then provide that decision back to the Speaker. That is our role: to defend the committee's decision. The fact is that the government clearly did not adhere to it—and the law clerk has been very clear about this—by censoring documents that they were not entitled to censor. We have that important response to give back to the Speaker. That's this motion that Mr. Poilievre has

suggested, with the amendment that I think we all accept. I think any other amendments are distinctly unhelpful.

I am very frustrated and dismayed by the attitude of the government, and we've seen this in other areas. Within days of the pandemic striking, \$750 billion in liquidity support was given to Canada's big banks, yet people with disabilities have been waiting now for seven months to get one cent of support from this government. The government delays when the people's interests need to be taken into consideration. When there are lobbyists, they just move right ahead. I find this deplorable.

If the government members were really interested in what has been raised as various points, given the fact that we have put forward an amendment and that the amendment was put forward in a way that should provide consensus from all members, we should be voting on the amendment and voting on the main motion. I will be voting against the latest amendment because I think it is basically a delaying tactic. We should be proceeding to inform the Speaker about our opinion on the documents that were so heavily, wholly and substantially censored. We should be able to move on to other important items.

I'm very dismayed that government members have now held up this committee hearing for 180 hours. We're in the midst of a pandemic. We should proceed to the vote. We should move on to other business.

The Chair: Okay.

The final one on my list is Mr. Samson, on the amendment to the amendment. That's the one we're on.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Chair. As a point of order, I'm also on that list. I thought I had raised my hand too. I'm glad to speak whenever it's appropriate.

The Chair: Okay. I'll go to Mr. Samson and then to Mr. Fragiskatos.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will certainly support the subamendment, which is extremely important. As my colleague Mr. Gerretsen explained, if the letters are not included with the documentation, we can't make decisions or confirm that the information is correct. I explained it clearly in English earlier. So I am doing it again in French, because I cannot vote on a document until the clerks have confirmed that this is exactly what existed before.

I want to raise a second point. I believe Mr. Poilievre has made it clear today that his strategic tactic, in fact, was not to address the most important issue, which is Ms. Dzerowicz's motion. This motion demonstrates unequivocally that our committee's task at this point is to ensure that we can move on to the extremely important prebudget consultations, so that we get the documentation. As I said earlier, I do not understand how the Conservatives can waste their time and not proceed with the prebudget consultations when, for months and months, they have been saying that we should table a budget to show Canadians where we stand. It is amazing how the Conservatives play politics. They are preventing the committee from carrying out its responsibilities, which are well established in the standing orders communicated to us.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to speak on this matter.
[English]

The Chair: I have two on my list: Mr. Fragiskatos and Mr. Gerretsen.

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'll respond to the comments made by Mr. Julian a few moments ago. I think he raises some legitimate points. I will disagree on the substance of the points he raised, but when he does make general arguments about the need for all of us to stay focused on Canadians, I think that is a perfectly reasonable point of view. It's one that I wish was adopted unanimously at this committee.

We are facing as a country right now our most difficult moments, the most challenging time the country has seen since the Second World War. That sentiment was reflected in a tweet Mr. Julian put out very recently calling for support to be given to Canadian food banks. I applaud the government for standing with food banks, not with just one announcement for financial support but two, as we've seen in recent days. Those are the sorts of issues we should be debating at this committee.

There are Canadians in need. I did notice that Mr. Julian failed to mention the importance of the CERB and how that has assisted folks, and the CEBA. The CECRA program has assisted, with admittedly some gaps. Let's talk about those things. Let's recognize Ms. Dzerowicz's motion to begin pre-budget consultations, which, I remind this committee, is absolutely mandatory. It is not a choice that we can make. Standing Order 83.1 specifically mentions the Standing Committee on Finance, our committee here. It calls on us to take pre-budget consultations that have to commence at a particular time and end at a particular time. It's not a choice. We are mandated to do that.

I very much hope we can move towards that. Liberal members have wanted to move towards that particular outcome. Actually, it's not just Liberal members: Let me commend our colleague Gabriel Ste-Marie from the Bloc, who has made it clear he wishes also to put forward a motion that would move this committee towards pre-budget consultations. We need to commence that. There's no way around it.

I know the opposition wants to raise matters on the WE Charity issue. As I've said at the committee before, we're not trying to push

those questions aside. They ought to be raised. Mistakes were made by the government. That is not being denied here. When you're flying a plane and building it at the same time, it's going to be the case that errors will be made. The government has been forthcoming in a desire to release thousands of documents. I know the opposition still continues to raise its arms and wants to put forward motions that relate to those documents that, frankly, only the opposition understands.

We have an amendment to an amendment here that I think is very, very reasonable. It provides greater certainty and greater clarification. It calls on the opposition to compromise, to put some water in its wine. The opposition will not get its way every single time at committee. What they were originally proposing was inappropriate. It was coming very close to breaching, if not entirely breaching, the privilege of members on this committee.

What has happened? Mr. Gerretsen has very correctly put forward an amendment to the amendment suggested by Mr. Kelly. I think it was suggested many hours ago, and here we are, still debating. I fail to accept the rationale for the amendment. As we heard from Mr. Fraser as well, there are deep challenges with that amendment, for a number of technical but very important reasons. This amendment that's been put forward can move us forward in a way that provides a lot of certainty and greater comfort for members of this committee, who want to make decisions but in a way that matches with recognized parliamentary procedure. If we were to accept Mr. Kelly's amendment as it stands, on its own, then I worry that we would be going down a path that would set a very negative precedent for this committee. That's not something that I want to see happen. I know it's something that every member would be concerned about, and quite rightly.

Yes, this is a matter that we need to decide upon, but when we've seen close to 800 submissions from Canadian stakeholders from right across the country—and later I'm sure we'll be continuing this discussion—I do want to talk about some of those stakeholders.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has an interest in seeing support for municipalities continue. The federal government has stepped up in remarkable ways to support our cities and towns, but that needs to continue. That renewed federal-municipal relationship that took shape beginning in 2015 needs to proceed with even more vigour, particularly now as cities and towns face great difficulties. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business—

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Chair, this rambling on has absolutely nothing to do with the amendment to the amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Falk, I was just going to say to Mr. Fragiskatos that I believe he is straying away from the discussion on the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I disagree with what Mr. Falk is saying. Mr. Julian raised specific points with respect to how the government was responding, and Mr. Fragiskatos has been addressing those points. If you were going to allow Mr. Julian to make those points in the manner he did just preceding Mr. Fragiskatos, I think you have to allow the opportunity for Mr. Fragiskatos to respond to that.

The Chair: I believe we are straying into debate there, Mr. Gerretsen, so we'll ask Mr. Fragiskatos to make his argument as to why those points are on the amendment to the amendment. Then we'll move to the next speaker.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I echo the rationale of Mr. Gerretsen. I was simply offering a rebuttal to what Mr. Julian put on the table. Hence, there is relevance, but I will bring it back specifically.

We are debating the substance of Mr. Kelly's amendment. As Liberal members, we've heard Mr. Gerretsen put forward an amendment to that amendment, and I'm glad to continue to discuss that. I think there are important issues that have yet to be clarified and decided upon, but the more we focus on these technical issues, the more we are hindered from focusing on the lived realities of everyday Canadians. In my community in London, I know my constituents want us to focus on the COVID-19 response from an economic perspective. I know that constituents in every one of our communities feel exactly the same way.

Why we have now descended into a political battle over this particular issue is beyond me. In the summer, we saw a number of meetings, meeting after meeting, and those meetings needed to take place. They should have taken place. It was good for this committee to focus on the WE Charity issue, but now the Conservatives in particular, and the rest of the opposition too, are trying to steer this committee towards an outcome that suits their political interests and, I fear, not the interests of this country. This country right now needs its politicians at every level to focus on COVID-19 and the economic response.

I urge my colleagues, Mr. Chair, to move in that direction. We can keep debating this amendment, but again, on relevance, it's standing in the way of our talking about the main thing, and the main thing right now is COVID-19.

The Chair: Okay, I have Mr. Gerretsen and Ms. Dzerowicz, if I haven't missed anyone.

Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead on your amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, I raised my hand when I heard Mr. Julian, in speaking to this amendment to the amendment, starting to go on about the lack of work that the government has been doing.

The reality of the situation is, Mr. Chair, that 8.9 million Canadians have received CERB and 5.4 million Canadians received CERB between the time the World Health Organization declaring a global pandemic and a month and four days later. This government has been working around the clock, and, more importantly, so have the officials for the government, the departments, the folks who have been coming in for overtime, folks who have been working from home relentlessly to develop programs that would probably otherwise take 18 months to develop. You're seeing these programs come together, like CERB, in a matter of five or six days.

For Mr. Julian to be making the point, which he just made a moment ago, that the government is not doing anything and is not doing meaningful things to support Canadians, I think, is incredibly disingenuous, especially when you look at the facts.

He brought up businesses, so to address his point specifically, 106,000 small business have received commercial rent assistance in Canada. That's a lot of businesses throughout our country that are receiving assistance from the federal government.

There are 994,000 employees who have been helped as a result of that, and those businesses—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order. As you know, Mr. Chair, one can occasionally stray, as I did, for 20 seconds when intervening, but there is a question of relevance when people go on for minutes and minutes about something that is not related to the amendment at all.

Mr. Gerretsen, you've taken far longer than 20—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: If I understand correctly, Mr. Chair, Mr. Julian is—

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Chair, this is—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: —setting a new rule of 20 seconds.

Mr. Peter Julian: There is an issue of relevance here. Straying occasionally is quite different from devoting an entire speech to something that is not relevant to what is before the committee.

The Chair: Let's go back to Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: If that's the case, Mr. Chair, and I accept that from Mr. Julian, I would love for him to tell me what the official amount of time is. He said 20 seconds. Is that written down somewhere, or is that his anecdotal perspective? Or is that how long it takes him to stray? I guess as long as Mr. Julian can stray for 20 seconds....

Sorry, Mr. Chair, but your microphone is way up. I can't hear you trying to interrupt.

The Chair: Sorry. Mr. Gerretsen, I would say you've had quite the—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: But I do want to address this point of order.

The Chair: You've had quite a bit of time to rebut the remarks of Mr. Julian, and I think that's fair ball. If we could get back to the amendment and why you are proposing it and supporting it, that would be great.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Well, I didn't get to finish it. I am not as skilled as Mr. Julian. I haven't had the years of experience he has had to be able to summarize thoughts in 20 seconds or less. I apologize if it takes me longer to do that. I'm not as skilled a politician as he is.

I don't think it's appropriate for Mr. Julian to set arbitrarily time limits for how long one is able to stray off topic. Either you're allowed to, or you're not allowed to. Mr. Julian was allowed to, but I guess it was only 20 seconds, so he was okay. Now I'm trying to address what he said, and I'm being called out of order by him for doing that. I take exception to that, Mr. Chair.

I'll leave it at that, and I'll turn the floor back over to you.

The Chair: That's good, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Julian may not be able to set time limits, but as chair, I can, so let's get back to relevance.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'll cede the floor to Ms. Dzerowicz.

The Chair: We have Ms. Dzerowicz and then Mr. Fraser.

We're on the amendment to the amendment; keep that in mind.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Yes, thank you. One can get lost in all these, yes.

The reason I support the amendment is that it will ensure that the package of documents we have been provided a link to is complete and that the transmittal letters are included, and that is a fundamental reason I am supporting the motion of my colleague Mr. Gerretsen.

I also want to point out that perhaps if there is some question as to whether the documents were redacted properly, I think the committee should get to hear from the public servants who did the redactions and from the law clerk and the parliamentary counsel, because right now I think we have to ensure that due process is provided to them. If after the committee has heard from these witnesses it is still not satisfied, then it can take whatever action it deems necessary, but at least we will have afforded due process to allow those who redacted these documents to speak to them.

I would also point to some remarks that Minister Rodriguez's parliamentary assistant Kevin Lamoureux made in the House in September.

He said the following:

...I want to make it clear that when the finance committee restarts on October 8 or 9, if it readopts the motion and is not satisfied with the way the government has provided documents to the committee, the government is prepared to work in good faith with the committee to address any concerns that it may have.

I also want to point out again what the Harper Conservative government said in 2010 in response to the 22nd report of the public accounts committee. It's a government where Mr. Poilievre and indeed a number of MPs currently at this meeting served as MPs.

The Government believes that the departmental officials acted lawfully and diligently in these circumstances and that the House and Canadians should be concerned with the committee's exercise of a claimed privilege in these particular circumstances. Necessity is the principle that underlies parliamentary privilege, which itself is "a gift from the electorate" to safeguard their rights. In the Government's view, even if privilege were to extend so far, a very strong justification would be required for demanding the personal information of individual citizens, which in this case comprised twelve seconds of tape. In the same vein, the supplementary opinion of the 22nd report raises concerns that the committee "did not consider the public interest when demanding the production of these audiocassettes." Regardless of the scope of the committee's powers, the Government believes that parliamentary committees and all parliamentarians should, as a general principle and as a matter of convention, exercise restraint in the exercise of their privileges, particularly when the interests of individual citizens are affected.

Those are my comments so far, Mr. Chair, and that will feed over to Mr. Fraser, who was after me, I believe.

• (18250)

The Chair: Mrs. Jansen, did you have your hand up, or were you just giving a wave?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Sure, you can add me.

The Chair: Okay, we have Mr. Fraser, and then Mrs. Jansen.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll do my best to speak to the subamendment that's on the table, which really deals with the issue of the extent to which the full disclosure that the government provided should be part of the evidentiary record going forward. I would suggest that if we're going to proceed with any of the motions on the floor, whether we're dealing with the main motion, the amendment or the subamendment, the very least the professional public service is owed is the opportunity to explain why they've made the redactions they've made, before this committee embarks on a quest to find that their redaction of those documents constitutes a violation of the privileges held by members of this committee.

To maybe lead with the point, effectively what's going on here right now with respect to the subamendment is that those who have indicated their opposition to it have more or less said they want to ensure that the evidentiary record does not include the government's explanation as to its redactions. They instead want to find that those redactions constitute privilege and make sure we bury the evidence so we can't hear the government on why they may have done what they've done in terms of the document disclosure.

I don't think that's the right approach.

Ms. Dzerowicz actually quoted part of Kevin Lamoureux's remarks in the House when this made it to the floor previously. With respect, I believe Mr. Julian also made the point that there's obviously a breach of privilege. The Speaker of the House of Commons found that he could not find a *prima facie* case of privilege. I would therefore dispute the notion that it constituted one, notwithstanding his misplaced confidence.

In his remarks in the chamber, Mr. Lamoureux said the following:

The member argues that the government did not respect the finance committee's motion, while at the same time acknowledges that the government provided the requested documents to the clerk of the committee on August 8, 2020. It was the opposition parties who wanted the law clerk to review these documents for the purposes of additional redactions. Liberal members on the committee agreed to the motion. I want to be clear: The government respected the finance committee's motion and provided the documents on time. The government also provided exactly the information that the committee requested in its motion. The only things excluded were matters of cabinet confidence and national security, which the committee spelled out in the motion.

In preparing the documents in response to the committee motion, public servants respected their statutory obligations under law. The government provided the documents, which were 5,600 pages, on the date requested by the committee. Due to the time needed for the law clerk to do his work, Parliament was prorogued before they were properly given to the committee. As a result, not only did the finance committee cease to exist with prorogation, but the committee did not fully have these documents. It is therefore difficult for the opposition to argue that the government did not comply with the committee's motion, when they were not in a position to take such a determination since they did not have the formal law clerk-approved documents.

Then the portion that Ms. Dzerowicz read out—and this is important, given the nature of the allegation of a violation of privilege—was this:

...I want to make it clear that when the finance committee restarts on October 8 or 9, if it readopts the motion and is not satisfied with the way the government has provided documents to the committee, the government is prepared to work in good faith with the committee to address any concerns that it may have.

There has been an offer made to work with members of the committee. I would suggest that this is a far cry from a violation of privilege.

What I want to draw your attention to, though—and this is really the crux of the subamendment—is whether you're going to include all of the evidence, including specifically the government's explanation as to why certain redactions have been made. I don't understand how someone could oppose the inclusion of the explanation by the government of the very thing that has been alleged to constitute a violation of privilege.

• (18255)

If I take a look at some of the letters that the public servants prepared in response to the committee's motion, we can start with the letter from the Clerk of the Privy Council, which is specifically the kind of document that I now understand the opposition does not want to form part of the evidentiary record going forward.

In a letter on August 7 to David Gagnon, who was the clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance at the time, the Clerk of the Privy Council wrote:

Dear Mr. Gagnon,

I am pleased to provide records from the Privy Council Office (PCO) that were requested under the motion adopted by the Standing Committee on Finance ("the committee") on July 7, 2020 in relation to the committee's study on the WE Charity and the Canada Student Service Grant....

I am also pleased to provide information related to the undertakings that I agreed to at my appearance before the committee on July 21, 2020 which were as follows:

1. A detailed timeline of events.

Attached at Annex 2 is a timeline describing PCO's knowledge of and involvement with the file.

2. A full list of organizations that were consulted on program development.

On Friday July 24, 2020, the Department of Employment and Social Development (ESDC) provided the Committee with a list of the national coalition member organizations of the Canada Service Corps (CSC) who ESDC spoke with in March and April of 2020.

I am told that on April 9, 2020, Department of Finance officials were provided with a report on stakeholder outreach regarding support for students during the COVID-19 context....

3. PCO media monitoring from the dates when Margaret and Alexandre Trudeau had speaking engagements for WE Charity.

I can confirm that PCO Media Monitoring does not have any media content of the public appearances for either Margaret Trudeau or Alexandre Trudeau.

The PCO media centre monitors coverage of the Government of Canada priorities, programs and services and does not monitor media coverage related to the relatives of the Prime Minister or their public appearances.

4. All communications between PMO staff and PCO staff; the Finance Minister's Office and PCO; and the Finance Minister's Office and the Finance Department relating to WE charity contribution agreement and the CSSG

These communications are included in Annex 1 and in the package from the Department of Finance.

5. Names of participants....

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order.

Are we now discussing the documents? I'm confused. If we can just vote on the amendment, we could dispense with this.

The Chair: I think Mr. Fraser is making the point through the letter of why that is important evidence as related to Mr. Gerretsen's subamendment, so it is relevant.

Mr. Fraser, go ahead.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That is precisely why I'm going through some of this evidence. I am trying my best to highlight the context the government did provide, which the opposition now seems intent to exclude from consideration as we move forward.

I forget precisely where I was. I believe I was just picking up on number five:

5. Names of participants, notes, and recording of mid-April meetings between Rachel Wernick, Michelle Kovacevic (and whether PCO personnel were aware of the meeting taking place and participated)

I am told that a teleconference between officials with the Department of Finance and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) was held on the evening of April 18, 2020.

He provides a list of the officials who took part. I'll spare you from listing all of their names. He mentions near the end that:

No officials from PCO participated in the call or were aware of the meeting.

There is no recording of the meeting.

Meeting notes that were taken by Rachel Wernick in an e-mail thread about setting up the call are attached at Annex 4.

6. Due diligence analysis of any financial scrutiny undertaken with regard to the WE charity during this process.

Attached at Annex 5, you will find the detailed explanation prepared by ESDC of the controls embedded in the contribution agreement to ensure stewardship and appropriate use of funds, as well as a brief overview of the typical process used to evaluate projects and recipients.

Further information relating to due diligence that was done by officials in relation to the Canada Student Service Grant is provided in Annex 1 and in the packages that other relevant departments are providing to this committee.

7. The full text of contribution agreement

This document was provided to the Committee by ESDC on Friday July 24, 2020.

The letter goes on. The final page of this particular letter says:

As I noted when I appeared at committee on July 21, 2020, my intent has been to be as expansive as possible in relation to the information that I provide.

The committee's motion stipulates that Cabinet confidences and national security information are to be excluded from the package. No information is being withheld on the grounds of national security, since the information does not so pertain. With respect to Cabinet confidences, you will note that considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant that were Cabinet confidences, is being provided to the Committee. This is in keeping with the public disclosures of information on this matter made by members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. A principled approach was adopted to this information to ensure a non-selective application of the protection afforded by Cabinet confidentiality. As a result, considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant that would otherwise constitute Cabinet confidences is being released. Information not related to the Canada Student Service Grant that constitute cabinet confidences is withheld and identified as not relevant to the request.

In this package, I have also chosen to disclose certain personal information contained in the Privy Council records relating to individuals working in ministers' offices as well as personal information of individuals who work for WE. I have decided to disclose this information because in my view the public interest and disclosure clearly outweighs any invasion of privacy. I have notified the Privacy Commissioner of my intention to disclose this personal information, as I am required to do under the Privacy Act.

I have decided to protect the phone number and email addresses of WE employees other than Craig and Mark Kielburger. In addition, there are a few references to the family members of a public servant and I have chosen to protect that information. In my opinion, the public interest in disclosing this type of personal information does not clearly outweigh the invasion of privacy.

Similarly, because I believe that it is in the public interest to do so, I am prepared to issue a limited waiver of solicitor client privilege as it relates to the information that is being provided by departments in response to this motion and my undertakings.

Lastly, I wish to draw the committee's attention to a Note to File, prepared by Christiane Fox, the Deputy Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs at the Privy Council Office. In that Note to File, Ms. Fox provides a clarification regarding references in two email exchanges (Annex 6).

I trust that the Committee will find the above explanations helpful in its consideration of the enclosed materials.

Sincerely,

Ian Shugart

Clerk of the Privy Council Office

The final portion of the letter that I read said, "I trust that the Committee will find the above explanations helpful in its consideration of the enclosed materials." I am sure Mr. Shugart will be interested to hear that the committee not only is seemingly not finding them helpful, on the opposition side, but is actively trying to exclude that explanation from the evidentiary record going forward.

● (18300)

Perhaps the transmittal letters that provide context for these documents that are now the subject of the motion are the most important documents among those that were disclosed.

As you can see from the Clerk of the Privy Council's letter, more information was actually provided than was requested by the committee. Matters that constitute cabinet confidence were provided, as well as other information. In fact, Mr. Chair, I would suggest that the transmittal letters weren't necessarily requested by the committee, but certainly they have become relevant because they provide context to the rest of the documents that we're discussing, and we shouldn't be trying to hide the government's public explanation of the redactions that, in fact, took place.

The government, frankly, went above and beyond what was required in responding to what the committee asked for. It's not just Mr. Shugart who had a letter that provides a similar kind of context. In fact, the different departments have done something very similar.

If we actually look at the letter from the deputy minister of finance, for which I don't have the date before me—I believe it was also on the same day—I will point out the importance of this particular letter.

He says, "Dear Mr. Gagnon"—again, sent to the clerk—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm not one to interrupt, but I don't see Mr. Poilievre on screen again. He hasn't been on screen for a while. Is he all right? Is everything okay? Is something wrong?

The Chair: I don't believe that is a point of order.

We'll go back to you, Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Sure. I'm back to the deputy minister of finance's transmittal letter, which is being sought to be excluded from the evidentiary record going forward. The deputy minister wrote to Mr. Gagnon, who was then the clerk of the Standing Committee on Finance:

Dear Mr. Gagnon:

On behalf of the Department of Finance, I am transmitting the attached documents to you in response to the motion adopted by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance on July 7, 2020....

He copied the text of the motion before the committee in that letter:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Committee order that any contracts concluded with We Charity and Me to We, all briefing notes—

● (18305)

The Chair: Mr. Fraser, I hate to interrupt you, but the translators are having a little difficulty with the speed you are going at, so if you could just slow down a smidgen....

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I think we need to start over, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, just slow down a smidgen, and we'll be all right.

Mr. Sean Fraser: If we wanted to give them a real challenge, I would do my best to do this in French and see if the translators can make me sound sensible. I think it will take me a few more years of practice.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to our translators. I'll do my best to speak at a pace that is perhaps easier to translate.

Picking up from the motion, I'll carry on from roughly where I thought I was:

...from senior officials prepared for or sent to any Minister regarding the design and creation of the Canada Student Service Grant, as well as any written correspondence and records of other correspondence with We Charity and Me to We from March 2020 be provided to the Committee no later than August 8, 2020; that matters of Cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request; and that any redactions necessary, including to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons.

We're going back to the deputy minister's text in his letter rather than the quote of the motion now. It reads:

Documents are also enclosed as part of this package related to the undertakings of the Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to Cabinet, Mr. Ian Shugart, further to his testimony to the Committee on July 21, 2020.

The Committee's motion stipulates that Cabinet confidences and national security information are to be excluded from the package. No information is being withheld on the grounds of national security....

The same was true with Mr. Shugart's letter.

I will continue:

...since the information does not so pertain. With respect to Cabinet confidences, you will note that considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant contained in Cabinet confidences is being provided to the Committee. This is in keeping with the public disclosures of information on this matter made by members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. A principled approach was taken with respect to this information to ensure a non-selective application of the protection afforded by Cabinet confidentiality. As a result, considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant that would otherwise be protected as Cabinet confidence is being released. Information not related to the Canada Student Service Grant that is contained in Cabinet confidences is withheld and identified as not relevant to the request.

With respect to personal information, the department is obliged to protect such information under the Privacy Act unless the individuals to whom it relates consent to its disclosure, or disclosure is otherwise authorized in certain specified circumstances or the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs any resulting invasion of privacy.

It comes back to the point I made at the outset of this meeting, that there is, in fact, a natural tension that exists where you have the committee demanding one thing and the public service being subjected to legislation, including the Privacy Act, where things are not as clear as we might like them to be.

In any event, the letter continues:

Reasonable efforts were made by the department to obtain consent. Where consent was not given, the department found that the public interest in sharing the information with the Committee outweighed any invasion of the individual's privacy. As such, disclosure is being made pursuant to subparagraph 8(2)(m)(i) of the Privacy Act. As required by that Act, the Privacy Commissioner was informed of our decision. In very limited cases, personal information was redacted from these records as consent was not obtained from the individuals concerned nor was the department able to conclude that the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighed the invasion of the individuals' privacy. The type of personal information that remains protected consists of the identity of unrelated third parties where their opinion or view relates to an unrelated matter to this inquiry, as well as personal e-mail addresses and phone numbers.

As I referred to earlier in the meeting as well:

With respect to pages 190 and 194-213, further to consultation with the originating stakeholder, authorization to disclose this information was not given as it constitutes personal information as defined under the Privacy Act. Furthermore, this information is considered proprietary to the third party. The contents of this information is not relevant to the funding agreement or the Student Grant Program therefore, it has been severed in its entirety.

That would explain certain redactions made at those page numbers.

● (18310)

For clarity, note that there were a series of e-mails between Finance officials and staff in the Minister of Finance's Office regarding next steps. Of note, an email from the Minister's Office to Michelle Kovacevic on April 18 lists a series of items for the department to follow-up on as well as some items "WE" will address. In this instance, "WE" is a typographical error and refers to the Minister's Office, not WE Charity.

Also of note, the Annex 4 dated April 19 contains an error that was corrected verbally in an April 21 briefing with the Minister of Finance. While page 6 of the note references a cost estimate of \$0.8 billion for the proposal plus potential administration costs, pages 7, 8, and 9 recommend setting aside up to \$1 billion (\$900 million for the initiative and an additional \$100 million for implementation and associated costs). The correct recommendation (\$900 million) is reflected in the April 21 version of the note, also enclosed in the package.

Finally, following the April 21 briefing, a draft Ministerial Decision Page (enclosed as the first page of the April 21, 2020 version of the note) was prepared and routed to the Finance Minister's Office for review and approval by the Minister of Finance. This Ministerial Decision Page was not formally approved by the Minister of Finance. A formal decision was later made by the Prime Minister and is reflected in the package.

Yours sincerely, Paul Rochon, Deputy Minister of the Department of Finance.

Again, we're seeing in these letters that members of the committee are seeking to have excluded from consideration important context that actually puts into context the very specific reasons redactions would have been made. We're seeing an example of openness in divulging more information, in fact, than the committee requested when you look specifically to those items that would ordinarily be subject to cabinet confidences.

Mr. Chair, it's not just one or two departments. Several of them have included these kinds of letters.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, Ms. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I'm just concerned that the reading into the record of the documents... Although I love Mr. Fraser's dulcet tones, and it's lovely to hear him read, if you look in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*:

The Chair can curtail prolonged debate by limiting Members' speeches to points which have not already been made.... The freedom of debate enjoyed by Members does not extend to the repetition of arguments that have already been heard.

In the context of the legislative process, this...restriction applies to the Members' remarks only within the same stage of debate on a bill. Arguments advanced at one stage may [also] be legitimately be represented at another.

Finally, the rule against repetition has been used by Speakers in various other ways to assist the House in making efficient use of its time. Speakers have ruled against the tedious reading of letters even when they were used in support of an argument;

As I said, at the rate we're going I'm afraid Mr. Fraser is going to end up reading all 5,000 pages from the documents into the record. I wonder whether we could just go to a vote.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, on that point of order—

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: —what Mr. Fraser has been reading is not repetitious. He is reading in the important parts of those letters and I think it's important for that to be on the record. If Ms. Jansen's point is that it's repetitious, it isn't.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I think my point is that we are now reading the documents into the record. We are just saying, let's vote, let's move on, let's get it over and done with. That's what we would love, and to get back to work.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I think the point is that Mr. Fraser is putting it on the record so that we have it in the committee blues, so that it's on the record there.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On the same point of order?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I was going to say that it's perfectly fine for Ms. Jansen to interject, but I don't see the relevance here. I don't think that Mr. Fraser is repeating, he is making a point. Now, he is using a number of examples—

● (18315)

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: On this point of order I wonder if the chair could just make a ruling.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I was in the middle of a point of order.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: And so was I. I'm not sure who sets the precedence.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I thought you were finished.

The Chair: We'll hear everybody on the point of order.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Yes, I finished that point.

Related, though—

The Chair: No, that's not a point of order.

I'll go to Ms. Jansen to see whether she wants in on her point of order—

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Yes, please. Thank you.

The Chair: —and then I'll come back to Mr. Fraser.

Go ahead, Ms. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I'm just wondering if you could rule on that point of order so that we can move on.

The Chair: I—

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Chair, before you offer a ruling on the point of order, my understanding was that there would be an opportunity to debate the appropriateness of the point of order before you do offer a ruling. If I may offer an explanation, the point of my going through these letters and offering commentary on them is to demonstrate that the transmittal letters, which the members who are opposing the subamendment on the floor are trying to exclude from the evidentiary record before this committee.... In order to determine whether those letters should be excluded from the record formally in our subamendment, I do think it's relevant for the committee to actually hear what those letters said. I can't imagine something that would be more relevant to a discussion about transmittal letters than the transmittal letters.

The Chair: I—

Mr. Pat Kelly: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: The substance of this is not transmittal letters. Also in the procedure and practice...it's not merely repetition that are grounds upon which the chair may rule against excessive reading into the record. If doing so is vexatious in design, as this clearly is, to simply avoid a vote, the chair may rule it out of order. I bring those points to your attention.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order, too, Mr. Chair, but—

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: —it's not on this point. I guess you would have to rule on that.

The Chair: Okay. It's not on this point. The letters that Mr. Fraser has been reading are really relative to the subamendment, and I haven't heard.... Although they go to somewhat the same point, there's different information in each letter that goes to the relevance of the subamendment, so I'm going to allow it.

Mr. Fraser, it's back to you—

Mr. Sean Fraser: I believe Mr. Gerretsen actually had a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, we have Mr. Gerretsen on a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I know that you've ruled on the necessity of the members' screens to be on, and I respect that, but I just want

to know what you deem, Mr. Chair, to be a quorum. For example, if we were sitting in a committee room and people started actually leaving the room, you would know if we no longer had a quorum. When people are turning off their video cameras, we don't know if they're still there listening, or if Mr. Poilievre has gone to Starbucks, or what's going on. How are you determining, if enough screens go off, whether or not you still have a quorum to continue the meeting, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: I would determine it based on the people who I can see, and we haven't been—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: So if all—

The Chair: —below that number yet.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Oh, he has his Starbucks. He came back with his Starbucks. He could have brought one for everybody, at least.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order, too. Is it going to be all right—

The Chair: Just hold on, Ms. Jansen.

Are you done your point of order...?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: It's on the same thing.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Is it to my point of order, Mr. Chair?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Yes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay, great, because I'd like to hear a ruling on that.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I would like to know whether or not bathroom breaks are all right if we turn off the video.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Jansen, for a very short time.... When I need a bathroom break we're going to suspend for three minutes.

In any event, on Mr. Gerretsen's point, I certainly would prefer if people would leave their cameras on so that we can see that the members are present. When we're at an official committee meeting in person in Ottawa, the people are there, and if they leave the room it's quite easy to see who's there and who's not. All I see in some cases—in this case—is that the names are up, but I really don't know if they're present or not.

• (18320)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Just to that point—

The Chair: If the pictures on the screen drop below what is needed for quorum, then—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: —the meeting would have to stop.

For clarity on that point of order, Mr. Chair, if, for example, just hypothetically speaking, Mr. Poilievre was not on the screen, and, hypothetically speaking, all the Liberal members dropped off, then you wouldn't have quorum and you'd have to end the meeting. Is that correct?

The Chair: I would have to check the parliamentary rules and get clarification.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Then we can go to a vote.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay, I just wanted to check on that. Thank you.

The Chair: Now we're back to Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I had just finished going through some of the information included in the letter from the deputy minister of finance that the amendment to the main motion would exclude and that is the subject of the subamendment.

The next letter that was submitted in the government's disclosure package, which would not be adopted before this committee under current circumstances, came from the deputy minister of innovation, science and economic development. It was sent to Mr. Gagnon. Perhaps I'll spare some committee members the pain of hearing this next part again, which is repetitious. It began with copying and pasting the language from our July 7, 2020, motion, which I previously read into the record. Ms. Jansen, I'll spare you a few minutes of the voice you've indicated you enjoy so much.

In any event, after the copy of the motion, the text of the letter reads:

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada has retrieved all records from within the Department that respond to the Committee's motion. You will find the results of that search enclosed for the Committee's consideration.

It should be noted, however, that in the preparation of this package, care was taken to obtain consent to disclose certain personal information from exempt staff referenced in the material and, in collaboration with other government departments, the staff from WE Charity in accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act.

In addition, the Committee's motion stipulates that Cabinet confidences and national security information are to be excluded from the package. No information is being withheld on the grounds of national security, since the information does not so pertain. With respect to Cabinet confidences, you will note that information on the Canada Student Service Grant that was a Cabinet confidence is being provided to the Committee. This is in keeping with the public disclosures of information on this matter made by members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. A principled approach was adopted to this information to ensure a non-selective application of the protection afforded by Cabinet confidentiality. Information not related to the Canada Student Service Grant that constitutes a Cabinet confidence is withheld and identified as not relevant to the request.

This came from Simon Kennedy. ISED, too, made the point that they were providing disclosure in accordance with what the committee had asked. They explained, in instances where there was differentiation, why that may not be the case, and, in fact, explained that documents that would otherwise have been subjected to cabinet confidences were nevertheless disclosed.

If we look at the letter from the secretary of the Treasury Board, also sent to Mr. Gagnon, it started out similarly. It reads:

In response to the motion adopted by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance (FINA) on July 7, 2020 concerning any contracts concluded with We Charity and Me to We, all briefing notes, memos and emails, including the contribution agreement between the government and the organization, from senior officials prepared for or sent to any Minister regarding the design and creation of the Canada Student Service Grant, as well as any written correspondence and records of other correspondence with We Charity and Me to We from March 2020, please find enclosed bilingual copies of Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat records.

It should be noted, that in the preparation of this package, care was taken to obtain consent to disclose certain personal information from relevant exempt staff referenced in the material.

Similar to the other letters, this one from the Treasury Board indicates:

The Committee's motion stipulates that Cabinet confidences and national security information are to be excluded from the package. No information is being withheld on the grounds of national security, since the information does not so pertain. With respect to Cabinet confidences, you will note that considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant that were Cabinet confidences is being provided to the Committee. This is in keeping with the public disclosures of information on this matter made by members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. A principled approach was adopted to this information to ensure a non-selective application of the protection afforded by Cabinet confidentiality. As a result, considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant that would otherwise constitute Cabinet confidences is being released. Information not related to the Canada Student Service Grant that constitutes Cabinet confidences is withheld and identified as not relevant to the request.

This same principled approach was also applied to the second enclosed package of TBS documents, which is provided in support of the commitment by the Clerk of the Privy Council to provide additional information on due diligence on the Canada Student Service Grant subsequent to his appearance on July 21, 2020. Additionally, because I believe that it is in the public interest to do so, this package includes information being made available as a result of a limited waiver of solicitor client privilege as it relates to the information that is being provided by Employment and Social Development Canada.

● (18325)

While many TBS employees continue to work virtually, guided by public health measures and focused on curbing the spread of COVID-19, these two packages provide, to the best of my knowledge, as of August 7, 2020, the TBS documents in response to the above-noted request for production of papers and due diligence line of inquiry.

We're seeing a pattern here. One is that these transmittal letters, which are the subject of the subamendment, provide the necessary context. They refer to the committee's request for information from the different government departments.

These transmittal letters, which would not be part of the evidentiary record going forward under the proposed motion or the proposed amendment to the main motion, nevertheless continue to drive home the point that we have made redactions in accordance with what the committee has requested and in fact, particularly when it comes to cabinet confidences, we have nevertheless disclosed material that would ordinarily be subject to Crown privilege or cabinet confidence. There are various other departments as well, Mr. Chair.

I just finished with TBS. If we look at the letter from the deputy minister of ESDC and the senior ADM of ESDC and chief operating officer for Service Canada, as well as the senior associate deputy minister of diversity, inclusion and youth, that letter makes similar points. This evidence shouldn't be excluded from the record because it provides important context. They, too, wrote on August 8, to then clerk Mr. Gagnon of the Standing Committee on Finance.

They said:

Dear Mr. Gagnon:

On behalf of Canadian Heritage and Employment and Social Development Canada, please find enclosed, electronically, all records, in the original language of drafting, requested under the Motion for production of papers related to the Canada Student Service Grant (CSSG) and the We Charity and Me to We, adopted by the Standing Committee on Finance...on July 7, 2020. Due to the significant volume of documents requiring translation, a partial package containing the translated records is here enclosed. Over 400 translators have been working on the documents for some time and we will provide the rest as soon as possible.

As discussed during Committee testimony, Canadian Heritage, with support from Employment and Social Development Canada and Service Canada, are working diligently to ensure that students negatively affected by COVID-19 receive much-needed support as they seek to further their studies in a time of reduced employment opportunities.

As you will see from the enclosed documents, the approach adopted by the Departments is to disclose as much information as possible within the scope of the Motion, to further the Committee's breadth and depth of understanding of the design and creation of the CSSG.

The Committee's motion stipulates that Cabinet confidences and national security information are to be excluded from the package. No information is being withheld on the grounds of national security, since the information does not so pertain. With respect to Cabinet confidences, you will note that considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant that were Cabinet confidences, is being provided to the Committee. This is in keeping with the public disclosures....

I won't repeat that portion because it simply goes on to make the exact same point as the previous letters that in fact, because the committee requested national security and cabinet confidences be respected, the government nevertheless took the step in its redactions to make public certain measures that in these transmittal letters they've indicated their desire to keep public matters that would ordinarily be subjected to cabinet confidentiality.

The letter continued after that same paragraph we had seen before:

Recognizing the significant public interest we have included relevant personal information in the collection but not personal opinions, in accordance with s.37 of the *Department of Employment and Social Development Act* and s.8(2)(m) of the *Privacy Act*. We have communicated this decision to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. Similarly, because we believe that it is in the public interest to do so, we are prepared to issue a limited waiver of solicitor client privilege as it relates to the information that is being provided by Employment and Social Development Canada.

The information enclosed consists of four parts:

1. The Contribution Agreement signed between the Government of Canada and the WE Charity Foundation;
2. A list containing the names of Government of Canada representatives who received a proposal from WE Charity for funding to deliver a 3-month youth summer service program and a 12-month youth entrepreneurship program for youth 16 to 29;
3. A set of documents that illustrate key moments in the design of the CSSG; and
4. A larger collection of communications, documents and meeting notes connected with the development and decision-making processes for the CSSG.

In addition to the request from the Committee, Canadian Heritage and Employment and Social Development Canada have also received a significant number of Access to Information requests related to the CSSG. Some of these requests go beyond the scope of the Committee's Motion. We will make the Committee aware of ATIP releases related to the CSSG as they occur.

We trust that the Committee finds the enclosed material useful for its work.

● (18330)

That was signed by the deputy minister of ESDC, Graham Flack; the senior associate deputy minister of ESDC and chief operating officer for Service Canada, Lori MacDonald; and the senior associate deputy minister of diversity, inclusion and youth at Canadian Heritage, Gina Wilson.

As it's been made clear, Mr. Chair, by these transmittal letters following the adoption of the motion of the finance committee, our public service worked really hard to gather the relevant documents and provide the committee with literally more than 5,000 pages.

As has been noted, the motion adopted by the committee stipulated that matters of cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request, and that any redaction necessary, including to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose personal information may be included in the documents as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel at the House of Commons. The exemptions were applied by our non-partisan public service. Deputies at ESDC stated in their transmittal letter, which is the subject of the subamendment, that the approach that was adopted was to disclose as much information as possible within the scope of the committee's motion. No exclusions were made on the grounds of national security.

The other subject about which the committee said, "government, we don't want documents from you" was on cabinet confidences. The government decided, nevertheless, where it was appropriate to waive cabinet confidences and disclose those documents, even though the committee never asked for them. A substantial amount of information that would normally be under cabinet confidence was, in fact, provided to the committee, information that would fall under cabinet confidence but was not related to the Canada student service grant and therefore—

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: On a point of order, is this not debate now? I don't know; he seems to be debating that this is all important—

The Chair: On your point of order, no, I don't believe it is debate. I believe he is making the argument as to why these letters are relevant to the subamendment. I expect he's speaking in favour of the subamendment and why other members should agree with him and see these documents as important to be tabled.

● (18335)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Chair, may I comment on this point of order?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Samson.

While I'm on this point of order of Ms. Jansen's, I would say, to the benefit of the question raised by Mr. Gerretsen.... We all know that quorum is a majority, but what would happen, if I do not see a majority of members in person on my screen, is that I would have to suspend until such time as the members come back. It wouldn't be an adjournment; it would be a suspension until we again had quorum. So that point is cleared up.

Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Chair.

On this point of order, which is really important, I want to thank Mr. Fraser for the important information he's providing the committee and Canadians. It's essential. That's why we want to make sure that all the information.... Those letters that he's making reference to are providing us with key information in this debate.

What I find quite amazing is that here the opposition is willing to limit the information that is provided on this subamendment, but with their initial motion they were complaining they didn't have all the information. I don't know where they're going. Either they want all the information so that we can take a decision or they don't want all the information. This subamendment—

The Chair: I believe you're straying into considerable debate there, Mr. Samson.

I will go back to Mr. Fraser, who had the floor.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As much as I admire my fellow Nova Scotian and colleague, that may be debate. Perhaps he'll want to jump into the debate when I wrap up.

To Ms. Jansen's point—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will compliment Mr. Fraser and the person who prepared his presentation. I don't agree with it, but it is carefully prepared.

The Chair: I don't believe that's a point of order—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: A point of order.

The Chair: —but I'll bet you he takes the compliment.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I was just going to point out that it's not a point of order.

The Chair: Well, you're correct.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I've now gotten compliments from the NDP, and from Ms. Jansen on the tone of my voice, and Mr. Fragiskatos jumped to my defence. If only we had a Green Party member here, and of course our representative from the Bloc, whom I don't see because it's darkened, but I'll wait; perhaps I'll receive one in French before the meeting is done.

Mr. Chair, look, I will wrap up here. To Ms. Jansen's point, this is very much debate, but this is debate on the subamendment, which I think is appropriate.

The crux of my point is this. The transmittal letters are the subject of this subamendment. As it stands, under the main motion or the proposed amendment, the transmittal letters and other documents that specifically explain why the government made the redactions it did are being sought to be excluded by members of the opposition. I think if this motion goes anywhere, it should include the government's explanation before this committee declares the government to have violated its privilege as a result of the redactions it has made.

Specifically, the motion before the committee, as I've repeated a number of times, as was pointed out, to address Mr. Julian's point, to the people who prepared my presentation...are the non-partisan public servants who've written those letters that are sought to be ex-

cluded from the committee's record right now. But the points made by each of those letters are largely these. The committee never asked for anything that was subject to cabinet confidence or that would compromise national security. To the extent that any redactions touched on cabinet confidence or national security, those are really not an issue for this committee. In fact, there were no redactions made on the basis of national security. We know that because the transmittal letters say so. The committee may not formally know that if they don't include the transmittal letters in the record.

The second category of documents that were not subject to a request by this committee is the category of cabinet confidences. Similarly, if the argument is that a failure to divulge cabinet confidence constitutes a violation of this committee's privilege, there would be no basis...and in fact I don't think that would be disputed. Nevertheless, the government actually did disclose material that would ordinarily be subject to cabinet confidence.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: As a point of order, are we not again entering into debate? The idea was that you would receive unredacted documents at the committee that would go to the law clerk to get redacted. That didn't happen. Now you're debating I don't know what.

• (18340)

Mr. Sean Fraser: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order, as well, and I would like to address that point of order.

The Chair: I'll address the point of order. Was it Mr. Fraser who came in on the point of order? Then I'll go to Mr. Gerretsen. Then I'll tell you my thoughts.

Mr. Sean Fraser: In fact, Mr. Chair, this is debate. I'm not speaking on a point of order. I'm speaking in the debate on the subamendment. I think my debate would be appropriate. I can't disagree with Ms. Jansen. It's very much debate.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I was going to point out the same thing. Mr. Fraser is not speaking to a point of order right now, Mr. Chair. He's speaking to the actual amendment to the amendment. I don't know where the confusion is, but it's debate.

The Chair: I fully understand that. He is speaking to the subamendment and summing up his points.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I really am, I promise.

The final point is the other category of documents that would have been made subject to redactions by the law clerk. Anything that was redacted based on national security or cabinet confidence would properly be redacted because the committee never requested those documents.

The second grouping of categories were things like privacy, personal information. The committee has asked that the law clerk make those redactions. The independent civil service points out in their transmittal letters that certain committee members are trying to exclude from the record, that in fact they have certain obligations that they are required to adhere to, including those under the Privacy Act. They explained the process by which they made decisions as to when and whether they should redact those pieces of information. As far as I can tell, the redactions that would have been made under that heading relate to things like personal information on family members of people who may have been involved in some of the decision-making—personal phone numbers, email addresses—but not the contents of correspondence for people who had no say in this.

At the end of the day, my point on the subamendment is that if we're going to have this go anywhere, the transmittal letters give explicit direction as to what process the government implemented and what factors they considered when they were making those redactions. I think that's relevant to the work of this committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next on my list I have Ms. Jansen.

Go ahead, Ms. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Sorry, I have no idea where we are now. Are we debating?

The Chair: We are debating the subamendment, which is the amendment to the amendment. That's where we are at the moment on the transmittal letters.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Okay. I'm just hoping—because it's just going on and on and on—let's get to a vote. I think that would be awesome.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Do I see any others on the list? Can we go to a vote?

I see Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I know Ms. Jansen is anxious to go to a vote, but there are still matters that need to be put on the record in relation to the amendment to Mr. Kelly's initial amendment.

It's been a long day for all of us; forgive me if I read at a pace that is not a normal pace. I'm going to try to get through something that, as I said, needs to be put on the record here. I'm not intending to read slowly, Mr. Chair, but when you're staring at a screen for hours on end, your eyes are likely to play tricks on you. If not tricks, it's a painful experience to look at a screen for hours on end; let's put it that way.

In any case, Mr. Chair, colleagues, I want to offer all of you a bit of a deep dive on the documents that were provided to opposition parties and to detail how the redactions completely adhere to the motion that was tabled before this committee. I also want to point out that this work was undertaken by the world-class, non-partisan,

professional public service we have, who have helped us in such incredible ways through the COVID-19 crisis, and well beyond that, in accordance with their various obligations.

Let me start by reflecting on the motion that was tabled before this committee, which reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Committee order that any contracts concluded with We Charity and Me to We, all briefing notes, memos and emails from senior officials prepared for or sent to any Minister regarding the design and creation of the Canada Student Service Grant, as well as any written correspondence and records of other correspondence with We Charity and Me to We from March 2020 be provided to the Committee no later than August 8, 2020;

These next points are particularly relevant here:

that matters of Cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request; and that any redactions necessary, including to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons.

That was the motion. Let me return to the substance of my remarks.

This deep dive begins with the documents provided by the Privy Council Office.

As an example, Mr. Chair, let's start with page 49. I'm going to list pages, Mr. Chair, that might not align with what's been received most recently, but in any case, it doesn't take away anything from the substance of my remarks here.

● (18345)

The Chair: This is relevant to the subamendment, is it?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Yes, it is, Mr. Chair, and I'll be making that argument throughout.

As I said, let's start with page 49 of the PCO document release. There are a number of programs listed that are unrelated to the Canada student service grant that have nothing to do with the motion at hand. The committee explicitly did not ask for this. However, in keeping with the motion, items related to the CSSG were released.

Next there's an email from Mr. Kielburger, which is on pages 78 to 79 of the PCO document release. It's from Mr. Kielburger to Ms. Christiane Fox at PCO. The only redaction present is a private citizen's email address; this is Mr. Kielburger's assistant. This is private information and has no relevance whatsoever to this process, per the terms of the motion at the committee.

Again, this is all about giving context, all about relating to the issues we are discussing, Mr. Chair, and I think a fulsome understanding of the wider context is—

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: On a point of order, I'm a wee bit confused again. Sorry.

I thought you didn't have the documents, but now you're reading from the documents. Is that correct?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: The member is a new member to the committee, Mr. Chair. That much is—

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: You are reading from the documents you said you didn't have before? Is that correct?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: No, I'm sorry, Ms. Jansen. You're misunderstanding. I'm not reading from the documents that you're raising here. I'm giving context to the entire discussion, so let me continue.

Let me turn your attention to pages 105 to 110 of the PCO release.

A number of programs listed are unrelated to the CSSG and have nothing to do with the motion at hand. The committee explicitly did not ask for this, but still, where relevant, if there was mention of the CSSG, it was disclosed. An example is on page 107. Documents like this are a prime example of the documents that Mr. Poilievre was waving around, as you remember, many weeks ago in what some have termed, quite correctly, a stunt at a press conference. Items requested by the committee were related to the Canada student service grant, and this cabinet confidence document, I might add, was released with all information related to the CSSG contained therein. The non-partisan professional public service redacted matters that were not related to the committee motion, which was not only to be expected but was also both appropriate and prudent.

Another example, Mr. Chair, is on pages 189-190 of the PCO release. We are looking at an email between Rachel Wernick at ESDC and Ms. Tara Shannon from PCO. As the motion expressly stated, unrelated cabinet confidences were removed. As well, Ms. Wernick's cellphone number was removed. I hope we can all agree it wouldn't be appropriate for that number to be public. That is absolutely vital. The more we push this, the more I worry that certain members of the committee might not take that into account, but I'll leave that aside. In fact, the motion that was passed by this committee requesting these documents asked for this type of redaction to be made.

Again, here on page 191 of the PCO release, we have another email between Ms. Wernick and Ms. Shannon. Again, only a cellphone number has been removed. Yet another example is on pages 192-193 of the PCO release. There's another redaction to protect the cellphone number. I think we can all agree that the removal of such information is reasonable. Again, this is all adding context to the discussion here at hand, Mr. Chair. I find it interesting that while the public is battling a second wave of COVID-19, my opposition colleagues are chasing down private cellphone numbers.

Let's look at pages 219-221 of the PCO document that was released. Frankly, this is a truly extraordinary document, a document that would rarely be released, a document that we would never have seen released under the Harper government. The synopsis of an entire cabinet meeting has been made public. Obviously, there are items protected by cabinet confidence; however, items related to the CSSG were still disclosed. Who knows what other topics were discussed? It could be national security issues. We don't know. It could be cabinet confidences that are unrelated to any of this and that should be protected. This is determined by the Clerk of the Privy Council and referenced in his transmittal letter.

Frankly, Chair, there are reasons that documents like this are not normally public until long after a government's mandates have ended, ensuring the confidence of cabinet deliberations essential to the

peace, order and good governance of the country, which my colleagues across the aisle always talk about, I believe sincerely. Cabinet confidences are essential to responsible government, and in an extraordinary move the clerk waived privilege of the sections of this document as they related to the cabinet discussion on the CSSG. Cabinet confidences are among our country's most protected information, and here they are for everyone to read.

My opposition colleagues are not satisfied with only seeing the relevant information in question that they asked for in their motion—

• (18350)

The Chair: I need to interrupt you for a minute, Mr. Fragiskatos. Are these documents that you're reading from—I can't quite tell—related to the subamendment that we're debating now, or more related to the main motion or the amendment to the main motion? I could clearly tell that what Mr. Fraser was putting into the record was related to documents in the subamendment, but I'm not sure on these, so try to keep it relevant to the subamendment you're on, and if not, try to move back to documents that are relevant to the subamendment.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that they are relevant because they are related to the subamendment in highlighting the issues that are required to be reconciled by the discrepancies. What he's reading into the record directly speaks to the amendment to the amendment, or the subamendment.

The Chair: We'll monitor it and keep watch.

Just hold on, Mr. Fragiskatos. I believe I have a point of order from Mr. Fraser. Mr. Fraser, I don't know where your mike is. It's doing the same trick with me.

Pat, go ahead.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Chair, I would bring it to your attention that the remarks we heard sounded suspiciously like an argument already made. They were almost word for word from Mr. Fraser's earlier remarks. We could check the transcript. I would hope we are not repeating arguments that have already been made.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Fragiskatos can take that into consideration as well.

You're on, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, I'm simply adding greater detail and, as we heard from Mr. Gerretsen in his point of order, it is all related to the subamendment, because what's articulated are issues that are required to be reconciled, discrepancies that exist, and it's important also for that perspective to be brought forward for all of the committee and for the clerk as well.

Everything is intended to put context in place. I don't believe there has been any breach here or anything along those lines, but I will continue in this vein, and if colleagues wish to point anything out.... I was trying very hard to follow Mr. Fraser, and I believe I did, but it is not my intent here to repeat anything that my colleague has already put on the record.

I've lost my place here, Mr. Chair. I'm not complaining about the point of order that was raised, but let me....

● (18355)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Start from the beginning.

The Chair: While you are looking for your place, I am going to give a heads-up to Ms. Dzerowicz that she is next on the list.

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Here's yet another example. It's on pages 192 to 193 of the PCO release. It's another redaction to protect a cellphone number. We can all agree that the removal of such information is reasonable. It's interesting that while we are battling a second wave of COVID-19, my opposition colleagues are choosing to chase down private cellphone numbers. I do remember reading that already in to the record, Mr. Chair. Let me just skip down here.

On page 268 of the PCO release, we have an exchange between Ms. Wernick and Mr. Philip Jennings from PCO. In it, they are discussing an attachment that Ms. Wernick has forwarded to PCO. I know the opposition has a lot of interest in Ms. Wernick, but the only item redacted here is her cellphone number. I don't think they need that, Mr. Chair.

Here's another example. On pages 348 to 352 of the PCO release, we have another one of Mr. Poilievre's fully blacked out documents, if you can remember that famous press conference. If Mr. Poilievre were a sitting minister of the Crown—the overall result he is maybe looking for from all of this—he would have access to this entire document. However, seeing as how he is not, and following the motion passed at this committee, we have below the relevant portions of the document as they relate to the CSSG. In an extraordinary move, the relevant parties in this document were unredacted by the Clerk of the Privy Council.

Items that are not relevant to the committee's motion requesting documents were redacted by the non-partisan professional public service. The redactions were for good reason. For example, many items were likely on the agenda of the cabinet meeting as matters of national security and sensitive procurement that would hurt the government's ability to act in the national interest, matters that if released could be damaging to Canada. I don't know about my opposition colleagues, but I am always in favour of protecting Canada's reputation and national security before anything else, Mr. Chair.

These redactions clearly strike the right balance between releasing relevant information and ensuring necessary cabinet confidences are protected.

Mr. Chair, turning to a very important document, the actual funding agreement between WE and the Government of Canada, which is on pages 364 to 380 of the PCO release, again we see that the professional public service redacted personal contact information.

That is it. Nothing more. This entire funding agreement is public, not redacted, and available for public and parliamentary scrutiny.

I think it bears repeating that while we sit here discussing the redactions of private cellphone numbers, the second wave of COVID-19 continues to rage through parts of Canada. While our focus should be on assisting Canadians to get through the second wave and conducting pre-budget consultations to see how we can help to build back better, we are focusing on missing phone numbers, and again I remind my colleagues that there is a standing order pushing us, forcing us, to commence a pre-budget consultation.

Below is a Finance Canada proposal—not below; excuse me. Let me talk about a Finance Canada proposal on pages 394 to 401 in the PCO release. It discusses the implementation of the CSSG in full unredacted detail. The only information removed is again the private cellphone number of a public servant.

Next we have a very interesting document, Mr. Chair. I think my colleagues will find this quite interesting. We are looking here at page 404 of the PCO release, which is an invitation to a meeting to discuss the WE contract. The redaction is of a conference call login ID. These are all simple things that need to be redacted for privacy purposes.

From the PCO release, pages 417 to 419, we have cabinet confidence documents stamped “Limited distribution”, a document called a “Memorandum to the Prime Minister” seeking his decision regarding the CSSG and other matters.

As is noted in the motion from this committee, matters related to the CSSG were requested, and here we have them released. However, items unrelated to any confidences were redacted, as we expressly permitted by the motion that was agreed to by members of this committee.

Next there is a very interesting email in the PCO release on pages 426 to 427, an email from Ms. Rosanne MacKay at PCO to one of her colleagues, Alain Beaudoin. The topic is a cabinet meeting note from the Prime Minister. It's not unusual whatsoever. The redaction, again, is a public servant's cellphone number. There's a pattern here, Mr. Chair.

Let's take a look at other pages, 428 to 432, from PCO. Again, we have a document with a conference call ID redacted, an item that is clearly not related to the CSSG. These items were redacted by the professional and non-partisan public service.

● (18400)

Below we have another release that I'd like to talk about, further to my comments, on pages 433 to 434. Again, what is my opposition colleague's complaint? It is a public servant's cellphone number. What exactly is the opposition hoping to find with the cellphone number of public servants?

Another redacted page in the PCO release is page 456. Mr. Poilievre seems to take issue with a redaction on this page. I see that he's present at the meeting, or at least his screen is on, but he's not there to hear this. In any case, I'll continue by saying that we're looking at an email among public servants who are involved in the CSSG file. I'm sure colleagues on the other side would really decipher this email if they wanted to. I'll give them a hint. The email is of a private citizen.

There are more examples. Just for the information of Canadians watching, we are focused on getting you through this pandemic. That is our obligation now, and I think that will come to define what we do as parliamentarians in the weeks and months ahead. I hope that this committee is allowed to engage in that work. Unfortunately, we continue to see opposition colleagues focused on cellphone numbers of professional public servants.

Here's more from the PCO release. On pages 491 to 495, we have an email from Mr. Kielburger to Ms. Fox at PCO. The entire content and attached information from Mr. Kielburger are included. There are no redactions on content, other than the names of private citizens and personal contact information, which is not at all relevant.

Now let's turn our attention to the documents provided by the Department of Finance. I'll add that they've done an amazing job. They came to committee time and again in the previous session to answer committee members' questions about the pandemic, and I'm sure that will continue if this committee is allowed to do its work.

On pages 1 to 3 of the release, once again, all content related to the CSSG is present. The only redactions relate to third parties not associated with the program. Let's take a look at pages 51 to 54 of the Department of Finance release. We're looking at an email between Ms. Kovacevic from the Department of Finance and minister's staff. The content is all here, all visible for public and parliamentary scrutiny. The only redactions present are of cellphone numbers, information that is not relevant and should not be in the public realm.

In keeping with my opposition colleagues' predisposition to light their hair on fire, if I could put it that way, over what they call unreasonable redactions, let's turn our attention to page 189 of the Department of Finance release. We have a meeting invitation, with all information visible. The redactions are a conference call ID. I'd love to hear my opposition colleagues explain why this redaction is at all inappropriate. The redaction was completed by the non-partisan and professional public service, who, as I have mentioned throughout my remarks here, were following all relevant guidelines to ensure that the documents conformed with the committee's motion, which states that redaction of private information is permitted.

Now let's look at page 190 of the Department of Finance release. This same email from Craig Kielburger to then Minister Morneau

was also part of the WE documents submission that was received by this committee. In that email, we see the same email with all information present. As we see there, the information had nothing at all to do with the CSSG and thus had no relevance to the motion of this committee.

On page 216 of the Department of Finance release, there's an email from Ms. Marquez at WE to officials in the public service who were responsible for the CSSG. The only redactions present are of personal information of Ms. Marquez.

Again, on pages 222 to 223 of the Department of Finance release, we have all content of the email between Ms. Marquez and relevant department officials fully visible. What could the redactions be that my opposition colleagues are up in arms about? They are an email address and contact information for Ms. Marquez. This is not exactly anything shocking.

● (18405)

We're looking now at page 224 of the Department of Finance document. We have here a meeting invitation from Ms. Kovacevic to a minister's office staff member. All content is present. What redactions are Mr. Poilievre and the Conservatives taking issue with? These were a conference ID and Ms. Kovacevic's cellphone number. We can go on and on.

There's a similar story on page 226. Again, the only redaction present is a conference call ID. All content as well as the names and emails of relevant officials are present for Canadians and the opposition to see.

I will certainly be accused by some members of the committee, some of whom are smiling at me right now, of sounding like a broken record, but it bears emphasis that when we're looking at the Department of Finance release, we continue to see patterns. All content of this agenda and the notes for a meeting between members of the PCO, PMO, ESDC and the Department of Finance are included.

This is a cabinet confidence document, Mr. Chair, and it's been released for review—

The Chair: I'll just interrupt you again, Mr. Fragiskatos, on relevance. At this point, the information you seem to be providing to the committee is on the issue of redactions, which, in my view, is more aligned with what the main motion states. The subamendment we're discussing now is about the issue of providing more information, not less. I again remind you of relevance. I believe your comments are very relevant to the main motion, but I am questioning considerably whether they are relevant to the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Fragiskatos, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, isn't it relevant to the need for the clerk to be able to compare the documents? What he's providing now gives the opportunity for that work to actually happen.

The Chair: Just let me have a look at my rough notes on the subamendment, which mainly relates to transmittal letters.

Yes, you are talking about comparing documents, so go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you. I was just taking a water break there, Mr. Chair. I will continue.

I was speaking specifically about the Department of Finance release, as I said before. All content of this agenda and notes from a meeting of members of PCO, PMO, ESDC and the Department of Finance, all this content in terms of meetings, is included. This is a cabinet confidence document, Mr. Chair. It's been released for review, with all information related to the CSSG visible.

The redactions that we find here are a conference call ID number. Again, there's another pattern here, Mr. Chair. We could be conducting pre-budget consultations. Instead we're sitting here and debating the redaction of a conference call ID, Mr. Chair. I'm trying to add to the context. I'm just trying to, as Mr. Gerretsen said, put some more meat on the bones so that we can have a full understanding of what's at stake with the amendment to the amendment we are debating.

I'd much rather be debating getting help out the door for Canadians in need, Canadians looking to pay rent, Canadian small business owners, Canadians looking to secure themselves and their families. Just yesterday, Mr. Chair, I met with Meetings Mean Business Canada, a business having an enormously tough time. I would love to hear them at committee. Unfortunately, we cannot do that.

Let's take a look at an email exchange and the comments.

There's not that much more, Mr. Chair. I'm almost through.

Let's take a look at an email exchange between Ms. Kovacevic and the minister's office staff and department officials. In this chain, we find all the information in the body of the email present. Again, though, we have redactions of private cellphone numbers. This is information that does not need to be in the public domain; therefore, our non-partisan public service removed it, quite understandably, as per the terms of the motion voted on by the members of this committee.

Let's take a look now—

The Chair: The floor is yours, Mr. Fragiskatos.

• (18410)

The Chair: I'll just interrupt for a second, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Julian, am I correct that you don't have a point of order but you want on the speaking list? Okay, great.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: He'll be able to speak soon, Mr. Chair. As I said, I'll be wrapping up shortly.

Let's take a look at an email from Ms. Wernick to officials across the public service, including PCO and the Department of Finance, on pages 326 to 330 of the Department of Finance release. The redactions that the opposition is taking issue with include Ms. Kovacevic's cellphone number. It really is absurd here, Mr. Chair.

On pages 411 to 426 of the Department of Finance release, we seem to be looking at a decision document of some kind. On pages 411 to 426, again, what you'll notice here is that all the information relevant to the CSSG is unredacted and present for everyone to see. The redactions are unrelated cabinet confidences, as determined by the non-partisan and professional public service. As was expressly permitted for in the motion from this committee, all cabinet confidences that are related to CSSG would be released, but unrelated information was to be redacted, and it was.

There's nothing too complex here, Mr. Chair. It's not rocket science. It's already a rare occurrence for cabinet confidences of a sitting government to be released. The clerk took the extraordinary step of releasing all information as it related to the CSSG, while also maintaining protection of necessary and unrelated cabinet confidences. Everything present here has been done in the spirit of that promise and while respecting the committee's motion for information.

I'll conclude in a moment, but let me look at two more examples of broad redactions. These are the famous blacked-out pages that Mr. Poilievre wanted to bring to the attention of the country, again at a time when the country was focused on COVID-19 and not the musings of, with all due respect, Mr. Poilievre. Beginning on page 219 of the PCO release, we have a summary of a full cabinet meeting. The discussion could have been related to vaccines, PPE procurement, national security or other matters. A cabinet document such as this is rarely, if ever, made public. Cabinet confidences unrelated to the Canada student services grant are redacted, as per the terms of the motion adopted at the committee. In keeping with the spirit of the FINA motion, CSSG items are, however, entirely visible.

As a second example, on page 348 of the PCO release, we have a second cabinet note that is redacted. This is the later cabinet meeting in May of 2020. CSSG implementation was discussed and is unredacted, as ordered by the finance committee motion and as agreed to by the Clerk of the Privy Council. However, the rest of the information is redacted, as it falls under cabinet confidence. We do not know what the topics of discussion were here. There could have been talks related to national security issues or legal discussions with solicitor-client privilege, protected as such. There could have been discussions related to further PPE and vaccine procurement that, if public, would have put our competitiveness at risk.

To sum up, Mr. Chair, I think I've demonstrated here—and I'll admit I was exhaustive, but again, we have to put everything into proper context—that the redactions the opposition have been turning into political theatre are in fact in line with the motion they proposed at this very committee.

Mr. Chair, I'll now turn to you. I know that there are other speakers on the list. I'm glad to put this on the record, where it needs to be.

The Chair: Thank you.

The next two speakers are Ms. Dzerowicz and Mr. Julian, in that order. They're the only ones on my list until we vote on the amendment to the amendment.

Look, we've been at this for five hours and 15 minutes. I'm going to suspend for 10 minutes. I have to make my own coffee here—I'm in isolation—and take a washroom break, so take 10 minutes to stretch your legs. We'll come back on at 26 minutes after the hour.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1615)

(Pause)

• (1625)

The Chair: Okay, how are we doing for members coming back on?

I see Ms. Jansen, Mr. Falk, Mr. Fraser, Ms. Vecchio. She is waving both hands there. I'll tell you, instant coffee isn't as good as Starbucks, but it'll do.

Ms. Dzerowicz, you are on next on, if you are back. Ms. Dzerowicz and Mr. Julian are next.

All right, we have quorum. We are ready to go. Keep in mind that we are on the subamendment. Thanks for the 10-minute break. I needed that.

We'll turn to you, Ms. Dzerowicz, on the subamendment.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I also want to say a huge thanks to you, Mr. Chair, and to everyone, for the 10-minute break.

I too am going to go through a fairly detailed speech. It's not quite as long as my colleague Mr. Fragiskatos's, but I can assure you, Mr. Chair, it is related to the subamendment. It highlights the issues that we have to look at in the reconciliation of any discrepancies, and why it's important for us to have analysis from the clerk to compare the two versions we've been talking about.

I'm going to continue from where my colleague Mr. Fraser left off by providing a detailed examination of the package of the documents provided by ESDC. The transmittal letters read into the record by Mr. Fraser provide us with some good context. I'm going to be providing a few more examples of why it was very good context. I'm going to use the page numbers that were stamped on the documents, as they are the only indicators I have from the packages provided to the committee today. Again, this is all related to the ESDC documents. I'm going to start with pages 159 and 161.

At the very top right of the page a designation reads “secret”, and then there's another designation that reads “confidence of the Queen's Privy Council”. These are key designations that one would find in a document with cabinet confidences. Confidences of the Queen's Privy Council are defined in the following way:

Cabinet ministers are collectively responsible for all actions taken by the Cabinet and must publicly support all Cabinet decisions. In order to reach final decisions, ministers must be able to express their views freely during the discussions held in Cabinet. To allow the exchange of views to be disclosed publicly would result in the erosion of the collective responsibility of ministers. As a result, the collective decision-making process has traditionally been protected by the rule of confidentiality, which upholds the principle of collective responsibility and enables ministers to engage in full and frank discussions necessary for the effective functioning of a Cabinet system.

The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that cabinet confidentiality is essential to good government. In the decision *Babcock v. Canada*, 2002, SCC 57, at paragraph 18 the court explained the reasons for this:

The process of democratic governance works best when Cabinet members charged with government policy and decision-making are free to express themselves around the Cabinet table unreservedly.

To preserve this rule of confidentiality, subsection 70(1) of the Privacy Act—and from hereon in I'm going to be referring to the Privacy Act as “the act”—provides:

This Act does not apply to confidences of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada.

For convenience, in the following, “material confidences” will be used to refer to confidences of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. Matters classified as secret are considered secret because their release would cause serious injury to the national interest, yet here we see that one of those essential confidences was redacted with only a conference call ID redacted. Clearly, the government and public service have been proactive in releasing as much information as possible, even information that's typically closely held and privileged to allow for the proper and effective management of government.

Maybe I'll pause for one second. I think that sometimes when we use lingo for who's doing the redacting—I know it's been mentioned a few times, but it's always been said that you have to repeat things six or seven times for it to stick in someone's mind—the redactions were done by our independent civil servants and under very strict rules. These are rules that have been followed for years. They were not new rules that were created for these documents. I want to remind all Canadians who might be listening that this was done by independent civil servants to decide what should be redacted, what should not be included.

I'll provide some more information about what we continue to.... I want to highlight a few more redactions.

If we look to pages 414 to 429, you will see an email between relevant public servants responsible for the CSSG program. For those who have forgotten, CSSG is the Canada student service grant program, which WE had originally been awarded to deliver by ESDC. The only redactions we see here are of personal information and unrelated cabinet confidences, which were permitted under the FINA motion. However, our government was forthright. All information as it relates to the CSSG is here in plain sight. The entirely blacked-out pages that Mr. Poilievre has referenced several times are nowhere to be found. I want to make sure I point that out.

● (18430)

On pages 544 to 545, if we look at those pages of the ESDC release, we once again see redacted phone numbers. The only redactions we have found on these particular pages is in reference to a conference call ID.

On page 621, again we show redactions of conference call access information, which, Mr. Chair, is very reasonable. These are active conference call lines, likely used by Ms. Wernick or the minister's staff. There's no reason that the public should have access to it, for any reason. It is a security issue.

Chair, if we look at pages 622 to 628 of the ESDC release—and if you had it in front of you, you would see on the top right corner that this document is marked “secret”. For those Canadians who are following from home, Treasury Board Secretariat and our security services count any information that could cause serious injury to the national interest as secret information. I'm sure Canadians can understand that cabinet confidences are information critical to the national interest and government decision-making. They are, rightly, never disclosed lightly, yet here in this document we have a prime example of the level of transparency our government went to in order to ensure that documents related to CSSG were released to parliamentarians.

Where we do see redactions in these secret cabinet confidence documents, they are for information unrelated to our motion, and which are clearly in the critical national interest and therefore should remain protected. Our non-partisan public service went about ensuring that the national interest was respected.

We turn to pages 631 to 638. As mentioned earlier on, Mr. Chair, there are reasons why we're marking many of our documents secret or at a higher classification and why they're so closely guarded. I want to provide an example where the non-partisan public service did make some redactions.

Here we are looking at pages 631 to 638 of this ESDC release. Colleagues will note that it's only one page. This is due to the fact that the public service redacted the section due to relevance and to protect cabinet confidences, which is in our national interest.

I know, Mr. Chair, that my opposition colleagues sometimes will think that we have a negative intent when those redactions are done by our independent civil servants. I do think they've been very responsible. I think they've done their best to try to disclose as much information while honouring secret or non-disclosable information, as per how I've defined it earlier on when I started the presentation.

If we turn to pages 888 to 889, the only thing that's redacted here is a private cellphone number of public servant.

Again, if we turn to pages 958 to 966, it looks to be a cabinet document to discuss the implementation of the CSSG. Again, these are not the types of documents that, on average, are made public. In respect of the motion we have, it is almost entirely unredacted, with unrelated personal information and cabinet confidences removed.

If we turn to pages 975 to 979 from the ESDC release, we see minimal redactions. Only personal information was removed; 95% of all these pages are visible for anyone to read.

On pages 1056 to 1057, here we have an email from Ms. Wernick to several other officials. Clearly, all items are related to CSSG. They are unredacted. They're visible. At the time our government was busy delivering a number of programs to help Canadians through the pandemic. These redactions are likely discussions around those programs.

● (18435)

If you were able to turn to this and look at pages 1092 to 1098, this is an example of what a complete page redaction looks like.

As you could see from some of my previous examples, complete page removals like this are rare and are directly related to cabinet confidences, which, as the original FINA motion stated, were expressly excluded. Again, these pages were removed by the professional non-partisan public service, who were carrying out their duty to protect cabinet confidences.

Here's also an interesting redaction, Mr. Chair. Somewhere between pages 1262 and 1275 of the ESDC release, we see that the non-partisan public service has redacted a document password. Of course, we do that for security reasons, and for very valid reasons.

On pages 1784 to 1788, you'll see that there is communication between Ms. Wernick and several department officials, with minimal sections removed due to cabinet confidence, which is, again, expressly permitted under the FINA motion.

When we look to pages 1959 to 1960, we're looking at an email from Ms. Wernick to Ms. Shannon at PCO. We see that over 95% of the email is visible, with one minor redaction due to the cabinet confidence. As we've mentioned, that is completely allowable.

Let me see if I can give you a few more examples, and then I want to wrap up with a couple of comments.

On pages 2176 to 2181, we're looking at an email from the deputy minister at ESDC. We see a majority of the information is included as it relates to CSSG, but again, any cabinet confidence or private information is removed.

If we look at page 2191, we see it's an email from Minister Qualtrough to her deputy minister. We see there's no redaction other than the minister's private email address. Typically these types of correspondence are kept in confidence, but it was waived as it relates to CSSG and is here for all of us to see.

I think we can see from these examples that our public service did its very best to try to put out as much information as possible, as long as we were honouring anything that might be deemed a cabinet confidence or part of cabinet discussions, as long as we were honouring any secret information like telephone numbers or any personal details that might be completely irrelevant to the CSSG contract, to the CSSG program and to WE being selected to deliver the CSSG contract.

I'm trying to see if there is anything else that's relevant, other than telephone numbers being redacted and other bits of information. Largely, I have about another 10 pages where I could say, well, for the most part we haven't redacted the information. We've done our very best to try to provide information, or the civil servants tried to make sure that as much information was going out...as per the instructions of the July 7 motion.

I'm going to end with probably one more comment, Mr. Chair. One thing that I think we might have forgotten is that when our Prime Minister made the announcement that there was going to be a prorogation of government, I think he—

• (18440)

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order. Is that relevant right now to the subamendment we're discussing?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Absolutely, it is. If you'll just wait for me to complete my sentence, you'll hear it.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Okay.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you.

When he made the announcement in terms of prorogation, he made sure that he made the announcement after there was a release of all the documents and not before. I don't think that would be an action of a government that was in any way trying to hide anything.

With that, Mr. Easter, while I didn't go through another 10 or 12 examples of the ways that we didn't redact things or we only redacted things that were absolutely necessary, I think I made my point in terms of going through the ESDC argument. I'll leave it at that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now turn to Mr. Julian. Then, hopefully, we can have a vote on the subamendment.

Mr. Julian, the floor is yours. We're on the subamendment.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I meant no disrespect. You saw me a few minutes earlier eating popcorn as I watched the brilliant filibuster. I will compliment Mr. Fraser, Mr. Fragiskatos and Ms. Dzerowicz for their filibuster.

As you know, Mr. Chair, I hold the record for filibusters in the House of Commons, on the Harper softwood lumber sellout, at 16 hours by myself. I always love a good filibuster. However, a filibuster has to reinforce your point. If I'd spent 16 hours before the natural resources committee arguing for the softwood lumber sellout that Mr. Harper imposed on us, I wouldn't have had much credibility.

Here's the problem. We have had—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order.

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Julian is speaking to filibustering. He's not speaking to the amendment to the amendment. He really needs to speak to the amendment to the amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll give him a little leeway, as others have had leeway, on his—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Twenty seconds worth of leeway, right?

The Chair: He's getting rolling on his points, relevant—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Julian, I apologize if I interrupted your video clip. Maybe you want to start from the beginning again so you can capture the whole thing.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Mr. Julian, go ahead. You were winding up on your filibuster of the Harper government.

• (18445)

Mr. Peter Julian: My point is simply this, Mr. Chair: What we have heard from the last three Liberal members reinforces why we should be voting against the subamendment and voting through this motion.

The initial argument all along has been that the documents weren't provided and that committee members couldn't make a decision because the information wasn't available. By her own admission, Ms. Dzerowicz has another dozen pages of carefully prepared text that took days to prepare, and the same with Mr. Fragiskatos and with Mr. Fraser. That is meticulous. We have many Liberal Party operatives working overtime to produce all of this material to reinforce the subamendment.

The reality is that the argument the Liberal members of this committee have been using—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of information.

The Chair: Hold it, Mr. Julian.

We have a point of order from Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Well, it was more that Mr. Julian alluded to the fact that we already had the documents. The documents I was referring to were documents that were released by the government House leader's office. They were given to all members. They are not the documents that he was referring to. Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My point is very simple. They have meticulously prepared presentations on the subamendment that reinforce the point that we've been making all along. Committee members have had access to the documents. We need the ability now to move forward. It's been more than 180 hours, with breaks and with suspensions, as you know, Mr. Chair, but really, the reality is that people who are watching us know full well that the Liberals have had access and have provided very, very well researched and fulsome arguments that were prepared days in advance. It means their fundamental argument that the committee isn't aware of the documents that have been distributed now for months falls through. Those filibuster points have undermined the principal Liberal position.

Let's get on with it. Let's vote on the subamendment, on the amendment, and on the motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I agree. We should vote on the subamendment.

The Chair: Okay. We're ready for the vote, I gather, on the subamendment. I will turn to you, Madam Clerk. We will have a voice vote on the subamendment. It's the best way to go.

Madam Clerk, the floor is yours.

The Clerk: Thank you.

First of all, I just want to verify the presence of members. The list that I have here for the members of the committee present and allowed to vote is as follows: Mr. Fraser, Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Fragiskatos, Mr. Gerretsen, Madame Koutrakis, Mr. Poilievre, Mr. Falk, Ms. Jansen, Ms. Vecchio, Monsieur Ste-Marie and Peter Julian. Is that correct?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Did you miss Mr. Steinley?

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): I believe I'm here on behalf of Mr. Poilievre. I believe Mr. Poilievre is not here.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, documentation for that should have been submitted to the clerk if there's a subamendment.

Mr. Warren Steinley: It was, Mark. Thanks.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Well, the clerk doesn't seem to know that, because she's not under the impression that you're supposed to be here.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Excuse me, Mr. Gerretsen, I was copied on all of those emails. Just to let you know, it was indicated by the clerk that Mr. Steinley would go in for Mr. Poilievre, and that I would for Pat Kelly. Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: The clerk doesn't know that.

The Chair: Just hold on. We'll ask the clerk.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Ms. Vecchio, you did interrupt me when I was speaking.

The Chair: I assume, Madam Clerk, you have the documentation for Ms. Vecchio and Mr. Steinley.

The Clerk: Yes. I just wanted to verify it, because I see that Mr. Poilievre has logged in. I just wanted to double-check for the status, but I did receive the email.

The Chair: That's good. Thank you.

The Clerk: The question is on the amendment of Mr. Gerretsen.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The subamendment is lost. We will turn to the amendment.

Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead.

• (18450)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In listening to the debate on the previous amendment that I had put forward, really the only rationale that I heard for not wanting to proceed with it came from Ms. Jansen when she talked about the amount of work that would be created as a result of this. This was really the only argument that I had heard from opposition MPs as to why we should not proceed.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Point of order. Are we now debating what we just finished voting on? How does that work? I don't understand that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: We're on the amendment as not amended, I guess.

The Chair: We're on the amendment before the subamendment was lost. We're on the amendment itself.

I'm not sure if the list still remains the same, but according to the hands up, the list is Mr. Gerretsen, Mr. Julian, Ms. Dzerowicz and Mr. Fragiskatos. If that list has changed just let me know and we'll go from there.

Mr. Gerretsen, the floor is yours.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, if you'll allow me the opportunity, I'm just laying the groundwork for the next part of what I'm going to say, and I'll repeat that. I had started off by saying that Ms. Jansen had raised the point that there was going to be a considerable amount of work done as a result of this amendment. That was really the only point brought forward by the opposition that explained why they would be against a motion that would have brought forward that additional work in analyzing the documents that I had put forward in my previous one.

In that vein, I would like to try this again, and perhaps this time rather than looking for the full, detailed analysis I would like something a little simpler.

Mr. Chair, I would move as an amendment to the amendment that the clerk and the analyst prepare a page annotation, not an entire new analysis as I was previously suggesting, that would enable members and the Canadian public to easily find pages in various versions of the document disclosure request by the Standing Committee on Finance.

What I'm basically looking for in this is the ability to, in a more expeditious fashion, look at the documents and understand what the committee has been provided and what it hasn't, or what's missing, and an easy way to navigate through the documents that we currently don't have.

I'm hoping with this new amendment to the amendment that I'm putting forward that the opposition will look at this as something that does.... I already see some shaking of heads and I find that to be disappointing, but I hope the opposition would look at this as another way of getting the information to the public and to members of this committee, and indeed all parliamentarians, but not by putting in the vast amount of work that Ms. Jansen had pointed out in her comments about why she didn't support the motion.

I'll put that on the floor, Mr. Chair, and hopefully we can all agree that this doesn't require a whole lot of debate, and we can all vote in favour of it. I'm really hoping that we can make sure we have this added to it.

The Chair: If you could read the proposed subamendment fairly slowly so I can make note of it and see if it's in order, then we'll go from there.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: After the existing amendment I would say "and further, that the clerk and analysts prepare a page annotation that enables members and the Canadian public to easily find pages in various versions of the document disclosure requested by the Standing Committee on Finance".

I have that in French as well if the clerk would like that sent over.

• (18455)

The Chair: You had best send that to the clerk. The subamendment is in order and it is relating to the documents and the original motion.

We will start a new list.

Ms. Jansen, you're first on the list.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: We now have a subamendment on all of the documents that you just read into the record. I'm shocked. It just further delays this meeting. Let's move on, shall we?

Thank you.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to speak on this subamendment by Mr. Gerretsen?

Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I want to state very clearly that I think Mr. Gerretsen proposed an excellent subamendment. I think it's very logical. I think it is good for us to compare and make it easier for us to understand what might be the discrepancies and this provides a nice legend.

To Ms. Jansen's point, this could all be eliminated if the Conservatives withdraw their motion; we could go right to the pre-budget consultation motion that I proposed and we can get right into pre-budget consultations.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Jansen's back in.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I want to clarify with the clerk if this would delay the tabling of the point of privilege report. Can they prepare an annotation that doesn't stop you from going on after anything else after the report of privilege is returned to the House?

The Chair: Is the clerk, or for that matter any of the analysts, in the position to answer that?

Madam Clerk, Brett, or anyone who wants to try to answer that question, please go ahead.

The Clerk: I'm not sure how the committee would like us to proceed. We don't have the time defined in there.

The Chair: If I have this right, basically, Ms. Jansen, you're wondering how long it would take to prepare a page annotation that would enable members and the public to easily find the pages in the various versions to compare them.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Exactly. We're trying to move on.

Thank you.

The Chair: We're trying to see how much time that would take. I mentioned earlier, in regard to Mr. Poilievre's motion, some of the timing. I don't even know if "within 24 hours of adoption of this motion" is possible and I don't want us to blame the analysts or clerks or anyone else if it is not doable. If you have a rough idea of the time it might take for the analysts or the clerk, it would be helpful for us to know. It would basically be a comparison document, a one pager.

Procedural Clerk (Mr. Alexandre Roger): I think it would be difficult to give an estimate of the time it would take to go through all the documents provided and prepare the annotated list. I think it would be up to the committee as to whether they would want to wait for the annotation to proceed with their review of the subject matter.

The Chair: Thank you, Alexandre. If that's the best we can do, that's the best we can do.

Ms. Jansen, do you want add anything further?

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: No.

The Chair: Would anybody else like to speak, or shall we move to a vote?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Let's have your point of order, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, would it be something that the clerk maybe could look at doing, taking it under advisement and getting back to the committee?

The Chair: Yes. Getting back to the committee, the question is when? The motion stipulates, “shall be filed with the Clerk of the Committee within 24 hours”. We could ask her to do that.

I think what Ms. Jansen's question related to is whether this can be done in a pretty expedited fashion so that the information would be available and that doing this would not slow down the process, at least too much, in terms of getting the report to the House.

• (18500)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, I raise the point because it would be difficult to move towards a vote without that [*Inaudible—Editor*].

The Chair: I'm not hearing a lot of discussion on this subamendment.

Are you ready for the vote?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, are we voting on my subamendment?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Gerretsen, we're voting on your subamendment.

I don't believe members have changed. Well, maybe they have.

Madam Clerk, you'd better check your list, because Mr. Kelloway might have replaced Mr. Fraser. I'm not sure.

Mike, have you replaced Mr. Fraser?

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Chair, that is correct.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Just as a point of information, does Mr. Fraser have to be logged off to be able to have Mr. Kelloway on the vote, or can he stay on like that?

The Chair: No, members are certainly allowed to attend. It's their right, as a member, to attend. The important factor is who signed in to vote.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, do you want to go through the vote?

(Subamendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I see that Mr. Kelloway is into virtual voting on committee, the same as we do in the House. Way to go, Mike.

We're back to the amendment to the original motion.

Does anybody want it read, or do we know where we're at?

Madam Clerk, it comes right in after the first “that”, and it's about pulling up the documents from session 1 of the 43rd Parliament. Could you read that amendment into the record so that people know what we're discussing, and then we'll get on with it?

The Clerk: The amendment reads, “That the evidence heard and papers received by the committee during its study on government spending, WE and the Canada Student Service Grant during the first session of the 43rd Parliament be taken into consideration by the committee during the current session and accordingly”—

The Chair: Okay, we all know what the amendment is now.

I have on my original list: Mr. Gerretsen, Ms. Dzerowicz and Mr. Fragiskatos. They're the only three.

Does anybody else want on the list?

Are you ready to go, Mr. Gerretsen? You're the one I have on the....

Oops, now he's off and Ms. Dzerowicz is first.

Are you ready to roll, Julie?

• (18505)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I think Mr. Fragiskatos is first, Mr. Easter.

The Chair: The list is now Mr. Fragiskatos, Ms. Koutrakis, Ms. Dzerowicz and Mr. Gerretsen.

Go ahead.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, have we voted on the amendment yet, which is the amendment that was originally put forward by Mr. Kelly?

The Chair: This is the amendment that we're on now.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: We're on the amendment. My hand was raised for the original motion.

The Chair: We are now debating the amendment to the original motion that the clerk just read.

We'll start with you, Mr. Fragiskatos, and then we'll go to the list that I see before me.

People, put your hands up so I can see them.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's unfortunate. We had what I thought was a very elegant solution on the table because of Mr. Gerretsen's initiative to put forward an amendment to the amendment. We are seemingly running around in circles. Either way, sometimes that's what you have to do to get to a good outcome. Mr. Gerretsen had put forward something that I thought was quite reasonable. I wonder why opposition colleagues have not supported it. Here we are again debating an amendment that a number of us were rightly concerned about—an amendment that comes close, if not entirely, to breaching privilege.

With that said, Mr. Chair, I still have great hesitation here. I think we have to think very carefully about the way to proceed.

Let's not forget that all of this debate is obstructing what must be the fundamental focus of this committee, especially right now. That is COVID-19, pre-budget deliberations and inviting the nearly 800 stakeholders who want to come to this committee and make their case as they see it. We are continuing to dither on that.

As I've said here before today and I'll put on the record once again, Standing Order 83.1 calls on the committee to commence pre-budget deliberations, which should take place over a number of weeks with a defined timeline. It has to end by a particular date.

Mr. Chair, perhaps you could confer with the clerk on this: What happens if that standing order is violated? The more we continue to see the opposition play politics in this way, the more likely it is that standing order is violated. What happens if the committee is in violation of 83.1? What are the consequences for the committee? I think that needs to be understood by all members.

This is not an effort to sidestep issues around WE Charity and some of the mistakes that happened on that particular issue. I've been a member of this committee for some time, including during the summer, when we had a number of hearings on the matter. These are important questions no doubt, but I can tell you, and I think every single member of this committee would echo the sentiment, that there are people in our communities who want this committee to be serious about the work that it's doing. There are any number of questions that we would look at. I would think that we examine very closely issues related to COVID-19 without any hesitation.

The more the opposition wants to put forward amendments—or motions, to begin with, and then amendments to motions—that really have nothing to do with the issue of our time....

When I get up, I'm thinking about constituents. I know that MPs around the table are thinking about constituents, too. What are those constituents thinking about, Mr. Chair? They're thinking about the challenges they're facing because of COVID-19. They're thinking about paying their rent. They're thinking about paying their mortgage. They are thinking about putting groceries on the table. We have seen government programs really provide a lifeline. They have helped in so many ways to serve as a safety net for Canadians across the country, whether as individuals or as Canadians who own businesses.

The CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, says that it wants to see this committee be serious about moving forward with thoughts on and advice to the government based on expert testimony, which it would be included within. I would love to hear from the CFIB, even though it's been critical of the government on a number of points. It has made some cogent points throughout this entire experience of COVID-19.

That is also true of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which is another organization with an important voice that I know my Conservative colleagues certainly respect. Where is it on this? It wants to see this committee carry out very important work.

• (18510)

Restaurants are ailing right now. The more we debate amendments to motions and motions to do this, that and the other around the WE Charity issue, the more we are obstructed from helping those folks on the ground. I mentioned restaurants in particular. My family has great experience in restaurants. My parents recently retired from the sector, but I know that family members and friends who are still in it are facing real problems.

Take a look at what Todd Barclay recently said. He is, as you know, the president and CEO of Restaurants Canada. He said, “We appreciate the federal government acting on this critical recommendation” of stepping up to support Canadians during COVID-19, “among other new support measures announced—”

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm relating it back, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I think you're anticipating the point of order.

Mr. Julian, what is your point of order?

Mr. Peter Julian: I have no objections to Mr. Fragiskatos's carefully prepared arguments. I just wanted to verify with the clerk that the papers for Alistair MacGregor, the MP for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, a very dedicated guy who will be taking my place, have been submitted so that he can take over for me for the next few hours. I'll be back this evening to enjoy this filibuster in its second or third round.

The Chair: Yes, the clerk has them, Peter. You're okay.

Mr. Peter Julian: With that point, I will leave you all and see you later on.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, we'll go back to you.

• (18515)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I take a bit of issue with Mr. Julian's characterizing what's happening here as a filibuster. I think it's a spirited debate. A filibuster carries certain connotations. I don't doubt the sincerity of Mr. Julian, as he is a sincere person. I disagree with him a lot of the time, but he is someone who has added a great deal to committee deliberations. However, it's a spirited discussion that's happening here.

It's nice to see Mr. MacGregor at the committee. I also disagree with him on a number of issues, but he adds a great deal to Parliament. I know he has been the justice critic for the NDP in the past. I've sat on the justice committee in the past, though not as a formal member, and I've heard his thoughts on a number of issues relating to justice and human rights. He always adds something to the discussion, and I know he'll do that here tonight.

The point I was discussing earlier, before the intervention by Mr. Julian, was about restaurants. Again, Todd Barclay, the president and CEO of Restaurants Canada, has welcomed the various programs. Many programs that have been introduced at the federal level are benefiting restaurants, but they need ongoing support, as he has said, to help restaurants “pull through the ongoing pandemic.”

Isn't that true, Mr. Chair? If you talk to restaurant owners and their workers and hotel owners and their workers, in the tourism sector in particular, you hear these are ailing industries.

One of the sectors we all too often ignore is the meetings and events sector. As I mentioned earlier in today's meeting, yesterday I had the chance to sit down with a local business owner. It was a tour actually, a socially distanced one. He operates a meetings and events business that basically builds different stations that you would see at trade shows. Obviously trade shows are not happening right now. He employs well over 30 people—close to 40, actually—but right now his number is down to 10. He was very thankful for the wage subsidy. It's the only thing that is keeping his business going.

Those are the folks we need to hear from. We don't need to continue to go in circles in the way we have, debating issues we already talked about in the summer. It's not as if the government and the Liberal members here at committee are trying to ignore what the opposition is saying.

Again, we had a very good, reasonable solution, if not a compromise—but that's politics, isn't it?—when Mr. Gerretsen put forward something I thought really would have worked. Now here we are back to Mr. Kelly's motion, which—as we have put on the record, ad nauseam, I'll admit, but perhaps needs to be put on again so I'll do that here—is a problematic motion.

That all has to be kept in mind, Mr. Chair.

I continue to look at things that key stakeholders have raised, and I wonder what those stakeholders are thinking when they see us debating amendments to motions as we are here today and continue to do.

The YMCA, obviously a well-respected and well-recognized organization, wants to see pre-budget deliberations carried out. Nature Canada wants to see pre-budget deliberations carried out.

On the specific point of Nature Canada, let's not forget that issues of the environment have to remain front and centre. We should address the issue of the environment and make sure that it's not put on the back burner as it so often has in modern Canadian history, make sure that it is front and centre, that we do build back better and that a COVID-19 economic response plan takes into account the importance of the environment.

Take a look at what has been said at this committee previously, if not by my Conservative friends, then certainly the NDP and the Bloc Québécois, talking about the need to not ignore the environment. That's something we embrace as a committee. Liberal members feel the same way. We will disagree, perhaps, on the nuances, on the details, but I share the sentiments of Mr. Ste-Marie, who is an extraordinary member of this committee and regularly contributes. I know he has a background in economics and has taught economics. When I hear him talk passionately about the environment, I take that very seriously.

Mr. Julian has very insightful thoughts on the environment. Yes, we will disagree on particular matters relating to pipelines—and I won't get into the specifics of that—but I know I've heard Mr. MacGregor as well speak in a very passionate way in Parliament on issues relating to the environment.

When we continue to debate amendments—we're on the amendment to the motion—the point holds that it means we are not dis-

cussing the environment. It means that we are not discussing the issue of how to build back better, which is an interesting idea, this whole body of thought that has emerged that says we have a new opportunity to embrace an agenda that allows for the environment to be front and centre and to be—

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Is talking about building back better relevant to the motion? I'm confused, because I thought we were going to try to get to a vote.

The Chair: I hear your point of order, Mrs. Jansen.

I'll hear what Mr. Gerretsen's view is also on the point of order.

I ask that members be as close to relevant on the amendment as possible. This amendment is pretty broad. Therefore, it's fairly wide-ranging.

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: You took the words out of my mouth, Mr. Chair, in the sense that you said that it's a broad motion, in that it's asking for a whole whack of documents to come back. That's what this amendment is doing.

What Mr. Fragiskatos is doing, by talking about these other important things, is highlighting the fact that we're asking officials from Parliament to be working on this stuff when there are other, more important things he believes they should be working on. I would suggest that what he is discussing and the route he is going down is extremely germane to the discussion we're having on this particular amendment.

The opposition might not like to hear that, but it's the reality of the situation.

● (18520)

The Chair: I will allow Mr. Fragiskatos to continue to go down this road, but don't go too far down it or we'll have to pull it back.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the intervention of colleagues. It's not my intent here to obstruct the discussion, to stand in the way of what has been proposed by Mr. Kelly in the form of an amendment to a motion. Of course, we need to deal with that as a committee. I've said at length here that when we continue to debate matters that have been dealt with in so many ways, maybe not to the pure satisfaction of opposition colleagues, it obstructs us from dealing with the substantive matters at hand. Those relate, of course, to the environment. Those relate, of course, to COVID-19.

Provinces are dealing with the issue from a health perspective. I'm very happy to see the federal government step up to support provincial governments with the safe recovery announcement that we saw a number of weeks ago: \$19 billion for provinces. How those provinces put to use that, admittedly, very large amount of money—but necessary amount—is up to them. However, let's continue to hear from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. We're not only mentioning provinces here but also hearing from the FCM on what cities and towns require during this time.

Notice that I'm putting on record what I'm hearing from constituents. What I'm hearing from constituents is not relating to anything that the motion and the amendment to the motion has brought up. I'm hearing from constituents about their everyday challenges, and those challenges have only been accentuated because of COVID-19. This is where the country is.

Let's not also ignore the very important issue of indigenous affairs and how the Canadian government seeks to continue to put forward an agenda that is in line with the general ethic of reconciliation in this country. We could be raising all of those matters right now at committee in pre-budget deliberations. I don't know when we'll be able to do that when we have the opposition continuing to raise, in this committee and in other committees, issues that are not really in line with the desire to advance the interests of Canadians, and that are completely in line with a desire to promote political interests to exert as much—and if I can paraphrase my learned colleague, Mr. Gerretsen, here—as much “political carnage” against the Prime Minister and the government of the day as is possible.

At no point have I heard Conservative members in the motion and in the amendment to the motion bring up how either seeks to advance the interests of Canadians. There's been no argument put forward to that effect. That's very disappointing because my constituents, all of our constituents, Canadians across the country, deserve better. They deserve a finance committee that recognizes its fundamental role. We need to be very serious about gathering ideas that will, if not binding, certainly serve as important advice for the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and the wider cabinet. Will we have our way on every single point of advice? No, we will not. That's not the expectation at all, but certainly we've seen this government listen to this finance committee in important ways. There have been a number of things.

In fact, I would.... Perhaps I'm overdoing it here, Mr. Chair—I could be accused of that—but I don't think so. If you look at the programs that have been introduced and the changes to the programs that have been introduced as we've dealt with COVID-19.... I'm thinking about CEBA. I'm thinking about the need to support Canadians with rent through CECRA. I'm thinking about the payroll subsidy that the government put forward and very thankfully renewed, as we saw in the throne speech, so that it will continue until the summer of 2021. That's another point that I continue to hear from business owners: how thankful they are for that.

• (18525)

This committee had a central role in suggesting a lot of those ideas. They were based on what? Not on our own musings but on the thoughts, ideas and analysis of expert witnesses, whether in the form of organizations like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives—which I know Mr. MacGregor will sympathize with—the Chamber of Commerce or the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, not to mention a number of business owners, small business owners, and also large business owners. I think my Conservative colleagues sympathize with them, or at least I certainly hope so. They're not behaving in that way right now, though, at this committee. Certainly, we on the Liberal side have paid attention to this.

Those programs have kept the country going. There's no exaggeration there. They've kept the economy going. They've kept indi-

viduals going. What are the results? We've seen Canadians, yes, struggling, but at the same time the country, when we compare ourselves to other G7 partners, is doing rather well. We still have a very sustainable debt-to-GDP ratio at in and around 48%. I know the Conservatives—and they're free to do it—when they want to get back to the issues that genuinely matter to this committee, will bring issues of debt and deficit up. What they ignore is that at 48% we're still at a very reasonable debt-to-GDP ratio. This is something that can't be ignored. In the mid-1990s, the IMF called us an honorary—and I'm quoting here from *The Wall Street Journal* of the day, in 1994 I believe—member of the third world because we had a debt-to-GDP ratio of 67% at that time. We're not even close to that.

Let's debate these matters in a meaningful way at committee. I know witnesses want to come and tell us that, but here we have opposition colleagues continuing to go round and round and round on all of these particular issues. That's the challenge I have.

Let me also say that there are so many sectors that want to make the case. I've talked about the importance of the environment. I've talked about indigenous issues. I've talked about everyday people working in restaurants, hotels, meetings and events, in the tourism sector, but the building sector too, which is such an important economic driver. I remember seeing very recently the view of Canada's Building Trades Unions that they are ready to listen to the government, to work with government on infrastructure programs and shovel-ready projects that would stimulate the economy. I'd love to hear from them, but I can't do that right now. None of us can do that right now.

We are where we are on this issue, and that's the sad reality.

I'll leave it there for now. I thank the committee for indulging me. Again, we have to have pre-budget deliberations.

In the time that I've taken to speak, which I know has been some time, I wonder if you, Mr. Chair, or the clerk have an answer on what happens if the committee is found to be in violation of Standing Order 83.1? What would the consequences be? That's something that I've looked at in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. There is confusion on that point. I think I know the answer. What a book it is for new members at the committee, and I'm looking at Ms. Jansen who's smiling at me now, as I can see on the screen, in a very collegial way, and I'm sure is agreeing with me on my points. I would advise Ms. Jansen if she hasn't already done so, and other new committee members, to take a look at *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* by Bosc and Gagnon to familiarize themselves with the Standing Orders.

Under 83.1, as I've said, we have an obligation as a committee, but what happens when Standing Orders are broken? I know that mention is made in that book about “parliamentary agents”, which I take to be MPs. If MPs are found to be in violation of the Standing Orders, the consequences are quite serious. I was a bit confused about whether “parliamentary agents” refers to some other specific category, or whether it is referring specifically to MPs. Clarity on that point would be appreciated, but that's a related point.

• (18530)

The key question I started with was “What happens when we have a violation of Standing Order 83.1?” All these issues that I’ve raised relate to that need to begin a set of pre-budget hearings. Those deliberations are.... Well, I’ve made the point. You know how I feel, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

I will take a stab at that question. The only other person I have on my list coming up next would be Mr. Gerretsen, but for the benefit of the committee as a whole, 83.1 in the Standing Orders states:

Standing Committee on Finance to consider budgetary policy.

Commencing on the first...day in September of each year, the Standing Committee on Finance shall be authorized to consider and make reports upon proposals regarding the budgetary policy of the government. Any report or reports thereon may be made no later than the third sitting day before the last scheduled sitting day in December, as set forth in Standing Order 28(2).

That is the direction from the House to the Standing Committee on Finance. What would be the consequences? I don’t think the penalties or consequences are really spelled out. I think it would be up to the House to decide, but it is something that we could refer to the law clerk to see if we could get an answer at some point. I don’t think we need the answer tonight, but I think it would be up to the House to decide if the committee and its membership didn’t meet Standing Order 83.1.

I will say that the Standing Committee on Finance is always in a problem in an election year. The hearings get rushed. We did do the hearings last year, and the analysts did a great job of putting it together and getting our work done in a fairly straightforward way.

With that, we’ll go to Mr. Gerretsen. We are on the amendment to the original motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I believe that Annie was trying to get your attention. That’s what I was trying to signal to you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay, Ms. Koutrakis, you’re on.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: No, I’m fine, Mr. Chair. I’m sorry if I confused the committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Chair, I will take it then.

I find it very discouraging that we have been around this a few times, and we are trying to bring through a subamendment, if it hasn’t become overtly obvious by this point. What we’re trying to do is to bring some points back to this so that the reliability and the clarity of the information that is coming back is done in a way that people can properly understand it. What we’re hearing—and through this discussion we’re hearing quite a bit from the other side—is about timing, about 24 hours and needing this 24 hours.

It leads me to the conclusion that all that’s really wanted is some kind of smoking gun, which the Conservatives think exists out there. I think they’re going to be very disappointed when we do finally come to some kind of conclusion as to how the information will come back and in what way so as to make it as clean and clear as possible.

Some of my colleagues pointed out in their speeches earlier—Mr. Fraser and Mr. Fragiskatos—exactly why so much of the information was redacted. I know that Mr. Poilievre had the opportunity

to do a little grandstanding, as I said earlier, and stand at the podium and wave around his blacked-out pages, but if you actually take the time to look and to just go in and see the notes next to that blacked-out stuff, which I look forward to sharing with the committee when we get back to the main motion because I realize we are on the amendment right now, you end up seeing that the vast majority of it is extremely disconnected to this actual issue. That’s the only reason it’s being blacked out.

I look forward to the opportunity to really dive into that in a little bit and to share in great detail what is in those pages, because I think that the Canadian public, quite frankly, has the right to understand that.

Mr. Poilievre wants to paint the picture that some political operative sat in a room on the top floor of West Block with a big, black, thick Sharpie marker and went through all of these documents line by line blacking everything out. In reality, it was done in a very methodical way through independent individuals who are concealing information that is just not germane to the motion that was put forward by this committee. That, ultimately, is what’s there.

I realize that the members of the opposition are getting a little bit frustrated—rightfully so—that this is taking a long time, but what the Liberal members are trying to do here, if I have to make it extremely clear, is to put some parameters around how the information comes back, making sure that the information matches up perfectly, as I tried through one subamendment and then through the other subamendment, understanding that it could take a lot of time.

The other subamendment was about at least annotating and cross-correlating where the pages are so that it becomes easier for people to see that. You’re routinely seeing members of the opposition completely shoot that down because there’s no interest in that, because that’s not their end game here. Their end game is to wave around more blacked-out pages.

I think it’s extremely unfortunate because it’s disingenuous to the intellect of the public. It’s suggesting that the public can be easily lost in the idea—

• (18535)

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): I have a point of personal privilege, if I could, Mr. Chair.

I think it’s unfounded for the member opposite to be giving opinions on what the opposition’s mental state is, intent or general attitude, when we have not in any way, shape or form made any comments to that effect.

While this debate around the amendment may be important, I think we should stick to the facts at hand and discuss—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On that—

The Chair: Just hold on, Mr. Gerretsen.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: —the topic rather than taking personal shots at the members of the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I’m going to just reply to that point of order before you rule on that.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I think it is extremely rich, with all due respect to this member, Mr. Poilievre and a number of other members, to be criticizing taking shots and personal attacks at other members of Parliament.

Have you seen a question period, Mr. Chair, in which this member or Mr. Poilievre gets up? They don't have anything to contribute other than personal attacks. My attacks are not personal.

I am just providing input into this point of order. I am suggesting as to what I see as the motive behind this, and I'm entirely within my right to do that. I'm sure that this member... By the way, her mother is a great constituent of mine and lives just down the street from me on Highway 2. My in-laws actually live right across the street. I have a lot of respect for this member is what I'm saying—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Chair, my mother would say that two wrongs don't make a right, so—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: If everyone would come to order—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: If everyone would come to order—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I guess all I'm saying—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Come on, Gerretsen; come to order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Just to finish up my point—

The Chair: Just—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I guess all I'm saying, Mr. Chair, on my point of order, is that I am attributing what I believe to be the political objective here, not an individual person's motive. That is entirely fair, because it happens all the time in our parliamentary process and democracy generally speaking.

You can rule on that, but then I'd like to continue.

The Chair: I don't think there's anything to rule on. I'm seeing both as a matter of debate in the context of the discussion here.

Go ahead. The floor is yours.

• (18540)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

Just getting back to that, I'm concerned by the fact that—

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: On a point of order, just quickly—sorry—you're saying that he can talk about our motivation as part of his debate. Is that what you're saying?

That's relevant to the amendment.

The Chair: It's relevant to the amendment, because it's relevant to the conclusion of the motion.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: It's his own conjecture, what our motivation is. I mean, we've been trying to get this sped up and he's giving us a different motivation.

Sorry.

The Chair: There's no need to be sorry. You're entitled to make your point.

I'm seeing it as part of the debate on the reason for the motion, the analysis around the motion and the different opinions on the motion. We're seeing these kinds of points raised by all sides in the debate thus far.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just jumping back to that, what I'm basically getting at here is what I perceive to be going on: The only objective is to try to bring forward something in such a quick fashion as to be able to grandstand with the information.

What we've been trying to do, and this is what I've been getting at, is to put forward some amendments to the motion to set out the parameters in which the information is delivered so that it can be done in a way that is very easy for people to digest, for members to digest and for the Canadian public to digest. That's the premise of the two motions I brought forward previously.

I bring forward another motion to you, Mr. Chair. Hopefully, the members would agree that this subamendment would be more in line with what they think is appropriate, because I think this one is equally as important.

It reads as follows: "That, further, the committee requests the complete package of documents provided to the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons by relevant deputy ministers or signatories of the transmittal letters, as well as final packages of documents that the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons approved for release; that both the document packages be provided to the committee no later than October 19, 2020; and that after the committee reviews the two different versions of the documents, the committee invite each of the relevant deputy ministers or signatories of the transmittal letters, as well as the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons, to give testimony regarding the redactions applied to the documents that were requested and granted in the motion adopted on July 7, 2020; and that until such time as the testimony is complete, debate on the motion and the amendment from Mr. Poilievre be suspended; and that the Chair be authorized to schedule these witnesses and convene a meeting to resume the debate on Mr. Poilievre's motion once these meetings have taken place."

The Chair: Okay. Is the motion—

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Mr. Chair, is this admissible? This is not Mr. Kelly's amendment anymore. I'm not sure what's happening all of a sudden here.

The Chair: This is where we are. We have the original motion by Mr. Poilievre. We have the amendment by Mr. Kelly. We now have another subamendment from Mr. Gerretsen. From what I heard, it does relate to the motion and the amendment on the table. It is substantially different from the previous subamendments that were debated and lost. The subamendment is in order.

What I was going to ask was this: Does the clerk have a copy of that and can it be sent out to members for their discussion?

We'll let you—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I already have it in English and French, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to send that to the clerk right now.

The Chair: Send it to the clerk if you could. We'll let you speak on it for a further moment if you'd like, and then we'll establish a new list.

I'm still looking at the old list. I have Ms. Dzerowicz first. Are there any others who want to raise their hands? Mr. Fragiskatos. Anyone else?

Okay. If you'd send it over to the clerk, she can send it out to people. They can have a good look at it, and you can speak on it.

• (18545)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you. I'm just confirming that my staff are sending that out, so everybody should have that shortly. It'll go via the clerk.

I'll get back to what I was saying previously. I'm trying to find a solution here as to how the information can be transmitted back to committee in a way that is going to have the proper—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order.

The Chair: Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Just looking at the procedural stuff, since the subamendment is not in order—it includes suspending debate on the main motion—can we check on that? We have an amendment, a subamendment, but this is actually another amendment. He's saying it's a subamendment, but how many amendments should we be going into?

The Chair: It is in order, I believe, unless somebody can give me a reason it's not. It's just to back up a little bit, Karen, or Mrs. Vecchio—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Karen's good.

The Chair: The original motion came in from Mr. Poilievre, and I know you came in a little late—you're filling in for somebody else. Then there was an amendment by Mr. Kelly to basically pull the documents from the first session of the 43rd Parliament. Then there was the subamendment that was debated for quite a while, and that was defeated.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes.

The Chair: There was the second subamendment, and that was defeated. This is a third subamendment. The subamendment is allowed. It wouldn't be allowed if it were attempting to do the same thing as any of the subamendments that were defeated. This one is substantially different from the other subamendments that were debated, so I do see it as an order, unless the clerk sees something different here.

The floor is yours, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just getting back to—

Mr. Ted Falk: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I beg to differ on your ruling there. A subamendment cannot significantly alter the intent of the original amendment or the original motion, and this certainly does that. It's a significant departure from what the motion and the amendment are, and I think you need to rule it out of order. I'd like to have the clerk weigh in on that.

The Chair: I'll give my comments on that, Mr. Falk.

The intention of the subamendment is to raise the point of privilege with the Speaker. I don't want to read it, but if you go through it one by one and and the reason Mr. Poilievre believed there was a point of privilege there, you'll see that it asks for certain documents to go to the Speaker. This does not change the intent of doing that, other than basically asking for further review, to make sure the documents are all in order going forward. That's all it's doing.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

I just want to say, I've seen this now on both the PROC committee and this committee, where—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Come on.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: —Conservative members ask the clerk to weigh in and make a decision. The clerk is not there to provide advice to the committee. The clerk is there to provide advice to the chair. The chair makes the decisions, and I don't think it's appropriate to be putting government officials in positions like this—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Were you on a point of order, Mr. Gerretsen?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I was supplementing the point of order that was previously raised, but—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: He was back to his speech.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: If Mrs. Vecchio wants to come in, that's fine.

The Chair: Mrs. Vecchio, go ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Chair, you know I have the greatest respect for you, but there is the opportunity for us to question the ruling of the chair. Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen, for your input, but if the majority of the members on the committee do not agree, we can vote down the decision and vote that forward as well, so that's an option. Please, no more personal attacks, thank you.

• (18550)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: This is not a personal attack; I'm trying to defend the independence of the public servants. Mr. Falk said he would like the clerk to weigh in on this, it is not the clerk's job to weigh in on the procedure, that is the chair's. I think that anybody—

Mr. Ted Falk: Unfortunately, Mr. Gerretsen, the chair asked the clerk for her opinion, so maybe it's—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Not on that matter, he didn't.

Mr. Ted Falk: On exactly that matter, whether or not your subamendment was legitimate.

The Chair: I said unless the clerk thinks otherwise. I can talk to her offline if you want to suspend and I'll talk to the clerk. Do you want me to do that? Otherwise, we'll move ahead. I can have a five-minute chat with the clerk. I will—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

My understanding is that because it was ruled in order and Mr. Gerretsen began, everything's completely fine. Things are in order here. If the Conservatives wish to make up, or at least reinterpret parliamentary procedure—let me be more diplomatic in my language—that's up to them. Bosc and Gagnon is very clear on these points. Again, I'd invite my colleagues to bring a copy with them to meetings, as I have it here with me.

The Chair: So we are on solid ground here. I will suspend for five minutes. It will give people a little break anyway, and I will talk to the clerk offline. I'll give you a call on the cell, Evelyn.

The meeting is suspended for five minutes.

● (1750)

(Pause)

● (1805)

The Chair: The motion is in order as it relates to the original motion. That is what we can determine, but it's out of place in terms of where we have it, because when we look at the document as a whole, we see that it will produce conflicting dates in the whole final product that's going to the Speaker.

Whether it should be moved as a subamendment to the amendment, Mr. Gerretsen, or placed elsewhere in the document so that it would flow better and work better and we wouldn't have conflicting dates in the motion as a whole that's going to the Speaker.... In a sense, it's in order but it just doesn't flow.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, we could also change the dates that are in the main motion to fix this. I think the point would be entirely appropriate, if this motion were to pass, because if it does, then it automatically creates the need to change the dates in the main motion. I think that my preference would be to continue with this, because what my motion in a sense does is to say, let's get the officials here to weigh in on this and to provide their input, and then we can continue on with Mr. Poilievre's motion. Then if at that time it's determined that well, the dates in his motion are not achievable anymore because we passed some of them, they can always be changed at that time, or they can be changed when we come back to the main motion.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Easter, on a point of order, I see that the motion that Mr. Gerretsen has put forward actually amends what would be Pierre Poilievre's motion. It's not a subamendment to Pat Kelly's motion. Specifically, it is changing those dates. That's one of my concerns.

The Chair: That's basically what I'm saying. I think really what you need to do is to hold the motion, get it out to members so they can read it. We deal with the amendment. Then if you were to move that as an amendment to the motion as amended, it would flow better in the whole package, and we would see where it goes then.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: But the reason that wouldn't work is that what I'm addressing in the amendment relates specifically back to the documents that we're trying to bring back in through the main motion.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order.

The Chair: Yes, I'll take the point of order, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you. I don't know if you want me to do a point of order or just continue.

The fact is he is making an amendment to an amendment, so it has to be deemed to the amendment. What he is talking about is the main motion. If he wants to do that, he can make an amendment to the motion, but unfortunately it cannot be heard because there is a motion already on the table. I think this is a way of circumventing that, but I think the fact is it's out of order.

The Chair: I think I'll take your point of order.

Was it Mr. Fragiskatos?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It was, yes.

The Chair: After that, I'll make a comment.

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Sorry, I thought you were going to make the comment, but obviously I misheard.

Mr. Chair, it's vital that we follow parliamentary procedure and practice, Bosc and Gagnon. Footnote 580 is the relevant one here:

Decisions by the Chair are not debatable. They can, however, be appealed to the committee. To appeal a decision by a Chair, a member must inform the committee of his or her intent immediately

—“immediately” being the key word—

after the decision is announced. The Chair then asks the committee the following question: “Shall the decision of the Chair be sustained?”

If I remember correctly, Mr. Falk did raise his hand and make an appeal, but that came well after the fact, and that fact is that you recognized a motion to be in order, and Mr. Gerretsen was given the floor to speak. I'm afraid all of what we're now engaged in appears to be moot. That's not just my opinion; it's an opinion that aligns with the facts, the facts being based on what the record of practice that Bosc and Gagnon guides us with.

I think we ought to continue, respectfully, Mr. Chair. Of course, it is your choice. I think we ought to continue by allowing Mr. Gerretsen to expand upon and discuss the merits of his subamendment. I know a number of other members wish to raise their perspectives as well, and I would count myself in that group.

● (18610)

Mr. Ted Falk: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I didn't catch who that was. I think it was Mr. Falk.

Mr. Ted Falk: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

What Mr. Fragiskatos just stated is not accurate. I did, in fact, raise my point of order immediately after you made your comment. It was you who suggested getting the opinion of the clerk, and I was just affirming your suggestion. Mr. Fragiskatos was completely off base with his assertion that my comment was out of order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, it was not immediate. We can go back to the record. I know Mr. Falk is an experienced member, but he will recollect, I hope, that it was not an immediate appeal. Bosc and Gagnon is very clear that the appeal has to be immediate.

Mr. Chair, you recognized that Mr. Gerretsen's subamendment was in order. For that reason, I think we are not focused on the right thing here. We need to be talking about the subamendment.

The Chair: My concern is that it takes the flow out of the motion. I do believe the motion is in order, but it's misplaced. I will stand by my original decision and state that other changes are going to have to be made in the original motion to make it flow if this one carries. If this one doesn't carry, then no worries.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have one more point of order, Mr. Chair. It's brief.

The Chair: Okay, and then I'll go to Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

No one uttered the phrase "challenge the chair". No one formally put that on the record. As I said already—and I think it's a critical point that I'm emphasizing—Mr. Gerretsen had begun speaking after you recognized his subamendment to be in order. Again, respectfully, I appreciate that Mr. Falk disagrees, but it's out of line with recognized practice.

The Chair: I hear you and I do know the challenge to the chair had to come earlier.

Mr. MacGregor, I'll hear your point, and then we'll go back to the discussion on this and vote on it.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I have Mr. Poilievre's motion in front of me. I have the amendment by Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Chair, I have a question. When is Mr. Gerretsen's subamendment going to be electronically distributed to the committee so we can have everything in front of us?

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, have you sent that subamendment to people yet?

Madam Clerk, you don't have it yet, do you? Okay.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'll double-check on that right now.

The Chair: Double-check on that right now. We'll just hold on for a minute. In the meantime we can talk about the weather on the Charlotte Islands.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: That opens things up to you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, I know. It's not good.

Any word on them whether they sent it, Mark?

• (18615)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Sorry if there was some confusion. My staff were originally going to do it, but it is on its way to the clerk.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, when you can get that, send it out to people, please.

I'm going to let Mr. Gerretsen finish his remarks, and hopefully by that time all the documents will be in front of people. If anybody wants to speak further, we'll allow that, and then we will go to a vote.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: This is on my amendment, Mr. Chair.

I put this forward as another attempt. This is my third attempt to try to provide some clarity around what's expected and what's going to happen. I think that the committee should get to hear from public servants who did the redactions and the law clerk and parliamentary counsel. What the opposition is doing—again this is in my opinion, and I don't want to get criticized for attacking anybody personally, because that's certainly not what I'm doing—is finding officials to have breached privileges of Parliament without even providing them the due process of explaining themselves. The due process, I believe, Mr. Chair, is extremely important.

If after the committee has heard from the witnesses it is still not satisfied, then it can take whatever actions are deemed necessary. But we need to afford that due process, Mr. Chair. I think that in light of allowing that due process to occur, we should pass this motion to invite those officials. If the opposition is genuinely and truly interested in getting information in front of them and getting down to the bottom of this, why they wouldn't support bringing those officials to the committee to explain the process for themselves is a mystery to me.

If you want to talk about transparency and clarity and the need for accountability, what could be more accountable than having these individuals come to committee and address the issue and explain this?

You remember that earlier, Mr. Chair, I talked about what I perceived as the motivation. It wasn't about getting the information as much as it was about trying to sensationalize blacked out documents. You recall, Mr. Chair, that I spoke to that. There's a very easy way to prove me wrong, which is to support this motion, to let the individuals come forward, to let them speak and to let their voices be heard on this. If you don't do that, then you're leaving the question of, well, why wouldn't you want to do that? That's how I come to the conclusion that you don't want to do it, because it might make this argument of some massive conspiracy that some have been trying to build up over the last several months fall completely flat. So if people vote against this and they're basically saying, no, we don't want these officials to come forward and explain the process, in my opinion what you're basically doing is saying, no, we don't want the details; we don't want the facts; those don't matter. We want the sensational part of Mr. Poilievre waving around blacked out papers that he probably just made by taking a square and painting it black and hitting print and using that as his prop.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: On a point of order, I don't know that it's right for a member to suggest that somebody was bringing a fake document to a press release, but we do continue to argue the problem.

The Chair: I would say that is out of order, Mr. Gerretsen.

Go on with your argument.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's a really good point. I don't want to think that either, so I'll take back that comment.

Mr. Ted Falk: Apologize and resign.

A voice: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm trying to be as candid about this as possible and as honest about this as possible. If you want to get down to the truth and you want to really understand why those items were redacted, why wouldn't you want to bring forward the people who can explain how and why they did it?

• (18620)

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Point of order.

Again, we're not asking why they were done; we were supposed to help to have the same thing—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: This is not a point of order; this is debate.

The Chair: I think that, Madam Jansen, is debate. It's not a point of order. We'll finish with Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I clearly—

The Chair: We'll go onto Ms. Dzerowicz and if you want in, then we will go to you, and hopefully we'll go to a vote after that.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I get the sense, Mr. Chair, that I'm hitting a nerve. Maybe I'm on to something here because every time I bring up this point, Conservatives tend to jump all over it and try to say that I'm accusing them personally, that I'm doing this and I'm doing that.

I think I'm getting to some of the truth here, which disturbs Conservatives, and that's why they're trying to throw me off every time I'm in the middle of bringing up this topic.

You want to hear from people, you want the truth, you want accountability, then let's hear from the people who produced the documents, and let's not go down a road that provides the sensational information that people can have, because you're just showing the political motive in all of this, as opposed to one that truly gets to truth and accountability.

My comments go not just to the Conservatives, but to the NDP and to the Bloc as well. If this is really about that then I'm sure they'll find it necessary to hear from the people who did this.

I'll leave it for now, thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Dzerowicz, and then Ms. Jansen.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: It's true.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, thank you.

I'm going to repeat a little of what Mr. Gerretsen had mentioned. I think if you step back and look at what Mr. Poilievre's motion is about, and really from what I've heard from Mr. Julian, and we haven't heard a lot from Mr. Ste-Marie but my understanding is that he has this worry as well, if there is a belief that the redactions within the 5,600-page WE documents that were released towards the end of August were made because the Liberal government was deliberately trying to hide something, then this motion gets directly to the point.

The other thing I've been hearing, I've been hearing from Ms. Jansen and I've been hearing from Mr. Julian today, is that we should get going on stuff that matters to Canadians.

If we're trying to get to that, and if we need as a government to be able to prove that civil servants independently redacted this, and if we could actually bring them to committee, have them respond directly to the committee, directly provide the documents relevant to the committee, actually ask those questions ourselves in the public light, then I think we should be able to clear this up and move on to the business of why it is that we exist right now.

Let's ignore the fact for a moment, because we forget that the documents were just one part of the whole looking into the concerns around the selection of WE to run the CSSG, and recall that we had almost two full months of meetings on this committee, never mind the other committees and never mind that the Ethics Commissioner is looking at it, as well as the Auditor General. We have already proven, and we can go through all the people who want to remind themselves of this, whether they are new members or old members, or new or old members of this committee, that there are actually minutes that show this wasn't corruption. There was no misuse of funds. WE was independently selected by civil servants. We didn't do a sole-sourced contract. We selected a contribution agreement for very deliberate reasons, with clear parameters, and we absolutely did this for students.

I would say to you that this is an amazing opportunity. What this motion basically says, and I hope people have had a chance to look at it at this point, is that it's suspending the original motion that Mr. Poilievre put aside and the amendment, both of those, in order for us to be able to provide the two sets of documents we've been talking about today, as well as to bring forward the relevant civil servants who are in charge of doing the redactions. That would allow the committee to hear directly from them. This would all be done in the public context.

If for some reason the opposition is really unhappy with what they are hearing or they don't think it's enough, we can come back and we can make a decision to come back to the original motion of Mr. Poilievre as well as the amendment, although I would hope that we would be able to get past this, because as my colleague Mr. Gerretsen had indicated, then we will see this is just a game and this is just a way of our opposition members being able to say, "Well, you know what? We just want in some way to make the Liberals look bad."

Right now, we are in an unprecedented pandemic. Canadians are asking us to be our best selves. Canadians are asking us to be the government they need us to be at this moment. That means we have to get past this partisan stuff. We have to get past these games, if only for the moment, if only for this year, because we have some really important work to do.

If this is what it's going to take, that we have to bring the officials who did the redactions, if we have to spend a meeting or two on discussing it, then let's move forward and do it so we can get on as fast as possible to the important work we have ahead, and to rebuilding our economy and to supporting Canadians through this most unprecedented pandemic.

• (18625)

The Chair: Okay. I don't know if there are others after this, but I have Ms. Jansen and Mr. Fragiskatos. Then we will go to a vote, hopefully.

Ms. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I just want to say, from what I understand, Mr. Gerretsen's motion is to be able to explain why the non-partisan public service redacted the documents as opposed to the people who were supposed to, which was the Law Clerk.

This exact same thing happened at Health. Instead of it going straight to the Law Clerk, who is just as non-partisan and is just as efficient and amazing at his job as the non-partisan public service, it would have been perfectly fine for it to have gone to him instead of being done the way it was done.

I don't understand why he now wants to make this about why it was done like that when it should be about who should be doing it. That's what the motion is about: who should have done it. The point of privilege was that the Law Clerk was supposed to do it. He didn't. This is not done just here for the WE documents; it was done at Health as well.

Just the fact that Mr. Gerretsen suggested that Mr. Poilievre brought a fake document to a press release shows you who's doing political theatrics here.

The Chair: He did withdraw that comment.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I did. I think the public knows who does the political theatrics.

The Chair: We're not going to get into that argument.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Dzerowicz raised a number of pertinent points. I certainly agree with what she said.

I also think it's important to remind opposition colleagues exactly what the subamendment is that Mr. Gerretsen is calling for, just in case there is confusion. I would have thought by now that we would have unanimous support for something that is quite reasonable.

It says that "after the committee reviews the two different versions of documents, the committee invite each of the relevant deputy ministers or the signatories of the transmittal letters as well

as the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons to give testimony regarding the redactions applied to the documents that were requested and granted in the motion adopted on July 7, 2020."

I fail to understand, Mr. Chair, what exactly the opposition has a problem with. The Liberal members of the committee and the government... There's no obstruction here. You can't say that we, as Liberal members, are being obstructionist. In fact, we're trying to find a compromise.

We have a pretty good subamendment here. It's a very strong one; it is reasonable and it responsible. It would allow for committee members to give public servants and the law clerk the opportunity to tell us why particular redactions were made.

What is the opposition worried about? Are they worried, perhaps, that when public servants are questioned, they might say that the personal information of individuals is not something that should be revealed in public? That much is obvious—at least it should be obvious, but opposition members continue to have a problem with that, apparently—particularly the Conservatives. Are they worried that the law clerk would agree with that perspective? Perhaps they are, Mr. Chair. Let's allow those meetings to take place.

In the meantime, let's start planning for what is our chief responsibility right now, which is to abide by Standing Order 83.1. It's absolutely paramount, Mr. Chair.

So many things can be said on that front. When we look at our responsibility as members of Parliament, we not only think about what our role is.... Ms. Jansen put it very well. I had her quote in front of me, but it has since disappeared, so I won't look for it. She made the case this morning that she was elected by her constituents to go to Parliament to serve and to fight on behalf of the people in her community. Every single member of Parliament will echo that.

I humbly suggest to my opposition colleagues that they put some water into their wine, if I can use that analogy. Mr. Chair, Victor Hugo said, "Being good is easy, what is difficult is being just." I would add to that by saying that to be just, one must be fair. One must be open. One must be open to compromise.

Here is an opportunity to recognize that Liberal members and.... I speak for all of us here. Mr. Gerretsen has put forward a really credible amendment. It would allow us to move forward. It would allow the opposition to have their concerns heard, but in a way that is absolutely fair and, therefore, just.

Opposition colleagues were smiling when I brought up Victor Hugo. It's a famous quotation, and one that is quite relevant. We can't talk about fairness without talking about justice. He, obviously, had a great deal to say on the matter of justice.

What is wrong, in the spirit of fairness and justice, to bring public servants to the committee to put on record why they did what they did? I think it's fundamentally—

• (18630)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

For the benefit of the member, he might also appreciate a quote by Winston Churchill, who once said, “It is a good thing for an uneducated man to read books of quotations.”

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That is debate, Mr. Chair. It is not a point of order.

The Chair: I think that's a matter of debate, Mr. Genuis, and not a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thanks for clarifying.

The Chair: I don't believe there's anybody on the list after Mr. Fragiskatos, if you want to come in then.

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I did see Mr. Gerretsen with his hand up, but I'll let you revisit that. Mr. Gerretsen seems to be interested in speaking, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the intervention, even though I was interrupted, but I know the member did it in a spirit of goodwill. Mr. Genuis and I have sparred a number of times in the chamber through debate, and it's a pleasure to sit with him on the special committee that examines, at the moment, Canada-China relations. He's an able member of Parliament and someone who is extremely intelligent and learned. Of course, we are all so very impressed that he can quote Winston Churchill. That is good to know, and I'm glad—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's with Google.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: With Google—well, I won't say that, Mr. Chair. I don't know who said that. I heard something there—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You didn't let me say the quote. It makes much more sense in that context.

The Chair: We'll give you the opportunity later, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm sure he will take it.

To get back to the issue at hand, the subamendment of Mr. Gerretsen provides us with a framework that will not occupy the committee at enormous length and therefore prevent us from looking at, in a very serious way, the issue of pre-budget consultation. It is therefore completely in line with the spirit of Standing Order 83.1, which—as I have mentioned a number of times today—we need to recognize and follow.

We would have meetings on these documents. We would be allowed to question—and I would have questions, serious ones and not ones that would try to ignore the main issue or that would be partisan, but ones that would be very straightforward to public servants and to the law clerk. I would be very interested to hear what they have to say and put on record.

Why is the opposition trying to prevent those folks from coming to the committee and speaking to committee members? Is it because—and I'm just speculating here, Mr. Chair, and not making any accusations, which I would never do—

• (18635)

The Chair: That would be a first at this committee, but go ahead.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I always appreciate your point of view, Mr. Chair, and I will just try, in the spirit of being a good colleague, to be very sincere about what I am about to say.

I am not of the view at all that our job is to be partisan on these matters. Unfortunately, the opposition seems to continue to be anxious to score political points, because they're worried about scoring those points right now. What I'm worried about is making sure we have a decision here today that allows for meaningful discussions, for substantive meetings where we can actually question those involved in the decision-making around the redaction of documents.

Why that is such a problem I'm not sure. Perhaps they're looking at polling. I'm not quite sure. They want to score the points now. They're anxious. Maybe they've received orders from their whip that it is a must that the initial motion of Mr. Poilievre be accepted. If it's not that motion, then it must be the amendment of Mr. Kelly—who is not here right now, but was here earlier—that must be followed, so that the Conservatives cannot work with their colleagues in a spirit of good faith to agree to a compromise that gets to what the Conservatives want but also in a way that is, again, fair and just, to go back to that line of argument.

I will also make a point, Mr. Chair, that I've made a few times here, but I think certain members of the committee are not recognizing it. It is that where we are in the country necessitates a particular approach on the part of members of Parliament. We as MPs have an enormous responsibility, but we are agents of the state in so many ways. We are tasked with working within government and advocating to government on the part of our constituents.

There are many conceptions of the state, as you will know, Mr. Chair. I see Mr. MacGregor here from the NDP. It's good to have him here. If Mr. Julian was here, I'd say the same thing to him: that the NDP has a particular conception of what the state should look like and how it ought to operate, and it differs from how Liberals feel on the matter. It differs from how Conservatives feel—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Just going back, I missed Mr. Fragiskatos' comments there. Did he say that we, as members of Parliament, are agents of the state?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: He did.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Do you want to clarify that? I see myself as an agent of the people of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You could be many things at the same time. We operate within a state framework and therefore, in that sense, we are agents of the state, but I recognize, Mr. MacGregor, that you are also a member of Parliament. I don't know your personal situation, but you are also a son. Perhaps you are a husband. Perhaps you are a father. You can be many things at once.

The phrase “agents of the state” is not pejorative in any sense.

The Chair: We are straying a little from the relevance of this motion.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I was about to bring it back, Mr. Chair. I was, but Mr. MacGregor wanted clarification on that point.

When I was going to bring it back, I was going to simply say that in light of the fact that we continue to deal with COVID-19, we must recognize that the state, as a whole, has a responsibility. Naturally the NDP will understand the responsibility of the state in a particular way, one that seeks to put in a place of primacy working class Canadians.

Who can forget the very famous poem recited by Tommy Douglas? It's an interesting fact that it wasn't Tommy Douglas who came up with the *Mouseland* poem and fable. It was someone else, but either way, the idea is that the working class should be at the very core of what parliamentarians are looking at and who they are seeking to support.

Of course, he used the analogy of the mice and the black cats—the black cats, of course, being the capitalist class, and the mice being the working class—

• (18640)

The Chair: I do think we are straying from—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: —the motion we are debating.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I was trying to work it back, Mr. Chair. I am working to—

The Chair: We have a point of order from Mr. Genuis.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, based on what the member was saying, I had assumed we were in camera and that these were not things he wanted on the record. Could you clarify whether we are in camera or in public?

The Chair: This is public.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Oh, it's public. Okay. I'm glad the record will show it, then. Thank you.

The Chair: It is a public meeting, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Fragiskatos, we'll go on to relevance.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Certainly, Mr. Chair.

I'm making the point that when we think about pre-budget consultations, we have to think about responsibilities. Each member of Parliament will understand their responsibilities in a certain way. The NDP has a particular approach to the issue of responsibility and what it means for parliamentarians, which aligns with the ideological perspective of the NDP and the role of the state within that wider framework.

I'm glad to go on record on these things. I'm happy, even as a Liberal, to quote Tommy Douglas. It is interesting that if we reviewed the parliamentary record and some of the things Mr. Genuis has said over the years, I wonder if—

The Chair: I'm coming back to relevance again, but I'm reluctant to cut you off.

Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm getting to the point at hand, Mr. Chair. I've stayed on topic, although yes, perhaps I've strayed at certain points.

I know Mr. Genuis is off his game here a little bit and wants to continue to interject. It's not my intent to get under his skin. He's a valued colleague, and I hope we can remain collegial here.

There are others, Mr. Chair, who will say that the role of parliamentarians—and this again reflects their position on what the state is all about—the primary job of parliamentarians, is to make sure that people are secure, because the job of the state is to ensure the physical security of citizens, but that's not just a point that relates to the need for a strong military.

Think about economic security and what Canadians are going through right now. You don't have to have a particularly focused understanding of German sociology through the works of Max Weber and others on what the state is all about to recognize that the state is much more than an entity tasked with ensuring the physical security of citizens. The economic security of citizens is absolutely paramount, and here we have an opportunity at this committee to look at that matter in great detail.

I'm tempted, Mr. Chair, as someone of Greek heritage, to speak about the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato and what Socrates said about the state. I won't go into that—

The Chair: That's good, because I was going to suggest that the clerk has now sent you the motion. It might be good for you to pull it up so that you could be on the motion with relevance.

The floor is yours to start to sum up.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Again, with due respect, it is all relevant, Mr. Chair, when we are debating a subamendment that, if accepted, would allow this committee to meaningfully approach its various responsibilities.

Number one, we would finally have a path forward that would allow for pre-budget consultations to begin. On top of that, we would deal with the issues that our opposition friends have raised here today. They wish to discuss this issue of redaction—fair enough—but we cannot do that unless we discuss it with those who were involved, those being the public servants and the law clerk. Let's have them at committee. Let's have that meaningful discussion. Why we would hold that back is only for the opposition, namely the Conservatives, to answer, and they have not done it. Instead they want to continue to focus on political points and partisanship, issues that everyday Canadians on Main Street don't care at all about. They care about ideas that will lead to genuine policy outcomes, as we've seen.

As I made clear in my earlier remarks today, this committee has the ability to do that, the ability to suggest policy proposals to the government, namely the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister, that would continue to contribute to this country. CEBA, the payroll subsidy, and matters of rent could all be looked at in a very serious way.

Mr. Chair, I think we ought to move forward, agree to the subamendment of Mr. Gerretsen, and then begin planning what Ms. Dzerowicz and Mr. Ste-Marie have both called for, and I believe Mr. Julian too at some point—I don't want to leave him out of this—which is a pre-budget consultation. It's been a pleasure to serve on this committee for the last several years, and the best part of the role is sitting through pre-budget consultations. It's a very serious enterprise, one that I take incredibly seriously.

I've raised various philosophers and philosophical theories here today about what the state should be. Ultimately, the state should look after its citizens, whether you put the working class at the centre, as the NDP does, whether you put business at the centre, as the Conservatives do, or whether, as the Liberals do as a party of moderation, you put the needs of the working class, the poor and business in the middle. Again, it's a party of moderation, and we can find ways to work together.

All of what we've heard here today from the opposition stands in the way of that. What the Conservatives continue to do here is not in the spirit of collaboration. I would call on them to stop being obstructionist, to accept the subamendment of Mr. Gerretsen, and to get on with the business of this committee—namely, the recognition of Standing Order 83.1. Let's do what's right, agree with Mr. Gerretsen on what he has put forward, and then, as I said, start planning the real work.

● (18645)

The Chair: Thank you.

I said I'd give Mr. Genuis an opportunity to at least finish his quote on Winston Churchill or, if he wants to, make further remarks.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis. Then I will go to Mr. Gerretsen and Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I'm extremely grateful.

The quotation was from Winston Churchill, who said, "It is good for an uneducated man to read books of quotations."

That is all I have to say.

The Chair: That is the shortest I've ever heard you speak.

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I don't know how I'm supposed to follow that. That was a very enlightening quote Mr. Genuis provided.

Let's get back to what I am proposing. I put up my hand when Mrs. Jansen was speaking. This amendment hadn't been distributed yet, although I thought it had gone out. Fair enough. I don't know if she fully understood—and I'm just interpreting this based on what she was saying—what this is asking for.

I want to very quickly go through it again, now that everybody has it in front of them.

The first part says, "That the committee requests the complete package of documents provided to the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons by relevant Deputy Ministers or the signatories of the transmittal letters, as well as the final package of documents that the Law Clerk and Parlia-

mentary Counsel of the House of Commons approved for release". It's asking for those documents.

Then it goes on to say that "both the documents and packages be provided no later than October 19" and further, "that after the committee reviews the two versions of the documents, the committee invite the relevant deputy ministers, the signatories of the transmittal letters, as well as the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel"—which is to the point that she raised—"of the House of Commons to give testimony regarding the redactions".

Then it goes on to indicate various dates in there, and that Mr. Poilievre's motion be picked up after that fact.

I am having a very difficult time letting this go. Quite frankly, Mr. Chair, I'd love to hear from Mr. MacGregor or Mr. Ste-Marie as to where they are on this. I know they would not want to put themselves in a position of voting on something that basically deems these officials to have breached privileges of Parliament without even providing them due process.

Because we haven't heard from the NDP and the Bloc, I am really curious to know where they are in terms of supporting it. It's important for people to know that we're basically casting judgment based on some work that was done without asking for information as to how and why the work was done in the way that it was. Although I can appreciate the political need to not support my previous two motions, I think that members should pay a lot more attention to this one, because what we're saying is to give them....

I see that Mr. MacGregor has raised his hand to signal you, Mr. Chair. I know you're on a really small screen there, so hopefully you'll give him the opportunity to chime in at the appropriate moment. Maybe Mr. Ste-Marie wants to as well.

No, he doesn't. Okay.

We're basically saying that these officials, who are independent and work for Parliament, have breached privileges of members. What's worse is that you're not even giving them an opportunity to explain how and why they did their work before you deem that to be the case. If you really have an interest in defending the institution and the individuals, which I know the NDP and the Bloc do, you would want to at least explain, and put on the record, why you don't think they should be afforded the opportunity to defend themselves before casting this judgment on them.

The next part of it is.... It doesn't leave it there. This amendment doesn't just say, "Okay, that's it. That's the end of the story." The amendment goes on to say that if the committee is still not satisfied, it can take further actions it deems necessary—i.e., for privilege being breached—so there is still the opportunity to go back to Mr. Poilievre's motion and enforce that later on.

• (18650)

It's easy to assume that people out there don't understand the nuances of how this stuff works. Mr. Poilievre brought out documents that had been redacted, and he waved them around. When he did that, he was, of course, trying to imply that they had all been done by the PMO, that the Prime Minister sat there and blacked out all these things, or got his people to black out all these things, before they were turned over to Parliament. Come on. Nobody in this meeting right now thinks otherwise. Everybody knows that this was Mr. Poilievre's intention. Nobody believes that he took the time to explain to people, while he was flashing these documents around, that legal counsel and the officers of Parliament were the ones who blacked out the necessary portions of them. Nobody thinks that anybody took the time to do that.

Therefore, we have to let these people have their say. This is like trying an individual before a court without allowing that individual to put forth their defence. I can't understand how any member of Parliament wouldn't support more openness and accountability—unless of course, going back to what I've been accused of so many times today, the motive has nothing to do with openness and transparency and getting the information out there, but rather has to do with grandstanding and using this opportunity to once again, as Mr. Fragiskatos said, do nothing more than attempt to inflict political damage on the Prime Minister in particular.

We know that from day one, the Conservatives, in opposition since 2015, have spent very, very little time bringing forward policies and motions. I hand it to the NDP, because quite often, although not all the time, when they bring forward opposition motions, they are actually about policy. As we've seen from the Conservatives, every motion they bring forward has always been about how to make the Prime Minister look bad, how to paint him in a bad light. It has always been about personal attacks on the Prime Minister.

I apologize if I'm jumping to the conclusion that motives exist here, but it's all that I've witnessed from the Conservatives for five years. It's the only thing I've had the opportunity to see. There's no interest in policy. There's no interest in bringing forward anything that would advance the agenda of Canadians. They never do that. They just bring forward opposition motions, and take various opportunities during question period, to try to completely annihilate political careers, as opposed to advancing things that Canadians care about right now.

This is germane to the discussion, Mr. Chair. I'm trying to highlight why they're not interested in supporting something like this, or at least why I perceive they're not supporting something like this. I wholeheartedly believe that the NDP and the Bloc are in a different place in terms of worrying about how we are affecting public servants through this process and what a motion like this would be inflicting upon public servants. I think they should be extremely careful when going down this road.

Mr. Chair, I know that Mr. Badawey has something to add to this, so I will conclude my remarks by saying that I have a very, very difficult time letting this go. We're talking about more openness, we're talking about more transparency and we're talking about allowing people to defend themselves against accusations of a

breach of privilege. We should be affording them the opportunity to do that.

• (18655)

Maybe Mr. MacGregor or Mr. Ste-Marie see this a little differently and have problems with this particular amendment. Maybe they can find an amendment to the amendment that would make it more palatable in terms of their being able to accept it. However, I really think that at the end of the day, we need to make sure these individuals have the opportunity to have a say in what they're basically being accused of through this motion.

I'm really hoping that, as Mr. Fragiskatos said, in the spirit of collegiality, we can find a way to allow them the opportunity to do that. If you're genuinely interested in getting to the bottom of this, I think that people will support that idea.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just to give everyone a heads-up, I have on my list Mr. Badawey, Mr. MacGregor, and Mr. Lake.

First is Mr. Badawey.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have to say, just jumping into this fray—although I've been watching it for a bit today—that it's been quite a journey. I also have to say that I'm not going to be here to give anybody any lessons or any preaching or any quotes; I'm just going to get right to the point.

I guess somewhat of a benefit, Mr. Chairman, is that I'm coming from the perspective of being outside the box for the past day, in comparison to many of you who've been at this for quite some time. What I've witnessed, quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, is something that has disturbed me since becoming an MP in 2015, compared to my former life as a mayor for 14 years here in a small community in Niagara, in Port Colborne.

I've always had a certain attitude or mindset. It's an attitude that was progressive on behalf of the people I represented and a mindset that we put the business of good government ahead of the business of good politics. Quite frankly, that's what I can see here happening.

I say “good government” because we have priorities that are a heck of a lot more important to deal with today, like COVID and the pandemic and many of the files that many of you work on on a daily basis on behalf of each and every individual and business in your ridings.

When I look at this, I see two words that resonate in my mind, one being “accountability” and one being “transparency”. It's that simple, quite frankly: accountability based on what we're discussing and transparency on how to come out with decisions based on the motion that's before us. Equally as important, if not more important, is to get to the amendment that's been presented to us and that we're now discussing.

Mr. Chairman, it is about team and it is about respect. I bring up my former life as a mayor because one of the things I didn't demand but commanded was just that: a respect for our team. That's the respect for the people who are elected, but equally, if not more importantly, it's the respect for those people who work side by side with us on a daily basis who, quite frankly, make us look good.

Make no mistake about it, members: It's not you who does much of what is read about you or is the reason your name or face is in the paper. It's the people you work with on a daily basis. It's your staff. It's the team. In this case in the House, it's public servants, the law clerk, and the list goes on. Let's not dismiss that. Let's remember that. Quite frankly, they deserve your respect as much as they respect you. They're passionate about being in the business of good government, not in the business of good politics.

With that said, there are many opportunities that come out of that mindset, opportunities for you to best represent the people who are in your ridings and, quite frankly, even outside them, across Canada, as we get out of our ridings sometimes. In my former life, I also made it very clear to my council that we were not sitting around a horseshoe to bully the people we worked with. We were sitting around to listen, to learn and to make proper decisions because of what we heard and what we learned. This is no different. Here we are with an opportunity to make a good decision for the people we represent, a decision for good government, which is the business we should be in, and to take into consideration what our public servants and our law clerk have to say in explaining their decisions before we inform the House that they have breached members' privilege, your privilege.

I say "bully" because without that opportunity, quite frankly, that's what we're doing. We're taking on a decision that, in fact, is not fully informed.

I'm currently the chair of the Standing Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities. Frankly, I'm blessed to date—although we've only had one meeting with many discussions—with the committee members we have in place. What I hear from the sincerity of committee members, both at the meeting as well as off to the side, is that we all have a desire to get on with business and to get on with good government as opposed to good politics. With that said, it's political gain that you'll get, based on results.

• (18700)

When it comes election time, those results come from that narrative, on how hard you worked and what you brought back to your people.

I've talked to many people throughout the past many weeks and many months on this very issue, and quite frankly, what people are concerned with is putting food on their table, paying their bills and being healthy.

Quite frankly, this is, to some extent, rhetoric. It's noise, and as was mentioned earlier, it's just a ploy by the opposition party to gain a narrative, after the good work that has been done by this government, and not just by the government but by all of us working together for the past many months.

That said, it's not just about us; it's about the people we work with on a daily basis. It's the different organizations: the United Way, seniors organizations, our Legions, the people who help the homeless, people who put food on people's tables, and the list goes on, including our municipal councils. That's what we should be discussing right now. That's the priority. That's the business of good government.

I've always considered myself a riding MP, someone who will not get caught in the Ottawa bubble, in all the rhetoric and the attempts to capture the narrative and get that word out there. No, it's all about "simple". It's simply dealing with the residents, with Mrs. Jones in Thorold, Mrs. MacKinnon in Welland, Mr. Polc in Port Colborne and residents throughout the region. That's my priority. That's what I'm about. That's what I spend my time on.

Now I'm pulled into a meeting such as this, which, by the way, I fully appreciate. I feel very privileged, actually, to be with many of you, who I see almost on a daily basis are doing good work.

Why are we going down this road? If, in fact, we're going to go down this road, why are we not doing it properly? Why are we not doing it in a way that the people we represent expect us to, as MPs, and being accountable and transparent? Why are we not allowing the process to be accountable and transparent, and therefore allowing this amendment to move forward?

Again I go back to my former life, which I try to learn from when I'm in my current life as a member of Parliament and trying to inject better government into the process, versus better politics. As many of you may know, at the municipal level it's about the person you talk to in the Loblaws or on the soccer field or at the arena, or when you're walking down a sidewalk or you're interrupted while you're cutting your grass. They want to talk about transit or about the high water bills, and the list goes on.

This is no different. People still do that with me. One of the first questions they ask me is, "Why is it always a fight up in Ottawa? Why can't people just look after our best interests, the things that we deal with on a daily basis, as you used to do when you were a mayor, and simply stop playing politics and trying to gain a narrative, bashing the Prime Minister or bashing certain ministers or MPs?" Let's get down to it. Let's get down to work.

I came in about an hour ago and saw the amendment that has been brought forward, and when I see, quite frankly, the disrespect that's being shown here versus the respect for the people we deal with on a daily basis, it's quite disturbing.

Folks, we're all on the same team here. We all should be rowing in the same direction. It's Canada. I'll stop short of giving my opinion on some of the things that happen around the world or even with our neighbours to the south, because what's relevant here is that as Canadians, we should be rowing in the same direction.

Part of that—and I get the politics, because it is Ottawa—is allowing respect to be front and centre and therefore giving an opportunity for our team—our public servants and the law clerk—to come forward and be accountable, be transparent and give us a reason, and therefore move forward past that to the main motion.

● (18705)

To all of you, I say that: Show that respect. Show that you recognize the team. Show that you recognize that what's more important here is the business of government, not the business of politics. Therefore, we can move forward with this discussion, and I do respect the discussion, but equally if not more importantly is to move forward with what our priorities are here on this day, October 15, 2020, and moving forward as long as we're in this pandemic.

Those priorities are to ensure that people are healthy, safe, and confident and comfortable that they have a government that's working in their best interests in terms of what they're dealing with today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Badawey.

We have Mr. MacGregor followed by Mr. Lake.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I won't be long. Mr. Gerretsen asked for my viewpoint on this. When I go back and look at the original letter that was provided by the parliamentary law clerk, I was struck by that one paragraph where the parliamentary law clerk notes that the power the House and its committees have to order the production of records is absolute and unfettered as it constitutes a constitutional parliamentary privilege that supersedes statutory obligations such as the exemptions found in the Access to Information Act. That's it in a nutshell. That's it, full stop.

We're now dealing with a subamendment to an amendment to a main motion. I get what the Liberals are trying to do. They've talked repeatedly about wanting the finance committee to get on to more important matters, whereas members of the opposition are saying, yes, let's get to a vote so we can get to those other matters. However, for me it's the fact that various departments took that step of deciding what the committee could see and what the committee could not see. It just really goes back to that one sentence in the letter from the parliamentary law clerk. Our power to order the production of records and the production of papers is an absolute authority. It's rooted in centuries of tradition. That's what we're standing up for. Ultimately, we are the ones who make the decisions on what we view and so on.

I don't think, ultimately, any member of this committee.... I've heard members of the governing party allude to the fact that we may want to go on a witch hunt, or that members of various ministries and deputy ministers.... We're not interested in going after those people. I've worked very closely with deputy ministers at the agriculture committee. They're fine, upstanding people. In no way do we want to impugn their records or what they contribute to the way our government functions.

At the heart of this matter is our upholding the rights and privileges of Parliament as an institution, a convention and a set of rules

that are rooted in centuries of tradition. That's really where the opposition is at.

I was at the great PROC filibuster of 2017. I remember taking part in that. I wonder why the Liberals are choosing this hill to die on. If you're going to filibuster a committee—if you're going to delay our actually getting to a vote—you should have a reason.

In 2017 we were legitimately filibustering the procedure and house affairs committee because we were trying to stop the executive from unilaterally changing the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. That was a hill we were going to die on, because it was affecting not only our rights and privileges as members but the rights and privileges of all MPs—present and future. I think that was a more noble cause. It was something that could be easily explained to the Canadian public.

You have to ask yourself.... People who are tuning in right now—not only to the Standing Committee on Finance but also to the Standing Committee on Ethics—are wondering why it's still October 8 on the Standing Committee of Finance's website when we are now more than 176 hours in, and why we keep having subamendments to an amendment to the main motion. It's continuous delay to not allow us, as members of the committee, to see information that we are rightly allowed to see, given Parliament's absolute power in this regard.

I'll end there by saying that I understand the Liberal argument on why they have to do this and the process they're going through.

To Mr. Badawey's comments, I believe that Parliament and its various committees are able to walk and chew gum. The business of government is going on. The House of Commons is dealing with justice bills. I know the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food is looking at agricultural matters. This Standing Committee on Finance is doing something that's related to its mandate, as is the ethics committee.

● (18710)

The government is still functioning. The various ministries are still functioning. The House of Commons is still looking at other things. I believe that this committee is exercising a power that it should be exercising. I hope the Liberals on this committee understand that the longer this goes on, the reasons they have for delaying our getting to an actual vote are going to start wearing thin with the Canadian public.

You don't have, on your side, a plausible argument for delay like we, the opposition members, did in 2017. We had the public on side with us for that fight. The public inherently understood that it was about the rights of Parliament, the rights of its members and the rights against executive overreach. In this particular one, the longer this goes on, the more it looks like there's something to hide.

I would ask my Liberal MPs to help us get along so that the Standing Committee on Finance can have those pre-budgetary hearings. I know we're already in October, but there is still time left in this year to allow this committee to get to a vote on the main motion. We can uphold Parliament's right for the production of papers in order that we, as a committee, can exercise our right to look at the fully unredacted documents and work with parliamentary law counsel to decide what information should ultimately be withheld. There are numerous ways that committees can protect private information, but ultimately this goes to the heart of what parliamentary privilege is all about.

I would draw the attention of all members of this committee to that very important sentence that is contained in the original letter from the parliamentary law clerk.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll conclude my remarks.

• (18715)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

On the list I have Mr. Lake, and Mr. Gerretsen following that.

If there are others, click the hand on the reaction screen or raise your hand.

Mr. Lake.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you. It's a pleasure to be a guest here.

I wasn't going to weigh in. I was listening intently, and after listening to Mr. Gerretsen and Mr. Badawey, I had to, as they spoke in hushed tones, very serious tones about Parliament properly doing its work and about accountability and transparency. I know my constituents would be astonished if I didn't weigh in on their behalf, because it is unbelievably ironic to hear those words being used in the discussion we're having here today.

Of particular interest to me was Mr. Badawey's assertion that we should all be rowing in the same direction. How unbelievable that statement is, given that about eight weeks ago the Liberals not only stopped rowing but threw all the oars out of the boat so none of us could row either. It's absolutely astonishing to hear that being said in the middle of a global pandemic in order to avoid accountability and transparency, to use Mr. Badawey's words, to stop Parliament from functioning properly. "Properly" again being M. Badawey's words.

They shut down Parliament so that the COVID committee, for example, couldn't function and hear from expert witnesses from across the country on best measures that we could take as a country to address a global pandemic.

We're in a situation where, by the time this is over, we're probably going to be spending as much money or run up as much debt in months, maybe in a year, as we ran up in over 150 years of Confederation. Canadians expect that Parliament will sit and parliamentarians will hold the government to account, and in a minority Parliament, if anything, the government should be working with parliamentarians from all sides to get the best results for Canadians.

I had to weigh in. When I put my hand up at first, I think it was before Mr. Badawey even said the things he said. It was in response

to Mr. Gerretsen, who made the comment that opposition members, particularly Conservatives, haven't moved legislation or bills or motions to better the lives of Canadians.

In the spring of 2017, the one time I had the opportunity to move an opposition day motion, I remember working with members of the New Democratic Party, the Bloc and the Green Party, members from all sides of the House, to come up with a motion that I thought was the biggest no-brainer. In fact, I reached out to Liberals. Between a dozen and two dozen Liberals told me they would support my motion on a Canadian autism partnership. Talk about something that should be as easy to support as just about anything.

I put forward the motion. First of all, an expert committee put forward a proposal to government for a budget. It got rejected in the budget. Then we brought forward an opposition day motion to further the issue. New Democrats and Conservatives don't always agree, but on this point, we were in full agreement. At the end of the day, when it came time to stand up and vote, every Conservative, New Democrat and Green Party member voted in favour. Do you know who didn't vote in favour? Not one member of the Liberal Party voted in favour because they were whipped to vote against it.

I'm looking at all of you. Mr. Fragiskatos, Mr. Easter, Mr. Gerretsen, Mr. Badawey, Mr. Fraser, you voted against it. All five of you voted against it.

To hear Mr. Gerretsen give the lecture that he gave here earlier, a lecture that was born out of a situation where he has to waste as much of the committee's time as he can because he wants to avoid losing a vote that he's almost certainly going to lose eventually, to hear him make the points he made, I just couldn't stay silent.

• (18720)

On behalf of my constituents, on behalf of stakeholders whom I work with across the country, I had to weigh in. I will now, I assume, cede the floor so that we can listen to hours upon hours of Liberals standing up one after the other to lecture us in the way that they've been lecturing us for hours upon hours already.

With that, I hope, maybe hope against hope, that at some point we can come to a little bit of common sense and understanding and come to a vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake. It's your absolute right to weigh in.

I have Mr. Gerretsen and then Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I find it very interesting, Mr. Chair, to be lectured by a Conservative member who was sitting in the House of Commons when Stephen Harper prorogued Parliament solely for the purpose of avoiding an election. He's somehow sitting there with a straight face telling Liberal members that proroguing after spending over \$300 billion in order to get the gauge of Parliament to determine if we're taking the right course is somehow not a proper use of proroguing Parliament. Meanwhile this member was in the House that whole time, including when Stephen Harper did that and prorogued Parliament to save his own skin, and for no other reason.

I appreciate Mr. Lake's comments. I think he did a very good job of delivering that, in particular advancing his position on it, but hypocrisy is a very interesting thing and we're seeing it on full display right now in this committee from Conservative members.

Going back to Mr. MacGregor's point, the reason I have a difficult time with what he's saying is that the reality of the situation is that it's not department officials who were doing the majority of the redacting. It was specifically the officials, and I will go back to my motion, because we asked specifically for them to come. They are the deputy ministers but also the Law Clerk and the Parliamentary Counsel for the House of Commons. These are not political staff, nor are deputy ministers political staff. These are individuals who have no way to defend themselves.

To suggest, as Mr. MacGregor did, that it's okay to proceed with this parliamentary privilege because of the fact that they're in the department.... It's unfortunate, but it's the same angle the Conservatives are using. That angle is that they need to make sure that they just get as much out there as possible, so that Pierre can go out again and start waving things around and grandstanding, get a 20-second clip that he can share on Twitter for all of his faithful followers to watch. It actually produces nothing in terms of what a parliamentary privilege is intended to produce.

What we're doing here is we're saying is that those who were impacted by this and are being impacted by this motion that's being proposed right now.... Again, the way that we ended on this motion is very interesting in that Mr. Poilievre decided that he would circumvent the order in which motions were already being delivered in committee, but I digress. What we end up with is a motion that holds people in light of breached privileges of members of Parliament, and that's where I think Mr. MacGregor and all members of this committee need to focus. It is the fact that you're not allowing these people to defend themselves.

Mr. MacGregor brings up the point. He asks whether this is the hill we're willing to die on. Well, guess what. If this is a hill that involves saving the careers of individuals who are professionals, who work within the government and who don't have a voice because the system intentionally doesn't provide them a voice because they're non-partisan, then this is a hill that I'll go to. I will defend those people. I will go to the hill for those people, and if Mr. MacGregor chooses that it's not the hill that's he's interested in dying on, then that's entirely his prerogative. However, I think it's worth fighting for those people, worth fighting for them to give their voices so that their voices can be heard, and to give them the opportunity to come forward to committee to explain in detail why and how things were redacted in the way that they were.

I'm sure we're going to find out at the end of the day that there's nothing to this outside of a standard redaction of information that was not relevant to the motion and what was being requested by committee.

• (18725)

I've made the point before that we really need to look for a way to provide an avenue for these people to speak and explain themselves so that we can get all the information out there. The blatant disregard for giving them that opportunity, which is being showcased by members of all opposition parties for that matter, is ex-

tremely troubling. I'm willing to fight for those officials to make sure that their voices are heard.

This is a hill that I'm willing to die on, Mr. MacGregor. I'm willing to fight for those people to make sure that their voices can be heard. I respect the fact that you're claiming that you had the prerogative and you were justified in 2017 when you were in this position, but somehow magically we're not justified right now. That's a matter of your opinion, with which I, respectfully, completely, 100% disagree. We need to make sure that our public officials always have the protections and are given the opportunities at all junctures, whenever possible, to explain themselves, especially before you bring them before a motion that basically suggests that they have breached your privilege, which is extremely unfortunate.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair. I wanted to respond to Mr. MacGregor's comments on that, and of course to Mr. Lake's hypocrisy.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go on to Mr. Fragiskatos. I don't see Ms. Jansen.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I echo the sentiment that we just heard from Mr. Gerretsen on the point relating to Mr. MacGregor. It's not being disrespectful to say that it's very surprising when we have a subamendment before us that would very much allow for public servants to come forward to explain. The subamendment is perfectly in line with an idea and notion that suggest that public servants deserve to be treated fairly and, by virtue of the fact that they are non-partisan, we have to take it upon ourselves to provide them an avenue through which they will be able to articulate the particular decisions they've made. Opposition members can ask them questions—

• (18730)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm not trying to make this a point of debate. This is a point of clarification, and I hope you will find it a point of order.

Just to rewind, am I not correct that when the committee was examining the original motion back in July, it did approve that redactions could be made as necessary by the office of the law clerk? I thought that redactions had already been agreed to by this committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, that is a point of debate. I've been interrupted. It's a point of debate.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm asking for a clarification, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: There's no such thing as a point of clarification. It's a point of order, and that's definitely not a point of order.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Perhaps Mr. Chair can walk us down memory lane. I just want to have on the record a previous motion that was passed by the committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Well, it's Mr. Fragiskatos who has the floor. It's not a point of order.

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Fragiskatos.

I think you can go back to the record. I don't want to be in error by saying something that wasn't on the record at the time in terms of the directive. Therefore, the best thing is to go back and look at the blues and the motion.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I won't belabour the point, but I find it rather curious that Mr. MacGregor, being a member of the NDP and a passionate one, clearly put himself on the record as not supporting the subamendment that is opening the door, in a very transparent and fair way, to public servants to voice decisions that they made instead of the alternative. Mr. Kelly's amendment, like everything that Mr. Poilievre has done before it, does not allow for public servants to explain themselves. Instead, it silences them.

What we've done here on the Liberal side is put forward a subamendment, which I'll speak about in a moment at length, Mr. Chair, about why it continues to be important that we look at and support the subamendment of Mr. Gerretsen.

I found this rather curious, with the NDP being always on record as a party that supports public servants and the whole idea of a vibrant, professional, non-partisan public service.

To Mr. Lake's point, although I have not had the chance to get to know Mr. Lake very well, I know him to be a very passionate advocate around a number of issues, particularly autism. I know that he has taken issue with particular decisions made by the government in the past, which he's quite free to do.

I noticed, though, and I think it's important to say back to Mr. Lake that it is interesting—I'll use a neutral word—that Mr. Lake failed to mention the record of the Harper government. I know it goes back a little bit, but he was a part of it. When he accuses committee members of standing in the way here and of playing political games, which we are not.... Certainly, however, if you want to talk about political games, Mr. Chair, what do we call efforts to obstruct the work of committees, to get in the way of committee work, such as we saw under the Harper government?

In fact, if I'm not mistaken, there was a book that Conservative staffers wrote that was to be read by committee members—in particular, Conservative committee chairs. The intent of that booklet was to find ways to prevent committees from doing their work, to prevent them from meaningfully engaging in the issues of the day, to ensure that only Conservative-friendly witnesses would come forward to address committees. There are many other examples.

It's thus a bit rich that Mr. Lake has told us here today of how unfair he thinks the Liberal side is when it is putting forward ideas that allow for this issue around redacted documents on the WE Charity issue and that allow us as parliamentarians to engage in those matters, but in a way that allows public servants to voice their perspective. We're not being obstructionist at all.

I was also moved by Mr. Badawey's insight. He comes at this as someone who has led in politics in other ways. At the municipal level, he was a mayor for a number of years in the community of Port Colborne—to which, actually, I have a tie, Mr. Chair: my mother-in-law is originally from there. The Badawey family is well

known in that community and well respected. I think we understand why, when we hear Mr. Badawey speak with such passion about the everyday people he knows in his community.

I would ask my honourable colleagues that we keep that spirit and ethic in mind. What would our constituents say right now—and perhaps they are all watching and are seized with this issue on the parliamentary channel, though something tells me...[*Inaudible—Editor*].

What would they say, though, if they knew that we had a chance either to be debating this subject at great length—I believe we began at 11:00 a.m. today, and that's fine, as the days are long in parliamentary life—or were seized with parliamentary budget consultations as an alternative? Which would they want us to focus on, Mr. Chair? Which subject would be more important?

On top of that, if our constituents were made aware—and yes, some will be watching and so will already be aware, but if the vast majority knew—that the Liberal side has put forward a subamendment that allows for the general substance of what the opposition is seeking to hear, but in a much fairer way, what would they say? I think they would say the committee should unanimously support Mr. Gerretsen on this subject. I will leave those initial observations there.

• (18735)

I want to get into my further thoughts on what Mr. Gerretsen has articulated. It has been a while since he put forward the subamendment, so to remind members let me review the motion that Mr. Gerretsen has tabled. It reads, "That the committee requests the complete package of documents provided to the office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons by relevant deputy ministers or the signatories of the transmittal letters as well as the final package of documents the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons approved for release; that both of the documents packages be provided to the committee no later than October 19, 2020; and that after the committee reviews the two different versions of documents, the committee invite each of the relevant deputy ministers or the signatories of the transmittal letters as well as the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons to give testimony regarding the redactions applied to the documents that were requested and granted in the motion adopted on July 7, 2020. Until such a time as this testimony is complete debate on the main motion and amendment from Mr. Poilievre be suspended, and that the chair be authorized to schedule these witnesses and convene a meeting to resume debate on Mr. Poilievre's motion once these meetings have taken place."

I know I might be accused of trying to waste time here by reading out the subamendment for the motion of Mr. Gerretsen, but it's important to catch up because it has been a long day, and some time has passed since Mr. Gerretsen put forward his idea.

What we are looking for is a full and complete accounting, Mr. Chair, of the documents to be provided to the committee. The opposition has since twice voted down Liberal members' attempts to provide the committee with a common set of documents without a word, Mr. Chair—and here I find some surprise—from the Bloc or the NDP. It's not clear that these members have expressed a view, and many of the members from those two parties here are substitutes. I don't see Mr. Julian. I know Mr. MacGregor put himself on the record before. It's unfortunate he took the view that he did, so I think my previous comment applies.

Next, we are asking for the transmittal letters. They have been cited here at length, but let me repeat that these documents tell the committee how the world-class public servants who prepared these documents, per the motion of this committee, applied redactions. Let me share some highlights.

The text of the letter from Mr. Paul Rochon, the deputy minister of finance, reads:

The Committee's motion stipulates that Cabinet confidences and national security information are to be excluded from the package. No information is being withheld on the grounds of national security, since the information does not so pertain. With respect to Cabinet confidences, you will note that considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant contained in Cabinet confidences is being provided to the Committee. This is in keeping with the public disclosures of information on this matter made by members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. A principled approach was taken with respect to this information to ensure a non-selective application of the protection afforded by Cabinet confidentiality. As a result, considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant that would otherwise be protected as Cabinet confidence is being released. Information not related to the Canada Student Service Grant that is contained in Cabinet confidences is withheld and identified as not relevant to the request.

That is entirely reasonable, Mr. Chair. Furthermore, the letter states:

With respect to personal information, the department is obliged to protect such information under the *Privacy Act* unless the individuals to whom it relates consent to its disclosure, or disclosure is otherwise authorized in certain specified circumstances or the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs any resulting invasion of privacy.

• (18740)

His letter continues:

Reasonable efforts were made by the department to obtain consent. Where consent was not given, the department found that the public interest in sharing the information with the Committee outweighed any invasion of the individual's privacy. As such, disclosure is being made pursuant to subparagraph 8(2)(m)(i) of the *Privacy Act*. As required by that Act, the Privacy Commissioner was informed by our decision. In very limited cases, personal information was redacted from these records as consent was not obtained from the individuals concerned nor was the department able to conclude that the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighed the invasion of the individuals' privacy. The type of personal information that remains protected consists of the identity of unrelated third parties where their opinion or view relates to an unrelated matter to this inquiry, as well as personal e-mail addresses and phone numbers.

That is the end of the quote.

From the text of the letter from Mr. Simon Kennedy, Deputy Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, which my Conservative friends will know as the former Industry Canada, I read into the record the following:

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada has retrieved all records from within the Department that respond to the Committee's motion.

You will find the results of that search enclosed for the Committee's consideration.

It should be noted, however, that in the preparation of this package, care was taken to obtain consent to disclose certain personal information from exempt staff referenced in the material and, in collaboration with other government departments, the staff from WE Charity in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy Act*.

In addition, the Committee's motion stipulates that Cabinet confidences and national security information are to be excluded from the package. No information is being withheld on the grounds of national security, since the information does not so pertain. With respect to Cabinet confidences, you will note that information on the Canada Student Service Grant that was a Cabinet confidence is being provided to the Committee. This is in keeping with the public disclosures of information on this matter made by members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. A principled approach was adopted to this information to ensure a non-selective application of the protection afforded by Cabinet confidentiality. Information not related to the Canada Student Service Grant that constitutes a Cabinet confidence is withheld and identified as not relevant to the request.

Next, Mr. Chair, is the text from the secretary of the Treasury Board, Mr. Peter Wallace, who holds the distinction of having served as a senior public servant in three levels of government in Canada:

The Committee's motion stipulates that Cabinet confidences and national security information are to be excluded from the package. No information is being withheld on the grounds of national security, since the information does not so pertain. With respect to Cabinet confidences, you will note that considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant that were Cabinet confidences is being provided to the Committee. This is in keeping with the public disclosures of information on this matter made by members of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada. A principled approach was adopted to this information to ensure a non-selective application of the protection afforded by Cabinet confidentiality. As a result, considerable information on the Canada Student Service Grant that would otherwise constitute Cabinet confidences is being released. Information not related to the Canada Student Service Grant that constitutes Cabinet confidences is withheld and identified as not relevant to the request.

It continues.

This same principled approach was also applied to the second enclosed package of TBS documents, which is provided in support of the commitment by the Clerk of the Privy Council to provide additional information on due diligence on the Canada Student Service Grant subsequent to his appearance on July 21, 2020. Additionally, because I believe...it is in the public interest to do so, this package includes information being made available as a result of a limited waiver of solicitor client privilege as it relates to the information that is being provided by Employment and Social Development Canada.

While many TBS employees continue to work virtually, guided by public health measures and focused on curbing the spread of COVID-19, these two packages provide, to the best of my knowledge, as of August 7, 2020, the TBS documents in response to the above-noted request for production of papers and due diligence line of inquiry.

I've read into the record that perspective. Now, let me continue on my own, here, Mr. Chair. Again, the opposition—I'm especially thinking about the Bloc here, as I've not heard anything from them—and the NDP have opposed the provision of these critical transmittal letters, without a single word. It is because they are not tuned in, Mr. Chair. I see that Mr. Ste-Marie is there. I respect him a great deal.

• (18745)

But again, we have something here, in the form of Mr. Gerretsen's motion, that I think can be agreed to. Plenty of compromises have been made. I hope the Bloc has an opinion. I've heard the NDP's, but, unfortunately, it has not made much of an impact and that is why I say what has been offered doesn't really count, with all due respect to my honourable colleague, Mr. MacGregor.

Further, we are asking that the various versions of the documents be compared and that the very public servants who wrote to this committee, Mr. Gagnon and indeed all Canadians, in their transmittal letters, be asked to come before the committee to talk about their approach and to answer questions from members about this motion. Again, I have questions for these individuals. Sadly, the Conservatives are refusing to hear advice from the public servants. I made this comment before in my remarks about an hour ago. It's stunning to me that the Conservatives aren't open to that. What is the fear? Might it be the fact that public servants could put on the record very basic points relating to not wanting to disclose personal information, which I think is very reasonable. That would, therefore, expose all of this on the Conservative side as one big political game, which it surely is. But I leave that judgment aside for now.

Again, to my Bloc and NDP colleagues, Mr. Gerretsen has put this forward. That opens a path that allows us to get past the issues we have been debating so vigorously. We've finally reached a resolution, what I think is a reasonable one. Let's be serious about it. In every study this committee conducted in the last session of Parliament, officials provided us with testimony and that testimony was meaningful, Mr. Chair. That is their duty on behalf of Canadians.

This has been the case for every study I've been part of as a parliamentarian. There is no doubt about that. I've had the honour and privilege of serving on the finance committee, the foreign affairs committee, public safety and national security, and at every opportunity whenever officials have come we've only benefited as a committee.

It's unfortunate that some—and I'm not speaking specifically of Conservatives or only the Conservatives at the table here today, but in general there seems to be this view of public servants on the part of Conservatives, this branding of them as somehow irresponsible, as somehow living off the largesse of the state. It's frankly not true. If we look at some of the central actors who have been getting Canadians through this crisis, public servants have played an incredibly important role. Of course, Canadians deserve the most credit in the first instance because of the responsibility they have shouldered for themselves, their families and their businesses. Public servants have been instrumental in suggesting policy designs that have met the needs of the moment, and I'm thinking particularly of the CERB but also the various other programs that were created very quickly and executed with incredible skill by the public service, whom unfortunately members of the Conservative Party continue to demonize, and other opposition colleagues have not stood up for in the right way here today.

Let's review and let me go back to this point about what we have heard from public servants at committee before. On Monday, February 3, 2020, in a very lengthy meeting from 3:30 to 8 p.m.—if that meeting was very lengthy, what is today's? But anyway we will

leave that for now. ...a study on the pre-budget consultations of early 2020, what this committee should be working on, the following officials attended. From the Department of Finance, we heard from Nicholas Leswick, the assistant deputy minister of the economic and fiscal policy branch; Andrew Marsland, the senior assistant deputy minister in the tax policy branch. I will highlight him in particular here. At the very beginning of COVID-19, I had specific questions from constituents relating to certain programs the government had put forward. I asked him technical details very openly at committee, and he articulated the rationale. This allowed me, as a member of Parliament, to go back to my constituents and provide an explanation on why programs were designed in the way they were. He was very helpful in that.

• (18750)

Evelyn Dancey, the associate assistant deputy minister of economic development and corporate finance branch, also attended.

On Tuesday, March 10, from 3:30 to 5:30, the standard meeting time for this committee, we met for a study on corporate subsidies. What a lifetime ago that was. I have a faint memory of it, but it's still relevant to mention in my remarks because on that day we heard from ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, with Daryell Nowlan, the vice-president, policy, programs and communications; and Bill Grandy, the director general of programs. We also heard from the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, as well as the Department of Industry, with Mitch Davies and Andrea Johnston. Excuse me; that is not to disrespect Ms. Buist from the Northern Economic Development Agency, as she was also there—

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. Sorry to interrupt my esteemed colleague, but do we still have quorum? I see a number of our opposition members are not present.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Genuis counts as one and a half.

The Chair: Yes, we do, by one member, and yes, Mr. Genuis counts as one and a half at the moment.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Don't worry; we're not going anywhere.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: We also heard on that day from the Office of the Auditor General, with Mr. Andrew Hayes, the deputy auditor general and interim commissioner of the environment and sustainable development.

My colleagues could be wondering why I'm reading out the full titles of these individuals. It's because they have worked hard to attain the positions they're in and deserve to be recognized.

There was also Heather Miller—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Will you mention their degrees as well?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Well, Mr. Genuis, they have, if not one degree at the university level, two or three probably, and—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: These are from what institutions?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Genuis, I'm speaking here. It's really not good of you to interrupt. However, if you want me to go on and speak about the average education level of our public servants, you'll find that they have master's degrees and Ph.D.'s. They can't hear your criticisms because their Ph.D.'s are plugged in their ears, Mr. Genuis. That's how educated they are. You continue to find ways to belittle the public service. You continue to find ways to—

The Chair: You have to go through the chair, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Excuse me on that, Mr. Chair. It's been a long day, so sometimes I, too, forget the requirements at committee.

It's simply a rebuttal to Mr. Genuis, Mr. Chair, who again jumped in without even saying “point of order”. He was a great debate champion, as he's reminded all of us in Parliament, repeatedly.

A voice: He was?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Yes, apparently Mr. Genuis debated at length in high school and in university. He's quite proud of himself. That's fine. He has asked here about the education levels of public servants. They're very well educated, I assured him.

On Thursday, April 2, from 2 to 4 p.m., we had a study on the government's response to COVID-19. It was a set of meetings that I won't soon forget as a parliamentarian. We heard a number of individuals from the Canada Revenue Agency articulate their points of view. We had a number of folks from the Department of Employment and Social Development and from the Department of Finance who I've already mentioned, so I won't repeat them. It was an impressive group of people who, in the midst of carrying out all sorts of work on policy and program design, found time to appear here before the committee. I know they're expected to do that, Mr. Chair, but these are folks who are working 20-hour days and still finding ways to inform the committee about their work. I think they deserve respect, not just by acknowledging them here and now. They deserve the respect of being able to come here to committee to explain this issue that the opposition is so concerned about, instead of putting words in their mouth. That is effectively what the opposition wants to do by actively preventing them from coming to committee.

If we go with Mr. Gerretsen's motion, we have a fair outcome that allows the opposition to get answers to their questions in a way that does not silence our public servants.

I'll begin my conclusion from here, Mr. Chair.

Conservatives are refusing to engage at all. I hope that we start to see a different approach also taken by the NDP and the Bloc.

The members of the opposition are very fond of quoting the law clerk of the House of Commons who has said...and who carries out incredible service for all of us as parliamentarians and who serves the country as well. The Conservatives want to vote that down. Remember that Mr. Gerretsen's motion calls for the law clerk to appear, allowing all members, every single one of us, to engage. I call the NDP and the Bloc to support that. Unfortunately, I haven't heard very much on that point from either Mr. Ste-Marie or Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Chair, we should not dither here. We should not waste our time. The end of Mr. Gerretsen's very reasonable motion asks that

“debate on the main motion and the amendment from Mr. Poilievre be suspended, and that the chair be authorized to schedule these witnesses and convene a meeting to resume debate on Mr. Poilievre's motion once these meetings have taken place.”

This seems very reasonable to me, Mr. Chair. We ought to allow the clerk and analysts to do their important work and furnish us with the documents that this committee has not yet received.

Unfortunately, yet again, the opposition won't allow us to carry out the important work to be conducted here. That needs to be put on the record and recognized. We don't even know what they think or what their justification is for all of this. I hope that a member from the NDP and the Bloc—I've given up on the Conservatives—will come forward and tell this committee, their constituents and all Canadians watching at home what their view is, Mr. Chair.

I'll end my comments there. Thank you.

● (18755)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

We will turn to Mr. Ste-Marie, then Mr. Badawey, Ms. Dzerowicz and Mr. Gerretsen.

Okay, first up, we have Mr. Ste-Marie.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to respond to my colleague Mr. Fragiskatos, who says that the Bloc doesn't talk much. I will just say that the committee has been sitting for nine hours. If I'm not mistaken, Mr. Chair, only you and I have been present for the entire meeting without being replaced.

In my view, everything we have heard at this committee meeting could have been—

[English]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order too.

The Chair: Okay, we have two points of order, Mr. Ste-Marie.

We have Mr. Fragiskatos and Mr. Gerretsen.

● (18800)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm guessing that Mr. Gerretsen is jumping in on the same point of order as I am, and my voice is kind of hoarse right now, so I'm going to allow Mr. Gerretsen to speak.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead on your point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Fragiskatos and I have both been here since 11 o'clock, right from the beginning, Mr. Chair. I am disappointed to hear that what we've had to offer to this debate has not been so memorable as for Mr. Ste-Marie to remember the fact that we've been here from the beginning. We have indeed been here from the beginning of this meeting at 11 a.m.

The Chair: I think your point has been made.

Mr. Ste-Marie, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I apologize for implying that some of my colleagues have not always been here from the beginning. I had not noticed them, perhaps because they did not make five-minute speeches.

What I meant to say is that if I have not spoken in the past few hours, it is because, in my opinion, all the debates we have been party to today could be summed up quickly: if we limited arguments to 30 minutes, that would do the trick.

We are clearly witnessing systematic obstruction by people who are trying to buy time. Liberal Party members do not want to respect democracy or the majority in the committee, even though it reflects the will of the people in the most recent election.

In Quebec, debates are often organized according to the Code Morin. If the debate goes around in circles after a few statements from either side, the previous question can be put and the vote is called. However, that is not happening here.

I feel it would be in our best interest to be guided by Quebec's practices and perhaps also speak more French on the committee. My colleague Peter Julian spoke in French a little. Otherwise, it has been in English only. You might say that, for nine hours now, I have felt far removed from my world as I sit on this committee.

In my opinion, this subamendment, like the previous ones, distorts the main motion. All the floods of words we have heard so far are only intended to buy time and to ensure that we don't come to a quick decision.

That's all I have to say. You will not hear from me again in the minutes, or perhaps hours, to come.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Did I come in too soon, Mr. Badawey?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: I just want to make sure I have the right order here, because some people dropped off.

I have Mr. Badawey, Ms. Dzerowicz and then Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I should be on that as well, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, and then Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was going to wait awhile to speak again based on what I heard, but I had to jump back in based on some of the comments from some of my colleagues—in particular, Mr. Lake's comments on

some of the points that I had made, as well as other colleagues. It's, to some extent, time to really call out what it is, which I'm sure the opposition is thinking about and very well should. This is, once again, an attempt to gain a narrative because of the fine work that the government and Canadians have been doing since COVID hit us back in March. That's what it is. Let's just simply call it what it is.

Quite frankly, most of our residents—at least my residents here in Niagara—see that. They see right through what's happening here and, with that, are giving us a great deal of dialogue and a great deal of feedback with respect to what we should be doing and the priorities we should be having, as I spoke about earlier. To try to divert the discussion from the work that's being done is simply wrong.

I also want to bring up that word that I brought up earlier, which obviously isn't resonating: respect. It was mentioned by Mr. Lake with regard to fighting for the rights of...

Let me be very clear, Mr. Lake, who I/we are fighting for—and very well you should be fighting for. We should be respecting the people we represent and respecting our team. We should be respecting the ability and the opportunity for our team to come out and ensure that the decisions that we make are decisions that are based on evidence, that are based on reasons, that are based on what our team actually does on a day-to-day basis. Quite frankly, it's beyond what you and I do on a day-to-day basis, as it relates to issues that we depend on them to then, therefore, be evidence-based so that we then make the proper decisions. Once again, it's about respect—respect for them to do their jobs and respect for the people we represent—to ensure that those decisions are evidence-based and are, in fact, decisions that are sound.

I want to go back to the narrative again and, to some extent, based on Mr. Lake's comments, give a bit of a history lesson, the narrative being, again, putting Canadians first, putting people before politics versus putting politics before people. The narrative, quite frankly, on October 15, 2020, should be the health and safety of all Canadians. To have this discussion once again is simply rhetoric and noise, and it's, quite frankly, getting in the way of us doing that. When I say "us", I mean all 338 members of Parliament, as well as the people we represent, working together to row in that same direction. That same direction is looking out for the best interests of Canadians.

Let's be very clear on that, Mr. Lake and others on the opposite side of the table. That's our narrative. That's our priority.

With that said, some things that were mentioned were COVID spending and, of course, the direction that this government has taken throughout the past many months. Often I hear the new leader of the opposition, the former leader of the opposition and members of the opposition critique the spending that's happening. My comment has been, and continues to be this: Where's your feedback? What are your thoughts? Instead of being a critic and part of the problem, be part of the solution. Of course, with that, I/we welcome some of those thoughts and what you would do in terms of taking care of the people, putting food on our tables, ensuring that people are working, ensuring that our business community—our SMEs and our big businesses—are being looked after, that their rent can be paid. The list goes on. I don't have to give you that menu; you read about it every day. I'm sure that you hear about it every day with respect to the people who need and, for the most part, are being dealt with and taken care of because of the programs that we've put forward.

Yes, this is about transparency and accountability. As I said earlier, it's also simply about respect. I think that we should all be cognizant of that and ensure that, as much as we respect each other, we also respect the people we work with on a daily basis and, quite frankly, look after our best interests as much as we look after the interests of our constituents.

Having said all that, let's look at past parliaments, at votes in past parliaments that we entered into on many occasions, and at many occasions where the Conservatives would vote against.

● (18805)

I recall budgets and early morning votes that the Conservatives would stand in opposition to, investments in homelessness and poverty; seniors and infrastructure spending; health care; spending in my riding as well as the riding of Mr. Lake in Edmonton—Wetaskiwin; local sporting organizations; recreation; lowering taxes; support for businesses. I can't understand why those were voted against. Those were good things, very good things, like those we're doing right now in the middle of this pandemic. Fortunately, we had a majority government then. We moved forward on a lot of those investments.

I have to give another history lesson—I apologize, Mr. Chairman—just to respond to the words that are now on the record by Mr. Lake and others about proroguing Parliament. You know, look at the 41st Parliament, the Harper government, in October of 2013. They shut down Parliament for 33 days to avoid questions on Senate expenses and the Senate expense scandal and the resulting PMO cover-up. In the 40th Parliament, the Harper government shut down Parliament for 63 days to avoid the Afghan detainee issue. In 2008 the Harper Conservatives shut down Parliament to avoid a confidence vote that would have toppled the government. That shutdown lasted 53 days. In 2007 the Harper government shut down Parliament to declare mission accomplished on five priorities from the election, and took 32 days before bringing in a new Speech from the Throne.

Mr. Chairman, I'm flabbergasted at the comments being made and how people can actually have the nerve to make those comments while knowing this. Quite frankly, Mr. Lake was around then. He was a minister.

If the opposition parties do not support this subamendment, all it will show is that they don't care about the facts. They don't care about an evidence-based decision being made. Again, it's a lack of respect. All they care about is having something to flash around, props, to get their supporters supporting them, supporters who will blast out this information too for their next fundraising event. They should be ashamed that by doing that they're robbing this committee of the opportunity to do its important work.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I would go back to my former life. When we had situations like this and issues like this, no, we didn't go into filibustering. We didn't get into the minutiae of the politics. Quite frankly, we put the people before the politics. We didn't put the politics before the people, trying to gain a narrative. Quite frankly, the narrative should always be dealing with the issues that people deal with every day, that they talk about at the dinner table at 5:30 or six o'clock, sometimes at nine o'clock at night. For myself, tonight it will be midnight. These people think about and live that every day. To simply have the discussion diverted from what they're thinking about to something for political gain is wrong, frankly.

MPs from the other side can talk all they want. Call it what it is. Everyone knows it. We know it here. We're in the box, but quite frankly, folks, the people who are outside the box know it too. Call it what it is.

All this subamendment is asking for is simply to ensure that the decision being made is made on the best evidence presented to us by the folks we count on every day to bring us that evidence. You can't be hypocritical here. You can't say on one side of your mouth that you want that evidence in other ways on other issues, but yet you're not prepared to look at it here. What does that tell us? What does that tell Canadians?

● (18810)

It's about accountability. It's about transparency. But most of all, it's about respect, respecting our team and respecting the decisions that we're counted on to make in a manner that is evidence-based.

I often say to people that different people have held our seats throughout time. Although people have opinions about the people who sit in those seats, regardless of what level of government it may be—it could be a mayor; it could be a city councillor; it could be a member of Parliament, a member of a provincial parliament—the chairs sit there. Those seats sit there forever; different people occupy them.

People have opinions about those people who occupy them. However, as occupiers of those seats, we must—not should, but must—respect those seats we sit in. Part of that respect is ensuring that the decisions we make are made by a team that includes all parliamentarians as well as our support staff; ensuring that those decisions are evidence-based and therefore good decisions; and putting people before politics, not politics before people.

We see that too often from those on the opposite side of the floor. We lived it between 2015 and 2019. I think people see that, hence the reason we're here back in Parliament forming a government. The expectation is for that to continue.

I ask all of you to take that into consideration, the respect that those people deserve, the respect of making a decision that's evidence-based, and therefore the respect to make the proper decision.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

● (18815)

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you want in too, Mr. Genuis? Is that what you're saying? Okay, you're just making sure I'm off mute.

I have Ms. Dzerowicz, and then I'm not sure who's next, Mr. Gerretsen or Mr. Fraser. You'll have to notify me on that.

Ms. Dzerowicz, go ahead.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. I'm glad to be back as part of the discussion.

I was gone for 55 minutes, Mr. Ste-Marie, in case you are following that.

I was listening very closely to your comments, Mr. Ste-Marie, and was glad you did speak. I don't agree. This isn't about killing time; I think this direct motion that Mr. Gerretsen has proposed is trying to address what we felt was truly the concern of the opposition members. If there is a perception that there were redactions in order to somehow hide some secret information the public should be seeing, I think that motion was there to directly address that point.

Let me mention four key points of this motion.

The first part, the main motion and amendment of Mr. Poilievre, is suspended. It's just suspended. It's not killed; it's not thrown out; it is just suspended.

The second part is that the chair is authorized to schedule meetings with witnesses. Who are those witnesses? Basically, we invite each of the relevant deputy ministers or the signatories of the transmittal letters, as well as the law clerk and parliamentary counsel of the House of Commons to come and talk to us about the 5,600 plus documents, to answer our questions, to talk to us about why things were redacted.

The fourth part is to convene a meeting to resume debate on Mr. Poilievre's motion once these meetings have taken place, so it's to suspend to try to directly address the issue that we believe is actually at the heart and soul of what we are hearing from opposition members, the public, and even here. That's what we're trying to ad-

dress. If we're not hearing clearly, if we're missing something, then tell us what it is we're missing, because I want to listen. I want to hear you.

I agree with my colleagues that Mr. Badawey made a beautiful presentation, I think a very genuine one, about Canadians and where all our thoughts are—not just those of the Liberals but of all of us—in terms of where we want to be when we are thinking of them, setting a course for them, and helping to restart the economy in the strongest way possible, so I'm listening, Mr. Ste-Marie. I'm listening to all the opposition members right now. If we're missing something, tell us what we're missing because I thought this motion was not about killing time but about actually addressing, very deliberately, what we felt was the key issue being brought up by opposition members over the last few weeks.

I'll also say regarding this whole day of talk, talk, talk, that anyone listening is kind of thinking we are crazy people, anybody listening to us for any period of time, but sometimes I think you have to talk things out to try to get to some sort of a solution. It seems to be that is part of what we do here. We see if we can find some common ground, see whether or not cooler heads or our better angels prevail over time, so I don't see this whole day as a colossal waste, although I would have preferred not to be meeting for, I think, going on nine, 10 or 11 hours now.

I want to reiterate a couple of points, because this is what I believe we are trying to do with this motion.

We are being told that we, the federal Liberal government, are trying to hide things because of so many pages of redactions. We, the Liberal government, are saying that's not the case, because we have outstanding independent civil servants who followed the letter of the law to do their very best to provide all the information that was asked for in the motion that was presented and passed by Mr. Julian on July 7...although he presented the motion on July 2. You heard key evidence to that point from my colleagues Mr. Fragiskatos and Mr. Fraser, and from me. We read out key examples of civil servants doing their very best to give us as much information..., and if they hid some information it was personal cell-phone numbers—completely irrelevant information to the CSSG—and cabinet confidentially. We gave example after example after example.

● (18820)

The other thing I love about this motion is that it provides a chance for us to hear from bureaucrats, from our public servants who were in charge of this. I think the redactions would be a learning experience for all of us as well, around what the rules are, why the redactions, and I think it would comfort the opposition members. To be honest, if we need to hear from our public servants to be able to continue with the work of our pre-budget consultations, I'm willing to spend a couple of meetings on that.

Again—I want to keep on repeating this—we're just suspending the motion of Mr. Poilievre, as well as the amendment. The fourth part of our current motion says that we convene a meeting to resume debate on Mr. Poilievre's motion once the meetings have taken place. There's no desire to throw this out. We're trying to address the issue at hand.

I also want to mention a few other things. I often think that if people are saying, "Well, you know...". Just so you know, I've received zero telephone calls and emails. By the way I hate saying that publicly because whenever you put that out there all of a sudden someone starts a campaign to send you emails and make telephone calls around these things, but nobody has called us over the last few weeks about WE, believing that we were trying to hide things in some of the redactions of the WE documents that were submitted. People are very concerned about everyday things, and I'll talk a little more about that in a minute.

I want to point out to Canadians, or anybody outside our team right now who might be listening, two motions were put forward and approved on July 7. One was all this information, but the other one was to conduct a series of meetings that would look at why the government awarded the contract to WE and how the decision came to be made. I think there were some concerns about corruption. We heard very clear testimony. We heard under oath from the Kielburgers. We heard from Prime Minister Trudeau. Historically a prime minister doesn't come to committee, but he made a point of making sure he came to the committee to be transparent and to be personally accountable, to personally answer questions. We heard from Mr. Morneau. We heard from all of them, and they all said to us, "No, we're not friends. There's no corruption".

No one was selecting WE to make sure that WE was paid back for any type of friendship with our Prime Minister or any of our cabinet ministers. That is on record. There's no misuse of funds. We heard that all the money came back. Zero dollars were misused. There was no profit to WE. The contribution agreement we put in place had a number of checks and balances to make sure the money was being spent properly. There was no profit to WE. It was all about having as many students engaged in volunteer initiatives and earning some money to be able to continue their schooling.

We also heard from Ian Shugart and Gina Wilson and Rachel Wernick. For those who don't know, Ian Shugart is the Clerk of the Privy Council and Rachel Wernick and Gina Wilson are two top public servants. We heard very clearly from them that it was they, the public servants, who selected WE and felt that in the amount of time we had, WE was the best able to deliver this program.

We also explained why we were rushed to do the contribution agreement. It was because we only had four months and we were trying to do our very best for all our students.

I was only able to go to the cottage for two days this whole summer. I was talking to some friends and they thought the CSSG was the only program we provided for students. It's not true. We provided \$9 billion in supports. We provided supports through the Canada emergency student benefit. We expanded the number of jobs created beyond Canada summer jobs. We expanded it to more than 160,000 additional jobs. We made huge adjustments around Canada student loans, as well as Canada student grants. We did a tremendous

number of things for students, \$9 billion worth. Even if you take away the CSSG program, over \$8.1 billion was spent on students. They used it. It's been helpful to them. They're continuing their studies right now. We need to continue to do more for them.

● (18825)

I've already talked about the fact that it wasn't a sole-source contract. It was actually a contribution agreement.

I just want to remind everyone that we have contribution agreements for food security, \$100 million; for non-profits, \$350 million in order to help those in shelters; for our fight against domestic violence, \$50 million. We have contribution agreements. We made that. It's a very typical way for a government to basically engage in this.

I wanted to list all of that because it's part and parcel. Why did we ask for all these documents? It's all part of this initial consideration about whether there was anything inappropriate in terms of selecting WE.

Who selected WE? Was there anything untoward? I think the evidence proved unequivocally in each of the points that I mentioned that that is not the case.

It doesn't mean that no mistakes were made, because no government is perfect. I was listening to Malcolm Gladwell a couple of years ago at some sort of talk or speaking series in Toronto. One of the key things he said is that in a world of change that we're in right now, we need governments to step up and do radical experimentation. We need governments to be able to experiment and not be afraid to fail. Because if it's not governments, then who? We're the only ones who are able to do that.

I do come from the business world. A small part of my life was actually in the venture capital world. I'll tell you, success for them is one in 10. If they have one business in 10 that actually succeeds, then they actually think that's beneficial.

In any case, I actually think that Minister Qualtrough actually said it best. She said we dropped the ball on CSSG. We could have done much better. It was a pandemic, and things were crazy. We were going at breakneck speed. We should not have dropped the ball on this. But she also said that she didn't think in any way it should take away from the other really important, and I would say fantastic work that we've done for students and for Canadians, writ large. She goes on to talk about it.

We're not perfect. We did our best. Of course, we're going to make mistakes. Of course it's okay for a committee to have looked at it. We've spent about two months on it. We asked really important questions. We've answered the really important questions. I think it's important for us to acknowledge it.

I think it's also really important for us to acknowledge that the Auditor General is also looking.... We have to remember that we have two outstanding independent officers who have a long history of serving the public and serving Canadians. They are continuing to look at our spending as well to see if there were any ethical breaches. Our Auditor General came before us to say that she's actually looking at our spending, absolutely looking at all the programs and how we've gone about doing it. There will be a series of reports before the end of this year.

Then we have the Ethics Commissioner who's still investigating our Prime Minister and our former minister of finance, minister Morneau, to see whether or not there's actually been any ethical violations.

I want to remind Canadians that these committees...and I know for sure this committee is not non-partisan. It is not non-partisan. I wish it were if even for a moment. I think we have some really important work to do.

I visit a lot of classrooms. I'm sure you guys all do, too. One of my favourite classes was the grade 5/6 class at St. Nicholas of Bari. One thing they asked me was what was the surprising thing for me as a politician. I said to them that for me the surprise was just the theatrics. I didn't realize how much theatrics and gamesmanship there would be. I said that to them.

Another kid asked me—and it's relevant to this—“Miss, are there ever days where you think that you just can't take this anymore?” I loved them asking me this. I said, “Well, there are definitely frustrating days, but I can tell you that it's such an honour and privilege to have this job because I get a chance to be able to make people's lives better every single day. I get a chance to be able to work with an amazing team of colleagues to try to create a better country.”

I love those questions. They are my favourite class ever because they asked the best questions ever.

I will tell you that the stuff I've been hearing over the last—I want to say the last few weeks, but I would probably say the last few months—is that they're really worried about their parents and family members. In my riding they're worried about their kids in school with the second wave under way right now. They're wondering why the federal dollars that have been going down to the provinces and to the city haven't resulted in more test sites and more contact tracing.

• (18830)

They're wondering, and they're asking why. They are worried about their jobs and their future. They're worried about their extended families. There are a lot of things they're really worried about.

A number of them have written to me to say that if there's anything we could be studying in pre-budget consultations—they know I'm on the finance committee—we should look at the environment, look at how we could restart the economy in a way that's going to help us continue to transition to a low-carbon economy, that's going to help us decarbonize, that's going to help some of our energy sector and multiple other sectors to be able to transition.

They worry about housing. When I was growing up, my mother, who earned minimum wage, and my dad, who had a working-class wage, were able to afford a house in downtown Toronto. That isn't possible right now. They're worried about housing.

I have a lot of amazing people in the arts and culture sector in my riding. They have been struggling for a long time in terms of being able to survive in the 21st century. So much has changed in how we fund our artists and our cultural sector. We know that arts and culture, in addition to tourism and hospitality, have been particularly hard hit through this pandemic, and it's going to be a while before anything returns to normal.

I'll also say that we've been hearing and reading a lot from a lot of economic leaders, such as David Dodge and Don Drummond, and I think they've had some valuable things to say. It's made me think I'd really like to get to pre-budget consultations, because I want to hear ideas about how we can ensure that Canada has a competitive economy as we come out of this pandemic. How do we attract more foreign direct investment? How do we accelerate economic growth? How do we invest in productivity-enhancing physical and human capital? How do we invest in industries in transition? There are so many things that we should be getting to right now, and the everyday things that my colleague Vance Badawey was talking about. Those are the things that I hope we'll focus on.

I'll end with a few more comments, Mr. Chair.

Canadians need us, as leaders, to be our best selves and listen to our better angels, to be the government they need in this moment and to rise above partisan games and business as usual. I'm sorry that Mr. Poilievre feels that he needs to yawn during my comments, but I think they're important for us to hear.

I would say to you that I don't think what's happening on this committee now is trying to find a solution. That is what I am feeling is happening right now. I would say to you that it would be really powerful if we could find a way to move forward to pre-budget consultations. Just imagine that we could do that. What would we give up? Would we give up a bit of ego, a bit of power to hold up a committee or the illusion that the opposition members are now holding government to account?

Don't you think it would be far more powerful if we conducted the most ambitious pre-budget consultations, listened to a historic number of ideas and stakeholders and brought the best national and international leaders to give us their best ideas? How about if we actually had some true debate and battled over the best ideas? Maybe we could even try to present a unanimous report to the House of Commons, to our Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. Don't you think that would be more powerful and historic? We and Canadians could say in history that when we were going through an unprecedented pandemic, all of our parties laid down their partisan arms and worked together in the best interests of Canadians. This is the moment when Canadians need us to rise to the occasion, to be our best selves and say we rose up and did exactly that.

We all ran for office to serve Canadians and to create a better country. If it's not we who are leading and charting a course for the future, then who? If it's not now, at a moment of tremendous change, fear and confusion, then when?

Thanks so much, Mr. Chair.

● (18835)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Mr. Gerretsen will be next, followed by Mr. Fraser and then Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleague, Ms. Dzerowicz, for her intervention. The passion she showed towards the end of that is truly reflective of the calibre of MP that she is and what she brings to the table here. I wholeheartedly see that she wants a solution and a way through this. That is going to be a compromise that everybody is going to be able to appreciate and value.

I'll go back to Mr. Ste-Marie's comments. He said that this was a waste of time. Obviously, filibusters are inherently intended to do that to make a point. There is, perhaps, a bit of confusion as to why we're going down that road. The illusion that Mr. Poilievre and other Conservatives would like to paint is that there's something to hide. That couldn't be further from the truth.

I am very adamant about this one particular subamendment specifically because I'm concerned about the manner in which public officials are being treated. I want them to have a voice. I want to allow them to express themselves before we get to a point of determining whether or not they breached parliamentary privileges by the manner in which they provided information. I'm not talking about political staffers. I'm talking about the officials who contributed to the redactions that we see in the documents.

I'm getting a sense, Mr. Chair, that I'm not going to get anywhere with this. It hasn't been obvious to me that there's any interest from members other than Liberals at this time to support this amendment.

I'm led to the the conclusion that it's going to be very difficult for these public officials to be able to defend themselves. I think it's extremely important that they have the opportunity to do that. If we're not going to allow them the opportunity to defend themselves, Mr. Chair, then I think it's incumbent upon me to go to the wall on this

one, as Mr. MacGregor phrased it. It's incumbent upon us—and I certainly take the challenge—to make sure that they are properly represented and that their voices can be heard. I do not want officials to go down as the reason that parliamentary privilege was broken when perhaps that wasn't the case. We really won't know and be able to cast the best judgment possible unless we give them the opportunity to speak for themselves.

Since members don't want to afford that opportunity, I'm going to try to defend them to the best of my own ability.

With that, I would refer everybody to the PCO redactions that were submitted. I'd like to go through those to explicitly highlight where redactions were made so that the general public can know and it can be put on the record.

There are 151 pages in this document. I'll try to go through it as thoroughly as possible to provide as much detail as possible, so that their voices can be heard through this process of trying to make sure that what they did to the documents is understood.

If we start on page 49, we see the first perfect example. We are looking here at a PCO document. A number of programs are listed. I wish I could share my screen and go through this with everybody. What we have here is an Excel-style table. There are a number of programs here that completely do not relate to the Canada student service grant program that was the subject of this motion.

● (18840)

I'll read off the ones that were blacked out, the ones that were redacted. This was one of those perfect pages that Mr. Poilievre held up and shook while he stood there at the podium saying that it had all been blacked out. Well, let's talk about what was actually blacked out.

We have the youth employment and skills strategy, which wasn't relevant to this, the student work placement program, the student learning program, Canada Service Corps, other financial supports, the Canada student loans program, the doubling of the Canada student grant and the Canada student benefit. None of those were visible, because they were not the subject of the motion from this committee.

However, among the ones that were visible and were completely subject to this committee's motion was the Canada student grant, where it specifically talks about post-secondary students under 30 enrolled in spring, summer or fall courses who significantly contribute to COVID-19 efforts through voluntary service, and then it goes on to talk about the \$900 million to be set aside and the various questions that needed to be addressed in relation to that.

There was also the WE social entrepreneurship initiative, which was relevant and which is visible in the document. There's the \$12 million there, and again that is completely visible on that document.

The next part that came from the PCO that I think is germane and relevant to discuss is pages 78 to 79 of that document. It is from Mr. Kielburger to Ms. Fox at PCO, yet the only redaction present in this whole email, Mr. Chair, is the private citizen's email address. That's the email address of Mr. Kielburger's assistant. This is private information and has no relevance to the process. Therefore, there was nothing that was necessary to be—

Mr. Sean Fraser: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Fraser, go ahead.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm just seeing that one of our colleagues has apparently been booted off the call.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: He's back.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I think it has been remedied.

The Chair: He is back, in person—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm absolutely back, Mr. Chair, in person here and live.

The Chair: —with that wonderful picture behind him.

A voice: Thank God for Ikea.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Mr. Fraser. I thought you were calling me out on relevance or something like that. I was ready to defend my position. This is extremely relevant to my subamendment. In any event, thank you for pointing out that Mr. Fragiskatos was disconnected momentarily.

I'll go back to this email. In the email there are the introductory paragraphs that go into detail about the proposals, and there is also the executive summary of both the programs, which was sent from Craig Kielburger or his executive assistant. This is fully there. I don't know why this wasn't the page Mr. Poilievre was waving around. This one had all the information in it. He could have stood there and waved this one around and pointed out how much information we're getting, but no, of course he didn't do that. Instead, he pulled one from the previous example I used, which had information blacked out that had nothing to do with the actual program.

I encourage anyone in the media or anybody else to go back and grab a screenshot or a still shot of the video of Mr. Poilievre doing that to see if they can see what's on that page. I can guarantee that this looks almost exactly like the page he had, and it's information that is completely irrelevant to the motion that was prepared by the committee.

Moving on to another document, I turn your attention, Mr. Chair, to pages 105 to 110 of the PCO release. A number of programs listed here are unrelated to the CSSG. They have nothing to do with the motion at hand, and the committee explicitly did not ask for them. As you'll see, these are the ones that, because they had no mention, were not disclosed.

The problem here, to understand where the issue comes from, is what happens when we talk about redacted documents. The Conservatives like to use this angle because it plays really well in the media. They like to say that these documents are redacted so heavily that they can't read them. Usually when the public is receiving this kind of narrative, we're talking about an intelligence briefing or

something specific to a particular issue. It is an entire document, and stuff is being redacted from within it, but in this case, since the call for these documents ended up producing mass amounts of paper because so many programs were discussed, the way they redacted the programs that were not necessary was by completely blacking them out while still giving all the information. I know that when this eventually comes out in one form or another, the Conservatives are going to learn this and then fall flat on this argument, in this witch hunt for information that doesn't exist. That's what's going to end up happening.

It's unfortunate that they're putting us through this at this point, but my objective here is to protect the individuals and their credibility. These are the folks back in the parliamentary offices who went through the work of providing this information and redacting this stuff. I do this because they don't have the benefit of being able to defend themselves right now. Because the Conservatives don't want to afford them that opportunity, nor do the NDP and the Bloc apparently, I find it incumbent upon us to do that, so I'll continue with this and go through some more documents.

● (18845)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Ste-Marie, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm not sure I am following the debate correctly, but as I understand it, Mr. Gerretsen is telling us what the redacted parts contain. I would like to know how he got this information. Is this not a breach of trust? How can a Liberal member have access to this information when all members don't have access to it?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, can you respond?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Am I obliged to answer questions when I've been interrupted, or would the member like to wait? That's not a point of order. If he wants to wait until he has the opportunity—

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: No, that is not the case.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm happy to answer the question, but it's not a point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, it is a point of order.

[English]

The Chair: Can we come back to Mr.—?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Gerretsen, a Liberal member who is not a member of this committee, appears to have information that the other members do not have. That is unacceptable, and I demand an explanation for it.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm happy to explain that, Mr. Chair, and I'll do it; but before I do, I just want to say for the record that this is not a point of order. This is a member who clearly didn't open his email who is now challenging me as to why I did open my email and he didn't. That's what's going on here. This is not a point of order. Nonetheless, we all received these documents from the government House leader.

I don't know what to tell you, Mr. Ste-Marie. Please open your emails and you'll receive this, because that's what I'm going through. I'm going through this information that everybody received.

If you're okay with that, I'll continue.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a lot more to go through. I'm only discussing my sixth page out of 151, so I really want to get down to this.

As I was saying, the document that came from the PCO was titled "Increased Support for Canadian Youth and Students". This goes into a lot of the details about money, including where the money came from, why it was important, why these programs were being developed, the Minister of Finance's ultimate decision, and all this stuff. None of it is blacked out. It is all right there. None of it is blacked out. Again, this would have been a great page that Mr. Poilievre could have waved around that had nothing blacked out on it.

If you go to the next page, now you have a full page. Just so everybody's with me—I know everyone's following along closely—I'm on page 106 right now. This page specifically has three programs on it. This is marked "Secret" and "Confidence of the Queen's Privy Council". This one is obviously setting out details about programs that were used to compile the information. Two of the programs in here, the youth employment and skills development program and Canada student loans, were not relevant, so they were completely blacked out. They were not asked for in the motion, so they were completely blacked out. On the one that you do see in there, the reason it was important to provide this page was that a paragraph at the bottom specifically goes into the Canada emergency student benefit. This lists off everything with respect to the briefings and the eligibility for students and the extension to all post-secondary students, including those in college, whether part time or full time.

The point is that if we asked those officials to come here, which this motion is trying to do, they would have the opportunity to answer these questions. They'd say that they blacked out these large areas because they had stuff to do with other issues. They even left the titles in there so that at least you knew what they were blacking out. That's the irony here: They didn't even black out the titles. They left the titles in there so that you knew exactly what they were blacking out. You ended up with just this little paragraph at the bottom that was relevant to the motion.

Then you go to the next page of that same document. It continues on with two additional points as they relate to that particular program. Then it starts to go into other programs where again stuff is

blacked out, but then you have another area that is germane to the motion. It goes on to talk about the CSSG program again and everything that was offered in that.

You'll see this happening over and over again. It might make for great theatre in terms of being able to wave around papers and say, "Hey, see everything that was blacked out?" I know that when the time comes for Mr. Poilievre to see what was actually blacked out there, he's going to have nothing. He's going to fall flat, because there is nothing there. My motive here, as I've stated before, is to make sure that those who did do this are not found to have breached privileges of Parliament because they did exactly what they were supposed to do. It's unfortunate that we can't let them come here to tell us this.

I'm now at the bottom of page 108, in section 69. You will see that it references the Canada student service grant again. It says:

In your announcement, you indicated that the grants in support of post secondary studies would be available for students helping to fight against COVID-19 this summer. You also announced that the grant value would be between \$1,000 and \$5,000, depending on the number of hours. The remaining details including eligibility criteria, scalability, specific amounts based on hours and delivery mechanism have yet to be determined.

Then, of course, on the next page—I know everyone's following along—there's that section that talks about the WE social entrepreneurship initiative. It goes into the details about that, about a \$500 grant for a 10-week mentorship program. It finally comes to the PCO recommendation. The PCO's recommendation is all there, except for the one portion that is blacked out again, and it's clearly marked that it's not relevant.

● (18850)

You're getting the reason it's been blacked out. We keep coming back to this point of what could possibly be here.

I'm on page 111 of that submission. From the PCO release, it's pages 189 to 190. We're looking at an email between Rachel Wernick and Ms. Shannon from PCO. As the motion expressly stated, unrelated cabinet confidences were removed. They're unrelated. As well, Ms. Wernick's cellphone was removed. I don't know why Mr. Poilievre would want Ms. Wernick's cellphone number, but I think it's entirely her privilege to have that cellphone number distributed only to those who need it, nor do I think providing that phone number would be necessary or have any relevance to the issue at hand that this committee was looking for.

I think we can all agree that we wouldn't want that phone number to be out in public. However, the entire email and all the details about it, from Rachel to Tara and back and forth, it's all there, except for those details that are the missing phone numbers. It brings us back to the point about why we even need to have this information out there when it's completely irrelevant. People deserve to have that privacy.

Turning to page 191 now of the PCO release, we have another email between Ms. Wernick and Ms. Shannon. Again, only the cellphone number has been removed. This one is from May 7, 2020 at 3:14 in the afternoon. They discussed the intent of the policy and they go back and forth in multiple emails. All the email addresses are available. They're .gc.ca email addresses. Everything is available in there except where it says "Mobile:" and Ms. Wernick's phone number. That's the only thing that's been blacked out from there. Again, I have no clue why Mr. Poilievre would be offended by the fact that the phone number has been blacked out.

Going to pages 192 to 193 of that PCO release, we have another redaction due to a cellphone number. Again, I think we can all agree that the removal of such information is completely reasonable.

I find it interesting that while the public is battling the second wave of COVID-19, my colleagues are chasing down private cellphone numbers of people. I don't know what the motive is, but I'm sure they have a motive.

The point is that you see this entire email, which starts on Thursday, May 7 at 3:22 p.m. It starts off with Ms. Wernick, who says, "Wonderful, thanks [for the information]". It's a back-and-forth conversation between them.

I'm not going to lie; it's not the most entertaining stuff to read. It's definitely not juicy, nor does it have that smoking gun that apparently Mr. Poilievre was looking for. Therefore, I guess he decided that chasing down a mobile phone number or searching for other information that's completely unrelated to those programs must have the.... I don't know, maybe buried in there is even the discovery of who the second gunman on the grassy knoll was. I have absolutely no idea.

The point is that so much information is being provided here. The only stuff that isn't being provided is the information that is specifically irrelevant or confidential in terms of being somebody's phone number.

We can look at pages 219 to 221 of the PCO document release. Frankly, this is truly extraordinary. It is a document that would rarely ever be released. It never would have been released under the Harper government, I'm sure, unless Mr. Lake wants to correct me on the Harper government's incredible openness and transparency. This goes into a synopsis of the entire cabinet meeting. Obviously, this would be protected by confidence, but these details are in there. It's there for them to see. It's stuff that, as it relates to this particular issue, has not been held back.

We have another page—the next page. If it had not been for the one bullet and sub-bullet at the bottom of page 220, that one little section there that relates to the Canada student service grant, this page would never have even been included, because the entire page would have been irrelevant. The only way to provide the five or six lines there that are relevant is to black out the other sections.

• (18855)

Of course, Mr. Poilievre takes this and flashes it around and makes it seem like it's a smoking gun because we're covering up massive conspiracies—or at least he's trying to drum up those con-

spiracies—but the reality is that this page would never have even been provided had that bullet about the Canada student service grant at the bottom not been there. That's the only reason they had to get rid of the rest of it. The next page, because the bullet continues from there and leads into the next page, is completely non-redacted.

If there are still people out there among the public—and we're now 11 hours into this—who are watching and listening to this, I hope they can appreciate, though perhaps I'm not doing a great job of explaining it, what we're talking about in the redacted documents.

This is a perfect example. We have a page here, starting at page 220, about four-fifths of which, I would say, has been redacted. The only reason is that the information there was not germane to the motion. Then, in the next bullet, the part about the Canada student service grant starts. The following page, the entire page, is not redacted, because it relates to the Canada student service grant and the PCO's comment on where things were going and coming from, so it's entirely appropriate to share.

It's no different from copying and pasting, if you were to just copy and paste the relevant parts. The problem is—and again this goes to those people who may be paying attention to this—that rather than explain this to you, rather than think that the public is educated enough to be able to.... No, let me rephrase that. When somebody takes the one page that has the major part of the redaction and waves it around, it appears as though they are assuming the public is going to buy in right away and say, "Hey, this isn't the government being transparent; they blacked out everything." I understand why the theatrics of it play off so well, but it's the reality of how these documents are released.

As the document continues, as you go into pages 220 and 221, it really starts to talk about the details and PCO comment, and it turns to the Deputy Prime Minister to provide the key takeaways from it. Literally, it's all there for everybody to read.

There is another email, on page 222, which references pages 254 to 256 of the PCO release. Once again, we find a redacted part, and—you guessed it, folks—it's the personal and private cellphone numbers of a staff member, again something that would never be released in an ATIP, but something that Mr. Poilievre is obsessed with obtaining.

If you go into the details of the email, you can read the entire email. It's from Tara Shannon, again, going to Ms. Shannon Nix. It just goes back and forth about the partnership, about struggling to deliver on the existing programs, not having the capacity to take on more placements and so on. The second part goes into the CSC programming not being funded and so on, and it goes into the details of that.

My point is that nothing was redacted here that was germane to what is going on and what the committee was seeking to get through this motion. The only thing in this that has been redacted is the telephone number, both in French and in English. Her signature at the bottom is in English first and then in French, and the phone number in both versions of the signature has been redacted.

That's it, Mr. Chair. Everything else in there is totally available.

● (18900)

We can go on to the next email, an exchange between Ms. Wernick and Mr. Philip Jennings from the PCO. In it, they are discussing an attachment that Ms. Wernick has forwarded to the PCO. I know that the opposition has a lot of interest in Ms. Wernick; however, only one item here has been redacted. Can anybody guess it? Does anybody know? The cellphone number is the only part of this that's redacted.

See, this is what I find so fascinating. Mr. Poilievre didn't jump up to the podium there and start flashing around these papers saying, "Why isn't Ms. Wernick's phone number being shown to us? Why is it being redacted?" Of course not. He doesn't get theatre out of that. But that's the reality of all the documents that have been submitted.

Again, she talks about the attachment, being the proposal. Everything is in there: who it was sent to, when it was sent, what the PDF is called, her signature again, and then her phone number has been blacked out.

We get to confidence with regard to another document here, which would be the next one. We have another synopsis of a meeting, another cabinet scenario. Here again, it's another one of Mr. Poilievre's fully blacked-out documents that he wanted to wave around. The reality of the situation is that the parts of it that are blacked out are the parts that have absolutely nothing to do with the motion that this committee had asked for. However, the reason it was important to provide all of that—including the cover sheet, including the synopsis, and having all of it—was that, on the next page, which is the first page that becomes relevant, all of a sudden you have the part about the Canada student service grant.

This is happening time and time again in these documents, where these large sections are being blacked out, but the reality is that the only parts being blacked out are the parts that are completely irrelevant to the motion. When you do get to the parts that are relevant, then you get everything on the Canada student service grant. I mean, I don't know; perhaps Mr. Poilievre was hoping to get something else out of cabinet confidence that he was digging around for, and that's why he's upset that parts of this are blacked out. But the reality is that he got exactly what he asked for. The committee got exactly what they asked for.

With regard to my amendment, which we're speaking to right now, the reason I think it's so important for us to have a discussion about this and to pass this amendment is so that the people who did these redactions can come here and explain things.

Excuse me while I take a sip of water here, Mr. Chair.

They can say one of two things. They can come here and say, no, Gerretsen is totally incorrect; all the stuff we blacked out there was WE-related stuff and we just didn't want you to see it. Or they can come here and do what is probably the most plausible thing that we would see. We would see them come here and probably validate everything that my colleagues and I have been saying today on this issue, which is that the items that were redacted were items that were completely irrelevant and didn't have anything to do with supporting this particular motion. I'm sure we would end up seeing that, if that's the case; I have no doubt about it.

You know, people were asking why I'm suggesting motive by the opposition. Well, why wouldn't you want them to come here and confirm whether or not what I'm saying is true? I can't understand that. I find it incumbent on us to make sure that this voice is heard.

If you go to the next page, which is page 351 of that document, it continues to go right on. The PCO comment on this particular program is in two bullets there. Then it blacks out the rest. It blacks out the rest because it is completely unrelated. A really good sign to know that this is actually what's happening is the fact that in these documents, which are clearly PDF documents or some form of Word or something like that, you're not seeing lines here and there. It's not like you're seeing paragraphs and within the paragraphs words being blacked out, or sentences being blacked out. You don't see any of that in these documents.

● (18905)

What you do see in these documents are entire sections that are clearly coming before or after sections that relate to this program and sections that relate to the request that was made by the committee to get this information. That is a massive signal that what you're getting here is the reality of what was related to this particular motion, the CSSG program in particular.

I think people should take note of the fact that in a page or two of relevant information, not a single word, phrase, sentence or paragraph has been redacted. It's the entire portion that's related to this program.

I cannot wrap my head around the fact that the opposition would allow government officials, who are non-partisan, and parliamentary officers, who are non-partisan, to have their careers stained by the notion that they contributed to infringing upon the privilege of members of Parliament.

I can't understand, when it's so obvious that this is the case, why members of the opposition.... I get why the Conservatives are doing it. They've been doing this since day one, since I arrived on the Hill. They've been like this right from the beginning. I don't know what it is. Maybe they just don't have any good ideas. All they ever want to do is talk about the Prime Minister and everything he's doing that they perceive to be some kind of scandal. They don't want to offer actual substance.

But I'm shocked to see this coming from my colleagues from the Bloc and the NDP. I've always appreciated the fact that they want to stand up for the public servants we have. This is a glaring example of how they're not doing that.

I'm at a loss for words when it comes to that, Mr. Chair, because our public servants are the institution. They're the bedrock of how Parliament functions. Think about it. We politicians come and go. Of the people sitting around this table, some of us will be here after the election and some of us won't, and some of us will be gone after the election after that. However, those public servants, the clerks and the people who create the bedrock for the institution to function are the people we're talking about. These are the people who are being affected by this, Mr. Chair.

What's going on, Mr. Chair? Are we in a conference call?

● (18910)

The Chair: Just a moment. I heard somebody else coming on the line.

It's okay. We'll go back to Mr. Gerretsen.

I never noticed, Mr. Gerretsen, that you were at a loss for words, so I'll let you go again.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you. I'm only on page 28 of 151, Mr. Chair. I have a lot more to offer on this. If nobody else is going to defend these public servants, and if I can do my part, then I'm going to do that, because I think it is incredibly important.

We're back to this scenario where, as I was saying before a conference call interrupted us, I'm just shocked. I'm shocked that the NDP and the Bloc would suggest that non-partisan government officials go down with this ship. I understand the political attacks. I even understand the sport the Conservatives get engaged in even when it comes to personal attacks. It's one thing to attack parliamentarians. We're fair game. We have the stage. We have a soap box we can stand on and defend ourselves.

There is a rule when you get into politics, Mr. Chair, when you're an elected official. I learned this the hard way, I will say. I learned this the hard way, and I'll never forget this, because I think it's really important. It goes to this issue of how we treat public servants. That's really what my amendment is about. Rule number one is that you never attack or impugn motive on staff, because they can't defend themselves.

I learned that the hard way. I think it was my first or second meeting when I was a city councillor. There was a big issue. We had just come off the election and were debating an issue. I really went after one of the city commissioners at the time. Afterwards, a gentleman who had been involved in the community a long time—I won't name him—came up to me and said, “You know, the way you treated that staff person, you should never put them in that situation,” and he really reamed me out over it.

In retrospect, I learned a lot from that. I learned a lot from that opportunity, because I realized that we need to be better when it comes to taking care of our staff. At the next meeting, the first thing I did, Mr. Chair, was to raise a point of order at the beginning of the meeting and apologize to that staff member for what I had done, because it wasn't right. In the same spirit, the lesson I learned that day from that individual—he was a former principal of Queen's University, to be totally honest, though I still won't name him—I continue to carry around with me to this day.

Back to Mr. MacGregor's point, I'm not willing to just let this go, because this is about the integrity of officials, of parliamentary officers. I don't think it's appropriate that they're being treated this way, not being able to come and defend themselves. In the amount of time I've spoken just in this session, they could have defended themselves and answered some pretty quick questions about this, but of course the Conservatives don't want that. They don't want them to come and explain themselves, because it will completely discredit Mr. Poilievre's motive of trying to advance conspiracy theories, like the ones that, by the way, he shares from *The Post Millennial*. I can't believe Mr. Poilievre is retweeting *The Post Millennial*. I'll leave it at that. It's almost as bad as when the Conservatives get up and quote the Fraser Institute as a reliable source of information, but I digress.

I'll go back to what I was reading here. From page 364 to 380, we have the actual funding agreement between WE and the Government of Canada, which was released by the PCO. Again, the professional public service redacted personal contact information. That's it. Mr. Poilievre, in all the ammunition that he's looking for, has the document entitled, “Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan: support for students and recent graduates, funding agreement between Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada as represented by the Minister of Employment and Social Development (herein referred to as 'Canada') and WE Charity Foundation (herein referred to as 'the Recipient') hereinafter collectively referred to 'the Parties'”.

● (18915)

If there is going to be a smoking gun, Mr. Poilievre, I hate to rain on your parade—

The Chair: Through the chair, Mr. Gerretsen....

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Oh, sorry.

Mr. Chair, if there was ever to be a smoking gun, this is where Mr. Poilievre would have found that, in this document. This is the actual funding agreement. Guess what's redacted from this? Absolutely nothing. It's only the private cellphone numbers and contact information of people, not even their names. It goes into the “whereas” clauses and the resolve clauses. It has the interpretation and definitions. It goes on to the dates and duration. It has everything in there, Mr. Chair. Everything is in there that has the details of this plan.

This is where you were going to find it, if you were going to find it anywhere. This would have been everything that you were looking for, but unfortunately, while everybody was focusing on everything else that was going on with the pandemic, Mr. Chair, how I interpret it is that Mr. Poilievre was probably just going through this document, digging up and looking for the smoking gun in here, and he just couldn't find it. So what did he do? He went back to these previous documents that I referenced earlier. These are the documents where portions had been redacted because they're completely irrelevant to the motion that this committee had passed. This contractual agreement goes on for 11 pages before it gets to the signatory page, 11 pages with 37 parts with subparts and sub-subparts that they could be critiquing.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Poilievre could have been there with his staff—I'm sure they did—just drilling into every little detail of this agreement, looking for that little part that says so and so is going to get all this money, and it's going to be great, isn't it? No, because it's just not there. He was never going to find that and he knew it wasn't there. He looked through this. He read the agreement. They probably sat there in dismay thinking, “Oh no, what are we going to do now? We don't have the smoking gun that we thought we had. Oh, I have an idea. Let's go back to the redacted parts from earlier on where they redacted the whole page, and we'll say, ha, see what they're missing. They've taken everything that we had and they've redacted the whole thing, everything that we were supposed to get.” Meanwhile, it was parts of an Excel spreadsheet that had absolutely nothing to do with this actual motion, the actual documents that had been requested.

If I have to be completely honest with you, Mr. Chair, until I was asked to get on this committee and to participate, I didn't even really fully understand it. When I started to go through these documents and started to understand this better, I honestly came to the conclusion myself. Being a member of Parliament, somebody who's “in the know”, so to speak, I came to the same conclusion. I said, “How is it possible that Mr. Poilievre is so obsessed with this information when it's pretty clear the parts that were redacted were completely irrelevant?”

I'll bring you back to what I said earlier, Mr. Chair. If this was somehow a document where people wanted to redact portions of it for the purpose of hiding stuff, within emails and within letters, within contracts, you would have seen portions of it redacted. You would have seen sentences of it redacted. You would have seen paragraphs. You would have seen words. You don't see any of that. It's all open and available, with the exception of telephone numbers and in some cases email addresses, although a lot of email addresses were shared.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I'll say that the opposition members are asking themselves, why are they going on and on about this? Why are they intent on filibustering this? Why are they pushing this as hard as they can? It's because the premise of what has happened here is wrong. They're trying to fabricate a scandal where it doesn't exist. I see a problem with that.

• (18920)

The more abusive problem, Mr. Chair, and the more egregious issue that I have, is how they're trying to implicate officers of Parlia-

ment and department officials in this. It's one thing for the opposition to go after the personal characteristics or personal relationships of a member of Parliament—most often the Prime Minister's. It's a completely different ball game when they start going after the people who are there to support the institution and who—theoretically, in the way our system is set up—don't care whether it's a Liberal government or a Conservative government. They don't care. They're there to execute their directives in a department, whether they come from cabinet, their minister or from Parliament, as it was in this case. Now we're trying to implicate them in all this. I have a huge issue with that.

We hear people talk about why the Liberals are holding this up and why the Liberals are spending...pushing on 12 hours. I'm doing it because I don't want to see people who can't protect themselves in these scenarios go down because they're considered collateral damage by Mr. Poilievre. I don't think it's appropriate. I don't think it's fair.

It's one thing when he and the Conservatives continually go after the Prime Minister. They had no problem with WE Charity being collateral damage, as long as it served their objective. They had no problem with that, but when it comes to the independent officers of Parliament, I have a serious issue with it.

Yes, I will hold this up as much as I can. I will put the brakes on this as much as I can, and I will go to the wall for these people because they deserve it. If the Conservatives—and, much to my dismay and unfortunate reality, the NDP and the Bloc—don't see that and are unwilling to see that they're allowing these people to become collateral damage in Mr. Poilievre's quest, then that's extremely unfortunate. I won't let it happen. We'll go through all this, and I'll highlight.... I will try to defend them as much as possible. They deserve that from us, as I've said in the past.

I go now to page 376, Mr. Chair. This continues on from that other document. This is schedule A of the project description. I've gone through 13 pages. There are 37 parts of that contract, plus the signatory page, where everybody would print and sign their name. Then we get into schedule A. Schedule A is the project description.

By the way, I should point out that absolutely nothing was redacted in that contract. I encourage all members to do their homework and look at the entire contract that was provided by the government House leader's office.

Then we get to schedule A. The first thing that was redacted is a telephone number, then an email address, then another telephone number and another email address. We have the names of the people who were the recipients of the project, which was WE Charity. Their names are right there. The only thing we don't get is their telephone number and their email address. Again, I can't understand why people would see the need to have that.

It talks about how WE Charity will administer cash awards and facilitate the creation of volunteer opportunities. All of this was open to Mr. Poilievre and his research team, back in his cave or his office or wherever it is, to go through in fine detail, to look at it and to make sure where the smoking gun is.

● (18925)

It's all here. It's all in this, Mr. Chair.

You get the activities of what they're supposed to be doing between June and September of 2020, and you get all the details, the bullet points of absolutely everything that's going on. Everything is in there. Then you get July to August; you get September to November, December to March 2021.

The reality is that as I read this and reflect on it, I think of the massive lost opportunities for students as a result of this. I think of the collateral damage that's been done by allowing WE, the charity, to take the heat of Mr. Poilievre's politically charged motives. I think it's extremely.... It's a detriment.

There are kids, there are students, who are worse off now because of this. When you finally get exactly what you're after, after I go through all of this and put it all in the record, you'll see that none of this was anything that was offensive and that should not have been redacted. It's all there, right in the actual document, for you to see.

Let us go on to the next page, the eligibility to participate in the WE-created volunteer opportunities. Here's the eligibility for the volunteer service opportunities, for the CSSG award; everything is in there, open, available and transparent for members to scrutinize. There's so much information in here.

Mr. Poilievre and the Conservatives—and the NDP, for that matter—could have taken the opportunity when they got this document to scrutinize the manner in which policy was being created to advance the interests and opportunities of young adults. There is so much policy in here that could have been the subject of the scrutiny, but it wasn't, and that's what we keep coming back to. The subject of the scrutiny was this: How do we make it look like they were trying to hide something so that we can better our own political agenda? Unfortunately, that's what happened.

We go further on for the disbursements of the Canada student service grant award. They go into the details of the lump sum, how people were going to get paid, the expected results. These are the outputs that were expected from this program. All of that is in there.

Forty thousand eligible volunteer service opportunities are gone, gone because Mr. Poilievre looked at WE as an opportunity to create political carnage upon other people. That's what he ended up getting out of this. Those opportunities are gone, and unfortunately, we see other members of other opposition parties jumping on board and following suit.

However, you had the opportunity to criticize the policy of this when you got all of this, to criticize what those outputs were going to be. The NDP had the opportunity to come here and say, "Well, hold on. Why is it only forty thousand eligible volunteer service opportunities? Shouldn't, for this kind of money, we be seeing sixty thousand eligible volunteer service opportunities? Why don't we do X instead of Y? Why don't we craft this policy so that it works like this instead of that way?" But no, they chose to do none of that. They chose not to engage in meaningful, productive dialogue that

Canadians could benefit from. They chose nothing to that end, even though all the information was here.

I'm still going through this and I'm still on the schedules. I'm now at the signature line, where people were going to sign the acceptance of that schedule that's attached to the contract.

The next page I'm on here is page 394. This is Finance Canada's proposal from pages 394 to 401 of the PCO release. It discusses the implementation of the Canada student service grant in full and unredacted detail.

● (18930)

I am going to repeat that. It discusses the implementation of the CSSG in full and unredacted detail. This is the financial proposal. Can you guess at the only removal of information? ? I will put this out there. Can anybody at home guess what was left out from this information?

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead with your point of order, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank Alastair MacGregor, who has been doing a stellar job for the NDP. Mr. Chair, if you could catch me up on things, what have I missed over the last few hours?

The Chair: You will have to look at the blues for that, Mr. Julian. It will probably be more accurate than my assessment would be, but Mr. Fraser has been going through some of the documents extensively and explaining what was redacted and what was not.

We'll go back to you Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser: It was Mr. Gerretsen.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

● (18935)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have two things to say to that, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you, Mr. Julian. I usually leave it to my party to relieve me, but I appreciate the fact that you did so on my behalf.

Second, I just want to say that it is a massive compliment to be confused with Mr. Fraser, and I appreciate it, Mr. Chair. That was very nice of you.

Actually, Mr. Julian, for your benefit, I could start at the beginning again. Would you prefer that? No?

I'll just pick up where I left off, then. I was on page 380 and I was discussing the details in it and how the recipients and everybody was going to sign off on it.

Then I went to the next part. I thought it was very important. This was the financial proposal specifically on the implementation of the Canada student service program. I was putting it out there and I thought somebody was going to call me on a point of order for trying to turn this into a reality TV show and getting people to call in to answer my question.

I had put it out there that in the financial proposal, the implementation of the Canada student service grant goes into all the details. We get the overview, we get the proposal description, we get the costing, we get what to expect with the first 20,000 placement opportunities, we get the second cohort, and we get the initial processing and administrative capacity of the program.

We then go into the initial funding envelope of the grant, a total of \$500 million. We go into the contingency fund of additional grants. We go into the program support costs of the program and the costing assumptions. We go into the implementation, again within those time periods from June to July and then over the summer and fall, and then to the results.

Then we hit the stakeholder communications and considerations. We go into lots of detail about the stakeholders who have been consulted and have contributed to this, and then we get to the end, and can we guess what is blacked out, Mr. Chair?

This is what I was getting at. Mr. Chair, I don't even want to make you guess, because I don't want to put you on the spot, but it was a telephone number.

That's right, Mr. Chair. I went through every section of this entire document—the financial proposal, the implementation of the Canada student service program and its financial impacts—and the only part that was redacted was the phone numbers of the executive director and the director.

Of course, this isn't what Mr. Poilievre chose to criticize. I'm sure he could have found something in here to attack the government on in terms of the policy it was attempting to create and how horrible and wrong it was. He could have done that, but that's a lot of work. That requires actually having to come up with ideas and thinking of different ways to do things and how to be better at things than what you're seeing other people trying to do.

It's a lot of work. It's a lot easier to just grab pieces of paper, portions of which have been blacked out—and you know full well why they've been blacked out—and grab your podium and your iPhone for your Twitter clip and start waving around the pages, saying, “Look at all the blackout that's going on here”, never heeding the fact that the entire document, which relates to the financial proposal and the implementation of the program, is 100%, with the exception of a mere 18 digits that represent two phone numbers, open and accessible and unredacted.

In the entire document, 18 digits have been redacted, representing two phone numbers. Somehow, Mr. Chair, Mr. Poilievre, joined by Mr. Julian, the Bloc and the rest of the Conservatives, are offended by that. I just don't understand it. It's great theatre, but it's completely misrepresentative of what's actually going on.

Let's get to an even more interesting document, Mr. Chair. I'm on page 402 now.

● (18940)

This is a very interesting document. I think my colleagues will also find it interesting. It is an email, and we're looking at page 404 of the PCO release in which there's an invitation to a meeting to discuss the WE contract. The redaction is a conference call ID log-in. It's probably not even active anymore. Those conference IDs are usually generated every time there's a new meeting, but somehow the government officials decided it was important to remove the conference ID, and it became an extremely offensive point to Mr. Poilievre and everybody else on the committee who opposes allowing the people who did that redaction to come and explain themselves.

Why don't they want to hear from the person who removed the conference ID to explain why they removed the ID? I can't understand why anybody would not be interested in getting the answer to that question, unless of course the motive is they weren't interested in it at all from the beginning, because it doesn't serve their purpose of political carnage, which is the word that Mr. Fragiskatos and I have been using. It doesn't serve that purpose, and that's clearly the only reason somebody would not want that to be public information, not want the public to be able to understand that information right from the people who actually did it. Therefore, I am going to go through it painstakingly and make sure their voices are heard as to why they chose to do that.

At page 405, we get into the PCO release of pages 417 to 419. This is a cabinet confidence document stamped “Limited Distribution”. It's what we call a memorandum to the Prime Minister, and it's seeking a decision regarding this program, the Canada student service grant and other matters. As is noted in the motion from the committee, matters related to this particular program were requested, and here they have been released. You have this document labelled “Secret—Limited Distribution, Confidence of the Queen's Privy Council”. I don't know about you guys, but this is the closest.... I'm sure Mr. Easter, who has been in cabinet, has seen a document like this before. I certainly haven't, but so has Mr. Poilievre. It may not mean a lot to him, but when I see this this document, a memorandum to the Prime Minister, I think is a pretty important document. I've got to be honest; I've never seen one of these before.

What is being redacted here? Let's have a look. The only items—and there are just a few points—that have been redacted are one and a half points. Everything else that's available for people to read are items unrelated to cabinet confidences. All that stuff was provided. The only stuff that was redacted was the stuff that was related to cabinet confidence.

This goes back to my earlier point. Mr. Poilievre didn't grab this sheet and ask why the cabinet confidence of the Queen's Privy Council and the summary had been so widely distributed or why he is getting all the information they're providing here. That never happened. He didn't do that because it didn't serve his purpose, since the only items that are blacked out here are those unrelated to the motion that was brought forward by this committee.

Then you go to the next pages, page 2, page 3. All of page 2 is available to read. You've got everything in there, from the decision of the Minister of Finance to the PCO comments on the issue. All of it's available. Not a single word is blacked out in this secret, limited distribution document, confidence of the Queen's Privy Council. On page 2, it's all right there. This is the document the Prime Minister would have received.

On page 3 we go into this again, with bullet after bullet of the details right there. Then one item is blacked out toward the bottom.

● (18945)

Again, 97% of this, I'd say, with a quick glance, is totally available to be seen. As we've heard, the little bits that have been redacted were not germane to the motion and were not being asked for in the motion.

We then go to an interesting email here from the PCO. These are pages 426 to 427. It's an email from Ms. Roseanne MacKay at PCO to one of her colleagues, Alain Beaudoin. It is a cabinet meeting note for the Prime Minister, not unusual whatsoever. Does anybody out there want to guess what was redacted? I know I'm starting to sound like a broken record, but I think we're starting to notice a pattern here, Mr. Chair. What was redacted? It was a public servant's cellphone number. Again, clearly Mr. Poilievre has taken great offence to not being able to know that individual's cellphone number. Quite frankly, I don't think he needs to know. I don't think anybody else around this table generally believes, maybe with the exception of Mr. Poilievre, that they need to know.

The information, everything else in this email, is right here. This is from Roseanne McKay. She goes into detail. She says, "Please find attached the draft meeting management note for tomorrow's implementation call with the PMO." They get into the details. You're really getting to see behind the curtain here. You're pulling it all back and you're seeing exactly what happened. You're seeing the emails flying back and forth. You're seeing the documents. I've gone through the contract. You're seeing the documents in terms of what was provided on the financial impact of this program. You're seeing all the emails. You've literally pulled back the curtain.

It just surprises me. I understand the motive of the Conservatives, but Mr. Julian has had the opportunity to look at this stuff too. He had it from the House leader's office as well and had the opportunity to see this, yet he still thinks that it's okay for parliamentary officials to be collateral damage in this, to have them strung up as the people who were responsible for breaching parliamentary privilege.

The whole notion that members of Parliament would be willing to let people go down for this is absolutely foreign to me. I can even understand, although I don't agree with it, that when it is somebody like a deputy minister, you can say, "Well, that deputy

was really somewhere on the line between the politics and the non-partisan stuff." You can take a position on that. I get it, because people do that all the time. People can make those judgment calls. I don't think it's the right thing to do, but I know from time to time people do that. I can understand not doing it, but I can also understand why people jump to doing it. What I just can't understand is when we start accusing officers of Parliament or legal counsel. What motivates that? I don't know. I guess it's some perceived political agenda that leads people to jump on it and start doing something like this. We're seeing a pattern here.

I hope if my discussion this evening serves any purpose, Mr. Chair, it's to show that we're seeing a pattern. The very first thing that you should get out of this pattern is that the vast majority of times, the things that were redacted were telephone numbers. Next to that, it was information that just wasn't asked for. Perhaps there's a way around this in the future; perhaps there isn't. I don't know.

The problem is that when these documents were originally prepared, obviously nobody knew that they were going to be asked to be supplied to committee, so everything was put into one document and things were compiled together. As a result, when this stuff was asked for and they started going through the documents, pulling out sections, just like a chapter doesn't always have to start on the beginning of the next page, neither does an issue.

● (18950)

That's what we're seeing here. We're seeing multiple issues being discussed. One issue was concluded and then, when the next issue was the Canada student service grant, they had to redact the part before it because it wasn't asked for.

The unfortunate thing about doing it that way is that it gave ammunition to Mr. Poilievre to start waving this piece of paper around, saying that they redacted all of this because they didn't want us to see it. In reality, it's just that the people didn't want to put in a page break when they went to the next topic. That's really what this is about. This is about the fact that in a lot of these documents, there just wasn't a page break. If there had been a page break on each issue, then each issue would have been on its own page and there would have been no redaction at all. That's what this comes down to.

Mr. Julian knows this. I believe Mr. Ste-Marie knows this. I believe the majority of my colleagues from the Conservative Party know this. For some reason it doesn't matter to them. For some reason, Mr. Chair, the integrity of the people who did that redaction because there wasn't a page break are now somehow getting strung up on this charge that they impeded the parliamentary privilege of members. I take great exception to that.

It comes down to the lack of a page break, basically. If there had been page breaks, there wouldn't have had to be the redactions we saw and Mr. Poilievre would not have his prop to wave around to everybody.

We go to pages 428 to 432 from the PCO. Again, we have a document with a conference ID redacted—it's probably not even functioning anymore—and items that are clearly not related to the Canada student service grant. These items were redacted by the good folks at the public service.

I find it really interesting that in most cases, if not all, it still shows the title. We saw this routinely throughout this document, Mr. Chair. In this case, I'm on page 428. It says the status of implementation of the Canada emergency wage subsidy. That's all there. It has the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB. One part in there is not relevant, so it's been redacted. We're still seeing all the details of the other stuff. They're still giving us the titles, so that we know exactly what it is, where and why they were redacting stuff and how stuff was not relevant.

This document goes on and on. On pages 429 and 430, there is a lot of information about the Canada summer jobs program and an implementation update on that. The comments are available for that. The Canada emergency commercial rent assistance is in there as well. We get to the Canada emergency account that was set up for businesses. We have old age security, the guaranteed income supplement top-up and the regional relief and recovery fund.

The document goes on to page 432. Then, guess what? We have another email here, on pages 433 to 434. We see another release from the PCO. Mr. Chair, do you want to guess what's been redacted again? It's nine digits: a nine-digit phone number from an individual who sent an email. That's it.

● (18955)

Again, Mr. Poilievre has a fascination with public servants' phone numbers, and that's clearly becoming apparent to us; nonetheless, that's all that's been redacted, and you can see that it is so

Another email here from July 28 regarding the WE contract, saying “please find the email below”, is from Heather Moriarty in social development policy. It goes on to give the details in the email correspondence back-and-forth up to page 434.

We get to page 435 and the redaction below. This one again appears to be only an email address. It's an email address of an individual who is shown on the “cc” line, the carbon copy line. Mr. Chair, that's the only thing that's been redacted.

It goes into the details of an email from Marc Kielburger. His email says:

Hi —,

Thank you for your time and your call.

As we shared in our call, we are feeling confident for launch.

1. We currently have 10,000 WE placements which are ready.
2. If needed, we can have 15,000 WE placements which could be ready for launch.

It goes into all the details. Everything is in here. The only item that has been redacted is again the nine-digit phone number.

On page 458, we're again looking at an email exchange among public servants who are involved in the Canada student service grant file. The content again is all visible. The redaction is of the cellphone number of a public servant. That's it.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On a point of order, I'll hear Mr. Poilievre. Go ahead.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The member is suggesting that all that's being redacted here is phone numbers and email addresses—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: This is not a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: If that's the case—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, I still have a lot to say. This is not a point of order.

The Chair: I'll hear Mr. Poilievre out for a minute to see whether it is a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I was just going to say that under the terms of the previous motion, which was adopted in accordance with the Standing Orders, the documents were to be turned over to the Law Clerk of the House of Commons. If the redactions are simply phone numbers and email addresses, then the Law Clerk can confirm that to be true or untrue and make sure that nothing is released other than that which is permitted according to the original motion.

If it's just phone numbers and email addresses, then the government can hand it over unredacted—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's not a point of order.

The Chair: I don't think it is a point of order; it's a matter of debate.

I will go back to Mr. Gerretsen, who is staying pretty relevant to the motion that's on the floor.

Go ahead.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Although I would agree that it was not a point of order, I want to thank you, Mr. Poilievre, for bringing up that very important point because that is what this amendment is about.

It's about letting them confirm that. It's about inviting them to this committee to allow them the opportunity to confirm that, so, yes, you are right. You didn't have a point of order, but you raised an incredibly good point, which—

● (19000)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I agree with that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Yes, congratulations. We are starting to get somewhere now, Mr. Poilievre, and it's great.

That's what this amendment is about. It's saying, “Let's invite them here so that they can confirm that.”

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Just give it to the law clerk.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm going through detail. I know, Mr. Poilievre, that you have been following this.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Just give it to the law clerk.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Despite the fact that Mr. Poilievre has been changing backgrounds, I know he has been following along with this.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Just give it to the law clerk.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: He will know, Mr. Chair, that I am going meticulously through these details because where he does not see it as being his responsibility to protect the great public servants that we have, I am going to defend their case—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Just give it to the law clerk.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: —because he will not allow them to come here and do that.

I still have a lot to go. I am on page 68 of 151 pages, Mr. Chair. I still have more to enter in here that I think is entirely appropriate, so I am going to continue to do that now.

The Chair: Go ahead. You still have the floor.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

I'm sorry, Mr. Poilievre, if I got under your skin there a little bit, but you will have an opportunity to respond in good time.

We have more emails here. I am now on the email that is on page 458, again looking at public servants involved in the Canada student service grant file. The content is all visible.

Mr. Poilievre, do you want to guess what's missing?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The law clerk.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, it's the nine-digit phone number that you're obsessed with getting.

The only thing—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I just want to call the public servant and ask for the documents to be handed over in accordance with the motion. That's why I need the number. The politicians won't do it, and I know the public servants will. They have the integrity that the politicians don't have.

Maybe what we need is a phone number around here, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's fair, but it's up to that public servant to provide him with the phone number, and that's the problem here. The public servant does not want you to have the phone number, Mr. Poilievre. I'm sorry to have to let you down on this, but it's the reality of the situation. Until you can get that phone number on your own, I'll just continue reading on this.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I'm sure he's a wonderful guy, whoever he is, a terrific guy, and I'm sure he'd love to hear from me.

The Chair: I'm sure you are having a wonderful debate, guys, but it would be better to go through the chair.

You have the floor, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: The only thing on this email from June 11 to Tara Shannon, as requested here, are the responses to the technical questions on the contribution agreement. The third party has in-

dictated they require a signed agreement by tomorrow to launch for Monday and there are more details about it. The only thing missing is the nine-digit phone number that Mr. Poilievre is so obsessed with getting.

Next I'll go to page 481. This is where we get to the Canada student service grant. These are questions, responses and background on contribution agreements. There are all the details. Contribution agreements are used by the government to further policy objectives. Under a contribution agreement the recipient is responsible to design project activities to meet objectives and outcomes. There are some questions in there. There is question one and then there are responses. Question two is about the relevance of the May 5 date. On page two, they get into all the details. It's great stuff. It's having an opportunity to pull back the curtain, see what's going on behind the scenes and make sure everything is out in the open—and it is.

In this particular document, we have page one, which is page 481, and then it goes to page 482, 483, 484 and 485 and absolutely nothing was redacted. This particular document would not have served Mr. Poilievre's purpose of grandstanding in front of a podium because nothing is redacted here because they did use a page break at the end of this one. Actually, this one ends with a paragraph and then there is a page break.

At the bottom of 485, had there been another topic introduced here with other information that was completely unrelated—even though we see that this is the end of this particular set of questions on the CSSG—they would have had to redact that and there would have been a big, blacked out part because it wouldn't have been germane to the motion that this committee had passed. Luckily, somebody put a page break there and started on a new page, so they didn't have to redact anything that was unrelated.

Going to page 486, we have an email from Craig Kielburger to Ms. Fox at the PCO. It's on pages 491 to 495 of the PCO release. The entire content and attached information from Mr. Kielburger is included. There is no redaction of content other than the names of private citizens and personal contact information, which is all relevant.

We are seeing the recurring theme, Mr. Chair, of redactions of an email address and a telephone number. In some rare cases it is a first or last name of somebody. I've only seen that once in all the documents I have read so far. This goes into the details. This is from Mr. Kielburger. He goes into the details of what's going on with the particular agreement. The redacted parts are only about that personal information.

When you get to the next page they start to talk about some of the programs they're doing and some of the things they're advocating for. It's nothing that intrigues Mr. Poilievre, but's still very important information about what's being done for young folks in our country. It goes on to talk about their global development commitment, the WE board of directors, HR recruitment, transparency, human resources and diversity and inclusion training.

Mr. Chair, these are all great things. A hundred per cent of this is intact and has not had a single letter redacted. Everything is here for scrutiny for the Conservatives to fall over and dig deeply into the details. Of course, they didn't find anything because there was nothing to find. Yet they want to suggest that somehow we can find officers of Parliament to have contributed to the breach of parliamentary privilege, which again is so unfortunate.

● (19005)

I turn your attention now, Mr. Chair, to some of the documents.

I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I just realized that I've been talking for a really long time. Somebody else might want to get in here. I have a page break, and maybe I will pause right now, because I was about to get into the documents from the finance committee. I'm about halfway through, so why don't I take a break right now. Then, if necessary, I will come back to start talking about them afterwards.

I don't want to leave you with any cliffhangers, but I have a feeling that we're going to see more redacted phone numbers. When we get to that point, I want you to remember that I warned you of this in advance and that this was a recurring theme.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: We talked about repetition. I'm wondering if it's possible to stop being repetitious.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On that point of order, I have not repeated anything. These are individual emails that are not related. I've been referencing the page numbers so everybody can follow along and they know exactly the emails I'm discussing.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I thought I would try, because it is really repetitious, but by all means—

The Chair: He is going through the pages, so if anyone wants to follow along, pull up the documents and they'll have the pages.

I have on my list Mr. Fraser next and Mr. Vaughan. Mr. Fragiskatos, did I see your hand go up?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'm glad to go in that order.

The Chair: I think I have Mr. Fraser first, so we'll go there, and Mr. Badawey is up as well.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have remarks ready to go. I think we have been carrying on for quite some time, so perhaps I'll give the committee an opportunity to wrap things up before I get into my remarks.

Mr. Chair, I move that we adjourn now.

The Chair: Okay. You've moved that we adjourn. We'll see if we have the will of the committee to adjourn.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I believe that the motion to adjourn is a debatable motion. At least I'd like to have a word before—

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Chair, let's call the question.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: No, you can't just shut the thing down.

A voice: It is not debatable, Mr. Chair.

● (19010)

The Chair: Just hold on.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Just wait until I make my point before you make your point of order.

To adjourn, we have to have the will of the committee, so we have to have the majority.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order.

The Chair: That's that.

What's your point of order?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, according to the Standing Orders, the matter needs to be treated before the meeting is adjourned. It's been clear through this marathon speech session, which has gone on now for 12 hours, that the Liberals on this committee have something to hide. There are obviously bombshells in these documents—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, that is not a point of order.

Some hon. members: It is not a point of order.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: They want to shut it down.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Listen to all of them shouting. It's like a chorus of screaming and hollering.

The Chair: Order.

That's not a point of order, so I'm going to take a poll—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The second the truth starts to come out, we get some terrified people screaming from the caucus of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Chair, if you can't get him in order, you're going to have to suspend this meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Now he wants to suspend the meeting.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I don't, but if you're going to be out of order like this—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thou dost protest too much.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I do not want to suspend. I still have 76 pages to go through.

I don't want to suspend.

The Chair: Gentlemen, gentlemen, gentlemen. It's not a point of order. We will poll the committee to see if there is the will to adjourn—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Is it a point of order this time?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It is indeed.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: We'll see.

The Chair: Let's hear it and we'll see.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Based on the Standing Orders, it is clear that you cannot use an adjournment to cover up a political scandal.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's not a point of order. Pierre, I was rooting for you that time.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Can someone, the Sergeant-at-Arms, go over there and settle him down?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: It's not a point of order.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, would you poll the committee to see if we have the will of a majority to adjourn?

The Clerk: You would like me to ask for a recorded division?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: This is clearly a cover-up. They're going to shut down the meeting instead of allowing the meeting to go ahead—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Stop with the rhetoric there.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, that is not a point of order, and the clerk is in the process of polling the committee to see if there is adjournment agreement.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: There must be some real bombshells in those documents to shut it down like this.

The Clerk: The members of the committee who can vote are the following: Mr. Fraser, Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Fragiskatos, Mr.—

The Chair: Mr. Vaughan.

The Clerk: Sorry, Mr. Gerretsen is still on. I have Mr. Badawey, Mr. Poilievre, Mr. Nater, Ms. Jansen, Ms. McLeod, Mr. Ste-Marie, and Mr. Julian.

Is this list correct?

The Chair: Yes. Mr. Julian is there.

You have the names right. Go ahead.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned to the call of the chair. We will re-establish the meeting tomorrow at 11.

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