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Chair: Mr. David Sweet

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC)): Colleagues, we'll call the meeting to order.

I have some administration I want to cover with you because of a couple of items that have come up.

First off, the dress code was brought up at the last meeting. You should know that in committee, we don't have the same standard as we do in the chamber, so there's a lot more flexibility in that regard. I would of course ask, for the reputation of the committee, that you always dress respectfully, but there's no demand for a jacket or tie, or that kind of thing, as there is in the chamber.

Next is in regard to speaking list, because that came up as well. When we adjourn a meeting, we will always start the next meeting with a fresh speakers list. If we suspend, that's a different story. On a suspension for whatever kind of break, we'll always return to the existing speaking order.

Also, as a point of information with regard to the amended motion that we're dealing with right now, and the clerk will remind me, I think the motion asks for documents going back to 2008. Is that correct?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): That's correct.

The Chair: Colleagues, just so that you know, the documents that Speakers' Spotlight has date back only seven years. According to CRA guidelines, they destroyed everything with an earlier date, so they do not have documents older than from seven years ago. We can continue on with the motion the way it's worded or, by unanimous consent, we can change the date of the motion to seven years back to make sure that Speakers' Spotlight is able to be compliant with our recommendation.

Last, I want you to know that our meeting is scheduled from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. If we go overtime, we have resources from the House of Commons only until 5:30 p.m. today.

I have the speakers list right now. You can go ahead electronically, colleagues, because I have it—

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, on a point of order, at the last meeting when I was giving my remarks, I was cut off because the meeting had to adjourn as we had to return to the House. I thought the understanding was that when we started the next meeting, I would continue, to finish my thoughts and debate this amendment. Is that your recollection, Chair?

The Chair: That's why I covered that right up front, Mr. Dong. My recollection was that you were the last one speaking, but when we adjourn a meeting, we start a new meeting afresh. If it was a suspension we were dealing with and we were returning, then I would have continued on with the same speaking list.

Mr. Han Dong: I will respect that. Thank you, Chair. That's fine.

The Chair: It will be consistent—

Mr. Han Dong: I will wait my turn.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): I have a point of order as well.

The Chair: Madame Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, just on the question of the seven years, what year are we looking at, then, and are we looking at a date? Is this an amendment that would have to be brought forward? I just want to clarify that.

The Chair: Nothing has to be done to the motion right now. All I'm saying, for a point of information, is that Speakers' Spotlight could not comply because they don't have anything from earlier than seven years ago. Since it's 2020, if we go back seven years, that means they would have records from 2013 until today. I was just making a suggestion that if there is unanimous consent in the committee, we would simply change that date only in respect of Speakers' Spotlight so that they could actually comply, because they can't comply right now with the date that we have because they don't have the documents.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Clearly, when a third party firm cannot comply with an order, that is a problem.

The Chair: It's not a problem. We obviously can't make someone do something that they aren't able to accomplish. I'm simply saying that if we did that by unanimous consent, then Speakers' Spotlight could comply and there would be no question that they weren't complying with the order from the committee. It's will just be a little bit cleaner. It's not necessary, but it will be a little bit cleaner.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Understood.

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Angus in just a moment.

I know that Madame Shanahan is going to want to know the speaking list and she holds me to account on that since she is a great vice-chair. It's going to go Mr. Angus, Madame Shanahan, Madame Gaudreau, Mr. Dong and Mr. Barrett. That's who I have right at the moment.

Go ahead, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

The issues regarding the Canada summer student service grant and the Trudeau government.... We are now into the fourth, coming now almost into the fifth, month of this issue. I have never, in my 16 years sitting on multiple committees, ever been in a situation where a committee was unable to finish a report it had begun, unable to finish because of continual interference by government members, continual points of order and continual efforts to stop the committee in its work. This is really unprecedented territory.

I find this really disturbing now, because as the Liberals have been doing everything they procedurally can to stop us from finalizing our report, we learn that the Kielburger group has engaged in a massive and it seems very well-paid publicity campaign to counter the work of our committee. They brought in American foundation money and American spokesmen, and these apparently have hired a number of people doing op-eds and supposed reports, to debunk the work of a committee that has been unable to finish its work. I find that very, very troubling for the state of parliamentary democracy that we are having our hands tied by the Liberals while the Kielburger group is able to rely on big American donors to take out full-page ads in newspapers, making claims that simply don't add up to what we've already managed to find in the documents.

I think this is really concerning, because when the issue first came up of the Canada summer student service grant, we had no interest in going after WE Charity. We were not all that interested in their work. We were interested in their connections to the Trudeau government, the deep connections they had built up certainly with the Prime Minister's family; the hiring of the Prime Minister's mother and brother; his wife being deeply involved. Was there a connection? That's a legitimate question.

We then found out about the deep connections with Bill Morneau, with his family, with the free trips. We then learned that a number of the key ministers who were involved in the decision had been invited to participate in WE Day. So that was our focus: How did this group, that is a supposed charity for children, get such an inside track on a deal that was between \$500 million and \$912 million?

It was the Kielburger brothers who insisted on coming before committee. It was the Kielburger brothers who insisted on swearing under oath, which is a very extraordinary thing to do. It was in that testimony that a number of questions began to get raised, in my mind, about how they run their operations.

I want to speak to this publicity campaign, this disinformation campaign, which seems to be very well funded, that is attempting, I believe, to obstruct the work of our committee and to undermine the credibility of the evidence we've attempted to gather while the Liberals are doing everything they can to make sure we cannot present our report.

Now, before I get into the various people who have been hired by the Kielburgers and how it's laid out, what I find very, very surprising, to me, is a pattern. Again, for a group that is a children's charity, a group that tells really great stories to kids in every school in

the country, it seems, they have access to.... Yet we find that when it comes to their very aggressive approach to their public image, for example, they hired the Republicans' oppo firm Firehouse Strategies. WE paid over \$600,000 to U.S. political consulting firms, including Firehouse Strategies. That comes from internal revenue sources for the fiscal year ending August 2019, showing that the U.S. arm of the Toronto-based charity paid three firms a total of \$605,853, including the \$130,000 paid to Firehouse Strategies.

• (1110)

I don't assume that anybody in our committee is aware of Firehouse Strategies, so I think it's worth illuminating who they are. This company was started by veterans of Marco Rubio's presidential campaign. What they claim to do is teach people to do "combative media training". I'm wondering now why a children's charity needs to do combative media training done by Republican groups that come out of the Marco Rubio team. But the combative and defensive media training, they say, came out of having learned from the Trump campaign. The firm's founders adopted Trump's aggressive methods after he so easily beat Marco Rubio.

The quote is this:

After managing US [Senator] Marco Rubio's 2016 presidential campaign (and, as they say, losing to a reality TV star in the late stages of the primary process) three longtime GOP operatives—Terry Sullivan, Alex Conant and Will Holley—gave up [their] campaign trail to start Washington public affairs shop Firehouse Strategies.

Here's the kicker:

Their strategy: take lessons learned from that wild election cycle—the one in which Donald Trump upended modern communications—and use them to help clients communicate in the modern age.

Again I'm thinking, this is a children's charity that tells us they're worried about children in Kenya. Why would they be wanting to use the Donald Trump election strategy that has "upended modern communications"?

So, how was it used?

Well, this is according to The Globe and Mail:

Last year, before the Firehouse contract came to light, Canadaland

—the journal that had raised serious questions about the Kielburger organization—

questioned why a number of U.S. Republican consultants had written articles attacking the news outlet and whether it was part of an organized campaign.

Among the Republican operatives who attacked Canadaland is Ben Proler, who worked on Mr. Rubio's presidential campaign and is currently on the board of the U.S. political action committee Maverick PAC, which "provides a platform to engage the next generation of young, conservative professionals in business and politics."

This is really interesting, because the media strategy used to attack journalists who were raising questions about WE—in this case Canadaland—was that they were "adding to Canada's growing fake news fears".

Wow. Again, a charity looking after children was hiring a Republican firm to embed newspaper articles in the United States accusing Canadian journalists of fake news.

Here's another place they managed to get their content:

...Zachary Almond, a former chair of the North Carolina Federation of College Republicans and a former political consultant to Representative Robert Pittenger, one of the leaders of Mr. Rubio's presidential campaign in North Carolina. In November, 2018, Mr. Almond wrote an article for Red State, a U.S. conservative blog, criticizing Canadaland for "false content."

Moreover:

The IRS filing shows that WE also paid consultancy 202 Strategies US\$297,570 during the last fiscal year.

Yet we have no record of what this organization did.

You know, when I'm reading these articles by the media team that's been put together for the Kielburgers claiming that 100% of all the monies go to the charity, I'm thinking, well, then, who's paying these operatives?

We also know that they paid for a private investigation firm to dig into Canadaland's publisher, Jesse Brown, and his employee Jaren Kerr. As part of that investigation, they identified where his children went to school. I mention that because I find it very troubling that the Liberals are so tied to an organization that seems to feel they need to be hiring not just political operatives; a private eye is investigating journalists. I mean, this is Canada that this is happening in.

The other big news story that came out this month, on November 1, was from The Times of Israel:

Wikipedia probe exposes an Israeli stealth PR firm that worked for scammers: Shining rare spotlight on murky business of online reputation management, Wikipedia editor points finger at Percepto—an Israeli firm that helps wealthy clients bury dubious pasts.

That was The Times of Israel on November 1, 2020.

• (1115)

What I find really surprising here is that in their article about scammers and dubious pasts, they have a picture of the Kielburger brothers. I was absolutely floored by that because, again, this is the group that speaks in schools across the country. They have been given almost quasi-ambassadorial status by the Liberal government. When the Liberals wanted to do a big event at the UN, they brought in WE. When WE wanted to go and sell their brand in England, they brought the Prime Minister's wife with them.

Is it possible that a children's charity, which is saying that they only spend money to help children in the third world, is hiring an Israeli disinformation team that comes from former Israeli military intelligence? The military intelligence wing comes from Nir Shafir, who's the partner and COO and who served in Unit 8200 of the Israel Defense Forces, and Yuval Levi, who's a CPA, partner and CFO, who began his career as a military intelligence analyst for the Israeli army.

What does this group Percepto do? Well, they've described themselves as follows:

Over the years, we have developed a rich arsenal of strategies—

That's interesting for former military. They have a "rich arsenal of strategies".

—which enables us to respond quickly and accurately in multiple languages and cultural contexts to all sorts of online challenges. We are fully aware of the complexities of our field, are accustomed to its dynamism, and are attentive to our clients' needs.

No matter what circumstances you are facing, we...find a way to protect your image, optimize your digital presence, and tell your story.

Hmm.

Now, they do list apparently in their clients a number of pretty dodgy Ukrainian oligarchs and other quasi-criminal behaviour, so why would the Kielburger brothers, who do so much work in terms of public relations with children and third world charities in Kenya, need to hire a group that does online disinformation?

I want to be clear here. I'm taking this from The Globe and Mail and from The Times of Israel report, but when The Times of Israel reported the WE Kielburger connection to this Israeli disinformation team, WE responded and said:

WE Charity did not hire Percepto or anyone associated with Percepto to edit WE associated Wikipedia pages. In fact, we had never heard of Percepto until reading your article.

Wow. Okay, I could see that. I mean, why would a charity be hiring a disinformation team? But here's the thing: what the Times reported is that there was a Dropbox that identified their clients, and among their clients they list WE.

It's the thing that I find very confusing about this group. Whenever something seems very simple, it's actually much more complex. How is it possible that poor WE is identified out of all the possible groups on Wikipedia to be drawn into this Israeli disinformation team and listed as a client when they say they've never heard of them?

I say that because when I see the latest big media machine that's being rolled out while we are being obstructed by Liberals, it raises questions about the credibility of the documents and the claims being made—claims being made in full-page newspaper ads right now.

The Toronto Star had to apologize for the op-ed it ran that claimed the independent financial audits had exonerated WE completely. I read those reports, and I didn't see it exonerated. I thought it was interesting, but it certainly didn't jibe with the documents we had read. The Toronto Star had to clarify and issue a statement because they didn't bother to tell their readers—and this is Bruce Campion-Smith on November 6, 2020—that "Failure to disclose backer of WE Charity reports left readers in the dark". The sub-headline was "Transparency, please". But they didn't bother to say who commissioned these reports that supposedly exonerated WE and pretty much undermine the claims and the work that our committee has been doing.

Who paid for this? Well, it was the Stillman Foundation and David Stillman, who has been speaking on behalf of WE. Again, I don't think many on our committee have ever heard of the Stillmans, because we probably don't travel in the circles where that kind of American money moves.

• (1120)

I'm finding it really interesting that an American group is funding Canadian ads undermining the work of our parliamentary committee. I did a Google search on David Stillman, and the first time his name came up to me was in a September 9 article in *Maclean's* magazine. Guess what it's about. It's about the Kielburgers.

The article is entitled "The rise and fall of WE: The charity invented by an earnest 12-year-old finds itself engulfed in a cynical, star-studded cronyism scandal." Cynical, star-studded cronyism—that's not me saying that; that's *Maclean's* magazine.

They're talking about what happened to WE, which was started by Craig Kielburger when he was 12 years old. My god, we bought my daughter that book for Christmas. She was about 11 when she read that book.

They talk in the *Maclean's* article about the problems in the WE organization and about how, when they are faced with problems, they don't actually present independent, outside credibility to validate. In fact, Kate Bahen, managing director of Charity Intelligence, is quoted in the *Maclean's* article saying that boards need to be independent from the charities they oversee:

As a WE donor, as somebody who donates to WE Charity, I would want an independent director who hasn't previously worked with Marc Kielburger.

There's the importance of having independence so that we have credibility.

The fact is that what we learn is that David Stillman, who has become the voice in this media campaign, served on the board. He worked for WE Charity in the United States from 2010 to 2015 as director of their U.S. operations. David Stillman worked for WE Charity for five years as their director and he has served on the board of the WE Charity. When we're seeing a full-page ad from an American who says that he represents the best of the charity sector—and he may do a lot of great charity work—the fact that he worked for WE as director of operations and that he is on their board, to me, is highly problematic. I think that's what got The Toronto Star in trouble; they didn't bother to explain that it is the Stillman Foundation that is hiring these reports.

The Stillman Foundation is paying for these full-page ads, and David Stillman is the spokesman, the same David Stillman who worked for five years as a director of operations for WE in the United States and who is on their board. The Stillman Foundation, when questioned about this connection and this lack of transparency and this lack of independence in terms of why they were stepping forward, stated that that David Stillman is from another branch of the family and has no affiliation with the foundation and no involvement with the reports.

I'm like, "Say what?"

The Stillman Foundation pays for all the reports. David Stillman goes out and is the spokesperson for it, the David Stillman who is

on the board at WE and who worked for them. He's not representing the Stillman Foundation? He's from another branch of the family?

This is just wacky.

Chair, I ask you, if there were questions about Oxfam or the Heart and Stroke Foundation or any other charity, would we be thinking that they would hire someone to exonerate them who had worked for them, who then said they were not really involved with how the money...?

It just doesn't make sense.

I ask this because whenever we start to look into the WE group and their multiple numbers of companies, it feels as though we're in this rabbit hole that goes deeper and deeper into a labyrinth. We're talking about what should be pretty straightforward; a child charity and how that child charity got this government contract. Was it done right or was it done wrong? These should be very straightforward answers. The fact that my Liberal colleagues have spent four months obstructing a simple parliamentary report on whether this was done right or wrong to me raises serious questions.

• (1125)

I want to go now to what they're claiming is the exoneration—the Torigian report. They say that the Torigian report completely exonerates WE and the Kielburgers:

The evidence is clear that the government reached out to WE Charity, not the reverse. Bureaucrats examined their options, considered other organizations, like the YMCA and Shopify, but concluded that WE Charity was the right choice.

That's a pretty declarative statement, but what I find really surprising is that when you actually look at the documents the government turned over, there were no meetings listed with the YMCA or Shopify, so how do they claim that WE was considered out of a number of independent organizations? It also came forward that this was the choice when these other organizations had not been spoken to.

The other thing he said is that it was the government that reached out to WE Charity, not the reverse. He states:

As has been documented by the finance committee, it was senior bureaucrat Rachel Wernick who contacted Craig Kielburger to discuss WE's potential involvement in administering the program that would later be known as the CSSG. While that's not as enticing a storyline as the generally accepted narrative, it happens to be the truth.

Well, that's not the truth. I don't know where the Torigian report read their documents. I know that they certainly took the words of Minister Chagger. That was her line. They certainly took the claims of Craig and Mark Kielburger—that's their line—but if you look at the documents that identify how this deal came about, we see that the Kielburgers were reaching out for an initial program. We're going to talk about that later, because that is a very interesting one that has been very overlooked.

On April 7, they met with Minister Ng. On April 10, Craig Kielburger wrote to Minister Chagger:

I hope this finds you well and healthy...I'm sure [the] celebrations looked a little different this year [but let me] wish you a happy belated birthday.

During this difficult time, we're deeply inspired by your incredible efforts... Understanding you're aware of the conversations between our Head of Gov't Relations, Sofia Marquez, and your team exploring ways WE can assist in your objectives, I thought to share an update following following our discussions with Minister Ng.

That is April 10. He has already been in contact with them through Sofia Marquez.

Now, Sofia Marquez is an interesting character, because she's listed as the head of government relations. She sets up all the meetings. That's a lobbyist. But we learned that WE never bothered to register to lobby. They said they didn't do all that much work. Well, the documents show a big difference: that they did a lot of work. Not only were they so busy with the head of government relations, they'd actually posted for a manager of government relations, all while not bothering to register to lobby. The question of whether or not illegal lobbying was done to get this \$900-million contract is certainly something that we could look at in our committee report.

From this April 10 message to Minister Chagger, we get this famous April 17 meeting between Minister Chagger, Craig Kielburger and Sofia Marquez. That was the meeting that Minister Chagger pretended never happened. She claimed that she never spoke to them and then, when we confronted her, said that she did speak to them. She claimed that she had never discussed at all anything about the youth entrepreneurial proposal, which did not exist then.

What we see from the documents on April 17—this is how Craig Kielburger describes it—is that WE Charity held a phone call with Minister of Diversity and Youth, Minister Bardish Chagger to discuss an unrelated.... Oh, sorry. This is what he's claiming. There is so much here, Mr. Chair. I won't go all day.

It was at the April 17 meeting that they began these conversations, so from that email on April 17, on Monday morning, April 20, Sofia Marquez writes:

Happy Monday. Thank[s]...for your call....

I wanted to give you a quick note following our meeting with Min[ister] Chagger on...the highlights:

• (1130)

That was Craig Kielburger who was at the meeting.

She continues:

Min. Chagger expressed interest in exploring ways to adapt the entrepreneurship proposal we submitted to Min. Ng and include a service component to it. She suggested that we should consider opening a service-stream for youth who are currently not well supported through virtual mentorship are looking for micro-grants to advance their project.. That effect, Craig reassured the Minister that if given the right policy objectives we could amend the proposal.

—again, this is Sofia Marquez saying what happened at that meeting—

Min. Chagger expressed her willingness, as next steps, to connect WE with her team and identify tangible ways to move this opportunity forward, I told her that I had shared our proposal with you, Gina Wilson, Ritu, and Rachel Wernick (over the weekend). I have yet to hear back from her or team members.

Oh, my God.

Now, the Torigian report tells us that it was Rachel Wernick who reached out to the Kielburgers. Remember that famous quote where the Kielburgers said they never should have accepted that call from Canada, but they felt duty bound to receive that call? Well, the call is clear: It came from Sofia Marquez, as the lobbyist for WE, that set up the meeting with Minister Ng, that then set up the meeting with Minister Chagger, and then, according to Sofia Marquez, they reached out to Rachel Wernick on that weekend. The idea that Rachel Wernick came up with the idea on her own simply doesn't add up.

Mr. Chair, why am I putting this into the record? I'm putting this into the record because we have been obstructed for four solid months by the Liberals, who have refused to let us address these documents and have refused to let us question witnesses like Sofia Marquez to find out the nature of that lobbying and whether or not that lobbying was even legal. We are having to put onto the record what actually happened, the truth of what happened, in those documents, because we are facing this major campaign of disinformation and spin that's being paid for by American groups with full-page ads, with op-eds in the Toronto Star, with claims of independent review that simply don't meet the test of evidence. For however long the Liberals want to drag this out, I think it would be worth our committee using this time to put it into the record so that people know what the documents actually say.

Here's another one, just while I'm on it, from Craig Kielburger to Bardish Chagger on April 22:

"We appreciate your thoughtful offer to connect us with relevant members of your ministry," Kielburger said. "[Over the weekend our] team has...been hard at work to adapt your suggestion of a second stream focused on [the] summer service opportunity."

Now, this is really interesting, because we have Craig Kielburger saying that it was Minister Chagger's suggestion. Minister Chagger told us at committee that she had never spoken to them about this proposal. But on April 22, Craig Kielburger thanks her for her suggestions and that she is going to open the door. So the idea that it was poor Rachel Wernick, a civil servant who took it upon herself, pushed this thing through and got everyone signed up....

This is the myth that's being promoted by the Kielburgers' very large-funded organization right now. It is not backed up by any of the facts. It's not backed up by facts like the claim that they were financially solid. You know, that's not really an issue for us one way or the other. They were certainly financially solid because they had enormous real estate holdings, which we haven't looked at. But the idea that the Kielburgers didn't need to do this, that the WE group was in perfectly good financial order.... This is what's being claimed now, but it certainly doesn't meet the test of when we interviewed Michelle Douglas, the former chair, who was denied access to the financial reports.

Now, it's irrelevant to me whether or not the Kielburger group is financially solid. What matters to me is that they're a charity, and as a charity you have obligations to report. Madam Douglas raises serious questions in her testimony about the fact that the board and the chair were denied access to the financial documents while massive amounts of layoffs and firings were happening.

• (1135)

Why is that relevant? Again, we're dealing with a group that proposes to be a new kind of charity, but a new kind of charity or an old kind of charity has reporting obligations. Those reporting obligations are fundamental to its finances, so when Michelle Douglas told the finance committee that she had to resign because she could not get financial information from a charity that was laying off and firing hundreds of people and that then she, along with much of the board, was fired for asking these questions, that raises a serious flag. It raises a serious flag, because we asked the Kielburger brothers about, according to reports we had, how they had gotten very angry at the board and had hung up on them and had then phoned and said they wanted their resignations. We couldn't get a straight answer to that.

This is about governance. This is about an organization that is duly bound to follow the rules and yet, once again, we see that whether it was getting rid of its board, which is really questionable, or whether or not we can get answers at this parliamentary committee—because the Liberals are obstructing us—that is also very questionable. It's very questionable that it is getting support. I don't know what the financial arrangements with this Stillman Foundation are, but it's putting up people as supposed voices for WE who worked for it, and the fact that in the past we saw hirings of hardcore republican media and disinformation teams, along with the Israeli connection, is all really, really disturbing.

Was any of that germane to the work of the committee when we began? No, our committee focus was simply about why it had such an inside track, but four months of obstruction by the Liberals is making me question what it is about this group. What is it about its connections? How has it been able to insinuate itself so tightly into the power structure of Canada to be able to call into ministers' offices when so many organizations are in free fall? How has it been able to be given this contract and then to have the Liberals cover up for it, to have the Liberals obstruct, and to have the Prime Minister shut down Parliament so that we can't actually get the documents? It raises serious questions.

Mr. Chair, I think I will stop for now but I'm more than willing to continue looking into the questions that we, I think now, need to put on the table regarding how this group operates and what the accountability mechanisms are, given that it is a group that works with children across this country, and given its deep connection to the Prime Minister and his family, and given that my Liberal colleagues are so intent on obstructing our work.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Angus.

Now we'll move on to Madame Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair, and I thank my honourable colleague for his remarks although I am a little mystified as

to why WE was very interesting. There was quite a lot of information from different sources in his intervention, but at one point Mr. Angus referred to our WE study. We don't have a WE study. We did not do a WE study here. In fact that study belonged in the finance committee. That's where it was. I know that Mr. Angus and other MPs do go back and forth between the two committees, but here in this committee the study that we were concerned with was on the speaking engagements by the Prime Minister and his family members, which may or may not have had a connection to the WE Charity.

So while this was very interesting—

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Chair, this certainly predates your time and I don't know if I've fallen down another rabbit hole, but is the member saying that we never actually held any meetings on this subject? I find that really astounding. Maybe this is the new line of operation, that there never had been anything to do with WE, but I certainly remember meetings that I sat through. Maybe my colleagues could chime in and say whether they were at those meetings. Again, there is this disinformation that we're actually seeing being embedded into the record here. I think it's very, very unfortunate.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Madame Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, indeed. I can go back to the motion that we were studying, and it did have to do with the production of records:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the Committee review the safeguards which are in place to avoid and prevent conflicts of interest in federal government procurement, contracting, granting, contribution and other expenditure policies; and that, to provide a case study for this review, an Order of the Committee do issue to Speakers' Spotlight for a copy of all records pertaining to speaking appearances arranged, since October 14, 2008, for Justin Trudeau, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, Margaret Trudeau and Alexandre Trudeau—including, in respect of each speaking appearance, an indication of the fee provided, any expenses that were reimbursed and the name of the company, organization, person or entity booking it—provided that these records shall be provided to the Clerk of Committee within one week of the adoption of this Order.

That, Mr. Chair, was the motion we were studying. We had three meetings on that motion, which included, of course, interventions from academics on the notion of prevention of conflict of interest in organizations, and from a previous commissioner of ethics, Mary Dawson. I recall that Ian Shugart, the Clerk of the Privy Council, was also one of the witnesses there.

Indeed, this is my understanding of what we are discussing here today, which is the idea of this committee calling for the production of documents, when the Ethics Commissioner is well able to do so, and the treatment of those documents as a matter of principle.

If we do want to talk about WE, a number of political parties and members of political parties certainly had dealings with WE as an organization. I can recall to the committee that former Prime Minister Harper hosted a WE Day reception at 24 Sussex in 2013. There was government funding provided by the previous Conservative government as well to WE: in 2012, \$100,000 for WE Day and WE Schools in action; in 2013, \$100,000 for WE ACT; and in 2014, \$300,000 to WE ACT. The Premier of Alberta at the time, Rachel Notley, spoke at a WE Day event.

When my colleague makes the remark that WE is associated only with Liberals, I do beg to differ. I think that if there's an investigation of WE.... I understand that was what the finance committee was concerned about, and I certainly heard different interventions emanating from the finance committee, but it is really the task that we have here today to be looking at this issue of production of documents, specifically from Speakers' Spotlight.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

I'm not sure whether I have the latest version of Zoom. Can you hear the interpretation clearly? I'm being told that you can.

Mr. Chair, at the previous meeting, I had some comments regarding the motion under consideration, which concerns Mr. Baylis and the company that manufactures ventilators. I'll save this topic for later, because I really want to address the production of records.

I want to thank the chair and the clerk for the information that they provided at the start of this meeting. They said that the production of records is sometimes limited, regardless of goodwill and the person to whom the records belong. We must determine how we'll address the issue of the seven-year limit for the production of records related to this study.

I want to talk about the Prime Minister as an individual elected to Parliament. When he was elected as a member, he was already a public figure. He was already earning an income as a speaker. When he ran for the leadership of the Liberal Party, Justin Trudeau clearly stated that he sought the approval and advice of the Ethics Commissioner with respect to his speaking engagements. He worked with her with a view to publishing anything that could involve a conflict of interest, since he was no longer a private member. I'm not saying that members of Parliament are ordinary people. However, there's a difference between a member of Parliament and a candidate for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada.

When Mr. Trudeau spoke to the media in 2013, he clearly stated that he sat down with Mary Dawson and asked her open-ended questions about what was appropriate. We should all do this. He told her about his activities, which were already public knowledge to some extent. He disclosed all his activities outside his work as a member. He told her that he wanted to make sure that everything was done properly.

At the time, a column was published in the Ottawa Citizen. The column reported that the Prime Minister was receiving a salary, or rather, fees. When you give a speech, you receive fees and a reimbursement for your expenses. He already had this source of income before he entered politics. He continued to do this work even after he became a member of Parliament.

• (1150)

Like all the other members, he publicly disclosed his income to Ms. Dawson's office until 2009. This information is available in the archives of Parliament. The same applies to all members. They have pursued different paths, they have personal or business interests, and they receive income from other sources. This income has been properly reported.

At the time, the Prime Minister wasn't required to disclose the exact amount that he earned. Since we're still talking about this code or system, you should know that our income amounts and reporting methods have changed.

He did this voluntarily during his first four years as the member for Papineau. He said this publicly. He wanted to share not only the amount earned, but also the complete list of each event and the amount of money received. He did this for the sake of transparency with respect to his personal assets.

Personally, I've worked in the asset management business with wealthy people. There's wealth and there's wealth. Not everyone necessarily knows the type of wealth that makes us truly financially independent. I know many people who have assets, properties or portfolios. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that they can live comfortably off them.

People who enter public life are willing to lose some say in their affairs. Mr. Trudeau was very proactive. He took more steps than what was required at the time. It's interesting. I think that people don't necessarily know how many members of Parliament, past or present, still own private businesses even while sitting in the House.

• (1155)

Our obligations in the House are quite substantial. However, some people are able to get organized and to continue running their businesses while fulfilling the responsibilities required of members of Parliament.

According to a Canadian Press report, in 2010, 151 of the 308 members, or almost half, had other sources of income. However, we acknowledge that earning income from speaking engagements may have conflict of interest or ethical implications if there's reason to believe that the speaker is in attendance because they're a member of Parliament.

It's easy to imagine that a group of stakeholders or players in a certain sector would invite a speaker specifically because the speaker is a member of Parliament. That's why the Prime Minister, who wasn't even the prime minister at the time, made statements that exceeded the requirements. He also did this when he was the prime minister.

It's important to show that government members have recently provided documents as part of our committee meetings. Mr. Rodriguez, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, has already submitted a list of all his engagements for the benefit of all members and the public. Why is the opposition still asking for these documents? This really reminds me of a witch hunt, or at least a fishing expedition.

We can also talk about other parliamentarians who are very well known in the conference circuit. One of them was Senator Mike Duffy, a very colourful media personality. Larry Smith, whom I know personally, worked with the Montreal Alouettes. We can look at Pamela Wallin, a media personality, and Jacques Demers, who works in sports.

These people earned income from public speaking after coming to Parliament. Neither this committee nor the Senate investigated them. However, we can connect their role as parliamentarians with the invitations that they received to participate in events.

• (1200)

Senator Duffy's profile with the National Speakers Bureau states as follows:

[*English*]

“a must-have primer on the key political issues of the day.”

[*Translation*]

This means that people want to hear him talk about his current knowledge.

[*English*]

As well, he “combines the latest buzz from ‘inside Ottawa’ with rollicking political humour, to provide a unique and memorable presentation you won’t want to miss.”

[*Translation*]

Senator Duffy is certainly familiar with the field. He has decided to earn an income from his speaking engagements. Mr. Trudeau, on the other hand, never promoted himself when he was a private member. His speeches focused on issues such as education, the environment and youth. These topics weren't political. If we're talking about ethics, I think the difference is that he never portrayed himself as someone who could divulge hidden aspects of politics. In my opinion, it's clear that his speeches concerned issues that he knew about.

The Conflict of Interest Code for Members of Parliament doesn't prevent members who aren't government members or parliamentary secretaries from having a second job or a business, provided that there's no conflict of interest. Currently, if members are hired to speak to any group, they aren't required to report the speaking engagement. The code doesn't require the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to maintain a list of companies that hire members of the House of Commons for public engagements. I'm referring, in my own words, to comments made by Jocelyne Brisebois, a communications officer at the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

Radio-Canada also conducted an analysis of the reports produced by all members of the 42nd Parliament in 2017. It's worth noting that 36 of them were receiving pensions from pension plans in addition to their salaries. According to this analysis, 20% of members were receiving a pension from the federal government or the Canadian Armed Forces. This information may be of interest to the public.

• (1205)

The 36 members received pensions mainly from the government or from public service jobs. Two of them received pensions from private companies. These members are NDP MP Scott Duvall who receives a pension from the steel company ArcelorMittal Dofasco, and Conservative MP Peter Kent, who receives a pension from Global Communications. The members are receiving money from various sources. This is public knowledge and completely consistent with current regulations.

We could also talk about the former prime minister, the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, whom I really like. He always said that he didn't have a discussion with Karlheinz Schreiber. In the past, this committee has discussed and studied this issue extensively.

In 2007, a public inquiry showed that Mulroney knew Schreiber, who helped him fund his leadership race in 1983. In addition, he accepted \$225,000 from Mr. Schreiber, in 1993-94. In his 2010 report, Justice Jeffrey J. Oliphant determined that Mr. Mulroney didn't break the law and didn't exercise any influence over the contract as prime minister. However, the facts were clear. Mr. Mulroney met with Mr. Schreiber in three hotel rooms, including one in New York, and received envelopes full of money in denominations of \$1,000. Justice Oliphant's report also showed several inappropriate aspects, including the fact that there had been no bank deposit. This impeded certain audits and made it possible to avoid paying taxes.

We must look at the past to understand how our criteria for ethical and unethical behaviour have changed. The law may not have covered all activities. However, we're still satisfied with the investigation that took place at the time.

• (1210)

Of course, there was some interest in the activities of Mr. Trudeau, even when he was a private member, because he participated in activities as a speaker.

In 2010, Dean Del Mastro filed a complaint against Mr. Trudeau with the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, Ms. Dawson. As everyone is well aware, Mr. Del Mastro's story was very colourful.

My Conservative colleagues and my colleagues from all opposition parties will recall that Mr. Del Mastro was the parliamentary secretary to the prime minister, which is normally a highly respected position. He was forced to leave the House for a while before moving on to another “house”. I don't want to go into details.

In his complaint, Mr. Del Mastro said that Mr. Trudeau allowed himself to be referred to as a member of Parliament in the promotion of four events in November 2009. Mr. Trudeau said that it would have been a bit odd to not be identified as a member in his biography for the speakers bureau.

Mr. Trudeau said that his clients were told that he would be participating in the events as an individual and not as a member of Parliament. He has a great deal of knowledge about the environment, youth and education, and he had things to say about these issues.

Commissioner Dawson completely dismissed the complaint. She wrote the following to Mr. Del Mastro:

• (1215)

[English]

I do not agree that allowing himself to be referred to as a Member of Parliament, on its own, constitutes using his position as a Member to influence the decisions of others to engage him as a paid speaker.

There is no information before me to suggest that Mr. Trudeau was performing parliamentary duties and functions when he spoke at these events or that he acted in any way to further his private interests as a paid speaker when performing those duties and functions.

[Translation]

Clearly, the commissioner conducted her investigation.

Do the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the commissioner's staff have the necessary tools and independence to carry out all their work? In this case, obviously the decision was made and the complaint was completely dismissed. Nothing in the complaint was well founded.

When Mr. Trudeau started giving public speeches, he said that he didn't want to trade on his family name as part of his work.

We could even say that it's often a burden for him. Of course, even though we love our mothers and fathers, we aren't those people. We are ourselves. We all must live our own lives, especially when we have a public occupation.

When Mr. Trudeau was elected to Parliament, it was quite a big deal as well. The people who read his book *Common Ground* know that Mr. Trudeau wasn't given any handouts at the time. The Liberal Party didn't give him a so-called guaranteed seat. Far from it. At the time, I believe that a Bloc member represented the riding of Papineau. Mr. Trudeau often tells us that he and Sophie went door to door to meet people who were often newcomers to Canada and who didn't even know the Trudeau name. This shows how he decided to make his own way without being given anything.

After he was elected, he started attending fewer events. Of course, following these events, he received fees ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000. The organizations that hired him felt that it was important to have a speaker who would draw people to their events. These organizations sold tickets and received donations from participants. He was very popular at fundraising events. Over time, since he cut back on his work from 2009 to 2012—

• (1220)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[English]

The Chair: On a point of order, Madame Gaudreau.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I've been listening to Mrs. Shanahan for several dozen minutes. I wish I could connect what she's saying to the work that we must accomplish today. I also want to know where we're headed, since I'm eager to speak.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Gaudreau.

Relevance is always important, and I would just remind members to try to make sure that they continue to focus on the motion at hand.

Go ahead, Madame Shanahan.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague.

The dates are very important. At the start of the meeting, we learned that the issue concerned dates for the production of records. That's why I'm looking at the chronology of events.

According to Mr. Trudeau, in 2009, he had 10% fewer engagements than in the previous year. In spring 2012 or so, he stopped accepting engagements because he was considering running for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada.

All this may be old news, but it's public information. However, for some reason, the opposition is somewhat fascinated or even obsessed with it. Opposition members are trying to take advantage of the fact that the Prime Minister worked and agreed to give public speeches when he was a private member and up until he became the party leader.

He isn't the only one who has done this. Other offices or agencies, aside from Speakers' Spotlight, work with people who are involved in public and political life. As we've seen, the amount provided can range from \$100 to \$150,000. I'm thinking in particular of former prime minister Mr. Harper.

• (1225)

[English]

This is his bio on the Speaker's Bureau website:

Stephen Harper is a Canadian politician and member of parliament who served as the 22nd Prime Minister of Canada for nine years. He was the first prime minister in history to come from the modern Conservative Party of Canada. Harper has been the member of parliament for the riding of Calgary Heritage in Alberta for fourteen years and counting.

So he was still a member of Parliament. It continues:

Previously, he was the MP for Calgary West, representing the Reform Party of Canada. Harper is now an opposition backbench member of parliament.

Of course, we know that he is no longer in Parliament.

I'm not sure how much of anything Mr. Harper made from this company while he was a member of the opposition, but I'm sure that he cleared it with the Ethics Commissioner because I know how important ethics are to the Conservative Party—I have many good friends in the Conservative Party—and that he publicly disclosed his earnings.

The motion that is before us talks about the production of documents from Speakers' Spotlight.

[*Translation*]

Lastly, I want to point out that the motion has been defeated twice by this committee. I really wonder about the motives of some committee members.

Given all the major issues that we must address, why is it so important for these members, who want to do meaningful work for Canadians, to get involved in some type of fishing expedition? We should instead be discussing motions that concern facial recognition, a topic that we've already addressed, or the need to have a digital identity. I know that my colleagues on both sides also have important questions for us. We'll be hearing from them soon.

Mr. Chair, I wanted to talk a bit about the motion regarding Mr. Baylis, but I'll address it another time. Thank you for giving me time to talk about my opposition to the amendment to the motion regarding Speakers' Spotlight.

Thank you.

• (1230)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The speakers list stands thus: Madame Gaudreau, Mr. Dong, Mr. Barrett, Madame Lattanzio, Mr. Sorbara, and Mr. Fergus.

Now we will go to Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Good afternoon. I see that it's my turn to speak.

I'm very fortunate. I'll speak slowly so that the interpreters, who are doing an excellent job, can follow what I'm saying. As usual, I won't take up much time.

I want us to take a few moments to review the chronology of events leading up to today, November 9. As you may recall, summer was quite busy. We've been working on building trust and enhancing the integrity of our experience as parliamentarians. We've found that this doesn't involve you or us, but it does concern the events surrounding a student scholarship. This issue was brought to light. Unfortunately, just as we were getting down to business, there was a six-week break and we lost some time. That said, our constituents' issues are serious in every respect.

In terms of ethics, I must say that I'm very concerned about privacy issues dating back to before the prorogation. After the prorogation, a request was made. The Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics first requested that we create a special committee together for the following two reasons. We wanted to finish what we were in the process of completing. This involved

integrity and maintaining the trust of all our constituents. We then wanted to continue the work that concerned us greatly as 2020 draws to a close. We're seeing a great deal of fraud and identity issues. Of course, this motion hasn't been adopted yet.

On a Conservative opposition day, we raised essentially the same issue, which is shared respect for democracy. As I said before, we must do our job. We must help Canadians and Quebecers and shed light on issues that are unclear. The sad thing about these events is that, when we reconvened in August, we had to spend countless hours on a request. We reached agreements—I'm very proud of this—to respect privacy as much as possible.

There were many amendments. When the final vote took place, an error occurred. There was an error and I want to point this out. I attended every hour of the meetings. Several of you, if not the majority, had replacements. I was there with you from the start. For 12 minutes, I was replaced. We asked that the decision be repealed. We weren't asking for an interpretation of what I believed. We were asking for a review of the decision.

• (1235)

What I am hearing is that no one is allowed to make mistakes. Have you never been a first-time member? Have you never been the victim of a translation issue during this virtual Parliament? I urge you to go back and listen to the French audio, not the floor audio. I urge you to make the connection between what you hear on the telephone and what you hear on Parlvu.

For hours upon hours, we listened to people go on about terminology and give history lessons. For a few moments, when someone was standing in for me, there was a breakdown in communication. We submitted a request. Other committees are more accommodating—I checked. Anyone who has not been on other committees should know that they are more open to being accommodating than we are. What happened? The motion was defeated because of a mistake, not because of a change of heart. That is important.

Since we do things properly, we asked that the error be corrected, but our request was denied. We were told to put forward what we had to put forward, with the necessary amendments. What happened? I don't know. Others changed their minds, but we are the ones being accused of that. It's a good question.

We have been talking about this for four months now. A motion was put forward, and once again, the amendment to the motion was adopted. We are here until 5:30 p.m., but I could stay until tomorrow morning. Something has to be done. By the way, I want to thank the technical support team.

We took the time to find the information and do the work that a special committee could have done, according to everything my fellow members have said. The initial objective was for the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to consider the ethical issues and for a special committee to complete the work we began.

I wonder about your good faith and integrity as parliamentarians. You will tell me that you have orders, that you have to follow the guidelines or that you have to save someone's skin, and I recognize that. You made a commitment to study ethical issues as a member of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

I told my children that, when people drag things out, either they are trying to protect someone or they want to keep the truth from coming out. What are they afraid of? When people are sure everything is hunky-dory, they have no problem doing things properly, but when people have doubts, they draw things out. That is what has been happening for hours upon hours now.

People are out there struggling and they need our help. Today, we should be delivering results. There was no change of heart; that is borne out in the chronological sequence of events. We absolutely must show our constituents that we have integrity and are worthy of their trust.

● (1240)

Regardless of partisanship, regardless of one's level of commitment, this can go far, very far. I have been a member for a year now, and I'm disappointed to see the ethics committee engage in so many political games. Other standing committees encourage active listening and consensus-building among their members, so they can actually achieve their objectives.

We would not even be talking about this today had we given consideration to amending the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's powers, so as not to go through this again.

I am speaking to those people, those members, those individuals who are trustworthy. It's time to wake up and take action. It's time to think about our constituents. With all of our efforts and all of the compromises we have been able to make, I cannot understand why we aren't making things better right now. You will bring up what came before, but this is now, so we must take a forward-looking approach.

As I said in the beginning, the first time I had someone stand in for me, a mistake was made, but I wasn't even given a chance to change my vote. I appreciate my fellow member replacing me for 12 minutes. Now, there are two strikes against the Prime Minister, and the third.... It's time to do something about this, please.

I welcome your history lessons and all the information you have to share. I am learning things, and that is wonderful, but enough is enough. Everyone knows what's going on. Our own children are watching us in action and saying very clearly that this would not even happen in school.

I hope the next speakers will take less than 10 minutes. We are bound by rules everywhere but here. It's very unfortunate. I urge you to get to the bottom of this and to fix what needs fixing. Today

is November 9, and we need to deal with the motions that were put on notice. It will be a four-week sprint to the end of the year. This is an appeal to your conscience.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Mr. Dong, it is your turn.

● (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Chair.

Watching the time, I note that I may be in the same situation I was in last week, but thank you. I'm very happy to still have the opportunity to complete my remarks from our meeting last week.

You can imagine how surprised I am to be here on Monday morning of a constituency week discussing pretty much the same motion again. I was definitely under the impression after the defeat of this motion two weeks ago and again last week that we might finally be moving on from this matter to the matters that concern Canadians during COVID.

I was listening to the comment of my honourable colleague Madame Gaudreau. One thing I do agree with her on is that enough is enough. This was voted on two weeks ago. We all take this committee business very seriously.

When this came to the committee again last week, it received another decision, but now in front of us the same motion has been put in the form of an amendment, effectively stalling the progress of Mr. Angus' motion. As I said, it had received a decision.

I do have concerns, as I was saying last week, about the precedent being set here, Mr. Chair, so I look forward to hearing from you on this topic. My argument last week was that after being voted on twice, the same motion made its way back, so what if it fails again? Is the honourable member going to try for the fourth and the fifth time?

She used the analogy of being in school. I think it could be viewed from another perspective, that the honourable member is, obviously, upset that she's not getting her way. A committee consists of members from all parties, so I humbly ask that the rights and position of other colleagues be respected as well. Again, I look forward to hearing from you, Chair, on the issue of the precedent being set here.

Last time I was going back through the history of our committee since February of this year, when we met for the first time after the election. We had gone through the list of motions, and they had been brought forward by Mr. Barrett, Mr. Kurek, Madame Gaudreau and Mr. Angus. I think we had left off talking about a motion by Mr. Fortin, who, it should be noted, is not a permanent member of this committee, and it was promptly defeated.

Following that was a motion by Mr. Green, also not a member of this committee. He moved that we conduct a study on conflict of interest and that we call witnesses from PCO and the PMO as well as ministers. Oddly enough, none of those witnesses was the Ethics Commissioner. And, by the way, I think it's a big part of this committee's job to study and review and discuss the findings of the commissioners, and to provide our recommendations, and make sure that the recommendations in those things studied by the commissioner are being followed through.

I view that as the main job of our committee, rather than running a parallel investigation, by doing which, we heard from witnesses last session, we would be running the risk of contaminating or interfering with the commissioner's work.

● (1250)

Finally, Chair, in that session we had a motion from Mr. Kurek asking the committee to write letters to all members of cabinet again.

Now fast forward to this session of Parliament. I am sure all members here are familiar with how things have played out. In our meetings we started with the motion from Madame Gaudreau that the committee recommend to the House a special committee to review the Canada student service grant. After some debate, Mr. Barrett moved that we adjourn that debate so that we could get to one of his motions again. Mr. Barrett then moved that the committee issue an order for a copy of all records pertaining to speaking appearances arranged since October 14, 2004, and so on. After much debate, that motion was defeated last week.

Next up was Ms. Gaudreau again, this time moving a motion that the committee request Speakers' Spotlight to produce a document of all records relating to speeches organized since October 14, 2008. I'm sure my dear colleagues are familiar with this by now. This motion was defeated for a second time.

Finally we come to Mr. Angus's motion, which we are debating right now, that this committee undertake a study into issues of conflict of interest and the Lobbying Act in relation to pandemic spending, and so on and so forth. It was amended by Madame Gaudreau to include a request to Speakers' Spotlight to produce a copy of all records relating to the speeches organized since October 14, 2008.

Why the history lesson, Mr. Chair? Since this committee first met in February this year, in what feels like a year ago with everything going on with COVID-19, there have been 14 motions—14 motions—put forward for debate, with 14 MPs called upon to move their motions to study the issues they think are the most important ones to Canadians. Of those 14, four have been from Mr. Barrett, three have been from Mr. Angus, and two have been from members who do not even sit on this committee.

How many motions have been allowed to come forward from the Liberal side, Mr. Chair? Zero; zero motions.

That does not come from lack of effort. My colleague Ms. Shanahan provided notice on at least three motions in our last session. I gave notice of motion on digital currency weeks ago. Here we are debating the same motion for the third time in a week, when

no one on this side of the table has even been given a chance to move a motion yet this year. That's not right. In my opinion, it is not fair to members from all sides...to be recognized, to bring forward their ideas on this committee.

One of the ideas I've been trying to bring forward, Mr. Chair, is about digital currency. It's been a popular topic and has received a lot of attention recently. I will quote an excerpt from a speech in 2019 by the Governor of the Bank of England, the former Governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney, entitled "The growing Challenges for Monetary Policy in the current International Monetary and Financial System".

● (1255)

This is important because we've seen increased online activities during COVID, so the whole discussion and study of digital currency is an urgent matter. I'll spare the members the whole speech, but getting to the core part I think might be of interest to the members of this committee. You'll understand why I see it as a priority that we must look into it in terms of privacy and access to information, which this committee has the responsibility for.

The quote starts with this: "Even if the initial variants of the idea prove wanting, the concept is intriguing." It continues: "It is worth considering how a [synthetic hegemonic currency] in the [international monetary financial system] could support—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order.

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Angus, go ahead.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes. I have been sitting with my colleague Mr. Dong for a couple of months, and I've found him to be very, very good at points of order and prevarications and denials, but the fact that he's now trying to talk about international currency while obstructing our work at our committee while filibustering is bizarre.

We are not here to discuss his theories of international currency. We are here to discuss a motion, and he can either vote for the motion or vote against it, but I ask him not to waste our time talking about things that have nothing to do with the study.

Mr. Han Dong: Mr. Chair, Mr. Angus has been given a wide berth for outlining the ongoing feud between the Kielburgers and Canadaland, and also for stories about Israeli disinformation, whose relevance to the motion we are talking about I was quite puzzled to understand. He was shown respect and nobody interrupted him. Nobody raised a point of order—

Mr. Charlie Angus: It was because I was speaking to the motion.

Mr. Han Dong: I'm not arguing with Mr. Angus. My understanding—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I was speaking to the motion. You're speaking about something that is totally irrelevant.

Mr. Han Dong: I have the floor and I will get to the point—

Mr. Charlie Angus: You need to talk to the motion.

Mr. Han Dong: —Chair, where he will understand the relevance to the motion of what I'm talking about.

The Chair: Please, members. When we get multiple speakers, first off, no one can hear even the language that you're speaking, and certainly no one can translate.

Mr. Angus, thanks for the point of order. I have reminded some of our colleagues to try to stay concise around the motion.

You can continue, Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will continue:

A [synthetic hegemonic currency] in the [international monetary financial system] could support better global outcomes, given the scale of the challenges of the current IMFS and the risks in the transition to a new hegemonic reserve currency like the Renminbi.

That is the Chinese currency right now. I'll continue:

An SHC could dampen the domineering influence of the US dollar on global trade. If the share of the trade invoiced in SHC were to rise, shocks in the US would have less potent spillovers through exchange rates, and trade would become less synchronised across countries. By the same token, global trade would become more sensitive to changes in conditions in the countries of the other currencies in the basket backing the SHC.

The dollar's influence on global financial conditions could similarly decline if a financial architecture developed around the new SHC and it displaced the dollar's dominance in credit markets. By reducing the influence of the US on the global financial cycle, this would help reduce the volatility of capital flows to [emerging market economies].

Widespread use of SHC in international trade and finance would imply that the currencies that compose its basket could gradually be seen as reliable reserve assets, encouraging EMEs to diversify their holdings of safe assets away from the dollar. This would lessen the downward pressure on equilibrium interest rates and help alleviate the global liquidity trap.

However, for all the positive aspects outlined by the governor, there remain a lot of questions about this evolving technology. We know, as has been reported, that China has been looking at this idea since 2014, and their early experience shows that there's actually quite a bit of risk to privacy. An article in *The Economist* in April of this year says, "China began exploring the concept in 2014 because of technical upheaval in its current financial system."

It says:

But the bigger prize for China is the new powers that would come with a [central bank digital currency]. China's version will be a centralised currency, rather like the anti-bitcoin. Officials will be able to track all digital cash in circulation, making it much harder to launder money or evade taxes. The central bank could also use coding to control how the money is used. For example, if it issues [the central bank digital currency] to a commercial bank for lending on to small businesses, it could ensure that the money is activated only once transferred to a small firm. And China might find it easier to make nominal interest rates negative: cash would no longer be an alternative to bank deposits because negative interest rates could apply to digital cash itself.

These powers are still some way off—

● (1300)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. I'd like to know how a possible motion relates to what we are supposed to be discussing now.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gaudreau.

Mr. Dong—

Mr. Han Dong: I'll be very quick and to the point.

Mr. Chair, I appreciate the point of order, but this is very important. What I'm trying to put forward to my colleagues is that, first, there were 14 motions allowed. Of all motions allowed to be brought forward by members of this committee, including the chair, so far none of the 14 have come from our side, from a Liberal MP. The point I'm trying to make is that there are very important issues that, if we missed a chance to study right now, we would be entering a whole new world in which we would always be a few steps behind.

Bear with me for a second. I will come to what the Bank of Canada has done on this central bank digital currency technology, and I'm sure you will find it fascinating. I'll bring it to my final point.

In Canada the Bank of Canada has been looking at this idea as well. In June this year they published an analytical note called "Privacy in CBDC technology". Here are some of the key messages:

There are many cryptographic techniques and operational arrangements for fine-grained privacy design. These demand knowledge of detailed requirements around privacy and disclosure.

The Bank could engineer a CBDC system with higher levels of privacy than commercial products can offer—but with trade-offs. Some combinations of requirements will not be feasible or may lead to high operational costs and excessive complexity and risk. Also, the user's overall privacy will depend on factors such as user behaviour and the privacy policies of other entities in the CBDC ecosystem.

Techniques to achieve cash-like privacy are immature. They have limited deployments, none of which comply with know-your-customer (KYC) and anti-money laundering (AML) regulations.

● (1305)

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we do have some rules at this committee. One of them is about relevance.

Again, this long-winded discussion about financial currency does not speak to the motion. We're speaking to a motion that the Liberals are obstructing. If he has nothing to say to speak to the motion, then we should go to the vote. We have to have some manner of rules here. If he wants to speak to the issues regarding the motion, he can speak to those, but he can't just start to speak on cryptocurrency. Next he might speak on the history of the Romanian language or some other subject that might be very interesting in another time but that here is obstructive.

Mr. Han Dong: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: Mr. Chair, the last time I talked about the importance of anti-Asian racism I was interrupted multiple times by Mr. Angus. I'm trying to bring to the member's attention the fact that 14 motions, including those last year and this year, have been allowed to be debated in front of this committee and that none of those came from our side.

The Chair: Mr. Dong, I was trying to respond to Mr. Angus because it was a relevant point of order.

I encourage you again to try to weave your statement into something that is relevant to the motion.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Han Dong: My point to my honourable colleague is that I understand where he's coming from. However, the fact is that I was never given a chance to talk about issues that are so important, not just to me but also my constituents and the people I meet with and talk to and receive phone calls from during this pandemic. I was never given any opportunity to go in depth to talk about these issues. I hope once I shed some light on these issues, the committee members will understand, or even just consider, that maybe we should switch our attention from debating the same thing over and over and over again to something that really matters to Canadians and that also addresses their everyday issues.

Very quickly, I want to share with you what the Bank of Canada has done on digital currency. There are three more points. I talked about how the techniques to achieve cash-like privacy are immature. Next is the following:

Maintaining privacy and complying with regulations (the latter which requires disclosure of information) present a [challenge] for a CBDC. This is further complicated by the need for proactive disclosure to prevent fraud.

Public trust in the privacy design the Bank enacts could be enhanced through third-party reviews of CBDC architecture and operations.

This October, just a month ago, Deputy Governor Tim Lane said the following during a panel on the future of money:

The main point, I think, is this is all looking a lot more urgent because of the speed with which technology is evolving... With COVID, we've seen an acceleration of the shift of activities online and that suggests if we want to be ready to develop any kind of digital central bank product, we need to move faster than we thought was going to be necessary.

I would agree with the deputy governor. That was my point earlier, that it is rapidly evolving technology and something that needs to be reviewed before countries around the world start to move towards this direction. I'm sure members of this committee would agree that it is our role as members of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to study the subject and to do so as soon as possible.

Chair, I expect to hear from my colleagues, as I've heard already a few times from the other side, "Just vote on this motion and we can get to yours." Well, as I previously demonstrated, at both our last meeting and earlier in my remarks today, that's simply not the case. Voting on their motion doesn't mean I'll get a turn to speak next, or to move a motion next to be discussed and accepted, and to really get the committee to study something that, as I've heard from my constituents, is so important to them.

With that in mind, I move that the committee proceed to my motion from October 13:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h)(vii), the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics conduct a study of no more than 4 meetings on the use of digital currency in Canada and around the world; and that the committee investigate the potential implications for individual citizens' and businesses' privacy and property rights in Canada.

● (1310)

The Chair: Mr. Dong, we presently have a motion on the floor. We can deal with one motion at a time. That's really the way the business of the committee works.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, far be it for me to interrupt, but I think if you asked the clerk you would find that this is a dilatory motion, moving to other business for the committee.

Perhaps we can take it up with the clerk or we can take a five-minute break.

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I've seen a lot in my many years, but listening to Mr. Dong say that he feels he's been hard done by because he doesn't get what he wants when he wants to do something on his own is not a credible reason to interrupt what has been an ongoing discussion since the summer. Mr. Dong would rather do something else. Maybe he's bored. Maybe he should move to another committee. You can't erase a motion that hasn't been voted on. If he wants, we could send him the book of rules. He could read up on them. He could maybe help out at some other committees, but we have work to do. I think this is another game, another obstruction, another circus by the Liberals, and Mr. Dong should do better. I think we need to now get back to our motion and stop wasting time.

Mr. Han Dong: On a point of order, Chair, I just heard the lecture on the rules from the honourable member Mr. Angus to me as a new member, but I think this has been done previously. I remember Mr. Barrett interrupting Ms. Gaudreau's motion with his motion.

What I'm saying is that, given the history of this committee, 14 motions came forward, none of which were from this side—

The Chair: Mr. Dong, please—

Mr. Han Dong: —so perhaps we can study my motion first.

The Chair: Hang on for just a minute. Getting into debate amongst ourselves is not going to be helpful.

It is 1:14 p.m. right now, and I'm certain that people need to have a nature break anyway. Why don't we suspend right now and I will give you a ruling on what is at hand?

We will suspend for 20 minutes.

• (1314) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1340)

The Chair: Colleagues, what we witnessed, and the reason we took some time to deliberate—there's a massive amount of experience, I can tell you, among the number of people who are looking into this matter—is that there is precedence for a motion being considered dilatory when there's an order from the House. In this case, there's no order to the committee in regard to the motion that Mr. Dong was proposing—to simply put another motion on the table and then sideline or remove the motion at hand and in debate—so we need to proceed with the motion at hand. We could consider new business after that, or if, of course, we have an order from the House, that would be substantive to go to a vote right away for the committee to consider that.

Right now, Mr. Dong, your motion would not be in order.

We'll continue on with the speakers list.

Mr. Han Dong: I have a point of order, Chair.

I listened carefully to what you just said. My colleague Mr. Angus also advised me that I should read the rule book, so I'm reading the rule book.

Bosc and Gagnon, on pages 1067 to 1068, states:

A dilatory motion is a motion designed to dispose of the original question before the committee, either for the time being or permanently. Dilatory motions do not require notice, nor can they be amended or debated. They are therefore put to a vote immediately.

The main dilatory motions admissible in committee include...“That the Committee proceed to [another order of business]”:

This motion results in the matter then under consideration by the committee being replaced by the order of business proposed in the motion. If the motion is carried, the committee immediately proceeds to the “order” referred to in the motion.

I would ask if you could enlighten the committee on the interpretation of this section of the rule book.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madam Gladu. Then I'll respond to Mr. Dong.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Thank you, Chair.

I realize that I'm not always at the ethics committee, but I have been paying attention to what goes on. I just think this whole motion is disgraceful.

I mean, this is a government that the Liberals have been calling open and transparent, yet the committee is trying to get at an ethical matter and they've done nothing but stall and filibuster and redact documents, with now minutiae procedural motions to keep Canadians from getting the information they absolutely need. I think it's disgraceful.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gladu.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order, Chair.

I'm just hoping that maybe we can actually get our committee back to a working relationship. I'm very glad Mr. Dong went and

read the rule book, but this is clearly not a dilatory motion, and you ruled on it.

As for Madam Gladu's attack on Mr. Dong, I would like to offer a compromise. I mean, Mr. Dong has been obstructing our work for four months. We could have dealt with his motion at any time if we'd gotten our work done. As a compromise, I would ask Mr. Dong if he would agree to ask his Liberal colleagues to stop obstructing our work, allow us to deal with this motion and allow us to get this study done. If we had done this study back in September, we could be looking at his. Whether it has merit or not, we would have had an opportunity.

In an offer of compromise to Mr. Dong, would he agree to stop obstructing so that we're not wasting another day, another week, another two or three or four months? Then he may actually have an opportunity to present something to us. It's an offer of compromise.

• (1345)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Han Dong: On a point of order, Chair, I feel I need to respond to that.

The Chair: I'll tell you what, Mr. Dong. I'll be glad to allow you to respond to that, but first let me explain to you...because you came back with a concern and quoted from the book. You did rightly quote it. I may not have been coherent enough for you to get the parlance that we're dealing with.

There's a very fine line here. We don't have another order of business to go to. That is the fine line between ruling your motion in order or not. You're absolutely correct that if there were another order of business coming from the House that we'd be moving to, then that would be in order. Your motion is not an order of business. It's simply one that you can put on notice. It's not a motion that's an order from the House.

Mr. Han Dong: Okay. I was going to say that I remember... First of all, I asked a whole bunch of questions when we considered Mr. Barrett's motion, including why we would run a parallel investigation with the commissioner's. The other point I pointed out is that there have been 14 motions put forward for discussion, and I just feel there was no opportunity for me to even propose the motion, which is of great interest to my constituents. We all have constituents to answer to.

The third point is that Mr. Barrett moved a motion to dispose of Madam Gaudreau's original motion and to put his motion forward. There was a recent precedent set, and that's why I put forward this dilatory motion for the committee to vote on.

The Chair: In the case of Mr. Barrett's motion, first off the committee voted to do exactly what he said. He had moved a motion to suspend debate on that particular motion and then the committee voted. That's the history of what happened there.

This is a different circumstance. Believe me, Mr. Dong, I'm doing the best that I can and I want to commend our clerk as well, because she's also doing the best that she can in order to make sure that we get this right. I'm very confident in the ruling I just made to continue on in the fashion that we are with the motion that's at hand.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): On a point of order, I think this is the first time I've spoken and it's about 1:48, so about three hours in. It's really nice to see everyone of course.

Chair, I would like to ask, in terms of my study of the procedures.... I'm not a procedural expert by any stretch of the imagination, but I try my best to follow along and read the green book, which I have right behind me here, which I take out. I call it the green book.

In terms of how we proceed forward and trying to further understand what we can and can't present as members of Parliament here at committee, in terms of what dilatory motions are and what types of dilatory motions will be accepted here, I do ask, Chair, if you could please clarify for me and the committee members the types of dilatory motions we can present and will be allowed by you, with interpretation from the clerk. If we can get some explanation on that, I think that would be great for my understanding of how I can provide better feedback to the committee and better feedback in terms of understanding and learning as a member of Parliament. It would be greatly appreciated.

The Chair: With great respect and humility, Mr. Sorbara, we could have a workshop sometime on that. The passage on committees is quite [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] procedures manual. I have read it three or four times, and of course there's a new version out now. We always need to keep apprised.

Look, if it's a dilatory motion we will rule accordingly, and as I said, we'll do everything we possibly can to make sure the rulings are correct and fair to all.

• (1350)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: If I can just reference back, Chair, will you now allow that the committee do now adjourn?

The Chair: If somebody who has the floor moves that motion, then we have to go directly to the vote, Mr. Sorbara.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, first the Liberals attempted to throw out a motion, which they couldn't. They've been undermining the decision of the chair. Now Mr. Sorbara is attempting to shut the hearing down when he doesn't have the floor, as far as I know.

I would say to my Liberal colleagues, if they do not respect the decision of the chair, they can challenge the chair. Otherwise, they need to be quiet, allow the committee to continue its work and let the next speaker speak.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

I'm going to review the speakers list right now. We have Mr. Barrett, Madam Lattanzio, Mr. Sorbara, Mr. Fergus, Madam Shanahan, Ms. Gladu and Madam Gaudreau.

We'll now go to Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

That was an interesting set of interventions we just saw. We're more than 25 hours into filibustering at this session of the committee, and we've heard reference back to the previous session, at length, about motions that were introduced and motions that were defeated. We heard from one of the previous speakers that the committee, when it comes to dealing with ethical matters, ought to only review the work of the Ethics Commissioner, but when a motion was put forward to have the Ethics Commissioner come and present his report, the "Trudeau II Report", which was the second finding that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had broken ethics laws, the Liberal members of this committee voted against that happening. Now when we have a motion in front of us to take a look at a number of ethical issues, including the Canada student service grant administration and the awarding of that contribution agreement, they don't want to vote on that motion either.

I heard from one of the previous speakers great disappointment that there isn't an opportunity to deal with the agenda items they would like to put forward. We can deal with more than one thing at a time. The committee can work concurrently on two studies, but over a six-week period we've had dozens of hours of filibustering to prevent the opportunity for those other issues to come forward. If the committee viewed that those issues ought to be studied, those studies could happen concurrently with whatever else this committee decided. Eventually, this motion ought to come to a vote. When it does, if a study is the will of the committee, then that could happen. Perhaps other studies could happen concurrently, but nothing else will happen until the filibuster ends, until the cover-up is brought to an end. We've seen all of the tactics and all of the strategies on full display.

Interestingly, at the start of the meeting we heard something new, that Speakers' Spotlight has destroyed all of the records of speaking engagements for the individuals named in the motion, the Prime Minister and his spouse, for any period outside of seven years. Now, interestingly, this committee ordered those documents, and actually more documents, but it included those documents, in the previous session. Speakers' Spotlight requested an extension. They needed more time to assemble the documents. The committee granted them all of the time they requested. On the eve that those documents were to be released to the committee, and on the day that illegally redacted documents were released to the finance committee, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau prorogued Parliament. He shut down the House and locked out committees.

Speakers' Spotlight communicated with the committee clerk once this session started and even said that the documents were ready to go. We've just now heard that many of those documents have been destroyed.

I want to draw to the committee's attention a letter from the government House leader, Pablo Rodriguez. That letter is dated October 19, 2020. In that letter, on the second page, in the fourth paragraph, he states the following:

As a demonstration of transparency, the Prime Minister has asked that I proactively share exhaustive information with you about events organized through Speakers' Spotlight, for which the Prime Minister was a guest speaker. Speakers' Spotlight has confirmed the accuracy of the events and fees listed.

I'll stop quoting the letter there.

It's very interesting to me that Speakers' Spotlight was able to confirm the accuracy of those events and fees listed if any of them appeared outside of that seven-year period we're currently in now. I'm curious about that.

● (1355)

I think it's all the more important now, with the conflicting testimony that Mr. Angus spoke about, the contradictions we have seen and the disinformation campaign that we're seeing from the WE organization, the likes of which I don't believe have ever been seen in Canadian politics—and now this. Now there is this major discrepancy.

This motion we have does call for a member of that organization to testify at the committee, and I think that's important. Canadians need these answers.

What we have seen with dozens of hours of filibustering is the continuation of a cover-up, something else of a magnitude that has not been seen before. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau shut down the House, issued documents ordered by a committee that were redacted against the committee's orders, and then had parliamentary secretaries out in the news media saying no, the law clerk redacted those documents, that it was not PCO or other government officials. The law clerk had to write a letter to clear his own name, to say “No, ladies and gentlemen, these documents came to me redacted, against the committee's order.” It was highly inappropriate and highly unusual.

Then we have come to this committee, where we have seen the same thing as at the finance committee and at other committees where government members are filibustering. They talk about wanting to get to work for Canadians and the importance of these other motions, but it's disingenuous at best to say that these other items are important if they are not willing to vote on the motion.

A previous speaker expressed frustration and disappointment that motions hadn't been moved by government members. Government members need to be reminded that they do not hold a majority in this committee or in this House, and the odds are against them on the order in which those members will be recognized.

On this issue, they can't just crush the questions the way we saw with the SNC-Lavalin scandal, which saw the Prime Minister found guilty of breaking ethics laws for a second time. This time they can't just shut down the committee. We have already seen Parliament and committees shut down, but now we're back. They were willing to force an election over this in the House, but here at committee they are just willing to give up any other work that this committee would do. That's their choice.

I can tell you that I'm ready for this item to come to a vote today. I have polled my Conservative colleagues on this committee, and they tell me they are ready for this to come to a vote today. I expect that if you canvassed other opposition members, you might find a similar willingness for it to come to a vote today, but the arguments we're hearing from the government are that we should be doing something else. Because they might not be next recognized when business is considered and their motion might be put in front of the committee, they are going to, as the saying goes, cut off their nose to spite their face. They are going to filibuster all work of this committee because they didn't get their way to this point.

Well, these are the realities of a minority Parliament. Canadians revoked the majority mandate of these Liberals for reasons, such as the Prime Minister twice being found guilty of breaking ethics laws. Will it happen a third time? We shall see.

Today this committee has a motion that is in order in front of it. The ruling of the chair on the admissibility of this motion has been upheld. While we heard multiple unofficial challenges against the chair and an undermining of the chair prior to my taking the floor, here we are. It's up to these Liberals to decide if they are going to continue the cover-up or if they are going to stand against corruption and stand for accountability.

Chair, I would invite you to ask members of the committee if they are prepared to bring this to a vote.

In that spirit of collaboration that Mr. Angus spoke about, I would not seek the floor in advance of Mr. Dong from the Liberal Party if he wanted to put his motion forward. In spite of the fact that he wanted to hijack this debate, I would be happy to debate his motion next.

● (1400)

Perhaps those studies can happen concurrently. There's the olive branch. Do you want to do two things at once? Let's do them. Today's the day.

That offer, of course, is an offer for a limited time only. Today I'm happy to move forward concurrently with multiple items for this committee, but I get the feeling, Chair, that this isn't about collaboration and it's not about doing other work. It's about a cover-up.

Canadians deserve the truth, Chair. Let's see if members of the Liberal Party have the courage of their convictions and are prepared to vote on this motion.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barrett. I'll take a look.

I see no consensus at all, Mr. Barrett.

Now we go to Madame Lattanzio.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to reply in terms of some of the comments that were made this morning, and specifically in terms of what has transpired in the past with regard to where we are, or as one colleague mentioned, the chronology of events, but I'm going to stop short and focus on when the motion was voted on by a replacement of a member of the same political stripe as my colleague who sits on this committee.

I'm going to tell you how I see things. It's fine and dandy to accuse and to say that one party is wasting time and does not want to move on, and to allude to the fact that we do not want to work collaboratively. We do, and what I see from my perspective is that a vote was taken, and then a member came back and said it was an error.

I was not satisfied with that explanation. I think we need to respect the outcome of a vote. If we simply are of the opinion that another member of the same political stripe can come back and say, "Look, I would have voted differently" and then, because he doesn't have a chance to go back and reverse the outcome of the vote, he presents an amendment on the exact same paragraphs or writings that we disposed of....

We disposed of them because there was goodwill around the table. Another member had made amendments to the original motion, and I think there was goodwill among the majority of us to be able to move on with this issue. We want to move on with this issue because we heard the message from the Conservatives, loud and clear, that if we do not vote on this, well, we're not going to move on.

Then who is holding us back here? I can tell you from this side of the fence that we want to move on, but I'm afraid, Mr. Chair, that we are heading onto a slippery slope if we are of the opinion that we can vote on a subject matter and then, if we're not satisfied with the outcome of the vote, come back and introduce the exact same wording that we had already decided on.

If that's how we're going to be conducting ourselves in this committee, as a new member of this committee I wonder if we're ever going to be able to get past any motions or do any work. I'm afraid we're setting a precedent and an example that if we do not like the outcome of a vote, it doesn't matter; we can just come back and present the exact same thing, amend it into a motion that we're discussing, and that's that—and up until such time as we do not agree to that, well, I'm sorry, but everything will be stifled. Committee work will not be able to go on. We've heard that loud and clear. Either you do this and we move to a vote—

• (1405)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I would like something explained. Obviously, I am not satisfied with the member's comments.

What's more, the person who replaced me, Mrs. Vignola, made it clear that statements she could not understand were not translated and that she certainly did not vote that way. It was a mistake.

Why does the committee not invite her to address that? Why does the committee not examine what transpired?

Members are commenting on what happened, but they need to be careful. We have not gotten to the bottom of the matter. Certain things were not confirmed. I did not ask her to vote that way. She even indicated that she could not, in good conscience, vote that way and that she did not have the information she needed. She had neither the text, nor the audio. That is serious.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thanks, Madame Gaudreau.

Continue on, Madame Lattanzio.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think it's important that we look on the other side of the medal and appreciate another perspective in what we have transpiring at this committee. I started with that and I'm going to end with that.

Now let me take a few moments and speak today in reference to the motion that is before us.

To be fair, Chair, after the defeat of this motion last week, I thought we might finally be moving on from this matter into items that Canadians are actually concerned with. There are several topics of study that we could be reviewing at this committee, including looking at the COVID Alert contact tracking application, facial recognition software and reviewing the Conflict of Interest Act, and I can go on and on and on. There have been several study recommendations, all of which merit a serious discussion and a serious review by this committee.

Now we are once again discussing a motion that, while it may be a legitimate topic of study, Mr. Chair, in practice does something vastly different. What I am trying to get to the bottom of, Chair, is that the purpose of this motion needs to be looked at carefully, because on the one side we see MP Gaudreau proposing a study on the procedures in place to prevent conflicts of interest in the PMO, which I think is a fair study, and then at the next moment we see her narrowing her study to only reviewing the current Prime Minister, and in particular the speaking fees he and his wife may have received.

Clearly—and it is apparent to me—this is a backdoor way to try to continue the review into the WE Charity matter, even though, as a committee, we had already decided this matter last week with a vote.

Furthermore, the information being requested in this motion not only goes back well before the time frame of the WE Charity matter, but also beyond the Prime Minister's time in government, back to when he was elected as an MP. I fail to see any relevance to this type of request, Mr. Chair.

In reviewing the motion of Madame Gaudreau, I would say that I can at least understand the purpose of this motion and the study being proposed. It has its merits, and I think there is a lot that could be learned by studying how all governments handled matters of conflict of interest and by reviewing the best practices to prevent them now and in the future.

As I also mentioned, I do find the scope of this motion rather bizarre. On the one hand, we are examining procedures that are in place to prevent conflicts of interest as they relate to the office of the Prime Minister. As I noted, on the face of it, this seems like a legitimate course of action; however, we also have provisions of this motion that have no relevance—and I highlight, no relevance whatsoever—to the stated topic of discussion.

At a minimum, I would challenge the relevance of why a topic that we may want to look into as part of this study is being established as part of the terms of reference of the study when no other matters that we may look into as part of the studies are being given that same consideration and honour.

● (1410)

The opposition is blatantly disguising this fishing expedition, as my colleague Mr. Francesco Sorbara has called it, as it relates to the WE Charity matter. They are pretty much saying, “It’s fine. We want to get to the bottom of real issues. Let’s take a look at how the PMO prevents conflicts, but by the way, while we are here, let’s have the requested details and documentation that have absolutely nothing to do with the study on hand.”

My opposition colleagues know full well that there is no merit whatsoever in this request for documents from Speakers’ Spotlight. The very idea that the Prime Minister’s past speaking engagements are somehow related to this matter is just simply absurd. That is why we call this a fishing expedition. There is no proof to back up the claims being made by my colleagues on the other side, and therefore they are looking to reach all the way back to 2008 in the hopes that they find something.

There is only one issue with that approach: the information being requested by the members across the way has already been released. We’ve said this time and time again, as did the Prime Minister himself just a few weeks ago. Furthermore, the information that was released by the Prime Minister was already in the public sphere, as it was released by him when he first became the Liberal leader. Members of the media and the opposition have had over seven years to look at these speaking engagements, and in those seven years, nothing has come to light.

Our Prime Minister, Mr. Trudeau, followed all the guidelines and requirements as an MP when he took on those speaking engagements, and when he became the leader, he ceased doing them, as we’ve referenced this morning.

In relation to the Prime Minister’s spouse, Madame Grégoire Trudeau, we all know that she has worked with WE in the past. Nobody has denied that. It’s well documented and recognized. Furthermore, this work was cleared by the Ethics Commissioner himself. There is no active investigation into her involvement. The Ethics Commissioner has publicly acknowledged that she was cleared to

have the involvement she had and to be reimbursed for reasonable expenses, so colleagues, why are we looking into this matter?

I have to say that I am happy my colleagues have come to their senses and dropped the idea of looking into the private and personal lives of Madame Margaret Trudeau and Mr. Alexandre Trudeau. We really would have been sailing into uncharted waters if we as a committee had decided that we were going to start studying the private lives of parliamentarians’ family members.

As we all very well know, we at this standing committee of Parliament are not an investigative body. We have an individual who does exactly that. There is no due process in the conduct of a parliamentary committee. There are no lawyers present. There are no judges present. There is no framework in which we can conduct ourselves with judicial fairness. This is non-existent.

This very idea that we would start going down the rabbit hole of investigating members of an MP’s family was very concerning. While my opposition colleagues may have wished we were in the United States Congress, where investigations like this are commonplace, we’re in Canada. We are not in the U.S. I’m happy we have at least partially moved on with the amendments brought forward by our colleague Mr. Angus.

● (1415)

That being said, here we are again today, and, as our colleagues keep reminding me and others of the many hours that we’ve been discussing this very motion, we are still looking to have documents produced by Speakers’ Spotlight, and now with this motion, going one step further, requesting that representatives of this organization appear.

I think it’s reasonable to assume that my opposition colleagues will not keep their questioning of these witnesses to the topic at hand. They have not shown that they are at all proactive at sticking to the facts or central points of discussion.

The Prime Minister has been open and transparent about his past work and speaking engagements. Documents have also been produced. Madame Grégoire Trudeau has also been open and transparent about her work. All documents related to speaking engagements are out in the public domain for everyone to scrutinize. All this motion seeks to do is to further tie up this committee’s important work. So who is holding up this committee?

There is absolutely no purpose to the motion at hand. I think it’s actually very important that we get down to the real business of Canadians and look at some of these and other very important studies that we have before us, which we have discussed even today—colleagues have made reference to some of the motions that have been put on the table—and over the past several weeks.

We as a committee voted on this matter last week. The matter was decided. We need to move on. We need to turn the page. Now it is time for us to get back to work and focus on the issues that really matter, colleagues. I ask that we move from this and get back to the motion that had been amended by our colleague Mr. Angus previously, that we move on and that we can get to doing the work that we have the responsibility to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1420)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Lattanzio.

Just as a reminder, our speakers list is Mr. Sorbara, Mr. Fergus, Madame Shanahan, Madame Gladu, Madame Gaudreau, Mr. Dong and Mr. Angus.

We will now go to Mr. Sorbara.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you, Chair.

It's great to see everyone. As I said earlier on, it's great to be here this Monday. Obviously, it's been quite an eventful past few days in the world. We want to wish all administrations well. I think I put out a few tweets and points on Instagram. As someone who has lived and worked in and who has relatives in the United States—before I go back to the motion—I wish the administration and people of the United States, our great southern neighbours, *bonne chance* and good work. I look forward to working together as vice-chair of the interparliamentary association. It will be a great and constructive relationship, I feel, and with all administrations, of course.

Chair, one thing that's been brought up is the vote that happened a few weeks ago. There was a change of individuals. A member had to leave committee for whatever reason, obviously a valid reason, of course. They had to be replaced by a colleague and matters ensued. I really want to point out that the individual at hand asked questions in terms of clarification, listened intently and then voted. That's democracy. That's democracy, whether in the House of Commons or democracy as we see it here with respect to how committees work. If I look at the rules in terms of corrections in a vote, obviously it cannot be changed without the unanimous consent of the House or a committee. I, for one, don't believe in mulligans or do-overs. I just don't. That's not the way the world works in a democracy. Just because we don't like the result at the end of the day, it doesn't mean we can just go and vote on it again until we get the result we need.

I go back to Mr. Angus's intervention today on WE, which I actually found quite interesting and relevant. We're not here to investigate WE, and I'm not here to defend WE in any way. I listened intently to Mr. Angus's comments and concerns, what he pointed out with respect to the WE story, and the scenarios and narrations that followed on in the last couple of weeks, with certain organizations supporting or acting on behalf of WE, which Mr. Angus read into the record today. Frankly, I did not know about this organization prior to this happening where the proposed program was going to be announced. It was an organization I had never heard about. I have subsequently heard much about the organization from educators, principals and folks. Some of it has been constructive. I would say it's been constructive to learn about the goings-on. So I share Mr. Angus's concerns, absolutely. I'm a big believer in transparency.

I read the write-up in the Toronto Star. I don't think the Toronto Star has ever stated that it's a right-leaning paper. It's more of a centrist paper, I would say, or maybe centre-left. I read the comments written there. I read the stories written there. I fundamentally believe in asking "Why?" when something is stated. Why are we doing something? Why should I believe in something? Where is it coming from? Where is the message coming from? Who is support-

ing it? Whether it's something written by the Fraser Institute or something written by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, I always question it. That's my nature. I don't believe the hype. I like to investigate and dig deeper on an intellectual basis as to whether I support a position. I don't believe in firebrand and populism or anything like that. I just believe in facts. I believe in helping put in place good policy to assist people. I want to make sure my constituents are informed.

Mr. Chair, the opposition is trying to turn this committee into a... I don't want to use the word "circus", but we're here, and it's 25 hours in or whatever number of days it is. The finance committee, which I participated in during the summertime, heard from the Kielburger brothers for four long hours. Whether we liked their testimony, whether we thought it was transparent and whether we thought it was forthright, that's for each committee member to decide. That's for all Canadians to decide.

• (1425)

In fact, I don't know these two individuals. I've never met them. I've never talked to them. I've never been in a room with them. I don't know who they are. What I can say is that when I look at our government's response to COVID-19 and as we continue to work in terms of allowing businesses to recover, having the backs of Canadians is what I'm focused on.

This meeting was remarkable. I'm referencing the meeting with the Kielburgers, Mr. Chair. For all the hype and for all the accusations that were made by the opposition, at the end of the day all the questions put forth were answered, and they agreed to provide to the committee all documents that were requested.

I do know that much of the last hour and a half of the meeting was basically a rehashing of the same questions by the opposition, over and over again. I remember that day vehemently. It's kind of imprinted. The questions in the first half were repeated in the second half. I was disappointed but not surprised at this, as the opposition knew for a fact, or at least should have, had they read the contribution agreement, that WE Charity would make zero dollars from this agreement. They knew that WE would only be reimbursed for eligible expenses, yet the opposition continued to promote the fallacy that WE was in it to make money, when in fact we knew it wasn't.

Again, I'm not here to defend WE. That's not my shtick at all. I'm here to go over something that we need to point out to the committee members. The opposition tried over and over but failed to find some sort of political interference with the selection of WE, when we know that it actually was the opposite.

It was the opposite. In fact, as the chief of staff to the Prime Minister pointed out, and as the Prime Minister pointed out, a lot of tough questions were asked in terms of why we were selecting that organization and what the program was about. I call it due diligence. In a prior life, due diligence was going into a data room, looking for facts and looking at the numbers. In this, it was just asking tough questions. We heard time after time that all the evidence pointed to what we heard from Ms. Wernick in her testimony. A decision was made after a proper assessment by the department with absolutely no—and what I define as zero—political interference.

It is something that I think obviously goes to the heart of our democracy. It goes to the heart of transparency and of how any government operates, whether it's a prior Conservative government or a prior Liberal government. Decisions are made, and bureaucrats are free to provide recommendations to ministers and their staff. In this instance, that was the case. The recommendation came from the bureaucrats, from the civil servants.

We've seen them do so much heavy lifting, Chair, over the last seven or eight months, whether it's the Canada Revenue Agency, ESDC or for the Minister of Seniors. We've seen so much from the civil servants. These are good folks. These are folks who are working for us and working for all Canadians.

I understand how disappointing it would have been for the opposition that none of the facts seemed to align with their narrative of some sort of collusion or political interference. For me, in my humble view, the opposition has consistently mis-characterized the contribution agreement as being bigger than it really is. The contribution agreement wasn't \$900 million. It was for \$543 million. The difference was just allocated and not committed, which is of course a common practice with income. We know that, Mr. Chair. You've been part of the government for many years. It's something that's very important. I would expect the opposition to know that.

Just to be clear, let me quote my learned friend when he was asked about a program that had money allocated that was not all spent. He said the following:

Thank you very much for your question.

I think we need to put the issue of lapsed funding into its proper context. It is the regular practice of governments to spend underneath the budget that Parliament authorizes for them, and there's a good 800-year-old reason for that, which is that departments are not meant to spend what Parliament has not approved, and it's unwise to spend right up to the limit for fear of going over it. It is good, prudent financial management to come in under budget and to leave a buffer between that which you have approved and that which we spend.

That, of course, was—I believe he was a minister in that Parliament—the Honourable Pierre Poilievre speaking. I can forward the link to you, Chair. I think it was during a HUMA meeting that he commented.

• (1430)

So it seems that at one point, the opposition did have an idea about the difference between money allocated...at no point did the opposition have an idea about the difference between money allocated and money committed to a program, with a healthy reserve set aside.

Let's take a real look at these numbers. To go back, Mr. Angus brought up some very valid points this morning on WE. I read that article. I was glad the Toronto Star put something out in terms of exactly where this information came from, because it's very important. We know that in life these days we need to understand the angle that organizations are coming from. Frankly, some organizations, like the Fraser Institute, are more centre-right, and some, like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, are more centre-left. It's very, very important that we look at the biases.

Let's look at the numbers. First, let's look at the \$912 million, the total value of the Canada student service grant when the program was announced by the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, on April 22.

I will slow down for the interpreters. You folks are doing a fantastic job.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your hard work and patience.

[*English*]

A comprehensive table that lays out all federal emergency spending estimates still assigned that number to the CSSG program on July 28. Let's look at that and break it down: \$543.53 million was the total federal funding allotted to the CSSG, according to the contribution agreement signed by both WE Charity Foundation representatives and the Honourable Minister Bardish Chagger; with regard to the \$354.23 million, in order to access this, additional funding approvals would have needed to be sought; \$500 million was the total federal maximum funding allotted for students who would be eligible to receive \$5,000 paid in increments of \$1,000 for every 100 hours volunteered; \$43.53 million was the total maximum of federal funding possible to WE Charity Foundation for eligible expenditures associated with the design, implementation and delivery of the CSSG; \$19.5 million was for cohort one of 20,000 students; \$13.53 million was for cohort two of 20,000; \$10.5 million was for the supplementary cohort of up to 60,000; \$30 million was the amount to be transferred to WE Charity Foundation to get the program up and running; \$5 million was the amount WE would transfer to other not-for-profits to enable their start-up and program costs; \$30,000 was to be used for accessibility purposes; 40,000 was the number of students who could sign up for what this contribution agreement calls “WE volunteer service opportunities” across Canada, which included roles with both WE and the program's other non-profit partners; and 60,000 was the combined number of students who could sign up for what the contribution agreement calls “non-WE volunteer service opportunities”, which would be generated for not-for-profits that proactively reach out and would like to be part of the program.

Chair, let's have a very brief recap—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Madame Gaudreau, go ahead on a point of order.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I would like the member to slow down, especially when he is reading from documents the interpreters do not have, as they have signalled. The member needs to speak more slowly, please.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Gaudreau.

Continue on, Mr. Sorbara.

[Translation]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you for pointing that out, Ms. Gaudreau. I will slow down.

• (1435)

[English]

Let us have a very brief recap of one of the finance committee meetings on this point. I will point out that it was much more informative and relevant than the testimony of some of the other witnesses that had been called before us on this study. As Craig Kielburger said:

When Employment and Social Development Canada asked us to administer the Canada student service grant, we regret that we didn't recognize how this decision would be perceived. We would never have picked up the phone when the civil service called, asking us to help young Canadians get through the pandemic, if we had known the consequences: that young people would not get the help they need now and that 25 years of WE Charity's programs helping millions of youth would be in jeopardy.

What a disgrace or shame that the founders of this organization, which has been helping elected officials from all parties and thousands of other people for the past 25 years, were, in many people's eyes, unfairly badgered during their appearance. Much of the focus was on whether, somehow, the Kielburgers were in it for the money. They promised to provide their T4 slips to the committee. I do note that they have already posted online the information with regard to their remuneration. I would like to read what it says into the record.

The independent review was undertaken by:

...the Honourable Stephen Goudge, a respected Canadian jurist who served on the Ontario Court of Appeal from 1996 to 2014. In 2013, Justice Goudge received the Law Foundation of Ontario's Guthrie Award for his outstanding contributions to Canada's justice system.

Mr. Goudge wrote:

A. WE's compensation of Craig and Marc Kielburger

I have reviewed a statement from the Chair of WE Charity's board of directors, a statement from members of WE Charity's board, a statement from the CFO of WE Charity and ME to WE, a letter from ME to WE's accountants, and Craig and Marc Kielburger's 2017 and 2018 T4 statements of remuneration.

Craig and Marc Kielburger's T4 slips show that they each received an income of \$125,173.02 from ME to WE in 2018, and that they each received an income of \$113,461.54 from ME to WE in 2017. The CFO of ME to WE and WE Charity certifies that these amounts represent the full extent of any payments which the Kielburgers received from ME to WE in these years. WE's CFO also certifies that neither Craig nor Marc Kielburger has ever received any form of salary from WE Charity or its predecessor, Free the Children. This is also the collective understanding of WE Charity's board of directors.

WE's CFO further certifies that neither Craig nor Marc Kielburger have ever received dividends from ME to WE. Moreover, ME to WE's accountants state that ME to WE has never distributed—

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The topic in hand is the motion and the amendment. It feels as though I'm reliving those four weeks in the summer members spent proclaiming facts pulled from the archives.

We could actually move on to something else if we could vote. I would like us to stay focused on the motion. We can talk about the rest afterwards, once we get to that stage.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

As I have for all colleagues, I caution to stay relevant to the motion at hand.

Please continue, Mr. Sorbara.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Again, I appreciate Ms. Gaudreau's comment.

[English]

It continued:

Moreover, neither Marc nor Craig Kielburger have received any form of salary from WE Charity or its predecessor, Free the Children.

I also contend and suggest to you, Chair, that the opposition members know fully—they would never admit this publicly and certainly not in front of members of the media—that this is nothing more than a red herring. It's nothing more than trying to throw dirt, to dig it up, in a thinly concealed and thinly disguised campaign to try to embarrass the government.

I'm not here to defend the WE Charity or the Kielburgers. I said that at the outset. I believe that they are more than capable of making their own defence. I do, however, take great exception to the notion that's still being promoted on this fishing trip of a study, which is that somehow the ESDC officials are engaging in some sort of cover-up to protect political members and their staff.

Not only is this argument extremely harmful to our professional public servants who have faithfully served governments of all stripes, but it has absolutely no basis in fact. There's not one iota of evidence to suggest that the testimony of the senior public servants who serve, irrespective of whatever government is in power, was anything but the truth.

I use this word very cautiously, but I must. I'm appalled that the opposition members have not issued an apology to the public servants who, in the midst of the pandemic, pulled together, with the private sector, a program that would have helped thousands of youth have an enjoyable, productive experience in volunteering for groups across the country.

I would like to remind members of Ms. Wernick's testimony at committee, where she said:

Our experience with the Canada service corps program had taught us many things about the key ingredients for a successful youth service initiative. First, to engage in [a] service the majority of youth—in particular, youth who are under-represented and who are from groups facing barriers—require additional supports ranging from orientation to mentoring to wraparound supports.

Secondly, the biggest influencers of youth are other youth. The success of the initiative required a strong start, whereby a large number of meaningful opportunities would be available to immediately grab youths' interest, so they would spread the word with their friends. Youth do not come to government websites, no matter how well we build them. There was a need for active outreach to find youth where they were. Promotion and communications tailored to a younger audience and that would reach them through all social media platforms were essential.

We know how important social media platforms are, although I believe there are more youth on Instagram and TikTok, which I'm still not sure how to operate sometimes, and less on Facebook. She continued:

The purpose was to create a digital platform that allowed for registration of students and not-for-profit organizations, including directly inputting information, logging and tracking of hours, and matching of students with opportunities.

This required analysis of what technological capability would be required, how it would meet all government requirements for bilingualism, accessibility and protection of personal information, and how to ensure the system [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

She continued:

The third party needed massive speed, reach and scale, an ability to quickly mobilize the whole country. The third party needed a demonstrated track record—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I have two things to say.

One, I would ask the honourable member to slow down. Two, I have no desire to listen to him rehash what we've been hearing for the past few hours. It is redundant, and on top of that, I'm missing some of his remarks because he is speaking too quickly.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gaudreau.

Mr. Sorbara, please keep your cadence to a pace that the translators can deal with.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: My apologies, Ms. Gaudreau, if I'm speaking too quickly.

[*English*]

The third party needed a demonstrated track record of mobilizing youth for service and to be technologically strong. Some of the bodies we considered and set aside were small advocacy groups with no program delivery experience. Other organizations did not have experience with youth, nor did they have strong technological capacity. Many had never delivered a program of such complexity.

I did engage WE Charity as a potential partner—

Again, this is Ms. Wernick's testimony:

—letting them know the broad parameters of what the government was looking for. They were an obvious option as the largest youth service charity in Canada, with high technological capacity and a Facebook following of four million youth. They had already provided to several officials and ministers a proposal related to social entrepreneurship and indicated it could be adapted as needed.

On April 22, WE Charity sent me a detailed proposal to quickly develop tens of thousands of volunteer placements for youth within a few weeks. Given the need for speed and scale, I determined, with my team and colleagues, that their draft proposal was the best available option in the time we had to work with. The team proceeded to work up the proposed initiative in a form that could be vetted by central agencies and considered by cabinet.

I sent the draft cabinet proposal to the deputy minister for approval, and her office sent it on to the minister in early May.

To be clear, the department's recommendation was that a contribution agreement with WE Charity to mobilize other not-for-profit partners was the best available option, given the requirement for speed, scope, scale and to reach a broad diversity of youth.

There has not been one single iota of evidence of any interference by ministers, their staff or any others in the awarding of this contribution agreement, and when the Prime Minister made his appearance before this committee, it should have been clear to all Canadians, with of course the exception of the rabid partisans who never let the facts get in the way of their arguments, that there was no political interference, either direct or implied, in the awarding of the contribution agreement.

I find it appalling that in the middle of a pandemic, with real work before the committee, we spend any more time on this study.

We know we are here in reference to the amended motion that began from Mr. Angus's motion. I think I said this in the last meeting we had. Obviously we are on the break week and because of the call for today's meeting, many of us have had to rearrange our schedules, which is fine. These are, like the TV series, *The Facts of Life*.

• (1445)

I would go back to Mr. Angus's original motion and how we worked together on it. We removed, I believe, two of the bullet points that were really not of significance: “an examination of the use of partisan resources and processes in the appointment of federal judges that may have constituted violations of the privacy rights of nominees” and “an examination into MCAP and Rob Silver's involvement with the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance program”.

I would go back to that original motion, the motion that Mr. Angus put forward on October 22 of this very remarkable and unique year of 2020. Yesterday we lost two great Canadians—Mr. Howie Meeker, a former Progressive Conservative member of Parliament and great champion of ice hockey, someone I watched for many years; and Alex Trebek, no explanation needed.

Let me read Mr. Angus's motion:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this Committee undertake a study into issues of conflict of interest and the Lobbying Act in relation to pandemic spending;

that this study continue our work relating to the Canada Student Service Grant, including this committee's work to review the safeguards to prevent conflicts of interest in federal government expenditures; government spending, WE Charity and the Canada Student Service Grant; and the administration of the Canada Student Service Grant and WE Charity;

I apologize, interpreters, if I am going too fast.

The motion then states that the study would include four bullet points, two of which we removed; we voted on and passed it.

I would say to Deputy Angus, for whom I've always had a great deal of respect, which I'm not just saying because we're sitting here at the ethics committee—I would say this privately and publicly—that to me this was very constructive. I thought we could move forward from that motion. Then we had the mulligan, and the mulligan came back in terms of amendments brought forth by Ms. Gaudreau. To me, we've gotten to a place that I just don't think I would call correct and right. I don't think we should have gotten there. I think, looking at Mr. Angus's original motion, everything that was here encompassed what we needed to study and encompassed where we should be going. We could have moved forward in a constructive manner. We have a lot of stuff to study. We have a lot of stuff to do and a lot of stuff to learn.

It's fascinating, with everything going on in this world, how technology is leading us in different directions. As members of the ethics committee, we know full well and with full conviction.... I always hear about the conviction of your values or the conviction of your thoughts. For me, the conviction of my values right now is to make sure the interests of my constituents are represented not only at the ethics committee but obviously in everything I do, but here specifically there are privacy interests. Whether it's facial recognition or whether it's going back to the Privacy Commissioner's report of a few weeks ago, we have a lot of work to do.

I believe there was another.... I don't know if it was another motion by Mr. Angus. It was on facial recognition. I have much interest in it and would be glad to support it when it comes up during the appropriate period.

Chair, I will stop in a couple of minutes. I'll try to be done by hopefully three o'clock or so.

As we know, all committees are masters of their own domain. We are free to study what we choose, when we reach unanimous consent or if the committee decides to—

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

Mme Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The honourable member just said that the committee is the master of its own domain. Mr. Chair, I have not attended dozens upon dozens of committee meetings. Just so things are clearer in my mind, I would like to know whether he means that the committee is also the master of its own procedure for the sake of efficiency.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gaudreau.

Every member, from my experience in committees over the years, has a different understanding of what efficiency is. Some usually see efficiency as saving time. Some see efficiency as making sure they dispose of everything they need to as far as their ideas and verbally relating them goes. I appreciate the point of order. I would just encourage members to own their own efficiency in the proceedings so that the committee can do its work.

Go ahead, Mr. Sorbara.

• (1455)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, Ms. Gaudreau, thank you for your comment.

[*English*]

I do look forward to working together on the ethics committee in the weeks and months ahead as we continue in this fall session of Parliament and into the winter, and then as we continue on into the spring session.

I go back to MP Angus's comments at the beginning. The original motion that he put forward on October 22, 2020, would actually allow Mr. Angus to potentially call witnesses with regard to some of the questions he had this morning. He could potentially ask the questions that he put forward today and put forward his thoughts, which are very important. I found Mr. Angus's comments this morning quite interesting and compelling, if I can use that term, Deputy Angus.

At the same time, I thought we were making very good headway in coming to an agreement in terms of what we wanted to focus on in our study, to narrow our study and put forward a motion that we could all work with and that would be constructive, not only for the committee but for Canadians, so that we could move on to other issues at hand.

Mr. Chair, it is now 2:57 p.m. I believe I've laid out.... I was able to speak and, for the first part of the committee, my thoughts have been stated. I believe there's a speakers list behind me, with members waiting to share their thoughts.

With that, I do wish to cede the floor and finish my thoughts for now. I'll put myself back on the list after my other dignified and honourable members share their thoughts on this very important topic that we're speaking to today and that has occupied a lot of the committee's time.

I wish to say thank you, Chair, for your deliberations and, Chair, if I can say this from a very sincere angle, thank you for your patience and for your direction on this committee.

I will cede to the next speaker.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sorbara.

We have Mr. Fergus, Madam Shanahan, Madam Gladu, Madam Gaudreau, Mr. Dong, Mr. Angus and Madam Lattanzio.

We'll go now to Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, honourable members. I'm glad to see you, even during this break week, when we are all busy at work in our ridings.

As you know, we are in our ridings just about every day during this pandemic, so I have an opportunity to see, and talk with, my constituents in Hull—Aylmer. Their situation is unique in Canada in that many of them work for the federal public service or have family members who do. They keep a close eye on what Parliament is doing.

Over the summer, I spoke with people in my riding, and they expressed concern over the situation involving the WE Organization. They were eager to hear the testimony of the Prime Minister, his chief of staff, the Clerk of the Privy Council and other high-ranking government officials. After hearing what the Prime Minister, his chief of staff, the Clerk of the Privy Council and the other officials had to say, the people in my riding told me again and again that nothing serious had transpired.

Truth be told, I stand behind my constituents and I think they are right. The official opposition, in particular, insists on keeping alive a version of events that is baseless. Every time the members of the official opposition try to establish a threshold that must be met before they will move on to other matters, the non-partisan public service rises to the occasion. When the result does not fit with their version of events, they move the goalpost yet again, and we must respond.

It has gotten so bad that, in recent weeks, my constituents have said to me, “turn the page because there are other issues you need to deal with.” I wholeheartedly agree with them. If we can't agree on a matter, let's move on to something else.

Despite my opinion and the reasoned views of my constituents, I do not question the good faith of the honourable members at this table, especially those on the other side. They may very well be sincere in their belief that we need to dig even deeper to see whether there is anything there.

● (1500)

The Prime Minister and Mrs. Grégoire Trudeau made public all of the income they earned as speakers. Those documents do not reveal anything unexpected, given the circumstances.

This motion is an amalgamation of two motions. The first is Mr. Angus's, which deals with not only the WE Organization matter, but also other issues. Not to worry, I won't go through them all. That said, the intent is to ensure that we continue our work on the Canada student service grant. The motion calls on the committee to examine the situation involving the WE Organization, the Canada student service grant and so on.

Mr. Angus would also like the committee to address four other matters related to government expenditures since the pandemic began. He wants us to discuss the events involving the Baylis Medical Company, and the relationship between Palantir Canada and the Canadian government. The study would also cover the firm MCAP and its involvement in two programs. Lastly, the study would address issues related to the appointment of judges.

Far be it from me not to give the devil his due, as they say, so I wish to recognize Mr. Angus's desire to reach a consensus. That is why he withdrew the two components of his motion relating to the MCAP firm and the appointment of judges. That was positive. The

Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner already issued his decision on the matter. There again, nothing untoward happened and no rules were broken. As for the appointment of judges, Mr. Angus seems to be convinced that the Standing Committee on Justice could deal with the matter. Well done. I was prepared to support those amendments. In its infinite wisdom, the committee agreed to them, as well. We were ready to tackle the studies straightaway.

Thanks to Mr. Angus, the members of the committee realized that it was possible to reach a consensus on certain issues and not others. It took time to get there, but rather than focus on issues we don't agree on, we are going to concentrate on those where we do agree. That way, we can move forward. I commend those efforts.

● (1505)

We were fully prepared to do that work. I hope the committee can see the tremendous amount of work ahead and focus on areas of consensus. As Mr. Barrett has repeatedly mentioned, it is time for action. That is where we are.

However, the committee focused on other issues. As I explained when I first took the floor, the allegations are baseless. We, as a committee, voted not to spend time on the matter.

The committee said no once, but some were concerned that the decision did not reflect the interests of all the committee members, so they asked that the motion be reconsidered.

Mr. Chair, you are a man of experience—much more than I. I believe you and Mr. Angus are the two with the most experience on the committee. Perhaps you were both newcomers to Parliament at the same time, I'm not sure. Very wisely, you determined that a do-over was not possible; the reset button was not an option because if the committee went down that rabbit hole, it would never come out. It would be anything goes. The committee can't revisit a decision every time a member wants to do something or does not agree.

For a second time, then, the committee decided not to have this discussion.

This is the third time members have tried to make a motion do the same thing. The first two times, the committee said no, but this is the third attempt.

● (1510)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I want to make clear that the motion is very different, with equally different objectives and outcomes. I think the member should retract his remarks that we are bringing back the same motion. That is not true.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gaudreau.

Mr. Fergus, please continue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My intent is not to offend anyone unnecessarily, but the least I can say is that the motion contains basically the same elements that the committee rejected, that the chair rejected. I will choose my words carefully. I believe I was right and that my comments were justified.

Mr. Chair, it's unfortunate that the committee has succumbed to this temptation, because we are moving away from consensus. My fellow member Mr. Barrett regularly brings up the importance of seeking consensus, working in a manner that has unanimous support and not wasting time. I completely agree with him. We must never waste the committee's time.

It is equally important to abide by established principles. When the committee voted against going down this road once, a second attempt to do the same thing was made. It, too, was voted down. It defies logic to keep at this and to allow a third attempt. This is truly unfortunate, because it is preventing the committee from addressing issues that have unanimous support. On top of that, this is setting a precedent that makes no sense.

I find myself in the frustrating position of prevailing upon my fellow members to be reasonable and not to persist in what is unreasonable. It is essential that we work together. I must stress that.

Mr. Chair, although I do not have as much experience as you and the NDP member, I think that everyone at this table wants to make sure the decisions we make strengthen the good procedure of the House of Commons. I am certain, however, that the motion as it currently stands puts us on the wrong path.

I am using this opportunity to voice my concerns to you and to all Canadians. I hope I can rely on good old Canadian common sense to set us on the right path, by which I mean getting down to work and tackling issues that reflect a consensus, instead of spinning our wheels.

● (1515)

I had high hopes when I was assigned to this committee. I can remember the fruitful discussions we had, in the beginning, when Ms. Harder was chair.

In February, we talked about studies that were very important to the committee. Motions were defeated. My fellow members who were dissatisfied with the motions spoke for two or three meetings until the committee finally decided to put the motion to a vote. It was defeated.

I clearly recall Mr. Barrett's displeasure, and that was okay. He exercised his right to tell the committee members that he felt they had gone down the wrong road. I didn't agree with him, like most of the members. Nevertheless, he had the right to continue voicing his views. I would have never dared to say that he did not have that right, because I respect parliamentary tradition.

I am appealing to you and to all the members. We can spend weeks, even months, trying to convince one another of why we are right or we can recognize that this will not work because there is no consensus on the issue. A consensus is not a majority.

Mr. Chair, I don't want to put you in the awkward position of conducting a vote that would determine the committee's work. You do not interfere in debate. You make decisions to ensure the proper conduct of the discussion. You do a fine job, even when I disagree with your reasoning. I have the utmost respect for you and I consider you a good friend. We disagree from time to time, but in no way does that diminish the regard I have for you. I hope you feel the same.

We have a golden opportunity here. I have no doubt that there is consensus on certain parts of Mr. Angus's initial motion, if not unanimous support.

Why not focus our efforts on the parts everyone agrees on?

● (1520)

Mr. Chair, through you, I have a question for my fellow parliamentarians at this virtual table. Why not focus our efforts on areas where there is broad consensus, if not unanimous support?

If we did that, Mr. Chair, we could adopt a motion immediately. We could get down to work and examine other issues Canadians care deeply about as well.

I have repeatedly brought up the importance of facial recognition based on artificial intelligence or similar software.

As I have explained numerous times, Mr. Chair, this is an extremely important issue, mainly because of the flaws in these types of programs. I would wager \$100 that everyone sitting at this virtual table is supportive of that study; after all, everyone knows how unfair it is that these programs cannot identify non-whites properly. It's not just a small percentage, either.

● (1525)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I have been listening attentively for 11 hours, day in, day out. I wish everyone would speak specifically to the motion before us. Then, we can discuss the others and vote on them.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gaudreau.

Mr. Fergus, please continue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My intention is not to abuse my privilege or the speaking time you have given me, but I would like to respond to Ms. Gaudreau. Since she cannot see how my comments are relevant, she should know that they relate to point (c) of the motion being debated. It reads as follows:

and, that this study include:

(c) an examination into Palantir Canada's relationship with the government including the breach of the Conflict of Interest Act by its president and former Canadian ambassador to the U.S. David MacNaughton.

Mr. Chair, Palantir Technologies is currently pitching facial recognition software, so that is why I brought it up. That is why I think—

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I would like to apologize to the honourable member. I realize that the subject has come up a lot and that it is relevant. We recognize the benefit, so I wanted to apologize and say that we are ready to move on.

Mr. Greg Fergus: May I say something, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: Carry on, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Ms. Gaudreau. Don't worry about excuses. I know it's a long process, but I'm doing my best to include relevant points in this debate.

I'm not a betting man, but if I were, I'd wager a hundred dollars on the following fact. I'm sure that all my honourable colleagues would support what needs to be supported in order for this very important issue to be addressed. It is not just for me personally, but for many of my fellow citizens who want a level playing field. We don't want software that is devoid of tags that are going to lead to huge errors.

Ms. Gaudreau, Ms. Shanahan and I—all three of us are Quebecers—saw a Radio-Canada survey last year during the holidays in which they applied these software programs to members of the National Assembly. It was quickly concluded that the number of errors affecting non-white members of the National Assembly was truly enormous. You can imagine, in this world where personal security is often at stake in airports and public infrastructures, that the intelligence services could use this software in good faith, unaware that there are major shortcomings. This could create problems for many people who have to fly, apply for jobs or undergo background checks for security purposes. That's really important. The risk is enormous, and that's why I think there's a broad consensus, if not unanimity, in the committee on these issues.

This is one of the crucial reasons why we must devote our efforts and limited time to these issues. We can do it. It's easy. Just remove the parts that don't have consensus in the committee. These are items that were added at the last minute, despite the fact that we had rejected them.

I beg your pardon, Ms. Gaudreau, but I will point out that these are elements that, in substance, resemble the motion that was in fact rejected twice by this committee.

● (1530)

So I think it's better that we put our energy into this.

I think there's another very important element, and we should put all our energy into it. In the main motion, we were asked to exam-

ine the relationship between the government and Baylis Medical. This is important for two reasons.

Personally, I sincerely believe that there is nothing wrong with it. However, we need to get this clear because we don't want to sully the good reputation of an excellent private company that has been around for more than a generation. It has created a lot of good jobs in my province and across Canada. I think it's important to say that.

There is a consensus among the honourable members that we should look into this and invite key players to appear. I imagine we will be inviting officials and others when we look at this. I hope we will find that there's nothing wrong with it and that everything was done according to the rules, as the Ethics Commissioner found out when he investigated the chief of staff and her husband.

I'm prepared to support that, and I think the honourable members around the table agree with me on that—I see people nodding.

We are ready to start with that. However, there seems to be an insistence on dealing with elements on which there is no consensus. Why is this being done? Is it because of partisanship? One of my colleagues talked about efficiency in our committee, and I agree with her. However, is it politically efficient? I don't think so.

My constituents are following these issues closely. They are ordinary people from Hull—Aylmer. Frankly, I think that, in my riding, no one is ordinary, everyone is extraordinary. They are closely following what is happening here in Ottawa, in the House and in committee. They are people who work inside the system, whether they are public servants or employees of the House of Commons, such as analysts, clerks, interpreters or support teams for MPs.

● (1535)

Many of these people come from my area, from my riding, Hull—Aylmer. These people follow what's going on. Often, when I talk to them, they say that they have questioned things they heard during the testimonies of good people. They say they were worried when they didn't have the right information, but now that they have it, they wonder where the problem is.

Is this really politically efficient, or are we giving Canadians the impression that we are committing the great sin of partisanship?

You know, people accept to a certain extent those who defend their interests. However, they expect us as parliamentarians to work hard for them on issues that matter to them. That's why the popularity of politicians—it's not just one political party—rose dramatically in the early days of the pandemic. Canadians saw that all parliamentarians were working together for the well-being of Canadians, regardless of their political affiliation or their desire to create an independent state or a united Canada. Congratulations! We didn't get carried away by the temptation to play political games.

We have a golden opportunity before us to do the same thing again, here and now. We can set aside largely political initiatives and focus all our efforts on issues that are important to Canadians. This is our duty, this is what will make a difference and it will be of great benefit to all parliamentarians. That's the most important thing.

We have seen this in several jurisdictions in Canada. There's a reason why there's a consensus among several premiers. They have dedicated themselves and worked for all citizens, not just their constituents. I'm asking all my colleagues to follow in their footsteps and work for Canadians by focusing on what is considered by Canadians to be common sense, in the spirit of the great Quebec and Canadian consensus that exists to that effect. In this way, I think we'll be able to accomplish great things.

• (1540)

We have a motion before us. One part of it deeply divides the committee, while another unifies all the political parties. I hope we'll make a decision. It may be difficult because we are used to looking for partisan interests. We have to go against our nature in order to continue our work for the benefit of all Canadians. I think the motion we are debating gives us the opportunity to do that.

Mr. Chair, you know the objectives of our committee better than I do. You know that part of our mandate is to support the work of certain officers of Parliament, including the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. We should leave the other part to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, so that he can do his work independently and selflessly as to the outcome. That way, we will do our job better. For instance—

• (1545)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, I'm sorry to interrupt you.

[Translation]

Mr. Greg Fergus: That's okay, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: I don't like to interrupt a member. Will your comments be much longer?

Mr. Greg Fergus: I actually don't know, Mr. Chair. I am expressing.... I'm hoping that I'm advancing some arguments. I'm not certain how long I have been speaking for, so forgive me for.... Oh, I see. It will be a little while longer, but it won't be unduly longer, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It's 3:45 p.m. It's been a while since we've had a break. We will return to you, Mr. Fergus, but we'll just suspend now

for 20 minutes and let everybody deal with what they need to deal with.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Chair, before we suspend, I thought you said that we had parliamentary resources until five o'clock. Is that correct?

The Chair: I believe 5:30 p.m. is the time, yes.

Mr. Charlie Angus: We're suspending for 20 minutes...?

The Chair: Yes. I don't know where all the facilities are for everybody, so I want to make sure that everybody is able to do that and get back to the screen.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: What time would that be, Chair, just to be clear on the time?

The Chair: On my computer right now, I have 3:46 p.m., so 20 minutes from now would be 4:06 p.m.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Excellent. Thank you.

• (1545) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1605)

The Chair: Okay. We're back in session now.

Mr. Fergus, you can continue.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Chair—

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have just a quick point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Barrett, go ahead on your point of order.

By the way, Mr. Barrett, your Internet is cutting in and out.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I hope that it has resolved itself, Chair.

I don't want to interrupt Mr. Fergus once he starts speaking again. We have been at this for 30 hours. I gave a number earlier. We're up to about 30 hours now. I know that you identified 5:30 p.m. as the end of resources that are available. I would just ask you to inquire—I don't need an immediate answer—as to what the limitation is.

The committee ought to be the arbiter of when the meetings are adjourned, not anyone else. While I appreciate that there are certain practical limitations that may exist, those practical limitations should be detailed so that members know what else is impeding this process. We've identified one issue—I won't relitigate that—but with respect to the technical limitations once we enter hour 31, I'm just wondering what it is that is bringing our meeting to a halt and, I would say, necessitating further meetings during this constituency week.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett, it's pretty much all technical. My understanding is that there are a host of things. We'll get you a specific list, but it was translation, as well as the realities of COVID, too, with sanitation, etc., and all those different things. I'll be glad to try to get some more specifics for you.

Mr. Fergus, please continue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since Mr. Barrett raised this excellent question, I would like to explain to Canadians who are listening that it isn't just members of Parliament who are working very hard to move the debate forward. Dozens of people are also involved. For example, I'm thinking of the interpreters, who are doing an outstanding job.

As Ms. Gaudreau has pointed out several times, it's very important to take our time and speak very calmly so that the interpreters can do their job. Mr. Chair, you know as well as I do that these people are working in conditions that we wouldn't have thought possible in 2019. They are always listening, and they have a great capacity for concentration. They translate the words of members of Parliament, not only for members of Parliament who don't speak the other official language, but for everyone. This allows all members of Parliament to participate in the debate. Their work is exceptional, and I would like to tip my hat to the interpreters for the work they are doing under very difficult conditions during the pandemic.

From our committee clerk, to the analysts, to the support teams, everyone is working very hard to support us and give us all the resources we need to do our job. I'm very grateful to them for that.

I'm not saying this because they are mainly citizens of Hull—Aylmer, but because their work is very much appreciated. On behalf of everyone around the table, I thank them for that.

Mr. Chair, thank you for allowing me to give this short testimonial.

I'll now come back to the subject at hand. I would like to make a few comments. I'll focus on what's before us.

Mr. Barrett pointed out that we have been arguing for several hours about the direction of the committee's work.

I would like to reiterate that a few days ago, we were about to move forward with the committee's work and set aside our partisan interests to find a consensus. There is this beautiful saying in English:

● (1610)

[*English*]

It is that we seized defeat out of the jaws of victory.

[*Translation*]

We were on the verge of finding a consensus or a compromise that satisfied everyone, but we missed it. That's unfortunate, Mr. Chair. That possibility is still there. We can seize the victory instead of remaining at this impasse.

As my colleagues and I have said, let's seize the victory. Let's seize the compromise being presented. This is a golden opportunity to demonstrate that we can put aside our partisan interests to do the job Canadians expect of us.

This is extremely important. It could be resolved in two minutes. I invite Ms. Gaudreau, who is so hard-working, to do so. She's right; she herself is present at these meetings 98% of the time. She

has no replacement. She is always there, and she listens attentively, which is rare. I know I shouldn't refer to her, but it's all to Ms. Gaudreau's credit. It's rare that her camera isn't on. I see her all the time, and I know that she listens to me. I tip my hat to her. I'm keen to work with her at the part where there is a great understanding between the two of us. I hope we'll seize this opportunity.

I salute the work of all members of Parliament. For many reasons, people have things to do. They need to take care of their constituents, their families or themselves to maintain a certain mental and physical health. We all have things to do. I don't want to waste people's time or my own. Like everyone else around this table, I invited my constituents to a meeting and had to postpone it to a more convenient time.

I don't know if we'll continue to sit through this week, but I'm prepared to do so with the goal of reaching a compromise. There are some hard-core people who believe that compromise is almost sacrilege. That's far from being the case. When you buy a house, the buyer doesn't always stick to the price without deviating from it. There's a negotiation and a compromise is reached. The seller and the buyer find common ground. It's the same thing we're doing here. Some members of the committee insist on point A, others insist on point C, but there is a point B that we can agree on.

I'm offering you not one hand, but both. Please accept this opportunity to reach a good compromise that will allow us to address the important issues in the motion put forward by the NDP member. Let's take this opportunity, because we could resolve this in two minutes.

I'm willing to work and so are the members of my party.

● (1615)

What I'm asking is that we meet in between, that we find common ground. This will allow both sides to present things that are important not only to ourselves—it's not interesting—but to Canadians, to citizens. That's what I'm asking for, and I hope we can get there. Situations where you can have it all don't exist. You have to put a little water in your wine. That's what I'm asking for, and I will do the same. That way we can find common ground.

Some excellent motions have been presented. They contain sections or paragraphs on which there is consensus. Other proposals were added after they were rejected once by the committee and a second time by the chair because they were not in order. If this is removed, there will be consensus. We'll talk about three items: the Canada student service grant program, Baylis Medical and Palantir Canada. That way, we can take immediate action.

If anyone thinks we're going to use this as an opportunity to undertake a study that's going to drag on and on, I encourage them to suggest that the committee look at this for a couple of meetings before moving on to something else. So we can limit all of that. Make me an offer.

This is what we're waiting for. There's a way to find common ground. I'm ready, I'm walking towards you, and I'm asking you to show the same openness. By doing so, we can come to a good understanding.

Mr. Chair, on many occasions you've shown great patience and wisdom. Your decisions are never clouded by your opinions. I know you'll welcome the opportunity to take action. So I encourage you to convince my colleagues to come to an agreement. I know, that's not your role. I don't know if this can be resolved by a meeting of the subcommittee. Maybe it's time to call a separate meeting in order to come to an agreement. It's very important to take action. In the meantime, I assure you of my co-operation and my desire to find a compromise. I think all the elements are there. It was there and is still there. So we can take action.

• (1620)

If, however, we insist on winning at any cost, we are no longer negotiating. We are not giving others a chance. Politics is the art of the possible. We all know what is impossible and, for the most part, I believe, what is fundamentally unacceptable. We also know that it is possible for all of us to come to an agreement, and that's the most important thing.

I will end my comments there.

[English]

I have already overstayed my welcome.

[Translation]

The one message I'd like to send my colleagues opposite is that we need to seize this opportunity to compromise for the benefit of all Canadians. Then we can take action.

With that, I give you the floor.

• (1625)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

The speakers list, as I have it now, is Madame Shanahan, Madame Gaudreau, Mr. Dong, Mr. Angus, Mr. Barrett and Mr. Sorbara.

Madame Shanahan, go ahead.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, can I clarify? I believe Madame Lattanzio was on the speakers list. I could be wrong.

The Chair: I don't recollect that. I don't have that on my screen, either. If you'd like to cede the floor to her...

I'm sorry; I do have Madame Lattanzio on the list now. After Mr. Sorbara, it will be Madame Lattanzio.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: All right. Very good.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, Madame Gaudreau.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Can you repeat the speaking list? I did not hear any interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: The speakers list is Madame Shanahan, Madame Gaudreau, Mr. Dong, Mr. Angus, Mr. Barrett, Mr. Sorbara and Ms. Lattanzio.

Please proceed, Madame Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Chair.

I thank my honourable colleague Mr. Fergus. I have had occasion during other meetings to yield to him, so I thank him for the return favour. He has yielded the floor to me. We benefit greatly from his wisdom. As I ponder the words he said just before me, I think they are well worth repeating and coming back to in due course.

In the meantime, when I spoke earlier today I indicated that at that time I was speaking directly to the last amendment that was appended to the motion we had before us, the famous clause (c), I believe, which involved Speakers' Spotlight. I spoke at length about my opposition to that last amendment; indeed, in brief, it's for the reasons that others have mentioned today, in that it has been dealt with already at least twice in this committee and firmly rejected.

When I then look back upon the motion, Mr. Angus's motion as amended by Mr. Fergus, I am looking at clause (a). I understand the reasons. I agree with my colleague Mr. Fergus about compromise and about getting to that place where we can look at a motion. It may not be everything we want, but when we look at the different elements, we can say that this is something we can move forward with.

I would like to put some important elements on the record at this time concerning the origins of clause (a), why it has come up and why I gather that it is part of the motion we are discussing today.

I would like to say, Chair, that I was never one of those people who knew exactly what they wanted to do when they grew up. I've had a number of different roles in my life. In one of them—after being, if you can imagine, a community worker—I was actually hired by a major schedule I bank to be a commercial account manager, where, for the first time in my life, I was working with business people. I come from a family of educators, and I thought, “My goodness, what am I going to do?”

I'm talking about the eighties, Chair. If you remember, it was the yuppie era. Greed was good. We had *The Wolf of Wall Street* and all that sort of thing. I really didn't know if this would be an area that I would find interesting. What I did learn about, Chair, from the business people I had the pleasure to meet, the entrepreneurs—again, we're talking about the eighties and even the early nineties, when it was a challenging time for businesses, certainly in Quebec—was the creativity. It was the ability to see a problem and to come up with a solution, and to do that while taking risks with one's own financial well-being.

- (1630)

For someone like me, who comes from a family of educators with reasonable salaried compensation and more or less the security that comes with that, it was a real eye-opener to meet some of these entrepreneurs. In a different context, I would tell you the stories, but even then there's confidentiality in some of those stories. Let's just say they are household names today. I literally knew them when some of these business owners were operating out of holes in the wall, so to speak, but they are household names today.

Just as one little aside, I remember one rough, gruff old guy. You had to know how to handle these guys. He came to me and asked for an accommodation, a bond guarantee for a six-figure amount, to be able to sponsor his foreman, who came from, I believe, Nigeria, an African country.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thanks.

My hair's grey, so I do remember the 1980s. I have not regaled anyone on this committee with the time I spent travelling on the road with my band and all the neat people I met and all the great things that happened, because it's simply irrelevant.

We're 31 hours into this. We have been stalled and interfered with. We are speaking to a motion. Would Madame Shanahan speak to the motion and leave out all the past interesting people she met 40 years ago, please?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Yes, as I've cautioned many so far, we should try to be as specific as we can to the motion.

Please go ahead, Madame Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

Perhaps another time Mr. Angus can regale us with those stories on the road.

I was talking about this because of the humanity and the willingness of this gentleman, the risk he took, to bring somebody into this country who undoubtedly was a valuable employee to him and give that person that opportunity.

I want to refer to and put on the record an article. Mr. Angus had the occasion earlier today to share some of his media reading with us. This article is dated October 17, 2020, by Ryan Tumilty. It is headlined "Manufacturers start to deliver 40,000 ventilators, but with lower demand Canada may not need them". The subhead reads, "The 40,000 ventilators the government ordered came with a \$1.1B price tag, but experts believe, even in a worst-case, these machines may never be used."

The article reads as follows:

When the first ventilators rolled off a hastily put together assembly line, Rick Jamieson wanted to deliver them himself.

Jamieson, president of ABS Friction an Ontario brake pad manufacturer, climbed into the cab of a truck and went along for a 400-kilometre drive in late July.

"I, with the truck driver, drove it to Ottawa. That's how proud of it we were."

Jamieson's first 12 ventilators were part of an order of 10,000 that a consortium he helped put together is delivering. In total, the government ordered 40,000 from a variety of companies, including several small firms that overcame technical challenges, supply issues and other problems to get the machines built.

The artificial breathing machines can be essential for COVID patients, but even as the second wave hits there isn't a high demand and experts believe, even in a worst-case, these machines may never be used.

Back in March, Jamieson saw the news and decided he wanted to do something to help. The virus was ravaging New York City and northern Italy, overwhelming hospitals and leading to many deaths. People with existing respiratory conditions seemed particularly vulnerable.

"My brother David died of an asthma attack. I'm asthmatic and I said I am going to see what I can do on this to help out."

The 40,000 ventilators the government ordered came with a \$1.1-billion price tag. Few ventilators were made in Canada before the pandemic and most of the companies awarded contracts had to start from scratch. To date, the government has received just 3,210, but they also haven't been needed.

In an email, procurement department spokesperson Michèle LaRose said they ordered ventilators from five Canadian companies and eight international ones, but the Canadian firms are doing the bulk of the work. They said they expect the rest by early next year.

- (1635)

"All deliveries are expected by March 2021. Public Services and Procurement Canada continues to work with manufacturers to monitor delivery progress," she said.

Through the summer, ICU beds were mostly free of COVID patients and some provinces are now instituting lockdowns and restrictions precisely to avoid swamping intensive care units and forcing all these new ventilators into service.

Dr. Zain Chagla, an infectious disease specialist and professor at McMaster University, said in the early days there was a real fear ventilators could be needed on a mass scale.

"There was so much unknown about this disease, no one knew whether or not there were super spreaders in the community, whether or not there was a lot under the surface."

This is the subtitle: "Some of them may unfortunately be stockpiled, which is not the end of the world". It continues:

According to Canadian Institutes of Health Information, there are approximately 75,000 hospital beds in Canada, but having a bed is just half of the problem. Chagla said even if all 40,000 ventilators the government ordered were put into service, you would still need the doctors, respiratory technologists and critical care nurses to operate them.

"Some of these COVID patients...they're very difficult to ventilate to begin with and often need some very experienced operators of the ventilator," he said.

He said if hospitals were set to be overwhelmed, governments now know they can bring in restrictions and slow the spread of the virus. He said it doesn't hurt, however, to be over prepared.

"Some of them may unfortunately be stockpiled, which is not the end of the world. We will have pandemics in the future and hopefully the stock that's being bought up in Canada is relatively future proof."

After decades in the automotive business, Jamieson has a deep well of contacts in the industry that he brought together. He said everyone he spoke with was willing to pitch in on the project and there are several manufacturers helping out.

“It didn't seem to matter who I called, people took my call and said, I will help.” GM retooled one of its facilities to make surgical masks and Jamieson said his industry was well-suited to retool and manufacture something different.

“We know how to make things and we know how to make things at high volume.”

Jamieson didn't want to reinvent the wheel and didn't know how, so he sought to license a ventilator design. An attempt with a company in England fell apart, but then Medtronic, a massive American firm, agreed to release technical designs and allow use of their patent for free. Jamieson's team jumped on the chance.

They partnered with Baylis Medical to help manufacture the Medtronic devices. After early meetings with Health Canada, assuring bureaucrats they could make the devices, they were awarded a \$237-million contract to deliver 10,000 ventilators.

The contract has drawn criticism from opposition parties, partly due to the involvement of Frank Baylis, chairman of Baylis Medical and a Liberal MP from 2015 to 2019.

● (1640)

Conservative MP Michelle Rempel Garner said in the house that it raises questions because it was awarded before the ventilators were even approved by Health Canada. She specifically questioned why this order went through and orders for rapid tests languished.

“The health minister agreed to pay \$237 million to Baylis Medical for 10,000 ventilators, even though the devices were not approved in any jurisdiction,” she said.

Jamieson said their ventilator is a copy of Medtronic's device and he rejects any suggestion of impropriety. Their copy of Medtronic's device wasn't approved in Canada but Medtronic's original was and it was simply a matter of proving to Health Canada they were making the same unit.

“I didn't know Frank Baylis was a politician when we signed them for the contract,” he said. “They are the largest, privately held Canadian medical device company. Who else should I have partnered with?”

He said Baylis is helping manufacture the devices because they have the clean-room facilities necessary to keep the units sterile.

“I'm not making them in an auto parts plant.”

Jamieson isn't the only one learning to build a ventilator from scratch. StarFish Medical, a company that normally designs and consults on medical devices, got into the business and is expected to deliver 7,500 devices for a total cost of \$169 million.

John Walmsley, a vice president with the company, said they found a design from an inventor in Winnipeg. The real challenge was finding parts and their design had to be structured around what they could find.

“There were a lot of design decisions that had to be made very fast, people worked long hours, seven days a week.”

Walmsley said they reached out at one point to Yorkville Instruments, a company that makes musical instruments, amplifiers and other audio equipment. The ventilator needed a lot of switches and dials and the volume had gone down on the music industry.

“There wasn't a lot of music being done, not a lot of people buying amps at that time. So they stepped up. And we're happy to use their components.”

Walmsley said his company has received approval from Health Canada for their unit and now expects to start delivering units quickly. He said when they have completed this order they may stay in the business.

“We're fulfilling our commitments first, and then see where that leaves us. But we're definitely interested in the future of the company.”

Jamieson is not interested in keeping his ventilator business going. Medtronic only opened their patent for as long as the pandemic lasts or 2024, whichever comes sooner. He said they have delivered about 3,000 units thus far with four shifts running in the Toronto facility and expected to be done in December.

He said his project should be seen as a success story.

“I know that Canadian engineers and Canadian ingenuity were unbelievable on the project.”

He said he did this fundamentally to protect people.

“I am going to have a glass of wine when we save the first Canadian life. That's what I am going [to] do to celebrate.”

Mr. Chair, it is indeed a success story.

● (1645)

I think we all remember those early days and weeks of the pandemic when we were hearing the stories coming out of Italy and other countries, when the hospitals were overwhelmed and did not have sufficient ventilators. Here, we have small businesses, small and medium-sized businesses, businesses that are still run by an owner-operator, by somebody who is close to his business and is stepping up to the plate and bringing that human element of “I want to help”.

Will we need all of those ventilators? We don't know, but they can be stockpiled, as the article points out. These are business people who are to be commended for their actions. By the way, is anyone asking what parties they donated to at that time? No, they are not, or at least we should not be doing that. If there were ever a time for a team Canada approach, then this would be the time.

Chair, I do want to take a moment to thank you for your leadership on this committee, because I think we are getting to that good place that my colleague Mr. Fergus described, that good place that we were almost at last week. However, I must speak to the motion in front of us and put some things on the record during this time that you have graciously accorded to me.

This is now the motion that has been before us, I'm going to guess, for at least a week or so. It's the amended motion. I know that members are eager to get to a vote on it, but I think that the thoughtful debate we are having here is exactly what is required to bring us to that good place.

Getting this right is essential. The work we do here does affect the lives of individual Canadians. We have already seen the adverse effects of committee studies going too far.

My colleague Mr. Angus brought forward this morning some information about the WE Charity that was certainly not known to me. He spoke quite at length about the Kielburger brothers and about their work. I'm not really sure why, since they've already shuttered their operations in Canada. I think we can all agree to disagree about the merits of the WE Charity being selected to oversee the Canada student service grant, but indeed, prior to that matter, the WE Charity was, by all reports, a well-respected charity. Tens of thousands of Canadian students worked with them, including, I believe, some of the children of members here in our committee and in the House, and some of the biggest names in philanthropy have supported them. Now they're no longer functioning in Canada.

I'm not taking a position on WE Charity one way or another. I am just stating the recognized facts. We just need to remember that here at this committee when we discuss something it is in public. I appreciate that. I know that the members here want our work to be done publicly as much as possible, but there are indeed real and tangible outcomes to our actions. For every action—

• (1650)

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order.

I appreciate Ms. Shanahan questioning why I asked about and raised issues about WE Charity, but she omitted—as she seems to have this funny path of omitting some serious things—that the reason it was raised was that since we have been unable to finish our report, WE Charity and their American-backed financiers are running full-page newspaper ads basically disputing the work we have done at this committee and at finance committee. They are running op-eds without saying where the support came from. They're hiring people who are giving them a spin.

Ms. Shanahan and her colleagues are keeping us from finishing our report. I think that is an obstruction of the work of Parliament. That is the key issue on the WE Charity. It's that they are running a major media campaign right now and Ms. Shanahan is doing everything to stop us from doing our work.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Madam Shanahan, please continue.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Chair.

Indeed I want to continue, really, with the purpose of this intervention, which is to look at specific Canadian businesses. I think, in my reading of this article, you can see that I'm very much concerned with those businesses that have stepped up to the plate to help with pandemic relief. Indeed, the mobilization of Canadian business, large and small, I think is equivalent to the war effort of World Wars I and II, of World War II specifically, when that was a key factor in the Allies' winning of the war.

We are all keenly aware of the effect COVID-19 is having on our businesses. They are on the front lines, as is everyone else, with regard to the effects of the pandemic.

I speak to residents, business owners and employees of businesses in my riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle every day. I wish I could be speaking to more of them today. Many of them have come to me. Some who have never ever had occasion to call upon their federal MP in the past have done so over the last eight months, as much to offer a hand as to ask for a hand up, depending on their situation. I know that we're all very much aware of how some sectors have, in a way, benefited from the pandemic while others have been completely demolished. I will leave it to other colleagues to speak more specifically to the kinds of macroeconomic effects of COVID.

It is germane and it is important to these business owners, whether or not they are personally affected, that we as a government continue to focus, to provide the leadership in combatting the pandemic and in planning remedies to assist with the economic recovery to follow. I think that we need to focus on that work. That is

what it's all about now. Everything we do must be contributing to advancing that work.

It certainly does not mean that the work of the government goes unchallenged or without review. I think that the reviewing of pandemic spending and the decisions around how the funds are spent is a good use of our time.

When we adjourned on March 13, back in the early days of the lockdown, we certainly did not take that decision lightly. We recognized that, as a country, we were embarking on a national battle, the likes of which we had not experienced since the Second World War. In terms of death and destruction there is no comparison, but the overwhelming national response that was required from the people of Canada during this pandemic is said to be similar.

I'm very proud, especially during this week of remembrance of our veterans, that Canadians are stepping up to the plate. We are being tested, and not without.... There have been ups and downs. There have been challenges to that response, but I dare say that every Canadian wants to do their part.

• (1700)

The emergency spending in response to the pandemic will definitely be under review, not just by Parliament but by the Auditor General and all relevant officers of Parliament. This is essential. I was proud to have served on the public accounts committee as one of my first roles back in 2015. I think we can rely on the good work of our parliamentary officers to do that investigation, to do those reviews and to bring them in front of parliamentarians so that we have that transparency, especially during this difficult time. I think Canadians, and certainly my constituents, while they may not refer directly to the steps that we know are in Parliament, expect that there would be accountability for the spending.

When we look at Mr. Angus's motion, I think the initial thrust of it is relevant, although normally it would be the finance committee, I would think, that would focus on the spending aspects as they're currently unfolding, such as how and where the money is to be spent. In passing, I do hope the finance committee is able to get to its very important work of looking at pre-budget consultations.

As to the relevant control mechanisms about who got a particular contract and the process of its awarding, well, that could be studied by government operations and estimates. That's another committee that I also had the privilege of serving on. These are good experiences for new members. It's good to serve on the different financial committees. I would think that for this committee, it's perfectly fair for us to undertake a study into the safeguards put in place to ensure that no conflicts of interest were present during the spending of pandemic funds. I also think it's appropriate for us to review spending from a privacy angle to ensure privacy laws were respected, and from a lobbying front to ensure that lobbying regulations were followed.

As an overall focus and area of study, we could really get some good work done by looking at the pandemic from this angle. I am having a tough time with the singling out of the Canada student service grant and the matter of Baylis Medical in particular. It would be my opinion that to group all these matters together, including Palantir, would be to presuppose an outcome. I am gathering that my opposition colleagues are trying to build a narrative around each of the items listed in the motion, trying to surmise that something irregular occurred, that somehow rules were broken.

That's their prerogative, Chair. I can understand that questions can be asked, but I do resist and wonder... When we listen to Mr. Barrett, for example—he hasn't really been speaking out too much today, but we certainly have heard him at past meetings—one would assume that corruption has run rampant and unchecked. We know that this is simply not the case.

I also contend that there is a relevance matter, as these are all very separate items. They're just loosely tied together via this motion. It's sort of like a grocery list.

• (1705)

In my opinion, this is being done simply to sow confusion with the public.

This brings me back to this idea, the presupposition of guilt, because it's so obvious that the opposition—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order.

We listened to Mr. Fergus talk for I don't know how many hours about how good the motion was and how much the Liberals want to work with us, and now we've listened to Ms. Shanahan for most of the afternoon and she's attacking the motion.

Perhaps the Liberals could actually have a side meeting to decide whether they're going to be openly opposing this motion or they're going to pretend that they like the motion and that they want to work with us. Because what we're hearing from Ms. Shanahan and what we've heard from Mr. Sorbara is that as much as they say they want to work, they are opposing everything that's been voted on.

I think this is something they need to work out amongst themselves and stop wasting our time. As a committee, we have work to do that is much more important than these internal nicker-nack battles within the Liberal membership. If Ms. Shanahan speaks for them and they hate this motion and they think it's not right, fine. Then Mr. Fergus shouldn't have taken up the last two hours in say-

ing how much he wanted to work with us. They're wasting our time.

The Chair: Please continue, Madam Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

I find “hate” is a very strong word, because that is not where I'm going with this. It's the composing of the motion that I am commenting on, and I think, as I said at the very top of my remarks here, that can happen. That is the very nature of the committee's looking at a text that's in front of us, as Mr. Fergus so ably pointed out, and being able to say, well, I may not be happy with this or I don't see why this is important, but we are able to come to a compromise and we are able to work forward. It does not take away from any member the fact that they may not agree with the way a motion is put together.

Again, it's the way that these elements have been put together and the fact that we are not an investigative committee in the sense that a court of law would be. We're not the police. We don't have a team of investigators at our disposal, nor do we have those kinds of procedures in place, and nor do we want that. That was never the intention of Parliament when, over the course of time, the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner was established, as well as the offices of the other very important, very independent and very competent commissioners.

I want to say something about Baylis Medical. Indeed, I think there are very few members here who did not know Frank Baylis in some way, the former member for Pierrefonds—Dollard. Yes, he is involved with this company. I think that is something he certainly declared. This was public knowledge. This was not in any way kept from the House. I just want to talk about—

The Chair: Madam Shanahan [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Is there a problem with my sound?

The Chair: It's all good now. I'm sorry about that.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay. Very good.

I just want to say that I had the occasion.... I don't know Frank well. I didn't know him before he was a member of Parliament. I have not had the occasion to meet with him since then. I remember getting the notice, during the last Parliament, about the death of his mother and about when the funeral would be taking place. That was at a time when, of course, we could go to funerals. I was very pleased that I was able to go. It was there that I heard that the Baylis Medical company was her company. She founded that company. How she founded that company is really a Canadian and Quebec success story.

Mr. Baylis and his family immigrated from Barbados when he was young. It was Gloria Baylis, his mother, whom I believe was a nurse, who started the company as an import business to help bring much-needed medical devices to Canada, which were not previously available. She was an entrepreneur and a proud Quebecker. She built this company from the ground up. From what Frank told us, his father was nominally involved but it was really his mother, at a time when there were very few black women, I can just imagine, starting companies in Quebec and Canada.

Frank eventually did join her, and together they built the company into a force in the medical device industry in Canada. It's that selfsame company that Mr. Jamieson, in the article I read out before, was delighted to find and to work with to develop his ventilator, to subcontract with him for his ventilator. Baylis is the type of business we should all be promoting. When Frank got the call from Mr. Jamieson, he stepped up.

Instead, because he happened to be a former Liberal MP, something that was not.... I don't know if he was ever a parliamentary secretary, but he certainly was never a minister. He was just an ordinary member of Parliament, like so many of us here. Because of that, he and his company were demonized.

I just don't understand. I think members were made aware very quickly that the contract for ventilators was in fact a subcontract to Baylis, that it was another company that had the contract. That didn't stop the muckraking and smears that were going on.

This is why I say that we must be careful. Yes, there could be questions about how a contract is awarded. Yes, there could be questions, as the article pointed out, about whether indeed the numbers were correct. Were the volumes adequately gauged and put forward? At the end of the day, it is the Canadian taxpayer who pays the bill.

However, to just smear a company, a company owner, a businessman or partners who are working together just because of what their background is, I would take objection to our paying special attention to that when we study this in this committee. There are no open investigations, to my knowledge, in regard to the Ethics Commissioner, or the Privacy Commissioner or the Commissioner of Lobbying in this matter. The contract to the primary contractor is public and was disclosed transparently.

I could go on, Chair, to talk about businesses that happen to be Conservative donors or affiliated with the Conservative Party. I imagine there are a few businesses that are affiliated with the NDP, or the Bloc or the Green Party. I mean, business is not something that is reserved for just one political stripe.

● (1715)

We celebrate the work and creativity and ingenuity of business owners. It's a sad day when members of this Parliament would disparage the work of business owners and their goodwill in stepping up to fight the pandemic.

Chair, as I say, I could go on, but I am mindful of the time. I will leave you with just the final point that we are still in the middle of a second wave of COVID-19. We've had some good news, but who knows? Will it hold true? Let us be hopeful. However, as of today, most of Quebec is in the red zone. Ontario is in a modified stage two. We need to get all hands on deck fighting this pandemic. That's the work we need to be doing.

Thank you very much, Chair, for your patience.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Shanahan. I appreciate it.

Madam Gaudreau, it's 5:16 p.m. We have a hard stop at 5:30.

Mr. Barrett inquired as to why. Both IT and room allocation need our facility in order to do some upgrades. As I said, there's always a

challenge these days in regard to resources. We need to have that hard stop at 5:30, and I need about three minutes in order to address some issues with the committee.

That leaves you about 10 minutes, Madam Gaudreau. I didn't want to interrupt you without warning you that we have that limited amount of time.

Please go ahead, Madam Gaudreau.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I just love this way of doing things!

I salute you, Mr. Chair.

It's not easy to pursue a discussion that should technically be followed by questions and answers. This is a one-way conversation and we are listening to ourselves talk a lot. I have taken notes and I want to use the next few minutes to say what I have to say.

First of all, my dear members of the governing party, my hat is off to you and I salute you. You deserve a medal. I am amazed at your ability to keep talking for so long. I will know whom to ask for help when I have no time limit.

I also understood your heartfelt appeals. I have also come a long way. You may not have headaches, but it is now 5:18 p.m. and this meeting started at 11:00 a.m. In my view, it could easily have lasted only two hours. Indeed, one speaking round, when one has time to reflect, to present the content and reasonable grounds to ultimately end up democratically... We hear the word "consensus" a lot. We're part of a democratic federation, so democracy must prevail.

I'd like to take a moment to dismiss some comments made by members of the government party; I didn't hear what other members had to say. Then I will present my conclusions.

I heard someone say that we have a right to the truth and that accountability is important. I have heard a lot about transparency. I will not say all of your names, because you know who you are. I also heard someone else say that they wanted facts. I heard that we need to move forward and that we can let this go. I heard the words "consensus" and "democracy". Consensus, which comes from the heart and via a majority, and democracy, which must decide. It was quite impressive.

First of all, despite your rhetorical skills, I noticed that you were walking on eggshells. I also had to give speeches in my line of work. Maybe it's because we have been here for several hours. We keep saying that it is now 5:00 p.m., but we have actually been talking about this for 31 hours.

We heard the words “victory”, “facts”, “accountability”, “truth”. In our lives, when we know something or we feel we smell a rat, we can react in either of two ways: we can dare to face it down, or we can avoid it at all costs. We must not avoid it in this case. I commend all the work, energy, money and time we have devoted to this issue to bring us to this point today.

• (1720)

I'd also like to clarify some comments that will be reported in the “blues”.

People are saying that we need to move on and deal with the things that matter, and I could not agree with them more. We like to say that we heard this or that, but some beg to differ. The riding of Hull—Aylmer is my second home, and my neighbours are asking me to explain to them what is going on, and at least to finish what we started. These are Quebeckers, people I see in the street. I may see you in the street, Mr. Fergus.

I'm often told that parliamentarians play partisan politics. If anyone here is focused on one interest only, and it's clearly not power, it's the members of the Bloc Québécois. We look out for Quebeckers' interests. I represent Quebeckers, I cannot hide that. Every time I hear that people are playing politics, I don't feel it's directed at me. Anyway, it goes around in circles. We blame things on others, we obstruct, we find ways, we try to find a rule that has been around

for so many years that, technically, it should have an expiry date. It's hard to keep up with it all.

Given everything that has been said, including that politics is the art of the possible, I offer what is possible. With everything I have said so far, the facts, the traps we set and the things we try to hide, I have to see this through to the end. In any case, the proposal has been accepted. We have to pass the motion as amended and proceed democratically.

Mr. Chair, it is 5:24 p.m. and you have three minutes left. We can wrap this up, now that the sun has set.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, the sun has surely set here in Ontario as well, Madam Gaudreau. It is 5:25.

Colleagues, I'll keep my words very short. We will reconvene on Friday at 11:00 a.m. I would encourage you to read the procedure book, pages 1057 and 1058, and see the challenge that I have. We'll begin the next meeting with some discussion around that before we return to our motion at hand.

Colleagues, enjoy the rest of your evening. We now are adjourned.

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