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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

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Tuesday, February 23, 2021

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Chair: Ms. Ruby Sahota





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• (1110)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 25 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. Therefore, members are attending in person in the room and remotely, using the Zoom application.

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. You are aware that the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants to this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of the screen are not permitted.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and concern with public health, there are recommendations made by public health. To all those attending the meeting in person, you are to maintain a two-metre physical distance. You must wear a medical mask when circulating in the room. It's also highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when you are seated. You must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the room entrance.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting. I thank the members in advance for their co-operation. I'm sure Justin will help me out with being able to maintain those rules.

For those participating virtually, I'd like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for the meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French audio. With the latest Zoom version, you may now speak in the language of your choice without the need to select the corresponding language channel each time you switch. You will also notice that the platform's "raise hand" function is easily accessible at the bottom of the screen.

For members participating in person, just proceed as you usually would when the meeting is proceeding in person.

Before speaking, wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled by the proceedings and verification officer. As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking your mike should be on mute.

With regard to a speaking list, the clerk and I will try to keep a consolidated list, since we do have people in the room as well. You know the drill. Just unmute yourself and say you have a point of order. I'm sure there will be quite a few today. We'll maintain a speakers list in the toolbar, and one in person.

Before we start, I have just a couple of questions and then we will get to the issue that is first at hand, which is the witnesses for prorogation. I did want to say that we had the estimates come forward, so we have some time for the estimates. That would be due back in May, at some point.

Justin, when are the estimates exactly due back, so that everyone has a frame of reference?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive):** It is May. I'll find the precise date for you and pass it on to the committee.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I wanted to state that there has been a Standing Orders debate taking place in the House, as well.

Andre, I had a question for you. Usually you prepare a document for this committee regarding the Standing Orders debate. Is that something we could look forward to in the near future?

**Mr. Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Laurence and I had not yet turned our attention to doing that. We were waiting to see what the committee's views were, and when the Standing Orders study would follow in the sequence of work that the committee would like to undertake.

**The Chair:** As a reminder for me, there's no time frame for that. The time frame is only for the debate to occur in the House, but not for our review. Is that correct? Okay.

One piece before we get started is a budget. I think it would be best if we were able to pass that budget at the beginning of the meeting before we start, so that we can make payment for the head-phones used by witnesses and the costs of the lines. I believe that was circulated to everyone.

If you haven't taken a quick look, please open that up. I just wanted to see if there was consensus from everyone to adopt this budget.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I see nodding. Justin, is that good for you?

**The Clerk:** That will do it. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Now I see some hands up.

Mrs. Vecchio, go ahead.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Thanks very much.

This is an important day today because I think we're going to be starting to talk more about the prorogation study. I know that we've had a great assortment of different witnesses who have come in and provided great scholarly and academic views.

However, as many of them have indicated, and as our motion indicated previously, there are, ultimately, a few people we need to hear from. Those would be the people who put forward the prorogation, and the Prime Minister himself.

I would like to move another motion. I know that Justin should, perhaps, have just received this motion to share with everybody.

**The Clerk:** I've just sent it out.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** It reiterates our point in the first place and our original motion.

I will just read it into the record:

That, in respect of the Committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020, the Committee:

(a) renew the invitation issued to the Prime Minister to appear before the committee, provided that if he does not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to appear for at least three hours, the Chair shall be instructed to report to the House forthwith a recommendation that this committee be empowered to order his appearance from time to time;

(b) renew the invitations issued to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, each to appear separately before the committee, provided that in respect of each of them who does not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to appear for at least 90 minutes each, the Chair shall be instructed to report to the House forthwith a recommendation that this committee be empowered to order her appearance from time to time;

(c) renew the invitations issued to the Honourable Bill Morneau, Katie Telford, Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger, each to appear separately before the committee, provided that in respect of each of them who does not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to appear for at least three hours each, a summons do issue for his or her appearance before the Committee at a date and time determined by the Chair but no later than one month following the adoption of this motion;

(d) renew the invitations issued to Farah Perelmuter and Martin Perelmuter, to appear before the committee, provided that if they do not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to appear for at least 90 minutes, a summons do issue for their appearance before the Committee at a date and time determined by the Chair but no later than one month following the adoption of this motion;

(e) issue an order for the production of all memoranda, e-mails, text messages, documents, notes or other records from the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office, since June 25, 2020, concerning options, plans and preparations for the prorogation of Parliament, including polling and public opinion research used to inform the decision to prorogue Parliament, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within two weeks of the adoption of this motion;

(f) issue an order for the production of records of all communications between the government and any of WE Charity (or its affiliated organizations), Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger, or Speakers' Spotlight, since June 25, 2020, in respect of the prorogation of Parliament, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within two weeks of the adoption of this motion;

(g) issue orders to WE Charity (including its affiliated organizations), Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger and Speakers' Spotlight for the production of all memoranda, e-mails, text messages, documents, notes or other records, since June 25, 2020, concerning the prorogation of Parliament, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within two weeks of the adoption of this motion; and

(h) all documents provided to the clerk of the committee in respect of paragraphs (e) to (g) shall be published on the committee's website as soon as practical upon receipt, once they are available in both official languages.

Madam Chair, I want to bring this motion forward. As you know, this is ultimately where we're at in this study. We can continue to ask for academics to be here. We can continue to ask for people from across this country and across the globe to come here to give us their perspectives, but ultimately, there is only one perspective we need and that is that of the Prime Minister.

Regarding the people who have been asked—just in case any of the members are asking—you will see that this is all to do with the prorogation study and, perhaps, additional information that has been provided previously to the witnesses we have asked here. Was there any plan for this prorogation? This is something that we would like to look into. The Prime Minister himself changed the Standing Orders, and these are things that he said he would put forward. When it comes to being an accountable and transparent government, let's see it.

Thank you very much for your time, Madam Chair, and I look forward to the conversation.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I see in the motion that you're looking forward to seeing all of these people coming in, not just the Prime Minister.

When you wrapped it up, you said—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** No. I put forward the motion, and there was a post-amble, I guess you would say.

This is the motion that I would move here. I would prefer that we took it to a vote as soon as possible so that we could get this work done, but it is up to the members of the committee.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Should we put it to a vote?

Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** I know we received testimony from about 12 witnesses. I'm just wondering why, in this particular situation, we can't move to formulate recommendations within a report. It seems to me that we've had quite a number of strong witnesses. We've heard from the government House leader. It certainly seems to me that the opposition parties have had their theories about why prorogation happened. I think we all have differing opinions on this.

I have all of the evidence printed out here. It's quite a substantial package of information with really lots and lots of testimony. We've heard the opinions of experts. We've heard from some officials. I think the most appropriate official is the government House leader. Mr. Rodriguez came and answered our questions. From my perspective there seems to be lots of information from the witnesses we've had with which to start formulating some recommendations.

● (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

First, I entirely agree with my colleague Mr. Turnbull. Since December, many witnesses have appeared on this subject before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

On December 10, we heard from Barbara Messamore, professor of history at the University of the Fraser Valley; Daniel Turp, professor at the Université de Montréal; Kathy Brock, professor at Queen's University; and Philippe Lagassé, professor at the University of Ottawa. Yes, they are academics, but they nevertheless gave us their views and opinions on this subject.

On January 28, we had Hugo Cyr, professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal; Ian Brody, professor at the University of Calgary; and Lori Turnbull, professor at Dalhousie University. Once again, these are highly qualified people who gave us their views. I had a chance to reread their testimony yesterday evening. It contains very good information that I truly believe will help us make good recommendations.

At the February 16 meeting, we had, in his capacity as Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Pablo Rodriguez, who outlined his views and answered many questions. I think that went very well. He was accompanied by Alan Sutherland and Donald Booth.

Lastly, on February 18, we heard from Duane Bratt, professor at Mount Royal University, and Patrick Taillon, professor at the Université Laval.

Once again, we may not agree on all the opinions that were given, but I nevertheless think that, thanks to all the information conveyed to us by those academics and Mr. Rodriguez, we are in a very good position to begin working on recommendations.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Kent.

**Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I must say that I agree with Mr. Turnbull and Ms. Petitpas Taylor that we have heard from a substantial body of witnesses, many of them academics, and I think that it's important that a number of those academics agreed that it would benefit this study to hear from

the Prime Minister and to hear from the other individuals most directly involved in the circumstances leading up to the prorogation. Certainly the government House leader was interesting in his appearance before committee last week, although I think his testimony was undercut somewhat by his denial that the PMO frequently sends directions to committee with regard to the behaviour of committee members, both in terms of filibustering and directly in terms of their vote.

This motion would serve this study well and would add substantially to the body of testimony that we already have.

● (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Thank you very much.

I want to back up for a moment and consider why we're doing this study. We're doing this study in part because there was a new mechanism established in the last Parliament having to do with prorogation. It was based, not on this particular prorogation but on a controversial set of prorogations under the Harper government. This was supposed to be the thing that was going to dissuade governments from abusing the power of prorogation.

I'm thinking of those other two prorogations and wondering if members, all members of the committee, would be satisfied if a study like this took place in the face of the 2008 prorogation, for instance. If Peter Van Loan, as the House leader of the day, I believe—Peter can correct me if I'm wrong on that, but I believe that's the case—appeared here, and the Prime Minister didn't, it seems to me that would be quite dissatisfying in terms of trying to get at the root of some of the conversations that would have taken place within the government about prorogation in 2008.

I'm mindful of the fact that this is a mechanism that has a history, even though it's the first time that it's being used, and that we're setting a precedent here. I think it would be totally unsatisfactory as a precedent if the Prime Minister didn't appear to speak directly to the issue of prorogation and the government's reasons for prorogation, given that the Prime Minister ultimately is the person who gives the advice to the Governor General on whether or not to have a prorogation.

If we're going to vote on this motion on a straight up and down vote, I'll certainly be voting for it. I'm open to the idea that we would vote on something that is pared down if it meant that we could get strong unanimous support for calling the Prime Minister here.

The other person I think would be interesting from the point of view of this particular prorogation, who is mentioned in this motion, which for me is another reason to support it, is the former finance minister, because the prorogation was coincident with his resignation.

For those of us on the outside looking in, it's very hard to imagine that it is a coincidence and that the former finance minister doesn't have anything to add or a part of the story to tell that would shed some light on the reasons for prorogation.

Along similar lines, I think we've heard something somewhat similar both from Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Kent, among others now, to the effect that we have heard from a lot of academics. I don't think we need more context. I think what we need is more direct information from decision-makers in order to make an assessment about the nature of this particular prorogation and whether it constituted an abuse of the power. I don't think anybody is suggesting that the Prime Minister was outside of his constitutional powers to advise for a prorogation. The question is whether there was a kind of political abuse of that power, even though it was done in accordance with constitutional convention.

How do you get at that? You can only get at that by talking to the Prime Minister and those around him at the time. It seems to me that the Prime Minister and the former minister of finance are the people to talk to.

That's why I'll be supporting this motion. If members have a proposal for paring it down so that we can get closer to those two people, that's fine by me. If there is a desire on the part of some members to move to a report, I'm really reticent to do that without hearing from the Prime Minister, as I say, because I think it's a bad precedent. We'll see about that, but I don't think we're ready to move on to writing a report. If we did, I can't see doing anything but an interim report, because I don't think we can have a final report until we speak to the Prime Minister about this.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your contribution.

Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thanks.

I appreciate the perspective of my colleagues here. In terms of the comments being made, I think this study is really designed to continue to reflect on what's already happened. We've gathered a diversity of perspectives and opinions on that from witnesses who were, I would suggest, mostly proposed by opposition parties. We've heard from them. They've had their opinions. They've presented to us. They've shared those thoughts with us.

Mr. Blaikie, I might have to disagree with you on the point you made about context, because I think in this particular case, context is everything. We're in a worldwide global pandemic. I believe we're staring down the barrel of a likely third wave of COVID-19 with the variants of concern that are percolating and starting to rear their heads. We're seeing the impact of that in Newfoundland, for example, where the election is being affected by these new variants.

I have this concern that's forward-facing, that's looking at the work that this committee needs to do—for example, to prepare to pass Bill C-19 and perhaps maybe even look at a pre-study on that. We've seen some delays with that with some concurrence motions. I feel that we need to be able to equip Elections Canada with the possibility that an election could be called at any time. They need to have the tools to do so, yet here we are looking back, debating how many more witnesses. How many more meetings do we really need to have? I think we have a diversity of perspectives. You're going to formulate your theory and rationale with the evidence that you've heard, and we're all going to debate that and see, to my mind, how that plays out in terms of the recommendations we'd like to make in a report moving forward.

To me, that process seems pretty substantive when you contrast it with the past, when there was no study on prorogation and there were many examples of prorogation in more controversial situations than the one we're seeing here, which, when we look at it, there was a really good rationale for. We were in a global pandemic. There was a first and second wave in between, and there was naturally an opportunity to reflect on where we're going as a country and to renew our agenda. To me, that just is plainly obvious to most Canadians out there. I think it's intuitive. It makes sense.

I don't know why we need to have more and more witnesses come forward when it really seems like we've done the job of entertaining the different theories and speculative perspectives on why prorogation happened. We've heard directly from.... Government tabled a report. It's substantive. It's never happened before. I would say that's a positive step in the right direction. I think we can all agree.

We heard from the government House leader directly. Who better to give us that testimony than the government House Leader? I think that's the most appropriate person to provide us that perspective. We have that. I'm sorry if it's not what the opposition parties are looking to prove here, but from my perspective, we have that perspective already in two forms, in a written report and in the testimony from the House leader. What more do we really need?

What are you going to get out of having more and more witnesses come forward to basically tell you the same thing? If it's not what you want to hear, I understand, but are you really going to get anything different? It's all consistent. It's a very consistent rationale for why our government took those steps and why the Prime Minister exercised that right.

Thank you.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Monsieur Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to speak to you in my capacity as a new member of the committee. I've taken the time to read all the documents available on the website concerning the witnesses the committee has heard from. I have inquired into the witnesses, read the testimony of each of them, and, like my colleagues, I have concluded that, as a committee, you have done a very good job. By inviting professors, physicians, public servants and even the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, as has been emphasized several times, you made sure you established a clear overview. From my viewpoint as an outsider, because I haven't been following the committee's proceedings, I think the committee has enough information to go ahead and draft a final report.

Many witnesses have addressed this prorogation issue. We don't all agree on the conclusions of some witnesses, but we have the information we need to draft a final report. Consequently, I would like to bring the matter to a close.

Then we can talk more about measures to facilitate work-life balance, which is all the more important in the context of the pandemic, and indeed one of the very important and current topics that remains for us to address. As we all very well know, we've had to adjust to this new reality. Many of us members are parents of young children, and we function very differently when they are at home.

In addition, several witnesses suggested modern solutions to us and pointed us to new technologies that would assist in adapting the electoral system in the event an election is held during the pandemic. They will also be useful in normal conditions following the pandemic. They are tools that we will have developed during the pandemic and that will remain available to us.

I would also like the committee to discuss at greater length the legal structure of the Parliamentary protective service, another hot topic. We've received threats; Canadians are experiencing many mental health problems and pressure is mounting. As a committee, we must examine the legal structure of the Parliamentary protective service very soon.

I wasn't here at the time to suggest study topics to the committee, but I really would have liked it to conduct a study on the conduct of elections in rural areas. You're familiar with the issues we generally encounter during elections. You've also heard testimony from many individuals on the problems people have experienced during the pandemic. However, we've focused very little on the problems experienced in pandemic conditions during elections in a constituency such as mine or that of Serge Cormier, for example, where polling stations are in extremely remote locations. Voters there have to drive two or three hours without even being able to stop because the road stops and restaurants are closed due to the pandemic. And no consideration is given either to seniors or persons who are losing their independence.

These are things that I would have liked to discuss, and that's still possible if we work together to draft the final report. Since the Leader of the Government in the House did a capable job of presenting the government's view, and members were able to ask questions and get honest answers, we are now in a position to draft the final report. I'm new to this committee, but, as I see it, we have enough information to go ahead.

• (1135)

Since the prorogation, there has been a throne speech and the fall economic statement. Many significant changes and events have taken place since the members of the committee began the prorogation study. I'm thinking in particular of the general election in Newfoundland and Labrador, which was held during the pandemic. I believe the committee must react quickly and conduct a study on those elections. The committee must adjust to events as they occur. And then there's the arrival of the COVID variants.

Some witnesses discussed the underlying reasons for prorogation. Their opinion does count. However, the specific reason for prorogation was to let the government take a necessary step back in order to make the right decisions for restarting the system. That's precisely what the Prime Minister has done.

I understand the differences of opinion in the evidence, but the document already contains all we need to make a good decision.

• (1140)

[*English*]

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** Madam Chair, on a point of order, I am just wondering if you are able to check the translation for MP Lauzon. The translator and his voice are coming through at the same level. Sometimes that's because you don't have the proper button clicked on your screen.

**The Chair:** That's not supposed to happen anymore. I keep being told that with the upgrades it doesn't matter what button you select, but I don't know if that could still be an issue. I'll check on that.

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, that problem should have been addressed. Depending on the version of Zoom that members are working on, sometimes it can still be an issue. The latest versions of Zoom should have resolved that, but if you have on your computer a prior version of Zoom, the issue may still occur and it might require members to toggle back and forth between the English and the French.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** It's okay. I just wanted to point it out. I don't know if other members are hearing the same level of voices or not.

**The Chair:** I don't know if it was at the same level for me, but it was loud. You had to focus really hard.

Mr. Lauzon, you were on the French interpretation button. Did you have French selected?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Yes, I selected French, but I could have switched it off, and it would have worked all the same under the new system.

[*English*]

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Madam Chair, I'm not trying to be difficult. I just thought that if it was a quick switch, we could fix that. It's not urgent.

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair and Mr. Long, I'm going to have an IT ambassador reach out to Mr. Long to see what the issue might be, so that we can try to get a higher volume for him so that he can hear more clearly.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you very much, and thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thanks for pointing that out.

Mr. Lauzon, I'm sorry for the interruption. Mr. Long just wants to be able to hear everything you are saying. Please, carry on.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** I'm sorry not everyone can hear me clearly. I hope the technical issue is resolved as soon as possible.

I was discussing the fact that, as a new member of the committee, I have examined its proceedings from the notes the clerks have provided me. I'd like to thank the clerks and all the members of their teams for the work they've done. Although I arrived in the middle of the committee's proceedings, I was quickly able to get up to speed thanks to the service the clerks provided me. I'd like to thank them for all the necessary documents and explanations, and in French to boot.

In closing, I would like to point out that the committee recently heard from two Privy Council Office officials on the conventional norms regarding prorogation. They once again confirmed that prorogation is a prerogative of the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister. That's precisely what we did. It's important to consider the dates and facts stated in the government's report. The prorogation took place in August 2020. According to the evidence I read, when the question was put to the witnesses, they often responded that it was not the right time for a prorogation. Then what would have been the right time? When you're in the midst of a pandemic, new factors arise every week. A vaccine appeared in Canada in the first week. We had heard about vaccines in other countries, including China. A series of events then followed.

So there's no ideal date to request a prorogation. That's what appears from the evidence. That's at least what I sensed in reading it. All the witnesses began their testimony by explaining their position on the idea of a prorogation. Some said that it was done too quickly, others that it was too late. Still others told us it should not have occurred. Those are opinions, and I agree that people should express their opinions. However, the opinions presented in the report will help us make the right decisions.

Even if the Prime Minister came and explained to us what we already know, that wouldn't change those decisions in any way. If he had to come before the committee to explain to us why prorogation was requested at that specific moment, he would tell us that Parliament was prorogued at a point where we had to take a step back. We could have done it sooner, just as we could have done it later. In actual fact, we could even prorogue Parliament today, given what's coming, so we could take a step back and address the delivery of vaccines, the Newfoundland and Labrador election and the arrival of COVID variants. Then we could focus on distributing the vaccines in all the provinces. Those would all be good reasons.

The Prime Minister, who was elected by the people, decided to go and see the Governor General and ask her to prorogue Parliament in order to take a necessary step back so he could move forward more effectively. Everything has already been explained through the opinions presented in the report.

We have to be honest with Canadians and to explain our decisions to them. Unlike the former Conservative government, which constantly prorogued Parliament without providing any explanation, we explain actions. When the Conservatives were in power, they prorogued Parliament three times, in 2007, 2008 and 2009, for a total of 63 days, without providing any explanation or answering any questions. They simply prorogued Parliament.

We, on the other hand, went further. We've been transparent. Let's not forget we're going through a crisis like no other government has experienced in Canadian history.

In 2017, our government instituted a change that will now require every government to table a report in the House outlining the reasons for a prorogation. We're the ones who made that change. That report will explain why the Prime Minister decided to prorogue Parliament and will therefore stand in lieu of testimony by the Prime Minister.

● (1145)

Of course, the committees may examine other matters. That's entirely appropriate, and that's what we have done. I know the committee has previously studied cases in which the government of the time requested a prorogation. This isn't the first time that's been done. You can see from the archives that prorogations have previously been studied.

The report is based on the remarks of certain experts in an effort to explain the prorogation we're now discussing. Those explanations may encourage us to review certain matters. Our committee could look more closely into the circumstances leading to the prorogation and determine whether changes should be made so that other governments may use prorogation for reasons other than those stated today.

However, that's not what we're discussing today. What's important is knowing whether we can now make recommendations in light of the prorogation we have experienced.

The committees may of course examine certain questions. However, all members, including those from the opposition parties, have had an opportunity to tell us loud and clear what they felt were the reasons for the prorogation. Those reasons were clear in their minds. Whatever the case may be, no study has ever gone as far as this one.

At this stage, I'm not at all sure why we need to take this study even further and make a spectacle of it. I think that we're responsible enough and that, given all the testimony we've heard, we could avoid all this theatre and spectacle. We definitely have all we need to draft the final report.

In reading the evidence, I noticed a statement that our honourable colleague from the New Democratic Party made on January 28, at the start of this study. He felt at the time that the prerogative to request prorogation had been abused because it had been used to get the government out of a political crisis.

In view of his remarks, I wonder whether the member is even taking part in the committee's study and meetings in good faith and with an open mind. We're here to work together and find solutions. You have to listen to the government's arguments. Even though the member is hearing those arguments, he already seems to have made his decision. He's drawing his conclusions even before the study is done. Decisions were already made even before the expert witnesses—physicians, professors, officials and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Mr. Rodriguez—were heard.



What bothered me when I read the evidence were the intentions of certain individuals. When I saw that one committee member told the committee that he had reached his decision even before taking the time to examine the matter, I thought nothing would change even if the committee heard testimony from the Prime Minister. The member had abandoned the fundamental role he's supposed to play on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and instead was playing politics, content to express his own opinion before even hearing the witnesses.

In addition, at the last meeting, the House Leader of the Bloc Québécois spoke even before we had heard witnesses that his own party had suggested should be heard. He said it was very clear to him that Parliament had been prorogued to put a stop to the work of the committees investigating the WE Charity scandal. Why then did we conduct a study on the subject? Why do we have committees to assist in the proper operation of Parliament? Can we say this is evidence of good faith? Certainly not. The leader of the Bloc Québécois also made his bias clear before the study was even complete.

• (1150)

I nevertheless tip my hat to all the witnesses who came and testified on the matter. We asked them whether they thought the government had had valid reasons to prorogue Parliament. They all began by saying that all the reasons justified seeking prorogation. Is it appropriate for those people to express their opinions? Yes.

We, as parliamentarians, have a role to play when witnesses appear before a committee to assess the situation. I personally consider it a delicate matter for a committee member or party leader to make a public statement about a study under way in order to announce his own solutions for the decisions he has previously made even before the committee has completed the study.

That at least is my interpretation of the situation. I joined this committee when it was already under way; I carefully read all the documents, and that's what I sensed. One can imagine how ordinary people reading the reports without having attended the committee's proceedings might not feel any better than I did after spending the weekend, as a new member of the committee, reading documents to bring myself up to speed.

On September 24, 2020, the Conservative member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock stated in the House that we all knew the Prime Minister had decided to prorogue Parliament as a result of his involvement in the WE Charity scandal. That was said in the House even before we had presented all our work. The member said that the prorogation was a distraction. When he said that, we were in the middle of a crisis, seniors were dying, physicians and nursing staff were on their knees, emergency rooms were full, not a single bed was free and our staff was exhausted.

We're working hand in hand with the public in all constituencies, whether Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Bloquiste, independent or Green. We're all supposed to work hand in hand during this kind of crisis. We have to earn the public's trust, give them hope and make them feel supported.

All the parties worked together and sent us recommendations that we relied on in implementing programs. We made adjustments

along the way. The step back taken as a result of the prorogation was extremely important in helping us move forward more effectively and developing more responsive programs.

For example, we're all aware of what's happened to travellers. There are 338 members in the House of Commons. We read the documents and we make decisions as quickly as possible, and to the best of our ability, based on what we know. All parties are in the same boat. When we realized that a traveller could return from a trip and be fined \$1,000, we had to review our decisions and amend the measures. No one saw that coming because we have to make the kinds of decisions no one has ever seen before. The pandemic didn't come with an instruction manual. We all had to adjust at every stage and take a step back. We prorogued Parliament so we could take a step back.

On October 5, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman claimed that the Prime Minister's main reason for proroguing Parliament was to attempt a cover-up. Once again, fellow citizens were told that we had tried to conceal files concerning the WE Charity and in other cases. We should bear in mind that we had a crisis to manage during the pandemic and that we had programs to implement for students, workers who had lost their jobs and seniors, who we sensed were in distress.

As parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Seniors, I was in contact with seniors across Canada from the start of the pandemic. I sensed their distress, particularly among those living in long-term care centres, which are called CHSLDs in Quebec. I can tell you that the crisis is still raging in long-term care centres in Ontario.

• (1155)

I think that that's the priority of every government, that the Prime Minister has a lot to do in managing a pandemic crisis and that we have to prepare a report as soon as possible.

I started reading around December 10, when the initial meetings on the committee's study began. In my initial reading, I saw that Dr. David Williams had said the following:

Over the spring and into the summer we flattened the curve down to a very low fewer than 100 cases a day, even lower than that...

So, on December 10, he said we had flattened the curve to fewer than 100 cases a day in Ontario. He's a physician in that province. He continued, saying:

...and then they started rising again in September, much as in other provinces, and more recently as in some territories.

We're now in February 2021. When I began my reading, we were already talking about...

• (1200)

[English]

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

It's absolutely wonderful hearing from the member, but could he just stick along the lines of the prorogation? I know that he is sharing all of the other things that we could be working on, but we have a motion on the floor and perhaps he could just continue speaking to the motion.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right. I guess the members heard that comment. It's to relate your comments to the motion at hand.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you very much, Ms. Vecchio. Sometimes I get carried away with emotion. When I dive into a file, I get down to the bottom of it.

However, I can say that everything I've told you is directly related to the prorogation. Canadians and I myself have never been as sensitive to seniors as in this pandemic or in the history of Canada. Prorogation was also one of the measures we took for seniors and the general public. It was effective in helping us take a step back so that we could move forward more effectively. Everything I've explained to you to this point is related to the prorogation.

On January 28, 2021, at start of the meetings on the prorogation study, the member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan said the following in his preamble, before putting his question to Dr. Ian Brodie, Prime Minister Harper's former chief of staff, "We are charged with the responsibility of conducting a study on the reasons why this government and the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament."

Remember, I just told you he is Mr. Harper's former chief of staff. Mr. Lukiwski continued, saying, "Quite frankly, the reasons are crystal clear, and we all know it."

At the last meeting, on February 16, Mr. Lukiwski continued to show his bias and inherent partiality on this issue, declaring on the basis of no study or approval by this committee:

It is clear to everyone in this committee, and I know it's clear to you as well, there was only one reason for prorogation being called in early August...

As a member, when I read that, I had to stand up, have a glass of water and take a deep breath.

Remember what we were going through in my constituency and yours in August. The weather was beautiful, we were having a bit of a break, there was some fear and apprehension, and we weren't safe from a second wave. Life was very hard for the general public.

I respect the testimony of an expert who comes and tells us that there was only one reason to prorogue Parliament, and we will take it into account in the report, but let me tell you that I happened to read other testimony stating that the prorogation assisted in making decisions and in taking a step back so we could move forward more effectively.

When he says there was only one reason, does the member also think that prosecutors should be able to sit on the jury and vote even before an investigation?

Fortunately, he's not the one who...

• (1205)

[*English*]

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I have a quick point of order, Madam Chair.

There's a bit of confusion. The member said he doesn't want to spend more time talking about the WE Charity scandal, but I take it from his intervention that he does. He just doesn't want to do it with witnesses that could contribute meaningful information about the nature of the prorogation decision.

**The Chair:** Is this really a point of order, or is it just debate?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** That's for you to decide, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Seeing as you have your hand up, you will get your chance to make your reflections known to the members of the committee.

Carry on, Mr. Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** I think that position's ridiculous. Given what I've read, I can tell you I would be very pleased to take part in a good-faith debate with some of these witnesses or with opposition members. However, it's increasingly hard for me to give them the benefit of the doubt, first of all, because they've made their decision even before appearing before the committee. What could I do about that?

The member continued by saying there was a singular reason for doing so. The record should show that the member was referring to the prorogation. He found it disturbing that he and other members of his party, and of the opposition, could sit here and say they would examine the prorogation matter and get to the bottom of things. To shed light on what?

Madam Chair, it seems they already made their decision long ago. The decision of some was already made even before they testified. We nevertheless listened to them, and we nevertheless received some very good evidence. We heard from 12 witnesses, all equally expert and equally partisan, and we listened to them. We asked good questions, thanks to the democratic system we have here, and each of the parties was granted the same number of minutes. We heard a broad range of testimony, and we could therefore prepare a comprehensive report today.

I want to make the following point for the record. The member I'm referring to regularly argues fiercely against this government, even going so far as to tell the Leader of the Government in the House, during the previous meeting that I attended, that he felt sorry for him. That same member advanced an entirely contrary argument in 2010. The situation was different in 2010; today, he feels sorry.

In that year, this committee conducted a very similar study when the Conservative government prorogued Parliament. At the time, the member represented the former riding of Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre. As you can see, he is an experienced member because he was already a member in 2010. At the time, I was a municipal councillor. When the Conservative government prorogued Parliament, he argued that prorogation was a fairly common and routinely used procedure.

Parliament has been prorogued three times by the Conservatives and only once by the Liberals, and, in that case, during an international health crisis. I would emphasize the word “routinely.” Today, however, the opposition parties contend that this prorogation was a kind of abuse of Parliament. Today, they’re trying to prove, supported by examples, that it was an abuse and an extremist measure. However, they still forget the pandemic aspect. It’s that aspect that troubles me a little more. It’s as a result of that aspect that my human side has trouble accepting the idea that we said we did it for nothing. It’s as though there were no pandemic and we didn’t need to take a step back.

It takes a lot of work to prepare a throne speech and an economic statement. I heard here that we could have turned on a dime, stopped for two days, prepared a throne speech and presented it in public. However, that takes hours and weeks of work. You have to mobilize all members and employees of the Prime Minister’s Office. You have to conduct consultations. When you prorogue Parliament, you do so to take a step back, not to take a vacation. It involves six weeks of intensive work during which we review every line of the programs we’ve put in place, every flaw in the system.

• (1210)

And there were some flaws in my riding, and they’re still there. No system is perfect. The prorogation let us take a step back, gather strength and make good decisions. Now you want to invite everyone in turn. All that’s missing from the motion tabled is the pope...

[English]

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Mr. Lauzon has indicated that he is a new member. In our previous motion, providing this information had been agreed to unanimously by the entire committee. Because there has not been anything received, this is why we’re reinviting. It’s not a new list at all. These are already current and all members of this committee did support it.

**The Chair:** Maybe for further clarification, I will let you know what happened. Witnesses were invited through the subcommittee, as they would normally be invited. At some point, there was a motion brought forward with four witness names. One of them was the House leader, and the House leader has attended. The other three were the Prime Minister, Ms. Telford and.... Who was the third?

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** It was Morneau.

**The Chair:** The third was Morneau. That was Mrs. Vecchio’s motion.

At the subcommittee, since they were potential witnesses who were already on the list, there was consensus to go ahead and invite. That report was presented to the committee, and the whole committee voted to go ahead and invite.

We are on this motion, because some invitations have not received a response.

Go ahead, Mr. Lauzon

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you very much for that clarification, Madam Chair.

Thanks as well to Ms. Vecchio for raising that point. I’m still learning, and I very much welcome any clarification.

I received the motion today and I read it briefly before joining the committee meeting. The witness list is quite long: the Prime Minister, the Leader in the House, who has already testified, the Prime Minister’s chief of staff, former members, citizens and so on. I can’t name them all.

I would like to point out that the Prime Minister appeared before Canadians at a press conference and explained why the government had had to prepare for a potential second wave of the pandemic that was under way. He had to review his priorities relative to those he had announced in the 2019 throne speech, and he set other legislative priorities.

In other words, we had to reset the parliamentary agenda. That’s somewhat what I’ve been explaining to you from the start. We really pressed the reset button. The Prime Minister could not have been clearer than that. He organized a press conference, and he clearly expressed that to the public. He also told all members in the House. He wanted to have those priorities front and centre in the context of the pandemic crisis.

As we said, and as academics and officials have also stated, the prorogation mechanism was justified. No other mechanism could reset the agenda in that kind of situation. The Prime Minister therefore decided to seek leave from the Governor General to prorogue and end the Parliament. Previous governments have also used this measure for much longer periods and for far less valid reasons.

It appears that, in wanting to invite the Prime Minister back, opposition members did not consider the severity of the crisis Canada was facing. We had just emerged from a brutal first wave. A second wave arrived, and the government went into crisis management mode literally to save—and I would emphasize that word—as many lives as possible, to support Canadians during an unprecedented crisis. That was a priority; that’s what we should take into consideration. We must address the points that I indicated at the start of my speech. In other words, we must focus on other extremely important matters. We abandoned them during the election campaign and election process.

If my memory serves me, the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020, monopolized all public health authorities. We were virtually certain from the outset that there would be a second wave. How could we have requested prorogation at that point without living through what we did in our respective constituencies during that new pandemic wave? We experienced various problems, we saw they were serious, and we looked for solutions.

According to some experts, we could have prorogued Parliament when the pandemic started. However, since we didn't have a crystal ball, we couldn't see the future. I had to make changes in my riding and adapt to the situation. Some of the improvements could not have been made if the session had ended when the pandemic started.

As I have said and now repeat, it would've been a good idea to prorogue Parliament at the start of the pandemic, and it was also a good idea when we made the decision. It would still be a good decision today. This kind of process enables us to take a step back and review the measures in place.

• (1215)

Every time we make a change, we hear that prorogation made it possible to establish the mechanism that enables us to make those kinds of changes. Even now, members rise in the House saying it takes a lot of time to get a telephone line. However, you can hire 2,000 persons if you want, but you still have to train them. You have to find them the necessary equipment and help them settle in. Prorogation helps you make those decisions and take a step back so you can come back stronger.

[*English*]

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

This time I hope you'll find that it is, in fact, a well-founded point of order.

[*Translation*]

Perhaps it might help Mr. Lauzon's learning and that of other members of the committee. There was a mechanism during the last parliament.

[*English*]

When there were filibusters in the last Parliament at PROC, I think it was Liberal MP Scott Simms who developed a mechanism that was accepted by this committee.

**The Chair:** It was the Simms method.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** It may already have been used in this committee in this Parliament. It is that once we know that members are committed to talking out a meeting, other members could be permitted to speak at the discretion of the member who has the floor, without that member ceding the floor. I think that makes for a more conversational meeting.

Mr. Lauzon has already made a number of substantive claims about the nature of this study. I'm sure certain members, me included, would love the opportunity to respond to some of those claims. Unless the plan is for him to wrap up shortly and proceed with the discussion in the normal way or to proceed to a vote, I just want to recall that the mechanism exists. It may be a way for other mem-

bers to address some of the substantive points that Mr. Lauzon has made.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** This came out of a time of necessity in a previous Parliament, Mr. Lauzon. In the middle of a long discussion, our colleague Scott Simms had created a mechanism in which there was trust among opposition and government members—all parties on the committee—that they could interject and make some comments and then give the floor back to the speaker who was speaking at the time.

Generally, the regular procedural rules would be that if it's not a point of order and another member is speaking, the first member would cede the floor and no longer have their position in line. Through this method, there was a cordial way to have sometimes necessary interventions, which could maybe lead us to some type of compromise.

Mr. Blaikie is suggesting that he would like to make a few comments and still give you the floor back so that you can continue the rest of your speech, unless you only have a couple more minutes. If there's much more that you wish to say, Mr. Blaikie could just interject. The interjection is supposed to be short—a few minutes. It's not a long interjection, but something that would maybe carry the conversation forward.

Mr. Lauzon, it's up to you. Then you would have the floor back.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** I have great respect for Mr. Blaikie, but I think every one of the points I raised was directly related to the study I made last weekend. You can see the work I've done to catch up to you.

However, I do understand your argument, Mr. Blaikie. So I will stop here and wrap up my analysis of the reading I did on the weekend concerning another component. Since I see some raised hands, I'll let those people respond and come back after that.

[*English*]

I will raise my hand again.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

We'll hear from Mr. Blaikie for a short interjection. There is a long speakers list, too. I don't want to have a whole bunch of other people put far behind because of this.

Go ahead and make your points, Mr. Blaikie. Hopefully, they move the conversation forward.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Thank you.

I'd like to respond to a few things that Monsieur Lauzon had to say, and then I'll end with a proposal, Madam Chair.

The first thing I want to say, because I know Monsieur Lauzon has made quite a big deal out of comments that members of Parliament have made about the nature of the prorogation as somehow prejudicing what I think at one point he even called a "commission".

Of course, this is a committee study, and we're not a court of law. We are a political place and our function primarily is a function of accountability. An important dimension of accountability is that of calling on decision-makers to defend their decisions and to articulate the reasons for their decisions.

The decision-maker when it comes to prorogation is the Prime Minister, of course, so I think it's perfectly reasonable to still want to hear from the Prime Minister. The committee has already agreed that we want to hear from the Prime Minister, so it's not like this is a new thing or that we didn't have some kind of agreement on that before. I don't think our study is done until we hear from the principal decision-maker in this regard.

I just wanted to correct the record there. I don't see my role here as that of a judge. My role here is that of an elected official who is trying to hold the government to account by getting it to explain its actions. I'm entitled to have opinions about whether or not I agree with those explanations, and I'm entitled to go into the investigation with some opinions about what I think really happened, for precisely the reason that I'm not a judge. It would be inappropriate, in my view, to behave like one in this regard, because it wouldn't allow me to do the accountability work that I was elected to do.

I think we've been called to work together in this crisis. That's true. I think there's a lot of evidence of that having happened. I actually think the prorogation got in the way of that. I was part of an effort on the part of the NDP to call for more sittings in August and September in order to deal with the looming CERB deadline. I think it was a mistake from the point of view, substantially, of CERB policy not to engage Parliament on that question in the lead-up to the deadline of the expiration of CERB, and I think it was a mistake from the point of view of parliamentary collaboration not to continue and to even create more time within the parliamentary forum to hammer out some of those issues. We've seen problems with the sick day program, for instance, because we didn't have the time up front to be able to look at that.

I take his point about collaboration, but I propose that prorogation is not the way to encourage parliamentary collaboration. I think that's pretty obvious on the face of it, frankly.

Those are just some things I would offer in response to a few of the points—what I would call the more interesting points—that Monsieur Lauzon has made over the past hour or so.

My proposal is to recognize that there are other things that this committee could be looking at, and I do see value in addressing other topics, but as I said, I think we also have to recognize that what we're doing is precedent setting. While Liberal members of the committee may be satisfied that they know the reasons for prorogation and that there's no value in questioning the decision-maker, which in this case is the Prime Minister, I disagree. I suspect they might feel differently if the Prime Minister were wearing a different colour of tie. Also, were we having this conversation in 2008 or elsewhere, they would feel that it was appropriate for the Prime Minister to appear.

I'm interested in establishing an appropriate precedent. If it would help to move this conversation along and reach a decision, we could call on the Prime Minister alone to come and testify at

this committee. I would be prepared to support that if it helps us get to a decision. If we do that and the Prime Minister is ragging the puck on his appearance, I could see myself supporting the idea that we would file an interim report with the House of Commons, provided that the report expressed the committee's view, if it is the committee's view, that the report is not complete until we hear from the Prime Minister. I think that would go a long way to establishing a precedent, in the context where the Prime Minister refuses to appear, of at least making it clear that the committee thinks it's appropriate for prime ministers to appear in the context of these kinds of studies.

In the future, of course, I'd prefer if the Prime Minister did appear. I think it would be helpful, and I also think it would show the kind of leadership in support of his own policy that he proposed in the 2015 election. Obviously, I can't make that decision for the Prime Minister. What I can do is ask for support on this committee to continue to beseech him to live up to his promise of 2015 and to set the precedent that this kind of accountability for the Prime Minister on the decision of prorogation is appropriate.

• (1225)

That's my proposal, Madam Chair—that we might find a way to hasten this conversation and reach a decision if we move in that direction. I leave it to committee members to weigh in on whether or not that is acceptable to them as a way to proceed.

**The Chair:** I guess it's up to the committee members and Mr. Lauzon to respond, since he has the floor back, if he wishes to move in that direction, but you would need the support of other members as well.

Mr. Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Yes, my colleague opposite is trying to strike a compromise on a motion I can't go against. I can't go against it for all the reasons I've given. The Prime Minister has a lot to do during this COVID-19 crisis, and I think we have enough information to go ahead and prepare a report to assist our government and the Canadian public. Then we can move on to something else.

You added an important point when you said there are subjects we would like to discuss at greater length. We can't avoid what we've just experienced as a result of the pandemic, which started in the middle of an election. In addition, we absolutely have to review initiatives designed to facilitate work-life balance. That has come along with the pandemic, and it's up to our committee to do it.

As I previously said, there's a lot of work to be done on the legal structure. We have to make some major changes to the way we deal with mental health problems that have arisen during the pandemic. We all know someone who has been affected. People have been isolated.

We also have to review the provisions respecting the legal structure of the parliamentary protection service. The Prime Minister has received threats and members have been affected. I don't think we should wait until an incident occurs. We shouldn't postpone this or fail to examine what happened during the election that was just held or the cases in which threats were made.

• (1230)

[*English*]

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm just going to say that he's well over an hour, and we have half an hour left of this. Unless he's going to cede the floor, he has not provided any new information regarding the study and regarding the motion that we're supposed to be discussing. I know there are other members on the waiting list who would like to speak, so perhaps we can actually get back on topic.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks, Mrs. Vecchio.

I'm sorry. I was just conferring on some procedure with the clerk, but Mr. Lauzon does have the floor, and I can't really force him to—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** It still needs to be relevant. That's all.

**The Chair:** I apologize again. I may not have heard what was said in the last 30 seconds, but we'll remind Mr. Lauzon to stay on the point of the motion.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** There's still a connection to the motion, but I'll be more careful.

Would the official opposition have preferred that the federal government simply disregard the upcoming second wave and act as certain provincial Conservative premiers did who disregarded warnings about the second wave? Would that have been better?

The Prime Minister spoke responsibly on national television, urging Canadians to limit their contacts and travel, among other things. In spite of that, some people are still gathering and others travelling.

It's all well and good to use prorogation as a way to take a step back, to make the best possible decisions and to send clear messages to our fellow citizens, but they are nevertheless the ones who spread the virus. The Prime Minister spoke responsibly when he urged Canadians to limit their contacts. He tried to save Christmas, since it's an important celebration for Canadians. The prorogation made it possible for us to take a step back before making that decision.

During that time, the official opposition ridiculed his national speech, characterizing it as alarmist and unhelpful. What he was told was that there was no need to fear. They thought we were scaring people. And yet, today, thousands of people are dead.

The committee has conducted a study on the prorogation. I listened to the opposition members and witnesses at our most recent

meetings. I read everyone's testimony. I also listened to the Leader of the Government in the House.

I think the members of the committee at times show partisan tendencies that shape the way they view events, but there has to be a limit to that. You have to be honest with the committee. We have to work together to achieve something new. I'm a team player, and I often wear the captain's "C" on my jersey.

With your permission, I'm going to quote the former Conservative member for Elgin—Middlesex—London. In 2010, he said, "Prorogation, as I have stated, is at the core of the separation of powers. It provides the Crown with a mechanism for responding to changing circumstances."

In the government's mind, is there any greater change than COVID-19? We now have to vote remotely. There was also a serious global economic crisis last year, as a result of which we began the new parliamentary session with new priorities. Those priorities were stated in the throne speech, which was presented to parliamentarians and the Canadian people upon our return following the prorogation.

I suppose that a one-of-a-kind global pandemic that changed the lives of some 7 billion people around the world doesn't amount to a change in circumstances in the opposition's view. I don't know what it takes for the opposition to change its opinion. We have to work together once and for all to move forward and draft a report.

I will now let my colleagues take over, Madam Chair.

Thank you. I will come back later, if necessary.

• (1235)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

For the committee's information, I know procedurally that things can get a little... There can be a lot of questions. When Mr. Blaikie made his brief interjection, he made some suggestions to come to a compromise. My thinking on that is that if you are to make a formal amendment to any motion, then that would have to be when it's your formal turn to speak and when you have the floor.

If through consensus the committee continues to use the Simms protocol through this discussion, I wanted to make it clear that the Simms protocol is only to be used for a very brief interjection and not to move anything formally or any of that stuff that you would do when you have the floor through the proper procedural mechanisms when it is your turn on the list.

That's just a reminder because it's something that is not codified nor in the formal rules of procedure. However, it is something that this committee has been doing for some time before this Parliament. I know there are a lot of new members too, so I wanted to give more clarification on that. We would only be using such a mechanism for brief interjections, if there is consensus among the committee, as well.

The person who has the floor does not have to cede the floor. They also don't even have to allow for the interjection if they don't find it valuable or don't want it. It's more a cordial thing, as I mentioned before.

Mr. Therrien.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Thank you.

I don't want to go back over everything that's been said. I'll simply go back to the motion. We of the Bloc Québécois find it very interesting. It refers more to Mr. Trudeau's appearance. Several experts have told us that Mr. Trudeau's appearance would have been essential to our forming an opinion of the prorogation of last summer. I therefore think that the motion will simply comfort the experts in their suggestion that the Prime Minister should be invited to appear.

The Liberals are obviously telling us that the Leader of the Government in the House nevertheless came and answered questions. However, we didn't learn much. He failed to answer me when I asked him what had happened on August 17, whereas the answer was that Mr. Morneau, the Trudeau government's number two, had resigned. When I asked him why they had chosen August 18, he said he didn't know. So, in all honesty, it appears the leader wasn't aware of what was going on within his government. That's my perception. It's either that or else he just didn't want to speak.

When I asked him why the government hadn't prorogued Parliament on September 18, as Mr. Lauzon mentioned earlier, he answered that it took time to prepare for a prorogation. He found that an odd question, whereas, in response to the same question, the experts subsequently told us that the government could have prorogued Parliament on September 18. Furthermore, that would even have been appropriate, given the context of the ongoing pandemic and the fact that tough decisions had to be made. Among other things, Mr. Taillon said that the government shouldn't have deprived itself of the parliamentary toolbox in the face of a pandemic as vicious as the one we are currently experiencing.

Consequently, if we want answers to our questions and consider the suggestions from all the speakers who came here, the Prime Minister must absolutely come and see us to answer our questions. We of the Bloc Québécois support this motion and hope it's adopted.

• (1240)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you for your input, Mr. Therrien. We know where you stand.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair

Mr. Therrien won't need to use the interpretation service very much today since our conversation is mostly taking place in French. That will at least give them a break.

As this meeting is public, I wanted to make a few preliminary remarks, since many Canadians are probably listening to us. On the weekend, I spoke to hundreds of citizens in my riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe. I speak with them roughly once a month to see how they feel, particularly as a result of the pandemic. It's a habit I acquired a few months ago, and I have to say the reception from citizens is still very positive; they know we're concerned for them and that we want to hear their concerns. They tell me they're very pleased that the various levels of government, and in many instances even the parties, have recently worked well together to manage the pandemic. That doesn't mean we always agree, but my fellow citizens tell me they expect us elected members to work closely together to establish good assistance programs.

I'll be very honest with you. Among the concerns my fellow citizens have mentioned, I have never heard anything about prorogation. I'm satisfied that it's nevertheless an important study that we must conduct and for which we've heard 12 witnesses. However, the priorities and concerns of the Canadians who are watching us focus on the measures their elected members will be taking to assist them during this global pandemic. In Canada, more than 800,000 Canadians have already been diagnosed with COVID-19. That's enormous. We've seen that we can work hard to establish programs. I think Canadians want to see us continue working together in close collaboration in order to serve them well.

The Standing Committee of Procedure and House Affairs is very important. I was fortunate to sit on it in the first year I was in Parliament and saw the truly essential work that can be done here.

Once again, we've done a great deal of work on this question since the prorogation. I would say we're ready to make recommendations. The reason I say so is that I'm concerned that the opposition already has very fixed opinions. My colleague and friend Mr. Lauzon—who, I have to say, is a good talker—has reported some quotations from people. I've also done a little research on opposition comments. I have here the comments by a member of Parliament for Vancouver Kingsway:

• (1245)

[*English*]

For the record, as health critic for the NDP, I want to register my deep objection to the unnecessary and politically motivated prorogation, which was done transparently to cut off committee examination into various political scandals of the Liberal government, including the WE matter.

[*Translation*]

Reading this kind of comment, you understand that this person has already made up his mind.

I have a great deal of respect for my colleague Mr. Blaikie, the member for Elmwood—Transcona. Here's a comment that he made on January 28:

[*English*]

I think it's pretty clear for a lot of us that the prerogative for prorogation was abused and was used to get the government out of a political crisis, which I don't think is the legitimate use of that.

[*Translation*]

I'm afraid their minds are made up. They already have an opinion on the findings of this study. Consequently, I'm suspicious of their intention to invite other individuals to testify on the subject.

However, I think it's genuinely important that we continue to work together. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has recently done an outstanding job and, I'm convinced, will continue to do so.

I'll try not to take too much time, since several hands are raised. However, as I was doing a little preparation for this committee, a number of thoughts came to mind that I think are relevant and should be heard by my colleagues on the committee and by all Canadians.

First of all, I want my colleagues to reflect on the precedent they established in causing delays, by both summoning witnesses and calling for documents. I know that, when you're in opposition, you're always looking for creative ways to hold the government accountable, as it were. For those watching us at home, yes, we all occasionally use parliamentary procedure or any other tool at our disposal to challenge the government.

By the way, Madam Chair, I believe you were with me during the first year of this iteration of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. During one of the first meetings I attended, Mr. Christopherson, a member I greatly respect, spoke for two hours. As a new member, I really couldn't understand what was going on.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** It was our first meeting.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** I was moved and somewhat traumatized, but I nevertheless understood that these are work tools that can be used. I have considerable esteem for Mr. Christopherson, and I very much miss his speeches in the House.

Once again, we acknowledge that the opposition has these tools at its disposal. This is acceptable and has been the case since the advent of the Westminster parliamentary model. However, there are nevertheless limits on everything within our field of work. What is true, or at least what was true until 2020, is that a prime minister appears before a committee only in rare and exceptional circumstances.

We must remember that Prime Minister Trudeau appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance in August 2020 as a sign of openness and transparency and to answer relevant questions. He had previously spoken before the committee only a handful of times. We must realize that the Prime Minister testified before this committee for an hour and a half. He didn't just make a brief visit; he answered all questions from the members present.

Consequently, I find the present debate on the subject of inviting the Prime Minister to our committee somewhat concerning. I frankly believe that, if the opposition members really wanted the Prime Minister to discuss prorogation, there would be at least a minimum of relevance to their request. Not so long ago, we heard

from the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, and the purpose of that appearance was somewhat relevant. It was logical and related to the topic of the prorogation study. Mr. Rodriguez was with us for a good hour, if not more, on that occasion, and answered questions. We may not always agree on the answers he gave, but he was nevertheless honest and provided us with information. He explained to the committee the government's reasoning on the prorogation on behalf of the Prime Minister and his cabinet.

We have heard from the Prime Minister in the course of testimony on this subject, as we have on all other government policy matters currently before the committee. How many the times has the Prime Minister appeared before a committee on a matter pertaining to the activities of the House or to questions pertaining to the Privy Council Office? The answer is simple: based on my research, that has never happened.

Let's put that on the table today. Today, the opposition members want to summon the Prime Minister to come here and discuss the WE Charity affair. We all know that this is what they're trying to do, and we all know why they're doing it as part of this prorogation study. Its relevance is a problem. They've tried this in several other committees, slyly linking the WE Charity to all aspects of government operations and to the COVID-19 response.

The Conservative Party attempted these theatrics when the committee went back on the road for the second session of the 43th Parliament. It tried to bundle another committee study on the WE Charity scandal with the prorogation study. Our camp believed at the time that it was an inappropriate move, which it still is today. Now our colleagues opposite are going to continue trying to say that's not the case, but, once again, we have an idea of what the members of the various parties are saying. All we have to do is look at the list of witnesses they're calling and it becomes quite clear.

The Prime Minister, Ms. Telford and Minister Chagger have all appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance. Remember that, in the case of Minister Chagger and Ms. Telford, those witnesses didn't testify for a mere half-hour, hour or hour and a half, but for two full hours. They provided two hours of testimony and answered all questions, even though they were tough.

● (1250)

The theory advanced by our opposition colleagues has been dismissed and even rejected on numerous occasions.

Mr. Poilievre tried it against the Prime Minister at one point, but it fell flat. Mr. Cooper tried to do the same to Ms. Telford, but it was even less successful. As we can see, the theory is an empty shell. The ridiculous theory that the Prime Minister and his family had a personal interest in the decision to hand responsibility for a federal program over to the WE Charity is absurd and has been rebutted.



The Standing Committee on Finance, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics and the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates have tried on many occasions to keep the WE Charity affair alive in the minds of Canadians and the media. However, no one believed what the Conservatives and their opposition allies proposed. Frankly, I must say that Canadians are more intelligent than that. They saw this political ploy for what it was and promptly moved on to something else. They wanted a proper government, focused on them, that could help them make it through the pandemic. That's exactly what we have done. Who would've thought, one year ago, that we would be in this situation today?

The past year has been incredible. Last March, when we left Ottawa, few of us knew what COVID-19 was. Now we know the vocabulary associated with it, and we use it regularly. Before the pandemic, who ever thought of physical distancing and rigorous hand-washing? Everything has changed. Canadians had expectations, and we have met them. We've implemented programs to help them, and we will continue to do so during and after the pandemic.

I spoke to many of my fellow citizens last weekend. What did they talk to me about? They talked about vaccinations—they want to make sure their parents and seniors get their vaccines—the financial assistance program that the government has established to help small and medium-size businesses, transportation and so on. Canadians simply want to be sure that their members and their government are there to help them and that they're working for them. That's precisely what we've done.

If I may digress for a moment, Madam Chair, all the parties worked very well together in the initial months of the pandemic. We made adjustments to established programs. They may not have been perfect at the outset, but, as a result of feedback from all members in the House, we made changes to introduce good programs that could help Canadians. That's precisely what Canadians expect from us.

And yet, here we are again. Once again, we're facing what we hope is the last effort by a desperate opposition that's now trying to keep this baseless story alive. Let me be clear, Madam Chair: the motion we are debating today is nothing more than a political ploy designed to destroy the last vestiges of decorum. The Conservatives and other opposition parties have done what certain other politicians do: they are prepared to disconnect completely from reality and to say whatever it takes to achieve their goal. To my mind, their only goal is power.

Today, my colleagues on the other side of the table have contended that we needed to hear the persons cited earlier in order to determine what led to the decision to prorogue Parliament in August 2020. That was said on several occasions, but, for the benefit of the members of the committee, I won't repeat it. The international pandemic struck our country in March 2020 and continues to ravage our population. The throne speech of December 2019 was simply no longer relevant at all as a result of that pandemic.

• (1255)

Throughout the first wave, the government worked relentlessly to ensure Canadians had the support they needed. Many of us

thought the first wave was behind us and everything would be fine, but the second wave, which was even worse, hit us hard.

In August 2020, with restrictions relaxed and the country returned to some degree of normalcy, the government took stock of the situation and realized that the established roadmap did not take into consideration the most relevant factor: the global pandemic. Consequently, a reset was needed to ensure the government as a whole was prepared to face the imminent second wave and to restart the economy.

Prorogation was thus a parliamentary tool that the government could use to wipe the slate clean, as it were, and to recentre the government's agenda. No one, not even my cynical colleagues on the other side, can contend that the previous throne speech was still relevant and that a new plan was unnecessary.

[English]

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** On a quick point of order, Madam Chair, I'm just looking for a little bit of clarification on what happens. I know we're approaching the end of the scheduled meeting time. Am I right that we will be taking this up at the next meeting?

• (1300)

**The Chair:** For Thursday's meeting, we have nothing on the agenda, so I would be in favour of putting committee business back on the agenda. Right now, if we have consensus, we can adjourn today's meeting and pick back up with the same speakers list for Thursday's meeting. However, if we don't have consensus, then....

It's really up to you guys. I'm waiting for signalling from you.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I'm sorry, Madam Chair. If we're looking for consensus on that, my thought would be that consensus would include continuing this in a public session as we have done today.

**The Chair:** That's correct. I see no reason to change how we're having the meeting. We would just carry on.

I will adjourn if there is consensus to adjourn. Is there consensus to adjourn today's meeting?

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** There is not at this time. No.

**The Chair:** We will carry on with Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

[Translation]

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I don't know exactly where my opposition colleagues are headed with this motion. They want to bring in witnesses to give us the same testimony they've already presented elsewhere, and which could simply be consulted by reading the proceedings. If that's not a political sideshow, I don't know what is.

The truth is that the opposition members have already come to a decision on issues related to prorogation and the WE Charity affair. We've repeatedly given them evidence against their theory, but they continue to look for ways of getting people to believe their storyline.

Unfortunately, I have some bad news for my opposition colleagues. The fact is that the public does not believe that Her Majesty's loyal opposition is investigating this issue for the public good. Canadians know that the purpose of this motion is to promote the political interests of the Conservative Party and the other opposition parties.

Why bother to have these witnesses appear if the opposition has already decided what their evidence demonstrates?

The evidence the committee has heard on this matter has been clear. Public servants, politicians and constitutionalists are all agreed: the power to prorogue Parliament belongs solely to the Prime Minister. It's a political decision, and there's nothing wrong with that. Governments are elected because of their political leanings, and even their programs are inherently political. It's therefore only logical that the reboot of the government agenda should be a political decision, and that's precisely what the Prime Minister did.

Our constitutional conventions assign the power to prorogue Parliament to the Governor General, who exercises this power on the advice of the Prime Minister. Just as calling elections or choosing ministers are by their very nature political and wholly—

[*English*]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC):** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

I apologize for interrupting. However, I would just point out to my colleague Ginette that I believe, although I'm not certain of this but if I'm reading the tea leaves correctly, if she or any one of her colleagues who have the floor would move for adjournment, she would probably find that a vote to adjourn would be carried.

That's just my opinion, and of course, I do not have the floor, so I'll let her make her best judgment call on that one.

**The Chair:** You must have great intuition. I know you were a former chair of this committee as well. Thank you.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** Madam Chair, my only question is that, if that is the case, I certainly want to make sure I will still have the floor at the next meeting.

**The Chair:** Yes. If a member were to move to adjourn, what I could do is commit to putting committee business back on the schedule for Thursday and carrying forward with our current speakers list—

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Madam Chair, if I could....

• (1305)

**The Chair:** —so that this particular motion would be back on the floor.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** I think Mr. Blaikie was first.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** It's just to say, if we're on a point of order, I think what's happening here is a little awkward. If members aren't prepared to come to some kind of agreement as a committee to adjourn the meeting, then I don't know who's going to vote for adjournment. Either the committee should get to the point where we agree that we're coming back to this the next day, in which case there is no point in carrying on, if we can do that as a committee by consensus, or if there are members who think we should continue to sit around the table when we have a scheduled time to deal with this next time, I guess we'll continue to sit around the table.

We're all mature adults here, and we have a next scheduled meeting. There seems to be, from a number of sides now in the meeting, a desire to adjourn. We should just agree on that, rather than having a non-debatable motion where a vote is going to be forced and I think members might be surprised by the outcome. They might not get the adjournment they're expecting.

**The Chair:** The last time I posed this question, we didn't have consensus, because at least one vocal member did not provide consensus. I don't know if there were maybe non-vocal members who felt the same way.

The only way we could move forward is that I could ask again whether we have consensus—

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** —or somebody could move the motion. I'm willing to ask again whether we have consensus so that it is clear.

Do we have consensus to adjourn today's meeting and resume on Thursday?

I'm seeing nodding in the negative from Madame Normandin, so it does not seem we have consensus.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Madam Chair, I would like to intervene and move the following motion.

That the committee now be adjourned.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Clerk, if you could help us with a vote on that?

**Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Madam Chair, on a point of order, you can't make a motion on a point of order.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** You'll have to check the record. I didn't say "a point of order". I only said, "Madam Chair, can I propose a motion?"

**Mr. John Nater:** Which he cannot do—

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Check the record.

The first time it was a point of order, and the second time it was "Madam Chair".

**The Chair:** Just one moment, please....

Mr. Nater, you are correct. The floor goes back to Ms. Petitpas Taylor and we can resume.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** Madam Chair, I just wonder if it's possible for me perhaps to move to adjourn.

**The Chair:** Yes, it is.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** I will move the motion for adjournment.

**The Chair:** All right. We will take a vote, and Mr. Vaive will help us with that.

(Motion negatived: 6 nays; 5 yeas)

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Lukiwski, I guess your intuition wasn't that good.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Apparently it was not.

**The Chair:** Perhaps it was not even good enough to know what your next move was.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, you have the floor. You may resume.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll be happy to continue with my thoughts on this subject.

In accordance with our constitutional conventions, the power to prorogue Parliament rests with the Governor General, who, let us be clear on this, exercises this power on the advice of the Prime Minister. Similarly, the calling of elections and the selection of ministers are political actions left entirely to the discretion of the Prime Minister. There is nothing wrong or inappropriate about it, and I'm convinced that the Conservatives agree on this point, at least when they are in power.

Furthermore, opposition members may continue to draw conclusions about the amount of time that has gone by between prorogation and the Speech from the Throne, or twist things around in the hope of making things match their version of the facts. They have maintained that in the past, there was only a day or two between prorogation and the subsequent throne speech. And yet, they know very well that it isn't true. Let's not forget that the previous Conservative government prorogued Parliament and stopped working not only for a few days, but for weeks.

At the time, the Conservatives gave as a rationale for their actions the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the 2008 economic crisis. In many respects, the situation in which we found ourselves at the end of the 2020 year was much worse than the one faced by the Conservatives in 2008. The government had to deal concurrently with an incredibly widespread international pandemic and huge economic problems. No one here could have anticipated what happened over the past year. It was not the time to produce a roadmap to set a course for our government. Instead, we took the time to conduct consultations to ensure that we would be able to take the right approach on behalf of all Canadians.

The welfare of Canadians was this government's top priority throughout its term, particularly during this unprecedented pandemic. Unlike our opposition colleagues, we have not been wasting our time attempting to score easy political points. Over the weekend, I had the opportunity to speak to my fellow citizens, and they are well aware that as members of Parliament and as a government, we

have worked tirelessly to help them and will continue to be there for them.

It's perfectly clear that the appearance of witnesses being requested by some members of Parliament is not necessary. The Prime Minister, Ms. Telford and Minister Chagger have already testified in connection with this file. The clerk could easily request their testimony from the Standing Committee on Finance. As for Minister Freeland, frankly, I wonder why she's on this list at all, because she has nothing to do with the prorogation debate. Although she performs a key and important function in government management, she's not the Prime Minister and therefore has no role to play in the decision to prorogue Parliament.

What Canadians need in the future is for parliamentarians to focus on the task in hand. The economic recovery to come will be the greatest since the Second World War. Canadians don't have time for political gamesmanship. I'd like to reiterate what my fellow citizens told me repeatedly over the weekend: they want us to work together and they want us to be there to help them.

My colleagues said that they were prepared to join us in putting together a team Canada that could rebuild our economy after the pandemic. We are therefore prepared to lend a hand and to ask them to join us so that we can work together on it. Canadians expect us to do that for them.

This isn't the moment for a political offensive on the WE Charity. This whole matter was investigated in depth and put on the back burner. It's now time to focus on the welfare of Canadians.

Once again, as I said before, I had the opportunity to speak to a hundred or so of my fellow citizens last weekend and no one mentioned the WE Charity. What they really wanted from us was for us to put all of our energy into the economic recovery and for us to continue to give them the assistance they need to manage this pandemic. Of course, vaccination is central to these efforts.

• (1310)

I'm asking my colleagues on the other side of the table to withdraw this motion and join us to work on behalf of all Canadians.

Madam Chair, I'll stop there, because I can see that several hands have been raised. I still have a lot to say, but I can wait until the next round.

• (1315)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Monsieur Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Your comments were very apt, Ms. Petitpas Taylor. You were emphatic about not requiring an appearance by the Prime Minister, and the need to simply get on with it.

I'd also like to remind everyone of the importance of the subject under discussion here, which is prorogation. That's the main reason for our meeting today. We need to produce a report that might possibly suggest changes that would improve the prorogation process.

Having said that, the Prime Minister has spoken clearly to the people. He explained his position on the prorogation of Parliament and the resumption of parliamentary work.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I'm just recognizing how much we're going to be going over time. With all the fear, I know there's been a lot of confusion and concern about interpretation. I want to make sure that reinforcements are available. We don't want any problems involving the health and safety of all of our interpreters.

Could we make sure that everybody's available or see how we're going to go around the logistics of this issue?

**The Chair:** Yes, we're working on that on the back end. We just had a vote. It seems like the will of the committee is to move on, so we'll be doing that work on the back end to make sure that the will of the members can be carried on.

I think, however, that we may not have backup after two o'clock. I'm trying to figure that out, but I will give the floor back to Mr. Lauzon.

Thank you for bringing that point up, Ms. Vecchio.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Ms. Vecchio, It is indeed important for our support staff, and in particular the interpreters, to be able to meet our needs and remain healthy. That, moreover, is one of the reasons why we introduced a motion for us to continue the discussion at the next meeting. Unfortunately, a partisan motion was introduced which prevents us from ending our meeting today and forces us to continue to explain why this motion should be withdrawn.

It's very unusual in Canadian history for a prime minister to come and give evidence. We know the intent underlying such a request. Indeed, the opposition's game plan was established even before we had these committee discussions. That's what I've understood in light of what I've heard in the House and during the evidence given by those invited at the suggestion of all parties. The claim was that a solution had been found even before discussions began on this committee. So the reasons why this request to have the Prime Minister appear remain nebulous.

We received many documents and I have read all the testimony as of the month of December, including that given by Dr. David Williams, the Chief Medical Officer of Health for the Ontario Ministry of Health. On December 10, he told us that intensive care units had reached their capacity. This was in December, when you began to receive witnesses. The hospitals were already seriously tested at the time. There was already a shortage of beds in intensive care. Today, the situation is different.

It's important to understand that prorogation allowed us to take stock. There is more than just the health system. We haven't yet

spoken about how the crisis has affected tourism or rural companies like the ones in my riding. A riding like mine, which has 41 municipalities, depends on micro-enterprises. Most employers there have one or two employees. Sometimes, the owner is the only employee. It was therefore extremely important to request a prorogation, to size things up and to find an approach that could provide assistance to ridings like mine.

In Ontario, Quebec and other provinces, the system has become very vulnerable. People are exhausted, fed up with COVID-19, and want to move on to something else.

Our understanding of this request is that they want to pour fuel on the fire and generate more debate so that the Prime Minister or anyone else invited further to this motion would provide testimony that would be included in the proceedings. We already know what this evidence would say, because the government has already addressed the people through a Speech from the Throne, an economic statement and public meetings. The Prime Minister has spoken almost every day to keep Canadians informed.

How do you go about keeping everyone informed about a federal system that has been seriously affected by a crisis that a country like ours has never experienced before? It's the worst event to have ever happened, with the exception of the world wars. Try to understand why a prorogation is important in such instances. It's not the right time to talk about the ideal moment to request prorogation, the best way to proceed, or the ideal length of the interval between a prorogation and the resumption of work.

These six weeks were extremely important to take stock of the whole situation and make a forceful return. During that period, there were discussions within the government and public servants worked tirelessly.

• (1320)

A government's organizational systems and programs are not designed to manage a pandemic. They are used to implement government decisions, which always have an impact on the public service. May I remind you of the Phoenix pay system, whose failures completely short-circuited the workings of the government apparatus.

Decisions made during the pandemic, including the decision to prorogue Parliament, placed an increased burden of work on the public service, particularly with respect to managing the required portfolios. When a \$300 billion deficit is reported, that's how much money was spent on administering them. The money, from government coffers, is being used to help people, and our fellow citizens in the various ridings. Our public servants manage these funds directly.

Ms. Vecchio raised an important point earlier. She emphasized that it was important to take care of our employees and interpreters. The same goes for all public service employees, who are having to deal with an added workload within the federal government machinery. This pandemic is a life lesson both administratively and politically, one that we must, together, put to good use in moving forward.

Nothing good would come from this motion. It doesn't help us advance, and it could frighten Canadians. We need to write a report, for one thing, but we also need to work on courses of action to improve the system. Being able to sit on the Standing Committee on Procedures and House Affairs is a godsend. It gives me the opportunity to help improve House and electoral procedures so that we can move forward within a modern system.

We have developed modern tools, including an electronic voting application. It's going to change the world of politics. We're in step with the latest methods that will enable us to change, and to adapt to today's technology. Proroguing a government like ours is a decision that will pay off.

The Prime Minister requested the prorogation of Parliament with a view to making it better than it was before. In life, it's important not to be afraid of taking one step back to move two steps forward. In the course of my career, I've acquired positive values. Ambiguous situations frequently came up, and decisions were difficult to make. I've learned that taking a step back can allow you to see more clearly. I'm particularly fond of an English expression that expresses that idea well.

• (1325)

[*English*]

We have to look at the big picture.

[*Translation*]

Stepping back provides an overview that makes you better prepared to move forward.

Our Prime Minister reassured Canadians when he mentioned the need to change the data tied to certain programs, and that had to be adjusted over time. I am thinking in particular of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and the controversial Canada Emergency Student Benefit.

Allow me to give you another example. Before prorogation, there was a problem in my riding for companies that operate ferryboats. Four ferries were going back and forth between Ontario and Quebec. There were no provisions in the existing programs that could help companies like these, which operated seasonally. It was impossible for them to come up with numbers for the previous year, because on the specified dates for that year, they had been unable to operate because of floods.

What happened in my riding was unprecedented. Who could have predicted that another flood would occur on the same date of the following year, during the pandemic?

To receive assistance, a company had to demonstrate what their net revenue had been during this period. The companies in my riding provided essential services because it was the only way to cross the river between Ontario and Quebec. As there is no bridge in my rural riding, people depended on the ferryboats. People have no idea of the challenges faced by the ferries in my riding during the pandemic.

We were able to deal with the situation, and not because I'm a member of the same party as Justin Trudeau. During the pandemic, I was in the same grey area as all members of Parliament.

In the House, I heard some of my colleagues talking about specific cases. We all vehemently defended a number of these. In the House, when members reported a situation in their ridings, the minister would tell them to send the matter to his department and they would look into what could be done. He did not want to proceed on a case-by-case basis in the House. There was often no real solution, and there was no perfect recipe for dealing with these matters.

To move forward, a government must sometimes take a step back.

I've heard that there was only one reason for the prorogation, and that it wasn't the pandemic. I'm sorry, but if that's what people are thinking, then this motion is inappropriate here. My way of thinking agrees with what Canadians think. We're not here to frighten people, but to help them and give them grants, as we did for seniors. We made decisions.

During the pandemic, we helped elderly couples because they had financial needs. They had to pay more to have their groceries delivered, for their prescription drugs, and all kinds of other things. The government provided \$1,500 for elderly couples. That's very important. We were there for seniors and everyone else.

I find it very disappointing to hear what my colleagues are saying, when what was needed was perspective.

I even asked a witness what he thought would have been the ideal time to prorogue Parliament, and how come he thought that the prorogation should have lasted two days in August and that that would have been enough. I agree that we need to consult specialists. However specialists are not members of Parliament who work in the field and who meet their fellow citizens; they're not public servants who have to work on the recovery or on rebooting the government; they're not ministers who meet every evening in order to be able to make the best possible decisions. The Prime Minister and his ministers redoubled their efforts and worked long hours to take care of citizens. They worked relentlessly to make the best possible decisions.

And yet, here we are being told that the solution was simple. We're being told that prorogation could have occurred earlier. My colleagues and I don't have a crystal ball. We therefore can't know what's going on in every riding. We can't put ourselves in the shoes of the seniors in long-term care centres. In Ontario and Quebec, we had to send the military and the Red Cross to these centres. Doctors, nurses and armed forces client care attendants came to support the system, because it was failing during the pandemic.

• (1330)

The Canadian health system couldn't cope with the suffering caused by COVID-19.

Now I'm being told that these aren't good reasons to prorogue Parliament. My fellow citizens are more important than the underlying reasons for such claims, and in a situation like this, they need to be the priority. We need to move ahead and finalize the report.

As a new member of the committee, I want to make a contribution. I'm not yet familiar with all of the procedures, but there are a few points that make me sorry for not having been here before. I would have liked to do more to defend certain subjects as a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs by proposing solutions, studies or adjustments that could be made to the studies in progress. I promise to be here for what comes next.

Right now, it's important not to send a negative message to the people. We don't need it. What people in need is reassurance. We need to show solidarity among all government parties and to encourage collaborative decisions.

This week, I feel obliged to defend seniors, in Canada and Quebec, because of the false allegations made by the leader of the Bloc Québécois. How can you get things moving in the right places when the leader of the Bloc Québécois is giving seniors false information to frighten them?

Today, this prorogation—

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

• (1335)

[English]

**The Chair:** Go ahead with the point of order.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** I can understand that things can get heated sometimes in our debates, but isn't it unparliamentary to accuse the leader of the Bloc Québécois of lying?

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Madam Chair, I said that the leader of the Bloc Québécois had not told the truth, which is true. The information he sent to seniors was false, and we need to call it out. I take full responsibility, Madam Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, Mr. Lauzon. Go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** In any event, it's important to reframe the prorogation debate. It's important to make decisions and to work together. That's the message I want to send today.

Why make the Prime Minister come here, and pour fuel on the fire.

Continuing to call for the presence of the Prime Minister, which is something that happens only in exceptional circumstances, when we already have everything we need to make decisions and produce a report, strikes me as pointless.

According to Dr. David Williams, Ontario is in agreement with our committee. He is a witness, and I will therefore quote his sentence:

...the administration of an election should be executed without creating further barriers to voting, especially in consideration of providing every individual who is legally able to vote with the opportunity to vote, regardless of accessibility needs.

There is an important point in what he said afterwards:

That means using assistive voting technology and other types of assistance at the voting location...

It's important for us to keep up with what's happening, and we need to discuss it in this committee. We could bring a motion simply on the basis of Dr David Williams' December 10 evidence. He believes that technology could play an extremely important role.

Think about the challenges to be met and the problems to be dealt with in a riding like mine, where barely 40% of the population has access to high-speed Internet, and where people have to drive for an hour to get to the nearest polling station. We need only think of elderly people or those with decreasing independence who need transportation assistance when there is none in rural areas. They need a friend or family member to help out. There are also those who live alone. We need to debate the procedure and some factors that are extremely important for the future of this committee, not to mention the fact that we have a long list of other subjects to discuss.

For all these reasons, I sincerely believe that we should reject this motion and concentrate on writing the report.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate this.

I really appreciate the comments and sentiments of my colleagues. I substantially share them. I feel that the message from Mr. Lauzon about working together is really key for us to keep in mind here.

From my perspective, this feels like there's partisanship, a desire to win political points and assume what the conclusion will be of this study. I've done a bit of reading on this. Just looking back at some of the questions and testimony by members on this committee and other members of other parties in the House, it's obvious to me that quite a lot of comments have been made that assume this study's conclusion.

I would say this. What is the point of doing a study if we don't bring real, clear, honest, good-faith intentions in undertaking the study to get to a conclusion? If it's a foregone conclusion, then it seems like it's done for other purposes, and I call that into question. I just don't know.

I would like to say, for the record, that this committee has heard from senior officials from the Privy Council's Office about the norms and conventions regarding prorogation. Their testimony has reconfirmed for us what we've heard from multiple witnesses, namely, that prorogation is within the prerogative of the Governor General at the advice of the prime minister. This has been consistent. We've heard this over and over again.

Our government obviously believes, and has maintained all along, that we are being upfront with Canadians and explaining our decisions. This has not been the standard practice in the past. Conservative governments have made no attempt, as far as I can tell based on my research, to explain why they prorogued in the past. Stephen Harper prorogued, I think, four times. I calculated that Parliament was prorogued for something like 181 days in his time as prime minister. Some of those moments were quite controversial. Certainly, I'm sure the opposition benches were rightly skeptical about some of those, and I think that's fine.

In particular, in 2017, as members know, our government instituted a change that requires all governments going forward to table a report in the House of Commons explaining the reasons for prorogation. We have that report. This is a major improvement from the past, and I don't really hear anyone acknowledging that. Here we are in a pandemic and the government prorogued. I think there was a real rational basis for that based on the massive, full-court press approach that we all took collaboratively, and I think quite successfully, in the early stages of the pandemic and through the first wave.

Here we are, and the government has provided a detailed rationale. Instead of looking at the merits of that report, we're calling it into question. If there was a good-faith attempt at doing that, then I could see myself being very supportive. I think we have been very collaborative, in the sense that when the opposition parties wanted to dig further into this and do a study, we were very willing to undertake that. At this point, I feel like we've exhausted that study. We had witnesses who came forward—12 of them, in fact. We heard some substantial evidence. Perhaps that doesn't fit with what the opposition members want to try to prove, which they have no evidence for, which is something that is, really, from what I see, just being assumed.

Of course, committees have the ability to study certain matters. I know that PROC previously studied the prorogations of former governments.

● (1340)

Madam Chair, my concern is this. We've already heard loud and clear from opposition members and members of all parties on what they view to be the reasons behind prorogation. They've been clear on what they perceive the reasons to be, so I'm not sure what the purpose is of moving forward. We can belabour this, and keep studying and studying and studying, but there is so much other important business that we could be doing.

I believe in the role of opposition parties and the constructive relationship we can have in a minority Parliament. I really believe that this working together is extremely important. I'm just finding it hard to believe that there are good intentions here. There seems to be a presupposition of the conclusion. I have many examples of this.

I don't mean to pick on Mr. Blaikie at all, but the honourable member from the NDP said on January 28, at the very beginning of this study, that he believes it is “pretty clear...that the prerogative for prorogation was abused and was used to get the government out of a political crisis”. I mean, that showcases right there that you're putting your opinion and belief before actually undertaking the

study. You're leading with that opinion. You're looking for evidence to support that. The fact that you haven't gotten that at this point....

You've gotten a whole bunch of opinions from academics. You've heard from the House leader. I will note that we had the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, the leader of the government in the House of Commons. From the Privy Council Office we had Allen Sutherland, assistant secretary to the cabinet in the office of the deputy secretary to the cabinet; and Donald Booth, director of strategic policy and Canadian security to the Queen, machinery of government. These are two officials who....

Let me also say that people had turns to ask their questions. I went through the testimony, and Mr. Deltell and Mr. Therrien had two rounds. Mr. Blaikie had two rounds; Mr. Nater, Mr. Lukiwski. All asked very good questions of the government House leader. We had our round. It was a fair process. Everybody had their turn. We got the answers that the government provided in addition to the substantive report.

With regard to the officials, Ms. Vecchio had two rounds. Mr. Kent had a round; Mr. Therrien, Mr. Blaikie and Mr. Nater again. I hope I didn't miss anybody. There has been quite an opportunity here to question those officials and the government House leader. When I look at some of the other comments that individuals made prior to getting into the study, and even how they framed their questions, most of the questions assumed the conclusion they were looking for.

I guess what I'm asking is this: What's the point? Is this just a political play here to win points? I mean, it just seems pretty clear. Furthermore, the House leader for the Bloc Québécois said at the last meeting, before we even heard from witnesses, that it was clear to him that Parliament was prorogued to put an end to the work of the committees that were looking at the WE Charity scandal.

Madam Chair, would you call it a good-faith question when you're assuming the answer that you want to hear in the question itself? Like, what's a study for? A study is to explore an issue that we all think is important. This is one, we've agreed with you, where, okay, let's dig in further and study this. We've done that, at this point. It just seems like we've exhausted the list of witnesses.

● (1345)

Ms. Vecchio, I don't understand why you included certain witnesses in your motion. I wish you could tell us. Why is the Minister of Finance, for example, in the motion? It makes no sense to me. I don't understand why the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, the deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, would be in there.

Obviously, all of the other witnesses imply an agenda, which is to somehow link prorogation to WE Charity and the things that happened. I will note that I followed the work of the finance and the ethics committees and some of the other committees and I know most of that work picked up basically where it left off after prorogation. When I think about this from a rational perspective, I think the honourable members of this committee sometimes claim this was an attempt to shut down that committee work.

I'm on another standing committee, HUMA, and we resumed our work and put all the motions forward again in one, very large motion that put all of those things back on the agenda. My understanding is that other committees largely did the same. There may be some exceptions, but that work continued.

Also, I'd reference the Conservative member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, who rose in the House of Commons on September 24, 2020, to say “that the Prime Minister, we all know, decided to prorogue Parliament because of his involvement in the WE charity scandal”, and that prorogation was all about distraction. Furthermore on October 5, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman stated that, “The only reason we had prorogation by the Prime Minister...is the WE scandal”, and he went on to say that it was about trying to do a cover-up.

There seems to be a deliberate attempt here to put out these statements and conclusions without any evidence other than what we've heard from people, which I've hotly contested, that just because of the timing there are really good reasons the government prorogued at that time. It made sense to re-evaluate at a moment when we were in-between the first and second waves of COVID-19. It was a natural point at which you could reflect on how we were going to prepare for the second wave and how we were going to deal with the deep economic scarring and the incredible vulnerability that Canadians have been suffering through coming out of this.

Certainly I see how much work we did during that time. Mr. Blaikie has claimed that we took a break. We didn't take a break. So much consultation and so much work went into essentially trying to evaluate where we were as a country after this exhausting full-court press of a major global crisis. To me that seems very rational, and it coincides with what others have said. There's testimony on this from, I think, our first meeting. I can't remember the name of the person. I do have it here, but I won't go there yet. I'll save that one for a little later.

Essentially one of the many reasons that governments have prorogued throughout history was a major shift in context, which certainly causes people to ask if our priorities as a government are the same. Should we be re-evaluating them and ensuring that we have the confidence of the House and that we're addressing the needs of Canadians? To me that's responsive, responsible government.

• (1350)

Not only have we been more transparent than any government in history in Canada by tabling a report and undertaking a study willingly, but now we're also at a juncture where, okay, the opposition parties aren't getting what they want, so they're trying to bully or force us into delays that eventually, I'm sure, you want to continue and to—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Ms. Vecchio.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Thank you very much, Mr. Turnbull.

Of course, we don't want a delay, so we could have an option of either going to a vote or.... Unfortunately, I want to ensure that we not adjourn just because it's QP, and if that is the decision, we should be suspending and returning after QP if this issue has not been voted on and settled.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I am having the team look at resources. Right now other committees have the space occupied after this meeting, so we definitely have until 2 p.m. and—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** We have confirmed that. It should be good. Thank you.

• (1355)

**The Chair:** All right. Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

At the beginning of the very first meeting of this committee's study on the government's prorogation, the member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan had preamble in his question to Dr. Ian Brodie, former prime minister Harper's chief of staff, by saying that this committee is “charged with the responsibility of conducting a study on the reasons why this government and the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament.” He continued in the same breath to say, “Quite frankly, the reasons are crystal clear, and we all know it”, again, implying that they knew what was really going on and assuming the conclusion.

That same member, at the last meeting held on February 16 continued to show his pre-judgment of this matter and his inherent bias by stating without a study or concurrence by this committee that “It is clear to everyone in this committee, and I know it's clear to you as well, there was only one reason for prorogation being called in early August.” Again, this demonstrates that there's not a good faith intention being brought to this study. It's assuming the conclusion.

Again, what's the point of doing a study and not moving forward to our recommendations if the opposition already have their minds made up? This is really what we're seeing here. You have your mind made up, so what's the point in hearing from further witnesses. It doesn't make sense to me.

I think there's only one reason. Does the member think that prosecutors should also be able to sit on a jury and pre-submit their vote before an investigation starts? It seems kind of ridiculous, doesn't it?

Anyway, I'd be happy to engage in some good faith debate with some of the members opposite, but they make it increasingly difficult for me to give them the benefit of the doubt, and really, how could I?



The member went on to say that there was a “singular reason for doing so”, and by “so”, the record should reflect that the member is referring to prorogation. A singular reason, Madam Chair. It is baffling that the member and other members of his party and only opposition members can sit here and say, “Let's study prorogation and get to the bottom of this”. Get to the bottom of what, Madam Chair? It looks like they've already made up their minds long ago.

I have so many other statements here of members who have made claims about this over and over again. This is something they're trying to impress in people's minds. I would say it's merely for political points. It's trying to create a perception out there among Canadians that prorogation was done for the purpose that they want it to seem like it was done for. That's just not the case.

When you don't get the evidence that you want, do you keep searching and searching until you find what seems like it will support your theory? That's bad science. You haven't got what you want, and it's unfortunate, I guess, from your perspective, but it just doesn't make sense from my perspective as to why we continue delaying other important work that we have as a committee.

I have at least three other ideas of other studies that we could undertake. We have a list of other committee business that was provided to us in the brief in advance. There are a lot of important items of business here that could really be helping Canadians right now.

Madam Chair, I really find this motion confusing. First of all, I don't understand why Ms. Vecchio would want to hear from certain people in it. It doesn't make sense to me. I think for the reasons that I mentioned, it really assumes a conclusion that I think is reaching, at best.

• (1400)

I strongly oppose this motion because of the intentions with which it has been brought forward.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My colleagues will no doubt be pleased to hear that I don't intend to speak for very long. However, I would like to give you my point of view on the motion, and about the comments I've heard from my colleagues. I know that the member for La Prairie has already made his own comments, but as we are two different people, I'll allow myself to make my own.

I heard some arguments to the effect that some people have already testified before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I find it difficult to understand how this argument can hold water, because the people who have already testified before the Standing Committee on Finance did so before prorogation. Here today, we're asking for them to give evidence about prorogation. That's why their presence would not be entirely pointless simply because they previously testified before the Standing Committee on Finance.

We're being told that it's pointless to have more witnesses appear, and that we've already made up our minds. The evidence heard was mainly circumstantial or based on an analysis of prorogation criteria. It's relevant from that standpoint, because it could give us an idea of what the conclusions of an eventual report would be. However, as my colleague Ms. Petitpas Taylor mentioned, the prerogative for prorogation belongs to the Prime Minister. He is well aware of the factors that underpin his decision, hence the relevance of his testimony.

We've also been told that it's not relevant to have Minister Chagger come, or chief of staff Katie Telford. I think you'd have to be deliberately blind to say that it is frivolous to suggest that prorogation was used to hide the WE Charity scandal. It's certainly possible. The party in power may not be happy about it, but if I were in their shoes, I'd be uneasy about saying it's completely frivolous. Given the context, evidence from those affected by the WE Charity scandal definitely becomes relevant, even if only as circumstantial evidence.

What I was hearing about the very idea of a study of prorogation almost made me fearful. For example, someone said that it's the Prime Minister's prerogative and that we ought not to challenge it unduly, because the Prime Minister can do it and if he wants to do it then let him do it.

Moreover, in his testimony, professor Daniel Turp said that the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom had rendered a decision in the fall of 2019 ruling to the effect that even when there is a prerogative, it's a power that requires limitations. The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom came to a decision, indicating that there had been an abuse of power and ruled the prorogation at issue unlawful, thus cancelling it. In such a context, I think that the subject is altogether relevant, not only for what has just happened, but also for the future. After all, people on the government side mentioned that there had been four prorogations under the Conservative government. That's completely pertinent in the exercise of democracy. According to the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, prorogation cannot be exercised irrespectively of Parliament's capacity to perform its constitutional and legislative duties. It's altogether relevant to ask whether this prorogation was legitimate. Doing so would make it possible to establish criteria for the future, in the event of another prorogation.

Those then are my comments on what I heard from my colleagues. I now gladly turn the floor over to whomever is next.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Normandin.

Next we have Mr. Long.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm a bit of a pinch-hitter here. Why can't we just do this? The committee's going to come back on Thursday on this motion.

I now move that the committee be adjourned.

• (1405)

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, the question is on whether the committee should be adjourned.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Long.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon to everybody on PROC.

I'm happy to be here and happy to pinch-hit. This is probably my third time stepping in. I think I'll also be back on Thursday.

I just want to compliment everybody on this committee for the great work they're all doing on behalf of Canadians. Obviously we're a little bit sideways right now, in my opinion, but the work that PROC does, and certainly the work all of us do on behalf of all Canadians, is instrumental and vital to an effective Parliament.

Certainly, we're in difficult times. I think we've all been stretched to the max. I remember coming back from Ottawa on March 13. It seems like yesterday, and it's hard to believe it's been a year. It's been almost a year since we've come back. We came back on March 13 not knowing quite what to expect, not knowing how long this road would be. I look back also with a sense of pride. Certainly on behalf of the constituents of Saint John—Rothesay, as their member of Parliament, my team and I—my team of Jeanette Arsenault, Jody Wheaton and Kevin Collins—stood up and answered the bell for Canadians.

One thing that's abundantly clear is that Canadians want a government that has their backs, that is responsive to their needs and stands up for them. It's abundantly clear to me that's what Canadians want from their parliamentarians, their members of Parliament, right now. They want us to get to work on behalf of Canadians.

I want to speak on this motion before us, which proposes bringing forward yet more witnesses for this study on the government's reasons for proroguing Parliament in August 2020. As my friend and colleague MP Turnbull said, there have been plenty of witnesses who have come before the committee and lots of questions were asked by all parliamentarians of these witnesses, and sometimes it's abundantly clear that some parliamentarians are looking for an outcome. They know what outcome they want, and they're trying to continue to ask for more witnesses so they can do that. They want this to be extended to try to find the answer they want. It's not the answer that's obviously abundantly clear.

In my riding of Saint John—Rothesay, I haven't had a call, not one call, in my constituency office about this. Like my friend and colleague to the north of me by about an hour and 15 minutes, MP Petitpas Taylor, I also do AMAs regularly. "AMA", for those who don't know is, "ask me anything". We had almost 7,000 views of our AMA last week. We put it out there. Ask me anything. Let's talk about issues that are important to you. We probably had 300 questions. Was there anything about prorogation? No.

Sometimes they call this something that's important to the "bubble" or to the "Ottawa circle". It's not important to my constituents. My constituents are concerned about getting back to work, making sure that, if their work has been delayed or cancelled or they've been laid off, that our government has the proper support for them, whether it's the CERB, the CRB or expanded EI, or whether they're a business and they've applied to the wage subsidy, the rent support

or CEBA, the business loan, a \$40,000 loan of which only \$30,000 is repayable. There is no interest on that loan as long as you pay it back by December 2022. Then we added another \$20,000 on top of that.

● (1410)

Canadians want to know that we're there for them. Canadians want to make sure that Parliament is working well right now. I believe that the committee has done what it's required to do and has fulfilled its obligation in regard to the study.

To be honest, I am of the belief that the opposition has moved this motion not to actually gather vital information that could decide the outcome of any report by this committee, but to yet again follow the lead of some other committees to score political points.

The opposition members, and the Conservatives in particular, have made no secret of the fact that they already knew enough about the prorogation, as they have made hundreds of statements to that effect to the media, and their followers, within hours of the prorogation's taking effect. The Conservatives have been quick to call this a cover-up, but the Conservatives cannot be too loud here.

Let's take a few moments to see what the recent history of prorogation has been. I still consider myself somewhat new to politics. I started in 2015 with a dream of representing my community. Before that, I was part owner and president of Saint John Sea Dogs. Some of you are probably tired. Mr. Blaikie heard a lot about the Saint John Sea Dogs at previous committees. In our first session, we sat on the ethics committee, and I'm proud of that.

I'm also proud of the past, and I was proud to bring a Memorial Cup to this wonderful city. We were the quickest expansion team to actually win a Memorial Cup. We started as an expansion team in 2005 and won in 2011.

Back to the motion, I want to take a few moments to see what the recent history has been.

In April through October of 2010, PROC was seized with the issue of prorogation during the time of Prime Minister Harper. Harper used prorogation on a regular basis, sometimes for many months. The most egregious use of prorogation was to save his political hide to prevent the opposition from moving a motion of non-confidence in 2008. I would recommend to all members of the committee that they read the evidence from those meetings, as well as the report that emanated from its study.

In 2010, I was knee-deep in hockey, and travelling the country with my Saint John Sea Dogs hockey team, but I do remember it. I do remember how at that point Prime Minister Harper prorogued with a minority government. He prorogued to avoid a defeat. I remember that. I remember the talk around the country how he used that.

For the education of some members who either were not in the House at the time or unaware of what happened, I would like to give a very brief explanation of what did happen.

In 2008–09, during the 40th Canadian Parliament, the Conservative government of the day created legitimate outrage on a national scale because of its prorogation of the House. It was triggered by the express intention of the opposition parties, who together held a majority of seats in the House of Commons, to defeat the Conservative minority government on a motion of non-confidence six weeks after the federal election of October 14, 2008.

The intention to vote non-confidence arose from the government's fiscal update [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

• (1415)

**The Chair:** Was that from the interpreter?

We might need to suspend, as we've lost interpretation.

**The Clerk:** Yes, Madam Chair. We'll check to see how we've lost interpretation.

**The Chair:** We'll suspend for a minute.

• (1415)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1430)

**The Chair:** Welcome back.

I believe we were with Mr. Long, if he's ready to continue.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome back, everybody. I'm sure you were all waiting with bated breath for me to start this up again. I'm happy to oblige, for sure.

Let me see. Where was I? Is anybody able to tell me where I stopped?

I'm just joking.

**The Chair:** I remember the team that you wanted to work with. That's about it. That was the highlight.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Just skip to the good parts, Wayne. I keep waiting for the good part. I haven't heard it yet.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Daniel, I have a checklist here. Saint John—check. Memorial Cup—check.

At least we can laugh.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I appreciate that you're not wasting paper by devising new checklists all the time.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Indeed, my friend.

When the chair was good enough to give us a 10-minute recess, I was talking about me not even being involved in politics.

I remember then prime minister Harper proroguing in 2008. I recall what an uproar it was. He prorogued six weeks after a federal election.

The intention to vote non-confidence arose from the government's fiscal update tabled on November 27, 2008. It included several contentious provisions that the opposition parties rejected. The Liberal party and the New Democratic Party reached an accord to form a minority coalition government. The Bloc Québécois agreed to provide support on confidence votes, thereby enabling the coal-

tion to have a working majority in the Commons. I do recall that, absolutely.

On December 4, 2008, then Governor General Michaëlle Jean granted Prime Minister Stephen Harper a prorogation.

Before any member thinks that this is not relevant to the motion before us in regard to calling witnesses, I can assure you that if you listen a little longer, you will see.

The background to this is that on November 28, 2008, Stephen Harper referred to the accord between the Liberals and NDP as undemocratic backroom dealing, stating that the opposition parties were overturning the results of an election a few weeks earlier in order to form a coalition nobody voted for. The Liberals indicated that they intended to present their motion of non-confidence on December 8.

The government then cancelled opposition day, originally to be held on December 1—

• (1435)

**Mr. John Nater:** I have point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Nater.

**Mr. John Nater:** I'm just curious whether or not Mr. Long will be reading the entire Wikipedia article that he seems to be citing word for word from the 2008-09 Canadian Parliamentary dispute?

If he is just planning to recite Wikipedia then perhaps he could table it and let us get on with voting on the resolution.

**The Chair:** Perhaps he would like to table it. He can probably explain.

I would like to interject at this point. Of course, you have to relate it back to the motion at hand.

There has been a lot of latitude given by many chairs. I served quite a lot of time under the leadership of the previous chair of this committee. I recall Mr. Nater also reciting from many textbooks during those times. As long as he related it back to the motion, I saw that Mr. Bagnell had allowed for such references to be made.

I wasn't there at the time Mr. Lukiwski was chair. I've heard he was a very fair chair and allowed for some latitude as well.

I will allow it as long as there's a point of reference to the motion and a connection made.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I certainly intend to continue with my speech. I will add some colour here and there to make sure that we bring it back to the motion and at least, certainly, include the relevance of what I'm saying.

Again, as a proud two-time member of Parliament now, I feel like a veteran. I guess I'm in my sixth year, believe it or not. I have a job to do. I have a job to represent my constituents here in this riding and in Ottawa. I have to do the work that my constituents elected me to do: to represent them on behalf of all Canadians and continue to be a part of making Parliament work. Part of making Parliament work is good dialogue, good exchanges and, certainly, differences of opinion and ideology. However, in the end, I think everybody on this committee—certainly all of my colleagues—wants to see us move forward with things that are important to Canadians, things that Canadians care about. I know that the constituents in my riding want me to represent them in a way that they're proud of and to do things that help them, whether that's, like I said earlier, programs from our government to help them through COVID or infrastructure investment.

Anyway, let's get back to my motion, Madam Chair.

I forget where I was in the country—I think, actually, I was in Val-d'Or or Rouyn-Noranda—but I remember Prime Minister Harper's cancelling opposition day and what an uproar that was. He cancelled that day on December 1, and that meant that the earliest a coalition non-confidence motion could occur would be the following week, December 8.

The Conservatives hold the record in modern times for the prorogation of Parliament. Let's take a quick walk back in history to see.

During the 41st Parliament, the Harper government, in October 2013, shut down Parliament for 33 days to avoid questions on the Senate expense scandal and the resulting PMO cover-up. In the 40th Parliament, the Harper government shut down Parliament for 63 days to avoid the Afghan detainee issue. In 2008, as I mentioned earlier, the Harper Conservatives shut down Parliament to avoid a confidence vote that would have toppled the government. This shutdown last 53 days. Again, let's think about that; they prorogued to avoid a confidence vote. In 2007, the Harper government shut down Parliament to declare mission accomplished on five priorities from the election, and it took 32 days before bringing in a new Speech from the Throne.

After all that was done, how many times do you think Stephen Harper was before a committee to explain his reasons for prorogation? How many times? Was it two times? Was it three times? Did he go every time, like this committee seems to want? No. The answer is zero; he didn't appear.

On August 19, Pierre Poilievre—who was, prior to his demotion, the Conservative finance critic—alongside Michael Barrett, publicly stated that the prorogation was a cover-up to shut down the study with regard to WE Charity. Poilievre falsely claimed that documents provided by the government were redacted to assist in this supposed cover-up. This, of course, ignored the fact that the government House leader's office distributed the documents to all parties, and it turned out that they were only redacted in line with privacy legislation. Again, Madam Chair, the Conservatives are never ones to let facts get in the way of their arguments, and this is the case here.

• (1440)

Prorogation, of course, did not and cannot stop a committee from resuming a study that was under way prior to prorogation or, for that matter, starting a new study on any topic within the mandate of the committee, and that is evidenced by the fact that numerous committees did hear from and still are hearing from witnesses on the WE matter. The focus is, of course, much less due to the fact that after hearing from all the witnesses and seeing all the documents, no—zero—proof exists that there was any political interference by political actors in regard to choosing WE Charity to administer the agreement.

I know this fact is disturbing to the opposition, who seem to love using parliamentary time and resources on chasing their tails in attempts to smear this government and score cheap political points, but, Madam Chair, the facts of this are clear. The prorogation was put in place to allow for a bit of resetting of priorities in light of the resignation of the Minister of Finance and likely more importantly to address issues in regard to the pandemic, which members on this side believe are among the most if not the most important issues facing Parliament, the government, and the vast majority of the Canadian public. I think all of us, Madam Chair, would hold that to be true. Look at the people who come into our constituency offices. Look at the calls we take.

Madam Chair, I believe this committee should get down to getting the report written and move on to studying something that is actually relevant to everyday Canadians, something that everyday Canadians, our constituents, care about.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The next speaker we have is Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor:** Hello, Madam Chair.

First of all, thank you so much, and thank you to my friend and colleague Wayne Long, for his speech. I know we have an awful lot in common, being in the same province. I always appreciate hearing about the Sea Dogs and whatever else he has to share with us.

I would like to bring forward a motion to suspend the meeting until this Thursday, and I would like to proceed immediately to a vote on that.

**The Chair:** Okay.

It's a superseding motion, so I have been advised that we can move to a vote on that motion at this point.

I just want to clarify that the timing would be this Thursday at our regular 11 a.m. time slot.

Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Thank you to all of you and your staff and to the interpreters, especially. It's not easy going for that long. Thank you for accommodating the member's request to debate this issue. We really do appreciate it.

We will see you all back on Thursday at 11 a.m.

Thank you.

• (5900)

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting back to order.

The committee is resuming meeting number 25 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, as you are all aware, from Tuesday's session. This meeting was suspended on February 23. This is the 25th meeting, as I said, and it's February 25 at 11 a.m.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. Therefore members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind all participants of this meeting that screenshots and taking photos of your screen are not permitted.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation, and consistent with health recommendations, all those attending the meeting in person... I didn't have a chance to check because I logged on late, but I don't think we have anyone attending currently in person, though we never know when we have substitutes, which did happen last time.

Those in the room and those who are getting substitutes into the meeting, I just want to remind everyone that, if they are in the room, they have to maintain a two-metre physical distance and wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It's also highly recommended that they wear a mask at all times, even when they are seated. Also, they must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the room entrance.

As the chair, I'll be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank members in advance for your co-operation.

For those participating virtually, which right now is everyone, I'd like to outline a few rules to follow. Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French audio. With the latest Zoom version you may now speak in the language of your choice without the need to select the corresponding language channel.

You will also notice that the platform's "raise hand" feature is now in a more easily accessed location on the main toolbar, should you wish to speak or to alert the chair.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in the committee room. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on your microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled by the proceedings and verification officer.

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair, and when you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

There is another interesting thing I just want to mention before we resume our business. If we are to settle the first item of our business today, which is Ms. Vecchio's motion, there are three motions by Mr. Therrien that have been put on notice, and there is a second motion by Mr. Blaikie that was put on notice on Tuesday. This is in addition to the study motion that he put forward, so you may want to take a look at those.

When we left off last time, we had a speaking list and on that speaking list was Madam Pettipas Taylor. I'm just checking. Is someone subbing in for Ms. Pettipas Taylor today?

• (5905)

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I am.

**The Chair:** Okay, Mr. Long is subbing in for her.

I believe we will go to the next person on the list since Ms. Pettipas Taylor is not here, and—correct me if I'm wrong, Clerk—it was Ms. Vecchio who was next after Ms. Pettipas Taylor.

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, the member after Madam Pettipas Taylor was Mr. Lauzon, and Mr. Lauzon isn't here either.

Therefore, it's Ms. Vecchio.

**The Chair:** Perfect.

Ms. Vecchio, you are next on the list.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Thank you very much.

I won't take too much time today. We all know what we are looking for. This motion was put forward to do a reinvestigation to the Prime Minister specifically, and there was a list of other people who were on that motion as well. The subcommittee had taken this to the committee where we had all agreed, unanimously, to have these invitations sent out.

We have yet to hear from the Prime Minister's Office, and perhaps since this floor is open now, without losing my opportunity, perhaps the clerk can provide to me detail on the invitations that have been sent out and the feedback to date, if you don't mind.

**The Clerk:** Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

Invitations were sent to the Prime Minister, and we are still waiting for a response one way or the other from the Prime Minister.

An invitation was sent to the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Ms. Katie Telford. We're waiting for a response to her invitation as well.

An invitation was sent to Minister Freeland, and we are still currently waiting for a response from Minister Freeland.

The same goes for Minister Chagger. An invitation was made, but we are still waiting for a response from Minister Chagger.

An invitation was made to Marc and Craig Kielburger. The dates that were offered did not work for them. Alternative dates were provided to them, and I am still waiting to hear back whether those would be acceptable.

An invitation was made to Farah and Martin Perelmuter from Speakers' Spotlight. They have declined the committee's invitation.

An invitation was made to Bill Morneau. Mr. Morneau got back to me and declined the invitation as well.

An invitation was also made to Pablo Rodriguez, and Pablo Rodriguez did appear before the committee last week on February 16.

An invitation was made to Ian Shugart, the Clerk of the Privy Council, as well as Ian McCowan, the deputy secretary to cabinet. They were not available, but senior officials from the Privy Council Office appeared last week, on February 16.

That's the state of play as of this morning.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Mr. Clerk, maybe you can share with me some information.

On what date were the invitations sent to the Prime Minister's Office and to Katie Telford specifically?

**The Clerk:** I would have to check back on the specific date that I sent them. They were sent out on the day immediately following the day this committee adopted the steering committee report to invite all of those additional witnesses.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I think it has been three to four weeks then.

What is the normal turnaround time on invitations? How quickly do we usually hear a response back from witnesses?

**The Clerk:** In all honesty, there's no real timeline. It varies tremendously from one witness to another. Sometimes you hear back from them the day you send the invitation out. Other times it might take several days or even longer.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Excellent. I just wanted to get some of that for clarification as we're discussing this today. I know there will be a lot of rhetoric that comes out and sharing of different things. That's why I wanted to get some of these things on the record just to indicate that invitations have already been sent out following a decision by this committee.

• (5910)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Madam Chairperson.

You have my apologies, Ms. Vecchio, for interrupting what you were saying, but I just wanted to get some clarity at the beginning because I think it's really important as I'm anticipating that this could be debated for a little while yet.

I'm not too sure of the process. Am I to take it, Madam Chair, that it is appropriate that, if a member is actually speaking, they can actually pose questions of the staff that support the committee, to have that interjection in order to assist them in their discussions during what might be considered their debate time?

I always thought when you had the floor you used the floor, and you were not able to pose a question and to get the question answered. The only interruption would, in fact, be for a point of order.

I much prefer what I just witnessed, and I think that's a responsible way of doing it. I know I too have some questions that I would like to be able to ask when it does come to my turn to be able to speak.

I raise it now only because the Conservative member has illustrated that Liberal members, or in fact all members of the committee and those MPs who want to be able to participate going forward, would have the same right to do exactly what it is that's been done here.

I just want to make clear that it is, in fact, the proper process.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

I didn't quite understand at the beginning, but I'm understanding that you're asking whether, once a member speaks, they cede the floor so that the clerk answers and then somebody else would have the floor. Right now what you're seeing is that there's an interjection and then the floor goes back to Ms. Vecchio, in this instance.

That is interesting. Informally, we have done that, but in terms of formal debate, maybe I will let the clerk clarify because I think there is some discretion for that. I feel like we've been doing it this way, but maybe it is good to have a clear understanding.

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, I'm not sure if there's any specific procedural advice I can provide to you or to the rest of the committee on that point, other than to say that it does seem to be something that this committee has done before, and not just with me. Even when considering a draft report, the committee has sought clarifications from the committee staff, whether it's me or whether it's the analyst, on factual information that the staff might have and that members or the full committee might be interested in hearing about.

**The Chair:** That was my thought, so then all members would continue to have that ability.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Wonderful.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Thank you very much to the Liberal member and the deputy House leader for being so kind with his words as well. I think that's just some of the points of clarification on this process and why this motion was put forward. This motion clearly indicated that it was regarding documentation. It's regarding discussions regarding prorogation. We're not asking for other things. We're asking about discussions that happened regarding prorogation.

I recognize that many people have gone back and they've talked about prorogations that have happened in the past. They've talked about the prorogations in 2004, 2008 and a variety of different things. Yes, that's great to put on the record, but I do want to put on the record as well that in 2017 there was a change, and this change was made because the Prime Minister said he wanted to be open, transparent and accountable to Canadians.

In the Standing Orders there was a change, so that if there was going to be prorogation, a report would have to follow that, tabled by the Crown. That has been done.

For any other report, and I can even think about what we've done in the past with the elections report, when somebody has a written report, or when a report has been tabled in their name, we have always had the opportunity to ask members about that report. We can think of the election study we just did. There was a report put in by the Chief Electoral Officer. We had questions about it. He was able to come to our committee and he was able to discuss that. That is what a report is for. It shouldn't just be a written report, slam dunk and it's done. There are many things in this, and I think if we're going to talk about open, accountable and transparent government the way that, in 2017, this was modelled, why would he not be willing to come to committee to discuss this report?

I recognize that everybody is going to say, you're doing this, this and this, but we are also setting a precedent here and I want to bring in what Daniel Blaikie said. This is the first time, because this is the first time this committee has put forward a report. We can talk about how no other Prime Minister has done this before, and that is correct. There has not been a precedent set for a Prime Minister to do this, but now there has been.

If we want to make sure that we are doing the right things for Canadians, not just for today but in the future, to make sure that our prime ministers are accountable when they're prorogating, regardless of what political party we're talking about, this is the way. We are setting the precedent for the future, not just for today. I just want to leave that with the Liberal members. I think it's really important.

I also know that there have been lots of indications that people don't want to have this reopened. I know that yesterday, and I'm just going to put this on the record, one of the members got very excited on Twitter because there were multiple polls put out. There were multiple polls put out in both French and English and the data has come in. If you need transparency, if you want to see what that data we collected was, it was showing over 60% in favour of the Prime Minister's coming to committee.

The only one that was shared unfortunately by the Liberal MPs of this committee was the English version on Twitter, but not looking at the official languages because we wanted to consider that and the different forums and templates that we're using this on. All of that information has been compiled, not that it's an official poll by any means, but the thing is this: Let's just get to the bottom of this. As I indicated, we are setting precedents. We are setting what we expect from all of our future leaders. If this current leader is not willing to do this, then he has ruined it for the rest of the country perhaps, if he's talking about being transparent.

I just want to put that forward. I look forward to any of the commentary that makes sense today and hopefully we will be able to get through this so that we can have this come to a vote.

I'm going to ask Mr. Clerk now, can we take this? I'm looking for consensus so that we can go to a vote. Are we able to go to a vote now, Mr. Clerk? I would like to call the vote on this motion.

• (5915)

**The Chair:** We had this happen in the last meeting as well. I don't think the clerk or you can call the vote in that way.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

I apologize for interrupting your flow, but I can't hear the interpreter very well.

[*English*]

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, we'll check on that and try to get the volume increased.

**The Chair:** Mr. Clerk, your volume was also very low just now.

Does the interpretation volume sound good, Monsieur Therrien?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Yes, that's better. Thank you very much.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Madam Chair, I have a point of order on the same subject.

It's true that the sound volume for your comments and those of the clerk is not balanced. One is very loud and the other is very low. Everything needs to be balanced as much as possible, whether for your comments, the clerk's or Ms. Vecchio's, for example.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** On a point of order, I hear what Mr. Arseneault is saying, but when it comes from Mr. Therrien, it starts very low and then the volume gradually reaches up within five or six seconds. It means that we do miss the very beginning, unless the translator is starting that few seconds behind.

**The Chair:** It wasn't always that way, was it? I noticed it just at the last meeting.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Yes. It's more now.

**The Chair:** I noticed it when somebody was switching in their speech from English to French and they were doing it without a pause. They just continued to speak. You had that gap, because the volume just changed all of a sudden. It was very low.

I feel like we need to tell our witnesses—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** You're right, Madam Chair. However, it was worse. We couldn't hear the interpreter very well, but the sound was certainly louder.

My colleague was right to say that there was a big difference, but it's better now. It's okay for me.

[*English*]

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, the technicians in the back have fine-tuned the volume a bit. They'll try to continuously adjust it if we continue to have a problem.

• (5920)

**The Chair:** Your volume is not very good to me, Mr. Clerk.

**The Clerk:** Is that right? I'm having a problem now.

**The Chair:** It's getting better.

**The Clerk:** Okay.

I was just saying that the technicians are fine-tuning the volume and adjusting it as we go. If there are any other issues like that, please just let us know and we'll try to continue to improve it.

**The Chair:** I know that we're being told with the new version of Zoom that you don't need to switch between your interpretation languages in your tool box. Let me know if this is not an appropriate suggestion, but I would suggest that if a member is changing languages from French to English, maybe they could be mindful and try to take a one- or two-second pause before they switch to the other language they're speaking. When the translators switch the channel, we don't hear the volume immediately at the level we should be hearing it at.

If you're a very talented person and bilingual and like to switch back and forth between the languages, which I love to see, just be mindful to leave a gap of a few seconds there. I think it would help for those listening to the interpretation.

At any rate, Ms. Vecchio had called for a vote. I need consensus to move to a vote and for the debate to finish on that motion for it to go to a vote. You can't just call for a vote in that way.

I can see at least four hands up, at this point—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Madam Speaker, I see that this isn't going to go on. I see that it's all Liberal members. Welcome to today's filibuster.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Next we have Mr. Long.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Chair, on a point of order, if I may, before you go to Mr. Long, I just want to make sure that in fact I'm registered to be able to be on the speakers list. Ms. Vecchio and others have kind of inspired me to want to add some thoughts on the issue. If you could just provide me the assurance that I am on the list, I would very much appreciate it.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I have a point of order on that. How many members are able to be on the speaking list?

**The Chair:** I don't think there's a limit to the speakers list.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I'm just referring to each party. Is somebody else giving up their time? I'm just wondering about subs. Is this a sub or is this a person just sharing their time?

**The Chair:** I see what you're saying. Let's see if the official paperwork has been received by the clerk. If so, I believe that Mr. Lamoureux is here as an official sub.

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, I believe Mr. Lamoureux isn't here as an official sub. He's a member sitting in on the meeting, which members can do in a public meeting, which this is.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Perfect. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Can members speak if they're just sitting in?

**The Clerk:** Generally, the practice has been to put them in the speaking list if they do want to speak. Their turn comes up when their turn comes up.

**The Chair:** That is what I've seen previously as well, but I just wanted to.... I know that these types of procedural issues can become contentious in a meeting like this, and I wanted to be certain and clear.

Mr. Lamoureux, you are on the speakers list. You are after Mr. Fragiskatos.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** On a point of order, Madam Chair, you said my name right, just at the end there. If you just clip that and run with it, you'll be great.

**The Chair:** I know. Sometimes I want to reverse the "R" and put the "A" in front, and that messes me up. Thank you for that.

Thank you for your patience and for not getting irritated with me about that.

Mr. Long, it's your turn.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon to all my colleagues.

I have just one thing on the interpretation. I wanted to jump in there. If you go to the interpretation button and click on "mute" or "unmute original audio", sometimes that will help fix that problem of both voices coming through at the same time. I just wanted to add that. I'm not a computer technician, but that's what I was told last time.

Again, thank you. I'm happy to sub in on PROC again. I feel like a regular now. I think I've attended probably five or six meetings in the last few weeks. I love coming in here. I thank you, Chair, and certainly all the committee members, for all the great work you're doing on behalf of Canadians.

I'm thrilled today to see a real strong New Brunswick flavour to the committee. My two friends and colleagues, Serge Cormier and René Arseneault, from the north part of the province, are on the meeting too. Don't be envious of Saint John, guys. It is +6°C here today and I know it's probably -20°C in northern New Brunswick, but things will get warmer up there for you soon, I'm sure.

Madam Chair, we're obviously here to talk about the motion, and I have some thoughts, but I do want to read this into the record. I know that there were some polls done. MP Vecchio referenced some polls being done. I'm looking at the Twitter polls and, to her point, there were French and English Twitter polls done. There were almost 6,000 votes between the two. The numbers on the Twitter polls of 6,000 votes were, give or take, that 60% said "no" and 40% said "yes". That's for both Twitter polls, both French and English. I just wanted to make sure that this was read in.



Again, we're here for this motion. I'm here to speak on the motion. I just want to go back very briefly to talk about when I first came to Ottawa as a member of Parliament. Obviously, that was in 2015. I'm a two-term MP now. I don't feel like a veteran, but I guess I am. I remember going to committee. I was excited to be on committee at that point. As some people will remember, I was on HUMA and on the ethics committee. I was certainly excited to participate in the committees and to debate and to ask questions of people who presented.

I can remember calling ministers in, whether it was for supps or what have you. I won't name the minister or the MP on the Conservative side, but I can remember when the minister came in once—

● (5925)

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** On a point of order, Madam Chair, for all those watching at home—I'm sure there are millions of Canadians tuning in—the short form is what we tend to use in the committee. As MPs, we all know what “supps” means, but for the record and, again, for the benefit of those watching, I wonder if our colleague could just put on the record the long form of “supps”.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Yes, it's the supplementary estimates. It gives them an opportunity to ask questions of the ministers or departments or what have you.

I can remember all parties, whether they were in opposition or government or the third party or what have you, wanting ministers to appear before committee to ask questions. I can remember, and again, I was a rookie, sitting back and watching a minister literally being—to put it in words is hard—attacked. He was attacked again and again and again. This minister couldn't even get the answers out.

That's when it hit me—and I want to get back to the motion—that the opposition didn't want that minister there to ask that minister relevant questions or important questions on behalf of Canadians. On the contrary, they wanted the minister there for a snippet, a clip or a quote. That's when I started to say, hold on here.

I want to get back to this motion. Let's be straight up here. The Prime Minister is in the House of Commons every Wednesday for question period. This is just one example, and we went through this yesterday. To his credit, he takes questions for the whole question period. I don't want to say that's unprecedented, but certainly in my limited political experience I had not seen that before, that the Prime Minister of Canada comes and actually doesn't defer questions to ministers or other people. He doesn't sidestep. He stands there and takes questions from everybody for two hours.

I'll go back to the motion. I know this is all about getting the Prime Minister to come into PROC to testify, but I ask this question of the committee: If these questions need to be asked of the Prime Minister, why can't these questions be asked in question period? Again, as my New Brunswick colleagues will know, I'm not a political machine here. I was elected to represent my riding and I was elected to fight for my riding. On the actual political side of things, even though I'm a politician, I will admit that I'm not as strong as others are.

The Prime Minister is available each and every Wednesday to take questions. If these questions need to be asked so badly, why

can't they be asked in question period? The last time I checked, the Conservative Party had lots of opportunities to ask questions, so why can't the questions be asked there? They would be asked in front of all Canadians, in front of all reporters, to be scrutinized, to be talked about on TV that night and to be in the papers the next day. He's available. He's there for opposition parties to ask questions of him.

I don't want to go too far down that hole. It really struck me this morning when I was thinking about this meeting. I can remember when previous prime ministers would duck question period. They wouldn't be available. You can count on your hand how many times they were available to take questions, yet the Prime Minister is there week in, week out, every Wednesday, standing there taking questions from opposition parties. It doesn't matter if you're the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the next party or a backbencher. It doesn't matter; he answers the questions.

● (5930)

Then I go back to the fact that he's available to answer questions and he does. What's the big deal about getting him here to answer questions when he's available to answer questions? I just wanted to state that. Again, I certainly am the first to admit that I have some good support on the parliamentary side on the whys, hows and whats, but he's there to answer questions on Wednesdays, and I don't understand why those questions can't be asked.

The motion's there. I'm here to talk about the motion. I was certainly very appreciative of the opportunity I had last time to speak on the motion. I know everyone on this committee was waiting with bated breath for every word I said, and I certainly appreciated that. I could tell by looking at the Zoom screen that people were anticipating what was coming next and were excited for what was to come, but time did run out last time. Time did run out, unfortunately.

I want to pick up where I left off last time. I was talking about the historical precedent. I know it has been said earlier in the meeting, conveniently, with the greatest respect, of course, “That was then and this is now” or “Don't worry about the past. It doesn't matter what happened then. It doesn't matter what Prime Minister Harper did. It doesn't matter about the proroguing and about the minority government and proroguing to save his government. This is about now.” However, it's important. It's important for the committee. It's important for me to talk about that.

With respect to the motion and keeping the motion in mind, it's important to talk about what happened in the past to educate ourselves and to educate Canadians from coast to coast about prorogation, what it means, how it's used, how it can be abused and how, at other times, it's not abused—how sometimes it's the proper thing to do, the right thing to do, when you're dealt with a curveball, with a generational pandemic. That does not moderately change our lives. It has impacted every one of our lives in a major way.

Little did I know when I came back on March 13 from Ottawa how quickly things would change for us, how our world would change, how our country would change, how the way we needed to govern would change, how what we needed to do would change, how we needed to pivot and how we needed to come up with programs for Canadians, whether it was the wage subsidy, CEBA, CERB, the recovery benefit, expanded EI, rent relief—the list goes on and on. We all know them off by heart.

I can remember at the end of March wondering if I could remember the names for CERB and all that stuff. I think all of us go to bed at night quoting CERB and the programs that we have delivered. Things change, and we did need to reboot, if you will, to restart, reload and refocus. It was the proper thing to do. It was the right thing to do, and it was needed.

First and foremost, I want to talk, again, about history. I want to get back to the motion on that. It's important for Canadians to have the proper context when they're watching us and making decisions on whether this is the right thing or the wrong thing to do, and whether PROC should be seized with this when so much is going on in our country.

● (5935)

I did a quick tally this morning again, preparing for this. I'm very active on social media. I'm very active on Facebook. Last week, I did four posts. On one site, I did three videos. The videos were seen by, give or take, 65,000 people, the three videos. There were over 1,000 comments, including my “Ask Me Anything”, which I referenced at the last meeting. There were 1,000 comments about what we needed to do as a government, what we needed to focus on, where we needed to go and how we needed to deliver for Canadians.

Do you know how many comments talked about prorogation and PROC, and asked for the Prime Minister to appear before PROC, for what I would classify as a theatrical event? Do you know how many out of those 1,000 comments? I see my good friend MP Turnbull put up the proper amount. It was zero, none, because Canadians want their members of Parliament, all of us, in all parties, to govern. They want us to have their backs. They do not want us spending time on things such as this.

A couple of MPs would know where my office is. I'm in a mall, for what it's worth. If I walked out my office door right now, if I walked out into the mall today and asked the first 100 people who walked by my door whether they were aware of this, were concerned about this, knew about it or cared about it, I'll tell you straight up, none of them would, because Canadians are concerned about where they're getting their next paycheque and whether they're going to be employed. If they lose their jobs, are there bene-

fits for them? That's what they're concerned about. Is there a business account loan, if they can save their business? Is there rent relief?

Those are the things Canadians are seized with. They are not seized with us sitting here talking about trying to get the Prime Minister to come in. As you know, I've sat on PROC a bit, and hopefully people are happy about that, but I've also listened to witness after witness's testimony, and we're still searching. It's like we're an answer searching for a question. It's like we're not getting what we want to hear so we're going to continue. We're going to continue to move on, and we're going to continue to try to get the Prime Minister come in. We're going to try to continue to get a sound clip here and there. I'm just imploring all of us that Canadians aren't seized with this and the polls show it.

Anyway, I want to get back to the motion. I want to get back to make sure Canadians have context. In April through October, in 2010, the same committee was seized with prorogation when Prime Minister Harper was in. We know he used prorogation regularly. He used it on a regular basis for many months. It was a regular thing.

● (5940)

I would say the most egregious use of prorogation was to save their government from a non-confidence vote, and he did it.

Again, for the education of members who were not in the House at that time and are unaware of what happened, in 2008-09, during the 40th Canadian Parliament, the Conservative government of the day created legitimate outrage on a national scale for the prorogation of the House. I remember it. I wasn't even involved in politics; in fact, being an MP was the furthest thing from my mind. It was really far from my mind. I was in hockey, I was travelling the country, but I remember that. I remember watching it on TV on CTV and CBC and all the channels.

I remember how they were talking about how he prorogued to avoid the non-confidence vote, and that's when I was, like, isn't that interesting. How is he allowed to do that?

It was triggered by the express intention of the opposition parties. We were going to work together. The opposition parties held the majority of seats in the House and we were going to defeat the Conservative minority government on a motion of non-confidence, and it was only six weeks after the federal election of October 14, 2008.

The intention to vote non-confidence arose from the government's fiscal update, tabled on November 27, 2008. It included several contentious provisions that the opposition parties rejected. The Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party reached an accord to form a minority coalition government. Imagine.

The Bloc Québécois agreed to provide support on confidence votes, thereby enabling the coalition a working majority in the Commons.

On December 4, 2008, then Governor General—

• (5945)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I just want to raise an issue.

It's come to my attention that someone, a member of this committee or someone who is involved in this committee, has been putting screenshots on the Internet. I am not sure whether that's allowed in the official rules, but I'm pretty sure....

Let me ask for your clarification on this. Is that appropriate behaviour for parliamentarians?

My understanding is that we aren't allowed to take any photos of these meetings.

**The Chair:** Yes, and I did mention at the beginning of the meeting that no members are to take screenshots or pictures of their screen of this committee proceeding.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Are we able to tell, Madam Chair, who it is? It's clearly not me. My hands are tied up with my speech.

I would like to think that didn't actually happen and that there are not screenshots of this meeting on social media.

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** There is a picture of Mr. Long speaking at the meeting that's been posted on the Internet.

**Hon. Peter Kent:** Madam Chair, this is a public meeting and people who are watching on the Internet can obviously take screenshots themselves.

Rather than making a statement suspecting members of the committee of breaking protocol, I think you should consider that there is a much wider opportunity for people to do it from the public meeting on the web.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Madam Chair, if I could follow up on my point of order—

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** —my understanding is that it's on Mrs. Vecchio's website or social media. I am not sure who took it. I'm not accusing anyone of anything.

I have resisted the temptation to take pictures of many meetings for many months while we've been operating in a hybrid environment. I think this is just inappropriate.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I will address this if I can, on a point of order.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mrs. Vecchio.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** It's a public meeting. There has been absolutely nothing taken. I can tell you that my phone is here and my iPad is here, which I've been doing emails on, but it is a live meeting so therefore there is a live feed that is coming from ParlVU, I believe.

There has been absolutely nothing breaking rules, but perhaps if it is the case you think someone did, there could be an apology. No one broke any rules here, sorry.

**The Chair:** Just give me a second. I'll get some clarification from the clerk on this.

It's on your social media, but you're saying it's not yours.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** It's a ParlVU live feed. It's a live feed that you can do from committees. It's available on ParlVU.

**The Chair:** Did you take a picture of your feed?

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** No, I have no photo showing up. I have a live feed on my social media page today, so perhaps Ryan can go on there and get the information and maybe you can look.

**The Chair:** I don't know how that works. I'll look into it if you just give me a moment.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I can tell you that the accusation is absolutely false. There have been absolutely no photos.

**The Chair:** I'll look into it and I'll just speak to the clerk on the side.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Yes. That would be great.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Am I good to go?

**The Chair:** No. Just hold on for a minute while I'm getting advice, and then I'll let you know.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Go to my Facebook page. It's a livestream on Facebook.

**The Chair:** Okay, I'm back. Sorry about that.

I guess I just want to take this opportunity to remind all the members in this meeting....

Ms. Vecchio, you're right. I don't have a way to prove anything one way or another necessarily.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Perhaps if there was an accusation, if I could actually see the photo, I'd prefer that. If someone is going to accuse me, please just share with me what we've actually done, because it seems that there is absolutely no evidence of this, but instead it's said that I've done something.

I would like that cleared, please.

• (5950)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Madam Chair, can I speak to that?

**The Chair:** Sure, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I think I explicitly said I'm not making an accusation. All I know is that we have a report and I have a photo of something that has been posted on Ms. Vecchio's, I guess, Facebook page or livestream, so I was just asking for clarification whether that's appropriate.

Also, I believe the commentary on it trivializes the very important ability of members of Parliament to express their points of view. I know the members opposite believe in freedom of speech and protecting civil liberties, and in fact, my colleague Mr. Long is presenting his point of view in debate. I just wonder whether that's appropriate.

I was just asking for clarification. I'm not making an accusation. I'm just asking to clarify whether this is within the rules of the House.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Madam Chair, if I may, I would like to speak on this same point of order.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Blaikie.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** It might be helpful at this point if the clerk could just confirm for us that there is a public-facing webcast of the committee proceedings with a livestream that can be shared through social media. It appears to me that this is what is happening on Ms. Vecchio's Facebook page. If the committee is broadcasting in a livestream and that's shareable from the committee website, it doesn't seem to me that members would be doing anything inappropriate by sharing that public-facing aspect of the committee's own website.

As well, to Mr. Turnbull's comments, I think we should really steer clear of having committees pronounce on the appropriateness of commentary by members on their own social media feeds about what's happening in committee. I don't think that's a useful road to go down. Unless it's hate speech or something to that effect, members are free to have opinions.

Members are free to express their points of view. Members are free to have opinions about the opinions of other members and they're free to share those. I don't think we want to get into a situation where a parliamentary committee is trying to regulate what can be on members' social media feeds.

Therefore, I would encourage members to just stay away from that line of argument. They can go there if they want, of course, but I don't think it would be productive or really an appropriate use of this committee's time to try to pronounce on those things.

**The Chair:** Yes. I myself, at least, wasn't really looking into that. I was just looking into screenshots or photos taken of the meeting, which I have been explicit about, and I just want to remind all the committee members.

That's fine. I don't have Ms. Vecchio's page. If it is a sharing of a feed, we can see if there is proper advice or if that has been looked into at this point.

Okay, I see it's live there, so that's fine.

I'll just remind all the members, though, once again, and their staff as well, because there are staff on this Zoom meeting as well, that there are no photos or screenshots of the committee, just as if

we were in the committee we would not be taking pictures on our cellphones either.

Mr. Clerk, did you want to speak to the sharing of a live feed? I don't know if there is any actual official advice on that. I don't know if that has ever been discussed.

**The Clerk:** What I'd limit my comments to, Madam Chair, is just that I believe... I think one of the members—I just saw them—held up their own iPad, showing what very much appears to be the ParlVU web feed from the meeting that is being webcast on the ParlVU website. All public meetings are webcast, and in terms of what people do with those webcasts once they're out in the public, it's really up to them, I guess. It does look very much like it was the webcast from the ParlVU website that at least Mr. Kent just held up. I'm not sure if that's what Mr. Turnbull is referring to on Ms. Vecchio's website, but that would be my comment on that.

The issue, when it comes to in-person meetings and the prohibition against taking photos or using another device to record a meeting... That is problematic. It's not problematic when the feed is coming from the House of Commons broadcasting services, as the ParlVU webcast of this meeting currently is. I don't have any specific advice on whether there is a problem for someone linking to that webcast, but it appears that what is at issue here is the webcast from the ParlVU website itself, which is the official means of broadcasting or webcasting public committee meetings.

• (5955)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

There have been a lot of clarifications. It's never a bad thing for us to be certain about the rules. I'm glad that we cleared that up.

I'm sorry, Mr. Long. This went longer than I expected. I hope you still know where you left off.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I'm absolutely fine with the sharing of the feed. There's no issue there whatsoever. It reminds me, actually, of the first time I ever did a live TV interview where a video was broadcast of me. It was way back in 2005, when we brought the Saint John Sea Dogs to Saint John. I did my first interview. I remember being so nervous in anticipation. I walked the floor and I was so nervous.

Now, obviously for politicians it's commonplace to have our pictures taken and do videos and be on Facebook and so on and so forth. The wider it's spread, the more Canadians can make up their own minds as to whether this is necessary—whether calling a prime minister to a committee to testify when that prime minister is already at the House of Commons every Wednesday and can answer questions.... I'm not an expert in parliamentary procedure, but I would dare say the Conservative Party would have perhaps 20 questions every question period, give or take? Every question they wanted could be with respect to this issue, if they so wanted.

I want to get back to where I was. The break was nice, I will admit, to get a drink of water and coffee and to replenish a bit, but it's time to get back to it. I was talking about context. I think it's important in bringing it back to the motion. It's important that Canadians be able to judge in context, so they need to know the history.

In 2008, back when, I was talking about the prorogation with then prime minister Stephen Harper, he referred to the accord between the Liberals and NDP as undemocratic backroom dealing, stating that the opposition parties were overturning the results of an election a few weeks earlier in order to form a coalition that nobody voted for.

The Liberals indicated that they intended to present their motion of non-confidence on December 8. The government then cancelled opposition day, originally to be held on December 1, to avert the threatened vote of non-confidence. This meant the earliest the coalition non-confidence motion could occur would be the following week, December 8, 2008.

The Conservative Party holds the record in modern times on prorogation of Parliament. Let's take a quick walk back in history and we see.... I'll list these off very quickly.

During the 41st Parliament, the Harper government in October 2013 shut down Parliament for 33 days to avoid questions on the Senate expense scandal and a resulting PMO cover-up.

In the 40th Parliament, the Harper government shut down Parliament for 63 days to avoid the Afghan detainee issue.

In 2008, as I mentioned earlier, the Harper Conservatives shut down Parliament to avoid a confidence vote that would have toppled the government. This shutdown lasted 53 days.

In 2007, the Harper government shut down Parliament to declare mission accomplished on five priorities from the election and took 32 days before bringing in a new Speech from the Throne.

After all that was done, how many times do you think Stephen Harper was before a committee to explain his reasons for prorogation? How many times? None. Not once did he appear.

● (6000)

Somebody earlier talked about the precedent that we're setting for the future. I would argue, Madam Chair, and argue strongly, that the precedent is already set. Former prime minister Harper didn't appear before a committee once with respect to prorogation.

On August 19, Pierre Poilievre, who was, prior to demotion, as I said the last time, the Conservative finance critic, alongside Michael Barrett, publicly stated that prorogation was a cover-up to shut down the study in regard to WE Charity.

MP Poilievre falsely claimed that the documents provided by the government were redacted to assist in this supposed cover-up. This is, of course, ignoring the fact that the government House leader's office distributed the documents to all parties—all parties, Madam Chair—which, it turned out, were only redacted in line with privacy legislation.

Again, the Conservatives are never ones to let facts get in the way of their arguments, and this is the case here. Prorogation, of

course, did not and cannot stop a committee from resuming a study that was under way prior to prorogation, or for that matter, starting a new study on any topic within the mandate of the committee. That is evidenced by the fact that numerous committees did and still are hearing from witnesses on the WE matter.

The suggestion, Madam Chair, that things were prorogued to avoid the WE story, to get it past.... It's not true. It is absolutely not true, because the committees could continue to hear witnesses. It's very clear, and I want Canadians watching today to know that. I'm going to say it again. Prorogation cannot stop a committee from resuming a study that was under way prior to prorogation, or for that matter, starting a new study on any topic within the mandate of the committee.

The focus is, of course, much lessened due to the fact that, after hearing from all the witnesses and seeing all the documents, after all of this—all of it—no proof exists that there was any political interference by political actors in regard to the choosing of WE Charity to administer the agreement.

I know this fact is disturbing to the opposition, who seem to love using parliamentary time and resources on chasing their tails in an attempt to smear this government and score cheap political points, but the facts of this are clear. Prorogation was put in place to allow for a bit of a resetting of priorities in light of the resignation of the former minister of finance, and likely, more importantly, to address issues in regard to the pandemic that members on this side believe is one of the most important issues facing Parliament, the government and the vast majority of the Canadian public.

Madam Chair, let's be honest. Everybody on this screen and everybody watching me right now on Facebook Live, on ParlVU or what have you.... If you had to list the top 10 things you were concerned about with respect to your life, the pandemic, the Government of Canada, support programs, benefits, expanded EI, CERB, CEBA, the recovery benefit, rent relief and wage subsidy, does anybody on this committee or anybody out there have the prorogation of Parliament in their top 10 or top 20? No, they don't.

● (6005)

We all know that.

Madam Chair, all of us could walk out of our offices or our houses today and do a quick poll, and we know the answers. We all know that. We know that this is not in the sights of Canadians. Canadians want us to govern. Canadians want us to get on with the business of running this country.

Madam Chair, we're faced with an unprecedented time. Canadians want us to respond to their needs and have their backs. That's why I'm particularly proud of our government.

Madam Chair, we believe, as a Liberal government, that we are there to help Canadians, that government can do good things, that government can come forth with good programs, that government has Canadians' backs. We've done that. We have absolutely had Canadians' backs.

Again, I appeal to the committee members, each and every one of you, that it's time to move on. It's time to get past this. It's time to let it go. It's time to focus on what Canadians want us to focus on. It is not this.

I want to get back to the motion, Madam Chair. The motion before us now is to call yet more witnesses, to supposedly provide evidence with regard to this prorogation study. Let us be clear. The opposition has already made its own mind up. We could hear from witnesses offering counter views for the next six months, and nothing is going to change. I've sat.... I've been fortunate enough to.... Sometimes I would recommend, Madam Chair, that all MPs get an opportunity to sit in different committees. I think it's healthy. I think it kind of broadens our perspectives. I was certainly fortunate when I started to be on HUMA. In 2015, I was on HUMA and ethics, there, for a while. Now I'm back on HUMA. It's important to know.

As I said at the very start, my eyes were opened as a rookie MP. Look, I'll be very clear on this. I absolutely respect that the opposition has a vital role to play in our country and in government to hold us to account—no question, no problem. I think those of you who know me would agree that sometimes we do need to be held to account. I don't have any problem with that—none whatsoever—but this is more than that. This is.... We know where this will go.

Again, as a rookie MP in 2016, I saw the minister come. I was thrilled to see the minister, and then I was literally aghast. It was like, boom, the minister tries to answer, boom. It was just a barrage. Then I'm like, "Okay, this isn't really about getting answers from the minister." No, it's not about that; it's not. It's about getting the clip. It's about getting it in the paper and getting the quote and the sound bite. That's what it's about. We don't need it, Madam Chair. Committee doesn't need it. Canadians don't want it. We all know it. Each and every one of us knows it.

• (6010)

The opposition has been talking a great deal about the idea that the Liberals are trying to force an election. Really? We're trying to force an election...? Take a look outside. Take a look across the country. We're trying to force an election...? Oof.

It's not true. We are seized with governing. We're seized with getting Canadians through this pandemic and we will. We will get Canadians through this pandemic.

Madam Chair, to continue, Conservative member Nelly Shin in the House yesterday—well, it's not yesterday now, but back then—again repeated the canard that the Liberals want a snap election in response to previous comments about why the opposition would not allow Bill C-14 to come to a vote.

Why is it, I ask, that the Conservative agenda seems to run in two streams? One, rather than make legitimate arguments against the government's agenda or perhaps suggest their own alternatives,

the Conservatives try to play gotcha politics in an attempt to besmirch not the legislation but the character of our member who is their target, or, two, to spread complete mistruths both within and outside the House, usually to grab headlines from some of the more radical right-wing media and then to fundraise off that from supporters who likely do not understand that they are being told falsehoods.

As for the motion, the motion before us now, it is, I believe, the former. The opposition members think they can make great political display by bringing various cabinet ministers, staff and the Prime Minister before us to give evidence on a case that the opposition jury has already passed judgment on.

I guess I'm probably not allowed, Madam Chair, to hold up props, and I wouldn't do that anyway, but if you do the polling, if you talk to your constituents, if you go out...well, I guess we can't go outside, but if you do the polling, the poll I'm looking at here, the Twitter poll was 6,000 votes, and 60% said "no", move on. It's time to move on, everybody.

Anyway, here we are. I would also like to remind the committee members of the words of current Conservative MP Scott Reid, who was defending then prime minister Harper's prorogation to stop a non-confidence vote, and I will quote him. He said to a member of the opposition:

Yes, I do think both of those uses of prorogation were legitimate, and I want to point out to my hon. colleague that he thinks they were legitimate too. He may speak against them, but the fact [is] that he and his party had the chance to demonstrate their lack of confidence in a government that would use prorogation in the manner it was used by voting non-confidence in the government and forcing an election at that time. His party did not do that. It is always an option at the end of any prorogation in a minority Parliament.

I'd like to point out that in a minority Parliament the government can always be defeated by combined opposition. We're a minority government, and we can be defeated. I mean, we know that.

Now, I'm not saying that it's only the Conservatives who have prejudged the prorogation study. The BQ member for Manicouagan said back in October, and I quote:

They forgot to mention that they were looking to kill time for six weeks so that people would stop talking about WE Charity.

Plus, they are still trying to stall the committees to cover up the scandal. Why can they not be honest and admit that they shut down Parliament because of WE Charity?

It was not because we have a generational pandemic, not because we need to reload, reset and do different things—no.

● (6015)

The reason is not the reason we prorogued but it fit in with the narrative put out by the Conservatives. Now, rather than get down to the business of writing the report so that it may be presented in the House, the opposition wants to keep on beating this dead horse of a topic, much the same way they did with the WE Charity study.

Not to get too far into the weeds on this, but if you take a look at the House calendar, you will see that the House was supposed to end its sittings by the end of June and return on September 21. As we know, the House sat throughout the summer months until the middle of August. The House did, however, come back on September 23, so one could argue that this whole study is the reason the House lost two days of sitting in September.

What—if anything—would be gained by hearing from the witnesses named in this motion? I would argue nothing would be gained. All members of this committee, I believe, made up their own minds on this issue. Why take ministers' staff and the Prime Minister away from their duties in the midst of a pandemic just to allow the opposition to attempt to make what I would call cheap political points?

Madam Chair, I understand the opposition has a job to do. The opposition wants answers, but again in this case, we absolutely know that Canadians aren't interested in this. We all know it. Madam Chair, I believe the committee should get down to writing the report and then move on to study something that is actually relevant to everyday Canadians. I have the motion before me and I just want to point out a few things that I think make it untenable. I'm just going to quote here from the motion, part (a):

renew the invitation issued to the Prime Minister to appear before the committee, provided that if he does not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to appear for at least three hours, the Chair shall be instructed to report to the House forthwith a recommendation that this committee be empowered to order his appearance from time to time;

Now I'll read part (b):

renew the invitations issued to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, each to appear separately before the committee, provided that in respect of each of them who does not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to appear for at least 90 minutes each, the Chair shall be instructed to report to the House forthwith a recommendation that this committee be empowered to order her appearance from time to time;

The last part I want to read, Madam Chair, is part (d);

renew the invitations issued to Farah Perelmuter and Martin Perelmuter, to appear before the committee, provided that if they do not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to appear for at least 90 minutes, a summons do issue for their appearance before the Committee at a date and time determined by the Chair but no later than one month following the adoption of this motion;

● (6020)

Chair, I just find it strange and disturbing, frankly, that this motion before us is asking to hear from Martin Perelmuter, the owner of Speakers' Spotlight. For those of us who followed the ethics committee meetings on the WE Charity issue, it was obvious that Mr. Perelmuter and his wife had nothing to hide and provided everything they faced, the online attacks, due to the actions of the Conservative Party.

I was speaking earlier about MPs going to different committees and learning and expanding their horizons. Well, I actually subbed in on ethics. I sat in on ethics when this was debated. The PerelmUTERS had nothing to hide. The PerelmUTERS had to call the police. At a December 7 meeting, members of the Liberals and NDP apologized to Mr. Perelmuter—with the exception of the Conservatives, of course.

For the benefit of members who are not aware of what happened with Mr. Perelmuter, I will give a brief—very brief, I promise—outline. A small business that used to book speaking engagements for the Prime Minister and his family was caught in the partisan crossfire over the WE Charity affair. Martin Perelmuter, who co-founded Speakers' Spotlight 25 years ago with his wife, Farah, says his company has been harassed and his employees intimidated and threatened since August. That's when Conservative MPs began publicly calling on the company to disclose speaking fees earned over the past 12 years by the Prime Minister, his wife, mother and brother, even though that would have contravened privacy laws. In one Facebook quote, which is still online, Deputy Conservative Leader Candice Bergen provided the company's toll-free number and urged people to call, to press the point.

Ever since, Perelmuter said at his appearance at the ethics committee, his company has faced harassment, personal threats and a social media campaign that he described as designed to discredit him and his wife and damage the reputation of their company, which was already struggling due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He said:

As a leader of a small company I feel that my first obligation is to ensure the physical, emotional and mental health safety and well-being of our employees. For the first time in my 25-year career I was in a situation where I didn't feel that I could properly protect everyone from what was going on. We had to get the police involved. It was a really nasty situation.

Perelmuter said that one individual who responded to the Conservative call posted on Facebook his wife's photo and private cell-phone number, along with a rant calling her disgusting and derogatory things. Her phone started ringing day and night with all kinds of people calling. It was really unsettling. His voice was breaking. Perelmuter said his wife was in fear of her own personal safety for a while. She didn't want to leave the house. He said that some of their 27 employees, particularly young women on staff, were also concerned about their safety.

Perelmuter said he understood that politics was “tough”. We all know that first-hand. It's a tough business. It's certainly different from the hockey business. One of the things I always joke about is hockey. In hockey everybody liked you. It didn't matter if you were Conservative, Liberal or NDP. Everybody had a common thing to rally around. It's one of the most beautiful things about sports, I find. It's unifying. Everybody can get together, and we can all stand arm in arm and cheer for our favourite team. As we all know, politics certainly isn't that way.

• (6025)

I'll go back to Speakers' Spotlight. It has 27 employees. There are young women on staff. They were concerned about safety. Perelmuter said he understands that politics is tough, but he said his company is not partisan and has been unfairly caught in the cross-fire. He noted that the company had only a tangential connection to the WE affair and had nothing to do with the student services grant at the heart of the controversy.

I'll quote him again. He said, "It's something I never thought I'd have to deal with. We're not a controversial type of business." Speakers' Spotlight got thrust into this, and now we see the damage that has been cast upon them. As part of its investigation into the affair, the ethics committee asked Speakers' Spotlight to turn over documents related to any fees earned by Trudeau and his family members for speaking engagements over the past 12 years.

As Parliament was prorogued, the clerk informed Perelmuter that he no longer had to submit the documents requested by the committee. However, Conservative MP Michael Barrett sent the company a letter the following week, which he released to the media before Perelmuter had a chance to read it, according to Perelmuter, asking him to do the right thing and turn over documents directly to members of the then disbanded committee.

Perelmuter said the company's legal counsel informed him that releasing the documents in that manner, without an order from the committee, would violate privacy laws. He was upset that a member of Parliament would ask the company to break the law, he told committee. Bergen's Facebook post came shortly after Barrett publicly released the letter. By making the request public, Perelmuter said he definitely felt like they were being intimidated by Barrett.

"It was frankly quite shocking to be completely honest," he said, adding that launching a lawsuit against Conservative MPs had certainly crossed his mind.

Barrett participated in the committee hearing but did not address the matter. He asked Perelmuter several questions about specific speaking engagements. "I am extremely disappointed and shocked, but maybe not surprised, that Mr. Barrett was present here and that he did not use his time to offer a complete apology for his actions," said MP Brenda Shanahan. She and other Liberal members of the committee apologized to Perelmuter for what had occurred, as did NDP ethics critic, Charlie Angus.

The chair of the committee, MP David Sweet—and I was there at that point with MP Sweet—concluded the meeting by offering a sincere apology on behalf of the committee for any of the unintended consequences that came from any actions of the committee members in regard to the obligations of our office. Once the committee was reconstituted in September, it sent a narrower request to Speakers' Spotlight for records of the speaking fees earned by Trudeau and his wife. The company complied with that request, and those records have been in the hands of the committee members for about a week.

No one asked Perelmuter any questions Monday about those documents.

Chair, I want to finish up. I want to talk to you, the committee and Canadians as directly, transparently and straight up as I can.

• (6030)

All of us, across every party, as members of Parliament, have been faced with an unprecedented situation—an unprecedented, historic, generational pandemic.

I know that MPs around me, whether it's MP Arseneault or Conservative MP Rob Moore, we have all had to deal with our constituents and offer support and be there. It's been trying times. I know that Canadians are proud that they have a strong government. Yes, we're a Liberal government, but I know Canadians across every stripe are just proud of their country. They're proud that there's a government there to have their backs. As a Liberal government, we have delivered in spades. We have had Canadians' backs during this pandemic, through CERB, CEBA, wage subsidies and rent relief. The programs go on and on.

We're tired. I think all of us are tired. We're physically tired, emotionally tired and mentally tired. Canadians are the same. They're tired. We want to move on. We need to get back to a reasonable, normal life again. We will.

I implore the committee. Let's move on. Let's get down to the great work that PROC can do. For me on HUMA, let's get to the great work that we can do. Let's get back to doing what we do well, which is working together, collaborating, working across party lines and doing things together to help Canadians. That's what Canadians want to see.

If we're still streaming this live, I know that's what you want to see. You want to see us working together to have your back and to support you. That's what you want. I'm absolutely convinced of it.

Madam Chair, I thank you for allowing me to express my thoughts today and to give you my opinions. I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to sit on PROC and speak and collaborate. I sincerely say—and I mean this—that I have a ton of respect for everybody on here. I know they have the best interests of their constituents at heart most times.

It's time for us to get back to work. It's time for us to move on.

I thank you again, Madam Chair, for giving me the floor. Have a great afternoon.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Well, you raised some very interesting points. Thank you for that.

Mr. Turnbull, you are next.

• (6035)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.



It's great to have a turn. I know my colleague Mr. Long mentioned that we're all tired and I know Canadians are tired of this pandemic. But I got a very good sleep last night—I'm not sure how—and I'm definitely looking forward to expressing my thoughts and point of view on this motion, which I think is really getting us off track in terms of what Canadians want.

I was hoping Mr. Peter Fragiskatos would stay on so I could pronounce his last name correctly and show off a little bit, but he's gone, unfortunately. I will say, though, as a rookie MP—and Mr. Long spoke to this—I think it's really disconcerting when we spend a long time debating motions like this.

I took this job on willingly. I gave up a business that I'd built for 12 years, and I really believe that the role of an MP is to make a difference and be there for constituents and our communities. I really think this motion veers us quite a ways off track. This is not where Canadians want to see us focusing our attention and our time, in my view, and I have quite a few thoughts about this.

Before I get into some of my arguments and my reasons, I'll just say that I'm a person who likes to provide reasons and evidence for all the things that I say. I feel pretty strongly about the principle of sufficient reason being something that really guides us in our work and that should be at the core of democracy.

I'll speak to a few opening remarks that Ms. Vecchio made at the beginning of the meeting. She said that this was going to set a precedent, and I thought that was an interesting comment to make. I think she meant it slightly differently from the way I'm interpreting it, but I think the real precedent-setting part of this conversation and even the study that PROC has undertaken already is that Standing Order 32(7) is actually a change that was put in place by the Liberal government. To me it's a real step forward in the right direction. I want to take a moment to read that. It was enacted on June 20, 2017. The House of Commons adopted a motion to amend its standing orders. Among the changes made to the Standing Orders was the addition of 32(7), which reads:

Not later than 20 sitting days after the beginning of the second or subsequent session of a Parliament, a minister of the Crown shall lay upon the table a document outlining the reasons for the latest prorogation. This document shall be deemed referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs immediately after it is presented in the House.

My understanding is that no such obligation on cabinet had ever existed before. In fact, even though prorogation has been used throughout our history many times, never before was there any requirement to produce any rationale in writing and for it to be tabled. So this already is a significant step in the right direction that we have—I think it's about a 37-page report, but I can't remember exactly how many pages—a pretty substantive report. Some of the reports we've produced on this committee are actually much longer, but I would say, to my mind, when I read it, it reflects a strong commonsensical rationale for why the Prime Minister chose to use his prerogative to call on the Governor General to prorogue and to my mind, the rationale makes sense to me.

• (6040)

It is actually a public document, I believe. Is it not a public document? Maybe I should not say that if it's not true, but I believe it is a public document, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Canadians can actually read that document and assess for themselves, but instead we're here with our honourable colleagues. I have deep respect, as I know Mr. Long expressed, for any and all members of Parliament, but I really feel this is an attempt to raise something that's already been studied in other committees, almost ad infinitum. It was something that continued even after prorogation on multiple committees.

There were thousands of pages of documents requested and these were handed over. There was ample time given to all members, all opposition parties, to question witnesses.

This really seems like it's redundant. It's been done before, several times. Unfortunately, the opposition parties are choosing to reinvigorate this type of debate and inquiry. I don't believe it's merited, just based on the rationale and the clear steps forward that we've made in terms of increasing transparency around prorogation.

Mrs. Vecchio also mentioned a poll that she did—I know someone else mentioned it as well—that I think showed that about 60% were actually against the Prime Minister appearing at committee. It's kind of interesting that the results were not overly positive there, but that's okay. We know that majorities are hard to come by sometimes.

I would just say that—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Is it a point of debate or a point of order?

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Ryan is referring to something. Could he indicate whether he is referring to a partial poll or the entire poll, just so we actually have the information? Is he referring to all of the polling that was done or just the one that he took out specifically?

**The Chair:** I'm sure he—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I'm seeing from René Arseneault that it was just the specific one, so he did not take into consideration everything else. It would be great if I could table that.

**The Chair:** I'm sure Mr. Turnbull wouldn't mind elaborating on polls. It's up to him.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Sure.

I've done quite a few polls. I actually did research for a living, running a consulting company for many years, so I'm really well versed in polling and research methodology.

I think you had a poll on Twitter that I saw. It's great that you put that out there. I believe in having that constant feedback from constituents. That's a part of participatory democracy that I am really fond of.

Mrs. Vecchio, did you ask about the other witnesses in your motion? What was the confidence interval? What was the sample size? Was there a sample bias in that poll? I would suggest that there was certainly a bias given the fact that you didn't distribute it across the country.

It absolutely could not be said to necessarily reflect—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mrs. Vecchio.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Ryan is saying that this is not worthy. Why are we speaking about something if it wasn't done properly?

**The Chair:** I think you brought it up in debate, Mrs. Vecchio. I'm a little confused now.

It was brought up today in the series of points that were made. Honestly, I don't know if I can rule it out of order at this point.

Carry on, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I guess it wasn't necessarily tested or randomized. There was a bias in the sample, so even if you combined.... I understand that the validity of the multiple results you may have gotten from social media could easily be called into question, based on a very flawed research methodology.

Is that correct, Mrs. Vecchio?

**The Chair:** Are we using the Simms protocol here? Is that what is about to occur?

I recognize that we do have Mr. Simms amongst us, but that's really up to you, Mr. Turnbull. Was that a rhetorical question or was that something you would—

• (6045)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I don't know what the Simms protocol is. With no disrespect to my colleague Mr. Simms, who I understand has a lot of experience, I'm just a new MP and I don't know the Simms protocol.

Could you maybe clarify that?

**The Chair:** Absolutely.

It came up yesterday when I don't remember which member had chosen to interject on the Simms protocol. I'm not sure if it was Mr. Nater or somebody else.

No, it was Mr. Blaikie who had interjected on using the Simms protocol.

Scott Simms, we were thinking of you yesterday.

The clarification to that is you wouldn't necessarily be ceding the floor to another member to make comments, but they would be able to make short interjectory remarks and you would then continue to have your speaking spot. In that time, they would not be able to move motions or anything like that but just perhaps carry the conversation in a direction that could come to some kind of compromise or move the conversation in a good direction.

Really, it's a good-faith tool to use to help in this type of debate when we're logjammed. However, that is to the discretion of the member who has the floor, whether they would allow somebody to have that time to interject comment to their remarks, and then you would have the floor back.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** In honour of Mr. Simms who is here, I think this is a great show of faith to have some informal discussion.

Ms. Vecchio, if you want to speak to the rigorous methodology of your polling, I would invite that for sure.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Absolutely, and Ryan, I really do appreciate this.

The one poll had gone out that was on Twitter. Because of the time frame that I was not aware of, we made sure that all polls closed at the same time. I did not know that Twitter was closing a couple of days earlier than the Facebook polls. We had put them both out at the same time and wanted to make sure that they were in both official languages, because that's also very important. Then, as soon as the Twitter polls closed, we closed all other polling and combined the results.

Thank you very much. I can say, Ryan, I do not have the methodology that you have, but if we were referring to this, we could look at these polls, and if we were looking at the Twitter poll, we could say it's 60% for. If we're looking at the Facebook polls that actually had the same type of base but different demographics, we'd be looking at the exact opposite results of 61%, I believe, in favour. Actually, it was even higher than that, but we know that when we combined the things....

I will be the first one to attest that the methodology of this is not great, but that said, it was a great opportunity in terms of where the public was on this. As you said, you are using the statistics one way. I can use the statistics the exact opposite way. Regardless of what we are looking at, if we combine the polls, out of the over 12,000 people responding, we have had over 6,000 Canadians, or actually it would be 7,000 people, who wanted him to come.

I think we can interpret either way, but yes, the methodology is not perfect. The next time, I'll work on this. We asked specifically about the Prime Minister. The reason for that was, rather than putting all of the others—all the other witnesses have been academics and scholar witnesses—the best person to hear from on the reason for prorogation would be the Prime Minister, since it was provoked by him and then brought forward by him to the Governor General. He is the only person who has that right.

Using the words of that, I believe it was you who asked the other day, have we done a poll on this? Someone had asked about that. We haven't done a poll, so thank you for giving me the ideas on how to do so, but next time, I will make sure I use your methodology.

Thank you.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Madam Chair, I appreciate that clarification.

Ms. Vecchio, I think it's great that you're making attempts to do that. I definitely feel strongly and passionately about having an open government with lots and lots of participation from the public.

Maybe one concern I would still have with your methodology is just that we all know the Facebook following is definitely a biased sample, because those folks have chosen to follow you in particular, so they might be more conservative minded, they might be slightly biased or they might be really biased, whereas Twitter is sort of out there. I would say it's a little more open, a little less corralled in terms of who specifically the demographic is that ends up seeing it. Combining those results and what you presented at the beginning, it seemed to me to take something that was quite biased and combine it with something that was maybe less biased in terms of who saw it.

How much weight can we put into those results? From my perspective, and from a rigorous scientific research perspective, I would say probably not a lot. That would be my perspective.

Would you agree with that? I'm using the Simms protocol, now that I'm accustomed to it.

• (6050)

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Ryan, I—

**Mr. John Nater:** I have a point of order on the Simms protocol.

Perhaps I could address that, Mr. Turnbull.

**The Chair:** Yes, okay, Mr. Nater.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I was asking Mrs. Vecchio a question on it.

**Mr. John Nater:** Yes, I'll be very brief, if it's all right. I'll just take a few seconds.

**The Chair:** Is that okay with you, Mr. Turnbull?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Sure.

**Mr. John Nater:** If we're talking about methodologies—and it's been a while since I've been actively involved in quantitative research—I would suggest that if we want to take a poll that really reflects the views of this committee, we put this motion to a vote right now. We take a poll right now of the committee members and we can deal with this motion and move on to some of the motions from Mr. Blaikie and Monsieur Therrien. It's just a suggestion there.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you for that. I appreciate that.

**The Chair:** Thank you for the suggestion.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Certainly, that doesn't necessarily reflect the views of the general public, though, which I think was the point of Ms. Vecchio attempting to do a poll to engage members of the public in key decisions that are being made by this committee. I think it's a good point, but I'm sure we'll get to a vote eventually, I still have quite a few other arguments to make, though, and I'm quite prepared.... As I said, I had a good sleep last night.

I would start by saying that I want to make some remarks that relate to some key—I would say important—testimony that was made. We heard from quite a number of academics in our study so far, in particular, one I took a shine to. Her name was Dr. Lori Turnbull. You'll notice we have the same last name, but it's not because she's a member of my clan that I refer to her. I just really think that some of the points that she made really struck me as important, so I have a few things to say about that.

First, you'll remember that Dr. Lori Turnbull was in agreement that any time a government prorogues, there will be different perspectives on it, with differing speculation about the motives. This is a pretty obvious point to make, but I think it's also an important reminder. She stated, "Just because there is a narrative that is political doesn't mean there's not one that can exist at the same time that is more about policy planning." She adds that these are "not mutually exclusive." I think the distinction is important here. It's between policy planning and the political narrative, and these are two different things.

I really want to go in depth about the policy planning process and I think that really speaks to a narrative that I think much more closely approximates the truth of why the government prorogued. Despite the difference of opinion on motive and speculation about motive, our federal government was, as I mentioned, the first to ever table a rationale or a report to document its reasons for proroguing. Dr. Turnbull also agreed that the report does indeed provide a rationale for proroguing. Think about this logically: We said we would provide a rationale, and we did. She said, "The narrative in the report is quite consistent with that of the fiscal update that we saw in November and the fiscal snapshot we saw in July." There's that word "consistent" popping up again, and we heard that multiple times before when I asked witnesses about why there would be such consistency in this process.

To me, it's logical that a government that's re-evaluating its priorities doesn't, and, because of a contextual shift as big and massive as a global pandemic, wouldn't abandon its values and its agenda entirely. You wouldn't expect a new Speech from the Throne to be entirely different. It would have some consistency, and we heard that from several witnesses when I asked them. They said, "Okay, I guess that would make sense." That's in addition to the fact that Ms. Turnbull doesn't believe the Prime Minister needs to have good reasons; but, nevertheless, he did have a good reason, as we told Canadians over and over.

Going back, however, the narrative given for prorogation is consistent with what occurred after prorogation. As you'll recall, we heard from Allen Sutherland, from the Privy Council Office, who said we should have seen, "every government department engaged with chipping in ideas as to the sorts of thematics or signature items that might help give life to the Speech from the Throne."

• (6055)

It went on to say that would have kicked in late in August or early in September, and then you would have seen a lot of iterations between the PMO and the Privy Council Office.

I want to just add a little bit from my perspective just to actually substantiate this claim that was made that there was an extensive consultation process done. This goes to the argument that really undermines, I think, the purpose of the motion before us. This is all related back to the motion. The motion assumes a theory or a narrative that is good for the opposition parties to be stimulating and amplifying because that message will have a negative effect on the position of the government and its ability to do its important work. I want to substantiate this claim that I think is substantiated by the extensive consultation work that went on during the time that Parliament was prorogued. I'll give you just a few examples of this locally. I'm not saying that this happened in every single riding across the country, because there were some differences, and we know this and I'm learning, as a new MP, that members of Parliament.... Ms. Vecchio put a poll.... I didn't put a poll on my Twitter account or my Facebook account, but during prorogation, I was quite excited to re-evaluate where we were at as a country, and in my riding I checked in with many of my constituents.

We did an extensive survey in the riding. We collected ideas and we got over 100 responses to a digital survey. We did a mail-out, a householder survey, as well, from which we got back quite a few responses. We did consultations with our seniors council and consultations with our youth council. Nationally we know that Minister Fortier had—I can't remember the exact number that she said—a very large number of consultations within our caucuses. I can't remember how many, but I know I participated in at least 12 of those consultations. These were really designed to identify what was on the minds of Canadians, what they had been experiencing, how businesses were affected, how families were affected by the pandemic, and sort of where we should go from where we were at that time.

I would say those extensive consultations provide a meaningful example that substantiates the reason we prorogued. This has been very consistent, and I believe it is important for opposition members to realize that this story is consistent. There's no inconsistency here. We've heard several witnesses call into question the timing of prorogation. Well, I would say to you that the timing makes perfect sense. It makes perfect sense because it basically happened within the first and the second wave. To me, it was a natural time to reflect on where we were at as a country and to reassess what was most important to our constituents, our communities and the country as a whole.

We also hosted a town hall session on Facebook Live to get thoughts and ideas to go into the throne speech. We launched a microsite on our website and got submissions from constituents on that. We received over 100 paper submissions, and then we received more than 400 submissions through the online microsite. Again there was lots of engagement there, and that was just in my riding. I can't speak for Mr. Arseneault or Mr. Lauzon or Mr. Blaikie or anybody else, but I'm sure we all reached out to our constituents at that time.

I understand consultation also went on between the Prime Minister and opposition leaders as well. He met with them. I think there is some documentation of that. I don't have that in front of me so I can't substantiate that.

• (6100)

I think some of the folks who may have participated in that may even be in the meeting today.

If the Prime Minister, like we maintain, has prorogued Parliament to reassess, to reset the table, reset the agenda, then isn't this consistent with hosting all of these consultations? I think Mr. Blaikie at one point, in some of the other questioning of witnesses, suggested in a way that we were taking a break and that we weren't working. It's preposterous to me to imply that MPs were not working during that time that we were prorogued. We know we only missed one day of House sitting time. By no means were members of Parliament laying on beaches and sitting on their hands. I think people were participating in that extensive consultation process.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Madam Chair, in the spirit of the Simms protocol, if Mr. Turnbull would like, I would be happy to clarify those remarks.

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Sure, please do.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I think it's important to note that what I was speaking to is the fact that Parliament as a parliament wasn't working. We weren't doing legislative work. There weren't negotiations happening between the parties in respect of important legislation around the deadline of the CERB. That's a fact. I can tell you, as the NDP critic who is responsible for the CERB and who participated through the spring of last year in many negotiations, that the government was not open to having those conversations, and did not invite us to the table around those things.

It's not to say that individual MPs weren't doing the good work of MPs or that they were off at the beach or something, but it's a fact that Parliament was not meeting and it's a fact that the government wasn't reaching out to other parties about that legislation. It's a fact that the work I was doing as an MP was hearing from constituents who were concerned about what was going to happen at the end of the CERB and why there wasn't legislation being put in place to tell them what they could expect in October with respect to their household budget.

That's what was going on. I do think it was a bloody shame that the government prorogued Parliament despite calls by the NDP to come back in September to do that work to give some certainty to Canadians. I thought it was a shame the way the debate proceeded on a short timeline with only three days when we came back when we all knew that deadline was coming. That's what I'm talking about. Let my remarks not be misrepresented as somehow saying that I don't think MPs were doing their normal work. Parliament wasn't doing the business of the nation that it needed to do when millions of Canadians' households budgets were riding on the line. That's what I'm upset about. It's not whether MPs were doing their work in their constituency or not.

I hope that provides the member some relief from the anxiety he was clearly experiencing about my remarks.

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I would say thanks for the clarification. I'm not sure if it provides me relief.

I know you are with me on participatory democracy and with many of your thoughts on civic engagement and the importance of citizen juries and other things like this that I know you're interested, Mr. Blaikie, in studying in the future. But I think I would say the way I view it is that taking the time to check in with Canadians between the first and second wave does not seem to me to be out of line or this sort of almost.... I don't want to characterize it the way you do because I don't see it the way you do. I see it as a part of that legislative process. To me these two things are fundamentally related in a healthy democracy. We've seen opposition parties delay key support and bills through the House of Commons for political purposes that relate specifically to COVID relief. We're seeing that now with concurrence motions.

I would say to you that it goes both ways. If it were so important to get that work done, then what about now? Why are opposition parties stalling things in the House and delaying our ability to get things done for Canadians? This motion is another attempt at that.

If you're so concerned about the efficiency with which we move forward then you would be dropping this particular motion and moving on with the supports that matter to Canadians right now. Having the Prime Minister come before this committee and testify does not seem to me to be a great use of the time.

I want to get back to my remarks and my conversation—

• (6105)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** As opposed to this, for instance.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

When I checked in with my constituents, I heard things like universal basic income, and I heard about how the pandemic was deeply scarring their businesses and putting them into debt. I heard about the social inequality that people were experiencing. I heard a lot about social justice issues. Climate change was something that was still on people's minds but not as an immediate concern. I think we saw that this became less of a concern during the pandemic, but it was still on people's minds as an important shift in transformation for our economy as we come out of the pandemic. Between the first and second wave, there were quite a few stakeholders engaged in discussions and very excited, I would say, about the whole “build back better” kind of messaging.

Some people have called that a token phrase. One of our witnesses said that, but I would say to you that no, this is a meaningful message that encapsulates a vision that Canadians, especially liberal-leaning or progressive-leaning ones, want to see. In my riding, they certainly want to see us build back our economy and our society in a way that is different and better, to create a more resilient Canada. Even the title of the throne speech reflects what my constituents have said and what we heard during that consultation process. Again, there's consistency here.

It just seems unjustified that we should continue with a study that repeats the past, and I would say, is only for political gain. There's no other reason for it.

Let me get back to my other remarks. I have reflections, too. I actually wrote a blog on my website, reflections on the throne

speech 2020. The reason I wrote it was that I was so excited, as a new member of Parliament, that my voice and the voices of my caucus members were being heard and that the throne speech reflected those comments and the feedback I received from Canadians, from my constituents.

Some people have said there's nothing new in the throne speech. This is absolute nonsense. I am sorry but I don't know how anyone can see that as a credible statement, one they actually believe is based on reality. There are so many things in the throne speech that are new and unique. I would say yes, there's still consistency there. It does reflect what we heard, and there was a genuine effort—an authentic engagement—that went into reformulating and reassessing our agenda and priorities. To me, that's why we prorogued. This is all consistent with the rationale given in the 37-page or the 40-page report that had been tabled.

One thing that really strikes me as important—and I know Mr. Lauzon will feel just as passionate about this as I do—is having national standards for long-term care and those being a priority for our government. This was reflected in this Speech from the Throne. It came out of that process. My mother's in long-term care, Mr. Blaikie, and I'm concerned for her health every day. I've had a major outbreak in my riding, at Sunnycrest in Whitby. I'm telling you, it breaks my heart to see what seniors have gone through and to see the failures in our system for long-term care.

I actually feel like I'm choking up over this. This is really how I feel, that those voices and that consultation process led to our government responding in the Speech from the Throne. That wouldn't have happened if we hadn't taken the time to reflect.

The opposition members keep saying that this was all just a ploy to avoid something. Well, what about the important work that was actually done? You're not taking that into account at all. You're disregarding the work of a healthy democracy under this government. I strongly believe that. With all my conviction, I really, passionately, believe that is the truth.

• (6110)

You want the truth, right? That's what you keep saying. You keep saying you want to drag everybody out and you want the truth. I'm telling you my version of the truth. My job as a member of Parliament, as I understand it, is to represent my constituents and do that to the best of my ability.

I don't think my constituents are watching right now, to be honest. I think what they care about is that we get pan-Canadian or national standards for long-term care and we improve the quality of care that our seniors deserve.

Why aren't we doing that? Let's work on that. Let's talk about that. I know that isn't the business of this committee, but those are the types of things that Canadians care about.

In a minority government we know there could be an election at any time. We could be doing a pre-study on the bill that deals with Elections Canada and the elections process. We've done a lot of great, meaningful work on that already, but we need expedient passage of that bill just in case, at any point, an election could be called.

I really worry about what would happen to our democratic process if we don't have speedy passage of that bill. This committee could be doing that work right now. There are other things that this committee could be doing with our time, but instead we are debating this motion, which I feel strongly against, as you can tell.

I want to get back to my original remarks because I didn't quite finish. I got a little taken up there in the emotion around the issue of national standards for long-term care, for which I hope no one would fault me.

Where was I?

We managed to accomplish all of the work that went into the throne speech, updating the government's priorities to fit into a wider global pandemic context while supporting Canadians and engaging in wide-scale public service consultations. In Mr. Sutherland's own words, a witness who came before the committee, there was one day lost between September 22 and 23 in pure House time—one day.

I would view that as an accomplishment for the government and a point for all House members to be proud of. The government accomplished all of its planning objectives without having to take away significant time from the House. It was only one day, for a task that Mr. Sutherland told us was a lot of hard work. I would attest to that, and I would attest to the hard work that I put into that process.

The opposition tries to make a fuss of the prorogation, but Mr. Sutherland said at our committee, "From a convention perspective, there is nothing at all."

One other thing that I've had on my mind came out of that consultation process that I was talking so passionately about. I would point to an article in the Toronto Star, published on September 18, 2020. It talks about Minister Chrystia Freeland talking to former finance ministers about the economic crisis. It goes into some detail. It doesn't provide a lot of detail, but what's interesting—and I heard this in my riding—is that many women have been set back and deeply affected by this pandemic. It's been referred to as a "she-cession".

Again, this speaks to the consultation work and the hard work that was put in during this time. The Minister of Finance checked in with one of the former ministers of finance, John Manley. She also took the time to check in with another Liberal MP who served as the minister of finance for several years, and that was Ralph Goodale. I have a lot of respect for both of them.

• (6115)

Ralph Goodale is quoted in this article as saying, referring to Minister Freeland, "She is very consultative. We've had some opportunities to have some really good conversations." Again, this

provides evidence. Notice I'm substantiating the things that I'm saying, because I believe that evidence and science are important.

In the article it says:

Especially in the case of women, child-care initiatives have "clearly" been effective, he said, and that it's fair in terms of "gender equality and gender fairness." And finally, Goodale said it adds to economic growth, not debt. "Women joining the workforce has been the single biggest contributor to productivity in Canada since the Second World War," he said.

Here is another quote: "Because of COVID, we've lost a chunk of that, and women have been put at a disadvantageous position."

This is important to me. I spoke with Minister Freeland about this myself as the chair of the 905 caucus, and I heard a lot of feedback from that caucus about the importance of women's full participation in the economy. This, to me, is another aspect of the Speech from the Throne that is a major section in there. We've seen it follow from this in the fall economic statement.

I'm not saying our government wasn't committed before this to achieving gender equality and advancing women's rights in every aspect, and that hard work we've been undertaking for quite some time, but again, this speaks to that consistency in the rationale provided for prorogation, which is that there was time needed to reset our agenda, and that work was done.

Look at the throne speech. Have people read the throne speech? I know you all heard it, probably, and watched it, but the throne speech has a section called "Women in the Economy". The first part of it focuses on—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Can I do a Simms intervention here, if you don't mind?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** How does a Simms intervention work? Do I have to agree to it every time?

**The Chair:** Yes, you have to agree.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Oh, so members can't just jump in and interrupt. Okay.

**The Chair:** No.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I would prefer continuing on this one, if you don't mind, Ms. Vecchio. I was on a roll there.

One thing I could say is that, in the throne speech, there's a section on women in the economy. It says, "Many women have bravely served on the frontlines of this crisis, in our communities or by shouldering the burden of unpaid care work at home."

The next line goes further and says, "We must not let the legacy of the pandemic be one of rolling back the clock on women's participation in the workforce, nor one of backtracking on the social and political gains women and allies have fought so hard to secure."

Again, think about this. This appears in the throne speech. There was no such thing as a "she-cession" before the pandemic. It wasn't on the mind. Certainly we were committed to advancing women's rights and equality, but we weren't talking about a she-cession. We weren't talking about rolling back the clock on women's participation in the workforce.

• (6120)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I have a quick question, if you don't mind, Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Okay, sure.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Am I to take from this that the government wasn't aware of the research on the nature of how this was becoming a she-cession until during the prorogation? It sounds to me like this consultation was necessary, and one of the things that the government learned was that the nature of the economic consequences of the pandemic were generating a she-cession during that consultation. Am I to gather from you that it was news to the government during prorogation that the pandemic was having a disproportionate influence on women?

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I would say no. I think we were all aware that it was becoming more and more of a clear issue, but did we understand how that stacked up in relation to other priorities, how deep that was right across the country, and just what that impact had on everyday Canadians in our ridings? I would say yes and no.

I mean, did it give us a chance to check in with people and do a pulse check? Yes, it did. Did it clarify specifically what that impact was and the true qualitative nature of how that was really impacting women's lives in this case? I would say yes. I think it deepened our understanding of something that we had already identified.

I would answer your question that it allowed us to reflect on how that related to all of the other competing priorities before government. There are a lot, and obviously you know that.

That's how I would answer your question.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I just want to ask, if I can, in the same vein—

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** This is really unique that...I noticed....

I like the engaging debate, but is this normal? People don't normally jump in. I feel like I'm really stimulating people to jump in here. Are we encouraging that? I guess it's up to me, is it?

Madam Chair, you're looking at me, and I'm looking at you.

I just wonder.

**The Chair:** I know.

Some people have allowed it since yesterday.

You can just say, "I don't want any interventions. I want to carry on with my speech", and that's fine. Then there are no interventions, and you can carry on. You must be—

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I was just going to ask, because it was on the same thread as Daniel. I was asking if I could go on that same thread as the former status of women chair.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I guess so, yes.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** Ryan, I hear exactly what you're saying on the she-cession because we had an excellent report that the status of women committee had put together. We had emergency meetings in July. On July 7 and 8 we came in for emergency meetings. I think all of government with all opposition parties working together knew that there was an issue. We had an excellent report that was

being put together. I know it was going through final translation, and it was supposed to be tabled on the 19 or 20.

Ryan, I know there are issues. Perhaps the government might be ever willing to look at that report that was never able to be tabled. We had some of the finest Canadians in there talking about this she-cession, so I agree.

I can say that there was extraordinary work done by the status of women on emergency committees based on this. Unfortunately, we couldn't table it.

Thank you.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you.

I'm on two other committees, and one is the HUMA committee. I don't know if Mr. Long is still here, but he serves on that committee with me.

We decided right after prorogation to essentially reconvene with one motion, which put all of the studies that we had done before back on the table, and we continued forward on our work. There was really no difference. We reassessed our priorities a little bit, but we continued with our work.

I wonder why the committee that you're speaking of didn't do that. Maybe you felt that the Speech from the Throne already dealt with—

• (6125)

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** They did go back into it. It's just that we had something that was very.... It was talking about child care issues and a variety of different things.

It would have just come about five months earlier, that's all. That information was already there, and it would have been available to the government in July instead of waiting for the committees to reconvene. FEWO was the last committee to reconvene due to the technical difficulties that we currently have. They were late to reconvene.

I know that this is something they've studied. I'm just saying that the subject matter and all of the information was there in July for the government, and they did not have to wait for them to reconvene and get back on the study. I think it's been reported now, but those are some of the delays. It was a five-month delay for status of women, which means child care and all of those other issues that you're talking about....

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I'm glad you mentioned child care. I can't really speak to the work of your committee, and I'm not aware of the report, but it's good to hear that eventually it did move forward. I was actually going to mention this. It sort of leads into a couple of other points I wanted to make before I wrapped up.

This is from page 13 of the throne speech:

The Government will create an Action Plan for Women in the Economy to help more women get back into the workforce and to ensure a feminist, intersectional response to this pandemic and recovery.

I could go on about that, but I think it's a really important commitment that we made. Obviously, there's more work to be done.

It also states:

It has been nearly 50 years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women outlined the necessity of child care services for women's social and economic equality....Recognizing the urgency of this challenge, the Government will make a significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system.

The pandemic highlighted the “she-cession” and how the hard-fought advancement of women's equality could be set back by this pandemic. The government is committed to making not only an action plan for women in the economy, but also a national early learning and child care system. I can't tell you how passionately some of my constituents feel about that as a priority.

Again, I know that we all have different opinions on things, and that's fine. Ms. Vecchio did some very substantive work, I'm sure, in her committee that I personally would value reading and reviewing. I try to read a lot. That's why my eyes are always so red. I stay up pretty late reading. That's why I remarked earlier that I got a good sleep for once, so I feel energized for today's debate. It's important, and I hope that all members are taking care of themselves at this time.

I really value the hard work you all put in every day. I really respect all of you. I hope you're all taking the time to take care of yourselves.

I'll wrap up there for now, Madam Chair. I do have a lot more to say about this, but for now I'll hand it over to one of my honourable colleagues. I don't know who is next, but I'm sure they have lots of meaningful things to share as well.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your remarks, Mr. Turnbull. I apologize about the interventions. Just give me a heads-up that....

You know, somehow more were encouraged than usual, or were prompted somehow, but if a member doesn't wish to go down that road, they don't have to. We don't have to use the protocol at all, really, if the committee doesn't find it helpful. It's only there to be helpful, not to actually make it worse.

I don't know what you think about that, but [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

• (6130)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

I would like to thank my colleague Ryan for his passion. We can't miss anything but we're here.

[*Translation*]

Thanks to everyone.

Once again, we're here to talk about the role and relevance of prorogation. My colleague frequently alluded to the throne speech and I'm also going to link it to the economic statement, which is also important. The Speech from the Throne was delivered in

September, but the economic statement was in November, and the work done during prorogation is what enabled us to greatly improve things.

I'd like to return to something extremely important that was raised by my colleague Mr. Turnbull, and that affected me directly. These were the decisions we made during this difficult period with respect to seniors. My colleague spoke to us about long-term care, but there's one thing in particular I'd like to address. I'd like to speak to my colleague's comments by saying that although these matters were discussed on other committees, we, the members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, also have something to say about the seniors file.

This is demonstrated by the fact that Bill C-19 includes extremely important long-term care provisions that are matters of procedure. These were part of the discussions we had with all levels of government. We worked with the provinces and territories. The government is aware of needs specific to vulnerable populations during this pandemic. We know that the vulnerable population is seniors. The government is proposing specific measures to protect the health and safety of Canadians living in long-term care centres by protecting their right to participate in the democratic process.

What seniors went through during the lockdown was unheard of. They were kept away from their families and anyone else. Today, we need to talk about their ability to exercise their democratic rights, because if there is an election, they need to be part of the process.

And if the bill were adopted, it would also give Elections Canada, the Chief Electoral Officer and electoral staff the latitude needed to make it possible for voters in long-term care centres to vote safely. This affects us directly. The committee is therefore involved in this file.

Mr. Turnbull prepared things very well, but before discussing the actions our government took during this pandemic and during the prorogation, I would like to speak about seniors, because I'm the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors. I also would like to apologize for not having been here for the first hour. If I am repeating anything that my colleagues may have already mentioned, then I'm sorry. I was in the House doing my duty and defending seniors, as it happens, in connection with a debate on a Bloc Québécois motion.

For seniors, we are also planning a 13-day period during which all electoral staff could help long-term care centre residents vote safely, in compliance with public health standards. We had to discuss these standards not only with Health Canada, but several other departments as well. We are working with Elections Canada, with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and with the entire House of Commons system.



This 13-day period would give electoral staff time to organize, contact the centres, make sure that no one is forgotten, specify the precise dates for safe voting and, of course, conduct the voting process itself.

• (6135)

The bill would also enable electoral staff to install polling stations on a number of floors or areas in the facilities, making sure that they are accessible and comply with the standards, and the needs of these vulnerable people.

It's important to pay attention to the coming waves. We've been told that we're in the second wave at the moment, but there could be a third. Some zones are "hotter" than others. Each province has introduced a classification system for the pandemic's level of severity. Many people might find themselves in a red zone as we're discussing it. It's therefore important to adjust and to take procedural steps to help our seniors in residential and long-term care facilities.

Madam Chair, I don't know if you can hear my dog barking. I'm going to have to let him out. Can you give me 10 seconds to do that? If I don't he's going to keep barking.

[English]

**The Chair:** You need only 10 seconds, but I actually need five minutes. Is it okay if we suspend for five minutes?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll all be back at 1:40.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** All right, let's take a five-minute health break.

I promise you that I'll be just as impassioned when I return.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

• (6135)

(Pause)

• (6145)

• (6150)

**The Chair:** The meeting is unsuspended.

Mr. Lauzon, please carry on.

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Karen, I just want to start by wishing a happy birthday to your husband. He's 50 years old. I reached that a few years ago.

[Translation]

Thank you all.

[English]

I will switch to French now. I think it's easier for me to speak in French. I can speak a little longer in French than in English.

Let's start again.

[Translation]

I was supporting what Mr. Turnbull said earlier, because I liked what he said about seniors. He also focused on the throne speech and the economic statement. The throne speech was in September and the economic statement in November. My view is that the Speech from the Throne is very important, because it mentions seniors.

Some of the evidence said that the throne speech had little or no impact because it wasn't really structured in a way that would allow the government to get moving again.

I also want to talk about items pertaining to our farmers, and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, where Mr. Arseneault is from. The Acadian reference is of interest to Mr. Arseneault.

I used to be a municipal councillor. I have therefore done business with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, an organization for which I have a lot of respect. The federation said that further measures to assist the cultural industry would result in a more stable sharing of the web giants' revenue, and that it was committed to promoting French across Canada; it also said that the strategies mentioned in the throne speech were highly encouraging.

Since then, the throne speech has allowed us to make a great deal of progress. In a riding like mine, people are as concerned about the environment as they are about agriculture. As I mentioned yesterday, my riding is huge—5,000 square kilometres—and has 41 rural municipalities. That's what the farmers said about climate change and that's what they thought about the very welcome paragraph in the throne speech about the importance of promoting French and the plan to strengthen the Official Languages Act on the basis of the specific status of French in Canada. Everybody's involved.

We changed things in the throne speech to give recognition to our culture. There is French in Quebec, but there is also French outside Quebec, in francophone and Acadian communities, for instance. The throne speech led to the changes we are seeing today. The Montreal Chamber of Commerce told us that in cities, our economy was being driven by clean technologies, something focused on in the throne speech. That's good news for electric transportation, a strong area of expertise in my province of Quebec. It's strong in Canada too. It's a Quebec organization, the Montreal Chamber of Commerce, one of the largest Canadian chambers of commerce, that said so.

It's worth noting that what was said in the throne speech following prorogation really changed things. We have the evidence. The good news is that this Speech from the Throne promises action to combat the opioid crisis, to improve the welfare of indigenous people, and to enhance access to mental health resources to ensure that everyone can get the care they need, when they need it. This came from the Canadian Mental Health Association, the CMHA. These are all organizations recognized across Canada.

The Prime Minister's promise to compensate dairy producers, which was reiterated in the throne speech, was favourably received. We announced it in the throne speech. What have we done since? Dairy producers in my riding and my colleagues' ridings received fair and equitable compensation, approved by all of the associations that represent dairy producers in Canada.

• (6155)

I could go on about many more subjects, but these were concrete measures taken following a setback. I've been asked what a proration accomplishes and how the government will be able to bounce back. I have just given you a list of measures, and there are many others. I haven't even spoken yet about seniors. As it happens, we reiterated that we would be increasing old age security benefits for seniors 75 years and over by 10%. That, for me, is something essential.

We are working together now to deal with a pandemic and we need to slow a number of things down so that we can work on programs that will help Canadians. We all have the same financial problems, whether in businesses, the cultural sector, organizations or the general population, including seniors in long-term care centres.

Our government has adapted to better serve Canadians. It introduced programs to help the entire population. I've already said, and will continue to say, that nothing is perfect. A pandemic doesn't come with an instruction manual.

I would like to say one thing though. I've been in politics for a long time. It must be nearly 25 years. I had been a municipal councillor since 2009, and I've been a federal member of Parliament since 2015. I've never felt as useful to my fellow citizens as I have by helping those in need. That includes all my fellow citizens. I've spoken to ferryboat operators, seniors and all kinds of fellow citizens, as well as micro-enterprises with only two or three employees.

Are you aware of what we've actually done? We've saved lives. I can go that far. I will say it. I'm speaking from the heart today. We saved lives. There is a great deal of psychological distress among people today. Were you aware that money is one of the main causes of psychological distress, in second place after divorce?

Not only that, but the crisis has clearly created family tensions and we all know that the number of incident reports from centres for women in distress have increased. We're very much aware of this.

Together, we've helped the community as best we can. I know that it increases the debt and that we will have to start thinking about that very soon. I'm very much aware that we're going to have to work twice as hard. However, by supporting businesses and much of the population, we've saved many families and marriages.

During the pandemic, senior couples in need were able to receive \$1,500. That's more than double the amount we had promised seniors in the 2015 election campaign, as an increase to the guaranteed income supplement. We are now prepared to consider a future increase in assistance for seniors. We are prepared to do even more

to help businesses and kickstart the economy. That's why we've launched an economic recovery plan.

There was also something added to the Speech from the Throne a little later, and that was the economic statement in the fall of 2020, from which I recall a number of items. Contrary to what I've heard in some of the evidence, and in what I've read in a number of documents, it's impossible to go back quickly and declare a 24-hour proration under the current circumstances. If a pandemic isn't a good reason to prorogue Parliament, then I don't know what would be for a government, whether in Canada or elsewhere in the world. We've come up against a wall that nobody had anticipated.

• (6200)

No one could have seen this pandemic coming. It's easy to say that the government didn't react quickly enough and that it could have done this or that. I've been hearing about "should haves" all my life. With a pandemic like the one we're in, we, as parliamentarians, need to pull together to do our work in the House and in the committees, and to adopt our motions.

I'm thinking, for example, of medical assistance in dying. People are waiting for it. When I returned home from jogging one day, I saw my neighbour sitting on my porch. He was crying as he waited for me. I asked him what was going on. He wanted us to take action on medical assistance in dying, because he needed it. He has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, and he's going to die soon. He told me that as a great athlete and marathon runner, he needed us. He wanted us to adopt an act that had more latitude; otherwise he wouldn't be entitled to medical assistance in dying.

Right now, we're trying to get things done in the House and people are putting obstacles in our way as we try to meet the requirements of the court and to work with the provinces and territories. More than ever, it's important for us to work together and to move this issue forward. The government motion we introduced does indeed have huge implications.

Our committee has many other issues to address, and I sincerely believe that the current report on proration will be enough for us to move forward and submit recommendations as best we can.

I went to bed late yesterday but slept very well. I read into the small hours of the morning to learn more about the file. After all the reading I've done over the past few days I can see that there are great differences of opinion, and I respect these.

But I have more trouble accepting the idea that an opinion can be submitted with accompanying solutions even before the committee has looked at the recommendations. That bothers me. It's nevertheless there in writing. We are responsible enough and educated enough to reach decisions about what we want and don't want to see in a report. We'll debate each of the recommendations and update all the information.

I sincerely believe that we need to get to work as quickly as possible to study the very important initiatives pertaining to our democracy. I sincerely believe that we need to move forward and introduce additional motions, and deal with new projects the committee will be working on.

My colleague spoke at length about the importance of the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to speak to you about the throne speech and the economic statement. Some claimed it was nothing more than a smokescreen and that it was unnecessary. And yet, I can already see a difference in Canadians.

I can understand that Ms. Vecchio might be pleased to hear me refer to what she said and what her party argued. But I truly believe that the throne speech was incredibly important—just as important as the economic statement.

• (6205)

We've been living through a very difficult winter. We're tired and fed up with being shut in, even though we are at least free. Sometimes, just for a change, I hide out in my riding office, but I'm always alone at home. From time to time, my dog wants to go out. My children are gone, my wife is off to work and I'm alone. I must admit that I too feel alone. And yet, I have everything I need. I have you on screen, I have the House of Commons, I have my passion for seniors and a role as a parliamentary secretary, and so I have nothing to complain about.

But then just think about the number of seniors who are isolated and can't even leave their room. All they have is a bed, a sink, a closet and a television set. Some don't even have the Internet. I heard some evidence pointing out that some seniors couldn't even get online. Well, in my riding, they can't get the Internet because there's simply no access to it. Only 40% of the population have access.

That's why the government made a commitment. Never has a government spent as much as us to make the Internet accessible and affordable to everyone as soon as possible. I'm talking about 5G and at least 50 megabits per second. Seniors and vulnerable people need this access to break out of their isolation.

I live in the country, but I have Internet access because it's a decision I made. To be a member of Parliament, needless to say, I had to find a place where I could have access. I had not anticipated the pandemic, but I needed Internet access at home, particularly so that the children could do their schoolwork. I needed it and I found it, but that's not the case for everyone in my riding.

Our government's priority is therefore to step back and ask how we can connect to the Internet in a riding like Argenteuil—La Pétite-Nation.

A highway was built right through the middle of my riding. Highway 50. As I drive it, I'm often on the telephone—needless to say I follow the rules and operate hands-free—but I lose contact four times because my cell phone loses the network connection.

This is 2021. What are our priorities? They're all important, but to break out of isolation and keep people safe, a communication system is essential. It's extremely important for our democracy and for the future we want to build for ourselves.

During the pandemic, some groups of people suffered from isolation, including seniors, but they're not alone. When I was driving on route 323 in my riding, I saw a car that seemed to be in distress at the top of a mountain. I pulled over to see if everything was all right. I could see that it was a woman and her three children, in the back seat. When I asked if I could help her, she said that there was nothing I could do except get her Internet access. She told me that she had stopped there because it was the only place where she could get the Internet so that her children could do their homework.

Really? In 2021, a mother has to drive her three children to the top of a mountain so that they can do their homework?

For me, this is a priority. There's hope, however, because the best is yet to come. The government, as it said in the economic statement and the throne speech, has a plan to help Canadians get what they need.

• (6210)

What's needed is connectivity, and for our seniors, it's long-term care and the national strategy on long-term care.

That's the background against which I'm speaking out on the importance of the throne speech and the economic statement so that I can explain why it's a good idea for our government and the Governor General to exercise their prerogative to prorogue Parliament for a few weeks.

Right now, we don't know exactly when or how the pandemic is going to end. We're already talking about variants and a possible third wave. We don't know where it's all headed, but we know that it will end. We've taken the steps needed to end the pandemic. The action we took stemmed from our government's decisions.

If the pandemic is not a good reason to take a step back in order to move two steps forward, then the rule should be eliminated. The prerogative to prorogue Parliament is essential for instances like the situation we've been in. No one can say that it wasn't useful.

The four committees that studied prorogation could have made all kinds of assumptions. I'm not naming names, but no one can tell us today that this prorogation was inappropriate.

The government's economic statement is clear. We were able to say afterwards that every Canadian could be vaccinated free of charge. We have a plan, and it's in place.

We're working hard, together with the suppliers and the hubs we want to create in Canada to meet future vaccination needs. Everyone knows that you can't build the plants, launch the companies and be on top of things in a week. It takes time. However, we are negotiating with other suppliers.

We have the most complete and most diversified vaccine portfolio in the world. Everyone will be able to get vaccinated. We even have access to many doses of vaccine. We have almost 430 million doses for those eligible for the vaccine. We are therefore in a good position.

The Fall Economic Statement 2020 also contained new measures for Canadians to combat the pandemic. We didn't only talk about vaccines—the vaccines are one component—we didn't only talk about long-term care and we didn't only talk about assistance to dairy producers, but that's nevertheless quite a lot.

• (6215)

For example, we spent money on tracing. The equipment we gave the provinces and territories cost billions of dollars. We also acquired personal protective equipment for nurses, doctors, health workers and front-line workers, in addition to rapid tests. At the moment, there are rapid tests that have not yet been used by the provinces because they have too many.

[*English*]

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Sorry, Monsieur Lauzon.

Can I raise a point of order?

**The Chair:** Sure.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I'm having trouble hearing. I don't know why the volume is quite low on the translation. I'm not sure if it's just me or if others are having the same issue, but I just wanted to raise it. Maybe we could check if the interpreter volume could be turned up just a little bit.

**The Clerk:** Madam Chair, we can check on that.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Justin.

You feel so helpless sometimes with these Zoom meetings. There's not something I can physically go and do.

While he's checking on it—and I don't know if this is appropriate—I thought it would be interesting to tell all of you about all of the people it takes to put on these meetings. I was just talking to the clerk the other day about it, because it takes more people than it usually does.

We have the interpreters, and we need more than we usually do need. We have 20-minute shifts for interpreters. We also have the proceedings and verification officer, who you usually see in the room, who switches the microphones on and off. Then we also have a control room for the webcasting, which used to be back there as well, but now in addition to that we have Zoom technicians. We have technicians who monitor everyone's connectivity, who are different from the Zoom technicians. Then we have IT ambassadors who give you the phone call if there's any kind of technical difficulty and you need help. And then, of course, we have our analysts and our fantastic clerk.

I just wanted to give them a little shout-out while we were figuring out this problem. It takes a lot of people to put on these meetings. We really appreciate all the hard work that goes on behind the scenes. Even though we don't get to see you, we know our meetings run smoothly because of your efforts, so thank you so much for that.

Hopefully, the problem is resolved. I'll hand it back to Mr. Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Lauzon:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was on a roll again. Every time we talk about health care resources sent to the provinces, I feel it personally, particularly when it helps seniors. Most of them have been deeply affected by the crisis.

We can never place enough emphasis on how important it is to support the people who built this country. We're talking about our parents, our friends and our family members who are elderly and want to live at home as long as possible. We've introduced measures to help. Some seniors cohabit with their family. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank those among you who cohabit with your parents. Hats off to you.

There are also all the seniors who live in long-term care centres or in private residences. They usually receive good care, but we all saw how the long-term care system failed. That's what was most heartbreaking.

We took a set of measures to protect long-term care residents. Earlier, I spoke about the equipment we sent to the provinces and territories, but we also sent help. At the request of two provinces, Ontario and Quebec, we sent in the military and the Red Cross to help seniors and to support a failing system. We are proud of that. We should all, as federal members of Parliament, take pride in having a system that was able to provide last resort assistance. When you have to call in the armed forces, you know that it's a last resort.

I never would have thought that the military would have to come to my riding. And yet it happened, because there have been two floods in my riding since I became the federal member of Parliament, and now there's a pandemic. When I accompany the army as a member of Parliament, I can tell you that I feel like a rooster in a henhouse. I'm proud to say that the Canadian Armed Forces helped us out. That's not to say that I'm proud about the circumstances that required it. If they're there, it's because there's an extreme need, but I take pride in saying that they came to shore up the provincial system.

I'd also like to speak about the \$150 million to improve ventilation in public buildings. My children were the beneficiaries of this. There's a teacher—

• (6220)

[*English*]

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Ms. Vecchio, are you having the same problem?

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** No, I am not having a problem. I recognize, and you indicated, that we have many great people working, and not only in the room—interpreters, clerks and the whole she-mozzle—but if we go past 2:30 today there will have to be a cancellation of other meetings because of protocol.

I just wanted to bring it up, because I believe that if you look at the room, you may be able to find consensus to suspend the meeting so that we are not now interfering in the rest of the afternoon and important committees. Thank you.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** I have a point of clarification, Madam Chair. Are we talking about suspending or adjourning?

**The Chair:** I believe Ms. Vecchio asked to seek consensus to suspend.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio:** I can go for an adjournment. I don't know what the legal matters of it are, but I just look at the fact that there are some really important things going on after this. Thank you.

**The Chair:** It looks like we have consensus on that.

I wanted to say that I forgot to mention the cleaners, who also make it possible for the committee meetings to move on. Ms. Vecchio is saying that 2:30 is generally the time they need to have the room before the 3:30 meetings can start.

We will adjourn for today. We'll see you back next time.

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