

Supplementary Opinion of the Conservative Party of Canada

Introduction

The Conservative Party of Canada would like to thank the Clerk of the Committee, Miriam Burke, and the staff of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics for their work on this study and the analysts for their diligence in writing this report. To the witnesses who responded to the Committee's invitations and provided their testimony into the government's pandemic spending conflicts of interest – Conservatives thank you.

Following the Prime Minister's prorogation of Parliament and shuttering of committees to avoid scrutiny of the depth of Cabinet's involvement in the WE Scandal, this study and subsequent report emerged out of a Liberal filibuster equal to twenty meetings of the Committee. This Committee was not the only one to be subject to the Liberal's blocking of investigations into Justin Trudeau's WE Scandal. The Standing Committees on Finance, Procedure and House Affairs, and Government Operations and Estimates all faced similar tactics of filibuster and blocking.

In addition to the Liberal's attempts to evade accountability for Justin Trudeau's WE Scandal, the Committee was met with difficulties from key players who refused the invitations of the Committee to testify on their role in the scandal. These individuals openly challenged and rebuked the Committee's authority to send for persons, papers, and records. Further, the government ordered key senior staff to disobey an Order of the House of Commons and refuse to appear before the Committee.

Liberal record of scandals

The abdication of accountability and responsibility leading to this study should come as no surprise. The WE scandal being just the latest in a long line of major scandals and a litany of Member's Code breaches from this Liberal government. The government's record speaks for itself.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was found guilty of contravening sections 5, 11, 12, and 21 of the Conflict of Interest Act for illegal vacations taken on Bells Cay, the Bahamian private island owned by the Aga Khan. The Prime Minister was found to have been in conflict of interest, accepted gifts that could influence him, accepted travel on a private aircraft, and for failing to recuse himself from discussions in which he was in a conflict of interest.

The Prime Minister was again found guilty for contravening section 9 of the Conflict of Interest Act for politically interfering in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. A company charged with fraud and corruption for bribing Libyan officials in the Muammar Gaddafi government to the tune of \$48 million and for defrauding Libyan organizations out of \$130 million. The Prime

Minister was found to have undertaken a concerted campaign to pressure the then Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Jody Wilson-Raybould, into offering SNC-Lavalin a deferred prosecution agreement in the name of political considerations and his re-election in Quebec.

The fallout of the Prime Minister's SNC-Lavalin scandal was severe. Ms. Wilson-Raybould and President of the Treasury Board Jane Philpott were removed from Cabinet and the Liberal Caucus for speaking out against corruption. In addition, the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Gerald Butts and Clerk of the Privy Council Michael Wernick resigned their posts in disgrace.

With the Prime Minister's continuous tendency for throwing ethics law to the wayside and setting the bar incredibly low, it is not hard to believe this mentality would leech out of the PMO and into Cabinet. The former Minister of Finance Bill Morneau, and the former Fisheries Minister Dominic Leblanc, both followed in the footsteps of the Prime Minister and were in turn found guilty of breaking ethics law.

Mr. Leblanc was found guilty of contravening sections 6(1) and 21 of the Conflict of Interest Act for awarding a lucrative Surf Clam fishing contract to a company meant to be run by his wife's first cousin worth nearly \$24 million. The private financial interests of the Minister's family stood to benefit from this clear conflict of interest and refusal to recuse himself from deliberations.

Mr. Morneau in his role as Finance Minister on no less than two occasions was found guilty of contravening the Conflict of Interest Act. He failed to disclose that he owned a villa in the French countryside as well as a corporation in which he had directorship. For two years, the former Finance Minister did not report his assets in France, an act of disclosure that is required of all Parliamentarians and especially Cabinet Ministers.

Mr. Morneau was further found guilty of contravening sections 6(1), 7, and 21 of the Conflict of Interest Act for improperly furthering the WE organizations private interests, failing to recuse himself from decisions relating to WE, and by giving WE preferential treatment. In his role as Finance Minister, Mr. Morneau gave unfettered access to the corridors of power to the Kielburger brothers of WE and allowed his senior Ministerial staff to assist WE with funding proposals, and even had them intervene on behalf of WE at the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal levels.

The ties between the Morneau family and WE are clear. Mr. Morneau accepted a \$41,000 vacation from the organization, his daughter worked for WE, and on multiple occasions he welcomed Craig Kielburger to the Morneau family home for brunch and other events. In the wake of the WE Scandal, Mr. Morneau was removed from Cabinet and resigned his seat as a Member of Parliament under the guise of a bid for the position of Secretary-General of OECD.

Predictably and despite being given 19 public servants to work on the bid, Mr. Morneau dropped out of the race.

Damaging the Public Trust in Institutions

Whether it is illegal vacations to billionaire island, ClamScam, forgotten French villas, political interference in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, or the WE Scandal – this Liberal government's complete disregard for good ethical governance has greatly damaged Canadian's trust in their governing institutions. The existence of a two-tiered set of laws is a reality for everyday Canadians. There is one set of rules for the Liberal elite in this country and another set for everyone else.

This couldn't be clearer with the constant unbridled access that Liberal insiders have to Cabinet and how these insiders drive public policy to suit their own needs, rather than what's in the best interest of Canadians. Under the approval of Justin Trudeau, insiders will always be given the inside track and be able to jump the queue while everyday Canadians are left behind.

The judicial system, in which Canadians must have absolute confidence in, is also given to Liberal insiders that are handed the fast track in appointments to the bench. Consistently the names that find themselves on top of the list of judicial appointments also find themselves on top of this Liberal government's donor list.

As far as the Canadian public is concerned, beyond the scandals, ethical breaches, and insider access, the very appearance of a conflict of interest from a public office holder is just as damaging to the public trust as a realized conflict of interest.

Questions Remaining

There are major questions left unanswered stemming from revelations found in the documents obtained by the Committee. The WE organization welcomed corporations onto the stage of their events, to be publicly vetted, which runs into the hundreds of thousands of dollars that a corporation must give WE to receive such treatment. The Prime Minister receives this treatment and public vetting by WE for free. A politician being brought before tens of thousands of potential voters, and built up by WE, is of great value to the receiving politician.

In the documents, WE stated that ten videos, which starred the Prime Minister on one occasion, were produced by Door Knocker Media and paid for by WE at a total cost of \$127,000 plus HST. Although the exact cost of each individual video has not been provided for, the high overall price tag for the ten videos, shows that the video starring the Prime Minister is of significant monetary value.

Besides the troubling financial implications of the Prime Minister's video, the platform it provided the leader of a political party for self-promotion is problematic. In the video the Prime Minister can be quoted saying, "I pledge to work hard for all Canadians... to invest in our youngest leaders – you." A promise to represent their interests as soon-to-be Canadian voters is a clear political message rather than a philanthropic endorsement of the WE organization. The video was an opportunity gifted to him by his friends the Kielburgers to further his personal and political brand.

Further, these new documents told the Committee that the Prime Minister's wife received a \$20,000 weekend away to attend the 2020 WE Day in London just weeks before WE was given the contract for the half-billion-dollar CSSG. The amount of both financial and in-kind benefit that the Prime Minister and his family have received from WE is astounding. These facts, and the appearance of a clear conflict of interest, have been severely damaging to the public's confidence in their democratic institution.

Accountability Measures

With the cronyism and corruption rampant in the Liberal government, a new and comprehensive anti-corruption law must be passed to return accountability to Ottawa. To begin to restore the public's trust in their governing institutions.

Conservatives support a review of the Conflict of Interest Act and the Conflict of Interest Code for Members to strengthen ethics laws and empower the Ethics Commissioner. A strengthened Ethics Commissioner could impose meaningful sanctions on those who are found to have contravened the Act and Code commensurate with the status of the offender and the severity of the contravention.

Conservatives also agree with the opinion of Nancy Bélanger, the Lobbying Commissioner, that the Lobbying Act must be reviewed and strengthened by removing loopholes and empowering the Lobbying Commissioner to seek a range of compliance measures. Including monetary sanctions and prohibitions.

In closing, Conservatives point out the government's bad faith actions throughout this study and adoption of this report as further evidence of the ethical breaches, insider access, and cronyism of Justin Trudeau and his Liberal government and the damage they have done to the Canadian public trust.