



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

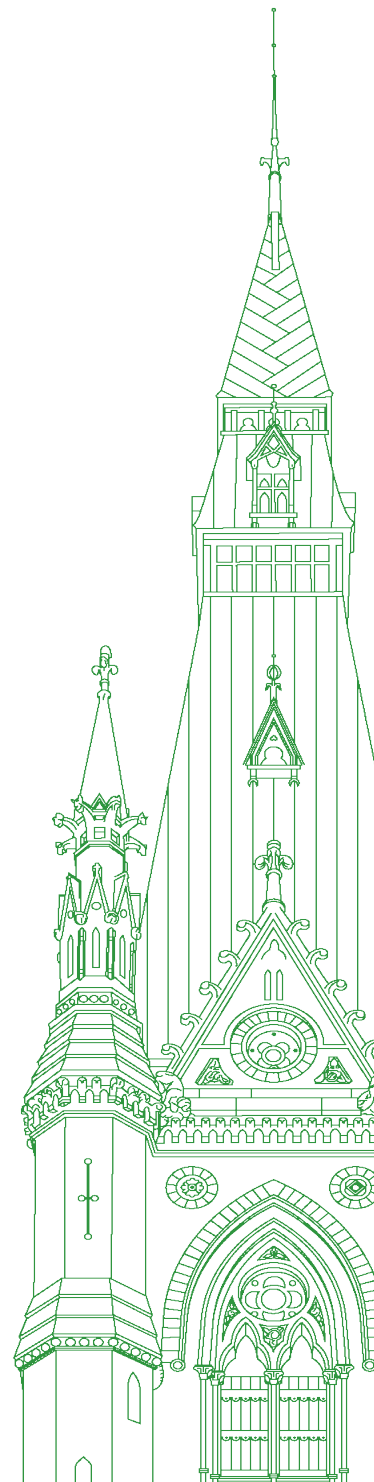
EVIDENCE

NUMBER 027

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Tuesday, April 13, 2021

Chair: Ms. Ruby Sahota



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 27 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. So you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

We don't have any members physically present in the room. Is that correct, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive): That's correct, Madam Chair. There are no members in the room.

The Chair: I'd like to take this opportunity to remind all participants in this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of your screen are not permitted.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation, and consistent with public health recommendations, all those who are in the room in person, including staff, are to maintain a two metre physical distance and must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is highly recommended that masks be worn at all times, including when seated. You must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the front entrance of the room.

As chair, with the help of the clerk, I will be enforcing these measures during the duration of the meeting.

For all those participating virtually, 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. With the latest Zoom version, you may now speak in the language of your choice without the need to switch to the corresponding language selection.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute your mike. If there are any substitutes who come into the room, they'll have their mike automatically controlled for them.

I remind members that all comments should be made through the chair. A speakers list will come in very handy today. I'll be following the toolbar, obviously, and the raised hand feature is there, so just continue to use that.

We are on committee business. There are several motions before the committee to consider. It's up to committee members as to how they want to proceed and move forward during today's meeting, and the discussion they wish to have about what they think this committee should be occupied with in the coming days.

The last meeting, just a reminder for those who weren't here, was adjourned on March 25. At that time, we were on Ms. Vecchio's motion.

Right now, we have notices of motion from Mr. Blaikie and Mr. Therrien. There are three motions Mr. Therrien has regarding translation and interpretation. They were submitted on February 23. Mr. Blaikie's motion was submitted on November 17.

We've circulated a new motion. Ms. Petitpas Taylor has one on political entities, which was submitted on March 23.

Mr. Turnbull also has a motion before the committee regarding the Ontario Superior Court decision. It was submitted on March 23.

Yesterday, Mr. Blaikie submitted a revised motion. I don't know if it's a revised motion. We'll let Mr. Blaikie speak to that a little later if he has an opportunity. There's a new motion on electoral reform or constituent assemblies, and it's a bit revised from the last motion.

There's another motion that has just been put on notice by Mr. Nater. It also has been circulated.

The few motions that have been brought to my attention, as of the last day or so, haven't been moved in committee yet, so I will move on to the hands we have up and the speakers list.

I wanted everyone to be aware of all the things that have come before the committee as of late, especially the ones in the last few days.

Ms. Vecchio, you are first on the speakers list.

• (1105)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much.

Getting back to the business of March 25 regarding the request for the Prime Minister and additional members to come here, I wanted to bring that back to the floor as part of our discussion for today, so we could finish the work and get to a vote on it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Vecchio has moved to have debate on the amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion on that issue.

Would anyone like to speak to that issue?

Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like a clarification.

Have we continued to debate based on...? Can you just clarify it please?

The Chair: Yes, I can clarify it.

We are back on Ms. Vecchio's motion. We left off with Ms. Vecchio's motion on March 25. Before adjourning we were on an amendment to her motion. That would automatically put us back on that amendment.

She would like to see a vote or any further debate on that and then an eventual vote.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair, for clarifying that.

We are back on the amendment that was brought forward by Mr. Turnbull. Is that correct?

The Chair: That's correct.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you so much.

Madam Chair, I will be saying how much I appreciate the amendment that was brought forward by my friend and colleague, Mr. Turnbull. I have been clear that I think it would be really important to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

I will also make the same point that I have repeatedly made, namely, that there is nothing more important than the COVID-19 pandemic, and that is where our sole focus should be. Canada is in the third wave of COVID-19. We are in a race between the variants and the vaccines, and our health system in Ontario is literally on the verge of collapse. Ontario field hospitals are being readied, but it's not just beds that are needed. Critical care staff are needed. We are hearing that this is absolutely unprecedented. This is the—quote—"nightmare scenario" we were all afraid of, yet this committee remains focused on a political motion.

Our country reported over 9,200 COVID infections on Friday. That was the new single-day high since the start of the pandemic. We have had the highest number of COVID-19 cases, and yet there is a partisan motion.

Worldwide, more than 2,850,000 people have lost their lives, and all of us, we have lost them. Globally, new COVID-19 cases rose for a sixth consecutive week, with over four million cases reported in the last week. The number of new deaths also increased by 11% compared to the previous week, with over 71,000 new deaths reported.

Far too many health care workers have died in the pandemic and millions have been infected. The pandemic has taken a huge toll on their physical and mental health, with devastating effects on their families and communities. Anxiety, depression, insomnia and stress have all increased, and yet we have a partisan motion.

The pandemic is exposing, exploiting and exacerbating inequalities. COVID-19 pushed an estimated 120 million people into extreme poverty last year. Gender inequalities have increased with more women than men leaving the labour force. Rich countries are vaccinating their populations while the world's poor watch and wait.

Health inequalities are not just unfair; they make the world less safe and less sustainable. Yet there is a partisan motion.

Here in Canada, we have had over one million COVID-19 cases. COVID-19 has claimed the lives of more than 23,250 Canadians. That's another 1,250 Canadians since I updated this committee on March 6—in fact, when I was repeatedly interrupted at this committee.

Madam Chair, I cannot imagine what could be more important than talking about COVID-19, the race between the variants and the vaccines and what this committee could actually do to ensure preparedness for pandemics going forward. The numbers of deaths are not just numbers. They were our grandparents, mothers, fathers, loved ones, neighbours, colleagues, lifelong friends, mentors and heroes, and they matter to so many more people.

All of us should be asking about the number of outbreaks of COVID-19 in hospitals right now, the number of health care workers who have developed COVID-19 and the number of health care workers who have ended up in ICU. All of us should be asking about the number of outbreaks in essential workplaces, in marginalized communities and in congregate settings.

A century after the 1918 influenza, poverty, hunger, well-being, gender, racialization and economic status still play a role in who gets sick, who gets treated and who survives COVID-19.

● (1110)

Non-emergency surgeries are on hold in Ontario hospitals as COVID-19 takes hold despite a backlog of postponed surgeries from the past year approaching 250,000. Ontario has not ordered such an across-the-board postponement of non-emergency surgeries since the first wave of the pandemic hit the province in March 2020.

Dr. Kevin Smith, the CEO of the University Health Network, has written, "This is going to be the most extraordinary and demanding time most of us have had in our working lives. It comes to us after a very long year which has left us feeling battered and drained."

They are battered and they are drained. In the words of one physician, "It's never-ending high stress and I'm actually afraid. I've never been afraid, but it's different with the variants. You have no idea what we see, the fear from the patient, the fear of families saying goodbye over Zoom, the fear of our families when we come home. It's unrelenting." But here we are focused on a partisan motion.

Let me be clear. We are still fighting the pandemic. Canada's cases have increased 82% over the last 14 days. In Ontario more COVID-19 patients are in the ICU than at any other point during the pandemic. The expectation is that we are locked in for a 5% to 7% daily increase in hospital admissions for the next two weeks. The number of new variant cases more than doubled in the last week.

An article states, "Canada's chief public health officer Dr. Theresa Tam said the rapidly spreading variants have now likely replaced the original virus, as more young people are getting sicker". This article is a few days old now, but it states that to date, "more than 26,000 cases linked to variants of concern have been reported" in Canada.

The variant initially reported in the United Kingdom accounts for more than 90%. For the variant first identified in Brazil, there have been more than 1,000 cases in Canada after doubling in the last week alone. The variant from South Africa is also picking up momentum, with cases in Ontario and Quebec. The article goes on to state:

Hospital admissions are also on the rise as health-care staff try to keep up with overflowing ICUs. Experts say the number of COVID-19 patients in ICUs continue to test hospital capacities with patients battling the disease.

My friends, we've done really good work in the past. Together we have done really good work. We did important work that allowed remote voting so that MPs weren't travelling back and forth to their communities and potentially spreading the virus. We did really important work in saying what was needed should there be an election during the pandemic. Now we have to step up again. We have to step up and do the work that's incumbent upon us. We need to look at the House of Commons' response so that we can make recommendations for when the next pandemic comes along. We need to do that work.

I'll come back to the motion that's before us. The original motion prejudices the need for prorogation. Mr. Turnbull's amendment refocuses the study on prorogation with research, evidence and facts, and reinviting our Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

The Prime Minister prorogued in order to take the time needed to take stock of Canada's situation: How are Canadians doing? Where were we in the pandemic? How was the pandemic affecting jobs and livelihoods? How had wave one affected our seniors, and particularly those in long-term care? Where should we go as a country after looking at the science, evidence and facts and hearing directly from Canadians?

• (1115)

I remember last spring when our Conservative colleagues wanted in-person Parliament with MPs travelling back and forth to Ottawa, possibly spreading the infection. They wanted in-person voting in Ottawa rather than electronic or remote voting.

When dealing with a new disease, it's important to acknowledge that not everything is known. It's important to exercise precaution. With a new disease, new science and data, information will likely change. There will likely need to be adjustments and guidelines, policies and recommendations. If we look at what was known last

January versus what is known today, there are a lot of differences: the role of aerosols, the role of indoor versus outdoor spaces and the role of masks. Scientific knowledge evolves over time, and decision-makers have to be open, flexible and willing to change course. Decision-makers must stay humble in the face of the new virus.

Colleagues, we're in the third wave. It is incumbent upon us to do our work so that in the future the House of Commons—Parliament—can be better prepared.

If the Deputy Prime Minister were here, we could ask about the evidence. We could ask about what consultations were taken during prorogation. It is for this reason that I am supporting my friend and colleague Mr. Turnbull and his amendment.

I'm here to represent the constituents of Etobicoke North. We are a caring, strong and resilient community. Many of our community members are essential workers.

I'm also here to debate the amendment at hand, which is to invite several ministers to appear in front of this committee. I support the amendment, as I said, but I would like to give further arguments as to why I think it's important to reinvite ministers.

Speaking for my constituents, I will first talk about COVID-19, as this is what is first and foremost—

• (1120)

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: We're referring back to the invitation, but I believe that Minister Chagger has already been invited, or has she been invited previously? If so, in the last three to four months, has she responded to those invitations?

We're debating something, but we know that there was already a motion, and an invitation has been sent, so perhaps we could find out from those ministers we've invited who in the last three months have answered and said they'll be coming. Or have they not answered the committee, and we're just continuing this filibuster, yet they haven't even answered the first request?

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull's amendment calls for them to be reinvited.

Maybe the clerk can help us with the first invitations as to whether there has been a response. We haven't had the opportunity, I guess, to chat about that in the last two weeks, but I can tell you that as of March 25 there was no response.

Maybe, Justin, you could let me know if I'm correct that there might not be one up to date.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, you are correct. To date, there has not been a response to the committee's invitations to Minister Chagger, Minister Freeland or the Prime Minister. We are still waiting.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On the point of order, Madam Chair, we are right now debating reinviting people who have already not responded. They're saying they want to do this. I appreciate all of the words we've had here today, but we've already sent these invitations out, not just once, but they've been reinvited. Now we're talking about wanting to reinvite them again. This is wasting our time, because we already have done that and they haven't responded. We're just talking about reinviting them. Well, they haven't come. How many birthday parties are we going to invite them to until we stop inviting them?

I'm just wondering where we're going here.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Vecchio.

We've invited them once. We haven't reinvited as of yet. I guess there's been no decision made on that. That's the issue we're currently on.

I will give it back to Ms. Duncan. Maybe there can be an eventual vote on this as to whether we should reinvite these ministers or not.

Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Again, I'm going to say that I absolutely think we should be reinviting them.

In speaking for my constituents, I will talk about COVID-19. This is first and foremost what is affecting their lives. I will speak about the issues that matter most in our community.

I want people to understand that the years 2020 and 2021 are historic. It's been over 100 years since the 1918 influenza pandemic that sickened about 500 million people, which was about one-third of the world's population. The disease killed about 50 million worldwide. It was the deadliest pandemic of the 20th century.

COVID-19 is tragically historic. It is not finished. Rather, the pandemic continues to inflict unprecedented harm on people, societies and economies around the world. The pandemic has pushed the world towards one of the worst recessions in modern times and is having a devastating effect on the most vulnerable countries and peoples. The progress the world has made on eradicating poverty and hunger, increasing opportunities for all and reducing inequalities within and between countries is being eroded.

I will finish by saying that I can't be clearer. We are in the third wave. The focus for our constituents is protecting their health and safety and jobs and livelihoods. As variants continue to spread, we are in a race between the vaccines and the variants. We don't need politics right now. This committee has a very important job. We have all been living this. We've experienced this. I think it is on all of us to actually look at the House of Commons response to make sure that we do this important work like we've done the important work in the past, and that we make recommendations so that we are better prepared going forward.

Madam Chair, I look forward to speaking later, but I will turn it over to one of my colleagues.

Thank you.

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Duncan.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux, it's nice to have you back. I know you had your hand up last time.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

You're right. I did have my hand up. I was hoping to at least get on the record the last time we met a couple of weeks ago. Fortunately for me, I'll be able to get on the record now.

It's such a pleasure, it really and truly is, to be back on PROC and to be afforded the opportunity to speak. It's been a number of years. I've always thought of PROC as one of those standing committees that is held in fairly high esteem, Madam Chair, as you and other members are no doubt aware. Often other committees will look at what's happening in PROC and things that take place in PROC will often disseminate to other committees.

For many years I served in PROC, in particular while I was in opposition. Since being in government, some members may have preferred that I not attend PROC because I was a parliamentary secretary and maybe too strongly linked to it. Nowadays, given what's taken place....

The deputy House leader had it right on. I don't think anyone could have said it any better. The way in which she often speaks I always find very inspiring. She speaks at a level that embodies what I think all politicians strive for. That's to have emotional passion and connection with real people, demonstrating so well how we need to care for people. In that, I think she is second to no other inside the House of Commons in her ability to empathize and sympathize with the public as a whole and as individuals. That's why I appreciate some of the words that she was starting to say concerning what the priority of this government really is.

I've been afforded many opportunities to address a wide variety of issues inside the House of Commons. I've never taken it for granted, nor have I ever taken for granted what takes place in this particular committee. This committee, I believe, needs to be able to demonstrate leadership—leadership that says that in a pandemic, we can get the job done, the job that's necessary; that we're able to get it done.

I must say I am somewhat disappointed. I'm disappointed because I believe in part there's a certain faction rooted within the Conservative House leadership team but which goes beyond it, which is starting to play as a very destructive force. I've made reference to the destructive force inside the House of Commons. The opposition is using partisan politics at a time when we want Canadians and others, including parliamentarians of all political stripes at all different levels, to work closer together.

I have had the opportunity to watch over what's been taking place in PROC. I've witnessed the official opposition leading the charge in ensuring that PROC is not doing some of the things it could and should be doing. The official opposition is more interested in doing what it can to cause filibustering, as some refer to it. I refer to it as more an opportunity for government members, in this particular situation, to try to focus members of the standing committee on what Canadians are so passionate about today.

There is so much more that the PROC committee could be doing. I want to get into some of that, but not until I get rid of a few frustrations that I have.

● (1130)

There is a good example from earlier today. I was going into the chamber anticipating that the member for Elmwood—Transcona would be moving a concurrence motion. I must say I was getting a little agitated. I was thinking about why they would want to move another concurrence motion, especially with respect to PROC, because the member for Elmwood—Transcona would be very much aware of Bill C-19. I'm sure that members of PROC are concerned about an election. After all, in a minority situation no one knows when the election is going to occur.

We continue to do whatever we can to stay focused on the pandemic, and minimizing the negative impacts of the pandemic. However, a part of that is that we need to be ready. As I say, the role that PROC plays is absolutely critical.

As I was going into the House this morning, I received a text. I'm not too sure exactly where it came from, but it implied that the NDP were going to be moving a motion for concurrence in an election report. I know the member for Elmwood—Transcona is listening. I suspect that was his intent this morning. I'm not trying to impute motive—I don't want to go against Beauchesne's here—but I would ask if that was the intent. The only reason it didn't happen is that the Conservatives moved another motion for concurrence. Right away, I'm starting to think, "Well, here we go again. The opposition is trying to frustrate the government."

We are trying to deal with substantial pieces of legislation, and the opposition wants to play games. In one sense, I was expecting the member for Elmwood—Transcona to bring forward his concurrence motion, and then I was hearing that they were going to ask for leave to have the debate occur later in the day, after the House adjourned. I suspect at some point in time the member for Elmwood—Transcona will provide some clarification if that was the plan.

Here's why it's so important to this particular committee. When we talk about the agenda, when we talk about what it is that we should or could be talking about, staying focused on what the deputy House leader was talking about, and that is the pandemic, Bill C-19 is completely relevant and would be a wonderful thing for PROC to be dealing with.

I was hoping that I would get the opportunity in that concurrence debate to go into details about the PROC report. In fact, the first thing I did was call it up on my computer in anticipation that we were going to see a concurrence motion.

Now, that would not have been my first choice, because, as the government has said day in and day out, there is a legislative agenda that the government is trying to get through the House of Commons. At the same time, the government's focus is on the pandemic. I would have preferred, if we were going to be debating something this morning, that it wasn't going to be.... I believe that Bill C-22 is being debated right now, for the very first time. It's an important piece of legislation.

● (1135)

I would have preferred that as opposed to debating the concurrence report, we would be debating Bill C-19. Bill C-19 should have been a major discussion, a topic area for debate inside the House, weeks ago. It has been sitting there for a long time. We've actually attempted—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order, Madam Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: We have called the legislation—

The Chair: I'm sorry. Who raised the point of order?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It's Karen Vecchio.

I'm just wondering if there's any information when it comes to misleading, because he's talking about Bill C-19, and he's fully misleading everybody. It has been scheduled twice for an hour and once for two hours. He's totally misleading any Canadians who are watching right now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Chair, on the same point of order—

The Chair: Maybe you can clarify, Mr. Lamoureux. I'm not aware of the scheduling, but I also wanted to let you know about the amendment that we are on as well.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Chair, I believe Ms. Vecchio was concerned about me misrepresenting the truth. I can assure the committee member and all committee members that everything that I have said is a hundred per cent accurate and can be demonstrated to be so by just looking at the record.

For example, on one occasion in which Bill C-19 was called, a motion for concurrence was moved. The debate wasn't allowed to continue.

For me, in regard to the comments about the relevancy, Madam Chair, relevancy is important in all discussions that we have. When we talk about what has been happening in the procedure and House affairs committee and having witnesses come forward, I would suggest to you that for the procedure and House affairs committee, in dealing with the pandemic, in dealing with witnesses and subject matter that it is completely responsible for, Bill C-19 is one such piece of legislation.

I don't know if you want to give me the green light to continue on, Madam Chair, because of the point of order.

• (1140)

The Chair: I do just want to remind you.... I know that I've been fairly gentle with everybody. This is just a gentle reminder that we are currently on Mr. Turnbull's amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion, which calls for witnesses to be reinvented. Those witnesses are Minister Chagger, Minister Freeland.... I should have the amendment right before me. You may, and I will pull it up in front of me so that I can remind you.

He wishes to invite those witnesses and exclude the Prime Minister and his chief of staff from being on that list, who are currently in Ms. Vecchio's motion. That's essentially what we're looking at within the context of the prorogation study, on which we've had several witnesses come before this committee. We're at a crossroads, I guess, on that prorogation study at this point as to whether we should have more witnesses invited. There's a difference in positions as to which witnesses should be invited, if any. Some are arguing that we should move on to the report stage of that study.

That's essentially a synopsis of where we are and of the different perspectives we're hearing from committee members.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: That's wonderful, Madam Chair. Thank you very much. That is indeed quite helpful. I think in approaching this, there is a lot of validity in terms of just being able to talk as to why prorogation was in fact important and to go through the different lines of the throne speech.

For now, I will continue to focus my attention on the need to ensure that the procedure and House affairs committee is able to remain focused on the pandemic. Bill C-19 is one piece of legislation that allows for procedure and House affairs to remain focused on the pandemic because of the changes to the Canada Elections Act.

I guess where I was going with this was to point out that earlier today, inside the House of Commons, we had a bit of frustration that was starting to get there dealing with concurrence reports. From what I was hearing, a concurrence report was coming, or the idea of calling for concurrence was coming, from the New Democratic Party. My advice was going to be that the New Democratic Party consider Bill C-19 as an area of debate being more important for the floor of the House of Commons than the concurrence report that was being suggested, from what I understand, by my New Democratic friends.

The reason I make that suggestion is that if you go through the report, this is something that PROC did a fantastic job on. Later on tonight, I hope to be able to go into a lot of the details of that particular report. It ensures that if there were to be an election during a pandemic, Canadians could feel that much more comfortable because of the work that PROC has done and the debate and discussions that would follow out of Bill C-19. That is the reason I would say that, if we are going to encourage additional debate on the floor of the House as opposed to having that concurrence report, the member for Elmwood—Transcona could consider having and encouraging a debate on Bill C-19.

Madam Chair, we talk about prorogation and the calling of witnesses and the responsibility of standing committees. I had the opportunity as recently as yesterday to talk about the calling of ministers to committee. I can tell you that it started off with a member from the Conservative Party saying they wanted more than just

ministers to appear. I went through what was taking place in the finance committee. I used that as an example.

Maybe I can repeat some of what I said yesterday, because I do believe it's relevant. When we talk about the importance of ministers and the ministers' roles at committee, it is really important that we recognize some of the things that have occurred in the past.

• (1145)

I go to Mr. Barrett who has played a leading role for the Conservative Party inside the House and in certain standing committees. He has indicated a litany of individuals who he would like to see called before committees. I indicated to him about accountabilities and ministerial roles and how, even in Stephen Harper's era, the minister played the critical role.

I gave one specific quote. I'd like to repeat that because I do believe it's important here. It came from the honourable Jay Hill. For those members who aren't familiar with Mr. Hill, he was actually the leader of the government in the House of Commons 10 years ago or so. In fact, if I look at it, it was on May 25, 2010, when Mr. Hill stated:

In our system of government, the powers of the Crown are exercised by ministers who are, in turn, answerable to Parliament. Ministers are individually and collectively responsible to the House of Commons for the policies, programs and activities of the government. They are supported in the exercise of their responsibilities by the public servants and by members of their office staffs.

Further on he said:

Accordingly, responsibility for providing information to Parliament and its committees rests with ministers.

As we look at witnesses and the calling of witnesses, I think some of the more important witnesses in terms of government actions will be found through ministers. The government has made ministers accessible and available for committees on a wide variety of issues.

I think cabinet ministers are accountable to the House of Commons for decisions of the government and of political staff. This is actually a very long-standing tradition of ministerial responsibility. In fact, there have been multiple House committees that have studied, for example, the student service grant. That's what I was making reference to, but one could easily reference other committees at the same time.

If you look at the finance committee in particular, it really amplifies what a committee was able to do in terms of ensuring ministerial accountability. Some incredible individuals appeared before that committee at that political level. There was the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, the Minister of Inclusion and Youth—

• (1150)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Although I really appreciate this and I recognize that his earlier speech was from the defence committee filibuster, we're talking about this, but he's not referring to the motion.

We're talking about having ministers here. There seems to be one staff member on here, which is the chief of staff for the Prime Minister, but there is absolutely no relevance if we're talking about staff. There's only one staff member that has yet to be discussed in the last two months of filibuster. Perhaps we can get onto the genuine motion, which is looking at calling these ministers, including the Prime Minister.

I'm hoping he can get back to relevancy and perhaps remind himself that he's at PROC, not the defence committee, finance committee, or ACVA, where we have seen these exact same statements.

Thank you.

The Chair: Something that I also left out last time, and I wanted to let you know is that, in Mr. Turnbull's amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion, there are not just the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Chagger, but other witnesses who are still being called forward once again. They are Bill Morneau, Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger. I believe what has also been removed from Mr. Turnbull's amendment in comparison to Ms. Vecchio's motion is the Speakers' Spotlight guests who were also invited. They are still a part of Ms. Vecchio's original motion, but they aren't part of Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

This is to give you some more information as what witnesses the amendment pertains to.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm not exactly sure what point Ms. Vecchio was attempting to make about relevancy. I'm just going to continue.

When we talk about having people appear before committees, we have seen throughout the last number of months standing committees calling for and receiving a wide spectrum of ministers attending. Using the finance committee as an example, I think is a positive thing and hopefully will contribute to part of the discussion that is taking place when we talk about ongoing committee meetings and who we're going to be hearing from and so forth. I want to emphasize that committee because it's something I was just talking about yesterday in the House, as it was information that was provided to me.

We had, as I indicated, the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. There was the former minister of finance. We had the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade. We had the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. We even had the Clerk of the Privy Council.

We've had endless other representations heard in committees from private citizens and organizations. In fact, on government supply—and this goes in part to what you were talking about in your explanation, Madam Chair, and I appreciate it—there was a great deal of information provided. It seems to me that we have more than one committee attempting to do the same thing that other committees are doing.

In this situation, when you talk about what was taking place in the finance committee, which was the WE Charity issue, and what PROC is looking at and follow some of the debates that occurred back then, there are some common themes.

There were 5,000 pages of documents provided to the finance committee—5,000 pages—dealing with WE Charity and the Canada summer youth program. There were documents that were also provided by the Prime Minister's Office. There were clerks who made presentations.

The leader of the government in the House has been very strong on the issue of what's taking place in standing committees and in recognizing that standing committees operate on their own and that it is the standing committee that will ultimately determine what its agenda is going to be. I believe that is why it's so important that we protect as much as possible the interests of that independence of standing committees. I believe what we have seen is an infection of sorts coming from primarily the official opposition, whose intent is to play partisan politics even more in our standing committees than we have seen before.

• (1155)

I've had opportunities to participate in PROC discussions in regard to the Canada Elections Act and the calling of witnesses, and who it is we should be listening to, and reports. I'm not 100% sure, but I believe we even submitted some form of a minority report from the past.

My concern is, at the end of the day, what is it that the official opposition is attempting to achieve. We have indicated from day one our expectation of dealing with the coronavirus. That is where our focus has been. I would like to pick up on that, Madam Chair.

Yesterday we had a very special celebration. The Prime Minister was there. I know Ms. Duncan was there also, as were you, Madam Chair. Today is Vaisakhi and I would like to say happy Vaisakhi to all members of the committee, but also to the broader population and those who are celebrating. Vaisakhi is a very special celebration in our Indo-Canadian community, but many others, including me, also acknowledge the importance of Vaisakhi and celebrate it.

A part of that celebration, as it was noted yesterday, is giving back, that we, as people, have a responsibility to give of ourselves to the community as a whole. What was so nice about yesterday's event is that it highlighted two things. It highlighted the richness of Canada's diversity and it allowed us to recognize that important issue that all Canadians are facing today: the coronavirus. That is what members of the Liberal caucus have been trying to get the focus on, whether it's in PROC or on the floor of the House.

At the celebration, that's what it was for me. In recognition of Vaisakhi, the Prime Minister said a few words, but more importantly, listened to what health care workers from across Canada had to say about the pandemic and the impact it was having on Canadians in a very real and tangible way. Ms. Duncan, Ms. Sahota and I were there, but I think all members of PROC would have benefited from listening to what was being said,

We were blessed to have had so many wonderful people not only wish us happy Vaisakhi but share with us their point of view as to what was taking place on the ground, and some of the things that we need to be working on. There were a couple of them that really touched me and made me think that we need to spend more energy and more time talking about them.

Ms. Duncan, I look to you and recognize your science background. We had the one doctor who talked about the backlogs of cancer patients that have been created because we've been so focused on the pandemic. The costs to our health care and our resources are so significant that we have not been able to do some of the things we've been able to do in the past in dealing with things like cancer detection. What is going to be the impact of that?

• (1200)

I appreciated those thoughts. Those are the types of issues that we need to be focusing on. We can all choose some very specific things. To use a few examples, I think, is good.

I'm genuinely concerned that there could be an election, and if there is an election, we have legislation that should be talked about.

I understand that we have a motion before PROC today that's talking about witnesses, that's talking indirectly about prorogation and why that had taken place. This is all related to it. What's taking place today is related to why prorogation was absolutely necessary back in August, which is the reason PROC is where it is today. I would argue that it is happening in that fashion because the Conservative party has chosen to politicize.

That's why I think it's good to bring up some examples of what real Canadians are saying. Towards the end of the discussion yesterday.... It didn't get anywhere near as much time as I and I'm sure other members would have liked to see. I know Ms. Petitpas Taylor, who is a former minister of health, is very passionate on the issue of mental health. Imagine the impact the pandemic will have on mental health. And you wonder why we wanted to refocus the House of Commons with a new throne speech.

You can only talk so much within the first hour or within one hour, and unfortunately, that was the limit we had yesterday in recognizing Vaisakhi and listening to those front-line health care workers who worked in emergency room settings and community settings. I can tell you that, even though it didn't get as much time, I believe that we have our work cut out for us on the mental health issue. It's absolutely critical that we reflect on the impacts that the pandemic has been having.

You see, prorogation ensured that the House of Commons would refocus its attention, because the first throne speech that we presented talked more about the economy, going forward and the previous four years when there were a lot of things that were done. The throne speech we heard back in September, I believe, allowed all of us, all political entities in the House, to recognize that there was a need for us to pay attention to what was the first priority for for all Canadians.

• (1205)

I was really encouraged yesterday when the Minister of Public Services and Procurement indicated that we are now on track to get 44 million doses of vaccine by the end of June. We need to recognize that the population of Canadian is 37.5 million, or maybe a little more than that. Depending on how provinces prioritize and how they administer the vaccines, Canada is in good shape today for a wide spectrum of reasons.

When it comes to the ultimate answer of vaccines, we have reason to be optimistic and hopeful. I think that's the type of thing for which all of us, whatever political affiliation we may have, can take some responsibility and start encouraging even more people to get engaged with the whole vaccination process.

I look at the types of actions that we have seen from the government that encouraged the prorogation. We often talk about day one, when it first became very clear that we had something that we needed to deal with, that there was no choice in the matter.

I can remember getting ready for budget 2020. We had the pre-budget consultations, which are fairly extensive in themselves. We were getting ready to present that budget on the floor of the House. Then we started to hear more about the pandemic. We started to hear from the health experts from the World Health Organization, from non-profits, from the private sector, from provinces, and the list goes on.

The Prime Minister made it very clear that the priority of the Government of Canada would be to have the backs of all Canadians, to be there in a very real and tangible way. There was a high sense of co-operation. There was very much a team Canada approach that we saw first-hand. We saw people of different political parties, different levels of government coming together and working out what was necessary in order to get us started on this path. Even the official opposition back then recognized the value of it.

We, with the support of so many, created programs that were absolutely non-existent prior to that time. We went from nowhere to a program that served almost nine million Canadians in every region of our country. Everyone knows it as CERB.

• (1210)

That was the beginning. As we started to move more and more into it, we saw the need to hit the reset button. That was a decision that the Prime Minister ultimately had to make. I support that decision. I support that decision because it reflects what Canadians expect of the government given the time. There was so much that was taking place.

I can remember how fluid things were and how things were changing. First the message seemed to be to wash your hands and keep your hands clean and to make sure that when you're speaking, you're not spitting—either intentionally or unintentionally, obviously—on others. That's how the coronavirus passed. Masks weren't compulsory anywhere. They weren't being made compulsory.

Remember we were talking about staying below the curve. Everything was about the curve. We talked so much about the curve. Do you remember the need for sanitizers for your hands? The educational component was so high at the beginning. People had no real idea what they needed to do. They really did not.

For the first number of weeks going into months, it was about education. It was about coming up with the support programs. It was about remaining under the curve. With the team Canada approach that was almost completely universal, we made a difference in a significant way.

Because of the experiences through that first wave, we were better able to deal with the second wave. Three weeks into it, how many people could have gone to a store and bought hand sanitizer? Do you remember the rush on toilet paper? PPE was very scarce. We were fighting to get PPE. We didn't have the stuff being produced or manufactured here in Canada. It was that first wave that woke everyone up. It was so encouraging to see that high sense of co-operation.

I said that we were just getting started on the debate on the 2020-21 budget. We were anticipating it. The House was going to be sitting and going ultimately into a budget debate, but then it was agreed amongst all the political parties that we needed to come up with some sort of a hybrid system. Even before then, we recognized that we needed to take a break and extend that break because of the coronavirus.

How many of us back in March last year anticipated that we would be doing what we're doing today? Very few really understood it. Today, because of the education, because of the programs that were put into place, we are in a much better position.

• (1215)

There should have been no surprise about the need to prorogue. That was something I would have thought was almost a given. Quite frankly, it was a bit disappointing to see the resistance toward it. If you go back, my belief is that sometime between June and July, you started to see at least a different attitude coming from some members, particularly in the opposition. We started to see more partisan politics being brought in at the national level.

That is why we needed to prorogue the session. I wish that the non-partisanship that we saw back in April, May and most of June 2020 would come back. We would be able to accomplish so much more if we were able to see that happen.

I support the idea of having studies done at PROC on House procedural matters, including prorogation. I wouldn't have a problem arguing that this is probably one of the best examples that one can give for proroguing a session. I couldn't think of a better example, other than a war maybe, but beyond that, it would be pretty tough to convince me.

I would have no problem at all comparing what our Prime Minister did in terms of the prorogation and the justification for it, to the last time under a different administration when the session was prorogued. I wouldn't have any problem at all doing a comparison of the two. I suspect that most Canadians would support what was done by the current Prime Minister.

Read through the throne speech. Maybe later on tonight I'll get the opportunity to go through the throne speech, and you'll see very clearly what's in that throne speech. The focus of that throne speech was about being there for Canadians in real and tangible ways.

I go back to when I emphasized the importance of education. Very few of us had any real understanding of the depth of what it was the world was getting into with the coronavirus. The death, sickness and costs to society have been enormous.

Are there things we could have done better? I'm not arrogant to believe we have been absolutely perfect. There has been, at times, a

need for us to make adjustments. We have done that. We have listened and made adjustments where it has been necessary.

I mentioned the creation of programs. There is a suite of programs out there as a result of the coronavirus.

• (1220)

We continue to make changes all the way up to legislation that was being debated yesterday for Bill C-14.

When we talk about being there, working together and trying to provide the supports that Canadians need, there are the two extremes. I started off a few minutes back talking about how we were working so well together back in April, May and most of June. Contrast that with what's happening today.

Look at Bill C-14. It's an excellent example. I don't know if it's because minority governments typically last 18 months and some people are getting the itch that they have to see something happen because of that. For me and I know for my colleagues, our focus continues to be on the pandemic.

I mention Bill C-14, because I think it's a great example of how the opposition has not responded well with the new throne speech. We prorogued Parliament. We came in with a new throne speech. Committees, including PROC, started to meet and they wanted to do X, Y and Z. We're saying that we want to continue to focus, as we should, on the pandemic and fighting and minimizing the negative impacts of the pandemic.

Bill C-14, as many will recall, was necessary because of the fall economic statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister back in November of last year. The legislation was tabled in December, I believe. Think of what is in that legislation. There are things to support Canada's middle class through the child benefit program, for businesses and the government's ability to borrow. There are things there that are absolutely essential.

Government has called the bill on many occasions. It gets talked out or things will be brought up to prevent it from being debated. The only reason it passed—and I remember back in January getting it out of second reading—was that the opposition parties were shamed into seeing why they weren't passing this necessary legislation. I hope to expand on that later.

I can tell you that when we look at prorogation and you talk about wanting witnesses, or talk about who you should be calling, I think the Deputy Prime Minister is someone who would be able to provide a lot of detail as to why it is so important that we remain focused on the coronavirus and the impact it's having on our society. We should be taking advantage of the work that has been done by so many and looking at ways we can improve upon it.

• (1225)

Our Prime Minister often talks about building back better. That's not just a phrase; that's a reality. We can do that. The opportunity is there. It's real. It's tangible. I'm even hopeful that we're going to see some of that—more of that—in the upcoming budget on the 19th.

I think we have an opportunity, in whatever capacity that we play, whether it's sitting in PROC and determining what it is we should be talking about, or the agenda of PROC and how we might be able to assist the process, or in some other capacity. If you believe that the pandemic is the number one concern of Canadians, as I do, as Liberal members of Parliament do, you can still be a viable, strong and healthy opposition. I believe there is a need to refocus.

I've been a parliamentarian for 30 years. I spent over 20 of those years in opposition. I've said on several occasions before that being positive and creative didn't hurt me when I was in opposition. There are still many different areas in which one can explore and contribute. Canadians aren't stupid. They will recognize the value of hard work.

Earlier I referenced the CERB program. I said it was a program that started from nowhere—

• (1230)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, I have a point of order on relevance. The member is going on another tangent.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vecchio.

I'll just remind the member to keep to the amendment by Mr. Turnbull.

Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think it's important that when we talk about programming and we talk about witnesses, whoever the witnesses might be and whatever the agenda—prorogation and the need for prorogation—we need to take into consideration what has been taking place in the last 12 months.

That's why I quickly made reference to CERB. I think it's an important part of the discussion and the debate, and it could even be something that might be raised with people who would be appearing before the committee, if in fact the committee is genuinely interested in what Canadians want Parliament to be talking about. That's why I believe that, in going to use CERB, looking at what it is that the government has done that justified it calling for a prorogation is really important.

We have, for all intents and purposes, provided a wide spectrum of programs. Those programs were put in place in good part in those months that followed the alarms going off on the coronavirus. Then, once we got into the summertime, what became very clear was the need to make changes to these programs, because they were not perfect.

I would recognize they were not perfect programs. That is one of the many reasons there was justification for prorogation. Going forward, if you're going to be dealing with the issue of prorogation or changing the rules or anything of that nature, there is a responsibility of committee members and others to understand what led to prorogation. It is why members, in particular those of the Liberal caucus, have chosen to talk about the coronavirus as the number one issue facing Canadians today.

I'm hoping that helps Ms. Vecchio understand why I'm talking about the program.

Madam Chair, I indicated that out of the suite of programs, the one that really comes to my mind is the CERB, because of the numbers and where it came from. It came from virtually nothing to a program to service just under nine million Canadians.

Why were programs of this nature so important? If you check with what people in our communities had to go through, one very quickly understands the importance of government having to be there for Canadians in a very real and tangible way. That's what CERB was. Imagine, if you will, where concerns are being raised, whether it's in the province of Ontario, the province of Manitoba, or any other province or territory, for that matter. There's a need to have people stay at home, to not go to work.

• (1235)

If people can't go to work, and they work at store X, they will likely lose their income while they're not there. In a situation like that, we need to recognize that the same principle doesn't apply for utility bills or mortgage payments or the need to buy groceries.

That is the reason the government had to bring forward a program that would support Canadians. That was the essence of the CERB. It allowed Canadians to have a disposable income during a very difficult time. It was absolutely critical for the Government of Canada, and I think most parliamentarians to support the need for that particular program.

That's the best example I could give for individuals. Then there are the small businesses. When you stop and think about the damage to the economy and the impact on the economy, is it any wonder that the Prime Minister would have given that extra consideration going into the need to prorogue the session. We've never faced that sort of situation in our past, where many businesses are being forced to shut down. It's not an option. Businesses were having a very difficult time. Once again, the government needed to respond. Much like with the CERB, of course there were going to be some modifications to the program.

The Canada emergency business account was there to protect the long-term interests of Canadians as a whole. Let me explain. When we take a look at Canada's economy, we need to recognize that small businesses are the backbone of our economy. Even my Conservative friends will acknowledge how important small businesses are, and I appreciate that. These programs that we're having to reflect on in terms of being able to justify prorogation made a difference in a very tangible way. Let me give you some details on that, Madam Chair.

Imagine, if you will, that you are a small business, and you are being told that you're going to have to reduce your business expectations because of the coronavirus. As a result, you're now going to have to lay off some people. Those people who you're laying off are going to be falling on some hard times. You might not even be able to start up again quickly. What could government do to support situations of that nature?

• (1240)

The wage subsidy program literally provided support to tens of thousands of businesses across this country. It enabled businesses to survive and employees to keep their jobs. By doing that, when the time is right and we're in a position to recover, we will see us in a better position, because there will have been fewer bankruptcies. It's the same thing with the rent subsidy program.

Every government program that prevented a company from going bankrupt, or that assisted employees in keeping their jobs, made a huge difference. They continue to do so in Canada's ability to build back better going forward and to keep those jobs.

In fact, after the second wave, I remember the Deputy Prime Minister in the House talking about how Canada, as a whole, was having far greater success than other countries around the world, in particular, the United States, in recovering the jobs that were lost because of the coronavirus. We were very successful because we came up with programs to support small businesses.

By supporting small businesses and people through programs like the CERB, the federal government was in a good position to protect our long-term interests. At the same time, the government has been there for Canadians in a very real and tangible way during this very difficult time.

I am not going to be able to stick around for much longer, but I did want to pick up on a couple of other points. When I talk about small businesses, there is one other aspect in which the government played a very important role. I could very easily have talked about other aspects of supporting small businesses, like the emergency business account, the credit availability account and the regional relief and recovery funds. There are different programs that have been put into place.

There's one thing on which I want to provide a brief comment. It's not just the Government of Canada, but there were other stakeholders, beyond the national government, the provincial governments and territories, indigenous leaders, non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations. Some of these companies have been absolutely incredible.

I talked about how this thing got under way in the first place, going back to March 2020 and how much PPE was actually being produced in Canada. Do a comparison today, and look at the companies today that are providing PPE for Canadians. There's no shortage today at all. It's there, and it's very real. I'm talking in particular about things such as masks for the public and hand sanitizer.

If I were the PS for procurement, I could probably go on and on, but I'm sure Mr. MacKinnon could speak endlessly on this issue regarding the number of companies, and how they contributed to take back industries that we had lost, and how we've stepped up.

• (1245)

When you talk about the situation that we were thrown into, that's what has impressed me the most.

Prorogation was necessary because it ensured that the focus of the House of Commons would be on the pandemic and minimizing the impacts of the coronavirus. All we needed to do was to take our lead, as the Prime Minister did, from what Canadians were saying

and doing. Whether it was the individual, the private company that retooled or the non-profit organizations that stepped up to the plate, I hope to be able to expand on a number of these things later tonight when we talk about the immense contributions made that sent a very clear message. That message was very simple, that as a Parliament, we needed to be focused on the coronavirus and minimizing the negative damage that was being caused by it.

I am very proud of the Prime Minister's decision to prorogue the session. I'm quite happy at any point in time to have a discussion about when a session should be prorogued. I would welcome that sort of a discussion, but I think it's important that, as parliamentarians, we be aware as to why the Prime Minister prorogued. It's there. It's real. It's tangible. From my perspective, I couldn't think of a better reason to do it. I believe Canadians see that and we are starting to see results.

It's important to recognize that we are not out of it. The third wave is here. It's real. It's killing people. Our hospitals are filling. We need to be aware that the third wave is here and it's real.

That said, one of the most important things the Government of Canada had to do was to acquire vaccines. We made that very clear. Months ago, we set the target of six million doses by the end of March. We exceeded that. We got close to 10 million. We will get close to 44 million by the end of June. Vaccine doses are coming.

That does not mean that we should lose our focus. We still have to do what we can. That's why I hope in the next go-around to be able to talk a little more positively about some of the things PROC could be doing, while reflecting, of course, on the amendment. I will be sure to read through both the motion and the amendment prior to this evening in case I might have deviated somewhat.

I can assure members that I really do appreciate the time that has been afforded to me this morning, and I look forward to being able to return later this evening.

• (1250)

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

Although we love hearing from you, hopefully you won't have to return this evening, but I guess time will tell.

We do still have a speakers list.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I notice it's 12:51. Since Monsieur Lauzon, I believe, is next on the list—and I'm assuming my friend and colleague has a lot to say—I'm wondering if we are planning to suspend the meeting at our regular time and start up again on Thursday, or if we are going to continue on.

I just want to get a sense of what the plan of action is on that.

The Chair: Thank you for that question.

I'm waiting for direction from you, as members of the committee, as to whether we will have a consensus to suspend at our regularly scheduled time of one o'clock or carry on with the speakers list.

I can put that question to the members to see if there is agreement at this point to end at the scheduled time.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On behalf of the CPC, I think it's okay if we are suspending, as long as we come back to this discussion.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vecchio.

It seems like there is some support to suspend at 1 p.m.

Monsieur Lauzon, I don't know if it would be worth going to you at this time. I don't know how long your remarks will be. Seeing as we are going to suspend in eight minutes, would you like to pick up in Thursday's meeting at that point?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): I would like to start right now for eight minutes. I'll take my place on Thursday, so I'll be the first one on Thursday.

The Chair: Okay.

One thing I forgot to mention at the beginning of the meeting is that we do have the issue of the main estimates.

Maybe I could have the clerk update the committee. If the committee does, eventually, want to report back to the House on the main estimates, we do have witnesses who would be ready to appear before committee, perhaps not this Thursday, but in the following week, on Monday or next Thursday, so we can complete that obligation.

Justin, can you update the committee on which witnesses would be willing to come forward?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I did talk to the House of Commons administration with respect to the House of Commons main estimates, as well as to the Parliamentary Protective Service's senior officials and to Elections Canada about a potential eventual appearance by them on the main estimates before PROC.

The main estimates are before PROC until the end of May. They did indicate to me that they are available to appear and they probably can appear on relatively short notice. Likely, though, that would not necessarily include appearing 48 hours from now at our meeting on Thursday. There shouldn't be a scheduling problem if we were looking at attempting to schedule at least some of those entities possibly as early as next week.

The Chair: Once again, it's up to the committee. I did want you to all be aware that is a possibility if you wish it to be so.

Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Just on that matter very quickly, Madam Chair, if we don't have a vote on the motion that's currently before the committee before when we might want or expect testimony on the estimates, is there a mechanism—whether it's unanimous consent or something else—to be able to receive those witnesses and then return to this debate?

I'm just wondering if you or the clerk have some advice on how we might go about implementing a negotiated solution, if we're able to arrive at one.

• (1255)

The Chair: I'll have the clerk supplement my answer. According to my understanding, we could adjourn debate on this motion at whatever point the committee wishes and it could be brought back at another time. It's up to the committee, really, if they would like to adjourn debate or resolve it through a vote. It would either end the matter or put the matter on pause and then the committee could decide to move forward with the witnesses on the main estimates.

Justin, do you want to supplement my understanding with anything?

The Clerk: No, Madam Chair. I think that's pretty much exactly the procedural response.

It would be for the committee, if it so wishes, to adjourn debate on this current motion, possibly schedule a meeting or two on main estimates, and then the committee could decide to resume debate on this motion and continue on with this debate.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I would only point out the obvious, that we still have seven weeks to go before the deadline for estimates to be discussed. That is, I believe, more than adequate time to continue on with this debate, and perhaps we can resolve it by coming to a vote. I would suggest we don't look at truncating this debate in any fashion until we come a little closer to a complete resolution. We have enough time to bring witnesses forward, to do a thorough analysis of the estimates and vote on the estimates, because that deadline is not until the end of May. I am certainly in favour of continuing the debate as opposed to adjournment.

The Chair: Thank you for your feedback on that. I think it gives the committee some idea where members might be on the issue. You're right; the supplementary estimates are due sooner than the main estimates, so we do have some time on the main estimates.

It's really up to the committee, depending on how many meetings...but I do just want to make sure that everyone is aware, because sometimes I get emails after the fact. It's easier for me to give you all the same information at the same time rather than have questions occur afterwards. That's that.

As I said, there are a few motions that have the appropriate notice given at this time and a few that have just been put on notice, but the notice requirement has not been met as of yet.

Mr. Lauzon, do you mind, since we only have a couple of minutes left, if we pick up right at the beginning on Thursday?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: No problem.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I thought I was going to interject for just one minute but it took a little bit longer.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: That's okay.

The Chair: Are there any more questions?

The meeting is suspended until Thursday.

[*The meeting was suspended at 12:58 p.m., Tuesday, April 13.*]

[*The meeting resumed at 11:50 a.m., Thursday, April 15.*]

• (5950)

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt. We're having a technical issue here in the room. You might need to suspend for a minute or two while we try to figure out what's going on. The recording has stopped. The meeting can't go on unless we have the recording. Just stand by. Apologies for that.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

• (6000)

The Chair: No problem.

The Clerk: Sorry about that.

• (6005)

The Chair: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] had on the speakers list. I believe I have a two-person speakers list at this time. It's Mr. Lauzon and then Mr. Samson. That's all I have for now. I will refresh the toolbar and check it. Okay, after that, we have Mr. Long. That is the speakers list.

Monsieur Lauzon, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Today we are honoured to have with us colleagues who want to assist the committee.

I'll reserve my energy, thoughts and words for later and will be pleased to come back then.

I'm going to yield the floor to my colleagues. I believe Mr. Samson is first to speak.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Samson.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Lauzon, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak sooner than expected. It's always a pleasure to appear before a committee as important as this one.

Yesterday Ms. Duncan and Mr. Lamoureux clearly established that the priority for Canadians is support for individuals, families, entrepreneurs and Canadians in general. This is an extremely difficult time for the entire country.

The situation for the moment seems slightly better in the Atlantic region. I believe there were 6 new cases and 41 active cases in Nova Scotia yesterday. We're doing quite well and that's because Nova Scotians are following Health Canada guidelines. That's for sure. It's extraordinary; we can see that people are following the guidelines. They've changed their habits. There are so many examples I could cite, but just just washing your hands—I've never washed my hands so often—makes all the difference. I have to say I was a teacher and taught grade one students for a year at one point. I had

to wash my hands a lot, especially when teaching young children. It can be quite a chore.

You know as well as I do that we were supposed to open our border with New Brunswick next Thursday. The Nova Scotia government and other Atlantic governments have shelved that idea for the moment because the health system in some regions is under additional pressure with people suffering from COVID-19. We want to keep our numbers down as far as possible because then we can do contact tracing, determine where the COVID-19 virus infecting people came from and make sure they're self-isolating.

For example, I made an announcement yesterday, and we rarely make public announcements. We can see from what's happening in Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia that the situation is very serious, as Ms. Duncan said yesterday. It's critical, it's tough, and people are tired. All this stress and these mental health problems generally weigh heavily on people as it is. Add to that this entire COVID-19 business and Canadians want and need support. Canadians need the vaccine.

Going back to the point I made yesterday, we rarely have to make public announcements, and we made a very important one yesterday. The federal government and Nova Scotia made an announcement. I was the master of ceremonies for that announcement, with all the technical responsibilities that entailed.

• (6010)

It was an outdoor event and we had to keep our distance from one another. However, the announcement was extremely important.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Point of order, Madam Chair.

I'm enjoying somewhat Mr. Samson's account of the trials and tribulations of public announcements during the pandemic, but to the matter of relevance, I wonder if he could get back to the sub-amendment that we're supposed to be debating. Perhaps he could tell us whether he and his Liberal colleagues have urged Minister Free-land and Minister Chagger to respond to the outstanding invitation of the committee to appear before us.

The Chair: You're correct, Mr. Kent. I was waiting to hear where our colleague was going with this, although I'm very interested about the public announcements.

I will remind Mr. Samson to stay on the issue of the motion at hand, and the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank my colleague, Mr. Kent.

Maybe, Mr. Kent, the delay in translation didn't allow you to really see the link I'm trying to draw, but there is a very important link here, because if you look at our amendment, it's about, as you said, hearing from the Deputy Prime Minister and hearing from the diversity minister about COVID.

If you look at the initial motion by my colleague Ms. Vecchio, which is really about the reasons we had to prorogue, this is all linked together, so maybe you'll allow me to continue. Maybe I'll do it in English for a little way and then I'll come back, because I want Mr. Kent to really see the link as I try to draw that link clearly.

COVID is the issue and prorogation is a reason why.... I'll go into that afterwards, but this announcement was on an investment from the federal government that we're doing in all provinces, not just Nova Scotia. I'd like to say it's just Nova Scotia, but that wouldn't go well with you, Mr. Kent, and I could understand that. This is a federal government announcement, part of the \$2 billion for education, to try to create space—outdoor classrooms. Again, as I was saying, we need to pivot now. This challenge, this crisis, is allowing us to better understand the gaps.

I'm a former teacher, Mr. Kent, and in my profession, we've been talking for probably 30 years—I'll be honest with you—about how important it is to teach outdoors and to have students actively participating and learning in the outdoor space, and here we are, finally. We've done something. It has been minimal to now, but here, finally, we officially are creating spaces and parks, or benches or seating areas, areas in which to play and learn at the same time. The announcement was a contribution of \$5.6 million to help us through COVID in education, Mr. Kent, as you can understand. The province is coming in with, I believe, \$1.6 million as well. So that's \$7.2 million.

What's so important about the announcement is that, for one thing, we were able to do it in person, which COVID has stopped. In Ontario, it would be a dream, maybe, to get that done, but we were able to do it and keep our distance and wear our masks. Elbows were the closest way of touching, I guess. There were no handshakes, as you can understand.

It was so important. Because of this COVID challenge, this will create official space for every elementary school in the province of Nova Scotia. This is what I said to the people in the audience. For every elementary school in the province of Nova Scotia, they will have outdoor learning spaces, which they will choose with the school advisory councils and the school boards, to ensure that learning outside will be an integral part of learning in general.

That is extremely important. When we talk about young people, I want to stress that what we're seeing in this challenge, this crisis, is that there are more young people in Ontario and Quebec who seem to be experiencing COVID-19 challenges, more challenges than we have seen in the past. This is something that we really have to think about, because we saw a big gap in long-term care in terms of how we need to deal with that as politicians, as representatives of the people.

This thing about parties—Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Green—is not what it's about. This is a team Canada approach. We need to do the right thing, and to do that, we need to have our Deputy Prime Minister share with us some of the key things that we have done, that we are doing and that we need to do. That's extremely important by itself.

• (6015)

Now that I got that announcement by, I want to talk about prorogation, because that is actually the motion that Ms. Vecchio brought to the table, which is important. It is very important.

I'll be very honest with you. When the Prime Minister announced that we were going to prorogue Parliament, I stopped for a second and thought, "Why would we do that? Is it the right thing to do? Is it what Canadians would want us to do?"

I thought about that and the answer was very clear right away. I can tell you all that it doesn't matter which party and it doesn't matter which stripe, I would have agreed with any prime minister that prorogation was an absolute necessity.

I don't think anyone listening today would disagree with that. I know some of my colleagues might want to punch holes in that argument, but think, really think about what prorogation means. It means to restart, reset, refocus. Yes.

I guess the only other reason that might be as important would be a war. We had no choice.

As I have said before, I'm an educator by trade. All of us in all our professions, and I know, Ms. Petipas Taylor in her work prior to being elected, at one point or another would have had to contribute to strategic planning, to setting an agenda, to setting a vision, to setting the steps that are necessary to achieve the outcomes we're looking for. We would have done consultations with all stakeholders to set that plan. I like to call it the map. Who's responsible for those achievements?

Well, my friends, we had no choice, because we as a country, prior to this prorogation, prior to this pandemic, prior to this challenge, were on the road of great success in a short period of time.

My friends, what I mean by that is in the four and a half or five years prior to COVID....

I still remember, as we all do, many of us, from different parties. I think, Ms. Vecchio, you might have been there, and Mr. Kent might have been there at the airport in the waiting lounge. We were going home on March 13. I thought we would be back in a month. We all thought we would be back in a month. We didn't realize the challenges that lay ahead. We just didn't foresee. Who could have foreseen at that time?

That's why we had to reset. We knew that we would have to have another look at the priorities we had laid out following the 2019 election. We would have to make sure that we were not trying to continue the great economy we had prior to March 13. You all know that Canadians had hired, and over one million new jobs had been created by Canadians. You all know that we had the lowest unemployment rate in the history, and they say in 40 years but there were no statistics prior to that. The economy was steaming ahead. We had lifted over 900,000 Canadians out of poverty. Those are major numbers.

• (6020)

The success was clear and we were on that track. It was a very positive track. Then we were faced with a cement wall, a crisis never experienced before. I say that but I have to share with you a very important story that is directly linked, Mr. Kent, to this very important discussion.

I'm from Nova Scotia, as you know, but I'm also from Cape Breton, which is an island off the mainland. You all know that, I think. What you may not know is that I'm actually from an island off the island of Cape Breton. It's a very small island

[Translation]

called Isle Madame. Mr. Therrien may visit my island one day. Some members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages had a chance to spend a few days there during the committee's trip.

I mention Isle Madame, which Mr. Therrien will soon be visiting, because a Samson family monument was erected in Lévis, Quebec, to celebrate Canada's 100th anniversary.

I want to speak to you about something very important.

[English]

In 1918, my friends, we were faced with a major pandemic. Millions and millions of people lost their lives. What I want to share with you—because this is similar, there are a lot of similarities—is that the island I'm from, Isle Madame, was actually the island hardest hit by the 1918 pandemic, per capita, in Canada. As I told you before, of course, we only had 6,000 people on the island. Now we're down to 4,000 and some.

• (6025)

[Translation]

Mr. Therrien, 99% of them are Acadians. The remaining 1% became Acadian indirectly, being anglophones from Newfoundland who married islanders. They were ship's captains and fishermen.

As you know, the Acadians were farmers before the expulsion. Then we became fishermen because we weren't allowed to return to our fertile lands in the valley. We were sent to live near the sea instead because we were considered poor at the time. We weren't allowed to communicate, but we were allowed to fish. Remember, and Ms. Petitpas Taylor and others can confirm this, lobster was considered a poor man's meal at the time.

[English]

Today, it's probably the richest meal on the table, or close to it, and guess what? The land is next to the ocean and the water is probably the richest as well, so the tables have turned.

We experienced challenges then. In those days, there were 10, 15 or 20 people in a family. I've seen families from that generation who lost 50% of their kids to the 1918 pandemic. This is serious.

They had their community and they had their family but government was not as present as it is today. That's why the struggle was even worse. Today, we have been able to support individuals and families.

Let me get back to prorogation, because that's what this motion is really about, and I don't want Mr. Kent to tell me that I am not linking this to prorogation, because it is crucial. Again, there's no question it was a need that any government should have and would have done—I know that—and we did it because we had to.

You know, I had to do a little bit of homework, because I wanted to see the government prior to our government. I wanted to check what the government of our friend Mr. Harper did. Some of you may have been in that government, but most of you were not. Did he prorogue Parliament? Let's look at the importance that lies in prorogation. Well, I found out that, in 2008, the Harper government asked the Governor General to prorogue Parliament. You ask why. Well, let me share that with you.

It actually happened shortly before, not after, not during—you guessed it—a vote of confidence that would have defeated the Conservative government, the minority government. It would have probably been a coalition between the Liberals and the NDP at the time, supported, I might add—for Monsieur Therrien, it's important—by the Bloc at the time. He prorogued. Now, I have to weigh that with proroguing in a pandemic, one of the biggest challenges in the world, the 2020 pandemic: prorogue to set a new agenda or prorogue to hide from a vote of confidence. I think this one would win.

Let's go to 2009. Let's go to the next year because—you guessed it—there was another prorogation. The government of the day, the Harper government, said, "We're faced with an economic challenge. We know there was a recession in 2008. We know that. We're not going to deny that because we're team Canada here; we're working together." The Harper government decided to prorogue to consult with Canadians, with the business community, to see if maybe we should do some adjustments, some resetting, some re-focusing of our priorities. Well, that's better; that's much better, I have to say. Between 2008 and 2009, this one is better. It's still not as difficult and challenging as when you don't really, truly know what's coming at you, when it's directly linked to health, but, hey, the economy is up there. It's not as high as the one that we did in 2020, but it has more merit. I know that Mrs. del Vecchio will be pleased to know that this one is much better. I can understand the prorogation there.

Now I'll go to 2013, if you'll allow me. Yes, you guessed it again: the Conservatives, the Harper government, decided to prorogue again. Let's look now, because I want to go back to the question of Mrs. del Vecchio.

Am I pronouncing del Vecchio right? I want to make sure. She's a good colleague of mine.

• (6030)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Well, we'll just start with Vecchio with a hard "c"; drop the "del", and we're good to go.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It's Vecchio. There you go. Thank you. I appreciate that very much.

In 2013, Parliament was shut down by the Conservative government through prorogation—part of this motion—to avoid questions on the Senate expense scandal, a particular senator and the PMO. That one I think is going to go back down to maybe even lower than the first one that the Conservatives did in 2008.

The motion is asking what was the reason we brought this prorogation to the table. I think I've drawn a pretty clear picture that the reason was we needed to refocus, to reset, to re-examine what would become the priorities, and how we were going to help Canadians in crisis.

That was the big question. The economy, as I described to you earlier, was booming like it hadn't been for a long time and all of a sudden everything crashed. Let's not forget the main problem, the health and security of Canadians. With that came the economy. We saw millions of Canadians lose their jobs in weeks, in two or three weeks.

Prorogation you say. Absolutely. If anything, we probably should have done it a little earlier, but it had to be done. It had to be done because we needed to be out there supporting Canadians.

I don't know if you can imagine, but I just cannot imagine coming home, looking at my family.... You know, I have five grandkids now in five years, so things are going well. They're working hard. I love spending time with them. Actually, I get to spend a little bit more time with them these days than I would because I've been in Ottawa for a stretch of 10 weeks out of 11, as you know. But just try to imagine.

Let's just stop. This is not political. I'm speaking to every Canadian now, I believe. Imagine anyone who shows up at home, walks through the door.... Some may have not wanted to go home for a long time because it's depressing. It's challenging. But imagine someone arriving home, looking at their family and telling them, "I was laid off." That in itself is scary. I just can't even imagine having to live through that. But that wasn't even the scariest, because the scariest is we are in lockdown.

I don't know if you heard what the Premier of Nova Scotia said. It went viral. You must have heard it because it's profound. He said, "Stay the blazes home." Stay the blazes home. I'm telling you, he was serious. When he said that, it wasn't on day one. It was probably on day 30. Do you know why he said that? He said that because people were not respecting the health recommendations.

• (6035)

People were not social distancing. People were still gathering in big numbers. That, we know, cannot happen when this pandemic is still storming away in its third wave, with variants and variants. We hear it every day. They know it in Ontario. They know it in Quebec. They know it in western Canada, in B.C.

So, here you are. You arrive home, having been laid off. Nine million Canadians, in the end, had to go on CERB—nine million. I didn't teach math in high school, but we know that's about a quarter of the population of this country—9,18, 36; we're up at 37 million and something.

This was a crisis, but that's not the worst. The worst is we're in a pandemic. We don't have a vaccine. It takes years and years. Ms.

Petitpas Taylor was minister of health. She knows how long it takes. It's scary when you know that you need something to help Canadians in their health, and you don't have it.

That's why our government right away focused on PPE, focused on investing in vaccine research, and asked companies in this country, "Can you help us? Can you find ways to help us through this pandemic? We need gloves. We need masks. We need gowns. We need and we need and we don't have." This is the amazing team Canada. This is what Canadians are all about.

It's amazing. Thousands of companies within Canada—thousands—raised their hands to retool, to help, because the pandemic isn't just in Canada. The pandemic is across the world. We needed Canadians to come together. It wasn't a question of whether you were Liberal, NDP, Green, Conservative.

I say the only time politics counts for Darrell Samson is on election day. After that, I represent everyone, every citizen in the great riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook. Sackville is rural-urban, somewhat. For those who fly into Halifax, between the airport and downtown Halifax, or if you're going to Halifax, or to half the province, you're going to pass through my riding. If I put up a blockade, you won't get in.

It was so important. It was amazing how Canadians came together to help with what we needed, but we also needed the financial support. Stay the blazes home. Keep your distance. Wash your hands. Don't gather in big groups. But if you're staying the blazes home, and you're doing what you can, you also need some money, food, shelter. That's another reason, which was crucial for Canadians.

• (6040)

I cannot thank doctors and the health professionals enough. If I did it every day, still it would not be enough.

I have to tell you that I also learned that the individuals stocking the shelves at Sobeys, Superstore, IGA, or Provigo—*je crois que c'est à Québec*—those people.... At the heart of the challenge, I think in April, May and June last year, people were scared. They're scared today, but there's hope today. Financially, they've been supported somewhat for now. Health-wise we have vaccines coming, but last April, May and June, people were scared to go outside. We needed food and we would make our way to the IGA, or whichever grocery store. I looked in the eyes of the individuals stocking the shelves or the cashier, and I thanked them.

Sometimes challenges are opportunities. We get to better understand and to see when there's a challenge. You look back at all the things you took for granted, and it makes you really focus on what it's all about. It's a lot bigger than politics; I'll tell you that. It's about Canadians; it's about communities; it's about a country working together to ensure that we have the successes that we should.

I could talk about the small businesses, because they, too, are struggling. Even with all the help, they're still struggling, but guess what? Communities are coming together. Instead of cooking these days, they're saying, "My son owns a little restaurant bar on that little island I described to you way back. He's only 26 years old. He called and said, 'Dad, now don't forget. You have to go out to eat three or four times a week. You have to help the small businesses, the small restaurants'". That's how people are thinking today: local community partnership. That's what the focus has to be about. We all need to be thinking of ways that we can contribute together through this challenge.

Prorogation was absolutely necessary, and thanks to that prorogation, we have reset our agenda. I don't have any secrets to tell, but on Monday another big piece of the pie will come out, and I know.... I don't know what's in it. I told you I don't have all the secrets, as much as you might think so, or even as much as I would like to. I don't, but I have a feeling. I have a feeling there's going to be some more help for Canadians, not just in Nova Scotia, not just in Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, but right across the country, all the provinces, all the territories. I know that we will be there as we should, as Canadians expect of us.

Our Prime Minister has been out daily updating Canadians and sharing with Canadians what's happening, because as an educator, as I said to you before, one of the most important things you can do is to communicate. Communication is the key.

• (6045)

I can't thank Ms. Duncan enough for her communication work through this pandemic. Every night we were online talking about how we could help Canadians. The public servants came and worked non-stop. We've got to be talking about these things, but we've got to be talking about what we do next, how we get there and where we are going. Those are crucial.

For the business community, as I said, the emergency business account really helped a lot. It didn't help all businesses—we can do more—but that was big.

There was also the wage subsidy. People say the wage subsidy helped their businesses. Yes, it did. That was the priority, but it also helped the individuals. Do you remember when I was talking to you earlier about going home and telling your family you lost your job? Now you could turn around and say, "Well, the government, who can afford it more than we can, can help Canadians and can help us." The government funnelled some funding for the wage subsidy to keep people working and to keep industry going.

Then there are the seniors. This has been very, very tough on seniors. We've done some key things to help them. There's more to be done. That's why we need to be talking about building back better.

We don't have all the answers, I don't have all the answers, but together we will find all the answers. That's what it's about. This committee is so important to help us move that agenda forward.

Let me stop for a second and reflect with you on Bill C-14, which we might be able to get done in the next day or so. I'm hoping, with all the individuals across this country and 338 MPs work-

ing together, to get the supports out as quickly as possible to Canadians, to individuals and to families.

One of the key economic stimulus mechanisms in Atlantic Canada—to stimulate the economy because of some of our challenges—is the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. ACOA offers business development assistance to support and stimulate the economy. They need some funds to help them do their job.

We did have a system, the RRRF, through which we were helping companies that may have been missed. As I said earlier, Ms. Duncan and many of our colleagues helped us to talk not only about the programs and the initiatives we were bringing forward but also about how they were working.

We had MPs from right across the country. The parties didn't matter. That's an example of working together to make life better. We were all saying, "Yes, that's a nice program, but this group is falling through the cracks. We're not helping this group enough. What can we tweak to improve our programs?"

• (6050)

You know, I think that may have been my proudest time as a member of Parliament. I felt so connected to my community because they were sharing with me the challenges, and I was sharing those challenges with other MPs across this country. We were sharing this with government. We were sharing this with bureaucrats and we were tweaking programs and initiatives, tweaking them continually, to support Canadians. Think about that. That's what it's all about.

I was elected the member of Parliament for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook to make life better for individuals, for families, for communities. We know, and we don't talk about it enough, that there are so many organizations out there doing so much for Canadians.

[Translation]

We're dragging our heels on Bill C-14; "on se traîne les pattes," to use that Acadian expression for Ms. Petitpas Taylor. We aren't moving very quickly to provide aid to Canadians.

We can't afford to play politics, particularly during a pandemic. The fact that debate on Bill C-14 has been dragged out and the bill itself challenged [Inaudible—Editor]...

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I just want to give the speaker some great news, because we'll be voting on Bill C-14 in just a few hours.

The Chair: That is true.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I want to thank my colleague for that, because I was going to land there soon. I'm glad that she helped point that out for all Canadians, because that's what team Canada is. You see how quickly she wanted to make sure that I didn't miss a step. She wanted to support me in my intervention and that's what it's about. She was coming to support us, because we're working together to achieve the same success, because Canada is a great country. Canadians are great people. We are proud of our country and we must continue to work together.

• (6055)

[Translation]

As my colleague noted earlier, yes, we'll finally be voting in a few hours. I hope all my colleagues and all parties can join with us in voting for Bill C-14 because Canadians have neither the time nor the appetite for partisan politics or strategies, at any time. They want us to work together for the welfare of Canadian citizens.

I want to get back to seniors.

I have to say that isolation is particularly hard on seniors. It's hard on us too because we like to see our fathers, mothers and grandparents, but we're afraid to visit them because we know we're in the midst of a pandemic and don't want to increase the risk of infection. These are tough situations as well.

Yesterday one of my constituents called me to discuss the difficult situation he was facing. He told me he hadn't seen his niece for more than a year because she had health issues, being acutely sensitive to environmental factors in particular and perhaps COVID-19. He lives 10 kilometers away from her. Situations like these are really trying for many Canadians.

As I said a little earlier, there are two tunnels.

The first tunnel concerns the health and safety of Canadians and the second the economy and support for individuals, families and entrepreneurs. We know that women have been the hardest hit economically; they have found the situation even harder, considering the greater and tougher challenges they've had to face. That's also the case of young people. We've doubled funding for student summer jobs. That will help a lot.

In my riding of Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook alone,

[English]

we just about doubled student summer jobs. This is crucial. Students need to work. They need to make money to continue their studies, and we need to support them.

We need to support them. That is why our government doubled our funding. I'm so proud of the support. Last year we didn't know if we could even get those jobs going or if companies would be able to function, but they found their way.

We work together, as we must continue to do today and tomorrow. It's crucial that we do it.

Getting back to seniors, we had to invest in certain areas to support them. I have so many stories. Down in Preston, a group of young people got together and brought some groceries to families. We had Beacon food bank, the Red Cross and the United Way.

These organizations play such an important role. If government had to pay them to do work, we wouldn't be able to afford it. They volunteer and do so much outreach.

Transportation for seniors is crucial. I spoke to a few seniors the other day. Some of them haven't been out for months. They are just waiting now. They are hopeful. They are feeling much better today than they were feeling a month ago because the vaccines are coming out.

Our government announced that we would have six million vaccines by March 31. I hate to say it, but some parties on the other side said, "That's not going to happen. It's not possible. There's so much need across the world that we'll never get six million." My friends, we got well over eight million vaccines. It's 10 million this week, and I think we're at 12 million next week. We're ramping up, and it's because of all of you and your support.

I know the opposition has a role to play, and you've played that role. It's important to give us suggestions, and to give us your comments and your opinions, but at the end of the day, we must govern. We must make decisions as government, and those decisions are very important.

Going back to Bill C-14, we're going to see some help in it for Canadians, but my friends, more good news will be coming on Monday. Again, I don't have a crystal ball, but I know that we have been consulting with Canadians. We have been listening. We've been having those conversations, putting the time in that's so crucial to help Canadians, and now we will be able to deliver a budget that will continue to support Canadians.

If we had not prorogued Parliament, if we had not reset the agenda and refocused.... We've been doing that, to be quite honest with you, for a long time. Yes, we prorogued, but we're still working and focusing on where to put our priorities. That's what the fall economic statement allowed us to do, to start building that blueprint and start putting into action some key things that we've seeing through Bill C-14.

• (6100)

Monday will be an important day for Canadians as we continue to support all Canadians right across this country. You know the old saying, from Newfoundland to Vancouver, and then the territories of course. I can't believe I skipped Nova Scotia and Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, but it's all provinces, all Canadians.

You know, when we're Canadian, we have to make sure.... When it comes to long-term care, we learned through this pandemic that there are gaps. We need to build national standards together. I have to say, that's where we need you to share with us what standards are necessary, to make sure that we continue to support and protect seniors. It's crucial.

I'm Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs. Veterans are also struggling through this pandemic. It has been extremely difficult for them. It is our responsibility to care for, to support, to help and to work in partnership with our veterans community. I know that we work very hard to support organizations that support veterans across this country. It was very important to help those organizations stay afloat. I'm talking about the Legion, which is another organization that is so important.

I don't know if you know, but there are 1,382 Legions in this country. I'm sure that each and every one of you, if we took a poll right now, could tell me how many Legions you have in your riding. As I said earlier, I wasn't a math teacher—I've been in the profession of education for 30 years—but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that if there are 1,382 to 1,400 Legions across this country, and there are 338 members of Parliament from all sides, all parts of this country, on average, you have three Legions in your riding. I have five. Some may have two.

These Legions, these people volunteering in Legions are playing a major role in supporting our veterans and our communities every day. Legions were shut down. They couldn't raise money. The poppy fund was getting weaker and weaker as we moved about. We had no choice. It was simple. Government had to come to their support as quickly as possible. They're one organization.

There's VETS Canada. They reach right across this country, and they're supporting veterans on the ground every day. There's also True Patriot Love. There are so many great organizations out there, and we were able to get them some support, financial support. There was \$20 million for all those organizations, about \$14 million of which went to Legions because, as I said, they cover a lot of turf.

● (6105)

I want to thank all of you here today. It's because of you, all parties, team Canada, that we were able to deliver that funding and continue the supports on the ground for these individuals. It's very important.

I understand we're going to vote on Bill C-14 today. I would like to think it will receive unanimous support because there are important investments in individuals, in Canadians, in this bill. It's already late, but together, as team Canada, we're going to get there because we need to get there.

I could go on for another hour if you want and talk about where our investments need to be when we talk about building back better because it's crucial. This is what the committee is supposed to be talking about. How can we work together to put forward the programs and initiatives and to create the investment environment?

Mr. Long is a businessman. As he knows, government is not to lead. We are to create that positive environment for the business community to prosper. We need to get out of their way to some extent for them to do that, and this is what we can do together.

I would love to continue on. Maybe I'll get another chance sometime, but I have another meeting. This is my first reflection with this committee in which I've had a chance to talk about this impor-

tant motion and the amendment. We should be focused on building back better, working together for all Canadians.

● (6110)

[Translation]

To all Canadians from Newfoundland, the Atlantic, Ontario, Quebec, the west, British Columbia and the territories, I say: together we can change things.

I'll conclude with the expression I used for 11 years as executive director: "Every problem has a solution; together we can change things."

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I'm sorry to interrupt. I first of all want to thank Darrell.

I also wondered if we could get a sense of how long we will be going today. I have no issues, but if there is anything I need to cancel, I would like to get a bit of a sense of whether we will be going on for an extended period of time or whether we're planning on finishing shortly.

I wonder if we could get a bit of direction on that.

The Chair: That's a good point. I didn't even realize it was past one o'clock.

Mr. Nater has his hand up.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Chair, why don't we move to a vote right now, and then we can adjourn after the vote. Why don't we vote on the motion and amendment, and carry on?

The Chair: Is everyone ready for a vote at this point?

Some are and some are not.

Mr. Darrell Samson: No. We still have some speakers on the list, I think. It's crucial to hear from everyone on this important topic.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

CBC aired your announcement of the apology for the Black battalion from World War I, and I thought that was really well done. Your speech in particular was very moving. I got to hear you speak from the comfort of my home. I'm glad CBC aired it in that way. I thought it was really accessible for everybody. It was a well done event, different from the announcement you were recently.... You've been doing a lot of announcements.

We will carry on with the list. We have Mr. Long next.

• (6115)

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon to all my friends and colleagues in PROC. I'm happy to be back as a sub. I have been here so often that sometimes I feel like I'm a regular member. I always joke with my colleagues that I want to make sure I'm invited to the barbecues, the Christmas parties and all of those things when we can all get together.

I want to commend MP Samson on that really moving, thought-provoking, unbelievable speech. It was a pleasure to listen to you, Darrell.

The Chair: We may have to do that in the future when we are all together. Previously, I think under the leadership of Scott Reid actually, we used to meet every once in a while in the Parliamentary Restaurant and have an unofficial committee business meeting. We'd just talk about our hopes about where we want to go in this committee and what kind of work we want to do. I always found the times we did that were really good. It was beneficial to all sit together from across parties and break some bread without the pressure of a formal meeting.

Maybe we can do that. Maybe it will be a barbecue this time, if you're cooking, Wayne.

I'm sorry to interrupt, but it just brought back a memory. Go ahead.

Mr. Wayne Long: I think times like that, Chair, when we can all get together in a more relaxed, informal environment are good. It's about team building and it's about talking to each other in a more non-political environment and surrounding. I think that's healthy.

Certainly, in my days at the Saint John Sea Dogs, a wonderful major junior hockey league team here in Saint John, I was very big with team building and making sure our players could get together away from the pressures of hockey, billets, parents, coaches, agents and so on and so forth.

I have lots of things I want to talk about. I'm sure the Sea Dogs will come up, but first and foremost I did want to just thank you, MP Samson, again for your speech. I always enjoy sitting around at the Atlantic caucus and national caucus with you. You're a wonderful member of Parliament and your riding is certainly lucky to have somebody as passionate as you.

I want to acknowledge a few things from your speech before I get started talking about MP Turnbull's amendment. One is your recognition of MP Duncan and the work she has done from, really, day one of this pandemic with all of us—the calls, the Zooms and just the leadership.

I will be frank. To get an email out of the blue from MP Duncan asking how you're doing means a lot. It means a lot to me, personally, that somebody who I have become friends with over the past few years.... A general out-of-the-blue email concerned about your well-being and how you are doing means a lot. Certainly, MP Duncan, kudos to you for your continued leadership.

I still look back at the time when you were in Saint John. We did an announcement with Brilliant Labs on coding. I will never ever

forget. We walked into the school. We did our announcement. We were there for probably 45 minutes, all in all. There were 20 to 25 young adults, give or take, who all had an exhibit they wanted to show MP Duncan. During her speech, she recalled every child's name who was there.

We wondered how she did that. We thought she must have had a list. No. She just remembered all their names. I will never forget that. I thought there must be some cue cards or something that one of her assistants was holding. No. She went left to right in that room and named absolutely everybody. Incredible. Kudos.

• (6120)

The Chair: Mr. Long, could you move your boom mike up just a little bit more?

Mr. Wayne Long: Sure. Is that better? I apologize.

The Chair: It looks better.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, yes, apparently it's better, so that's good.

Thank you, Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay, my apologies. I hope I didn't take out the ears of our wonderful interpreters.

Also, MP Samson, I want to acknowledge the two wonderful Legions in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay, Legion branch 69 and Jervis Bay Legion. They do wonderful work in our community. You are right. I believe you said there are 1,300 Legions across the country. My respect goes out to each and every one of them, and I'm certainly glad that, as a government, we were able to step in and help them, and when we help them, they help others. It's certainly a win-win for all of us.

It has been an interesting day. I gave a lot of thought to this meeting, the meeting we're in now, and the situation we're in. I did some preparation, obviously, and certainly saw some news of the day where the Leader of the Opposition came out with his climate plan. I looked at that with great interest. Certainly it looks like some parts of our plan are there.

I remark at the use of green screens now. The leader of the party was out in space at one point, and then he was over a lake, and then he was going through the forest, and then he was in the woods. It was remarkable to see. He was all over the place. Those presentations sometimes are difficult with green screens in the background.

I know certainly the leader of the opposition in the previous Parliament did his supposed climate plan at what almost looked like Camp Crystal Lake from *Friday the 13th*. It was this small, little lake where he did his presentation. Not to harken back to movies, but I was always reminded of the movie *Friday the 13th* when he made his announcement.

I want to build on MP Samson's speech. I never say that I was a businessman; I still am a business person. I've had great success. I've been lucky; I've been fortunate. I've taken risks. I remember leaving a somewhat secure job. I had a \$10,000 line of credit. I had two weeks' vacation. I remember sitting with my wife, Denise, and totalling up that I had about 10 weeks to make my business work, otherwise.... Denise at that point was home with our youngest son, Konnor, who was just two, and our oldest son, Khristian. I remember taking that risk. I remember being that entrepreneur. Sometimes people will look at entrepreneurs like they're just these risk-taking people, but that's how Canada was built. It was built by entrepreneurs and small business owners.

To link where I was as a small business person to where I am now, I love what I do. I thank God every day for the opportunity I have been given to represent my riding, my beautiful riding, its people and those who are in need and to be an advocate for them.

Being a small business owner, I had to meet payroll. I had to balance budgets. I had to run a deficit at times. I had to strategically invest. I had to do those things. I wanted to take those skill sets to Ottawa to contribute to our government and help with policy decisions and add my voice, whether it be in the New Brunswick caucus, Atlantic caucus or national caucus.

You know, I wouldn't say I've become disillusioned, not at all, but then you fast forward to my committee work. I love what I did at HUMA. I see MP Vecchio, who was a big part of our team in HUMA in the first Parliament. We travelled the country. We developed a report, if you will, a study on poverty reduction, which certainly was part and parcel of our poverty reduction strategy and our national housing strategy. I also sat on the ethics committee with MP Blaikie.

● (6125)

Committees can do great work. Look, I was the first person who was skeptical of committees: "Oh, yeah, committees, whatever. You go up there and you sit and you...." No. No. I tell my constituents that—no. We do work for Canadians in those committees, the work of Parliament—great work. We help with legislation. We help with bills. We study. We are the second sober thought at times.

Chair, we just talked about getting together in a more relaxed environment, maybe have a barbecue for some togetherness and fellowship. There's no committee that probably holds more esteem than PROC. It's a committee that a lot of MPs hold in the highest esteem.

Here we are. I understand that politics is politics, and the job of the opposition is to challenge the government, make government better, to hold government accountable. I get it. I get it absolutely.

I was elected in 2015. I guess I'm five and a half years in. I don't feel like a veteran. Some people call me a veteran, but I don't feel that way.

I think we need to step back, and we need to understand why we are where we are. MP Samson covered many, many topics and many, many issues. His speech was wonderful. I appreciate that. But in the end, to circle this back, we are here today and we're talk-

ing about MP Turnbull's amendment. Chair, correct me if I'm wrong here.

As I said the last time I spoke, this is like *Inception*. Have you ever watched that? You're at one layer and then you're at another layer and another, and then you're about four layers back, and then you have to try to crawl back up the ladder and get back to reality. Again, we're talking about MP Turnbull's amendment to MP Vecchio's motion.

For those Canadians who are listening, and I'm sure there are thousands upon thousands upon thousands of Canadians who are really tuned into this.... No, I can't say that with a straight face. As I did last week, and the week before and the week before that and the week before that, before I speak sometimes I like to just clear my head, so I'll go out. I'll turn the camera around and I'll show you. There's a route just outside my office door here into the mall. It's called Market Square. I just talk to constituents. I have my mask on and am obviously socially distanced. I talk to them about the issues of the day and what they want and what they're concerned about, and their hopes and dreams and their fears and concerns.

Their concerns are about a once-in-a-generation pandemic that we are in the midst of. They talk about COVID-19. They talk about vaccinations. They talk about our government delivering vaccinations to the tune of.... As for the numbers, as MP Samson said, we're ramping up. We have our foot on the pedal. We're full steam ahead here.

● (6130)

I apologize if I'm off, but we were supposed to deliver six million vaccines by the end of March. I believe we exceeded that by.... I think we were at eight, and then we were at 9.4. That number continues to grow and grow.

Later this afternoon I will be getting my AstraZeneca vaccine. I'm thrilled about that. As leaders in our communities, every one of us should absolutely fight back against vaccine hesitancy. I tell people that the best vaccine you can get is the first one available to you. My wife, Denise, and I will get the AstraZeneca vaccine later this afternoon. We're thrilled about that opportunity. We're going to continue to promote that and make sure all Canadians are vaccinated.

In fact, as we have said, we will make sure and certainly Premier Higgs in this province will make sure that.... Obviously, we're going to provide vaccines to Premier Higgs, but we're going to make sure that everybody can get their first vaccine by the middle of June. I think that will be a wonderful accomplishment. That's what people are concerned about. That's what people want us to be seized with, getting them through the pandemic, offering them support through the pandemic.

I'll be the first to tell you that I've gained a whole new appreciation for what a strong government can do for their country, their constituents and their citizens in times of crisis. Boy, have we as a Liberal government delivered for Canadians. We've been there when they needed us. We've had their backs.

I remember coming home on March 15 last year not knowing what we were going to face. I talked about that earlier. I don't think any of us from any party, whether it's MP Kent, MP Nater, MP Van Bynen or MP Simms.... I'm looking at the list here. I don't think any of us were really prepared for what we faced when we all came back to our constituencies in March—the fear, the uncertainty, what we saw going on in other parts of the world.

And we delivered—CERB, CEBA, commercial support for rent and rent support, loans, interest-free loans and working with banks on mortgage deferral. Then there was the CRB, expanded EI, caregiver benefits and sick leave. We have delivered programs for Canadians, and I'm proud of that. I know that Canadians are appreciative of what we have done as a government to be there for them.

Getting back to my being out in the—

The Chair: Do you have a point of order, Madam Normandin?

● (6135)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't like to interrupt my colleagues, but I see he's describing the actions the government has taken. He's no longer addressing Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Could you remind my colleague to be somewhat more relevant in his remarks?

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Normandin.

I do encourage the member to stay relevant to the amendment at hand.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Madam Chair and MP Normandin. I certainly take your point. I understand your point of order, and acknowledge that in making sure that I stay relevant to MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion. I'll just finish up with this, and then we'll get to MP Turnbull's amendment.

The programs we've offered are what Canadians needed. Canadians appreciated it from all of us who offered support: the Conservatives, the Bloc, the Greens, the NDP, our own party, the independents—whoever. I talked to 13 or 14 people today, and I asked them if they knew anything about prorogation and the Conservative Party challenging it with respect to...and we're going to get to this, obviously, to the Perelmutsers, the Kielburgers and all of this here in a second, with respect to the motion.

I asked them if they were seized with that. They were looking at me kind of like “no” and asking why they would be seized with that. They said they're interested in support. They said, “We're interested, Wayne, in your advocating for more funding for this riding, for infrastructure spending, for working with proponents in the rapid housing initiative and the federal co-investment fund to make sure we can deliver affordable housing from coast to coast.” Those are the things they want us working on.

I think this is important and you'll have to bear with me on this, Chair. For those Canadians who are listening in today with respect to MP Vecchio's motion, obviously you can't have an amendment to a motion without the motion, so I want to quickly go through MP Vecchio's motion and then explain MP Turnbull's amendment to it so that everybody understands it in context. I think that's only fair.

MP Normandin, I hope this ties it back now to the motion and the amendment to the motion. I have them here.

There are times for the old adage that there's an answer to the question or a solution to the problem, but when you don't want an answer to the question or a solution to the problem, you continue to look for the problem. You continue to look for the question when there's an answer. You look for the problem when there's a solution.

To go to MP Vecchio's motion, I'll quote her:

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—

● (6140)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Although I'm really enjoying this, I do think we are supposed to be talking about the amendment. I understand that Mr. Long would like to put this forward, but after two months of this filibuster, if people tuning in today don't know that for the last eight weeks everybody has been filibustering, it's great, but we should really get on to the business of the day.

My turn was at the beginning, two months ago, when I actually addressed this. It has been addressed numerous times, so if we could talk about the amendment, I know there will be great [Technical difficulty—Editor] as he is starting right now.

Mr. Wayne Long: Chair, I would just like to say it is important for context. We're talking about MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion. For Canadians who are tuning in today, I personally think this should be read in again. It should be read in each and every time we go back to discuss an amendment to a motion. Canadians could be sitting there right now saying “Okay. There is the amendment.” When I talk about the amendment—and I'm going to get to this—and deleting paragraph (a) and replacing paragraph (b) with the following, Canadians are asking, “What's he talking about?”

I think it is only fair that the motion be talked about. That's what I wanted to do, and I think I should be allowed to do that.

The Chair: Certainly, Mr. Long, even when I looked at the amendment the other day when I was trying to repeat what was in the amendment, I had to go back to the original motion in order to understand what was being deleted and what was being removed so that I had the right people removed.

You do have to look at both at the same time to understand the amendment, because there is not enough language in it.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, as I said, this filibuster has been going on since February 23, so I'm just going to caution all of the speakers who have spoken multiple times about repetition. I am absolutely fine with reading out the motion, but I recognize that of all speakers I'm looking at, there is one person I'm seeing on here today who has yet to speak on it, and this is just wading into a lot of repetition.

Thank you.

The Chair: Absolutely, Ms. Vecchio.

I will remind speakers to make sure they are staying relevant but also not repeating their points.

Mr. Wayne Long: I certainly understand Ms. Vecchio's frustration.

As MPs each and every one of us needs to prepare. It's not like I just walked in here 30 minutes ago and picked up a bunch of papers and decided to read off some stuff. It's incumbent on all of us as MPs to do our preparation, do the background study and give some thought as to what we think we can do to come to a consensus and have a proper exchange of viewpoints.

For me, Chair, I had to go back through this. I know it's painful at times to go back through these things, but I can't articulate MP Turnbull's amendment by deleting (d) through (h) and let's add (a) and let's throw in a little bit of spice here and let's mix it all in a pot. I can't do that without going through this.

We just talked about the Prime Minister. We just talked about inviting the Prime Minister back to appear for three hours. I am not sure what possibly anybody thinks they're going to get. Again, I just don't understand what anyone thinks and what question would be asked that hasn't been answered time and time and time again. Maybe it's just me, maybe it's the non-political side of me, at times, that screams to me. The fact that we want to invite the Prime Minister—not we; it's the Conservative Party—back not for three, for at least three hours....

The next is:

(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—

—and so on and so forth. It's the same thing over again. The next is:

(d) renew the invitations issued to Farah Perelmutter and Martin Perelmutter, to appear before the committee—

Chair, I need to pause for one second, with respect to the Perelmuters. The fact that we want to invite them back again to me is puzzling. How much more do we want to ask them? What else could there possibly be? Obviously, the Perelmuters were owners of

the Speakers' Spotlight and they appeared before the ethics committee. He and his wife had nothing to hide. They provided everything they had and they faced online attacks. They had to call the police.

• (6145)

At a December 7 meeting of the ethics committee, members of the Liberals and NDP apologized to the Perelmuters, yet we want to bring them back again. We want to bring Speakers' Spotlight back again.

Mr. Perelmutter co-founded Speakers' Spotlight 25 years ago with his wife. Since all of this, they've been harassed. Employees have been intimidated. They've been threatened since August, yet we want to invite them back on the same thing to appear for 90 minutes, not three hours.

The next is:

(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—

—and so on and so forth.

The next is:

...issue an order for the production of records of all communication between the government and any of WE Charity (or... affiliated organizations)...Kielburger, Marc Kielburger, or Speakers' Spotlight, since...;

The next is:

(g) issue orders to WE Charity (including...affiliated organizations), Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger and Speakers' Spotlight for the production of all memoranda, e-mails, text messages, documents, notes or other records...concerning the prorogation of Parliament, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk...;

Last but not least, it says:

(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—

—and so on and so forth.

You can bring motions forward. It's within the rights of any MP to bring motions forward like that. MP Turnbull—and I respect him so much—wanted to compromise. He wanted to find some common ground because he recognized.... Let me say this. For a newly elected member of Parliament, MP Ryan Turnbull is as good as they get. He is sincere. He researches. He cares. He has depth. What a wonderful addition not only to our party, but to Parliament as an elected representative.

I know MP Turnbull has consulted other members of PROC about a compromise and something that was arguably a middle ground. Negotiations are all about give and take. I lived it with the Sea Dogs in negotiating with agents and players. You give a little; you take a little. You say to get this out, but let's give this back and let's come to some form of consensus here.

MP Turnbull, I feel, came up with something that's very meaningful, so that the motion of Karen Vecchio concerning the committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020 be amended by deleting paragraph (a).

I won't go back and read paragraph (a) again, but basically it's deleting the paragraph that calls the Prime Minister to come to testify and:

II. by replacing paragraph (b) with the following: "(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 for at least 90 minutes; and

III. by replacing paragraph (c) with the following: "(b) renew the invitations issued to the Honourable Bill Morneau, Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger, each to appear separately before the committee for at least 90 minutes.", and

IV. by deleting paragraph (d) to (h)."

● (6150)

As I've said many times, I'm no...sometimes I catch myself saying that I'm not a politician. Well, I am a politician, but you know, I'm not a procedural kind of person.

I try my best, and we all have strengths and weaknesses as parliamentarians, but I looked at that and said that is a very valid compromise, a very valid compromise, that we.... There are still people called to testify. The Prime Minister's already on record. The opposition parties can interview or ask questions, but no, that's not acceptable, so here we are.

Where do we go? I want to reflect and think about the level of collaboration we've seen in the past among members, regardless of political stripe or affiliation. I mean, from the CERB to the wage subsidy—

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

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I think, if you ask, you will find consensus that many of us would like to suspend and continue this conversation and this meeting at our next scheduled meeting as we move forward, but suspend for the rest of the day and move on with this discussion once again next Tuesday.

● (6155)

The Chair: Mr. Long, are you okay with that at this point? QP is going to start in five minutes, and I'm assuming some members could have statements and other things.

Mr. Wayne Long: I would very much like to attend question period.

The Chair: Okay.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I was doing that for Wayne, so you're welcome, Wayne. That was for you. You're welcome.

Mr. Wayne Long: Karen, thank you. I do appreciate it.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: You're welcome.

The Chair: As I don't think there's going to be any opposition to that, we're suspended until next Tuesday.

[The meeting was suspended at 1:55 p.m., Thursday, April 15.]

[The meeting resumed at 11:02 a.m., Tuesday, April 20.]

The Chair: Good Morning. I call this meeting to order.

We are resuming meeting 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Today is April 20, but we are on the April 13 meeting currently. This meeting, like always, is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order

of January 25. Therefore, members can attend in person, but I believe everyone is currently attending virtually.

You all know the drill by now. I think even the subs we have at this point are subs we've had before. Please use the raise hand function in the toolbar below in order to speak to any issue. I will let you know that since we are resuming from the last meeting, we do have a running speakers list. We are still on the amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion. That was Mr. Turnbull's amendment on the witness motion on the prorogation study put forth by Ms. Vecchio.

The first person we have on the speakers list is Mr. Long. He had the floor at the time we suspended our last meeting. Then we have Ms. Petitpas Taylor. Then we have Dr. Duncan. Then we have a few others who aren't here right now, but I'm told they may be here later so I don't know whether they'll just get dropped off the list or perhaps they'll be able to take their spots.

We will begin by giving the floor back to you, Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon. I'm coming to you from the beautiful riding of Saint John—Rothsay, so I am an hour ahead of you. I certainly want to thank you very much for allowing me to sub in again.

PROC is a committee that does great work for Parliament, has done great work for Parliament, but obviously we're at a point in time right now where we are certainly held up. We're stuck.

Not to repeat history, but certainly the amendment that my great friend MP Turnbull has submitted is reasonable. I think it's fair. Certainly, as we say, with everything like that there's a compromise and we need to go back and forth. MP Turnbull's amendment is valid. He certainly takes out the part with respect to the Prime Minister but replaces it, says that we'll invite the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion.

Again, we've been through this before. I don't think continuing to draw a hard line in wanting the Prime Minister to come before PROC to testify accomplishes anything. The Conservative Party in particular hasn't found what they want. I think the answers have been found, but they haven't found what they want, so they need to continue to try to call more witnesses and interview more people.

I don't think we're getting anywhere. I think, again, that the compromise was fair. We had every right to prorogue Parliament. We did need a reset.

Canadians are not focused on this. Canadians want us to focus on governing. Canadians want us to focus on doing the work that parliamentarians should be doing.

Certainly, how can we not mention the historic day that we all saw yesterday with the Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland, delivering a historic transformational budget that will change for the better the course of our country and change for the better the lives of millions of Canadians? I won't go too deeply into the budget, because that's not what we're here to talk about, but when you see the delivering of \$10-a-day day care, the replenishment of the trade corridor funding, housing funding, a 10% increase for seniors over 74 years of age, which is so well deserved, I can tell you that the emails I've received and the phone calls I've received are so supportive and appreciative of what we're doing.

We want to finish the fight against COVID. We want to be focused on our recovery, and we want to put people and Canadians first. That's what that budget has done and that's what we are focused on delivering.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I find Mr. Long very interesting. I'm not bored listening to him, but I'd just like to get back to the amendment to the motion so our issue and the discussion are headed in the right direction.

That's just a friendly reminder so we can get back to Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

[English]

The Chair: I see the point that Mr. Long is trying to make as to our coming to a resolution and trying to move on.

Just as a reminder, maybe don't go into too much depth in your examples.

Mr. Wayne Long: Sure. That's more than fair.

Again, I appeal to everybody on this committee, what Canadians are focused on is recovery. Canadians want parliamentarians to be debating that, and exchanging viewpoints and ideas on it. That's what we were elected to do.

I'll wrap this up because I know my colleagues are ready to go. I think MP Turnbull's amendment to MP Vecchio's motion is fair. It meets things halfway. It will allow us to move forward as a committee to do the great work that we should be doing.

I will turn it over to my great friend from Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, MP Ginette Petitpas Taylor.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Long.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

[Translation]

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

Once again I want to thank my friend and colleague Mr. Long, from Saint John, who really has become a regular member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Thanks very much, Mr. Long, for your help in the past few weeks.

We very much miss Mr. Turnbull and hope he'll be back with us soon.

As we all know, our friend Mr. Gerretsen can't be with us because he's in the House.

Getting back to the motion we're debating today and the amendment Mr. Turnbull introduced some time ago. I've been very clear about my position on this from the start. I think we're actually ready to begin drafting the report on this study. I'm going to recap what we've heard to date from the many witnesses who've appeared as part of this study.

I've prepared a brief list. We heard from Kathy Brock, Prof. Hugo Cyr, Duane Bratt and Minister Pablo Rodriguez, who spent a great deal of time with us discussing the prorogation. We also heard from expert Allen Sutherland, Barbara Messamore, Prof. Philippe Lagassé, Lori Turnbull, Ian Brodie and members of the Privy Council.

So many witnesses have appeared. I genuinely think we're ready to draft the report.

Having said that, I'll be flexible. I really want to reflect on this today and share my thoughts about why we should consider the amendment proposed by our friend and colleague Mr. Turnbull. Those of us who know him can say he's attempting a mediation because he wants to come up with wording we can all agree on. He makes some good points and I want to share my thoughts on the subject.

We should absolutely invite the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth to appear before the committee. There are probably many questions we could ask them about the situation to ascertain their views. We could also ask them for their thoughts on the prorogation and why it occurred. After all, the government believes that its ministers are responsible, effective and transparent, that they set a high bar for openness and that they answer questions asked by members of the committees.

Although I'm speaking directly to Mr. Turnbull's motion, I want to make clear once again that there's nothing more important than addressing the global crisis caused by COVID-19. As I mentioned when we were debating Ms. Vecchio's motion, I'm hearing nothing about prorogation in my riding right now. However, people are extremely concerned about rising COVID-19 case numbers and this global health crisis that has affected us all.

While we discuss politics, we have to acknowledge that millions of people around the world have contracted COVID-19, and Canada hasn't been spared. Many lives have been lost and we really must recognize that this crisis has caused suffering around the world. We can see exactly what's happening in many provinces that have recently been harder hit. I consider myself lucky because there are 158 active cases here in New Brunswick today. We're a small province, so that's definitely troubling, but we're managing the situation well compared to other regions. However, we have to be vigilant because the situation can change quickly. So many lives have been lost as a result of this crisis. When we look at the number of deaths, we also have to acknowledge that they aren't just figures; they represent our grandparents, our immediate families, our neighbours and so many others.

My heart goes out to those who have lost family members, friends and people close to them. I honour all the healthcare workers for their dedication and sacrifice and all the other essential workers who have made it possible for life to go on.

Those workers put the interests of their neighbours, their community and their country ahead of their own needs, and they do it every day. In addition to thanking them for their heroic efforts in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, every one of us will strive to slow the spread of this virus. Since the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global health crisis—especially now that we're seeing the consequences of the third wave—that has shaken the foundation of our economic, political and social security, it should our main focus and that of this committee.

However, as regards the amendment before us and my thoughts on the matter, let me explain why I think we should reinvoke our Deputy Prime Minister. She is a remarkable woman, and I'm sure she played a key role in the prorogation discussions that took place between the Prime Minister and members of the cabinet. I believe she could tell us what they were thinking and their reason for deciding to prorogue Parliament. I think we already have the information we need, but if committee members want to hear more, I'm sure the Minister of Finance would be the right person to tell us more and answer our questions.

Our government understood from the start of the pandemic that COVID-19 was truly disrupting all our lives. Who would have thought last year that we'd still be working on Zoom? I bet everyone of us thought at the time that we'd all be back in Ottawa sitting together in the committees as one big family. In the end, we're still isolating at home. Office buildings are empty, streets are quiet, and schools in many places are closed.

We in Acadie really can't complain because we're starting to resume our routines and lives. However, cases are increasing for my colleagues from Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, and they're facing a truly serious third wave. We have to continue following public health guidelines and encouraging people to get vaccinated, since that's what will help us get through this crisis.

However, I must say I'm very proud of Canadians and our communities. People have really adapted. Our government had to strike a balance between health and the economy. In some public debates, people said we had to choose between health and the economy in responding to the pandemic. But that's a false choice, as the Minis-

ter of Finance has said on numerous occasions. We have to understand that health and the economy are joined at the hip. As we often say, health and the economy go together.

We promised to be there for Canadians during the pandemic until order was restored in society. That's a promise that we made and will keep. Our government had a number of general objectives: to protect the health and safety of Canadians, to provide them with the economic support they needed to self-isolate at home in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus and, lastly, to protect their jobs and livelihoods.

We asked Canadians to do some extraordinary things, to stay at home, because we wanted to prevent the virus from spreading. Most Canadians have listened to us. We have to be there to help them and to support them through these incredibly trying times.

We shut down the borders to protect the health and safety of Canadians. We provided the provinces and territories with \$19 billion in funding under the safe restart agreement. We purchased personal protective equipment and screening test kits and pre-ordered and delivered vaccines, and we're still delivering them.

The most important things we can do to slow the spread of COVID-19 are to vaccinate, test, conduct contact tracing and self-isolate. I think testing and contact tracing were the magic bullet in Atlantic Canada. They really were our key to identifying and isolating infected individuals.

Our provinces are definitely smaller, but I believe those screening efforts are part of the magic solution that has protected Atlantic Canada. Our government purchased vaccine doses and tests and provided contact tracing.

I also think that, if we invited Deputy Prime Minister Freeland, she could explain to the committee the government's thinking on the prorogation and its purpose and describe those discussions to us.

The most extensive vaccination campaign in the country's history is under way here in Canada. According to Canada's top vaccine coordinator, we should have access to enough COVID-19 vaccine by the end of June to give every Canadian a first dose. Mr. Fortin frequently tells us we're on track to take delivery of at least 44 million doses of vaccine by the end of June and should have more than 100 million doses of various vaccines by late September.

Consequently, with vaccines being deployed, there's light at the end of the tunnel. Once again, we can't put all our eggs in one basket. We're eager to get the vaccines, but we also have to keep following public health guidelines, since vaccines alone won't get us through this crisis. We have to keep following those guidelines.

When we needed help from the men and women of our armed forces in the spring, they came in and took care of our seniors. My friend and colleague Mr. Lauzon spoke passionately about the work they did and the services they have provided to Canadians during the crisis.

The long-term care homes were hit hard by the first wave of COVID-19, and more than 70% of COVID deaths occurred among persons over 80 years of age, approximately twice the average for the other developed countries. It was truly tragic to witness the damage this pandemic caused initially and unfortunately once again during the second wave.

I'm thinking of the many long-term care homes in my community of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe. The seniors who died weren't just numbers. Seniors are people we know. I regularly visit long-term care homes every year as a member of Parliament. The people there love to chat and hear what we're doing and what our policies are. They want to know if and when pensions will be increased. We often dance with them. They aren't just numbers; they're our friends, our neighbours. I miss them and they miss me; we all want to gather again soon and spend some time together.

We owe everything to our seniors, who have helped build this country, including safe and dignified care. I realize we're here to discuss the budget that was announced yesterday, but I was very pleased to learn that \$3 billion will be invested to assist long-term care homes because we acknowledge that those institutions need more help.

The lives lost in long-term care homes are the greatest tragedy of this pandemic. Many of us have expressed our concerns on numerous occasions. We must make every effort to ensure that our seniors receive necessary services and attention. Although long-term care is a provincial and territorial jurisdiction, our government will take every possible measure to support seniors in cooperation with the provinces and territories. Our government will work with Parliament to amend the Criminal Code to penalize specifically those whose neglect of the seniors under their care would put those seniors at risk.

Our government will also cooperate with the provinces and territories in establishing new national long-term care standards to ensure that seniors receive the best possible care. I won't repeat the comments made by my colleague Mr. Lauzon, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Seniors, since he's given us a very good recap of everything that has to be done to correct the situation.

Once again we must emphasize that the creation of national standards for care facilities is a necessity. We have to introduce additional measures to assist people, and, I would say, not just to provide them with long-term care, but also to assist them in living at home as long as possible.

I know our seniors here in New Brunswick tell us that if they had a choice whether to live at home longer or to move into a seniors'

residence, they would prefer to stay at home. I'm sure that situation isn't unique to New Brunswick, that it's the same across Canada. In New Brunswick, we conducted a pilot project with the province's assistance two years ago to establish programs enabling seniors to stay at home as long as possible. We could invite Minister Freeland to come and tell us about their options in that regard. This is clearly a valid option if we want to protect our seniors in this manner.

Some significant measures were outlined in the Speech from the Throne, which was delivered following the prorogation and extensive consultations. I'm sure a lot of my colleagues held many consultation sessions, as I did, in our communities during the prorogation period. People told us about their priorities, particularly during a global pandemic. The priorities outlined in the 2019 Speech from the Throne were similar to those in place during the pandemic, although there were also some differences. Priorities changed. The prorogation period helped us self-evaluate and assess the government's priorities. I think it might be a good idea to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister on where we stand in implementing those priorities.

Seniors are an integral part of all our communities, and we must do everything in our power to protect their health, rights and well-being. We must value their experience, knowledge and talents, and we must address the challenges they face in society.

To preserve jobs and livelihoods, the government put strong measures in place to protect businesses and workers. I think Ms. Freeland could tell us what she thinks of those measures if we invited her to appear before the committee.

We had to take those strong measures because the virus could only be slowed down and stopped by limiting social contacts, which meant restricting economic activity. That meant shutting down workplaces and limiting the number of persons served in restaurants. As we can see now, contacts need to be limited further to address the pandemic as a result of the third wave now under way in many provinces.

It also meant isolating people at home after work, if they were sick or if their children were sick. It would simply have been unfair to ask businesses to shut down and workers to stay at home without compensating them for lost income.

Less than a week after our country shut down, the government announced a recovery plan including \$27 billion in emergency assistance for workers and businesses and \$55 billion for tax payment deferrals. We provided billions of dollars to assist businesses in obtaining [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and keeping workers on their payrolls, while enhancing federal benefits and support programs for individuals who had lost their jobs.

I'm sure you remember very clearly the daily calls and conversations we had with officials in the departments responsible. As a parliamentarian, I was pleased to see all the political parties working hard together to develop the best possible programs. At first, the programs obviously weren't perfect. We didn't have all the answers, but together we modified those programs to meet Canadians' needs. Once again, Ms. Freeland could tell us what she thinks of them if we invited her to come and speak to us.

The funds released would help Canadians pay their rent and buy groceries and assist businesses in continuing to pay their employees and suppliers.

I did a quick search yesterday, focusing solely on New Brunswick, to see what spending or investment is being provided here, just to give you an idea.

If you look at the Canada emergency business account, as of April 15 of this year, 11,870 loans had been made to businesses for a total value of \$626 million.

For the Canada emergency rent subsidy, as of February 24, 1,364 tenants in New Brunswick, representing 10,282 employees, received total funding of \$11.59 million. That's a really impressive number.

As for the Canada emergency rent subsidy and lockdown support, as of February 14, we had received 3,210 applications, which were approved for total subsidies amounting to \$7.4 million.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Petitpas Taylor, I hate to interrupt, but I was wondering if you could just slow down a little bit for the benefit of the interpreters. They're having some difficulty.

You generally speak a little fast, but right now it seems like you're getting faster and faster.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I will certainly slow down, absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I'm going to repeat, this time more slowly, the investments that were made in New Brunswick under the financial assistance programs for the businesses and people of our province.

Starting with the Canada emergency business account, as of April 15, 11,870 loans had been made to businesses for a total value of \$626 million.

As for the Canada emergency rent subsidy, as of February 24, 1,364 tenants in New Brunswick, representing 10,200 employees, had received total funding of \$11.59 million.

For the Canada emergency rent subsidy and lockdown support, as of February 13, we had approved 3,210 applications for total subsidies amounting to \$7.4 million.

As for the Canada emergency wage subsidy, as of March 7 of this year, we had approved 55,000 applications for a total of more than \$1 billion in subsidies. That helped protect 91,000 jobs in our small province of New Brunswick.

Now let's look at the figures for the Canada emergency response benefit. As of October 4, more than 165,000 New Brunswickers had applied for it. As you can see, that helped the population, one fifth of which received funding under that program.

With respect to the Canada recovery benefit, as of April 11, \$209.8 million had been allocated among 27,000 New Brunswickers.

Lastly, thanks to the Canada recovery sickness benefit, as of November 11, \$5.5 million had been allocated among approximately 6,000 New Brunswickers.

I'm citing those figures from a few searches that I did last night. When you look at the support the federal government has given to the provinces and territories and to the people in our communities, you can see that a lot of thought went into this. A lot of investments were made. If we invited the Deputy Prime Minister, Ms. Freeland, she could come and see us, and we could ask her questions on the subject. She could tell us what she thinks worked or didn't work and tell us what changes were made to all those programs along the way. I think she could broadly clarify certain points for us.

The funding provided helped Canadians meet their basic needs. Our government put several programs in place to ensure people would be supported.

I speak to my fellow citizens in the beautiful region of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe every day to see how their families are doing. I ask them what additional assistance they need. We generally hear that the CERB was really a lifesaver. It helped people pay their rent and pay for their groceries and transportation. Most importantly, it made it possible for our fellow citizens to stay at home when we asked them to do so to prevent the virus from spreading.

Our government also introduced the Canada emergency wage subsidy, which supported three million Canadian workers so they could stay on employer payrolls.

It should also not be forgotten that our local businesses are the heart and soul of our communities. They're run by our friends and neighbours. We can support them by ordering meals from neighbourhood restaurants and buying local. I think the pandemic clearly showed how important it is to support our local merchants.

These economic programs are good reasons to invite the Deputy Prime Minister to come and speak to us directly. She could give us an overview of the thinking and discussions that took place during the prorogation period.

Our government also realized that parents were concerned about the costs associated with raising their children, which is why we invested in families.

We increased the Canada child benefit for 2020-2021. The maximum annual benefit will rise to \$6,765 per child under 6 years of age and to \$5,708 per child 6 to 17.

We subsequently invested \$625 million in emergency federal support to ensure the safety of child care services, the number of available spaces and affordable access to those services. We aren't here to discuss the budget introduced yesterday, but I was very pleased to hear that our Deputy Prime Minister's priority is to make the necessary investments in a national plan for affordable child care centres. We can thank Quebec and our Quebec colleagues Mr. Lauzon and Mr. Therrien for that. Quebec has outstanding childcare services and has developed a plan that we can follow. We've learned a great deal from Quebec. The province is progressive and we have to take a look at what's worked well for it.

Our government also understood that additional support was needed for food banks and food organizations. Without that support, COVID-19 would have had an additional impact on vulnerable communities. We know that many Canadians rely on food banks and local community organizations to feed their families and for support during tough times.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the organizations in my community of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe such as Food Depot Alimentaire, the Peter McKee Community Food Centre and the United Way Greater Moncton and Southeastern New Brunswick for their efforts in providing our families with healthy and nutritional food.

I like to talk about Moncton's community organizations when I have the floor. Food Depot Alimentaire provides healthy and nutritional food to thousands of families in our community with the help of volunteers. This week is volunteer week. We have to thank all our community organizations and their volunteers for their hard work.

I'd like to talk about the United Way Greater Moncton and Southeastern New Brunswick organization. I think I raised the subject when we debated Ms. Vecchio's motion. We're fortunate to have a seniors program in Moncton. People at the United Way prepare meals for our seniors and deliver more than 600 meals every week. Volunteers prepare the meals and deliver them as well. We're glad we invested in helping them continue that important work.

Since our government also understood that young Canadians were facing unprecedented challenges, we doubled the Canadian student grants and created the Canada emergency student benefit. We wanted to ensure that students had the assistance they needed to continue their education. Students received that necessary assistance thanks to the investments we made.

Vaccine equity is another subject that our Deputy Prime Minister could discuss. The world needs vaccines to help reopen our societies and defeat this virus.

We know the third wave is vicious. More transmission means more variants, and the more variants there are, the more likely it is they'll elude vaccines. As long as the virus continues to spread, people will keep dying, business and travel will remain disrupted and economic recovery further delayed.

The global vaccination campaign is the greatest moral test of our time, but many low-income countries have yet to receive a single dose. Canada has agreed to increase funding for vaccine deployment in low-income countries. It has also committed to providing \$75 million more to the international vaccine-sharing program as other wealthier countries step up their own commitment.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Ms. Freeland, could also come and discuss that subject. That would help us answer certain questions. She could give us her thoughts on the subject, particularly during the prorogation.

This new commitment raises Canada's total contribution to \$940 million, which will help provide vaccine doses to other countries. It would be good to hear the Deputy Prime Minister's thoughts on how the world should come together to produce and distribute enough vaccine for everyone. This means that global manufacturing capacity must at least be doubled.

We have to understand that this is very important and that it really counts. The unfair distribution of vaccines is a moral outrage and both epidemiologically and economically self-destructive. The only way we can put an end to this pandemic, recover and restore our economy is by working together.

We know that the speed and extent of our economic recovery will be directly proportionate to our ability to limit the economic damage caused by the coronavirus.

Another compelling reason to invite the Deputy Prime Minister to meet with us would be to hear her discuss the economic recovery. We were in a sound fiscal position when we entered this crisis: Canada's net-debt-to-GDP ratio was the lowest of the G-7 countries when COVID-19 hit.

What investments will help make our economy stronger and assist us in laying the foundation for a green economy, an innovation economy and an equitable economy that supports good jobs for all Canadians? We want to emerge from the pandemic healthier and wealthier and with a greener economy. For the moment, we're still focusing on combating the pandemic. The health and safety of Canadians are still our priority. We're doing everything in our power to ensure the health, safety and solvency of Canadians.

The Deputy Prime Minister could also offer us her thoughts on lessons learned. That would be another reason to invite her. On that subject, my friend and colleague Kirsty Duncan has introduced a motion that we could consider.

Let me be absolutely clear: we will have ample time to consider our response in future, but, to date, what thoughts have we had about preparation? I think we all have to be ready: governments, private sectors, government organizations, non-governmental organizations and international organizations. When you aren't prepared, you suffer serious repercussions, devastating economic consequences and a raft of new inequalities and vulnerabilities. A virus can quickly erase all economic progress.

I'd also like to suggest that we hear what the Deputy Prime Minister has to say about the other global crisis we're facing—climate change—but let's set that issue aside for the moment, since we're considering the health crisis and COVID-19 today. However, we could nevertheless ask her for her thoughts on that subject.

The final reason why we should invite the Deputy Prime Minister would be to ask critical questions about what issues affect and concern people in our community. I'm sure that Mr. Lauzon, Mr. Therrien, Ms. Vecchio, Mr. Morrissey, Ms. Duncan, Mr. Blaikie, Mr. Long and Mr. Nater are all aware of issues that concern the people in their communities. If the Deputy Prime Minister were here, we could ask her questions about the post-COVID-19 economic recovery.

My priority is still to serve the people in my riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, an exceptional community of people who want to help each other. We have to be there for them. I want them to know that we're getting through this difficult period together and that I'll always be there to assist and support them in these tough times.

The pandemic has hit seniors, persons with disabilities, women, girls, indigenous peoples and racialized persons. We must understand that systemic racism is real, that unconscious prejudices are real and that these phenomena also occur in Canada.

It has now been a year since George Floyd died. We're discussing the issue of unconscious bias, and I think that event encourages us to assess what's happening in our communities. We can see that the pandemic has triggered feelings of hate, scapegoating, alarmism and xenophobia around the world. Once again, we have a lot of work to do on this subject.

We need to support all those who experience racism and whose human rights are violated. Canadian MPs met and adopted a motion condemning the rise of racism and racist attacks against Asia in North America and expressing our unanimous horror at the shootings that occurred in Georgia. Because COVID-19 seems to have come from Wuhan, China, people have used shocking and appalling language to designate the inhabitants of that region and we've seen an increase in discrimination and violence against Asians as a result.

In July 2020, Statistics Canada data suggested that Asian Canadians were more likely to report that they had observed a rise in racial or psychological harassment during the pandemic. The largest increase was observed among persons of Chinese, Korean and South

Asian decent. According to figures from a separate report prepared by the National Research Council Canada and released in September 2020, the number of racist incidents reported against Asians is higher in Canada than in the United States on a per capita basis.

We must promote inclusion and a sense of belonging among people to guarantee the safety of all Canadians. Since the mission of the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth is to help build a country where every individual has an equal chance of success, to defend all the dynamic diversity in Canada and to promote greater inclusion, I think this would be a good opportunity to ask her questions on that topic. We must work together to build a fairer future for all of us. We must always combat racism and prejudice and promote respect, compassion and equality.

Madam Chair, I see I've spoken at greater length than anticipated. I would like to discuss other thoughts as part of this debate, but I'm going to yield the floor to my friend Mr. Lauzon or Ms. Duncan. I don't know who's next on the list.

Madam Chair, thank you once again for the opportunity to make some important points on the subject.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Next we have Dr. Duncan on the list.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will begin by thanking my friend and colleague, the honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor, for her compassion, caring, her commitment to community and for her important speech.

It's important for people to know she's our former health minister. Her expertise is so appreciated. I would really like to thank her for her important comments regarding vaccine equity.

I will also thank my colleague and friend, Mr. Wayne Long. I not only appreciated his speech, but I also have very fond memories of seeing Mr. Long in his community and his joy of serving was so apparent.

I want to say how much I appreciate the amendment brought forward by my friend and colleague, Mr. Turnbull. I have been clear that I think it would be really important to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

I will also make the point that I have repeatedly made, namely, that there is nothing more important than the COVID-19 pandemic and that is where our sole focus should be. I think there are absolutely more important issues this committee should be studying. In fact, I have a motion calling for the review of Parliament's response to COVID-19 identifying lessons learned and putting forth recommendations so that future parliaments are better prepared for a pandemic.

As I said, there is nothing more important than the COVID-19 pandemic right now. This is where our sole focus should be.

Canada is in a third wave of COVID-19. When I was preparing last week, cases had increased by 82% over the previous 14 days. We are in a race between the variants and the vaccines.

While this committee does not oversee pandemic response, and we must be focused as a country on the response, we absolutely have a role to play in pandemic preparedness for the future. It is incumbent upon each of us to ensure that the House of Commons is prepared for the next pandemic, because in all likelihood, there will be a next time. COVID-19 is not going to be the last pandemic. Going forward, the House of Commons, Parliament, governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and international organizations must all be better prepared. When we are not prepared, we face not only deadly impacts, but also devastating economic consequences and new inequalities and vulnerabilities.

All of us on this committee, all of us in our communities and right across this country have been touched by the pandemic. We have to learn from the crisis. We can't forget what we have all been through. We need to prepare for the future. This includes our work at this very committee.

The job of the procedure and House affairs committee is to study and report on, among other things, the practice of the House and its committees, the internal administration of the House, and services and facilities for members of Parliament.

All of us need to be asking about the House of Commons' response to COVID-19. This is not partisan. It's real work that needs to be done, just as we have done real work on studies on remote voting, and how to promote democracy and public health and safety should there be an election during the pandemic.

Undertaking this study, as I have raised before, is important. Past crises have shown that once an outbreak is under control, organizations tend to turn their attention to other pressing concerns. If this committee does not do this study now, when will the study be done? What happens if an election intervenes? It is our committee members who have direct experience and it is our members who should be asking questions.

The point is we need to review the response to see what action was taken, when action was taken and what recommendations we can make to be better prepared for next time. We need to think of the thousands who work here in the parliamentary precinct. They are our colleagues, our friends, who work to maintain the people's house. We need to be thinking of protecting our democracy during a pandemic or another disaster.

Let me bring it back. Canada is in a third wave of COVID-19. We are in a race between the variants and the vaccines. Our health system in Ontario is literally on the verge of collapse and our health care professionals are exhausted, yet this committee remains focused on politics.

Our country reported 9,200 COVID-19 infections two Fridays ago, the single-day high since the start of the pandemic. Yesterday, Ontario reported over 4,400 cases of COVID-19, while the number of hospitalizations topped 2,200. It was the sixth straight day of

more than 4,000 new infections in the province—six straight days of more than 4,000 cases—yet we have a partisan motion in front of this committee.

Worldwide we have seen increases in the number of new cases of COVID-19 for the eighth week in a row. More than 5.2 million cases were reported last week. That is the most in a single week so far. Deaths rose for the fifth straight week. More than three million deaths—let me repeat that—more than three million deaths have been reported by the World Health Organization. It took nine months to reach one million deaths, four more months to reach two million, and three more months to reach three million. Big numbers can make us feel numb, but each of these deaths is a tragedy for families, communities and countries, yet this committee remains focused on politics.

More than 900 million vaccine doses have been administered worldwide, but there is a stark gap between vaccination programs in different countries, with some yet to report a single dose. Eighty-three per cent of the shots that have gone into arms worldwide have been administered in high- and upper-middle-income countries. Only 0.2% of doses have been administered in low-income countries. This, unfortunately, is not surprising. When HIV emerged 40 years ago, life-saving antiretrovirals were developed, but more than a decade passed before the world's poor got access.

While vaccines are a vital and powerful tool, they are not the only tool. Physical distancing works. Masks work. Hand hygiene works. Ventilation works. Surveillance, testing, contact tracing, isolation, supportive quarantine and compassionate care all work to stop infections and save lives.

It is important for people to understand that young, healthy people have died. We still don't fully understand the long-term consequences of infection for those who survive. Many people who have suffered even mild illness report long-term symptoms, including fatigue, weakness, brain fog, dizziness, tremors, insomnia, depression, anxiety, joint pain, chest tightness and more, all of which are symptoms of "long COVID".

Far too many health care workers have died in the pandemic. Millions have been infected and the pandemic has taken a huge toll on their physical and mental health, with devastating effects on their families and communities. Anxiety, depression, insomnia and stress have all increased.

One nurse said she's tired of seeing young people die. She keeps hearing that more people are getting sick, so more beds are needed. She's tired and she says it's demoralizing.

Another nurse says the daily scenes unfolding before her eyes—more acutely COVID-19, more acutely ill COVID-19 patients and young people fighting for their lives—weigh heavily on her. There's no escaping the hospital, even when she's home with her family. She tries not to burden them with her worries. She explains, "Sometimes when I sleep, I just keep thinking. Those things are going through my mind, and I just want to shut it down, just shut off for a minute." She says, "We are not only taking care of the patients. We have to take care of our staff. Everyone's burned out."

Heads of hospitals are worried about the number of people who are getting sick, their colleagues in cardiology and neurology, and the cancer rates that will follow, yet this committee has a partisan motion.

The pandemic is exposing and exacerbating inequalities. COVID-19 pushed an estimated 120 million people into extreme poverty last year. Gender inequalities have increased with more women than men leaving the labour force. Rich countries are vaccinating their populations while the world's poor watch and wait. Health inequalities are not just unfair; they make the world less safe and less sustainable, yet there is a partisan motion in front of this committee.

Here in Canada we have had over one million COVID-19 cases. COVID-19 has claimed more than 23,600 Canadians.

I cannot imagine what could be more important than talking about COVID-19 and the race between the variants and the vaccines. The numbers of deaths are not just numbers. They are our grandparents, mothers, fathers, loved ones, neighbours, colleagues, lifelong friends, mentors and heroes, and they matter, and they matter to so many more people.

All of us should be asking about the number of outbreaks of COVID-19 in hospitals, the number of health care workers who have developed COVID-19 and the number of health care workers who've ended up in the ICU. All of us should be asking about the number of outbreaks in essential workplaces, in marginalized communities and in congregate settings. All of us should be pushing for vaccine equity.

Throughout the pandemic, racialized communities have been hit hard. In the spring of 2020 in Ontario, the most diverse neighbourhoods were hit hard. Hospitalization rates were four times higher. ICU admission rates were four times higher. Death rates were twice as high. Data from the fall in Toronto show that 79% of reported COVID-19 cases were among those who identified with a racialized group. In Toronto, the neighbourhoods with the highest populations of racialized people had the lowest vaccination rates, despite the disproportionate impact of the disease on these communities.

A century—a century—after the 1918 influenza, poverty, hunger and well-being, gender, racialization and economic status still play a role in who gets sick, who gets treated and who survives COVID-19. Here in Ontario, surgeries are cancelled as the province braces for more COVID-19 patients. Cases of more transmissible coronavirus variants are surging in Ontario, and strained hospitals are forced to cancel elective and non-urgent surgeries. Cataract, joint and cancer surgeries are all cancelled despite a backlog of postponed surgeries from the past year approaching 250,000. One

emergency doctor says, "If alarm bells are not ringing now, I don't know what it will take."

The system is straining to keep up. Dr. Kevin Smith, CEO of Toronto's University Health Network, said, "This is going to be the most extraordinary and demanding time most of us have had in our working lives. It comes to us after a very long year which has left us feeling battered and drained." They are battered and they are drained, but this committee is focused on partisan politics.

Let me be clear. We are still fighting the pandemic. In Ontario, more COVID-19 patients are in the ICU than at any other point during the pandemic. Canada's chief public health officer has said that the rapidly spreading variants have now likely replaced the original virus as more young people are getting sicker. Hospital admissions are also on the rise as health care staff try to keep up with overflowing ICUs. Experts say the number of COVID-19 patients in ICUs continues to test hospital capacities with patients battling the disease.

Coming back to the amendment, the original motion prejudices the need for prorogation. Mr. Turnbull's amendment refocuses the study on prorogation with research, evidence and facts and reinviting our Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

The Prime Minister prorogued in order to take the time needed to understand what Canadians needed during the pandemic. How were they doing? Where were we in the pandemic? How was it affecting their jobs, their livelihoods? Could they put food on the table? How had wave one affected our seniors, particularly those in long-term care? Where should we go as a country after looking at the science, the evidence and the facts and hearing directly from Canadians?

When dealing with a new disease, it's important to acknowledge that not everything is known. It's important to exercise precautions. With a new disease and new data, information will likely change, and there will likely need to be adjustments in guidelines, policies and recommendations. If we look at what was known last January versus what is known today, we see there are a lot of differences. Science evolves over time, and decision-makers have to be open, flexible and willing to change course. They have to stay humble in the face of a new virus. If the—

Mr. John Nater: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, there are rules against both relevance and repetition. I would note that Ms. Duncan is repeating word for word what she said in previous meetings.

The Chair: I don't have her speech saved, but I'll let Dr. Duncan respond to that.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I would like to be clear that I spent last night updating this speech with the new facts, new evidence and new information from the World Health Organization and new information from the Province of Ontario. I'm here to represent the constituents of Etobicoke North, and I'll debate the amendment that is at hand.

I would like to speak about the issues that matter most to our community during this historic time, and this really is historic. It's 100 years since the last major pandemic—we also had influenza pandemics in 1957 and 1968—and it is tragically historic. It continues to inflict unprecedented harm on people, societies and economies around the world.

I would like to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister. We could ask her about the consultations that were made during prorogation, the investments that the government has made and what more needs to be done. Yesterday we heard that in the budget there will be investments of \$100 billion in Canadians. This budget is about finishing the fight against COVID-19. It's about healing the wounds left by the COVID-19 recession. It's about creating more jobs and prosperity for Canadians in the days—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I really appreciate all that Dr. Duncan is saying, and we have already invited the Deputy Prime Minister. We have yet to hear back. I just wanted to point that out.

Once again, could we get back to the actual motion? Referring to the budget is great, but let's go back to what actually happened. We're getting results, but we still don't know why we had to prorogue.

Thanks.

The Chair: At this time, we're speaking to Mr. Turnbull's amendment to reinvoke the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Chagger and a few others as well. I think Dr. Duncan—I am following closely—is speaking to why we should be inviting these people to speak to why prorogation was necessary, so I think I will allow that.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Yes, it is about hearing from our Deputy Prime Minister. I think it's important for Canadians to understand where we are in a pandemic, and the people of Etobicoke North and all Canadians want to know what will be done for them. That \$100 billion announced yesterday is so important. It's investments in Canadians.

Right now, the priority is protecting the health and safety of Canadians, their jobs and their livelihoods. While the focus is absolutely on protecting health, the government must also be investing in the economic recovery. We must ensure that Canada builds back better, that we have inclusive growth and that we have green growth. I would like to hear the Deputy Prime Minister's thoughts on the economic recovery and, of course, the budget that she just released, the investments in Canadians of over \$100 billion.

I know the community I serve would like to hear about the economy. I did hear from our community that they were pleased to see that the Speech from the Throne outlined paths to economic recovery. They felt that with the consultations that had been done by pro-

rogation they had been heard. The throne speech planned for incentives for employers to hire and retain workers and for training to quickly equip workers with new skills.

We have an opportunity not just to support Canadians but also to grow their potential. Working with provinces and territories, the government will make the largest investment in Canadian history in training for workers. This will include supporting Canadians as they build new skills in growing sectors, helping workers receive education and accreditation, and strengthening workers' futures by connecting them to employers and good jobs—

Mr. John Nater: Point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: I'm again reading word for word what Ms. Duncan is saying from a previous meeting. The last two paragraphs have been word for word what she said in a previous meeting.

The rule of repetition states that can't happen. If she has new information to bring forward, she should, but she should not be repeating word for word what has previously been said in this committee.

The Chair: I consider all members to be honourable. If Ms. Duncan says that she stayed up and submitted new facts and evidence to her speech to, essentially, make the guts of it different....

I'll confer with the clerk as well on this, if you would just give me a second.

I was conferring with the clerk as I want to take Mr. Nater's point of order seriously and give Dr. Duncan the respect she deserves as well, and the opportunity to make her point.

I'll just remind members that repetition, especially if it is word-for-word repetition, is not allowed. If there are new facts in evidence, then try to focus on those new facts in evidence and to refrain from repeating anything verbatim.

I guess that reminder goes to everyone.

Mr. Nater, thanks for raising that point of order.

I'll give Dr. Duncan the floor.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank Mr. Nater as well. I'm so careful, and I'd just like him to know. In fact, last night I checked the blues that were available on the PROC website to make sure I wasn't repeating anything, so I really hope that I have not.

In terms of new figures, I was talking about the importance of jobs. Of course, we saw that in the budget yesterday. I think it's really important that we hear from the Deputy Prime Minister, because she talks about a resilience agenda. What does that mean for health care? What does it mean for our social systems? We entered the pandemic in a strong fiscal position. It allowed us to take quick and decisive action supporting both people and business. The biggest danger we could have had would have been not doing enough.

I'd like to talk about addressing the gaps in our social system. For me, one of the most important things, the worst tragedy, was what happened in long-term care. It broke my heart. It broke my heart. Before I ever entered politics, I used to take the children I taught dancing to into the seniors homes in Etobicoke North. They knew these seniors for many years. To see what they have lived through.... I've known these seniors in these residences through politics an additional 12 years. I will be afraid to see, when we go back, who we have lost. They deserve to be safe and respected and to live in dignity.

I want families to know this: I know your loss. I know your terrible pain. I know it first-hand. I will absolutely raise long-term care again and again and again.

I'd like to recognize Monsieur Lauzon's leadership here. We've all heard about his caring and compassion for seniors. He's the parliamentary secretary to the minister. I'm glad to see in the budget another \$3 billion for long-term care. We will be investing \$12 billion over five years to increase old age security for seniors aged 75 and older.

If the Deputy Prime Minister came to our committee, we could ask her questions on behalf of our seniors. I know that the seniors in our Etobicoke North community, for example, our Humberwood seniors, our Sri Lankan Tamil seniors, our St. Andrew's seniors, to name just a few groups, would be really eager to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

I want to talk a bit about how COVID affected congregate settings and particularly people with disabilities. I've been a lifelong advocate for disability rights. I've worked with and learned from—learned from—persons living with disabilities all my life. I've worked with children with autism spectrum disorder. I've worked with adults with developmental delays. We saw with the pandemic that the disease spread quickly in these residences.

If we look at the survey on disability, we can see that more than six million Canadians identify as having a disability. That's important for this committee to know. When we look at employment, only 59% of Canadians with disabilities from age 25 to 64 are employed as compared with 80% of Canadians without disabilities. They also earn less. It's 12% less for those with milder disabilities and 51% for those with more severe disabilities. They're more likely to live in poverty.

I think it's incumbent upon all of us to build a fairer future where we all have an equal opportunity to succeed. If I look back to the last Parliament, our government undertook the most inclusive and accessible consultation with Canadians with disabilities and brought forth historic legislation.

There's more work to do. Our government will bring forward a disability inclusion plan and a new Canadian disability benefit modelled after the guaranteed income supplement for seniors. I think it would be really important to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister on these initiatives.

Next, I'd like to talk a bit about health. I would like to recognize my friend and colleague, Madam Petitpas Taylor and her tremendous work when she served as the minister of health for Canada. I hear regularly from the medical and research community that really recognized how she listened and what she achieved for our country. I will just highlight her work on the food guide, healthy food choices, and financial support for thalidomide survivors. Of course, I could go on.

Over the last many months, it's become clearer that we need a resilient health care system. Everyone should have access to a family doctor. We've seen with COVID-19 that our system has to be more flexible to be able to reach communities. I know from helping families in my own community that it's been really hard. It's been hard to reach a doctor during the pandemic. Many doctors are not operating. If they were operating, it's hard to get an appointment. If you could get an appointment and then you needed to see a specialist, that took more time. I'm really concerned about what we're going to see in the future in terms of cancers being diagnosed later, and heart and neurological issues.

I'd like to talk a bit about hearing from the Deputy Prime Minister when it comes to mental health initiatives.

I'd also like to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister about how we build safer, stronger communities and the importance of having a home. No one should ever have to survive a Canadian winter on the street. Everyone needs a home. It's one of the most important issues to our community. That's why I fight so hard for affordable housing. It's something everyone deserves. It's also a key driver of the economy.

Another issue that's really important to the people of Etobicoke North is ending gun violence. It's something I've fought for since I arrived in Parliament. I remember back in 2013, a group of grieving Somali mothers came to see me in my constituency office. They gave me a list of 50 young Somali Canadian men who had died violently, largely in Ontario and Alberta. Many of their deaths remain unsolved.

In 2012, it was that terrible summer here in Toronto when we had 33 Toronto shooting deaths that took the lives of Somali Canadian men. When I go to a meeting and 100 people are there—obviously, this is during non-COVID times—it's common for four mothers to come up to me and say that they are the parent of one of those young men. These are Canadian-born young men. Grieving mothers, community elders and imams say these were the children who were supposed to bury them. No one asks about their pain because no one wants to know.

Positive Change writes in their brochure, “50 sons, brothers, grandsons, friends lost. Together let's stop the violence”. It's really important that we do more. I think it would be important to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister on gun violence.

What matters to my community is having a job, having a home, having a safe community and addressing inequality and health care. What I hear from the youth in our community is that we're in a climate emergency. The global response has been inadequate, and we must urgently change course. It's important for people to understand that we've really faced three global emergencies this past year. There is the pandemic. There is the climate crisis. There is a crisis of injustice. The young people in my community—and we see youth leading around the world on climate change—want us to speak up for planet Earth. I think it's really important. We have to increase the level of ambition.

Earth Day is this week. There's also an important meeting taking place, a virtual Leaders Summit on Climate. We have to increase the level of ambition. We have to increase the action that will happen at COP26 this year in Glasgow.

Canadians understand that climate change threatens our health, our way of life and our planet. They want to see more action. I'm really pleased to see that our government is committed to that action. We saw that in the budget yesterday, with billions invested. I would like to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister about Canada's climate action and what more needs to be done.

Madam Chair, I've been speaking at length. I'm just going to finish by really bringing home that the sole focus of this committee should be the pandemic. It should be pandemic. It's what I hear in our community. It's what our community members are concerned about. I serve a wonderful community. It is the place where I was born and raised. It's very difficult, because our community works hard. Many are on the front line. They want to see members of Parliament fighting for them. They don't want to see politics.

Right now in Ontario our health care system is crumbling. The hospitalizations have increased. The ICU admissions have increased. Patients are being shipped around the province to make room for sicker patients. You can see the numbers increasing in other provinces. It's not just Ontario. We're seeing the numbers increase in other provinces.

I will make a plea to our dear colleagues on this committee. I so appreciate working with everyone. I think we have a good committee, and I think we've done good work. We did good work on remote voting. We did good work on putting in place recommendations should there be an election during a pandemic. I absolutely hope there is not an election during a pandemic. We do have work to do, real, meaningful work. There will be a pandemic in the future, and it is incumbent upon us to study Parliament's response and to make recommendations.

With that, Madam Chair, I will say thank you to my colleagues and friends and I will pass the floor to the next member.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Duncan. You always speak extremely passionately, but I've seen you first-hand in your community with your constituents. I'm amazed—and I think Wayne said this, too—at how many names you know, how many languages you

know in order to communicate with the diversity you have in your riding. Even when you pop into our ridings, how quickly you connect with people is pretty amazing.

I'm really sorry about the loss in your own family and about how COVID has affected you. It's a real tragedy. It is hitting many of us close to home.

Next we have Mr. Simms. Then we have Mr. Lauzon after that.

Mr. Simms, welcome back to PROC. How are you?

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Madam Chair, to be quite honest with you, I say—and I don't mean this as an understatement—the pleasure is all mine.

I want to thank Ms. Duncan for her interventions and for going through her experience, all of which you've just described aptly.

I want to say hello to my colleagues. It's been ages since I've seen you amongst the squares that unfold in front of my screen.

Yes, I see you too, Wayne. It's nice to see you as well. I included you in that, by the way, if you had any trepidation about that.

This is something I want to get into, because I took great interest in it. You may not believe me, but it is true. I'm taking a great interest in this and I'll tell you why.

When I was first elected in 2004, I think sideburns were a thing. I'm not sure we've progressed further in fashion since then; nevertheless, that's quite some time ago. I was so naive, so green towards the whole process of parliamentary procedure—this is an actual, true story—that I got to Ottawa for the first time and was standing in a lineup of about 50 people. The security guard came along. In those days you had various security guards. You had one set for the House of Commons and you had different security guards for the Senate.

A Senate security guard walked by, and I said, “Excuse me, sir, I'm just waiting to get in here, but do you know how long this will take? I have a meeting.” He said, “Who is your meeting with?” I said, “My meeting is with the Speaker of the House.” He said, “Are you from his area?” I said, “No, I'm from Newfoundland.”

We got to talking. He said, “What do you do?” I said, “I just got elected. I'm a member of Parliament—not sworn in yet, but I just got elected.” He just sighed and said, “Come with me, sir.” I said, “What did I do?” He said, “Sir, you can go wherever you want.” I said, “Really? I can go anywhere I want? I can walk in and see Paul Martin, the prime minister?” He said, “But not there.”

It was quite a journey. When I got in there he asked, "Are you okay?" I said, "Yes. Can I ask you a question?" He said, "Go ahead." I said, "Where's the House of Commons?"

I was in the lobby of the western side of Centre Block. I didn't have a clue where the House of Commons was. Not only that, I also didn't really have much of a history of how it works. All I know is from question period, when you get up and ask a question and someone gets up and answers the question. Neither of the two relates to the other. What was asked and what was answered would seem to be madly off in different directions.

Of course, everything has changed since then, right?

I was looking for a reaction. I see it.

At the time, I was thinking to myself that I knew nothing about how this place operates, how this place works. I never undermined its importance. I just thought to myself, "How does this all work?"

I sat down with as many rules and procedures as I could and talked to as many people as I could. I'll never forget one individual. He was sitting in front of me in the House of Commons. He was a Liberal, like me. His riding was Peterborough, which I think is Minister Monsef's riding. His name was Peter Adams. He had a very thick English accent. He taught me so much. He has passed away since then. I haven't thought about him in ages until this very moment. He took on the role of mentor to me and several others. He walked me through a lot of things.

I realized that many things happen in the House of Commons that are not written down. It's based more on tradition than anything else, which we inherited from the U.K. parliamentary system. I'll get to that in a moment. I know you're dying in anticipation, but I'll get to it in a moment.

Shortly thereafter we went to an orientation session. It was one of the first times they had instituted an orientation session for new parliamentarians. These things are fairly regular now, but in 2004 they weren't that regular. They were just starting out.

I was sitting down with three other members of Parliament. Two of us were Liberals and two were Conservatives. We got to know each other. It was then that I realized we were members of Parliament representing areas of Canada, and with a lot of the same goals, because before you come into Parliament, what you think of partisanship and what you think of debate.... It's like something that is altruistic, in the sense that you're constantly debating the other. It's not like that. There is a lot that happens that you don't see on the screen, and I mean that from a CPAC perspective, not from Zoom.

I'll never forget the person I sat next to. As I said, we were all members of Parliament, but there was a guy named Andrew Scheer there. You probably know him. I remember having a long discussion with him. He, being from Saskatchewan—from Ottawa but representing Saskatchewan—and I being from Newfoundland, we shared stories about people we knew in either province and so forth. There was another MP there, Mike Savage, who's now the mayor of Halifax, and another guy by the name of Jeff Watson. Some of you know him. Jeff was in Essex, in southwestern Ontario. I think he lives in Alberta now.

Nevertheless, I was talking to Andrew and Jeff, and I realized that they had such wonderful families and great kids. I spoke to their spouses, their partners, who were wonderful people. You sort of get into the context of why we're there in the beginning, and it's not to be a Liberal or a Conservative or an NDPer, but to further your goals as a Canadian. Sometimes I worry that we're losing sight of that in this virtual world.

Now, you might be thinking that's probably not apropos to the conversation at hand, but I only say that to preface my comments by saying that I would like to get into how Parliament has evolved from a human dimension, as well as the rules and procedures that we're doing, because, quite frankly, we are talking about one of those tools that we have in the tool box, which is known as proroguing the House. People will know what proroguing is—not very many—but they know what it is as in the superficial meaning of the word "proroguing". Far fewer, probably, know how to spell it, me included. I've been saying it for years and never knew how it was spelled, to be quite honest with you and, let's be honest, we're all honest.

It's a concept that I think is a tool we can use and which I think is a functional one. I think it's something that, as Canadians.... It evolved from a country outside of our own, but nevertheless, we've grasped this concept because we think it's one that is good, among many other traditions, customs and procedures of the House that we go through.

All that is to say that I'm glad to be a part of this, because I want to look at this from the functional aspect of what is proroguing of the House and, in a general sense, how our House operates, so that we can handle and pass laws in the most efficient way we know, and how the system has evolved.

Should the system be fixed? Yes, it should be. I looked on the screen here and I saw Mr. Nater earlier, who taught me a lot about the Magna Carta, stuff that I didn't know, from a session that went on and on—someone give me another word for "filibuster". Okay, it was a prolonging of a discussion that we had. It was the prolonging of a discussion primarily by the Conservatives and also the NDP and Mr. Christopherson at the time, which I found rather enjoyable. I actually found it to be really good. It was quite informative, with characters like Mr. Nater and Mr. Genuis and others who talked about how the Magna Carta had such a deep impact. We're talking about a thousand years ago.

Just by way of quick facts, do you know why the House of Commons is green and the Senate is red? The Senate is red because it signifies royalty, the Crown, the Queen, the King and all throughout the history of the last thousand years. We all know that red means the Crown. The green in the House of Commons signifies grass. No, not that grass.

Let's back up for a minute. When the Magna Carta was signed, it was done outside. There was no place inside for people who were commoners. There was no institution that would sanction the fact that commoners were getting together inside to debate issues. They had to do it outside, so naturally, the green represents the green grass outside where they debated. Now, of course, loosely based on the modern sense of debating amongst our peers, you probably looked to Iceland and the Althing, way back when. Nevertheless, the Magna Carta was signed around the time of Runnymede. That's why you see the green representing the outside, where the commoners would have to gather to debate.

Going back to the basics, the Magna Carta gave us the power of the individual to live in this country, to live in this world and to make sure they had human rights. Essentially, the role of the Crown was not to be against the people they served, if I could put it that way. Obviously, it's more complex than that. I'm just simplifying it the best way I know how.

Over the following thousand years, all of this evolved into the common rules and procedures that we have now. During a debate we had a few years ago over prolonging the discussion, we'll say, of House rules, one of the things we talked about was how unique times can create different measures and rules by which we govern ourselves. This was not even taking into consideration what was around the corner—the situation we find ourselves in a year and a half later.

If someone had told me when that was happening in 2018 that I would be voicing the opinions of my constituents with a “yea”, “nay” or “abstain” in the House of Commons by using this, I would have said, “That's insane.” I never would have thought about it.

I remember a member of the European parliament who came over from Germany. She had spent 25 years in Brussels, I think. She was a very smart person, very experienced. I'm president of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association, so I invited her and her colleague—

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

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Although I am truly enjoying Mr. Simms' intervention and I believe that we all have a lot to learn from his 17 years of experience, perhaps we can get back to the motion.

The Chair: I think Mr. Simms is going somewhere. However, I will remind you that we are on the study of prorogation and within that study, Ms. Vecchio has called for some witnesses to be reinvited. Then there is the amendment we are now debating, a different version of that list of witnesses, which would essentially remove the Prime Minister and his chief of staff from the list.

Anyway, that's the amendment at hand, within the scope of a prorogation study. I'll just gently remind you to bring your comments back to that issue. I do enjoy as well, Scott, all of the knowledge you bring each and every time you speak at committee, in the House or anywhere. Hopefully, within that argument, we'll still gain a whole bunch of knowledge and your perspective on it.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

I'm sorry, Ms. Vecchio. To be quite honest, you sounded a lot like my lawyer. I'm sorry. That was just an aside.

I'm sorry, Ms. Vecchio. I will lace up my running shoes and quickly run to the point in just a few moments. Before I do that, I want to sum up by saying that we find ourselves in a situation where so much has changed.

Anyway, to quickly finish that story—and I promise, Ms. Vecchio, I will finish it quickly—what she said was that she witnessed question period and then voting, because we had a vote after question period. In terms of question period, she said, “I really like question period; it's real 21st century stuff.” I asked what she meant. You have to understand that in European parliaments, most of them just stand up for 10 minutes, do their spiel, vent their spleen and then sit down. Each one does that, but there's no debate. She loved the back and forth. She thought that was real 21st century stuff, but she said, “I have a concern.” I asked her what it was. She said, “You debate like it's the 21st century, but you vote like it's the 19th century.” It's a good point. All we do is stand up and sit down every vote. There was no electronic vote then. Everyone else was doing electronic voting except for us, until this came along.

The point is that so much has changed in the House of Commons. How we conduct ourselves.... I see you all in a square that's so big in front of me, and I've been seeing that for quite some time, for almost a year now, if you look at the Zoom technology.

Our schools are this way. Broadband Internet used to be a wonderful tool to help with schooling in rural Canada. In rural Canada, broadband Internet is now the school. That's the school now, and not even just in rural areas but in urban areas, especially for those of you in Ontario and Quebec who are going through this latest situation. My heart goes out to all of you. I won't talk about that too much because I feel that Ms. Duncan did it so emotionally and appropriately that I would not serve it justice. It was quite something to behold.

The change that is thrust upon us has to take into consideration everything in the House of Commons. Why prorogue? What does it take? We used to joke that proroguing the House means that it's the old control-alt-delete of the political system, but actually, control-alt-delete is more of an election. This is more like the F5 refresh in terms of what is happening, what we have been doing and we're about to do.

Sometimes a government will exhaust itself to the point where we've done what we said we were going to do. Now, whether you believe that is a matter of debate, but nevertheless.... You're going to do all that you want to do, to a point where you say, “We've done that and where do we go from here?” Well, that calls for a Speech from the Throne. It calls for a direction. It calls for an indication to the people of where you want to go. That's the original purpose of this, but that's the government's decision.

What if the sands beneath us change and start to move? What if external factors dictate that life is not normal anymore, if what we knew as normal is no longer normal? Society has changed dramatically to the point where, when someone asks me, a politician, what's going to come of all this.... Who knows? Who knows what changes will come? What are the long-term effects of this? I don't know. How do you judge what the forest will look like if you're still amongst the trees?

I think that for us at some point we have to step back to a certain degree and try to refigure. The Speech from the Throne following the 2009 election had a distinct direction to it, whether you supported it or not. Whether you didn't like the direction or liked the direction, it had a path, but now the environment in which we walk has changed so dramatically that the path has to take a different way. Not entirely different.... It doesn't have to go backwards, but it has to change.

You have to think about what it takes to indicate to the country that things have changed, and now we have to think about that. Normally I would say to you to think of the budget from yesterday, but I won't get into the budget today. I won't talk about it because I know that's not what we're here to talk about. We're here to talk about the motion and the amendment and so on and so forth. I think that I'm glad to be here because prorogation was the original factor by which we find ourselves in this prolonged discussion about what it is that we want to do and where it is that we're going.

Those are my thoughts on the changing of the House. I know that we all want to change the way we operate in the House of Commons in a way that's befitting of our current circumstances. I'm even willing to say that we should go beyond what has affected us through this pandemic and say that now that we have made some changes, finally, such as voting through my phone, we can make other changes to the House.

There's Mr. Blaikie. He has some good ideas. I think he has one great idea that he'll probably bring up later, but this is something that we have to discuss. I'm glad we're doing this, because we're talking about prorogation as one of those things.

Prorogation is not our invention, but it's certainly something we practise. Earlier, I mentioned the path that we're on now, the circumstances and how the ground beneath our feet that has shifted and therefore we have to make.... That's why I think prorogation was justified in this particular instance. I know that others would say to you that the circumstances of the situation with the WE Charity, as was said earlier, were dictating that, but I have to disagree, not based on the fact of where I sit in the House, but only because I think that this is one of those times.

The question is, would prorogation exist outside all the factors that you're talking about regarding the issue with WE Charity and others? Absolutely, it would. It would be completely justified. If you look at.... I'll only mention this about the budget. Look at it. Look at the face of it, at all the things in that budget that were affected by the pandemic. You may not agree with the actual substance within that budget, but on the topics, just look at the index. Look at the table of contents. There's not a lot about the table of contents that you can disagree with, no matter who you are, because these issues have to be handled.

The extension of benefits such as the wage subsidy or the CEBA, these things.... This is something that is providing a great benefit to this country, but these things do have an expiry date, and that has to be talked about. These sorts of measures were not to be talked about before the pandemic struck. We tried with EI from the very beginning. We went into the benefits, the CERB. Going into the CERB, we had to create this new dimension in financial arrangements with our constituents. The pandemic dictated all of that.

How does that relate to prorogation? Well, I think that all leads into a refresh of the House. Some of you might say, then why didn't you just call an election? Yes, well, I'm from Newfoundland and Labrador. Not so much.... How would I say this without being insensitive? We just had an election in Newfoundland, the likes of which I don't even know if the Commonwealth has seen before—not just Canada, but the Commonwealth. That's in the sense that voting in person got shut down the day before we went to the polls. Then you had to mail in your vote. We may end up with a challenge based on the charter and the right to vote. Who knows? It's possible. A lot went awry. Without pointing fingers at anybody in this particular situation, I'm sure that will unfold, and rightly so.

There's a lot to learn from this. The ultimate refresh is the election. It may have worked in other places. I've read about what they've done in British Columbia. I think they did some really good things. In New Brunswick, there were some good things there too. There are things that we will address down the line.

How many times did we debate about voting online? How do you accomplish voting online in a national election without trusting the system completely? That's a hard thing to do. Voting by phone.... Basically, voting remotely is what we're looking at. My goodness, in the House of Commons, we're already doing it. I'll never forget it when I first got into this thing. I was still saying, "Pinch me. I can actually vote on my phone in the House of Commons."

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I don't know if anyone else is having any difficulty with the sound. Is it just me?

The Chair: I wasn't having any difficulty. Is anybody else having difficulty?

I don't see any.... Everyone is expressionless, Ms. Petitpas Taylor. I don't know what to make of it.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I'm going to simply take my mike out to do a restart. I just want to give a warning. I don't want to miss Mr. Simms' comments. I'll just be a second.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, before Ms. Petitpas Taylor does that, in looking at the time, I'm recognizing that we are coming to the end of the meeting. Perhaps we could suspend and return to this delightful discussion at our next meeting.

Mr. Scott Simms: No.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Scott, I'm enjoying it. Let's not kid ourselves. It's great, but I'm wondering if we can continue with this discussion at our next meeting on Thursday morning at 11 o'clock.

Then, Ginette, if things work out, you don't have to worry about anything.

I'm just taking that to the chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Scott, are you—

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I'm a bit disappointed. This is the second time you've suspended the meeting when I've arrived. I'm going to start taking it personally.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm sorry, Christine.

The Chair: I know that it has happened to a few members before, and they think it's them entering the room virtually.

Mr. Simms, is that okay with you?

Your comments are riveting and I'm also very shocked by how we've gotten to the point of app-based voting. I know that you, more than I have, have been through some gruelling discussions about changing the way we vote by even very minor adjustments before now. It's amazing. Sometimes it takes a pandemic. I wish it didn't.

Mr. Simms, are you okay with resuming on Wednesday?

Mr. Scott Simms: Sure. I don't have a choice, I gather. I guess I do, but you go ahead. I totally respect Ms. Vecchio's point of view.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Scott, if you could call me right after this, I'm here to listen to the rest of the story on behalf of the committee. I'll send you my number.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott Simms: Should I believe that? Thank you, Ms. Vecchio.

The Chair: All right. Everyone is in a good mood.

I want to say, Mr. Nater, that I really hope it doesn't snow, because you're not that far away from me, and that sounded scary when you let me know about it at the beginning of the meeting.

Let's suspend this meeting until Thursday at 11 a.m.

[The meeting was suspended at 1:01 p.m., Tuesday, April 20.]

[The meeting resumed at 11:01 a.m., Thursday, April 22.]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. It's nice to see that everyone is happy and thrilled to be back. It's good to see you all.

It is April 22. We are resuming meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13, 2021.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. Therefore, members can attend virtually or in person. We don't have anyone in person today as yet so I will skip the warnings for the people in the room. I think the staff in the room are well aware.

I want to remind everyone once again to unmute your mike when it's your turn to speak. Make sure your interpretation is on so you can get the full benefit of our interpreters.

Of course, as I think Dr. Duncan mentioned, thank you to the interpreters and all the staff who have been working so hard for so long to make sure we can participate in this hybrid format. We really do appreciate all that you do to keep us going.

Thanks to all the members. You guys have been cordial over this difficult time that this committee has been having. We're at somewhat of an impasse, but hopefully, we will come to some kind of conclusion at some point soon.

As Mr. Nater mentioned, we are resuming debate on Ms. Vecchio's motion for specific witnesses to be reinvited on the prorogation study. We have an amendment to that main motion from Mr. Turnbull. We are on that amendment.

We do have a speaking list from last time. On that speaking list is Mr. Simms. After that we have Mr. Lauzon, but Mr. Lauzon is not with us today. I hear he's not feeling very well. I hope he feels better very soon and can be back with us here at committee. After that, we have Mr. Long.

Mr. Simms, I will hand the floor back over to you.

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

Really quickly, could you read out the subamendment just so we can ensure that everybody knows what our actual topic is for today?

The Chair: Yes, I'm happy to read it out.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I just emailed it to you.

The Chair: Let me bring it up on my screen. It reads:

That the motion of Karen Vecchio, concerning the Committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020, be amended by

I. by deleting paragraph (a),

II. by replacing paragraph (b) with the following: "(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 for at least 90 minutes; and"

III. by replacing paragraph (c) with the following: "(b) renew the invitations issued to the Honourable Bill Morneau, Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger, each to appear separately before the committee for at least 90 minutes.", and

IV. by deleting paragraph (d) to (h).

That is what we're looking at. You may need to refer back to the main motion as well to get a better understanding, but essentially, you can tell from there which witnesses Mr. Turnbull would like to see invited back to the committee.

Ms. Vecchio, is there anything else?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: No. That's perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

We have Ms. Shanahan also after Mr. Long.

Ms. Shanahan, welcome to the committee. It's nice to have you here today.

We will resume with Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you very much. To say that I am as excited as you are is probably the understatement of the day, from my own perspective, of course.

I want to start by thanking everybody and by referring to the amendment by Ryan Turnbull that considers the witnesses in this particular case.

I'll get back to the witnesses in this particular case, or the amendment that attempts to do it, but I would like to go back to the issue of prorogation. As we discussed, I think it's very important to put this in the context of what prorogation is all about, what it was meant to be, what it has become. Whether it has veered off and gone madly off in different directions is another issue all unto its own.

Many parliamentary scholars around the world, but certainly in the Commonwealth, can debate quite extensively as to why we have prorogation. I think we do have it for the right reasons, for the grand reset, to use the vernacular. I mentioned this the last time, so to go back to what I said earlier, the grand reset is obviously an election, but for people like me when you're involved in parliamentary procedure so much—and I am sure I'll get a thumbs-up from Mr. Nater or Mr. Blaikie on that one as we delve into it.

I joked last time, but I'm somewhat serious as well, when I talk about how we look at how we've evolved over a thousand years of how we do democracy. Certainly for the Commonwealth nations, and this Westminster democracy that we have, goes back to the age of the Magna Carta, the original reason why we did this. The commoners massed outside every castle that you could think of in southern England. They wanted to bring power to the people through their own representation.

I think it was more at the time if you read the tea leaves, read through the language that was written at the time. Certainly if you read the Magna Carta you will see that there was an element of protection from absolute rule of the monarchy. There was some protection for them as well, and protection for others. It was the first time we were able to do several concepts a thousand years ago, which was the separation of what was royalty and what was the power to the people, and the protections for the common people who are subjects of the Crown.

On the other side, you had elements such as those who were being accused of doing something absolutely nasty that wasn't bearable by the commoners of England to be judged by one's peers, also spoken of in the Magna Carta and other documents. We all came from that, of course, as we know. Advance several years and you come to the Statute of Westminster where we find ourselves.

Basically, the Statute of Westminster tells us that we have a right to run our own affairs, but we still are attached to the Crown, to the Westminster traditions. I say traditions because even though we have a playbook that's about this thick, we still rely on a lot of customs and traditions when we go about our day in Parliament, whether it be in the House of Commons or in the Senate.

Of all the tools in the tool box, prorogation is actually quite prescriptive. Think about it. As I mentioned, sometimes you can take the interpretation and put it madly in different directions, but I think that prorogation has a prescriptive way about how we can accom-

plish something in Parliament when something comes to an end and we want a restart to do something else.

You can argue its existence from here to Sunday because why would you need that when all you need is an election or you just bring in different bills once the other bills are done? What prorogation does, specifically sparked by, of course, the Speech from the Throne, is that it indicates to the average citizen where you want to go. What's wrong with that? To me that's responsible government. It doesn't even have to be part of Westminster to say to the people, "This is where we want to go, this is the target we're trying to reach".

As we know, since the word is thrown around so much in any democracy, whether it be here, or in any other democracy like that in the United States of America, South America, or throughout the rest of Europe, accountability is key to an informed decision to vote.

The right to vote is of course in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. There is a basic and inherent right to express oneself democratically to the people one wants to lead. Some might say, "I don't want to be a leader. I don't want to be in a position where I make decisions for the masses, but I sure as hell know who I want to do it. I know what I'm looking for when that direction is laid out amongst my peers who are seeking my vote."

That being said, prorogation does several things. It stops and starts and it's a little more.... I think in a general sense the basic principle is that the people will look at us and say, "Where is it you want to go, exactly?"

They go about doing their daily business, and whether they introduce government bills, private members' bills, motions, committee work, studies or reports, all of this stuff that's contained within both the House of Commons and the Senate comes from a vision and direction put forward by the government. I was going to say the party with the most seats, but that's not exactly right. It comes down to a very essential concept, which is the party that commands the confidence of the House and the majority of the seats. That's what you have to do.

If you think about it, we could be in a situation in which within the ranks of one particular caucus we could be choosing the prime minister and the minister of everybody. It doesn't have to be the party with the most seats; it just has to command the confidence of the House. You can rely on people outside of your own caucus to give you that confidence.

You may recall how several years ago—I forget the date now but it was probably six or seven years ago—when Cameron was elected in the United Kingdom, he didn't have a majority. He had a minority. He had two choices: he could reach out to another party to make an agreement to govern for the next four years or he could just go about the daily machinations of governing and see what happened. Every day the House is sitting you're subjecting yourself to seeking the confidence in the House to pass legislation, particularly on confidence measures such as the budget or whatever is deemed confidence at that time.

What they did, obviously, was to reach out to those in receipt of the bronze medal, the third-place team. That would have been the Liberal Democrats. What was interesting, and what taught a lesson to a lot of people, was that you would think because the Conservatives had the most seats then, they had the prerogative to seek support from another party within the House of Commons to find themselves with the majority of seats and votes to keep them going.

Interestingly enough—at least I find this interestingly enough but I don't know if you do—there were also negotiations between those who had won the silver medal, the second-place team, which was the Labour Party, and the Liberal Democrats.

The first shot went to the Conservatives to reach out, and things were looking like “Well, we'll see.” I guess when the Liberal Democrats looked at it they said, “Well, to a certain degree I feel somewhat intoxicated with power being in third place. I may have the bronze medal, but I feel like I'm on top of the podium.” At that point they were the kingmakers.

In this particular case, things weren't going that well, so they reached out to the Labour side. How does second place team up with third place to be first? If you deal in an absolute world, you think that doesn't make sense, but it actually does, because second place combined with third place gets most of the seats in the House of Commons. You have the confidence.

A year later the Liberal Democrats said, “You know, it's all wonderful and grand, but this place is a little bit much for us. We're going to take the side door and walk out.” That means in a confidence vote if only the Labour Party would be a government, then they would lose confidence and then the Queen would have to decide whether... Okay, she has a choice. She can either pick someone else or just go to an election.

The whole point is that when you look at things like prorogation, you look at setting out a direction in which the government wants to go, after the House has chosen who that government is going to be.

Let's go from the U.K. back to Canada. Back in Canada we had a situation where the Liberals had a conversation with the NDP. I say that like I was outside of it, but I was in on it, for complete transparency. We still did not have that confidence. We still did not have enough seats, but we had an agreement with the Bloc at the time. The Bloc said, “I'll tell you what. We won't be part of your little game, your party, but what we'll do is stay out here, and we promise we won't take you down.”

The prime minister of the day did not like that very much. I'm trying to stay away from my opinion of the whole thing. I'm just trying to lay out what happened. Prime Minister Harper sought prorogation. Now we have a conundrum. What are we going to do?

Now you have to go to the Governor General and say, “I think we need a reset.” The Governor General naturally says, “Why would you want that?” The prime minister says, “Well, we want to reset. We don't want an election, but we just want to reset and probably do something a little different. We want to present a new vision of where we're going. Maybe it's not so much new, but a revised vision as to where we want to go.”

Some prime ministers went so far as to say that they were going to prorogue over several months, because people need to be comfortable. The MPs need to be comfortable with watching the Olympics. You'd probably think that what I just said is absolutely absurd, right? It's true. The Vancouver Olympics were happening; therefore, we need to prorogue Parliament. Listen, I'm not going to cast judgment, although the tone of my voice probably does.

Let me just back away from the tone of my voice by saying this. If this is nefarious at worst, and somewhat innocent at best, no matter where it lies, the argument was really about prorogation. What is it used for and why?

If you're going to use something like this, you better come with your game face, because this is something that's highly prescriptive, as I mentioned earlier. It is something that is incredibly useful for us as parliamentarians in our parliamentary democracy.

There are several other episodes of prorogation. Let's go from that one to the one we just had recently. This is where I may get a little bit more opinionated about how I feel about this particular prorogation, only because of what is happening right now.

Preceding my intervention at the last meeting, I congratulated my colleague, Ms. Duncan, who laid out what had happened over the past little while, which was the pandemic. She is a medical professional, so she's going to do far better than I am at doing this. Not only that, she also illustrated how in her riding and in her sphere of influence COVID-19 was affecting everyday life.

What she talked about, and it may sound bland, but you'll know what I mean when I say this is an understatement. What a game-changer for governments. What a game-changer for everybody. For those cited in the Constitution, national, subnational, federal, provincial and municipal governments, what a game-changer, right?

Ask every premier across the country. Yes, I'm in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's true our case numbers are not as dramatic compared to others. Just before I got on this call, I heard that this is not a good day for Nova Scotia. For Ontario and Quebec, to my colleagues who are on Zoom and outside of Zoom, I wish you all the best with staying safe.

Let me get back to prorogation. What I just illustrated was a change in vision by a particular government.

Yes, when a government finds itself in a position where it's close to exhausting its former mandate that it brought to the people, and it finds that it wants to do something that is essential for the country but may not have been laid out before, it does this. But again, this is the prerogative of a government that finds itself in a position where it wants to do something different and doesn't feel completely comfortable just doing this by sheer dint of its own personality and by saying, “Hey, look. We can do this. We're the government.”

What we have here is a different scenario. This is where the ground has changed beneath our feet in a major way. This is the stuff that we talk about when we change what we do because of a major war. In a sense, this is a war against the invisible enemy that is this virus. We're battling on all fronts. We are nurses. We are doctors. We are truck drivers. We are teachers. We are....

Just yesterday, I spoke to a gentleman who works as a technician to hook up Internet service. You might ask how he is a front-line worker: He's now bringing school to kids. Remember, the Internet for these small communities was a great tool for schooling, and now it is the school. Given what we're going through, it is the school now, so that person is vital in a way that we could never have imagined before any of this happened.

Has the ground changed beneath our feet? It sure has and, if nothing else, this will be probably be the most important thing I want to say today: If you cannot bring in what parliamentary procedure describes as a reset in prorogation, if you can't do it now, then when? When do you do it? It's a fundamental question.

Some people might say that it's not necessary. I know that great scholars, people smarter than I am, might say that, but you know, I go back to the experience that I've had. I've been here almost 18 years now. I've probably been here longer than some of the gargoyles that exist above the West Block, for God's sakes. In saying that, I've seen a lot of this come and go, and whether you think prorogation is used for nefarious reasons or for the right reasons, I've now come to realize that prorogation has to be used when it's absolutely necessary. This is a third dimension to it that I never thought of before, until now.

There have been several headlines going back to the few times that Prime Minister Harper did it, or back when Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien did it, and prorogation got lost in an argument of who gets the advantage here. It's like a game of chess. Whose side gets the advantage of doing this? I think this prorogation is bereft of anything that is strategy, which is being talked about here—I'll be honest with you—and, sure, I realize that's the side you would expect me to take, being on the government side, but, hey, listen. There was a time when prorogation happened during the Conservative years that I agreed with too. I disagreed with many of my own colleagues and my own party as a result of that. We're not doing this over so that we can be comforted in watching the full extent of the Vancouver Olympics. We're doing this because we're at war. There have been way too many lives lost in the last little while for us to get into this.

I respect the fact that you want to get to an issue that is of importance. I'll go back to Ms. Vecchio's motion and the amendment to follow about the situation with the charity, with the individuals involved who you want to bring here, such as the Deputy Prime Minister, and as the amendment points out, the Kielburger brothers. Look, I have as many questions as anybody else in this call—I do—and I am respectful of that, and I'm respectful of your initiative to get to the bottom of this.

Let's recall now that from 2006 to 2015 I was in opposition. I know how this works. I'm not in the middle of a filibuster; I'm in a prolonged conversation on what's going on.

We've all had our share of doing the things that we do for the good of the country. Some people might think it's not. We accuse each other of not doing so. Some people look at me and ask why I would be involved in a prolonged conversation that they would call a filibuster, so on and so forth, but it is a part of democracy. Every modern democracy has it, and when we look at this, you probably think, "Why would you be involved in these sorts of things when outside of this realm of Zoom there is some nasty stuff going on?"

Well, yes, that's right. There is, but I can tell you that we all come to this particular—I was going to say this committee meeting, but this committee Zoom meeting—from a virtual perspective only to say that we truly believe in what we're doing, all of us, and I don't doubt anybody. I'm not going to undermine anyone's argument as to why they want to bring certain witnesses in whom we've already heard, or there are delays to all of this because of the shenanigans that take place in the House of Commons. Many of these shenanigans that existed in the real world now exist in the virtual world. Well, that's fine because that's who we are, as parliamentarians.

This stuff isn't going to end, but only to argue your point, what bothers me a lot these days is that instead of fighting an argument with a counter-argument that bears, in my mind, complete logic, like why this prorogation should be now, you just want to shut people down. However, let's be honest. We have a right to talk our way through this, and we should.

When I first got into politics, a person with a great deal of experience told me that now that I was in politics, now that I was starting in politics, his advice to me was simple and based on math. I asked, "What's the math? If you get more seats, you get to be government?" He said, "No, it's not that. This is very simple math. This is called a 2:1 ratio." I asked what was the 2:1 ratio, and he said, "You have two ears and one mouth. Play to the ratio that you have. Try to listen more than you speak, and as time goes on, you might find yourself in a position where you've done far more good than not."

To paraphrase Shakespeare, you could just keep on going and it could signify nothing, or it could signify something that you're proud of at the end of the day.

Now, would I be proud of all this? As I mentioned earlier, I was in opposition. Am I proud of all the stuff that I tried to pull? No, but I'm proud of the fact that I did my best, and at the end of the day, I'm proud of the fact that I think I represented my constituents in the best way possible, and not just my own constituents but every Canadian who wants to live in a better place.

Let me go back to the prorogation issue again, because, to me, that's the essence of what prorogation is about. We are talking about two different things on two different planes when it comes to getting answers to questions on something that happened. You want these questions to be answered on one side, and then on the other side you have parliamentary procedure and why we use the tools that we have.

That said, prorogation started off long before we were around and long before I came around, and that's quite some time. However, as far as prorogation is concerned in this country, it has a base to it.

I'm going to read some of the very base of what prorogation is all about. I got here in 2004. I think it was 2010 when I learned how to actually spell "prorogation". I kind of knew what it was, but I didn't even know how to spell it, for goodness' sake.

It is:

a prerogative act of the Crown taken on the advice of the Prime Minister, results in the termination of a session. It is possible to prorogue a session of Parliament by proclamation when the House is sitting or during an adjournment. Both the House of Commons and the Senate then stand prorogued until the opening of the next session.

Now, there is the timing. Sometimes you could go months, to the full extent until you get the expiration of something like the Vancouver Olympics, or you could do it the next day, because that has happened too.

The time period in the most recent prorogation I think was reasonable enough—a few weeks—to allow the government to basically reorganize its priorities, to the point where we put ourselves forward as to where we want to go.

Remember now, we're in the middle of a pandemic in this. I'm going to be quite honest with you. If the Conservatives were in government and prorogued at the time that we did and then reassembled with a Speech from the Throne, I'd be at a loss to say that it was nefarious, by any stretch of the imagination.

It's a pandemic. I don't know how I can say this more often, in the fact that we're at war. On governance, look at what we've done over the past little while: CERB, wage subsidies, all this stuff.

Let's take CERB as an example, which was needed by so many of my constituents. This was not only more money, it was a new concept. We originally started with EI and realized that the system wasn't working. To say that we had to change gears to go from EI to CERB is an understatement.

If you had said to me before the last election that we would need a whole new system by which we provide benefits to people who are in trouble, completely outside of EI, and it would be delivered through the Canada Revenue Agency, I would have said, "Good Luck. Three studies and eight years later there maybe would be a modicum of it." We had to do it. I am just outlining the challenges we faced at that time.

As an individual MP sitting in your office taking calls from people, it was "Do I qualify? Do I not? What do I do?" This was at a time when these programs were coming out very quickly. To say that the government had to be nimble is also an understatement.

The wage subsidy is probably an even better example. You had so many companies that were slipping through the cracks that couldn't qualify, you had to manoeuvre it in such a way that these people now qualified. That was not because we felt it wasn't working for us, but because it had to work for them. The intent was to get most people covered. To do that, to be nimble, is an understatement.

I'm saying that because it paints the picture that invoking prorogation was appropriate.

With regard to the effects of prorogation, our *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states:

Prorogation of a session brings to an end all proceedings before Parliament. With certain exceptions, unfinished business "dies" on the Order Paper and must be started anew in a subsequent session.

Again, you look at the situation that we were in. Some of the stuff on the Order Paper, yes, was very important, and so on and so forth, but then you have to come back to it. Keep in mind that a lot of this could be brought back from the former session, which any government or anybody calling for prorogation can take advantage of as well.

Bills which have not received Royal Assent before prorogation are "entirely terminated" and, in order to be proceeded with in the new session, must be reintroduced as if they had never existed. On occasion, however, bills have been reinstated at the start of a new session at the same stage they had reached at the end of the previous session.

I heard someone describe prorogation as—and pardon my language; it's not my language, but pardon me for quoting it—"a guillotine", or "slice it right down the middle and that's it, done." That's not necessarily it. It's more like the big hand that comes and says, "Okay, you stop right there." Some of it can be brought back. I'll continue:

On occasion, however, bills have been reinstated at the start of a new session at the same stage they had reached at the end of the previous session. This has been accomplished either with the unanimous consent of the House or through the adoption of a motion to that effect, after notice and debate. The House has also adopted provisional amendments to the Standing Orders to carry over legislation to the next session, following a prorogation

I'm looking to see if I lost anyone. No, you're still there. Then again, we're parliamentarians, so there you go.

I see Ken McDonald waving from way back in his office, somewhere in the deep, dark corners, in the beautiful riding of Avalon. Good to see you, Mr. McDonald.

I'll continue:

Since 2003, prorogation has had almost no practical effect on Private Members' Business.

So the sanctity of a private member's bill remains despite the prorogation:

As a result of this significant exception to the termination of business principle, the List for the Consideration of Private Members' Business established at the beginning of a Parliament, and all bills and motions in the Order of Precedence, as well as those outside of it, continue from session to session.[]

There's the sanctity of that too.

One person I'll give credit to for doing a lot of this stuff is Paul Martin, who brought in a lot of changes to our procedures, good ones too. Consider, for instance, private members' bills. Did you know that when we vote on a private member's bill we start in the back row? Why do we do that, you ask? I'm glad you asked, Wayne Long. The point is that you won't be influenced by the front bench of your party, so the back row gets to go first.

As an aside, we used to say that the worst place to be was in the opposition or in the backbench sitting up in the corner and you had to vote first.

Mr. Wayne Long: We're closer to the buffet, though.

Mr. Scott Simms: Well, that may be true. Congratulations on that, Mr. Long. I'm sure that serves you well.

Mr. Wayne Long: I can smell the food.

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes, I can, all the way from my little corner here in Grand Falls—Windsor, Newfoundland.

It's funny you mentioned that because if you look at all that has been done and the changes that we've made, I think we can make more, when it comes to the rules of the House of Commons. I do. Now I may go too far with it, but I think we've made some changes. That's another thing that's going to happen. That's another reason why we say the ground has shifted beneath our feet.

The last time I voted in the House of Commons—this is probably too much information—I was running on a treadmill in Sandy Point, Newfoundland and Labrador. I used this to vote. Yep. I voted. It's my right to vote. It's my responsibility to vote on behalf of my constituents. It was transparent. It was posted up there, and I realized that, my goodness, life has changed for us dramatically.

As I mentioned earlier, we used to vote like it was the 19th century, stand up, sit down, stand up, sit down. It's fine if you like that, but it creates some long times in the House of Commons. You take people who are young parents, it's not easy when you have to be seconded into one little place and you have to stay there for hours doing the voting when you can now do this. Now that we've caught up with technology, that's great. If someone had said I could vote in the House of Commons on my phone after the last election, it was not even close to being possible. In the House of Commons, we don't even have a clock to tell you how long you have left to speak. We're probably the only place that does that.

Anyway, I'll even help the opposition by saying I've gone off topic, and I'll bring myself back. Sorry.

Ms. Vecchio, I apologize. I know it's your motion. Let me just get back to where I was.

Let's go back to prorogation again because I think that's the fundamental part about this. Members are released from their parliamentary duties after prorogation until the new session starts. The committees resume activities and are reconvened. We have to go through the process of committee work again, which makes sense. The government has a different direction or their policies are taking a different direction, then you have to dissolve the committees and put them back because the whole point of committee is to analyze legislation. So that needs to be reconfigured. That I get.

I'm glad private members' bills are okay because if you think about it, a private member's bill is something that you hold deep within your heart as a true piece of legislation that should be passed. Truly, it should be a law of this country or a motion to say that we should do good by this country. I don't think that changes much. Let's say you want to extend sick benefits from 15 to 26 weeks. I had a private member's bill which did that many years ago. Fortunately, it's done now. But at the time, that doesn't change. If

15 weeks doesn't cut it, we need more in the EI system to allow for people who are off work because they are sick through no fault of their own.

You're probably thinking now—and I'm just presupposing here—if this is prorogation in Canada, how does prorogation work for the people who invented it, the U.K.? Ken McDonald, I'm glad you asked because I know you're asking me. I could see your face in anticipation.

As for prorogation in the United Kingdom, constitutional law usually used to mark the end of a parliamentary session much like our own. It's part of the royal prerogative. It's the name given to the period between the end of the session of the U.K. parliament and the state opening of parliament that begins the next session. That's basically the same as ours. Nothing changes there. That's all part and parcel of where we got it from.

But it's very different in the origins of prorogation. The Queen formally prorogues Parliament on the advice of the Privy Council, the Privy Council, of course, being the cabinet. Prorogation usually takes the form of an announcement on behalf of the Queen. She did it recently. She prorogued parliament in her nineties. God love her. As with the state opening, it made both Houses...of course they have the House of Lords and House of Commons. MPs attend the House of Lords chamber to listen to the speech.

All of that is much the same. What happens to bills still in progress during prorogation? Prorogation brings to an end nearly all parliamentary business. I suspect—I don't know, but perhaps Mr. Nater could tell me the difference here as he's more of a scholar about this stuff than I am—they go further when it comes to prorogation and the determination of government business of the day, like the bills and so on and so forth. At least that's my impression. It's a serious thing, taken way back when.

Recently in the U.K., they went to the Supreme Court over the prorogation that was put on by Mr. Johnson at the time. It became very contentious, to say the least, because they were all bordering on the idea of minority parliaments. They twisted themselves into pretzels over how they were going to do this. That's when the Supreme Court got involved.

A session of parliament runs from the state opening of parliament. In the past, this has usually been November through the following November. They used to take longer periods of time to do this, up until recent memory. This is how they did things in the U.K.

At the origins of what was prorogation in the U.K., early prorogation ceremonies had four key elements. First the speaker made a speech mainly concerned with a subsidy bill. Now this is how they describe a subsidy bill. This is for sheer entertainment purposes. It's really kind of funny. They call it a bill "for the better support of Her Majesty's household". I found that rather amusing.

Then there was the Lord Chancellor or the Lord Keeper, another official of the royal household. The person who was involved had a title and the person was the Lord Keeper. I'm not sure if it exists, but if you asked the average British person what a "lord keeper" is, you'd probably see the best goaltender in soccer in all of the U.K. Otherwise, the Lord Keeper actually has a title and is part of Her Majesty's household that deals with this sort of thing.

The Lord Chancellor either prorogued or dissolved parliament, according to the sovereign's instructions. The sovereign was customarily present on these occasions and, from the 17th century onward, usually made the speech before prorogation or dissolution. Well, how about that?

There were two elements of it, which we used to do as well, if memory serves, where you had a speech at the ending and then you had a speech at the beginning. Of course, the speech at the ending was probably more towards justification. I would assume that now with modern communications it's quite evident why or at least you have to explain why you are doing this prorogation. What's more important, though, is when the House begins and you have the Speech from the Throne.

That's not the only reason you prorogue, but that's the most important part. You have to lay out for the country exactly what you're trying to do and where you want to go. Where you want to go really reverse engineers an answer as to where you've been and why you've done what you've done.

Personally, I've never witnessed a speech at prorogation within the context of, say, a Speech from the Throne, but I wouldn't feel it's really necessary. I say that for any party that's in government. I think that's probably a bit much. In saying that, it is quite something.

At this stage you're probably wondering one of two things: one, when will he be quiet, and two, what do they do in Australia?

Let's go down under, shall we? What do they do? They, of course, have the same system as we do. That being said, let's get to it.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: If I could, Madam Chair, I'm just wondering—

Mr. Scott Simms: Excuse me, is this a protocol thing? How does that work?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: It is indeed. I know we've had other members who aren't as open to the Simms protocol, but—

The Chair: That is true.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie:—given that you are, after all, the notorious Mr. Simms, I thought you might be more willing to entertain an intervention than others, so I just thought I'd put the question.

The Chair: Is that okay, Mr. Simms?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Blaikie, not only would I entertain it, I would be honoured to do so.

Thank you.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

There's one thing I've been trying to sort out, not just throughout your intervention but the intervention of others. I'll speak for myself on it; I won't speak for other members of the committee here. I think it's pretty clear that the Prime Minister was acting within his constitutional right to prorogue Parliament. I don't think that's where the dispute is. There's a question as to motive, obviously. That's been investigated at other committees beyond this one. I'm concerned about some of the goings-on of the WE Charity scandal. I'm concerned about the way in which prorogation interfered with parliamentary proceedings on the matter. I think that's serious. That's why I've been supportive of the motion that the amendment we're currently discussing seeks to modify.

Beyond that, I think there are some other questions. For instance, there's the timing of the prorogation, both when it began and the length of time. We know that opposition parties.... Again, I'll speak for the NDP. The NDP was calling for Parliament to return earlier in September, something that was made impossible by the prorogation. We were concerned about the pending expiration of the CERB. We wanted to make sure that we got the legislation right and that there was an opportunity for parliamentary discourse on that. A shorter prorogation closer to the Speech from the Throne would have created some space for Parliament to meet, including the final summer meeting of Parliament that was scheduled and would have taken place shortly after the day the Prime Minister decided to prorogue. There are questions about the timing and the effect that had on the discussion about what happened at the end of CERB as we knew it then.

What we've constantly heard in all of this is that, at the end of the day, it's the Prime Minister who makes that decision. He's the one with the right to make that decision, and that's just the way it is. That's why I think it would really make sense in the context of this study—a historic study in the sense that there hasn't been a like study of prorogation before. There hasn't been a like study of prorogation before because we've never required the government to give any reasons under the Standing Orders. That was something the Prime Minister himself committed to, in 2015, as his proposal for how to correct the abuses of prorogation that occurred under the Harper government.

We have a dual reason, as far as I'm concerned, for hearing from the Prime Minister beyond pressing for more answers on the WE Charity scandal, which is in itself, in my view, a very legitimate reason to have him here. It's also a question around his decision on the timing and the length of prorogation. It's about setting a good precedent for his own remedy to the abuses of prorogation under the Harper government, which was to have the government submit a response, to have it go to PROC, presumably for study. We keep hearing that all roads lead back to the Prime Minister on prorogation, so it's important for us to hear on the substance of this particular prorogation but also in general to set the precedent that the procedure and House affairs committee would, as a matter of routine, hear from prime ministers when prorogation happens.

I find it hard to believe that anybody who felt that Harper had abused prorogation, as I do, and I think, from your comments earlier, you do also, Mr. Simms....

Had the procedure and House affairs committee studied that, it would have been important to have the Prime Minister there. In fact, that Prime Minister ought to have appeared before PROC in order to try to provide some justification for what he did. We have the issue of the precedent on how this mechanism should happen, that the Prime Minister himself devised, in order to prevent political abuse of prorogation. Then we have some matters beyond the WE Charity scandal of the timing and duration of prorogation. We've heard that the person who can really answer this is the Prime Minister.

I've said to this committee before, very clearly, that if the Prime Minister would publicly commit to coming to PROC for an hour, we could dispense with this motion, because I'd be satisfied, at least, that we'd then set a good precedent. Even if I don't like the answers that the Prime Minister would provide, we'd at least get the precedent part right and we would have an opportunity to further explore these questions around the timing and length of prorogation.

It seems to me that obliquely, I feel, Liberals have said that I'm engaged in some sort of extreme partisanship on the matter. I don't think that comes off as a really extremely partisan thing. I think there's some appropriate concern for establishing a new parliamentary tradition and getting it right from the get-go. I think there are legitimate questions around the timing and length of prorogation that are fair to ask. We've heard that we've yet to ask it of the decision-maker himself. Wouldn't it be appropriate to conclude this study by hearing from the decision-maker and then getting on with filing the report and moving on to other business?

Thanks for the opportunity to intervene. I really do appreciate it.

Mr. Scott Simms: May I, Madam Chair...?

The Chair: Yes, of course. The floor goes back to you.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you.

Listen, thank you for taking the time. I appreciate it.

There's quite a bit to unpack, but I will say this. One thing I will unpack in the beginning is where we find common ground.

First of all, let me just say this, as probably a large disclaimer to put out there. I was not in on the conversations to prorogue, how to communicate to prorogue or why you would want to do that, so I'll speak from my own logic and from my own little corner of the world here in central Newfoundland, as I feel I should.

First of all, I will give kudos to the Prime Minister for showing up in front of committee prior to this.

My apologies in advance to my Conservative friends. Listen, I had great respect for Prime Minister Harper, but as I have said before, and I will say again, Prime Minister Harper going to a committee.... He wouldn't go near a committee if he had to walk through it to get home, but we do have a current Prime Minister who did show up to that committee. I gave him kudos for doing that. We found out a lot from that, I think.

Let me go back to the proroguing issue. If there's one thing that I can probably reverse course on in what I'm thinking, given the conversation we're just having here, it's the old tradition of formally

speaking on the proroguing itself and then bookending it with the beginning of the next session when you do your speech, so that basically you have a clear communication as to why you're proroguing.

Should the rules change around proroguing? I don't disagree with you at all, quite frankly. I think it is a tool to be used, but it's also a tool to be communicated, by which.... This is a serious thing, and if you do it, you have to justify it. On the element of bringing it forward for PROC—I should not talk in Commons speak—for the procedure and House affairs committee, I mean, to be involved in that decision, you know something...? That's not a bad idea. Again, I speak on behalf of my own self. I think that is something we should consider, because if you do this, the justification is there, and the transparency should be there for someone who wants to do something like this.

Mr. Blaikie, let me also talk about the timing of this. Again, this is from my own perspective. Let's pretend I'm prime minister. Don't be worried, anybody, as that's not likely to happen, but if I were, some of the elements.... I forget some of the timing you illustrated. I don't condemn the logic that you come from on this one when it talks about the fall, when it started and when it should go ahead. A lot of that is well founded. For me, there would be a decision on this and that, and on this day and that day, but one thing is that the proroguing of the House around the time we did, just before the House was scheduled to begin, I think was a good time to do that.

I say that for this reason. The functions of pandemic policy—the CERB, the wage subsidy, the rental alleviation, all the other elements that were involved in these new programs that were created because of COVID-19—I think had to play out further from the spring and into the summer. In other words, we as policy-makers had to get a better grounding in what we were dealing with, in what was working and what was not, before we decided to prorogue and have a Speech from the Throne that illustrates how we're going to go ahead in the future. To me, that's why you do it in the fall instead of the spring. It's hard to gauge where the forest lies when you're still going between trees.

That's basically what we were doing, especially on things like the CERB and others, and how the CERB, which was created outside of EI at that point.... I think we were going through a lot of that stuff before we found solid ground, enough of it to say, "We need to prorogue the House and do the reset and now is that time." Anything later than the fall probably would have stretched out too far, I think, only because the session would have started the same way it had ended before, which was that there was a lot to do, but what do we do about the pandemic?

I take your point seriously. I think the timing of proroguing was logically...I won't say it was spot-on, as we say in Newfoundland, but it was within that window, I think, that served Canadians well.

Another point when you talk about the justification aspect of proroguing the House and doing this great reset, is if you have a private member's bill. I'd love to see it. That's something we could consider. But, again, I'm just speaking on behalf of myself, because I really love talking about procedure in our House of Commons. Not only is it something we use today to make the country better, but it's something we give our children to govern themselves. Conversations like this need to happen especially in this committee, which is an overarching and loving way to say I miss you guys, because I was on this committee in the last session.

Anyway, Mr. Blaikie, thank you for that. I greatly appreciate it.

Getting back to all things down under, I was going to talk about Australia. I need a show of hands of who wants to hear about Australia.

In Australia it's much the same. They talk about the same arguments in the past, some of which they used in a nefarious way, and in ways they're not supposed to use. You basically take a fundamental concept of resetting policy and being transparent to the people to allow them to see where you are going, but others say that you're being strategic for your own selfish purposes.

In Australia, a new parliament begins with the opening by the governor general on the first day the two houses meet after a general election. To prorogue parliament means to bring an end to a session of parliament without dissolving the House of Representatives or both Houses. Australia has a House of Representatives and a Senate.

The Australian upper chamber is an elected one, which is very interesting. I don't know if anybody knew that. It is done on a proportional representation basis. You're actually seeing people involved in this process whose upper chamber is also elected. How that affects the idea of prorogation, I don't know. I do know that when there is a conflict between the two houses there is a dispute mechanism. That is very interesting. It's something we may want to think about in the future now that we have a largely independent Senate. It's not elected, but it's a largely independent Senate. That is one of the great things that the Prime Minister did in the past five years or so.

Prorogation has the effect of terminating all business pending before the Australian Houses of Parliament. It does not meet again until the date specified in the prorogation proclamation. From that, I gather they do a lot more than we do. It may be, in essence, the true guillotine we spoke about earlier where they just cut things off and it's a complete and utter reset without actually calling for an election. However, some of the experts can dispute what I just said.

Do the Australians say how long the prorogation of parliament lasts? There is little direction for how long parliament should be prorogued. However, *House of Representatives Practice* states that the recess involved need only be very short, for example, over a weekend. How about that for being prescriptive? That's right. That's quite a weekend, isn't it? You end on Friday and start up again on Monday. Talk about a ruined weekend for a lot of people. That just ruins your weekend altogether.

The Australians do it much like we do. The Senate is not able to revive bills through the upper chamber that originated in the House

without a request from the House, so maybe that's.... That's fairly recent for us, perhaps in the last 30 or 40 years about bringing bills back after a prorogation. It seems that in Australia, that has happened for quite some time, which is right. I agree with that, by the way. That's essential. I gave the example of private members' bills earlier where they are not touched. It's not even a question of bringing them back. They are there. To me, that is quite respectful for every individual member of Parliament.

There is no limitation on the Australian Senate introducing new bills and debating them, which is what we do. Their Senate may also add any other business it wishes to address, such as motions, orders and committee business, following prorogation.

That being said, what happens to committees? Practice differs between the committees of the House of Representatives and committees of the Senate and the joint committees. That is something that is different.

Committees of the Australian House of Representatives, which is their version of the House of Commons, generally continue to exist following prorogation, but do not meet during that time. Their committees for the most part stay intact. Committees of the House and joint committees appointed by—

Sorry, I'm reading really fast. My apologies to the interpreters. I tend to do that from time to time. That's a lesson for all of us. When you're reading from something, you should probably make a mental note to slow down. This is just a note to self for me.

House of Representatives Practice states:

Committees of the House and joint committees appointed by standing order or by resolution for the life of the Parliament continue in existence but may not meet and transact business following prorogation.

They may not meet, but they still exist. It's still there. That's a key difference.

Senate committees may continue to operate and meet following a prorogation. This is due to the Senate's status as a continuing House, and due to resolutions or Standing Orders that allow for their continuation.

That's Australia.

To summarize, it's much like our own system. It seems they keep more things intact, except for some of the bills. I think they take a lot of the bills out, but it's certainly something in the spirit of things. In the spirit of it, it's much like the U.K., which is much like ours.

All this to say, prorogation is a pillar of our democracy that not only has survived through time but has survived to place. It's one of those fundamental things of the U.K. parliamentary system that has been transferred to other jurisdictions and has remained relatively the same. Some of the traditions that were brought to us change. In the U.K., they have standing committees for legislation, but they also have standing committees, which they call select committees, that are on a more permanent basis. These are committees that do reports, and whenever a major bill is passed, they set up a new committee around that one.

Our standing committees do both. We function in parallel. We do reports. We do, as it were, the issue of the day. We have hearings on that, but we also, of course, of prime importance, study legislation.

Let's go to New Zealand.

I'm kidding. I won't get into what happens in New Zealand. That's no offence to anybody from New Zealand. Their system is very similar to ours. They have a different voting system where they do something along the lines of a mixed member proportional system.

I'm glad you brought up New Zealand for this reason alone: I don't know if they still do, but they had designated seats for the Maori, for the indigenous people, which is a very interesting concept. The last time that has been floated here was during the Charlottetown accord way back when, when the idea was introducing the concept of indigenous representatives for the Senate, I think. That's very interesting, but I know New Zealand has gone further with it with their indigenous representatives. That's all I have to say about them right now.

I see that my time is winding down. First of all, I thank everybody for their patience. Ms. Vecchio is just brimming with glee that I'm going to be quiet for a while.

I'm just kidding. She's not saying that at all. That's just me having fun.

Thank you for putting up with me, and I thank Mr. Blaikie as well for bringing this up. He made some very good points.

Chair, the floor goes back to you. Thanks for the time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms. It's always very educational every time you speak. I feel as though we all learn a bit of something about history and democracy. Thank you for your comments.

Mr. Long, you are next.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Madam Chair.

From Saint John, good afternoon to everybody on PROC.

Scott Simms is clearly a very hard act to follow. You can't see this, but I have a bowl of popcorn. I finished the bag listening to him. That was as good as anything I've seen. For something like this to hold my interest, with no pictures, infographics or anything like that, is amazing. I have a bit of ADHD, and I don't hide it. Sometimes I need something to capture my attention for me to really focus, and let me tell you that Scott Simms captured my attention with that wonderful presentation.

Scott, you have my respect, my friend.

I remember the first time I met Scott. It was shortly after being elected in 2015. There was a cross-party meeting of MPs who had NAS airports in their ridings. There was an issue with funding for NAS airports, so we all went to Scott's office for a meeting. I may be a little off on this, Scott, but I was told to go over to the East Block. He's nodding his head. I didn't know if I was going to the Soviet Union or where I was going. With East Block, West Block, Centre Block, the whole thing was new to me.

I got to know Scott, obviously, and I try to emulate as best I can his style of politics. He's a straight shooter who speaks from the heart. Canada is very well served with MPs like Scott, and like the other MPs on this committee, who really want what's best for Canadians and what's best for all of us so that we can move on.

Today I have a lot to say. I have a lot of thoughts.

To mirror the Scott Simms 2004 MP.... As soon as he said 2004, I was counting on my fingers and toes. I was like, "Oh my. That's 21 years." Is that correct, Scott? Maybe I'll get a head nod there. That's 21 years as a member of Parliament, give or take. It's amazing. I've been here for five and a half years and it feels like 50, so I don't know how 21 years feels. I'm sure I'll never quite make it that far.

Mr. Scott Simms: It's actually 18.

Mr. Wayne Long: What's that?

Mr. Scott Simms: It's 18.

Mr. Wayne Long: Right. I'm a little off on my math there. I must be thinking of a few other things.

Scott comes at this from a certain perspective of an MP who has been around, seen it all, seen the good, seen the bad, and, really, in a non-partisan way, I will say. Scott certainly calls it like he sees it.

My perspective is different. I came to the Parliament to be an MP more recently, obviously, in 2015. I joked the last time I talked in PROC that I consider myself a seasoned veteran—but not really. I don't kid myself. I have so much to learn. I do the best I can. I want to be a good representative for my riding. I want to convey the hopes, the dreams, the concerns of my constituents in Ottawa. I want to represent this riding the very best way I can. I certainly would never say Scott hasn't been out in the real world, because he certainly has. I come at it much more recently, and from a different viewpoint.

I look at this as somebody who always is saying, "What do Canadians really think about what we're doing? What do Canadians really think about the motion, and to be perfectly honest, MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion?" I know there's give and take and there's compromise and there's back and forth.

Obviously, the Conservative Party has a certain outcome they want to see from this, which is fair, and we have a certain outcome we want to see from this. Typically when you have a motion and then an amendment, there needs to be some compromise. There needs to be a way to meet in the middle. I know my Conservative friends won't agree with this, but there's also a time when I think all parties need to step back and say, "Okay, we've made our point." We could say, "Look, we've made our point. We've defended it."

This is where I'm coming from, Madam Chair. A business person who lives in the real world—I shouldn't say the real world, because certainly this is the real world too—has to do things like balance budgets and make payroll and deal with agents and sign and trade players, all those things. There has to be a point where, as parliamentarians, we need to realize the country, our constituents, want us to move on. They want us to move past this.

As MP Simms has said, I think it's significant that the Prime Minister has testified. I think it's extremely significant, unprecedented, and wanting him to come back.... I hope MP Vecchio will indulge me here, but the original motion—and don't worry, Karen, I won't read it out; I promise—cast such a wide net, such a wide net, that it was blatantly obvious to me that the Conservative Party just didn't get the answers they wanted to get.

It's not that there weren't answers. It's not that there wasn't testimony from the Kielburgers, the Perelmutter, the Prime Minister or Minister Rodriguez. It wasn't that questions weren't being asked. It was that the answers weren't what the other parties wanted.

I'll very quickly give you some context. My riding, Saint John—Rothesay, is a great riding. I'm very proud of my city, as I'm sure anybody that ever hears me speak knows. I think it's on one of the Parliament sites, on ParlVU or whatever. You get that word chart or graph about words you speak most often. Mine was Saint John—Rothesay. I don't apologize for that. I'm proud of that. Every time I speak I talk about my riding.

I really wasn't a political person. I briefly served in the student union at UNB. I first became politically aware and cared about the riding when Elsie Wayne was the member of Parliament for Saint John—Rothesay. Elsie Wayne was larger than life. We couldn't have been further apart in our beliefs from an ideology standpoint and what we wanted to champion. Elsie Wayne was very well known and a long-standing MP of this riding. I think she was there for 11 or 12 years.

For one term the riding switched back to Paul Zed, who was a Liberal MP. Then from Paul Zed it swung back to the Conservatives, and MP Rodney Weston. Then, obviously, it went to me. If you go back through the long history of this riding, I'm actually the first member of Parliament to win the riding back-to-back as a Liberal. I'm really proud of that.

The riding itself is a mix between great business success and a lot of challenges with child poverty and social issues. The meat and bones of this riding are union, middle-class, hard-working Canadians, who are represented here and in many ridings across the country.

People in this riding are extremely concerned with respect to the pandemic we're in, number one. The variants are number two. International travel, vaccines.... I walked by the television on my way in about an hour ago and I saw a flash which said that India today—I may be a little off my numbers and I apologize for this—had 315,000 cases of COVID diagnosed in one day. In one day, India had 315,000 cases.

The Chair: That's just the ones they know of.

Mr. Wayne Long: Madam Chair, you're absolutely right. It scares the you-know-what out of me. I walked in, got my coffee, looked at that and shook my head, scared.

Then we have Premier Ford doing a press conference, I guess a virtual whatever-you-call-it. He's obviously isolating right now. He was talking about his challenges and what's going on in Ontario. Again, it's horrifying to see what's happening in Ontario. You go from that and see the numbers in Quebec and then Alberta, and then we obviously have concerns here, too, now in Atlantic Canada. Our numbers are low. Thank God our numbers are low.

The variants are here; they're growing. The reason I'm bringing all this up is that we are in a—I don't want to say once-in-a-lifetime but—once-in-a-generation crisis. That's where we are right now, all of us. I know that everybody at PROC today is inundated with calls from constituents, from people who are scared, people who are concerned about what the future holds for them. That is what we should be seized with as parliamentarians. We have work to do, important work as government, and there's important work to be done as opposition. All of us, every one of us, needs to be pulling in the same direction.

Of course, as government we need to be challenged and we need to sometimes maybe readjust and think about some of our policies or what have you with unintended consequences and so on and so forth, but they're the kinds of things that we can be doing together. They're the kinds of things that this committee can be doing together, making sure that, even though we have disagreements, we will do the right things for Canadians.

For us to be literally stuck.... Let's just call a spade a spade. That's where we are right now. We're stuck. We're not moving forward. I've talked about the movies I've seen—*Inception* or *Friday the 13th* or the one I would mention today would be *Groundhog Day*. This is just the same thing again and again and again.

I won't pretend to be anywhere in the same ballpark as MP Simms and what he brings to the table with respect to his thoughts, but I do have a lot of thoughts. There's a lot I want to say. This is just a bit of a preamble before I get going, but I have a lot to say, and I can say it again, and I can say it again if I have to, because we need to find a way forward.

I think MP Turnbull's amendment to MP Vecchio's motion is extremely valid. MP Vecchio's motion—I won't read it—is an invitation to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity.... Okay, that's in the amendment. Renew the invitation to Bill Morneau is in the amendment to the motion.

The issue that got all of us, if I can be so blunt, is the wide scope of the initial motion: Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, former minister Morneau, Katie Telford, Marc Kielburger, Craig Kielburger, Farah and Martin Perelmutter from Speakers' Spotlight, documents, PMO, PCO, production of records, communications, WE Charity.... It casts a net so wide, it's almost like putting something out there. With the greatest respect, and I have a ton of respect for Ms. Vecchio, it's almost like throwing that motion out: "There's no way they're going to accept that motion, but let's get it out there, so we can make them say they won't accept it. Let's make them propose an amendment," and we did. We proposed an amendment, a good and fair amendment.

It states to renew invitations issued to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland. I'm so proud of her leadership. I'm so proud of the ceilings she's shattering, the barriers she's breaking down. She is the first female Minister of Finance to deliver a budget. I look at Minister Freeland and I'm inspired by her leadership, but it's not just her leadership. It's her style, delivery and authenticity. That's what we need as a minister of finance, somebody with that vision and leadership. Obviously, she delivered a wonderful budget 2021, which was delivered a couple of days ago. It was just an unbelievable budget.

There are those points in a country's history where you can drive that stake in the ground and say that this is a turning point. This is a turning point not for our party, but it's a turning point for the country. It's a shift for us to finally come forth with a solid commitment to child care. I'm so very proud to be part of this government, and all of us will look back at a later date and say, "I was there when we moved forward with day care."

Look at the plan and look at how ambitious it is. I don't know if Mr. Blaikie is still on the screen here. He might have needed to take a break. I don't see him. Correct me if I'm wrong and hopefully, I get this right, but the leader of the NDP called the plan bull.

He called the plan bull: to reduce day care costs by 50% in 2022. Within the next several years, the goal is to provide day care for \$10 a day. That could save, give or take, the average family in my riding about \$500 a month. It's transformational, absolutely transformational.

We are raising the OAS for those over 74 years of age, 75 and up, by 10%, because they are the most vulnerable seniors. They have increased costs. We ran on that. That was in our platform. That's not a surprise to anybody. We ran on that, so for us to fulfill that and for us to replenish the trade corridors fund, to replenish the housing money and to come up with new green initiatives and a massive investment in green technology and infrastructure....

One thing that flew under the radar, I believe, was the support for students and student loans and to continue with doubling the student grants. The other one that flew underneath the radar was the repayment of student loans, and the threshold of \$25,000 is now up to \$40,000. That's huge. It's unbelievably huge. Instead of 20% of gross income now, it's 10%. That's huge. It can shave off your payment per month from about \$400 to \$90. It's an incredibly important piece of legislation for students—unbelievable.

Look, I won't go on about everything in the budget, because obviously that's not on topic. Thank you for not calling me out on that. I thought it was important to talk about that. Then I'll dig back up a bit with respect to Minister Chrystia Freeland, who delivered that budget that will change Canadians' lives. Then I'll talk about the amendment to the motion that calls for renewed invitations to be issued to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Minister Chaggar, to appear separately before the committee.

Even MP Turnbull was suggesting that. Again, just very quickly, it says:

by replacing paragraph (b) with the following, "(b) renew the invitations issued to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, each to appear separately before the committee for at least 90 minutes;"

Also, very quickly, it says:

by replacing paragraph (c) with the following: "(b) renew the invitations issued to the Honourable Bill Morneau, Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger, each to appear separately before the committee...."

It's a good amendment.

It's a good amendment, and I appeal to members to consider the amendment. I'm not so bold to just ask for a show of hands, but accepting that amendment moves us forward. As I've said earlier, the Prime Minister has testified. The Prime Minister has appeared before a committee—just keeping it real, like MP Simms does.

Do we really expect, honestly, that we're going to hear anything different from what has already been said? Does anyone really believe that? I don't. He has already testified. He has already talked about it.

I know there are times when I get accused—I get accused of it all the time—of getting up there in that Ottawa bubble and thinking everybody cares about everything. It's like they're right. Some of my friends joke with me about that. They say, "You're in the Ottawa bubble; you don't really know what's going on, blah, blah, blah." In this case, it's like we need to step back.

I won't do it now, but we need to reread MP Turnbull's amendment. I get the art of, call it what it is, negotiation. There needs to be win-win. There needs to be give and take. Both parties need to feel that they didn't get everything they wanted but they got enough.

Look, who am I? I'm a guy who loves his riding, who loves his country and who wants to represent his constituents. That's who I am. What you see is what you get. I know the art of negotiation from my time with the Saint John Sea Dogs. We had to negotiate contracts with players, with billets, with our landlord Harbour Station and the City of Saint John. There were times when we thought it wasn't really everything we wanted; we wanted a little more. However, there were also times when I would step back with my organization and say, "Look, it's enough," because then we can turn the page and move forward and actually start to do things that matter, that mean something to Canadians.

I know that with this, I don't want to say "mass...", but prorogation, the WE Charity thing is kind of in there. I know what we need to do to move forward as a group, and I know we need to be united facing what I think, or not think but know, is one of the greatest challenges this country has faced since World War II. It's probably the greatest challenge. It's one of the greatest challenges this country has ever faced and we need to face it together.

We need to show Canadians that we can work across the aisle, work in a bipartisan way to represent Canadians. I know, because I dealt with it this morning, how—"needy" is not the right word—but how much in need Canadians are of our support, how much in need businesses and industries are of our support and how appreciative Canadians are of the initiatives and programs we're moving forward.

Out of the budget I could pick the wage subsidy. We're extending the wage subsidy through to—and I may be off a day here—September 25. Then there's the rent support. We're extending it. What a lifeline that is, allowing businesses in our ridings to survive. We have also extended the EI sickness benefits. We're offering other programs too, like the recovery benefit and the caregiver benefit. These programs are needed.

Minister Freeland said it best. We're going to be there as a government to get us through COVID. I believe she said "punch" through, but there's a reason I hesitate with the word "punch". I do a bit of boxing, believe it or not, at my age. I've actually had the opportunity to spar with the Prime Minister a few times. I don't know if that's a—

The Chair: There's no way—and she did say "punch".

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): By the size of you, you must get beaten up a lot.

Mr. Wayne Long: I do, I do. I can actually show you a picture of me after one of my.... I'm zero for two. Believe this or not, I'm an actual, what would you call it, registered boxer in the Canadian boxing, blah, blah, blah, because I was intent, when I actually boxed—this will be real quick—that I didn't just want to do a charity event, but I actually wanted to do a competitive box. It's called masters boxing for older people like me. Boy oh boy, I'll show you the picture sometime. I was beaten up. My nose was not crooked, but swollen up, and my eye was kind of closed. Anyway, I lost, but it was a great experience.

Back to the help, we're going to punch through COVID. We're going to focus on support and recovery, and we're going to be ready to roll and help this economy recover. We're going to come back stronger and more united than we've ever been. I'm absolutely convinced of that. We will get up and we will move forward. Sure, we're going to invest in more local production and make sure that, God forbid, if this happens again, we're going to be more ready and more prepared.

Oh my Lord, I know you can't see outside my window, but it's actually snowing right now. What is going on out there?

There are those who will say, "You should have done this. You could have done this." Look, we're going to do what we need to do to be more prepared in the future and to be more resilient as a country. I think that's one of my greatest frustrations.

Obviously, I think I wear my heart on my sleeve with respect to my riding. I care so much about my riding and its people because I feel that my constituents, all constituents across the country, clearly deserve members of Parliament who have their best interests in mind. That's key for me—their best interests, not my best interests. I want to make sure they're represented and that I can advocate for them, and I can take their voices and come back to them with meaningful programs, like the rapid housing initiative and the federal co-investment fund, where we can actually make investments in affordable housing in this riding and all of our ridings.

One of the greatest frustrations for me, to be honest with you, was with respect to housing. I was a rookie MP, and I remember my first month I was meeting with this group. I was going to do this with housing and do this with housing, and then all of a sudden somebody took me aside and said, "Wayne, you understand that housing is a provincial jurisdiction, right? We can do housing bilaterals until we're blue in the face, but the province needs to pull that money through." That's the beauty of the rapid housing initiative and the federal co-investment fund. They're direct federal programs where we can deal with proponents, and the programs are stackable. They're wonderful programs and wonderful initiatives.

I'll get back to MP Vecchio's motion, and MP Turnbull's amendment.

I miss Ryan. I hope we see him back here soon. He's a great MP. Like I said before, and I'll say it again right now, we could all use more people like Ryan—and like Ryans in other parties. I certainly apologize. I know there are great MPs like that. What I love about it, and I'll be honest, I caught myself at the very start of this session....

Ryan and I sit together on HUMA. He's a wonderful addition to our group. I have been fortunate. MP Vecchio and I were on HUMA together also. We did great work together, especially on the poverty reduction strategy. We did temporary foreign workers....

One thing about HUMA is that it crosses three or four different departments and makes up a third of the budget, I think. The responsibility of HUMA is massive. I love being on HUMA. I feel that it's one of those committees where you can really.... I know all of us on our committees, of course, can make a difference, but especially here with the challenges we have in this riding with respect to poverty, child poverty, teenage pregnancy and so many other issues that just absolutely break my heart like housing, I can have a direct impact.

I remember Ryan and I were sitting together. Ryan was saying, "I'm going to propose this" and "I'm going to do this". I said to him, "Oh no, don't. That's not going to work. Don't bother." He asked, "Why?" I said, "That's just not how it...." I caught myself. I said, "Whoa." I'm only six years.... It's not like I've been around for 60 like Scott has. I caught myself, and then I stopped.

That's what is refreshing about an MP like Ryan. He's not afraid to propose something, try something or put something forward. Just because it hadn't worked before, or just because that's not the way it should be doesn't mean you shouldn't move forward and try. That's why I'm so passionate about that.

I don't know if everybody's copy is highlighted like mine is, but this is Ryan's amendment to the motion. He brought the amendment forward because he wants to find a way out here. We all do. Come on. Let's call a spade a spade. I looked at the amendment. I thought it was fair. Obviously, again, here we are.

I know this has been discussed before, the prorogation and why it was done. Well, he did it to.... When I say "he", with the greatest respect, I mean the Prime Minister did it to avoid this. I know MP Simms said the timing or this or that.... Look, if any of us had the option of going back and tweaking something differently, redoing something differently or proposing something differently, sure, but it's all in hindsight. It's all looking back.

I think that the motion, the resistance and the prorogation was to avoid.... I would say that the Conservative Party, at times, has a short memory. Obviously, and it's been talked about, but I think it's relevant to compare what happened with the Harper government prorogation—I'm much better at saying prorogation now; I've worked on it—and how prorogation worked with Prime Minister Trudeau.

You've dealt with one of the worst crises in the country's history. The game changed. The floor changed beneath our feet. The rug was pulled out from under all of us. We needed to do a reboot, a reload, a refocus, a new throne speech, because we were dealt something no other government has had to deal with: a health crisis of worldwide proportion.

I laugh when I go back now and think about us. I made a statement once in the House about then prime minister Stephen Harper and the deficits he ran. I remember getting back, saying no, that doesn't count because we were in a crisis. I remember that's what I got back. We were in a major financial crisis. We had to invest and we had to do this and that, but yet now, what we're in is a thousand times more serious and worse and financially damaging than that. Now it's, "You shouldn't have prorogued. You didn't need to reset. You've invested too much in these programs. You need to cut programs back." I say no.

We need to have respectful disagreements. I think we've shown as government that we will listen to the opposition. We will take suggestions and work with, whether it's the Conservative Party, the NDP, the Bloc or the Green Party, and we will come up with programs and policies that will support and be there for Canadians. Sure, we're going to make mistakes. Yes, we had to change course and pivot very quickly. But as I've said before, it's as if we're trying to put gas in the airplane while it's taking off. We don't have a playbook to go by here. We are doing whatever it takes to protect Canadians and to make sure we get through this.

Did we need to prorogue? Yes. We needed a new throne speech. We needed to reset and reboot, no question. The fact that the committee wants to study and analyze the reasons for prorogation, I get it. I understand. I know MP Simms tackled the same thing. I get it. I

understand that. But then it's like this, as I've said before, and then the amendment. Let's move forward. Let's call some witnesses. Let's get it out there.

MP Blaikie certainly said there are questions he wants to ask the Prime Minister. Okay. This may be wrong to say, but there's the House of Commons. There's question period. There are all kinds of ways publicly to ask questions of the Prime Minister.

Again, it just takes me back to wondering what this is really about. What really is the end game here for this?

I wouldn't even be talking with as much passion as I can muster if not for the amendment. I would have been the first to say to my own party that we need to not just say no, that we need to offer something that is good, has credible people invited, is fair and will make us go forward.

Hopefully, I'm not talking too loud. Chair, is it fair to check with the interpreters? Is my voice coming through okay? Am I talking too loud?

The Chair: The mike is not popping. I would think louder would probably be beneficial, but I can check with the clerk if everything is okay.

The Clerk: Yes.

I have a thumbs-up from the interpreters, Mr. Long, so your sound is fine. They can hear you fine.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thanks for that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Long: Obviously I'm in my constituency office, the 800 square feet that I have in Market Square. It's a beautiful little office, and I'll be honest with myself. My constituents aren't seized with this. If I gave the first 50 people who walked by my office in the mall a piece of paper and asked them to list for me the top 20 priorities or concerns they have, I can guarantee—well, maybe not guarantee, but with 99% assurance, I know that prorogation wouldn't be on the sheets. There's no way. Come on. I obviously respect members so much, but come on. This isn't what constituents are seized with. Again, if we're truly here to represent our constituents, why are we so seized with this if our constituents aren't?

Look, I can't speak for every riding across the country, obviously. I can't speak for everybody. Maybe there are some ridings where constituency offices are absolutely inundated with calls, emails and Facebook messages about PROC and about a study on prorogation. However, unless I'm missing something, I don't see it.

Before I really start to dig in here with this—and I guess I don't really want to call it my speech—I'll think out loud. Is there a better way? Is there a way we can move forward? It's not like we're trying to make this go away. We're not making it go away. It's right here. Let's study it. It's not like we're trying to sweep it underneath and just put it at the bottom of the pile. No.

Let's get going with MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion. Let's call on these people. The last time I checked, Minister Free-land was pretty popular and a pretty big name out there. However, we're stuck, and that's what frustrates me as an MP of five and a half years. I know that my constituents want me to be focused on other things.

As other speakers have said before me, I would take the criticism that we are trying to totally avoid this. However, the Prime Minister has testified and Minister Rodriguez has testified.

MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion basically calls for the study to move forward. It isn't hiding or burying anything. It's just coming up with a way for opposition members to have a say, which is, let me be clear, absolutely their right. It makes us better. Trust me. I'm not afraid at times to speak my mind too.

It makes us a better government when we can feel a little uncomfortable. We can be pushed and challenged. That's what good government is about. Mr. Turnbull's amendment to the motion is a path forward. I'm convinced of that, but obviously, many people on this committee aren't convinced of that.

I remember when former prime minister Harper prorogued Parliament in 2008. At that time, I was with the Sea Dogs. I really wasn't a political animal. I still don't really consider myself, to be perfectly blunt, a political animal. I remember doing a double take, and I remember Canadians being outraged.

I was travelling with the team. We were pretty good in 2008. We won the Memorial Cup in 2011, as you are all sick of hearing me say. We were the quickest team to ever win a Memorial Cup from an expansion. The Saint John Sea Dogs were a piece of paper in 2004, and then we won a Memorial Cup in 2011. That's pretty good stuff. We had the best back-to-back-to-back record in CHL history, next to the Windsor Spitfires.

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

Mr. Wayne Long: The London Knights are also a very good team.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, the member knows that I love watching hockey, and I love the OHL, because I'm from Ontario, but we're not in that committee on hockey today. We're in PROC.

If he could just pull it back to PROC, that would be great.

The Chair: That's fair, Ms. Vecchio. Thanks for the reminder.

Mr. Wayne Long: I appreciate that, and I know Ms. Vecchio is a London Knights fan. The London Knights are a great organization. The Hunter brothers and their record of winning Memorial Cups and championships are second to none. The Windsor Spitfires had a great year and a great run. You know what? The Saint John Sea

Dogs broke records. There was one year where our record was 77 and 11. Think about that.

We have players in the NHL. The reason I bring it up—

The Chair: I don't think you're getting back to the topic at hand, Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: That's fair.

Very quickly, the reason I brought that up was that I was on the road with the Dogs—I'm going to climb back up now—when former prime minister Harper prorogued. I remember sitting down with some people in our organization wondering what this was. What's this prorogue thing? What does it mean? I didn't know what it meant. I'd been to Parliament Hill two times in my life and really don't remember. I was very young at that point.

Let's call a spade a spade. Prorogations are widely used. As the government already said when we reported it, prorogation was for the purpose of responding to the ongoing COVID pandemic. As a government, we needed to plan. We needed to focus and really get ready for what I would call the second wave. We didn't know what we were facing when we needed to prorogue. None of us did. Come on. None of us knew. Think back now a year and four months ago to January or February 2020. We didn't know what was going to hit us. We saw news reports about Wuhan and what was going on in China.

What we were faced with was unprecedented. When we were all sent home, we didn't know what we were going to have to face—the fears, the challenges, the deaths and the devastation. It wasn't just economic devastation. My lord, there was the personal devastation. We didn't know.

When we prorogued.... I think it's extremely important to point out the differences, because MP Vecchio's motion—and I'm not going to read it; I promise—is in respect to the committee's study of the government's reasons for proroguing. The motion is about studying the government's reasons for proroguing. That's what it says.

Let's all take a step back and think about that. We need to study the government's reasons for prorogation. What were the reasons for prorogation? We were facing the crisis of our lifetimes. We needed to prepare for the second wave—to plan and pivot.

It's not just to study the reasons for prorogation, but also (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (g) and (h). Let's invite the Kielburgers and the Perelmutsers. Let's seize documents. Let's get this and let's call the Prime Minister.

Whether you agree or not, the reasons for prorogation were that we were faced with a crisis. I find it extremely interesting that, of course, the WE Charity makes its way in here. That's when even a guy like me.... I'm not, self-admittedly, the most partisan person in the world, but as soon as I read it...at that point, I really wasn't even involved with PROC. I was doing my thing on HUMA and life was good.

Then I read the motion, and come on. The first sentence refers to studying the reasons for prorogation, but then it's about this and that and WE. Then I said, "Well, hold on here. The Prime Minister has already testified, so why do you want him again?" We all know why. It's to get a clip or to get something in the news that night or try for a gotcha question.

The reasons we prorogued were that we needed to pivot, and pivot we have, and stand up for Canadians, and we have. The fact that we were asked in this motion to accept the study on the reasons for prorogation.... It is important to put into context how former prime minister Harper prorogued and the reasons versus what we did and how we prorogued.

For context, the people who are watching today will understand what we're debating, and obviously we're debating the amendment. I know people kind of get dug deep in this, but right now we are talking about MP Turnbull's amendment to MP Vecchio's motion.

Let's compare. I want to call that out. Let's compare that. We have prime minister Stephen Harper, who prorogued. There was an article. I'm not sure it's been quoted, but I know there was a New York Times article, and I won't read the whole article. I have them all here on my screen. I could read you enough articles, Madam Chair, on prorogation, the pros and cons and who did what and where that you wouldn't need a watch; you'd need a calendar to keep track of time for me. I have so much that I want to say about this and so many points I want to bring forward with respect to the motion and the amendment to the motion and so on and so forth.

Here's the article:

Canada's parliamentary opposition reacted with outrage on Thursday after Prime Minister Stephen Harper shut down the legislature until Jan. 26, seeking to forestall a no-confidence vote that he was sure to lose and, possibly, provoking a constitutional crisis.

He was going to lose that. For context, this is a New York Times article:

The opposition fiercely criticized the decision to suspend Parliament, accusing Mr. Harper of undermining the nation's democracy. "We have to say to Canadians, 'Is this the kind of government you want?'" said Bob Rae, a member of the opposition Liberal Party. "Do we want a party in place that is so undemocratic that it will not meet...?"

That sentiment was echoed by constitutional scholars, who lamented that the governor general might have created a mechanism that future prime ministers could use to bypass the legislature....

I have another one from the CBC about Canadians outraged by Harper's use of prorogation:

Thousands of people attended rallies in towns and cities across Canada on Saturday to speak out against Prime Minister Stephen Harper's decision....

There were thousands of protestors, and so on and so forth.

Let's compare that to the articles on what happened with us when we prorogued. The Hill Times article has the headline "Trudeau

government says prorogation bought time to 'build a robust' response to pandemic, in new report". In it it says:

"We knew our plan would need to get us not just through the weeks and months ahead, but even further down the road," the report said. "This gave us the time we needed to do exactly that: to build a robust, responsive, and comprehensive approach to the challenges...."

The prorogation that happened with us versus the prorogation that happened in the Harper era are like apples and oranges; they're not even the same thing. We were faced with the challenge of a life-time. We needed to pause, to reflect, to rebuild, to reboot and to move forward in the name of all Canadians.

Again, I understand fully why the Conservative Party moved forward with the motion about prorogation. I get it. They want to study it. Study it? They wrote the textbook here in this motion. It's like, "Let's invite everybody and the kitchen sink to testify, and let's ramp this up and let's make it a big public affair." I've been in the backrooms of strategy, whether it's hockey, the salmon business or what have you. I absolutely totally get it when you have the court of public opinion behind you. It's politics. I get it.

They're like this: "You know what? We've got momentum. We've got people. Our phones are ringing off the hook. Let's go. Let's get this going. It's going to be good for us." Well, news flash—a Wayne Long news flash—nobody cares. They want us to work together. They want us to find a way forward. MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion takes us forward.

I did an AMA last night. I do these AMAs; they're called "ask me anythings". I do them pretty much every two weeks. I get great views. I get anywhere from 4,000 to 6,000 people watching them and, give or take, 200 or 300 questions in an hour. It's crazy. I always throw it out there and say, "Hey, it's Wayne. What's up?" I do a little ramble about what's going on in the riding. I do them live. Ask me anything, AMA, and talk about what you want, your concerns, your....

Since I've been subbing in here, I've done, I don't know, two or three of them. In the easily 3,000 questions, I would say, do you know how many questions I've had on prorogation? Do you know how many comments I've had about prorogation and PROC and amendments and subamendments? Do you know how many I've had out of the thousands? It's less than one. Okay? It's less than one. That's why I absolutely know that the right thing for us to do is to find a way forward, and MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion—we've held it up too many times—is a way forward.

Madam Chair, do you mind if I just take a drink of water? Is that okay?

The Chair: No. Go ahead.

I wanted to also ask if it was okay to suspend for 15 minutes for a quick health break.

Mr. Wayne Long: I would appreciate that, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

It seems that everyone is nodding in the affirmative.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you. I have somewhere to go here.

The Chair: Okay. We'll see all of you back here at 1:36 p.m.

• (22920)

(Pause)

• (22940)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

We'll start from where we left off.

Mr. Long, you have the floor.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the 15-minute break. It was much appreciated.

I got reloaded here. I have a bowl of Bits and Bites and a fresh glass of water. I'm reloaded and refreshed.

I have a blizzard going on outside my window right now. There was a snowstorm here about 30 minutes ago—literally a blizzard. I don't know what's going on here.

I want to try to bring us back to where I was with respect to my thoughts.

Unlike MP Simms, who comes at it from the vantage point of having a more historic experience in Parliament, I'm coming at it with more of a recently elected background. It's the same frustration, but a little bit different at times.

With the massive experience that MP Scott Simms has, I couldn't carry his school books. He speaks with such candour and passion. He knows his stuff. That's why when he speaks—like I said earlier, there's a little ADHD flowing through my blood here—sometimes it's hard for me to pay attention. Anyway, Scott's speech was really, really good.

I'm trying to articulate a bit of a different vantage point with respect to MP Vecchio's motion and MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion, and trying to find a way forward here.

I've talked about comparing the different prorogations. Between former prime minister Harper and obviously what happened here with our government and Prime Minister Trudeau, they couldn't be more different. That's where I'm coming from.

I'm coming from two vantage points really. They're like night and day. It's like night and day what happened with former prime minister Harper and what we did, because we had to pivot. We were faced—we are faced—with one of the greatest health challenges of our time.

What we had to do was necessary. I know we talked about that, and I've talked about that, obviously for an hour and 30 minutes. I'm kind of done with the comparison of the two events. We all know that story.

We also all know, if we're being honest with ourselves, what priority this has with our constituents. As I said earlier, if I took a piece of paper outside and asked my constituents to list the top 30

or 50 things, prorogation and this study wouldn't make it. Canadians are seized with what's happening on a daily basis in their lives. We cannot turn on the television and not see another tragedy, another life that's been taken, another life that's been ruined. We see it every day, and it's not over.

We need to be vigilant. All of us in all parties need to stand together and do the right things for Canadians, because with variants now coming, we don't really know what the future holds. We need to be together.

That's why I think MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion is so critically important for us to consider. I would love to see a show of hands. We could vote on this now. Then we could move forward and do the business that Canadians want us to do.

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

The Chair: Yes, are you calling for the vote?

Mr. John Nater: Yes, in response to Mr. Long's request, I'm ready to vote on this. Let's go ahead and vote. I appreciate the suggestion.

The Chair: Okay.

We go back to Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: I'm not ready to vote yet. I have a few more thoughts about this that I want to share.

I think MP Nater would agree with me that his office isn't inundated with calls about this. His phone isn't ringing off the hook about this, not at all. We owe it to our constituents to move forward. We owe it to Canadians to come up with a way forward. I know that a lot of us, basically all of us, had other careers before this one—if you want to call this a career—except for MP Simms, who has been an MP for about 50 years now. He must have started as an MP when he was very young.

This is where somebody like me gets frustrated. I know that if this were the business world and we were around the boardroom table, we would have to make decisions and we would do what was best. As president of the Saint John Sea Dogs, I made decisions and implemented them based on what was best for our season ticket holders, the fans of the Sea Dogs, my community. One of the greatest things about sports—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Sorry, Ken, you're not on mute. Are you also frozen?

Mr. Wayne Long: He's frozen, but he's on mute. No, actually he wasn't frozen. He's all set.

If I can, Chair, that was one of the great things that I always loved about sports. When we came down King Street with the Memorial Cup, with 20,000 to 30,000 people all around, it didn't matter if you were a Conservative or NDP or Liberal or Green or whatever. We were united and we had a common thing to rally around. Obviously, that was a very good thing.

As MPs, we also have a common thing now to rally around and to stand together, shoulder to shoulder and that's our fight against this deadly pandemic. That's what Canadians want. They don't want us talking about prorogation, and let's invite this one and that one.

Again, I get frustrated because the Prime Minister has already been invited and has already testified. I don't believe, and I don't think anyone on this committee would believe, that there would actually be some new revelation out of another testimony. I don't think anybody really believes that.

That's why I feel we need to find a way forward here. We need to come together for the benefit of all Canadians.

I know our government is seized with trying to make sure that we get through this together. We invest and refocus and get ready for a resurgence, and we put Canadians first and we put people first.

That's why I advocate for my constituents every day in this riding, and I know I've talked about that before. I want to make sure that we get our share of federal funding, and make sure I work with proponents to make sure we get the right things in here for this beautiful port city, this industrial riding.

A lot of people don't know it, but right outside my window—and the snowstorm has stopped—if I look right across the harbour, I am looking at the third busiest port in Canada, per volume. Think about that. Per volume—not container—per volume they're the third busiest port in Canada. I want to work with that port. I want to work with proponents. I want to make sure our government delivers strategic infrastructure and programs.

That's why it was so important for us to prorogue. That's why it was so important for us to have another throne speech, to reload, to refocus, to say we need to invest in this across the country. We need to work with these industries across the country.

The Chair: This is really bad of me, but I can't help.... I've been trying to stop myself for the last minute.

What's the difference between “per container” or “per volume”? Don't containers make volume?

Mr. Wayne Long: They do, but one of the things we import here is a lot of oil for the refineries, so actual sheer tonnage, if you will.

The Chair: Okay, I've got that.

Continue. I don't want you to—

Mr. Wayne Long: No problem.

I thought you were going to call a point of order, Chair, and tell me to get back on the subject. I was starting to get more paranoid when you jumped in there.

The Chair: I'm being bad myself. I got you off topic, but you had brought us there, and I couldn't help but ask the question.

Could you definitely stay on topic, though?

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes, but I guess my point is that prorogation allowed us to step back and refocus on what we needed to do to make sure that we helped Canadians through this, whether through CERB or CEBA or rent support or infrastructure. We created the resilience infrastructure fund, which, instead of the typical 40-40-20, give or take, was more of an 80-20, with much more flexibility. These are the kinds of things we did.

We supported communities. There was the money that went to help the municipalities. There was the—I know we have a new

name for it—gas tax doubling for communities. There were programs that we did that we knew needed to be there for Canadians, and that's why we did these things. We didn't do it to run and hide.

How do you accuse someone of running and hiding when the Prime Minister testifies, when I think we're very open and transparent about it, when committees continue to do work? I don't see it. I don't see it at all. I believe fully that MP Turnbull—and maybe he's listening in, I'm not sure, but I hope to see him back sooner rather than later.... That's what his amendment to the motion is for. It's to find a way forward. It's an opportunity for us to work together and do not what Canadians want us to do but need us to do.

That's why we were elected. I'm proud—I'm extremely proud and privileged—to be, number one, the member of Parliament for my wonderful riding, but also to be able to lead a community that is in crisis. I won't, obviously, look back in two or three years and think fondly of this time, but I will look back and say....

Leadership is easy in easy times. It's easy to be a leader when everything's great, but leadership really shows in tough times, in difficult times. That's when leadership shows, and that's the kind of leadership that each and every one of our ridings needs, regardless of the political party; that doesn't matter. We're in our constituencies to show leadership to our constituents, to be there for them, to offer support, to offer the programs. These are things that I'm going to look back on with a ton of pride, saying that with the programs we offered, we were there when people needed us.

I believe that MP Turnbull's amendment to MP Vecchio's motion is a way forward for us.

Madam Chair, I have a bit more that I would like to talk about. I recognize that there are three more hands up, and I'm sure everybody has their thoughts. I certainly want to say that I have a few other things I would like to talk about, just to provoke some more thought amongst the members and certainly amongst Canadians. In fairness to other colleagues, however, who have things that they want to say, I think I will wrap up.

I would like the opportunity to come back to continue with some of my thoughts, but Madam Chair, I'll yield the floor to you.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Long.

Ms. Shanahan.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to take this opportunity to speak French; that will let the interpreters spell each other off.

I'm very happy to be here today. This is the first time I've replaced a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I'm aware of its mandate. As I understand it, it's concerned with management of the House, as well as all matters pertaining to Elections Canada, our standing orders and parliamentarians' recommendations for the proper conduct of elections. That's very important.

As my excellent colleagues Mr. Simms and Mr. Long just indicated, everything we do here relates to trust and government accountability to the Canadian people. I must admit I'm very much a history buff. It was interesting to listen to Mr. Simms's speech on the origin of our parliamentary system, Magna Carta. I see I'm in the presence of someone who knows the subject well.

Something also struck me when I was elected to represent the riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle in 2015. Members on both sides of the House had a clear understanding of what constitutes a responsible government and of the reason why it was important to remain accountable to the Canadian people. We had to prove they could trust us.

What is a government? What is politics? It's a set of activities and policies that we propose, discuss, debate and implement. In fact, it's everything that's related to the governance of this country.

I wanted to add something on the subject. I'm grateful that the members around this table conduct themselves in an informal manner. I mention that because Quebec makes a significant contribution to the formation of our responsible government, one that's especially important because it distinguishes us from England and the other Commonwealth countries.

It's precisely the recognition of fundamental rights and of a community too that differentiates us from another community that constitutes the majority.

It's the majority that actually rules in a pure democracy. However, all individuals, all the country's citizens must nevertheless be respected. In my riding, Châteauguay—Lacolle, I tend to say that life is good. We really are a representative region of people, families and seniors who have been here for a long time. Dairy and agricultural producers have been here for generations. We also have a manufacturing plant and people who are very much involved in the community. I can't say they are people who follow day-to-day politics.

Here's more or less what I said when I was elected. During an election campaign, you introduce yourself. People know that we work for one party or another and they know how we see things, our values, the policies we recommend and the measures we want to put in place. Once the campaign is over, however, we're there to represent everyone in our riding. I think that a responsible government is a government that is accountable to all citizens.

As I said, I'm very interested in the history of our Parliament. I'm also interested in the way conventions and traditions have been established.

It was long before Confederation in 1867. I especially want to discuss the special rapport, the work and partnership at the time, around 1840 or 1850, between two members, Robert Baldwin from

Toronto and Louis-Hippolyte La Fontaine from Quebec. People interested in this can look up John Ralston Saul's well-written book that shows how those two men, who came from two completely different cultures and religions, managed to work together. In addition, being Catholic, at the time, meant being Catholic, and being Protestant meant being Protestant. Religion was more important than language. In certain circles, everyone was bilingual. That wasn't the problem. It was more the fact that religion was also a culture and an identity.

All that to say that those two men worked together to such an extent that when Louis-Hippolyte La Fontaine lost his election, Robert Baldwin found him a riding in Toronto.

Imagine that. I don't think that would be possible today.

[English]

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

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm enjoying it, but we've given at least the first seven minutes. I'm just hoping we can get on to the actual motion.

The Chair: I'll just remind Ms. Shanahan to stay on topic.

[Translation]

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

It's true; many people are history buffs. These traditions and practices were ways of solving everyday problems that led to the conventions and traditions we have today.

Getting back to what we're doing here in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I'm going to tell you another brief story.

The committee also deals with members. I introduced my Bill C-377, An Act to change the name of the electoral district of Châteauguay—Lacolle, during the 42nd^x Parliament. I didn't do it on a whim. There was actually an error in the name of my riding.

It was a very delicate matter for the people at home. Châteauguay is Châteauguay. The municipality of Lacolle isn't even part of my riding. The municipality that's part of my riding is Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle. There's a big difference between the two.

I'm going back over this because, at the time, a commission was responsible for constituencies, for making new subdivisions and considering suggestions for new names. The members for Châteauguay and the adjacent riding at the time hadn't done their job. They hadn't verified the matter and it was too late by the time of the 2015 election. Elections Canada told us it was too late, but we nevertheless immediately solved the problem.

That caused a number of misunderstandings among citizens. As I said, the citizens in my riding have better things to do than to follow politics and electoral boundaries. The people of Lacolle thought they were part of my riding, whereas they were part of the riding of Saint-Jean, I believe, but I may be mistaken. It definitely wasn't pleasant for the people of Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle.

I therefore introduced a bill to that effect and was criticized at the time by certain members of the Bloc québécois and the NDP, who felt it wasn't important. I'm not the one who decides what's important for the citizens of my riding. I listened to them. It was important for them. I was also pleased to be able...

I see Ms. Normandin has raised her hand. I'm prepared to allow her a few minutes. She may want to correct me on the matter of the riding of Saint-Jean.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Please allow me to speak, Madam Chair.

I'll be brief.

Dear neighbour, Lacolle is indeed part of my constituency.

I have a point of order regarding the relevance of my colleague's remarks. It's all very interesting and we can talk about it more when we recharge our Bolts at a charging station on the road to our respective ridings. For the moment, however, I'd like to hear you discuss Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: All right.

May I continue, Madam Chair?

[English]

The Chair: Although this is an issue that is relevant to PROC because redistribution, renaming and all that stuff does come to this committee, could we refocus the comments towards prorogation and the current amendment we are on?

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you.

I'm glad to hear this is an issue that's addressed in this committee. I'll pay attention next time because my bill failed during consideration in the Senate. When Parliament is prorogued, the parliamentary session ends and all bills die even if they've passed through all previous stages.

In discussing the Prime Minister's decision to prorogue Parliament, you have to understand that it was based on the principle of ministerial responsibility. As my colleagues Mr. Simms and Mr. Long said so well, the government was dealing with a new situation and all circumstances had changed.

When we came back after the election in 2019, we all wanted to get going and implement our campaign platforms, our ideas and the projects we had started during the first parliamentary session. However, although we would have liked to continue our work, we were faced with a major crisis.

As all my colleagues know, we were in total lockdown in March of last year. We couldn't hold in-person meetings because we didn't know how contagious the virus was or what the contamination fac-

tors were. It became very clear over the ensuing days and weeks that we were in the midst of a crisis.

We weren't yet using the Zoom platform at the time. We communicated via FaceTime, Skype and email. Constituents called my office for help. The health crisis was one thing, but the financial crisis was another. That much was obvious.

Since we didn't have tests yet, people had to stay at home as soon as they experienced minor cold symptoms or symptoms similar to those of COVID-19. Staying at home when you don't have sick leave can be a serious problem. So people called our offices on that subject. We all received those calls.

We discussed that amongst ourselves, and members from all political parties called the experts, senior officials and our team every day for information and to report what they had seen on the ground. As my colleagues said, we were at war with an invisible enemy.

I'm very proud of my experience. I've worked in banking and financial planning, but I was also a social worker.

So I was very sensitive to the fact that people were making essential decisions about both their health and their financial situations.

The accessibility of a website can cause stress and it's already stressful in normal circumstances. We were particularly struck by the case of a single father who had a job at a restaurant but couldn't go to work because he had a child to take care of. He looked for another job and dealt with the employment insurance system, which obviously isn't designed to address that kind of emergency.

With all due respect for the people who work in it, the employment insurance system was created as a measure of last not first resort. That's why there are so many obstacles, criteria, questions and evidence that must be provided before claimants can receive employment insurance benefits.

I'm very proud that we all came together around one incredible idea. Six weeks earlier, the idea that we could do what we did with the CRA would have been unthinkable. I'm sure I wasn't the only one to suggest it.

Given my work experience, I have a lot of respect for what the CRA did and for the fact that it was able to use its IT system to put money in the pockets...

[English]

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

I believe we are going far outside the scope of this motion.

The Chair: This time, I didn't find it to be so, so much.

Ms. Shanahan, I thought you were relating it to the reason for proroguing, but I guess Ms. Vecchio doesn't see the direct link. Could you re-emphasize the link?

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: That's an excellent comment.

I used to work with a lot of people. It was very moving for us as members. In fact, if you look at it from the government's point of view, it was obviously doing its best, but you can't change government agencies or programming systems, including the old age security system. I'm not even talking about businesses. The initial calls actually came from individuals. Entrepreneurs were something else. We had to completely rethink the machinery of government. Parliamentarians haven't even been able to meet safely until now.

We proceeded on a temporary basis; we held meetings and there were rounds of questions. I know that ministers' offices were prepared to answer all calls. Some of my colleagues from the opposition parties told me they had access to the ministers' offices and had answered their questions. They really wanted to help citizens who had problems.

We have to identify problems and key factors. I'm definitely not someone who follows all the COVID-19 testing developments. Medical issues really aren't my field. In any case, we didn't even understand what the virus was.

If we wanted to be a responsible government, we had to stop working and take a break in order to reset the government, which is a political tool... Politics isn't bad. Politics is the set of activities, vision, policies and programming that a government has to put forward to ensure the proper governance of the country. Our Prime Minister had to prorogue at that time.

As my colleagues said, we can discuss or ask questions about the reasons for the prorogation. Frankly, I have to say that Parliament should have been prorogued earlier. We were in the middle of a crisis.

I have my own way of doing things. As soon as we got more information and control over COVID-19, I wanted to know what we were going to do for people who needed help.

We all know we're living with this virus from day to day. There are always surprises.

We were doing our best, controlling what we could control. That's why we needed a new plan, to know how we would manage the pandemic and the financial crisis. We had to prepare to recover from the pandemic—which, we hope, will happen soon—based on an economic recovery plan.

Prorogation was entirely appropriate in my opinion. It was the right decision to make at the time.

[English]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: On a point of order, Madam Chair, and I'm sorry for interrupting my friend and colleague.

Could you ask the committee members if we're planning to continue on? Do we have any idea if we're planning to suspend? I'm trying to plan the activities for the day. That's my only issue.

Could you ask the committee members what their thoughts are on that?

The Chair: I could directly ask, but you have indirectly asked.

Would the committee wish to adjourn or suspend for the day? We're in the middle of question period. I guess there are other committees, but we'll be carrying on this afternoon, though I have another committee which is a very important one today.

How does the committee feel about that?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, we're happy to suspend, as long as we get back to this issue at our next scheduled time. We recognize that if we do not end by 2:30, there will be an impact on other committees.

I'm looking at Mr. Nater. I know he can speak, too, but on behalf of my party, we are okay with suspending and coming back.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie has his thumb up.

Ms. Normandin, are you okay with that?

All right then, thank you everyone.

We'll suspend for today and resume at our next scheduled time.

[The meeting was suspended at 2:29 p.m., Thursday, April 22.]

[The meeting resumed at 11:22 a.m., Tuesday, April 27.]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. We are resuming meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13, 2021.

Today's meeting, as you know, is taking place in a hybrid format. We have our clerk present in the committee room and of course supporting staff, but at this point there are no members there.

The rest of us will be participating virtually. I'd just like to remind you to unmute your mike—I myself sometimes forget to unmute—and when you are about to speak, raise your hand on the toolbar below if you'd like to speak to anything, or call out if you have a point of order, so I can distinguish whether you want to speak on the regular speakers list or would like to raise a concern.

Other than that, just as a reminder, you have interpretation at the bottom. Let's make sure with the points of order and other things as well that we wait for the speaker to stop speaking and not interrupt so that it's easier for the interpreters.

We are still on Mr. Turnbull's amendment from the last meeting. We do have a speakers list. I do have both the motion and the amendment before me, so if anyone needs a refresher as to what the nuances are between the main motion and the amendment, let me know.

Ms. Shanahan had the floor when we suspended, so I will give the floor back to her. After her we had Ms. Lambropoulos, who she is not here at this time, so she'll probably be dropped off the list unless she's back to resume her spot. Ms. Petitpas Taylor is after that, and then we had Mr. Long who is also not here currently and will be dropped off the list.

We have Ms. Shanahan, and then most likely Ms. Petitpas Taylor would be after her.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I note that Madam Shanahan is relatively new to PROC, so I welcome her and I welcome her perspective. It's always good to get new perspectives, but I would encourage you, Madam Chair, to remind all members that the topic we are discussing primarily is on prorogation. I remind you of that, Madam Chair, because in weeks past, we have seen several members who had a propensity to veer off topic and at times become completely irrelevant to the topic we are supposed to be addressing.

I would hope, Madam Chair, that you will remain vigilant in your duties to keep people on topic, and if they do tend to veer off, that you offer a course correction to get them back to the topic we are discussing. That will, I think, allow us to have a far more productive meeting and stop the interventions coming from people like me and others, reminding of the rules of relevance and repetition.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski. I'm sure all the members are heeding your warning, and we appreciate the reminder. I'll do my best to keep everyone on topic.

Ms. Shanahan, I'll give the floor back to you.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I do just want to note how pleased I am to be here in this committee and to make a reacquaintance with my good colleague Mr. Lukiwski, who was an excellent chair of the government operations committee. I think we did tremendous work together in the last Parliament, and I so respect his words of guidance and wisdom. I hope that what I will be saying today will be germane and useful to the topic at hand.

[Translation]

It's true that I poured out my heart last week. I have to say that, as members, we don't often have an opportunity to participate in the proceedings of other committees, especially those of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which considers matters of parliamentary procedure.

I'm very interested in the history and development of things, and I like putting things in context. I'm far from being an expert in the field, but it helps me when I look at matters in context.

However, I must say it's really unfortunate that we're here debating Ms. Vecchio's motion, which is under consideration, and Mr. Turnbull's amendment, which is designed to rectify matters.

My opposition friends' attempt to make the WE Charity issue the focal point of several other committees was unsuccessful. I would have preferred that they stop that little shell game. I would remind

people that I'm a member of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics and that I've seen a few things.

It's unfortunate because, as parliamentarians, we should focus on issues that really count for Canadians. We're currently in the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. A year ago, we hoped we could overcome the first wave and resume normal life, but that's not what happened. We're now in the third wave of the pandemic because some provinces unfortunately haven't managed to introduce adequate measures to ensure people's safety.

I say that with all due respect for the various levels of government because it's very difficult to put those measures in place. I was very pleased to see that all the levels of government in my riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle, in the Montérégie region, did a good job of cooperating. That was unfortunately not the case everywhere.

Canadians are rightly focusing on much more important issues, the millions of doses of vaccine in particular. The situation in Quebec is unfolding as it should, and we're very proud of the way vaccine distribution has been organized and of the booking system, which is very simple and accessible.

The government recently announced that we were able to vaccinate increasingly younger people, which is important, as young people are at risk as a result of the new variants. Large businesses are participating in this effort by offering vaccinations in their workplaces. Society stakeholders are showing the solidarity we expect of them and working together to combat COVID-19.

We want to focus on an imminent economic recovery. It's coming. It will be one of the biggest in more than a generation. And that's truly the test of our generation, isn't it?

We often talk about how people lived through World War II and all the subsequent economic reconstruction and transformation in Europe. People from the generations of our grandparents and parents really did work to build a better world for us young people.

Our challenge today is to create a better world for our children and grandchildren. That's what we've done by developing the budget we introduced last week. It must be a good budget because the Conservative members, who form the official opposition and whose job it is to criticize the budget, found nothing to criticize in that budget, even though they voted against it.

They don't want Canadians to be aware of what's in the budget. On the contrary, we need everyone to talk about budget items, initiatives and investments in health, economic recovery, of course, and the environment, which is the next test we'll have to face.

[English]

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

I really don't know how the budget is relevant to the amendment at hand that's related to last summer's prorogation. I would encourage Ms. Shanahan to get back on topic.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nater.

Ms. Shanahan, can you explain how you think the invitations in the amendment make your remarks relevant or not relevant? If they're not, could you steer back?

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I'm happy to oblige, Madam Chair.

The prorogation was important in that it let us make the pivot we needed. Our world wasn't what it had been when we came to power in 2019. There was no pandemic then, or even the slightest hint of one. We were dealing with other problems; we had other plans and we had been reelected on another platform.

However, prorogation became necessary when the pandemic hit and we were caught unawares by the crisis. It was really the only thing to do at the time, and we did it.

Let me be clear: the original motion, which calls for a study of the prorogation, is a bit of a shell game. What can I say about this set-up to keep the WE Charity scandal alive? It's a set-up; that's all I can see here.

Several other parliamentary committees examined more than 5,000 pages of documents in detail, heard hours and hours of testimony and found no evidence that anything inappropriate had taken place, nothing at all.

The real problem here is that the opposition parties can't stand the fact that they've wasted all this time, which they should have devoted to combating COVID-19 and taking positive measures that might have helped both the federal government and the provinces organize the purchase and distribution of vaccines. On the contrary, they preferred to devote their time to the WE Charity issue.

We saw the frustration on their faces as they listened to officials testifying, one after another, that nothing had happened, which was subsequently confirmed by thousands of pages of documents. We saw the frustration on their faces after the Prime Minister appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance. His chief of staff and the ministers who appeared before the committee all said the same thing. They all said that the Canada student grant for full-time students was theoretically a good program.

That program was one of the dozens of programs that we introduced during this critical period, and we thought we had done a good thing. Unfortunately, we failed in its execution. The program didn't work. These are things that happen. Who has ever had a 100% success rate every time? I don't think it's ever happened, and certainly not in our profession.

We've seen this kind of thing before. That's why we have committees that conduct studies on government operations and the public accounts. This kind of work is always being done. We have to

look at what we've done and determine how we can do things better. Sometimes that doesn't work. In some cases, we cancel everything, refund the money and the matter's closed. Then we move on to something else.

I heard the opposition members' comments on the subject. They definitely noted that more money was allocated for summer jobs in this year's budget. That measure was well received in Châteauguay—Lacolle, and it was a big success.

Officials and politicians worked countless hours to ensure that assistance programs for Canadians in difficulty were implemented. Some members previously mentioned this, but I repeat that programs such as the Canada emergency response benefit, the Canada emergency wage subsidy and the Canada emergency rent subsidy were very well received, especially here in Châteauguay—Lacolle. I think the same was true in ridings across the country.

As I said earlier, however, mistakes were made and the Prime Minister was the first to admit it. He apologized to the Canadian public. We were working at breakneck speed at the height of the pandemic's first wave, and that inevitably happened.

Members on the other side tried many times to fault the government. That's the reason we're here and why we're spending hours on these issues and committee hearings, particularly those of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, on which I sit. Opposition members see an opportunity to fault the government. They didn't succeed in doing so and apparently have nothing else to do but keep trying.

Late last fall, after hearing hours of testimony, supported by documents, and examining thousands of pages of documents, the opposition realized that it had overplayed its hand and rightly moved on to something else. I imagine all the members were contacted by their fellow citizens and urged to focus on the pandemic because that was, and still is, the only issue of any importance.

And yet the committee is once again considering a motion that clearly concerns the WE Charity issue but is disguised as a study of the prorogation in August 2020. What they're doing is so obvious it's almost funny. Mr. Turnbull's amendment is designed to make the scope of the main motion much more reasonable. It's an attempt to come up with something that satisfies everyone.

As some witnesses stated before this committee, under our constitutional conventions, the Prime Minister alone has authority to consult the Governor General on prorogation; that decision is no one else's. We also learned that the Prime Minister didn't need a reason to prorogue Parliament. Prorogation has been used throughout this country's history to reset the parliamentary agenda, as it were. The period between dissolution and a new throne speech has varied from a few hours to several weeks. It's a tool that prime ministers have used since our Parliament's inception. It's one tool among many, but it's nevertheless very important, particularly in a period of crisis.

I think it's interesting that the opposition used the time between the prorogation and the Speech from the Throne in September to claim that it was related to WE Charity. We were in the midst of a pandemic, and that was the concern of our government and of Canadians. We had to decide how we were going to organize our response to the pandemic. We obviously didn't know how long it would last. We knew it might go on for months, but no one knew exactly how long. And we're still in the midst of this crisis, aren't we?

Here are a few historical facts. In the fall of 2008, the former Conservative prime minister prorogued Parliament for several weeks before returning to the House. So I find it ironic that certain members who are sitting here and who were part of that government are now opposed to prorogation.

Prorogation as such is a political act based on political considerations, and there's nothing wrong or inappropriate about it. Politics is a set of activities and policies; it's the way we decide to organize the country's affairs. In times of great change, as is the case of the COVID-19 health crisis, prorogation is definitely a political decision. We need to reset and turn the situation around.

Notwithstanding the opposition's claims to the contrary, there's nothing inappropriate in the Prime Minister's making that decision. The Prime Minister has the right to make that kind of decision.

Why is prorogation political, and why is it acceptable? Because a government's legislative agenda is political. Colleagues must distinguish between a political act and a purely partisan act.

Sometimes people here in the riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle tell me they don't like politics. It's not politics they don't like, because they're all involved in non-profit groups: they campaign for social housing or wetlands conservation, for example, and work to reduce poverty. We have good conversations. I tell them they're engaged in politics precisely because they're committed to various causes. Those are political acts. What they don't like is partisanship. I can understand that because they feel it makes no sense. They don't understand the disputes among elected members. That's why I always say that every party presents its policies and platforms during an election campaign, but elected members represent everyone once the campaign is over. They must avoid partisan actions. They must be there for everyone, and the same is true of the government. The government is the government of all Canadians, and it's elected based on its political agenda.

The Speech from the Throne is a political manifesto that lays out the government's roadmap. A responsible and transparent govern-

ment provides a statement that clearly outlines for Canadians the basis on which it addresses the challenges facing it. Consequently, the decision to prorogue Parliament and reset that political agenda was entirely acceptable.

My friends, the present government delivered a Speech from the Throne in December 2019 that was based on the political promises it had made during the campaign leading up to the October 2019 election. However, no one could have foreseen the global pandemic that arrived in the space of only a few days in March 2020.

We all remember that week in March. We were in Ottawa and I had organized a small party at Darcy McGee's to celebrate St. Patrick's Day on the Monday of the week in question. There was a whole group of us, members from all the parties were present, and we had some good music. Some members are good singers and it was fun. I'm very pleased the party was a success. A few days later, Parliament shut down and the parties stopped. We love our political parties, but we enjoy our social parties even more.

All Canadians found themselves in the same situation at the same time. In the coming years and even decades, people will definitely study this historic event in an attempt to understand how we reacted to this unprecedented health crisis.

Of course, the agenda we put before Parliament in December 2019 became moot because there was nothing more we could do.

Madam Chair, will we have to go and vote in the House soon? You will let me know, won't you?

[English]

The Chair: I didn't want to interrupt. I was thinking maybe you would end and I would make an announcement. The bells should be going off any minute now and there will be a vote in the House.

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

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Nader.

Mr. John Nater: I'm thinking Mr. Kent and I were probably going to say the same thing, so I will let Mr. Kent, who is far more articulate than I am, make the comment.

Hon. Peter Kent: As just a brief observation, given that members all have the remote voting app, perhaps we could best use time by continuing Ms. Shanahan's remarks through the bells.

The Chair: Yes. Maybe this committee would like to really surprise me by giving unanimous consent to continue through the bells. I would say I would be a little surprised.

Definitely when something productive is happening, committees would like to work through the bells to achieve their goals. It's up to you guys whether you want to work through the bells. I don't see the notice yet for bells, but if you already give me unanimous consent, we can do so.

Okay. It seems that nobody is saying otherwise, so we'll just go through the bells.

Ms. Shanahan, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Pardon me, Madam Chair, but I can't keep speaking and vote simultaneously because I don't have the technical knowledge I'd need to take part in both Zoom meetings at the same time. Perhaps we can change our minds on that.

[English]

It's not really comfortable for me.

The Chair: I require unanimous consent to carry on, so if even one of the members is not comfortable doing so, we would just suspend for the bells and then resume after the vote is done.

I don't think we are hearing the bells, so I guess you can continue. It was expected by 11:52, but maybe things are running a few minutes behind.

Ms. Shanahan, you can carry on until the bells start ringing and then we can suspend.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay, very good.

[Translation]

All the plans, priorities and aspirations we might have had for the parliamentary session in early 2020 of course disappeared and were replaced by an urgent need to help Canadians get through the biggest international event since World War II.

[English]

The Chair: I'll have to interrupt you. The bells are ringing, and we will resume after the vote is completed.

• (34755)

(Pause)

• (34840)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Ms. Shanahan, you have the floor from where you left off.

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

[Translation]

I'll pick up where I left off.

How and why, indeed can and should, a prime minister decide to prorogue Parliament? All the plans, priorities and aspirations we had for the parliamentary session in early 2020 disappeared and were replaced by an urgent need to help Canadians get through the biggest international event since World War II. Consequently, it was entirely logical for the government to take stock of the situation once the first wave had abated in the summer of 2020 and to determine whether it could pursue the agenda it had established in December 2019.

No one around this virtual table can claim it was unnecessary to re-centre the government's priorities once the first wave of COVID-19 had subsided. We had to focus on economic recovery and continue vaccine planning. We were fortunate because the pharmaceutical companies informed us that the vaccines would be

arriving. Incidentally, I commend all the scientists, physicians and researchers who worked around the clock to create vaccines.

We were completely absorbed in preparing for a potential second wave. Now we're preparing for the third wave, but, this time, several vaccines have been developed. Managing this new situation was essential. It was a situation in which prorogation was necessary and appropriately used.

We heard that it was a political decision. As I explained earlier, politics is what we do. That political decision was made by the Prime Minister. My colleagues may have had other ideas about what had to be done. It's entirely understandable that the reasoning is still subject to debate. However, this committee heard the government's reasoning from the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Pablo Rodriguez, who appeared before this committee and confirmed the government's position. It wasn't absolutely necessary for the Prime Minister or his chief of staff to appear. As we explained—I know this is a topic of debate within the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics—the Prime Minister, under the principle of ministerial solidarity, always has the right to delegate his responsibilities to his ministers.

Frankly, the only relevant witnesses on the list proposed in Ms. Vecchio's motion are the Prime Minister and his chief of staff. They're the ones who are responsible. As I previously mentioned, the Prime Minister always has the right to delegate his responsibilities. It's the Leader of the Government who appeared before the committee to explain the government's position and to answer questions.

Let's not mince words here. My opposition colleagues want these witnesses to say that prorogation was connected in one way or another to the WE Charity issue. They want these witnesses to appear so they can try to establish a connection with that affair. Frankly, the idea is simply absurd.

Why should we receive the witnesses named in Ms. Vecchio's motion if they're already guilty of something in the court of Conservative and opposition party opinion?

Which brings me to the two witnesses whose names appear on that list: Farah and Martin Perelmutter.

I don't understand, and it bothers me, that members are asking Canadians, ordinary citizens who in this instance have a business and are taking care of their employees, their families and customers during the pandemic, to appear and thus drag them into this affair for solely partisan purposes. Mr. and Mrs. Perelmutter previously appeared before us in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, and the situation was appalling. I'll tell you what happened.

Those two individuals own a business called Speakers' Spotlight, which has been operating for 25 years. The business acts as an intermediary for groups and organizations wishing to secure the services of speakers. Speakers' Spotlight finds people who can give speeches, represents them and connects them with the organization. There is absolutely nothing nefarious or partisan about this kind of service, which incidentally is used by all kinds of companies, charities and civil organizations.

Why would we have those people come and testify as part of this study? It makes no sense, and that's why I support Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

I'm going to discuss the appearance of Mr. and Mrs. Perelmutter in greater detail. The way their appearance took place was truly disgusting. It's a disgrace for members of our Parliament to treat Canadians that way.

Despite the fact they had nothing to hide, they were treated as guilty parties and publicly portrayed in social media as though they were pawns in some game. They were attacked online and threatened in person by members of the public. We know that some individuals just look for opportunities to attack people. Some even called their office to threaten their employees.

That situation was the direct result of the behaviour of certain members. I'm really sorry to have to say it, since we're all colleagues here, but some Conservative Party members played that game.

The Perelmutter felt so threatened not only at work, but also at home, since their personal address was exposed, that they even had to call the police. These people have families. It was really...

[English]

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

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I fully support where she's going and understand, but in the amendment that Mr. Turnbull has put forward, this isn't part of that. It is removing it, which I respect, but I'm almost wondering about relevance, because she's talking about WE. The Kielburgers are actually in this motion. They too are private citizens. I'm just listening and hoping that we can get back to Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Yes, the Kielburgers are still in. You're right. So is Bill Morneau, who is also a private citizen at this point. They are in the amendment, but I do think that she's still speaking to whether she thinks that's a good idea or not, so it is relevant to what we have at hand. Maybe you'd like her to reveal more of her position on it, but I think that at this point I would say it's still relevant to the matter that we are speaking to. In terms of relevance, I think there's not an issue at this time.

Go ahead, Ms. Shanahan.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's unfortunate some members don't want me to discuss the Perelmutter because we put them in such a terrible situation I don't think we can apologize to them enough, although the Liberal Party and NDP members nevertheless did apologize when they appeared before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics on December 7.

The couple described everything they had personally experienced. It was the first time in a parliamentary committee setting that I've ever felt truly ashamed to be involved in a situation like that. As the English expression goes, it was an incidence of

[English]

“dragging people under the bus” and running the bus over them many times. This is what is in Ms. Vecchio's motion and what is happening here again. Yes, I support the amendment by Mr. Turnbull to remove those two witnesses.

The Perelmutter were not the only witnesses. I could go on about other witnesses who were dragged in front of the ethics committee. I'm sure there are other members who have seen things happening in other committees. There were so many going on at the same time, you couldn't follow them all. What was the idea? Drag as many people in front of as many committees to try to find something, that “got you” moment. Who were they trying to get? They were trying to get innocent Canadians. It was disgusting.

For those who didn't understand what I was saying in French before, that's what I am saying now.

Mrs. Perelmutter was not leaving her house. It was not for isolation's sake. She was afraid to leave her house. The degree of harassment and intimidation that they were subjected to since last August 2020.... 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, his mother and his brother, even though it would have contravened privacy laws.

I will continue in English, because I want the members here to understand this.

That is what was going on in social media.

According to the Toronto Star, “In one Facebook post, which is still online, deputy Conservative leader Candice Bergen provided the company's toll-free phone number and urged people to call to press the point.”

What were they looking for? It was records for the last 12 years. If that's not a witch hunt and a fishing expedition, I don't know what is.

Ever since, Mr. Perelmutter said, with that online harassment.... This is what he told us at his appearance on December 7, which happened after prorogation. Nothing was stopped because of prorogation. It continued.

His company faced harassment, personal threats and a social media campaign that he described as “designed to discredit him and his wife” and damage their reputation. It was real harm against them—both against their reputation and indeed, as I have said, Madam Chair, even to their persons. They were 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.”

Imagine what he was going through. He said, “We had to get the police involved. It was a really nasty situation.”

What Canadian doing business and trying to survive the pandemic asks for that?

Mr. Perelmutter said that one individual who responded to the Conservative call posted his wife’s photo and private cellphone number on Facebook, along with a rant calling her “disgusting and derogatory things. Her phone started ringing day and night”—

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

I fully respect this, but when she's talking about these photos, we've seen the exact same thing done to Charlie Angus. We have seen some of this. Yes, it's absolutely inappropriate, but I'm really hoping we can talk about—

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: We're talking about Mr. Turnbull's amendment, are we not?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Wonderful.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, I think this is a point of debate, perhaps, more than it is a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, since Ms. Shanahan is referring to witnesses whose participation would be cancelled by Ms. Vecchio's motion, perhaps people are ready to vote on Mr. Turnbull's amendment. Then we could move on to another motion.

I raise the point in the event members of the committee are ready to vote. We're discussing a point that would not be included in Mr. Turnbull's amendment or Ms. Vecchio's motion in any case.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's absolutely the committee's prerogative if they'd like to continue to vote. At this point, though, Ms. Shanahan has the floor, so I'll give the floor back to her. When she doesn't have the floor, we can, if the committee likes, proceed to a vote. It's up to the committee.

We do have other speakers on the list. I will let you know that we have, after this, Ms. Petipas Taylor, Mr. Turnbull and then Mr. Samson.

Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

I can understand that there are members of the opposition who don't want to hear what I have to say—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It's been going on for three months. Of course we want to hear it.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: —but it's not actually what I have to say; it's ordinary Canadians who have been dragged into this, and they have a right to be heard.

Mrs. Perelmutter was in fear for her own personal safety for a while. She didn't want to leave the house. Some of their 27 employees, particularly young women on staff, were also concerned about their safety. Maybe it's laughable to some members here. Maybe it's something that's not important or germane to where they want to go, but this is what Canadians are in shock about. This is why we are here.

Chair, if in some measure I can protect at least a couple of Canadians from this kind of abuse, I will feel that my time has been well spent and that I am doing my job here.

Mr. Perelmutter says he understands that politics is a tough business, but he said that his company is not partisan. Again, the difference between politics, policy and sheer partisanship, just to score political points, drag anybody down with you, it doesn't matter, because we have to score those points.... These people were unfairly caught in the crossfire. His company had only a tangential connection to the WE affair and had nothing to do—nothing—with the student services grant at the heart of the controversy. The information they were looking for was from the times the Prime Minister and his wife, before he was prime minister, would have spoken to maybe a Legion or a charity affair; I don't know. It was ridiculous.

Mr. Perelmutter goes on to say, “It's something that I never thought we would have to deal with. We're not in a controversial type of business.” As part of its investigation into the affair, the ethics committee asked Speakers' Spotlight to turn over documents related to any fees earned by the Prime Minister and his family members for speaking engagements over the past 12 years. At that time, Parliament was prorogued, so the clerk informed Mr. Perelmutter that he no longer had to submit the documents requested by the committee. “Aha,” says the opposition. “There—you see? They wanted to stop those documents from being produced. That was the evil plan.”

At the same time, Conservative MP Michael Barrett sent the company a letter the following week, which he released to the media before Mr. Perelmutter said he'd had the chance to read it, asking him to do the right thing and turn over the documents directly to the members of the then disbanded committee. So you see that Mr. Barrett had a plan to get to the bottom of all of this nefarious wrongdoing.

Mr. Perelmutter 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. We work by the rule of law. We have parliamentary tradition and parliamentary rules that we follow. Mr. Perelmutter said that he was upset that a member of Parliament would ask the company to break the law. This is what he told the committee.

Ms. Bergen's Facebook post came shortly after Mr. Barrett publicly released his letter. By making the request public, Mr. Perelmutter said, he "definitely felt like [he was] being intimidated" by Barrett. He said, "It was frankly quite shocking [to me] to be completely honest," adding, about launching a lawsuit against Conservative MPs, that "certainly it's crossed my mind".

That is where those Conservative MPs have brought us as parliamentarians.

I don't know about you, Madam Chair, and about other colleagues here, but my reputation, the honour, the privilege, as a parliamentarian is that what we do here is for the good of Canadians. We would never, never bring our position, our role.... I take my role as a parliamentarian on a committee, when we ask for witnesses and require witnesses to appear.... Anybody who has seen the work that we're doing on MindGeek and Pornhub will know that.

We are doing some very important work there, and we want to get to the bottom of those issues because that's what's important to Canadians. But to use those same powers against ordinary, innocent Canadians for partisan purposes, I cannot condone. I'm not one of those parliamentarians who gets up and rants and raves, so I think I may have surprised a few of my good friends here. This is what gets me, innocent people being dragged in.

Mr. Barrett participated in that committee hearing but he did not address the matter. He did ask Mr. Perelmutter several questions about some specific speaking engagements. I am extremely disappointed and shocked, but maybe not surprised. This is me saying that Mr. Barrett was present here and he did not use his time to offer a complete apology for his actions. That's what I said at the time, to give Mr. Barrett some time, the ample opportunity, to do the right thing. He's so keen on doing the right thing.

I and other members on the Liberal side, and Mr. Angus from the NDP, did take that time to apologize to the Perelmutter and the chair of the committee. Mr. Sweet, as chair of our ethics committee, did the right thing 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 obligation of our office. Then once the committee...remember when the prorogation happened, that must have been the evil plan, but the committee was reconstituted in September after the prorogation was over, after we had the new throne speech and after we had done the reset.

Our committee then sent a narrower request to Speakers' Spotlight for records of the speaking fees earned by Mr. Trudeau and his wife. The company complied with that request and those records were provided to the committee members for a week. I think committee members are familiar with how that's done, in privacy. We had all the time in the world to peruse them and guess what? No one, including Mr. Barrett, asked any questions about those documents at our meeting in December.

So that was the story of dragging in innocent witnesses with absolutely no connection to the matter at hand, except for a family name. Yes, that'll be just enough. They were dragged in front of the committee and their reputations and their personal well-being put up as fodder for the mill.

[Translation]

I'm going to keep saying that the opposition members on the committee presupposed the conclusion in this matter, exactly as the members of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics tried to do. They're doing everything they can to make the narrative fit the facts.

Unfortunately, we won't be satisfied with that response. Canadians have understood the game the Conservatives and their opposition collaborators are playing, and they aren't buying what they're selling. As Canadians, we will never allow a tribunal, whether parliamentary or otherwise, to render a decision before hearing the case put before it. That's the kind of judicial procedure used in dictatorships and oligarchies, not in Canada.

So I find it very interesting that, on the one hand, my opposition colleagues condemn authoritarian dictatorships that don't abide by the basic principles of legal fairness yet, on the other hand, sit on the committee and try to advance a process that has completely abandoned any semblance of legal fairness.

The scope of the motion before us is so broad and the motion itself so unrelated to this study that we, as members, have no choice but to reject it.

Rather than do that, my colleague Mr. Turnbull has introduced an amendment that will give the opposition another chance to take a crack at the settled matter of WE Charity's involvement in the student grant program. They're doing it under the pretext of a study on the prorogation of Parliament without however seeking the cooperation of the Prime Minister and his staff.

Reading the motion, which I hope will soon be amended, I thought it was interesting to see how obvious it was that the opposition had attempted to disguise its secret WE Charity study as a study of the prorogation. By simply looking at the dates of the documents requested, you can see that the opposition members aren't interested in the prorogation but rather are trying to connect WE Charity to this study.

If we support the amendment to the motion, they can still play that game, albeit in a slightly more limited way. I understand the frustration of my opposition colleagues, who have tried for months to raise the matter in several committees and the media, but without success. Now they're trying once again to make a final effort to embarrass the government over WE Charity. Seriously, where are their priorities?

These requests for witnesses and documents are nothing more than another set-up designed to slow the government's work, bog down officials in paperwork and make them waste time sorting, examining and sending documents to an overworked Translation Bureau rather than work on implementing the government's programs.

I say that ironically, but I find it amusing to hear the opposition leader say he wants the government to succeed in providing vaccines to Canadians and restarting the economy. He should speak to certain members from his party, who take a different view. However, the opposition leader is allowing his members to slow down the machinery of government by introducing frivolous concurrence motions that effectively achieve that end. We need to move on to other matters. The Conservatives have to stop playing their games, and we have to focus once again on what's important for Canadians: economic recovery and emerging from the COVID-19 crisis.

And on that note, I conclude my speech.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Shanahan.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, you're next.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I'm going to cede the floor. I believe that my friend and colleague Ryan Turnbull will be taking my place.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull is next on the list.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a hard act to follow, in terms of following after my colleague Mrs. Shanahan, whom I have great respect for. I attended a couple of those meetings of the ethics committee, just a very small number. I know she has done great work on that committee and I thank her for speaking so passionately. I, too, share many of her concerns when it comes to bringing forth private [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

In just a moment I will speak to my amendment, which does relate to that, but before I get started, I just want to say that I'm sorry I was away from the committee over the last two weeks. I want everyone to know that I wasn't avoiding this important and riveting debate. I was under the weather, but I'm feeling much better now and feel increasingly better every day. I extend my heartfelt thanks to my colleagues and my teammates who filled in for me while I was gone and checked in with me regularly. I really appreciate the fact that we have such a compassionate team.

While I was resting and trying to get better, I probably held on to some vain hope, a small grain of hope and optimism for returning and finding us having made progress on this motion and the proposed amendment, but alas, here we are, still debating this. It's unfortunate.

I have quite a few remarks. I've had lots of time to reflect and had lots of thoughts prepared before I fell ill and was away for a little while, and I'd like to get them on the record.

First of all, the amendment that I put forward was an attempt to compromise. You have to give something to get something. However, the members of the opposition on this committee have to give

too, and so far, I don't think there has been a willingness to be flexible and to give a little on the original motion.

I really don't think we need to hear from the Kielburgers and the Honourable Bill Morneau. Let's be honest. I think Mrs. Shanahan's comments are really poignant and point to the harm that can be caused, inadvertently, of course. It's not necessarily intentional, but it is harm that members of the public—private citizens, business owners, and so on—can experience as a result of being called before these committees. I think that's an important consideration.

Now, I left those two invitations, those renewed invitations, in the proposed amendment as a way to say to the opposition parties, "Okay, here is something perhaps that would appeal to your interests," which I think clearly we all know are for partisan purposes, or at least I suspect that, based on all the comments I've heard.

What I really think is that the added testimony from the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth would actually be relevant to extending the study, and hearing from them would add to the testimony something perhaps that we haven't heard before.

These witnesses are important because we can get a sense of the depth and breadth of the economic impact, as well as the significant data and evidence, not to mention the first-hand experiences relayed to us from our constituents about the inequities and vulnerabilities that Canadians are living with or are experiencing due to COVID-19, which is a reason that the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth would be appropriate, in my view, because this is her expertise. This is her mandate and file.

We also know that economic impacts have not been distributed evenly across our economy. Quite the opposite, they've been distributed unevenly. It goes without saying, and I think we've all heard this over and over again, that some industries have been decimated while others have prospered. Some will bounce back quickly and others will take years to return to pre-pandemic levels.

I remember in one of the previous meetings, before I was away, Mr. Blaikie made a comment. I think he said that the pandemic "also matters". I don't mean to quote him out of context, because it was within what he was saying and I'm sure he didn't mean this, but it seemed to me that it was sort of implied in his remarks that the pandemic was the distraction from what the opposition was really looking for in this study. Only a party focused on playing political games would characterize a global pandemic as an afterthought or a distraction.

The pandemic clearly is what we all, and certainly this committee, need to be completely seized with and focused upon at every moment. We are in a third wave of a global health crisis of epic proportions. Canadians need us. They care that their government is working for them, at all levels, to essentially meet their needs and protect them from the worst parts of this crisis—or help them get through this.

Canadians are rightfully exhausted by this and are counting on us to help. We can't afford to be looking backwards and to be distracted with partisan games, which is really what the original motion is about.

I think extending it, with a couple of witnesses, is a more than reasonable solution. It's an attempt at compromise. However, I see that this doesn't satisfy the opposition.

I want to quote someone. There's a gentleman I heard recently, who I'm sure some of my other colleagues probably know and admire. In a recent interview, Dr. Michael Ryan, the executive director of the World Health Organization's health emergencies program, said:

I think what we've learnt in Ebola outbreaks is you need to react quickly, you need to go after the virus, you need to stop the chains of transmission, you need to engage with communities very deeply; community acceptance is hugely important.

You need to be co-ordinated, you need to be coherent, you need to look at the other sectoral impacts, the schools and security and economic.

So it's essentially many of those same lessons but the lessons I've learnt after so many Ebola outbreaks in my career are be fast, have no regrets; you must be the first mover. The virus will always get you if you don't move quickly and you need to be prepared and I say this.

One of the great things in emergency response—and anyone who's involved in emergency response will know this—if you need to be right before you move you will never win.

“Perfection is the enemy of the good,” which is something our Prime Minister says often, “when it comes to emergency management.”

“Speed trumps perfection and the problem in society we have at the moment”—and he's speaking to this global pandemic—“is everyone is afraid of making a mistake, everyone is afraid of the consequence of error.”

“But the greatest error is not to move, the greatest error is to be paralysed by the fear of failure and I think that's the single biggest [lesson] I've learnt in Ebola responses in the past.”

That's what Dr. Michael Ryan said in a recent interview. I thought, wow, this is powerful advice. It really speaks to the need for us to move quickly, to focus on the future and not the past, and to not be debating, for months, a motion that has absolutely no relevance to managing the crisis we're in.

It is nothing but a political game, and the opposition parties, for some reason, persist. I understand that they want to win political points and get an uptick in the polls. I understand that. I understand that there's partisanship here, and it's always present. However, can we not put that aside and focus on what really matters?

We're heading into a wall, and we're looking in the rearview mirror instead of being focused on preparing for the fourth wave. I hope we don't have a fourth wave, but my colleague Dr. Duncan and people who have studied virology and understand pandemics....

There is so much work for us to be doing. I'm lying in bed for two weeks trying to get better, and all I can think about is how I can possibly rest when there is so much damned work to do that matters to people out there in the world—work that they're counting on me and us to do for them.

Here we are—what is it?—one month later, still debating. I don't know how many weeks it's been, but it seems like forever to me, because there are so many more pressing things coming into my constituency office, and so many other things, even within this committee, that we could be focusing on. It's just disheartening, to say the least. I say it's really disheartening.

Some of my colleagues on this committee have made it seem as though this is just a matter of how much time we use for this study, but I think it's about more than that. It's about what we invest our time in, what we choose to spend our time on. We're making decisions about what to focus on. We know that standing committees are masters of their own domain. We could be pursuing other more important topics, and there's a long list.

Hon. Peter Kent: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Kent. Are you going to say “Let's vote”?

Hon. Peter Kent: No, not at all. I respect Mr. Turnbull's passionate words, but with regard to his urging that the committee vote to invite Minister Freeland and Minister Chagger to appear before committee, has he spoken to them about the committee's open invitation, to which they have still not responded?

The Chair: I guess that's an interjection of some sort, but I'll give the floor back to Mr. Turnbull.

I can tell you that from my position—

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, it was just to Mr. Turnbull's point about the value of time. I would think that if they responded to an existing committee invitation, that time would be addressed.

The Chair: I guess I can put on the record that I have no responses at this point to any of the previous invitations.

Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

That's a great question. I have not heard anything from them to date. This is the whole point of the amendment that I put forward: to focus our time on something reasonable that adds a little more testimony, if that's the wish of the committee, but that doesn't extend too far into the witch hunt that I think the opposition parties are looking for, the “fishing expedition”, as my colleague Ms. Shanahan called it, which is how I would characterize it, too.

Thank you for the question, Mr. Kent. I definitely appreciate it.

I just want to continue with my remarks here.

The list is long. The committee did a study—I think some exceptional work was done—on preparing for the possibility of a pandemic election. Now, we know that's only going to happen if opposition parties thrust it upon the government, because there's no way we want an election during a global pandemic.

Bill C-19, however, has been tabled in the House. I understand it's still being debated, but I think we could be doing a prestudy of that bill, which would help expedite its passage through second reading. I think that would be a much better use of our time.

Another priority, which my honourable colleague Dr. Duncan has raised, is evaluating the effectiveness of infection, prevention and control measures on Parliament Hill and a bunch of other factors related to looking at how we responded during the pandemic. That's useful for helping us prepare for future waves or future pandemics, and I think it's a really important one.

I understand that my colleague Ms. Petitpas Taylor also put a motion on notice which I think has lots of relevance. I too have put a motion on notice which focuses on another topic that I think would be much more relevant for us to focus on. It's the one that focuses on the Ontario Superior Court decision to strike down changes to the Canada Elections Act that help protect Canadians against misinformation during elections.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, let's get back to the motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I have great concerns, within the election process, about the amount of misinformation that I've witnessed. In my riding Conservative Party of Canada fund flyers went to every primary residence in my riding, which provided misinformation to the public—it was actually stamped by the Conservative Party—in the last election.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: This really concerns me. Of course it's a part of election readiness, and we know that it's relevant, given the pandemic.

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

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I recognize that we're talking about other things that we could be studying, but if we could get back to the motion, that would be great. It's a little on point, but he just seemed to be elaborating a little more than necessary.

The Chair: Point noted, I guess.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I do think this is relevant because what I'm advocating for is an amendment to the motion. It would narrow the scope of the motion that was put forward, which would free up our time to focus on other items. It is therefore relevant to the argument I'm making. Again, there are much more important tasks here in my view, and I think many members, in the Liberal Party at least, would agree with me. They would be a much better use of our time and Canadians would appreciate our focusing on them.

Misinformation in elections and deliberate misinformation are issues that we all need to be concerned about, especially given the time we're living in, a time when people are consuming a lot more information online. I think there's a lot more partisanship and lots of polarization within our democratic society. That's deeply concerning to me, especially given what we saw happen during the

election in the United States. I think we can all agree that it would be good for us to address some of the root causes there and look at how we can avoid making some of the same mistakes that perhaps precipitated the insurrection in the United States.

I will leave it at that, on those points anyway. I have lots more to say, so I'll get back to the motion by Ms. Vecchio.

It has been said, which I need to say myself with conviction, that there was a motive, and the opposition is assuming that prorogation couldn't have happened for legitimate purposes. I find that so hard to believe because if a global pandemic is not a good reason for proroguing, what is a good reason? Honestly, I can't think of a bigger crisis and issue.

Stephen Harper and his government prorogued twice, once in 2008 and once in 2009, and cited the economic recession as their primary reason for proroguing. Certainly everyone suspected there were more partisan reasons and political reasons for doing this, but, legitimately, they cited that as their reason. Why, therefore, in a global pandemic of epic proportions, the biggest crisis in 100 years, can we not see a rational justification for proroguing Parliament?

I will go further in my remarks and say that there is no justification for prorogation that will satisfy the opposition parties because they are not interested in evidence, facts, data, arguments, reasons or reality. This is not about facts and getting to the truth. This is about pure partisanship, facts and reasonable arguments be damned. It seems the Conservatives have a tendency toward, and a growing fascination with, adopting views and positions that have no basis in evidence and reality.

If it's evidence you want, the committee has received a substantive report, which has been tabled, on the reasons for prorogation. It has heard from a selection of witnesses, and the majority of them were of the opposition's choosing. Our witness list had almost none. I don't think we even submitted any witnesses. The opposition parties are the ones that submitted the long list of witnesses they wanted to hear from, and many of them came forward and attended the committee. Members had ample opportunity to ask questions.

I've put forward a motion that allows a few more witnesses to be reinvited, which is a compromise, but there is still no movement. They want the Prime Minister. They have a vendetta against Justin Trudeau. This is not about anything other than a ploy to spin a story, get a headline and cause a small uptick in the polls. We know what this is about.

This is all at the expense of the Canadian public. The public is relying on us.

I shouldn't even be laughing because, in a way, it's just absurd that we're here and that I'm speaking to this.

Let me again represent my views on prorogation, which are supported by the evidence and facts. I have maintained and argued that the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 are deeper, more substantial and in fact many times greater and exponentially more severe—at least 10 times greater, according to many experts and our own chief statistician, on many of the indicators—than those of the 2008-09 recession.

Again, that recession was cited by Stephen Harper as the reason for two prorogations and, some would say, to avoid a confidence vote, and there are other reasons. I would just say that if those were good reasons for the Conservative Party back then, why is it so unbelievable to cite the same sorts of reasons for the most recent prorogation?

I think this is why, from my perspective, hearing from Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland would be beneficial, because who else can speak to the significance of the economic impact? Similarly, I thought that having the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth come to testify might help illuminate the many inequities that COVID-19 has laid bare. This makes sense. In fact, it's common sense, in my view, and if you were looking for the truth and looking for facts and information that are relevant, I think that would be more than acceptable to focus on.

Let us not forget that it was our government in the last Parliament that made the change to the Standing Orders that led to the submission of a report that provided a rationale for prorogation. For the first time ever in the history of our great country, we have a report tabled in the House of Commons and referred to this committee that we've all had a chance to review. Let that sink in for a minute, colleagues and Madam Chair. Never before has any prime minister or any government in Canada's history been required to provide a reason for proroguing Parliament. Never have they had to write and table a report. Never has PROC had to study such a matter. I think there have probably been some other studies that were decided on by the standing committee, but it was never required.

Mr. Blaikie has remarked several times that this would be precedent setting, and I think we've already set the precedent to a much higher standard and to a higher degree of transparency by having a report be something that's necessary, by following through on that and by even entertaining a study. We weren't required to have a study on prorogation just because a report was tabled. This committee chose to do that. We were willing partners in that pursuit. We voted to support that. We heard from witnesses, but now this is still not good enough. It's still not enough. Why? The opposition members didn't hear what they wanted to hear.

To be honest, I haven't even heard opposition members speak to the merits of the report that was tabled. If you were really concerned about that report being deficient in some way, you would be able to provide me with real reasons and arguments as to why it was deficient. Where is it deficient? It provides a great rationale that I think is very sensical and very much based on evidence and research. I think the opposition members have decided from day

one what they want to get out of this and never for a second have they entertained any other possibility.

I have mountains of evidence to demonstrate that proroguing Parliament made sense; that it has led to a process of consultation and re-evaluation; that it was timed perfectly between the first and second waves and to reduce any losses in sitting days in the House of Commons; and, that the priorities and themes of the throne speech, the specifics of the fall economic statement and the budget all reflected what we heard from Canadians. It's responsive. It makes sense. It's backed by data and evidence. It's consistent with the report that was tabled and the testimony given by the government House leader.

What more does the opposition need or want? If this were about reason and evidence, this would have been over a long time ago.

The timing made sense. Between the first and second wave of COVID-19, we took some time after many months of an all-hands-on-deck, full-court-press agenda supporting Canadians. We were moving an agenda forward that supported Canadians. Everyone was working full steam ahead.

We took a hiatus, a time to reassess priorities, to reset the agenda. Did that not make sense, between the first and second wave? It seemed to make sense to me.

I think any Canadian listening in could understand that this government had been working around the clock to serve Canadians, getting supports and programs designed in weeks instead of years, and that it took some time to re-evaluate priorities [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] at a time when Parliament would normally not be sitting anyway, between the first and second wave of the pandemic. It just made sense.

Why can't the opposition compromise a little on their original motion?

Opposition parties act as though they haven't had a chance to study prorogation, but we've had numerous meetings on the topic. We've heard from the government House leader who was willing to attend and who answered our questions. We heard from multiple other witnesses who testified before this committee. It was fair and transparent. All members had a chance to ask questions. The opposition provided their lists of witnesses and they now have testimony from academics, procedural experts, historians, officials and the government House leader. We have material that could be used to write a report.

Some of the opinions shared by witnesses even favour the opposition's preferred interpretation. Why can't we move to writing a report? They already have some evidence or some opinion, I would say, that supports their narrative. What more do they need?

The opposition has also, over and over again, claimed that the throne speech had no substance, which I emphatically deny. I say that's false. They still won't listen or concede that the throne speech has substantive themes and very specific measures that reflect the needs of Canadians. It is in fact true that it outlines priorities that relate directly to the information gathered by the chief statistician of Canada and the extensive consultation that was done during the time that our government was prorogued.

To be clear, our caucus was not on vacation during the time of prorogation. We weren't twiddling our thumbs or sitting on our hands. There were many stakeholder consultations, constituent surveys, caucus consultations, meetings with opposition parties, departmental and interdepartmental discussions during that time, all of which helped to inform the throne speech. Again, these things led to themes that appeared in the throne speech that were new and the relevance of which was directly tied to the pandemic and its deep, far-reaching impacts and were evidence-based.

Notable examples include additional supports for small businesses: the wage subsidy, the commercial rent subsidy, the redesign and improvements to the Canada business credit availability program, and expansion of the CEBA. These are huge supports for small businesses. I've heard over and over again how these have literally saved very many of our small businesses from going under due to the effects of this pandemic and the public health restrictions that have been necessary to protect Canadians.

Our supports for workers, the wage subsidy, the Canada recovery benefit and the central reforms to EI were outlined in the throne speech. They were not in the previous throne speech. They were new initiatives that were a direct result of taking some time to reflect on what Canadians needed.

On supports for the hardest-hit industries, we know there's a long list of industries that have been hard hit: hospitality, tourism, retail, and cultural industries. The list goes on and on.

National standards for long-term care weren't in the original throne speech. That is something I've spoken to before. My colleague, Mr. Lauzon, is not here today, but he speaks very passionately and is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, and he has spoken to this as well.

Those national standards for long-term care were in the throne speech. They were a direct result of the consultation that was done. Many of my colleagues and I advocated for that national standard to be in the throne speech. We're quite happy to see that it got in there.

These are just a few examples, but I'm going to give you others as well.

No one can say that addressing systemic racism was not in the previous throne speech. There were numerous actions outlined. I'm very proud that it appeared in the throne speech after prorogation, that it was a direct result of realizing the inequities that many racialized Canadians and many others were experiencing due to the pandemic. It's not that they weren't experiencing those before. They, in fact, had been for generations, but the pandemic and its impacts laid it bare. It showed us and taught us all about how deep those inequities are, and how deep racial injustice is in our country.

That appeared in the throne speech. It wasn't there before. It's something I'm very proud of, and I take very seriously. It speaks to the responsiveness of a government that took the time to reflect, and ask what Canadians need us to be focusing on. How are our agenda and priorities shifting and changing?

Some of the things in there are already under way, which is incredible. I'm particularly passionate about the inclusive and diverse public procurement, which has been an area of passion for me for a long time. Seeing that in the throne speech was something I felt very proud of.

I was pleased to see that we were taking action on online hate, making sure we have disaggregated data, so we can see the inequities better and identify how those play out, and how we can then develop policies based on that information.

There is also an action plan to increase representation in hiring and appointments in the public service. There are steps to acknowledge artistic and economic contributions of Black Canadians. Included are justice system reforms to address the overrepresentation of Black, indigenous and people of colour in our justice system. There is training for police in law enforcement. These things are incredible steps toward realizing greater degrees of justice in our country, and eliminating to the greatest degree possible systemic racism.

The opposition parties still continued to maintain that our throne speech had no substance to it, that it was no different, that we didn't need the time to reflect and re-evaluate. Would these themes and important measures be a priority for our government if we didn't take the time to do that work? I would say maybe not.

What about gender equality? There is an action plan for women in the economy, the Canadian-wide early learning and child care system, acceleration of the women's entrepreneurship strategy. These were all in the throne speech. Our government is deeply committed to realizing greater degrees of gender equity and gender equality. We have been working on that from day one. To have these specific measures identified confirms continued action and continued priority on realizing gender equality in Canada which, again, is something we've learned—

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

I'm sorry to interrupt, but I notice that Mr. Turnbull is talking about gender equality and gender equity. I notice we have a new member of the committee with us, Mrs. McCrimmon. I wonder if she might want to take the opportunity to apologize for shutting down the national defence committee meetings, which were looking at issues of sexual misconduct in the military.

The Chair: I don't think that's an appropriate point of order, Mr. Nater, and you know that as well.

Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

The other thing that appeared in the throne speech that I'm also very passionate about and pleased to see was the disability inclusion plan. That's a threefold commitment to income support, employment support and changes to eligibility criteria. This is very welcome.

Last, the throne speech also had the term "build back better". I know opposition parties—and I'll speak to this a little more later—have claimed that this is some token phrase. They've said this over and over again. I'll fight them to the end of the earth on that one and argue until the day I die. Literally the most important thing we need to do, in my view, is to build back better. That message is not a token phrase. It refers to realizing the many deep impacts and inequities and the ways in which our economy doesn't support full social and environmental responsibility.

It's referring to building our economy in a more intentional way so it really supports people and the planet. This is not socialism and communism, and the oppositions parties and the conspiracy theorists out there will tell you this is the great reset.

It's not the great reset. It's dealing with the very specific ways in which our systems are flawed, that are impacting people and the planet and creating the massive inequities and injustices that we see jeopardizing our future and our children's future. Things in the throne speech related to build back better, and that message is exceeding Canada's 2030 climate goal. We've seen our government put forward a new ambition and an ambitious target for a better target. I want to be more ambitious about that, as ambitious as we can possibly be.

This is really important. There's a new fund to attract investments in zero-emission products and to make Canada a leader in clean technology. I will say more about this because it's an area that I feel very strongly and passionately about. I think we still have lots of work to do. We have to go much further.

I want to reiterate that I find it just doesn't respect the value of that build back better phrase.... I know it sounds like a key message or a marketing strategy, but I think it's a very small packet of words that has a lot of meaning to it. For me, it really is important. It's what we heard from a lot of constituents.

Certainly in my riding, I have many climate activists and people who want serious and progressive change to be made on addressing climate change. They feel that this pandemic is a wake-up call for us to begin to realize just how better prepared we need to be. We have to realize how much better our systems and our politics and political system have to work to address major crises that we have

not addressed over many generations. They have been accumulating in importance. We've left it to the bitter end. We can't do that anymore. We have to collaborate and find ways to address the impending climate disaster that I know climatologists have been predicting for at least 20 or 30 years. It's probably even more than that.

I have a colleague who was a part of Pollution Probe, which is one of the first environmental organizations. He was one of the co-founders. He's been actively working towards climate action for over 40 years. He's been frustrated. He is now retired but still active, no matter what.

Anyway, I want to get back to my main argument. I feel like I have so much to say and I don't want to take up too much time. I was away for two weeks reflecting, so a lot of things have been percolating. I really value the opportunity to express myself fully and give my point of view, which I know is part of my responsibility. I take it very seriously.

Let me tell you a little bit more about my argument and why we need to get on with things but also hear, at least, from the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. I'm not going to speak too much more to the Kielburgers and the Honourable Bill Morneau. I left those reinventions in there as a compromise with Ms. Vecchio and the Conservative Party members. I really want to speak to my argument as to the importance of hearing from two more witnesses. I think it would be valuable. This speaks to the heart of my proposed amendment.

Again, I'm going back to a document I've referred to multiple times before, because I love data. I'm a bit of a data nerd. I think we have to base what we're doing on research and data. It's a report on the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, a six-month update released by the chief statistician of Canada in September 2020.

The reason I'm referring to that particular report is that the whole thing looks backwards in time and talks about why we prorogued. That report took statistical information on the social and economic impacts up to about August, then released a report on it in September. It really would have been some of the most relevant and substantive information available at the time. The reason it's relevant and important is that it demonstrates why the government did the things it did and how that information factored into resetting the agenda during prorogation, which is reflected in the throne speech.

I'll try to quickly summarize the main findings and then I'll go in to more detail. I will summarize by saying there are three major findings. There's a lot to say about each one of them. I could probably talk for two or three meetings on each one, but let's just start with the first. The evidence collected shows there's been an unprecedented depth of economic impact in every category. It's also been uneven and inequitable across industries. I've already said this but there's a lot more information on the extent and the depth of that economic impact, which I think is pretty substantive.

For example, it's uneven across industries. The declines in outputs are five times greater than in 2008, and that was only in August 2020. Just think, we've now been through the second and third waves of this pandemic. The economic impact of COVID-19 has been far, far greater, at least 10 times greater. It could be even more than that by now. I haven't looked at the most recent statistics yet.

There was a historic decline in all economic activity. This comes directly from the chief statistician's report. It doesn't matter what measure we use. There's a historic decline in imports, exports, business investment, household spending, real GDP and market prices. The recovery is also uneven. In other words, we saw some industries bounce back between the first and second waves. The retail industry, for example, started to bounce back much more quickly than some of the other industries. Just how resilient different industries are to this specific type of shock to the economy is very uneven. It requires a lot of exploration, reflection and data gathering.

I remember at that time I was saying, "What is the economic impact of all of this?" I remember in August that I didn't know about this chief statistician report. It was only later that I found it, and I really find it valuable.

There is also historic declines in the labour market activity. There are steep losses in the highest-impacted sectors. We can think about retail, cultural industries, hospitality, tourism and many others. I have that data here as well.

There are also structural challenges in heavily impacted sectors. That impacts the recovery of some of those heavily impacted sectors. It's not only that they had the highest losses, but they also have structural challenges within them in terms of recovering. It's also led to an overall context of business uncertainty, which the report goes into quite a few details about.

This is just the economic impact. Understanding how historic those declines are and how significant and deep the economic scarring was, or the potential for economic scarring, highlights the importance of hearing from Chrystia Freeland, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Understanding that depth of economic impact.... And I'm not even speaking to the health impacts, which are really the most important parts of all of this. I know my colleagues Dr. Duncan and Ms. Petitpas Taylor have spoken to those in previous meetings. I feel just as passionately about those. I perhaps will bring more comments on those at a later time. Because they've focused on those areas, are extremely knowledgeable and have expertise in that area and are very eloquent, I'm focusing on the economic and social impacts in my remarks today.

The other major finding of the report is inequity. If you were struggling or were on the margins before this pandemic, it only got worse. This includes the impacts on women, immigrants, visible minorities, people with disabilities, low-wage workers, youth, and the list goes on and on. There are other groups, but those are some of the main ones that are identified in the statistical data that was provided by the chief statistician.

When I spoke to what was in the throne speech and hearing the evidence and data, you can draw direct links between them. I could create a map if you wanted me to—which I like to do—and I could

draw lines between things and make those associations and connections. This is reasonable. For a rational person and someone who is very much interested in research and evidence-based thinking and policy solutions, this all connects. It adds up. If there was something fishy going on or some other nefarious activity, things probably wouldn't add up so well. They wouldn't make sense. They wouldn't be rational. There wouldn't be all of these very logical conclusions and arguments that could be made.

This is why I think it's so important for me to provide these sorts of rational arguments and draw these connections, because it goes to the heart of what this study is supposed to be about. We're now debating a motion and debating an amendment, which I'm trying to be very reasonable about, when opposition parties keep claiming that we don't want to study this or do that or provide reasons. They're assuming all of these motives. I thought, "We've provided evidence and rationale. We've been transparent. It makes sense, so what do you want?"

I digress on that. Getting back to the point I was making, there are three main conclusions that I drew from the evidence that the chief statistician provided.

The last one is the looming existential threat of climate change. It's not mentioned that way in the report, but what's mentioned in the statistics is just how much environmental services, clean-tech industries, are almost pandemic-proof or shock-proof. They represent massive economic opportunities for a country that's in the deepest economic crisis probably since the Great Depression.

What's interesting is the evidence shows that those industries really represent a lot of hope and opportunity for us, not to mention help us. Not only do they create the economic growth and prosperity we're looking for, after the deep scarring and hardship experienced by Canadians, but they also are the right thing to do. We must think about this pandemic as a wake-up call to the impending climate disaster that will be coming in the near future if we don't wake up and act in the way that Dr. Michael Ryan was speaking to, in the quotation I gave, with the same degree of urgency and immediacy that is required for this pandemic. That's the kind of full court press we need for fighting climate change.

I would say that our party and the throne speech and the data support this as not only being the right thing to do for many reasons, but as also representing some of the biggest economic opportunities for our country. When we say that the environment and the economy go hand in hand, this is why. There is actually evidence to suggest that this makes sense, too.

I want to speak a bit more about the inequities. No, let me say a few words just briefly about the economic impact, because I covered some things that I wanted to say in comments I gave in previous meetings, but I didn't cover everything I wanted to say, and there are quite a few important impacts.

One in particular that I feel pretty passionately about is the level of business uncertainty that the pandemic has created for business owners and entrepreneurs. Just in May 2020, that is, three months into the pandemic, a quarter of businesses had been granted rent or mortgage deferrals. At this point, the number is probably much higher than that, but just think about their being granted mortgage or rent deferrals at the time. This was before we had the rent subsidy. It was redesigned later on and I think worked much better. That was another example of our government's listening and responding to the needs of businesses.

Just having those deferrals add up—and remember, a deferral is a deferral; you still have to pay for a small business....

I was a small business owner for 12 years and helped other small businesses. I've helped more than 250 small businesses start up. I only worked with businesses that had a triple bottom line, ones that believed in social and environmental impact and integrated that sense of sustainability into their business models. That's my specialty.

For me, when thinking about business uncertainty and the impact of this pandemic and the kinds of opportunities it creates, but also about the way our government is responding to it, it's important to understand the kinds of uncertainties businesses are facing—or I should say “were facing” at the time we prorogued.

There's also evidence in the chief statistician's report that says many businesses will be reluctant to invest in the near term, and that means invest in their own businesses. They talked about businesses trying to protect their balance sheets and debt service.

The idea is that many businesses have planned expenditures in their businesses as they made a profit. They put the money back into their business to continue developing. It might be opening new branches, facilities; it could be in HR, personnel. There are all kinds of system improvements and operational pieces of their business that they might be planning in the near future to invest in.

I remember, as an entrepreneur, going from being a sole proprietor to a corporation to a mid-sized consulting firm over 12 years. You did business planning in order to anticipate the growth. Then you hustled to meet these targets so you had enough as an entrepreneur or a business owner to invest back in your business so you could continue to grow and develop and achieve your mission and purpose as a business. Just think about the fact that many businesses were reluctant to plan any expenditure and were protecting their balance sheet by saying, “We're not going to spend any money.” Think about what that says about our economy.

Seventeen per cent had an annual decrease in private sector capital spending as well. Firms sharply downgraded their capital spending plans, so private sector decreased planned capital spending by 16.6%, which is equivalent to going from \$178 billion to \$147 billion. That's only a 16.6% decrease, which seems small at this point. Now, after a second and third wave, I'm sure it's much, much, much higher. I don't have that number for you right now, but I think the chief statistician's most recent update would probably provide a useful comparator for us to understand the trend. For now just know that at the time, in August, it was literally a \$30-billion hit to private sector capital spending. That's huge. There was a 39% de-

crease in planned capital spending for accommodation and food services—a 39% decrease in that industry. It was much greater in some industries versus in others. A 27.2% decrease in capital spending planned for the oil and gas industry is another example.

Also, small service-based companies were disproportionately impacted. Three-quarters of small businesses have taken on debt as a result of COVID-19. I'm sure, again, that number is much higher today, but at the time 75% of small businesses had taken on debt. You can just think about how that's going to impact their ability to recover. Some of those businesses have told me that if we come roaring out of this pandemic with economic recovery, it will be almost a miracle if they can service the debt they've accumulated over the course of the first, second and third wave of this pandemic. That's why I've been a vocal advocate for “COVID zero”, which is an approach that is different from what some of our provinces and territories have taken. I think the Atlantic provinces have shown us the light and the way in terms of managing the pandemic without the continuous open-close, open-close, open-close disruption of our economy and our society over and over and over again.

Anyway, that's a bit of a side note.

I'll go back to the small service-based companies that have been disproportionately impacted. Sixty-eight per cent of those with debt estimated it would take them more than one year to pay that debt off. Again, that was in August 2020. A lot has happened since then. If 68%, almost 70%, would have taken a year to pay off their debt at that time, just think about how many years it's going to take them now. That debt has only gotten greater through the open, close, open, close of our economy.

On new firms and start-ups, again, I was highlighting these before I knew only too well. Since 2015, when the Liberal Party formed government, the number of new firms, so new business start-ups entering the market, was on average 16,500 on a quarterly basis. Every three months there were 16,500 new businesses in Canada from 2015 until the time this report was written in September.

Start-ups account for 45% of gross domestic product, so 45% of the output of our economy is essentially new start-up businesses. There were 88,000 business closures in April 2020 and 62,600 closures in May due to COVID-19. Those were closures, not bankruptcies or anything. Those businesses closed down. That's not to say they necessarily went completely out of existence or folded up, but they closed down.

You can see how many businesses were impacted. There were 100,000 fewer active businesses in May 2020 compared to May 2019. One hundred thousand fewer active businesses—that's unheard of. Think about how many businesses are going in the opposite direction. Whereas we have had 16,500 new businesses being started up in every quarter in Canada since 2015, now we have the reverse direction, which is these 100,000 fewer active businesses in May 2020 compared to the previous year.

I don't know if we can even really fathom.... I spent 12 years working with about 250 businesses, and I can tell you about the work those people put into building their businesses. To have all of that lost due to a public health crisis is just astronomical. It's very hard to fathom the depth of that impact, how far-reaching it is and how much it impacts those family-owned businesses, those individual entrepreneurs and those small partnerships and franchises: so many businesses and good people working their tails off to make a living and to do something they believe in that's often good for the community, good for the economy and good for them at the same time.

Business failures among small firms dwarf the lack of new entrants. Again, the amount of failures in the economy of those small businesses was far greater than any new start-ups during the pandemic.... There's a quote in the chief statistician's report that says, "The pace of...job recovery will depend in large part on the extent to which...companies...can remain viable...". That's on page 66. It goes without saying that if our small businesses make up such a huge portion of our economy and employ the largest number of people in our economy, I would say that they're the engine of our Canadian economy, and if we're seeing that many failures out there or that many closures and not as many new entrants, we're going to have a severe problem that's long term, right?

Our measures and supports that our government launched and were in the throne speech were designed specifically to help the most small businesses get through this crisis. For me, I've heard over and over again that for some small businesses that were family run or run by sole proprietors, the wage subsidy and the CERB were life-saving measures, supports and financial assistance for them.

The work on the commercial rent assistance and how the program was redesigned was done after prorogation. It was something we heard strongly during the prorogation. The small business tenants in commercial properties wanted the support to go directly to the small business owner so that they could pay the rent with resources instead of having it go through a more complex scheme, through their landlord, which clearly wasn't working, although it was a good intention on the part of our government. It didn't work as planned or as well as we had hoped, and it was redesigned promptly. I think it really was appreciated.

There were higher operating costs for many small businesses and definitely weak demand. They were anticipating a weakness in the demand for their services.

This wasn't the case with every industry. Certainly, I know of some examples in my community where some larger businesses did quite well in the pandemic. For the most part, though, the highest impacted sectors and industries and the small businesses that oper-

ate within those really were affected by a weak demand for their services and products.

Also, if they were to operate, they had higher operating costs. They had social distancing. They couldn't service as many individuals or take the volume of sales. There were all kinds of things they had to do to manage or prevent infection, control and operate with health and safety at the forefront, and develop protocols. There was all kinds of extra work they had to do and there were some extra costs for many of them.

Trade flows between the U.S. and Canada were impacted greatly by case numbers. As the case numbers went up and down in the United States and in Canada, they impacted the trade flows between the U.S. and Canada despite the fact that our government, I think, has done a lot of work to try and keep the trade flows between Canada and the U.S. going during the pandemic and to not have major interruptions. There's some evidence in the report to show that the trade flows with the U.S. were impacted by the case numbers of people suffering from COVID-19.

I also want to speak a little bit about the structural challenges in heavily impacted sectors. The transportation and warehousing sector employs a million people across Canada. Fifty per cent of employment is in accommodation and food services. For tourism, 22.1 million tourists from abroad would have come into Canada. Travellers spent over \$22 billion in Canada previously, and spent approximately \$1,640 per trip. That's in 2018. Just think about how many fewer people came into Canada. I think we heard from the Minister of Public Safety back then that travel was down about 98%, if I remember correctly.

Just think about the 22.1 million tourists who would normally come into Canada and all of the economic activity and revenue that would be generated for businesses that serve those travellers, which was estimated at \$22 billion a year. When tourism is down that low, just imagine how much our economy is impacted by that.

In 2001 after 9/11, the airline industry declined by 26%. In 2003 after the SARS outbreak, the decline in the industry was 26%. These were unprecedented numbers for impacts on the airline industry. It was 26% after 9/11 and a 26% decrease in the industry after the SARS outbreak. In 2020 after the global pandemic, decline in the industry was 97%.

Have I made my point clear yet? This is unprecedented. I hate to use that word at this point because people use it so often. I'm sick of hearing it and I'm sick of saying it, but it literally is unprecedented. The evidence is clear. After 9/11, there was a 26% decline in the airline industry. It was 26% after the SARS outbreak, but 97% during COVID-19.

The list goes on and on. I have so much more data and information that I feel like I could speak forever. I don't know whether my other colleagues want a chance to speak, but I have a lot more to say, Madam Chair. I also don't want to dominate the airwaves and not give my other colleagues time to speak.

I want to follow through with my argument, but perhaps I'll take a little break and let one of my other colleagues say a few words. I'll get back on the speakers list to continue my argument because by no means am I finished and I have quite a bit more to say on this matter. I would be grateful for some more time to express my thoughts.

I'll turn it over to the next member on the speakers list. I'm not sure, but I think it might be my friend and colleague Darrell Samson, if I'm not mistaken.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull, and I hope you're feeling okay.

I wanted to survey the committee. Ms. Petitpas Taylor, maybe whatever you have to say will inform me as to what I have on my mind.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I'm sorry, Madam Chair, I did not mean to interrupt your thought.

I'm just wondering if we could perhaps survey the committee members to see what the plan for the day is. Are we prepared to suspend or are we going to be continuing?

The Chair: My question was similar, just so the staff, the clerk and everybody in the room can prepare. They're asking me for direction as to whether the cleaning staff can come in for the next committee. They need about an hour's time, but I don't have any direction as to whether this committee would like to continue past 2:30, which is generally the time that is needed to switch over if the next committee is going to have their slot.

Are there any ideas? Has anybody spoken to any of the party whips? You can maybe give me information.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Ruby, I just put up my hand on this.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I think we're good to go until 2:30. We know that the human resources, skills and social development committee has a very important piece of legislation coming forward, so we want to honour the fact that it needs to be heard today.

I would ask that if we do suspend that we return on Thursday, but also to ensure that we do have coverage because we're continuing to try to make sure all the committees are able to sit. It would be great if we could get this one over and done with, this filibuster. Ryan was saying it's been going on for a few weeks. It's been exactly two months and a few days now. I know we all want to get it over with, so perhaps we can focus on making sure it's done on Thursday, and block out Thursday.

Let's get this done.

The Chair: Okay. I like the ambition and maybe the motivation that's being provided by Ms. Vecchio.

Seeing that it's 2:27, I'm sorry, Mr. Samson, but I feel that giving you a couple of minutes would probably be unfair, knowing how passionate you get when you speak. You would be on the speakers list. We would only be suspending and carrying the speakers list forward.

Perhaps we may have some resolution and votes on these motions or a new path forward, I don't know, but I do encourage everyone in committee, and also in your personal time to try to see if we can find a path forward.

Having said that, I will suspend until Thursday's scheduled time.

Thank you.

[The meeting was suspended at 2:28 p.m., Tuesday, April 27.]

[The meeting resumed at 1:59 p.m., Thursday, April 29.]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. This is a resumption of meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs which started on April 13, 2021.

[Translation]

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

Can you hear me?

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I can't hear anything. There's no sound at all. I heard you, but then the sound cut out. I don't know what's happening.

The Clerk: Mr. Therrien, we'll try to identify the problem.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Are you waiting for me? I can't hear a thing.

The Clerk: We can hear you.

[English]

The Chair: Let's suspend temporarily until we get everybody back on. There's no point in having this recorded right now.

• (39505)

(Pause)

• (39525)

The Chair: We are resuming meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13, 2021.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021, and therefore members can attend in person or using the Zoom application. Everyone today is using the Zoom application. More and more, I'm hearing that the House of Commons administration wants the most limited bodies possible in order to keep our technical professionals and everybody in the room safe. I appreciate everybody joining virtually. It is the safest way to conduct the meetings right now, especially considering the high numbers in Ontario.

I want to remind all the participants that screenshots and taking photos of your screen are not permitted. Everybody in the room knows the drill regarding COVID protocols that they have to undertake, but the chair and the clerk will be enforcing those measures in case anybody does have to go in person.

Remember to put your interpretation on at the bottom of your screen.

We have a speakers list from last time, but the two members who were on the speakers list, Mr. Samson and Ms. Lambropoulos, are not here today, so we have a new speakers list.

We have Dr. Duncan first on the speakers list. The issue that we are still on is Mr. Turnbull's amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion. We've been on this issue for quite some time, so I am confident you are all fully aware of the motion, but I have the motion in front of me in case anybody needs a refresher.

Dr. Duncan, the floor is yours.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I do think my colleague, Ms. Petitpas Taylor, was before me. I'll just see if she would like to go.

The Chair: I apologize. Maybe people have dropped off and I was probably not able to maintain the list as quickly.

Mr. Clerk, were you able to write down a speakers list at this point? Did you see some other order?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I did. I was just copying the same information you saw and so I did have Dr. Duncan, Mr. Turnbull and then Madam Petitpas Taylor, but that may not be the case either.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: That's fine.

I think we'll just start then.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciated my dear colleagues and their speeches, Mr. Simms' and Mr. Long's. I especially appreciated hearing Mr. Simms' expertise on the history of democracy.

I'm just so pleased to have our friend and colleague Mr. Turnbull back, and I'm glad to see he's doing well. I thank him again for his amendment and his important speech, talking not only about the health impacts of COVID-19 but also about the economic impacts.

We're here to debate why it's important to invite the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth to come to our committee and discuss why it was necessary for the government to prorogue to deal with a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic.

We still are in this pandemic. We're in a third wave and we've been in the toughest part.

I'm going to use my time today to focus on the most pressing issue we face as Canadians and explain why I believe my constituents of Etobicoke North and Canadians would like us to do the important work of bringing forward the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. They can explain why it was necessary to prorogue and tackle this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. We can use this time to ask these ministers how the government is supporting Canadians and will continue to do so through this pandemic and afterwards.

We have been at this amendment for weeks. The whole point of negotiation is to find a way through that all parties find acceptable.

We want to avoid arguing but agree to some sort of compromise. Our colleagues across the way put forward a motion. We came forward with an amendment.

Since early March, I have come to this committee and asked every week that we pay attention to what Canadians and our communities are talking about, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping themselves healthy and safe, and keeping their jobs and livelihoods.

Let me be clear. We prorogued because we were in a pandemic. We are still in a pandemic. Week after week, I have shared the number of Canadians sickened by COVID-19, the number of Canadians who have died of the coronavirus, how tired and exhausted our health care workers and front-line workers are, and how in Ontario our hospitals are overwhelmed.

I talk about how numbers of deaths are not just numbers. They're our families, our friends, our loved ones and what they meant to us, and they've left us.

However, even with hearing the COVID-19 evidence, we still have a partisan motion. We're in a pandemic. We were in a pandemic, and we are still in a pandemic and we should hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

Front-line workers in communities like the one I serve expect us to put them first as they continue to go to work to keep the community and country going, yet instead we continue with a partisan motion.

Marginalized communities—

Hon. Peter Kent: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, I agree that we would like to see Minister Freeland and Minister Chagger appear before our committee, but I wonder if my honourable colleague has pressed them to respond to the pre-existing invitation from the committee.

The Chair: I have definitely, through the clerk, pressed them to respond. We have not had a response to that invitation yet.

Dr. Duncan, if you have any other information, you could definitely share it with the committee if you feel that it would help.

Carry on.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will continue.

Marginalized communities, those who are low income or racialized, continue to be hardest hit by COVID-19 throughout the pandemic. Lineups at vaccine clinics in COVID-19 hot spots powerfully show the demands in the community for vaccines and the lack of resources in marginalized communities.

I have come here to be a voice for the people I serve in Etobicoke North. I'm hoping I will not be repeatedly interrupted today for bringing the voice of Etobicoke North to this committee and for bringing science, evidence and fact to this debate on the amendment.

We often hear that this place is so toxic. Building an institution is not toxic; it's how we treat one another. We have a choice every day when we come to committee in how we choose to conduct ourselves. The young people in my life tell me over and over about how put off they are by what is rewarded here. "A good punch" are the words that are used, aren't they? A good punch. Hitting back. Beating back someone into submission. The young people in my life are especially sickened by it during a pandemic when their friends and families are getting sick and, in some cases, dying.

We've all recently put out tweets, statements against bullying and for Pink Shirt Day. It should be the goal for all of us to get many young people, particularly women, involved in politics. When they watch colleagues being interrupted, they're turned off. I hope the interrupting will stop today.

I know colleagues have talked about their first days on the Hill and not being interrupted, so I will just give a little bit of my history.

I left a job I loved at the university doing research and teaching our inspiring and outstanding students in order to serve the wonderful community of Etobicoke North. It's the place where I was born and raised. I had two areas of expertise, pandemics and pandemic preparedness and climate change. Our colleagues across the way are well aware of my background, my pandemic work, as the previous government, a Conservative government, reached out to me during the 2009 H1 pandemic.

I trust I won't be interrupted today for talking about Etobicoke North. The community I serve matters, bringing their voice matters, and their ideas are absolutely relevant to this discussion.

I also trust I will not be interrupted for talking about a global pandemic, a pandemic where Canadian experts were ringing alarm bells for weeks while this committee focused on a partisan motion. We were in a pandemic last summer. We're still in a pandemic, and we should absolutely hear from our Deputy Prime Minister.

I should point out that I'm not just an Etobicoke MP; I am an Ontario MP, and my job is to stand up for my province. Recently the co-chairman of Ontario's expert panel said Ontario's hospitals could no longer function normally, yet we continue with a partisan motion.

Dr. Brown said, "Our children's hospitals are admitting adults. This has never happened in Ontario before. It's never happened in Canada before." Field hospitals are being set up in car parks.

Dr. Isaac Bogoch said the health care system was "already overloaded prior to the third wave, with hospitals still treating patients from the previous wave". I continue the quote:

In many places, for example Ontario, we never really decompressed our intensive care units from the second wave. We had a third wave come in very short after the second wave, so you've got more explosive outbreaks with the variants that also caused more significant illness proportionally compared to the strains of COVID-19 we had earlier.

The trifecta of more transmissible variants that cause more significant illness and proportionately more people ending up in the hospital, rapid reopening that's providing more opportunities for transmission, and a healthcare system that still hasn't decompressed from the second wave really puts us into the mess that we're at right now.

Yet this committee remains focused on a partisan motion. We were in a pandemic in the summer. We're still in a pandemic, and we should hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

Last week the rate of coronavirus infections in Ontario reached an all-time high as hospitals warned they were close to being overwhelmed. Ontario, at last, moved and introduced stricter public measures that were not rooted in science to control the spread of the virus, including closing playgrounds, while failing to move on measures that experts believed could decrease transmission, including paid sick days for workers. I'm glad to see yesterday there was movement in this direction.

One of the lessons of this pandemic has to be that this is a pandemic first and foremost, and that it requires paying attention to science, evidence and fact. It requires politicians paying attention to science, evidence and fact, and listening to experts.

There needed to be an understanding that the variants were fundamentally different. They were more transmissible and caused a higher severity of disease. Responding effectively to a pandemic requires seeing where the cases are going and taking early and preventive action, and not waiting until so-called fires are burning out of control.

Another lesson has to be about essential work and racialization, unfortunately a lesson that we have yet to learn. While many of us had the privilege of working from our bedrooms, kitchens or living rooms, essential workers kept our communities and country going.

Information from last April shows diverse neighbourhoods were hit hard by COVID-19. An analysis done last April shows that the most ethnoculturally diverse neighbourhoods in Ontario, primarily those concentrated in large urban areas, experienced disproportionately higher rates of COVID-19 and related deaths compared to neighbourhoods that were less diverse.

The rate of COVID-19 infections in the most diverse neighbourhoods was three times higher than the rate in the least diverse neighbourhoods. People living in the most diverse neighbourhoods were also more likely to experience severe outcomes, hospitalizations, ICU admissions and deaths, than people living in the least diverse neighbourhoods. In fact, hospitalization rates were four times higher. ICU admission rates were four times higher. Death rates were twice as high. Yet this committee remains focused on a partisan motion. We were in a pandemic in the summer. We're still in a pandemic. We need to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

Data from the City of Toronto last July showed the link between COVID-19 and racialization. The first release of individual level data findings captures information collected from May 2020 to mid-July 2020. It showed that 83% of people with reported COVID-19 infections identified with a racialized group. Yet this committee remains focused on a partisan issue. We were in a pandemic in the summer. We're still in a pandemic. We should hear from the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

More information from the City of Toronto in November showed a continuing picture about COVID-19 and racialization. In November, 79% of reported cases were among those who were racialized, while 21% of cases were among people who identified as white. While 48% of Toronto's population identifies as white, 52% of the city's population belongs to a racialized group. The COVID-19 infection rate among people in Toronto was higher for those identifying with racialized groups. These are appalling numbers.

This information required urgent action to protect those who are on the front lines. In February the chief public health officer for Canada showed that when it comes to COVID-19, it is clear that race matters. The report showed that although race-based data are not consistently available across Canada, local sources indicate that racialized communities are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. For example, surveillance data from Toronto and Ottawa indicates that COVID-19 cases are one and a half to five times higher—one and a half to five times higher—among racialized populations than among non-racialized populations in these two cities.

In April of this year, new research showed that the gap between who needs COVID vaccines and who's getting them was particularly bad. In Toronto, the neighbourhoods with the highest populations of racialized people had the lowest vaccination rates, despite the disproportionate impact of the disease on these communities. Last April data showed that racialized communities were hit hard. Last July it showed the same, as it did in November and, most recently, this spring. This is heartbreaking; it is wrong; it is systemic discrimination. The public health data is there.

More has to be done. Workplaces need to be safer. There need to be sick leave benefits, and vaccines have to go to the neighbourhoods that are on fire. Communities are strong, resilient and they are doing everything they can to fight the virus. It is not okay that in Ontario only one-quarter of the vaccines have been going to heavily hit communities. Yet we have a partisan motion. We were in a pandemic last summer and we're still in a pandemic. We should hear from our Deputy Prime Minister.

Let me be very clear. Collecting data does not mean change. It simply means information was gathered and perhaps collated. Telling a story does not mean change. Data collection must be used to improve lives.

Thankfully, after months of urgent calls about the need for paid sick leave by medical professionals, labour advocates, political leaders and even top doctors from some of Ontario's hardest-hit regions, the government has announced, now, a plan to provide three paid sick days through a temporary program. We'll see what more needs to be done.

I come from a community where people work hard for their family and work hard to make a difference in their community, and they do, each and every day. They make a difference in our community and they make a difference to our country. I come from a community where many people work on the front lines, and they put their health at risk in order to put food on the table and to keep the community and country going.

The community I serve wants us to do real work on their behalf, not be focused on a partisan motion, and yet we have a partisan motion. We were in a pandemic in the summer and we're still in a pandemic. We should hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

Thankfully, we're starting to see some improvement in Canadian case numbers, from a seven-day high of over 8,700 cases on April 18 to over 8,200 cases on April 24 to just under 8,000 cases on April 27. Ontario reported over 3,900 new COVID-19 infections this past Sunday, as the number of patients in intensive care units once again reached a record high. The number of patients in intensive care units and on ventilators reached new highs.

As of last Friday, there were almost 2,300 patients in hospital with the virus. A total of more than 830 people were in intensive care units, and more than 780 patients required ventilators to breathe.

On Monday, over 870 people with COVID-19 were being treated in intensive care units across the province, twice as many as there were at the beginning of April.

Hospitals across Ontario are stretched to capacity amid a surge of COVID-19 cases in the third wave. Ornge, the organization in charge of patient transport, says patients are being moved in record numbers, mostly by its critical care land ambulances, but also by its helicopters and airplanes and with the help of local paramedic services. Between April 1 and April 23, Ornge says 747 patients were transferred to out-of-town facilities to make room for new patients. Seven hundred and forty-seven: To put that figure into context, 209, 217 and 242 patients were transferred in January, February and March respectively.

We're starting to see change. On Tuesday, Ontario reported a fourth consecutive single-day drop in the number of new COVID-19 cases, but the province's test positivity rate remains high. Cases were almost 4,100 on Saturday, almost 3,950 on Sunday, almost 3,500 on Monday and over 3,250 on Tuesday, but the test positivity rate stands at 10.2%.

All of us should be concerned—all of us—about what's happening to Ontarians and what Ontarians have been facing and continue to face, yet this committee remains focused on a partisan motion. Let me be clear. We were in a pandemic in the summer. We're still in a pandemic. We should hear from our Deputy Prime Minister.

I've been raising the COVID-19 pandemic every time I had a chance to speak during this debate, and this committee actually has something it could do. It could study the House of Commons response to the pandemic so that there is better advice for future parliaments when a future pandemic or disaster strikes, because there will be a next time, and pandemic preparedness and readiness is a constant. There is no beginning, no end and no peacetime.

In 1918, the Spanish flu sickened half the population. Churches, governments and ministries closed. Private buildings were pressed into service as hospitals. Losses to businesses were staggering. I'm going to quote from a speech I delivered often and around the world in the early 2000s about pandemics predicted and past: "All countries will be affected. Widespread illness will occur. Medical supplies will be inadequate. Large numbers of deaths will occur. Economic and social disruption will be great. Global economic activity could weaken. Supply chains could fail. Once a vaccine is ready, who gets it? Health care workers? Essential service workers? At-risk groups? After a pandemic, millions will be affected in profound ways. From depression to the loss of friends and relatives to financial loss resulting in disruption to business, governments, society and corporations will have to ensure financial, psychological and social support for affected families, companies and the rebuilding of society."

Does it sound familiar? The point is that we have learned the same lesson time after time, most recently after the H1N1 influenza pandemic of 2009, yet instead of doing what is required, namely, to be prepared for next time, we remain on a partisan motion.

We were in a pandemic last summer. We're still in a pandemic. We should hear from the Deputy Prime Minister. Let's not make the same mistake. Let's learn from this pandemic so that we are better prepared going forward. Instead of focusing on politics, we should be focused on learning from the pandemic. It should be part of this committee's work to review any pandemic plan that existed for the House of Commons.

I don't know if there was one. Was there one? We had officials here. I asked if there was a plan. They didn't know. Was there a plan? Who drafted such a plan? Who was consulted? Who signed off? Who was the plan communicated to? How often was it reviewed? What did the cases look like here in the parliamentary precinct? Who was affected? What lessons have been learned to date?

Those are important questions. It's this committee that should be asking them, and it is this committee that should be driving continual improvement of any pandemic plan for the House of Commons.

Pandemic preparedness cannot be so-called hot for just a few years following a pandemic. It has to remain on the agenda. Science, research and public health have to remain on the agenda. It has been said we remain with a partisan motion. We were in a pandemic in the summer. We're still in a pandemic. We should hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

It is very clear that in 2020 Canada faced an unprecedented time in Canadian history. We were facing the worst pandemic since 1918. If we look back to 1918, tens of thousands of Canadians died. In Montreal the demand for transporting coffins was so great that

trolley cars had to be converted to hearses that could carry 10 coffins at a time. Eight cabinetmakers worked around the clock in Hamilton, Ontario, to keep up with the demand for coffins. Undertakers would take one casket to the cemetery and hurry back to the church to pick up the next. In Toronto funerals were allowed on Sunday. White hearses for children became a common sight.

No one knew what this pandemic would bring. It was a novel virus in 2020.

Let me be very clear. Our very special Etobicoke North community is focused on the pandemic and getting through it. They are focused on their health, their safety, their jobs and their livelihoods, yet this committee remains focused on a partisan motion.

We were in a pandemic in the summer and we're still in a pandemic. We should hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: I want to raise the issue of repetition.

The Chair: Repetition of what, today's piece?

Mr. John Nater: That's about the 16th time Ms. Duncan has said the exact same thing. She's on the verge of relevancy on a lot of these points. Let's get back to the motion at hand, the amendment.

The Chair: I think it is relevant to say that the prorogation study, all of these amendments, whether it's the first or the second motion, continue the study, but Ms. Duncan has the floor. I find it to be relevant, and I also find it to be also very interesting at this time when there are other studies this committee could be doing. That's relevant to whether the members want to vote one way or another on the motions that are before the committee, so I think I still find it within the realm of relevance.

If she is emphasizing a point by repeating it in her speech, that is for effectiveness and emphasis. That's a style that some speakers use when speaking so, I don't think that alone could be called repetition.

I'm finding all this information very interesting. I don't want to bring my riding into it, but I have to say that my riding's test positivity rate is 22%, so that 10% rate that Kirsty was mentioning.... We're at 22% in my riding, and it's very concerning to me, so I'm finding this information interesting.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, could I speak to that point of order?

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair—

The Chair: We'll have Mr. Turnbull and then Mr. Kent.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just want to speak to Mr. Nater's point of order.

I think repetition is a well-known rhetorical device. It has been around since the Greek Polis, so it literally is part of our democratic history. The Sophists use it. I'm sure Mr. Nater has used it from time to time as well in his speeches.

I don't think it's very fair to interrupt Ms. Duncan on the basis of repetition. I think she's emphasizing a very important point that she feels passionate about, and I would appreciate it if the member were to respect the fact that she's, I think, making a really valid argument. I certainly feel passionately and strongly about her words. The repetition in there is the emphasis, and I think that's important.

The Chair: Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent: On the matter of relevance, I think all members of the committee should remember that if the motion had been passed on February 23, we would have heard the witnesses and we would indeed be dealing with other issues of substance.

The Chair: That's a good argument that you make, Mr. Kent. Perhaps now that Ms. Duncan has the floor back, she could probably, if she wishes to, answer. I guess that's an issue of debate. That's a debate that I guess the other members would have to satisfy you on.

I'll give the floor back to Ms. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all of my colleagues for their questions.

I would just like to say that it is a very hard time in Ontario. Madam Chair, you're right. The average test positivity rate is 10.8%, but in some communities those numbers are much higher. My heart goes out to everybody who has worked so hard, who has put community and country before themselves—our front-line health care workers and our essential workers. As I've said, we were in a pandemic in the summer and we're still in a pandemic. We should hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

I was fortunate to be part of a very special Zoom meeting on Saturday with our Sri Lankan Tamil seniors of Etobicoke to celebrate Tamil new year but also to bring people together virtually to hear about their experiences during the pandemic and to talk about the importance of getting vaccinated.

How many times have I raised seniors and long-term care? Canada has the worst record for COVID-19 deaths in long-term care homes out of all wealthy nations. In Canada, between March 2020 and February 2021, more than 80,000 residents and staff members of long-term care homes were infected. Outbreaks occurred in 2,500 care homes. Ontario experienced the largest increase in excess deaths at 28%, while B.C. had the smallest, at just 4%.

That's what my community cares about. My community cares about knowing that we are doing everything possible to protect our seniors, those who helped build this country. We had an absolute tragedy take place last spring in long-term care homes. That tragedy was repeated in the second wave in long-term care. This should not have been a surprise. Infections, whether it is influenza or gastroenteritis, strike quickly in long-term care homes.

Provinces had warnings. They saw what happened in Europe before COVID-19 hit here. Ontario was aware as early as March 2020

that 98% of COVID-19 deaths in Italy had involved elderly people with pre-existing health conditions. That risk should have been recognized.

Yesterday, we heard from Ontario's Auditor General that the province's decision to delay implementing mandatory measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in long-term care homes may have contributed to the devastating toll. The province initially provided to long-term care homes direction on infection prevention and control in February 2020, but it was framed as guidance. It was ultimately up to home operators to decide what actions to take to protect the elderly, frail and ailing residents. By the time an emergency order was issued in early April, requiring that all staff and essential visitors wear masks, there had already been 500 confirmed cases among residents, almost 350 confirmed cases among staff and almost 100 deaths. It would take another two weeks to issue another emergency order restricting staff from working in more than one home. That order came nearly a month after officials in British Columbia took similar action.

In light of how quickly COVID-19 spread in long-term care homes, every day that implementing mandatory requirements was delayed made a difference in the effort to control its spread. That sickens me. There was warning, and not enough was done. There was not clear direction. Actions were delayed, and the necessary inspection to make sure that homes were complying with containment measures was not done.

Instead of focusing on a partisan motion, we should be talking about what Canadians care about, that we need to do better next time because there will be a next time. It is time to write this report on the study, to move on to being better prepared for the future. That's the job of this committee. If there is not a way to go forward, like my dear colleague and friend Mr. Turnbull, I believe we should be inviting the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Youth.

Just as I've been doing since the beginning of March, I will ground my remarks around the pandemic. The issue is the number one concern of Etobicoke North, the burning issue for our country and the world, one of the two global crises the world is facing, which of course are COVID-19 and the climate.

Let me talk for a moment about what is happening worldwide with COVID. Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to intensify. It's—

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

I realize, just like Ms. Duncan, we are all very concerned with this, but we are going further and further each moment. Instead of talking about the fact that we didn't close our borders, they were talking about long-term care homes and what the provinces were doing. Now we're talking about international things.

This motion is about prorogation. It would be as if we're talking about the budget. It's a big thing, but I really question how far off we're going to go when it comes to relevance. I do believe questions should be relevant when we come here. I've questioned the relevance for the last 10 minutes. I find we're so out of the realm of what we're talking about, even from two months ago. At least two months ago we were talking about the motion. Now it's just whatever we can put in to fill in time.

I'm asking that we get back to the motion on prorogation. By the way, I have not heard the word "prorogation" in the last hour, so I'm wondering if we're going to start talking about the motion.

The Chair: I'll remind the member to link all her remarks to the issue at hand, prorogation.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Absolutely, we prorogued. There was a pandemic. We were in a pandemic last summer. We're still in a pandemic, and we should be hearing from our Deputy Prime Minister.

I do think it's important for this committee to understand the context, and I will make two points here. Cases have been rising internationally for nine straight weeks. Deaths have increased for six straight weeks. We're all seeing what is happening in India. It's beyond heartbreaking. Yet this committee remains focused on a partisan motion. We were in a pandemic last summer. It's the reason we prorogued. We're still in a pandemic. We need to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

Public health measures have restricted many parts of life. They work. They save lives. Vaccines are giving us all hope, but vaccines alone will not end the pandemic. We have the tools to bring this pandemic under control in a matter of months, but only if we use those tools consistently and equitably.

This past Sunday a World Health Organization adviser, Dr. Peter Singer, a Canadian, had a message for Canadians. He said that dawn is coming. His comments came on the heels of soaring COVID-19 case counts in Canada, which had peaked at over 9,000 daily in April. As I've talked about, Ontario has faced a crushing third wave with record-breaking daily cases and ICUs stretched to their limits. Dr. Singer says it's the darkness before the dawn.

There is really no question that the situation in Canada has been very tough and that many people are suffering. I want to bring it home. This pandemic is the worst global public health crisis in 100 years. We were in a pandemic last summer. We prorogued because we were in a pandemic. We continue to be in a pandemic and we should hear from our Deputy Prime Minister.

This is a few days old, but over 11 million vaccines—I think it's much higher now—have been administered in Canada. Dawn is coming, but we have to keep maintaining the public health measures, the masking, the physical distancing, avoiding poorly ventilated indoor spaces. While this is some light, we have to keep maintaining public health measures, but this committee remains focused on a partisan motion. Again, we prorogued because there was a pandemic. We're still in the pandemic and we should be hearing from our Deputy Prime Minister.

Here at home, Ontario continues to struggle. Ontario made a formal request to the Canadian Armed Forces to help deal with the surge in critical care cases associated with COVID-19's third wave. A spokesperson made the request for assistance from the Canadian Armed Forces and the Canadian Red Cross. In addition, we're looking for health human resources, logistical and operational support—and the military will help—yet this committee remains focused on a partisan motion.

I heard from my honourable colleague that we haven't mentioned prorogation. I've mentioned it over and over. There was prorogation because we're in a pandemic. We continue to be in a pandemic. We absolutely should be hearing from our Deputy Prime Minister.

I will just finish by saying that no matter what Canada does here at home, there's a much bigger issue that could impact the real end date of the pandemic, and that is vaccine equity. It is the challenge of our time, and while my colleagues don't seem to be interested, this international—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, on a point of order, I really respect the member but now she is talking about vaccines.

If she is going to talk about things at least let there be relevance. She is talking about a debate that's probably taking place in the House right now because we're talking about the lack of vaccines right now.

I really want to get down to the relevance of this motion. As Mr. Kent noted, this started on February 23. We have now wasted 10 weeks of our time, probably about 35 to 40 hours. Every single person who was on that motion on February 23 could have been here in the committee and already given testimony. We would have already written this report. We probably would have already tabled this report but now, after two and a half months, we continue to just sit here and talk about it being a partisan motion.

Yes, there is a partisan motion because it is coming from a different party and not from the Liberals. It is a motion that has been put forward. There is a reason for prorogation and the Prime Minister, in 2017, indicated that he wanted to be responsible and accountable to all Canadians. We have asked for his presence, as he changed the Standing Orders in 2017, and to date we have not seen him, nor have we had a reply. Even with Mr. Turnbull's motion, there has not been one single person, including the Deputy Prime Minister, whom the member continues to refer to, has not had the courtesy to respond.

Perhaps one of these members can pick up the phone and call the Deputy Prime Minister and ask what the hold up is.

Thank you.

The Chair: I understand your frustration, Ms. Vecchio. We've definitely been going down a very long road. Perhaps we can have a vote on the amendment at some point and reinstate those individuals. It would give me something to work on as well, to try to get those witnesses before us. I would like nothing more than that.

Ms. Duncan, I guess you were wrapping up your remarks and perhaps at this meeting today we'll get to the point Ms. Vecchio would like to see.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Absolutely, Madam Chair. Thank you.

I wasn't here on February 23. Of course, I was in mourning.

The point I was making about vaccine equity, we have to tackle this globally and right now the vast majority of vaccines are going to high- or middle-income countries. Only 2.2% have gone to low-income peers.

We have rapidly spreading variants. There has been inconsistent use and premature easing of public health measures, fatigue with social restrictions and dramatic inequity in vaccine coverage. All have led to an alarming spike in new cases and deaths.

Madam Chair, I have been speaking at length. I thank my colleagues for their attention. I thank them for allowing me to bring the voice of Etobicoke North to talk about the pandemic here in Canada and particularly in the province where I am a member of Parliament. I'm glad I was able to bring science, evidence and facts to this debate.

I will pass the floor to one of my dear colleagues.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Duncan. I appreciate that and your passion for science and, of course, facts.

Mr. Turnbull, you are next.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I want to acknowledge my colleague Dr. Duncan for her incredible advocacy and work in the past and her incredible remarks that always focus on what I think Canadians want us to be focused on, which is the global health crisis that we're all struggling through together. I think she's pointing to the many lessons that we should be learning and the incredible amount of work we've done, but also that we still have ahead of us, because I know Dr. Duncan knows full well that this pandemic is not over, and I would just....

I really wish that we could focus on studies and motions that use our time to focus on what Canadians most need right now.

I've been arguing—and I may repeat myself a little for rhetorical emphasis as well, Ms. Vecchio. I hope you don't mind. Again, I studied ancient Greek philosophy. I know the roots of democracy that come from that and, in fact, repetition is a rhetorical device. It's been known for a long time—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Turnbull, I think you meant that little shot for Mr. Nater and not me, so maybe it is not directed to the right person.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Nater didn't have his camera on so I wasn't sure whether he was listening.

Mr. John Nater: I was listening, Mr. Turnbull. I too have studied the ancient Greeks and political philosophy and public administration and political science and parliamentary procedure, so I would love to see a debate relevant to the motion at hand, which can be quickly disposed of so we can get to the work of this committee rather than filibustering for over two months now.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Well, wonderful. Buckle up because I have quite a lot to say.

I hadn't finished making my argument in our last meeting, but I ceded the floor to one of my colleagues because I felt I was slightly dominating the airwaves and I don't like to do that. I believe that everyone on this committee deserves a chance to express themselves. We're all equal members of Parliament. We all represent constituents who have points of view that are exceptionally important to us, and it is our job to express those points of view.

I have made an argument that is directly relevant, Mr. Nater, to the amendment that I put forward. I've been making it for multiple weeks.

As you know, I was away for a short period of time due to sickness, but I'm glad to be back so I can make my views known.

My argument is building. Each of my speeches and remarks builds one on the other. Like Ms. Duncan, my colleague whom I respect and admire so much, I really believe in science, evidence, facts and research. I believe in making rational arguments and I've mapped out my logical argument.

I took enhanced logic way back when I was in my undergrad in philosophy. I use it every day because I think it's really important that we understand the logic behind the arguments that we make and that when we come to debate, we actually debate things in a way where we're willing to be influenced by each other's point of view. I think that's the very heart of democracy. Dialogue, actually, and dialectics, which is the heart of democracy, is that we approach truth through an open debate process, whereby the principle of sufficient reason actually is the principle that we all subscribe to, where we approach the truth together. Although we disagree along the way, we express varying perspectives that differ, but that we give up something every step of the way.

Compromise is built into the very art of debate, but we don't see that in many of our debates, especially on this committee. We see, as Ms. Duncan said, partisanship over truth, over facts, over reason. I really feel strongly that what I've put forward as an amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion was really an attempt to compromise. It gives you something. It gives the opposition parties something they wanted, i.e., I've left in the Honourable Bill Morneau and the Kielburgers to be reinstated to the committee, who I don't really feel need to be brought to the committee, to be honest, but I left them in as a bit of an olive branch.

The two ministers that Ms. Duncan spoke eloquently to wanting to hear from—and it's very intentional that they were left in there—are the honourable Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland, and the honourable Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Bardish Chagger. There are very good reasons those two were left in there. Before I get into that, I want to summarize the argument that I've been making.

I'm glad you are here today, Mr. Aitchison. I don't know if you've been at PROC this time around, but it's great to have you and I'm glad you're here to hear the summary of my overarching argument.

My colleague Mr. Amos is also here, who hasn't been in attendance on this committee as far as I recollect. It is great to have you, Mr. Amos. I know you're a real advocate for the environment and climate action, among many other things. I have such respect for you. I will be making some remarks related to that.

I think this pandemic has taught us something about the inequities in our society and the deep economic impacts we need to recover from, but also the opportunities that we have to build a stronger economy that's more sustainable and helps protect our planet while hopefully protecting us to some degree from more incidents and public health crises like the one we're going through now. I think climate change can be linked to the incidence of communicable disease and I know that pandemics could be far more frequent in the future as the climate warms.

I won't go there yet because I want to summarize my argument. I'll make a few points and then I'll go into more depth and detail. I hope Mr. Nater hasn't tuned out and is still listening.

First of all, I want to say that our government has been more transparent than any government in Canadian history when it comes to prorogation, okay? I've said this, but I'm saying it again. I am repeating myself, because I don't think it has sunk in for some folks out there that we've tabled a report. Our government, in the past Parliament, actually is the one that changed the Standing Orders to require a report to be tabled in the House of Commons to explain the rationale for prorogation. That was the first time in history this change was made to the Standing Orders, and it was done by our government.

We prorogued, which hadn't been done in the entire term of Justin Trudeau's Liberal government, whereas it was done four times, I think, in Stephen Harper's time. When you think about it, we only used prorogation for a very good reason and we complied with the rule change to the Standing Orders, which required a greater degree of transparency. We provided a rationale and a report—a significant report. I've read it. I'm not sure whether every member on the committee from the opposition parties took the time to read it carefully, but I certainly feel that, based on their remarks in the past, they haven't really assessed it on its merits. I think there are merits to that report.

There are also merits to be given to the testimony of our government House leader and the many others who came before this committee, as we, the Liberal members on this committee, agreed to do a study on this very topic. It wasn't required for us to do that. We agreed to that. We allowed opposition parties to call witnesses. We

all had a chance to scrutinize the testimony of those witnesses, ask them questions and make our arguments.

Now, what we have at the end of this, despite the willingness on our part and the commitment to that level of transparency, and no real argument that the opposition has made against the merits of that report or the testimony, a presumption that somehow there's some ulterior motive that is political in nature. This seems to be the driving force behind Ms. Vecchio's motion. I feel very frustrated by that, because I think we've made major improvements. There are so many other things to focus on. We've been more transparent than any government in Canadian history when it comes to prorogation, and still that's not enough.

Still that's not enough, so what more does the opposition really want here? What really is the driving motive behind the motion that Ms. Vecchio put forward? I would say that the WE Charity issue has been studied over and over again at other committees. Ms. Shanahan has been involved in some of that and spoke in our last meeting about how that work continued even after prorogation. There's really no reason to go on another fishing expedition in this committee, PROC, which is, I'm told, the mother of committees. I think we have other really important business to attend to.

All that said, in an effort to compromise and give a little more opportunity to extend this study and have a few more witnesses attend and give testimony, I put forward an amendment that I thought was very reasonable, and still there's no movement. It's partisanship over science and evidence, and over facts and information, in a global health crisis the proportion of which we have never known in our lifetimes, in a hundred years. We say it's unprecedented. I've said this before. I hate using that word these days because it's just so overused, but it really is something that I never thought I would live through or experience in my lifetime, to be honest.

My parents, and even my grandmother, who passed away this year during the pandemic, never lived through a crisis like this. Really, we have almost no.... Although we've learned a lot from other outbreaks that have happened—the SARS outbreak, Ebola, etc., and other communicable diseases that I think have taught us things—we really haven't learned the lessons.

We don't have any real memory of the—I know it's called the Spanish flu, and that's probably not the right term to use. I know that it was named and there's probably some controversy around that. Maybe Ms. Duncan can speak to that at a later date. She probably knows infinitely more than I do about that. I'll just refer to it as the Spanish flu for the moment. I know that's incorrect, so my apologies to her for all her astounding work in the area.

I want to get back to my argument, which is that we prorogued Parliament. There's that word, “prorogation”, that Ms. Vecchio was looking for, so this is relevant to prorogation. Prorogation was done at a time when doing so made complete sense. It was absolutely rational for a government that was working at full court press for many, many months in a row to reassess and re-evaluate between the first and second waves of a pandemic. That makes sense to me.

In addition, during the process we went through, as I've said, we didn't sit around and do nothing during that time. There was so much work and consultation that was undertaken during that time. There were interdepartmental meetings. I personally participated in something like 15 to 20 different consultation sessions, some in my community with constituents and some with caucus, the various caucuses we had, and those all informed a new Speech from the Throne. When you look at that Speech from the Throne—and opposition parties have stated over and over again that there's nothing of substance in the Speech from the Throne. I've heard them say this over and over again, and I wonder how anyone can say that.

I've done a full analysis of it. The last time, I actually outlined about 15 or 20 themes and parts of that throne speech that are unique, that were not there before and that were context dependent. In other words, they were grounded in the public health crisis. They came out of that, and they're supported by evidence, research, and consultation work that was done. It wasn't as if they came from nowhere. They came from the very process that was undertaken during the time of prorogation.

Again, this seems to be common sense. As I have reflected on it over and over and over during the time we've been debating this, I have come to the same conclusion. I'm very much a critical thinker. I studied philosophy for eight years in university. I have taught it around the world. I'm a critical thinker. I criticize myself just as much as I do the opposition members or anybody else. Reflecting deeply on this, I still can't find any reason to really support the opposition's intended motive or the narrative that they seem to be adamant about trying to boost or prop up at all costs.

Here's the main point, though, that I want to make. I've made this over and over again. It's repetition for emphasis' sake: if a global pandemic is not a good enough reason for proroguing Parliament, then nothing is. Nothing is. Literally, I can't think of a better way to say it than that. I've reflected on it over and over. Stephen Harper prorogued twice, once in 2008 and once in 2009, and he claimed that the recession at the time, so the shock to the economy of that recession, was his reason for proroguing not once but twice to re-evaluate and assess the impact on the economy and work on the plan to help the country recover.

What I've maintained and I've argued and I have ample evidence for—piles of evidence for, Mr. Kent—is that this pandemic is at least 10 times worse in terms of economic impact than the 2008-09 recession was, at least 10 times. That is based just on information that was available in August 2020. At this point, we've gone through the second and third waves, which were much greater than the first.

I'm using information that's based on the time when prorogation actually happened, that was available at that time, to demonstrate to you that the government in power, which I'm very proud to be a part of, was using that information to inform decisions that were made about what appeared in the throne speech, what then appeared in the fall economic statement and what then appeared in our 2021 budget.

Again, when you can draw direct links, logical links, rational links that are based on evidence and consultation across Canada, to the things that appeared in the throne speech, how can anyone even

maintain the claim...? How can any rational person maintain the claim that there's nothing in the throne speech that justifies reasons for prorogation? It makes absolutely no sense. It's nonsensical. It's absurd. It's absurd, given the evidence that we already have.

So, why are we here? Why are we doing this? There are at least four other motions in this committee that my colleagues and I have put on notice that we could be doing and which are significantly, exponentially and infinitely more important than this staring in the rear-view mirror.

I quoted last time a highly respected doctor at the World Health Organization, Dr. Michael Ryan. He said that we just can't afford to be staring in the rear-view mirror. We need to be ahead of the curve of this pandemic. Curve after curve, wave after wave, we, as Canadians, have been behind. We're not in front. Dr. Duncan said this so eloquently, but I believe it wholeheartedly, too. We are behind the curve every time. We need to move faster.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Agreed.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay, great. Let's move on, then, Ms. Vecchio. Let's move on. Let's drop the motion—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: [*Inaudible—Editor*] the whole time. Agreed.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Are you withdrawing your motion? No? Okay.

I thought that maybe I had convinced you. It was a vain hope, I guess.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, on a point of order, if the offer from Mr. Turnbull is that we dispose of this motion, then let's have the vote right now. I think we've heard enough. Let's move on. I think it's only the Liberals who have been participating in the debate. If they're eager to get on with it, I think we're ready to go. Let's go.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Mr. Nater. I appreciate your points, as always.

I do have a little bit more to say, though, to fill out my argument. I've highlighted some of the architecture of the argument, some of the main features of it, the sort of beams, but I want to build out with some of the material that I've prepared to substantiate claims.

I don't make claims to things that aren't based on evidence and fact. Certainly, occasionally I would put my opinion into my argument and perhaps overextend a little bit—I'm only human—but, in general, I would re-evaluate if someone contested that.... I would think critically about what I said and try to find out whether my opinion was something that was based in facts and evidence. Then I would revise my opinion, if I found that it wasn't substantiated by facts and evidence.

Again, this is literally the heart of democracy. I think if we lose the sense of the pursuit of truth, then our democratic system will suffer dramatically over time. This is why I speak out against disinformation coming from the opposition, which I've seen over and over again. I cannot stand by and let the public be intentionally misinformed—at least, I feel—in many cases.

I'm going to go back to my argument.

Mr. Kent, the main point of my argument is that the global pandemic, in terms of economic impact, is at least 10 times greater than the 2008-09 crisis or recession. It's almost a blip at this point compared to what we're living through today. For me, when I think about it, the evidence that's out there is supporting the fact that this pandemic is greater, and exponentially greater, in terms of impact.

I see this through the sustainability lens, so I'm looking at the economic impact, the social impact and the environmental impact, and thinking about how we recover from this; and how, at the time of prorogation, the government took some time to re-evaluate and reset the agenda so that it could really understand these impacts in a fulsome way and come out with an agenda that focused on the needs of Canadians. I think that process was rigorous. It was authentic. It was genuine. It was evidenced, informed. There was a lot of listening that was done. It was true to what I believe is good and responsible governance.

In terms of the economic impact, the depths of the economic impact cuts are uneven across industries, which I've said before. We've seen remarkable declines in output from the economy—five times greater in August 2020 than in 2008-09. We've seen historic declines, in all economic activity. The recovery has been uneven across industries. There have been historic declines in labour market activity, steep losses in the highest impacted sectors. There's an overall context of business uncertainty. This is where I went into more detail last time. Then, there are structural challenges in the heavily impacted sectors that are limiting them from being able to recover from this pandemic at the same rate. There are many examples that I have of this impact.

Last time, I went into depth on the heavily impacted sectors and some of the statistics on those. However, before I go back to some of those thoughts and remarks and some of the evidence I've gathered, I would like to outline the rest of my argument.

Notice that there are deep economic impacts that are unprecedented, and I've covered sub-points there that support that. This also provides a rationale for why the Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister would be a good person to have appear before this committee.

Really, if we're entertaining that and the extending of this study, when it comes down to it, I don't think it's completely necessary because, as I've argued over and over again, the evidence stacks up in favour of the explanation we've given being sound, rational and well supported by evidence and data.

I am again saying that if there were a need to gather some additional testimony or have some additional testimony at this committee during this study, the Minister of Finance would be one of the most appropriate individuals to have before us, because who better than someone who has been studying this and has a whole ministry that is responsible for understanding the depth of economic impacts? For that reason, I really think it would be great to have Chrystia Freeland, the Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister come before the committee.

My second major claim is that there have been social impacts during this pandemic. I outlined a whole bunch of those many meetings ago, but I also have a lot more equity issues, inequities

that the pandemic has caused. I shouldn't say that it caused inequities, because those inequities preceded the pandemic, but it exacerbated many of them. It highlighted them in a way that is unignorable at this point.

We cannot go back to the same systemic barriers that racialized minorities in this country have faced for generations. We cannot go back in terms of the hard-fought gains won by the women's movement in this country. We cannot afford to allow women's equality and equity and full participation in the workforce to be hindered by this global pandemic. We need to address these structural and systemic inequities that are present, and there are many more of them. I'm highlighting just a couple.

We've seen that there are unequal impacts on Canadian workers. These create challenges for robust and inclusive growth. Visible minority groups were at much higher risk of work stoppages during the first wave of the pandemic, but also, I think, in succeeding waves. There has been an unequal impact on low-wage workers far greater than in 2008-09. There are long-term effects of COVID-19, depending on the degree to which layoffs become permanent job losses. This is just part of it, but it really highlights the unequal impacts on Canadian workers.

There's another point that I would like to make related to equity. Immigrants and visible minorities have been the hardest hit. There is the September 2020 report on the the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, which is a six-month update. Again, I'm using data from the point in time that I think would have been most relevant at the time of prorogation and would have informed the throne speech. It only included data from March through to August, I believe, the point being that the data shows, I think, that this would prove over and over through updates that have been given by the chief statistician of Canada to this report.... I haven't gone back and done the comparison, but I do have the other reports. I just haven't had time to go through them, but if this debate were to persist, I could always do an analysis.

I'd be happy to do that, because I feel that this is an opportunity for me to learn, to be a better member of Parliament and to be able to advocate for my constituents and in fact all Canadians by understanding the depth of the social, economic and environmental impacts of COVID-19. I should say "and/or" opportunities, because I think that with some of this what we can see is that these challenges and this crisis have shown us that there are opportunities to address the systemic issues that we have in this country.

I think that's why folks, like my colleague, Mr. Amos, and his work as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, are so important to me, and inspiring. Our ministry, under his leadership and Minister Champagne's leadership, and Mr. Bains' before him, is really looking to build back better and find innovative solutions that are market based and that leverage our strengths and deal with inequities.

They launched the 50-30 challenge, for example, which I was over-the-moon excited about. It encourages much more diversity, equity and inclusion within all organizations and employers across Canada. People can voluntarily sign up for that challenge, to ensure that at least 50% of the workforce is represented by women, especially in management and board level positions, ensure that there's upward mobility in those companies and organizations for all women, but also for 30% to be from equity-seeking groups.

I think workforce diversity is something that, if we can get more employers to be voluntarily signing up for this program that was launched.... Based on evidence and research that's come to light during this pandemic, there are these massive inequities across our economy, and we need to address those inequities.

It's great work. It's great to have you here, MP Amos, with much love and respect for you. I'm really, really glad that you're here.

I'm going to get back to my argument.

Immigrants and visible minorities have been hit the hardest. They have been disproportionately represented in jobs with greater exposure to COVID-19. I've covered a little about this in the past. The hospitalization rate is much higher. I think four times higher was the amount that I recollect—I have the notes somewhere here—and the mortality rate was two times higher. Again, it's tough now.

The chief statistician's report talked about this being double and triple jeopardy for visible minorities and immigrants who are working in many of the lower-wage jobs and front-line essential services. Visible minorities were more likely to work in industries that have been the worst affected by the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 on immigrants' employment could reverse gains made in recent years. These are conclusions that were drawn from that report.

Immigrants and visible minorities are more likely to face harassment and stigma as a result of COVID-19. This is unacceptable to me. When we see the increased incidence of anti-Asian racism and anti-Black racism in our country, it breaks my heart. We cannot let this happen.

This is the result of a pandemic that has disproportionately impacted certain groups, and other portions of our society are blaming those groups and taking their frustrations out on those people. Honestly, I could cry over this. It breaks my heart when I think about those people, who have already been marginalized and excluded, systemically, in many ways, who have been on the front lines, who have taken the health risks, who have been in the lowest-wage jobs, and whose gains in our economy will be jeopardized by this in years to come.

They're the ones who are experiencing an increased incidence of hate, violence and stigma. I don't even know what to say. It's just appalling. It's appalling on so many levels. How much are they expected to take? How much are we going to let this be a reality, a lived experience for those people in our country, our precious country, our Canada, our home?

That's not my country. I don't believe in a country that fosters hate and intolerance. I won't stand for it. That's for sure.

I know my colleagues here won't stand for it. We've got to do a lot of work on this, and I think it requires systemic or system-level change.

That's what my life has been about. That's what my whole career has been about: how do we work collaboratively towards system-level change? It's like a concert with many instruments playing and resonating at the same time, because we have levels and layers within our society and its complex systems.

I am dealing with the motion because this fits into the architecture of my argument, so I'm not sure why Ms. Vecchio is interrupting me, but go ahead, Ms. Vecchio.

We can't hear you, though.

The Chair: You're not plugged in.

We still can't hear you, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Got it.

Madam Chair, although I respect where Mr. Turnbull is coming from in talking about systemic racism, as well as the information regarding women, I have a point of order. I'm looking at what we're actually studying. We're studying prorogation.

I want to inform him that because of prorogation, two studies, one on systemic racism and policing that was started in spring 2020 has yet to be tabled. They're still working on that because prorogation put a two-month stoppage on it. In the status of women committee on July 7 and 8 as the chair, there was the plan to be tabling the status of women report on what has happened to women during this pandemic. It talked about child care, domestic violence. Once again, because of prorogation, we could not do the final steps of interpretation because of prorogation. Once again more studies have been delayed.

I believe because of prorogation, we've made this worse and longer because the studies we had done on these really key issues that we saw in the first three months when we studied, not in PROC, but in status of women and in public safety.

Perhaps the member could get back to relevance. If he wants to talk about these things, he should keep in mind that due to prorogation, some of these studies have yet to be tabled, and the government has actually delayed work on racism.

I want him to note that and maybe get back to relevance.

The Chair: I think the relevance that Mr. Turnbull has been pointing to is that a shift was made after prorogation when it came to the throne speech.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, I question that because those are two studies that we're in the middle of. If he really wants to determine the government and our committees were working on this before prorogation, these were two of the significant things that were being worked on, both in public safety—

The Chair: I agree with that point. Part of your point of order—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: This is not a part of what's new. These are things that we were dealing with beforehand. Perhaps he can get to the relevance of the motion on prorogation and why we still have not heard about these witnesses coming. He's talking about two other committees that were prorogued as well, where things were delayed just like in this committee.

Let's talk about this committee and stop talking about the work that got delayed because of your government. If you want to talk about why your government prorogued and delayed these reports, go for it, but please stop patting yourself on the back.

The Chair: I think part of your intervention is a point on relevance, and in terms of relevance I do think Mr. Turnbull has been linking it back to the reasons for proroguing.

Part of your comments are debate as to what cons have maybe come out of that as well, so I guess the debate portion is not really a point of order, but Mr. Turnbull could address it if he pleases.

I'll hand the floor back to Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'd be happy to address Ms. Vecchio's comments, as always.

I was actually getting to the main point or conclusion from the many—

Where did Ms. Vecchio go? You don't ask a question, and then disappear if you want an answer.

Oh, she's having trouble with her camera, I see.

What I was saying was that because immigrants and visible minorities were hit the hardest, which is a conclusion made by the chief statistician in the report that was produced right before prorogation, that information directly guided some of the work, and the themes that were in the throne speech.

If you remember, when I last spoke at length, I gave you, Ms. Vecchio, many examples of things that appeared in the throne speech which addressed systemic racism. Maybe I should go back and just repeat that, since perhaps you didn't seem to recollect.

There's action being taken on online hate and collecting disaggregated data. There's an action plan to increase representation in hiring and appointments in the public service. Steps are being taken to acknowledge artistic and economic contributions of Black Canadians. There were justice system reforms to address systemic racism and training for police and law enforcement. As well, one I'm very happy to see that was in the throne speech was about inclusion and diversity in public procurement.

Those were all things in the new throne speech that were supported by the evidence I'm citing from the chief statistician, and that is being worked on by our government. I have many examples, actually, if Ms. Vecchio would like to hear them, of what our government has actually been working on that relate to addressing systemic racism, which came—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, on a point of order, do I get to answer? He asked if I wanted to hear them or not. Do I get to respond? The answer would be no.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Why did you ask the question then? You asked the question, and I am answering your question, and you don't want to hear the answer.

With all due respect, Ms. Vecchio, you don't seem to be interested in the arguments, the facts and the evidence. That's one of my main arguments I'm making here today. I feel pretty confident that even your [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] is another signal that you don't care about the facts and the evidence.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, on a point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, is it a point of order or debate, because I think it's going to a point where we're not using the Simms protocol to—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: We're definitely not using the Simms protocol.

I really appreciate Mr. Turnbull, but please don't question my work ethic or what matters to me. That is really wonderful. That's lovely. However, no personal attacks are necessary.

I am happy to hear you speak. You asked a question of whether I wanted to hear it. I responded with a joke, because do you want to know something? Listening to this stuff for over 40 hours has been a joke. You guys have just continued to talk and talk and talk, and yes, some of the stories have been really interesting, but come on, guys. Stop talking about how everybody has messed with the plans of what's going on in this committee.

The only people who have been filibustering have been Liberals. This five minutes that I'm wasting of my time right now is because we can't get to a motion. Perhaps there would be better discussions if you actually proposed something that was actually going to get something.

We have been working behind the scenes, as you must know, Ryan, but you guys haven't changed things. Perhaps you should get more involved with the leadership and you would find out that nothing's changed.

I got stuff back. I've been very actively working on this, Mr. Turnbull. Please do not question my integrity, because that's probably the one thing I have going for me.

Let's stay relevant, okay? Let's question ourselves. Why are we still on this filibuster? Let's also recognize that you guys are the ones talking and not us.

If you wish to move on and get business done at this procedure and House affairs committee, then let's get it done, or if you want to continue to play political games, as you have done since February 23, keep on talking.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, you have plenty of things going for you, and not just your integrity. Hopefully, no members will question each other's integrity on this committee.

As chair, I appreciate your reference to the work you've been doing behind the scenes, which is much appreciated, and will hopefully get us to some resolution soon.

I'll hand the floor back over to Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to Ms. Vecchio for her comments. I didn't at all mean to question her integrity. I was questioning the authenticity or genuineness of the question she asked me. When I was undertaking to answer that question and provide evidence and examples to substantiate what I was giving her as an answer, she promptly interjected that she wasn't interested in hearing that. It seems a little disingenuous to me when you ask a question but you then don't want to hear the answer.

That's all I'm saying. I'm not questioning your integrity as a member of Parliament, nor would I ever do that, because I don't believe in what are called *ad hominem* arguments: attacking the person rather than the argument. I can disagree with you and the things you say, but I would never disparage you as a human being because I respect you and I value you.

There's a big difference. I think Ms. Duncan talked about that and about bullying and the way in which we operate and conduct ourselves. I believe strongly that debate and differences of opinion and perspective and arguing about things from different perspectives make us all better and smarter and make our democracy work, but I think it has to be done with an authenticity to getting to the truth and to working together on our shared and common interests as Canadians. That's where I think perhaps we get snagged sometimes when parties or individuals put partisanship over progress.

That's how I'm feeling. I'm not saying that others have to share that perspective, but that's my perspective, and I'm allowed to express my perspective. In fact, it's my job, and to do so is also, as I've learned, a privilege that I have as a member of Parliament.

Getting back to my argument here, I was saying that immigrants and visible minorities are more likely to face harassment and stigma. Also, the evidence the chief statistician put together shows that at the time—I'm not sure, really, whether this has changed at all—the trend was that immigrants were more concerned with the health impacts and they were more willing to take precautions and follow public health advice, given the statistics at the time, but they were also less likely to get the vaccine. There was a higher degree of vaccine hesitancy among that segment of the population, statistically, at least, from the data that was gathered at the time. Again, this was relevant in August 2020.

There was also a huge amount of evidence that showed immigrants and visible minorities were overrepresented in low-wage jobs that were at risk of replacement by automation. This is another trend that I was shocked to see. I'm sure that some of my other colleagues perhaps know more about this than I do and know the true extent of it, but many of those low-wage jobs were at greater risk of being replaced by automation.

Again, for immigrants and visible minorities, the compounded layers of vulnerability and inequity they experience are so much greater than they are for many other Canadians. Again, I'm not saying that to disparage any other segment of the population at all. I think it's the reality that we have to acknowledge this coming out of this pandemic and to work towards corrective actions and solutions that help to address these massive structural inequities. They weren't intentionally done to anybody, but they're ways in which

our economy and our systems function that perpetuate injustice in our society.

Again, to go back to the point of prorogation and the argument that I'm making, it is that these inequities are another reason, and a very substantive reason, for why the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth would be the most appropriate person to testify at this committee.

Ms. Vecchio, you can't say that this isn't relevant to the argument and the amendment that I've made, because it is. I mean, it's backing up why the amendment's focus is on those two ministers and why they would be the best politicians to come before this committee to testify as to those inequities that we've experienced, and I think they would be best to fairly represent the extent to which that's a reality across Canada, given their portfolios.

I want to move on now to the third major point, which is the environment, which I noticed was highlighted in the chief statistician's report. It was highlighted more as an opportunity for economic growth and resiliency, which was interesting. There are a few trends here that I think are important for us to keep in mind. I'm going to get to the main conclusion that I want to make, which is something that was said by several opposition members way back that really bothered me. I won't let it go, ever, because it really struck me as something that, again, was just untrue.

They claimed that the build back better message was nothing more than a token phrase, that it had no meaning. For me, as I've said and claimed over and over again, it has a hugely significant meaning for our economic recovery, for building a Canada that works for everyone and that's inclusive, equitable, just, fair, resilient and sustainable. That's what I stand for. I would work my whole life towards that vision. I feel very passionately about that, so I won't give that up, and I won't allow other members to claim that this is some empty phrase, because I feel so adamantly that this has so much meaning for us as a country.

On build back better, yes, we could change the phrase and market it in a different way. I don't care about that, but on the underlying meaning behind it, I subscribe to that, and the vision that it represents to me is something incredibly inspiring for us to work towards as a country, as I think our government is committed to. That's why I'm proud to be a member of the Liberal Party.

I can't let that go. I won't stand down. I won't give that up, because it's so important to me and, I will say, important to my constituents. I have many constituents who want to see us build a sustainable economy. I get people coming to my office and calling every day with ideas. They know me as someone who's interested in those innovative solutions that have social, environmental and economic impacts. They're interested in seeing us be a leader on the global front and leading the way.

Anyway, to go back to my argument, digitalization is a trend that was documented in the chief statistician's report, and it's driving structural change in all our industries. Employment growth was seen in the digital economy and in clean tech and environmental services, solutions and protection. It's interesting to look at that. The growth was pretty stable and significant. I'm sure my colleague Mr. Amos will be able to speak to this, if he wants to. I associate him with being a great champion for our environment in his role as a parliamentary secretary. I relate all of these innovative solutions around this as something that he is very passionate and knowledgeable about, so I hope that I'm not assuming too much, Mr. Amos.

Also, digitally intensive industries have higher growth and rates of innovation. This is another conclusion that was made based on the evidence and statistics in the report that I keep referencing. Also, teleworking and the prevalence of that was another major area that was highlighted.

Obviously teleworking increased significantly. People are working from home, but what's interesting to note is the share of businesses with at least 10% of the workforce that were teleworking doubled from 16.6% to 32.6%. Again, this is as of August. A greater number of businesses had at least 10% of their workforce teleworking, and one-fifth of businesses expect 10% of their workforce will continue to telework after COVID-19.

That was back then, so that trend has continued through wave after wave of COVID-19. Teleworking capacity is greatest in industries such as finance, education, professional services, information and cultural services and public administration. It's interesting to look at digitalization. It really does not equal jobs, and it's interesting to think about how automation is replacing low-wage jobs, and teleworking is allowing higher-income earners and families to be able to continue working in a pandemic or any other type of crisis.

Again, think about how the inequity is perpetuated by these two trends that we see within our economies, digitalization and teleworking. If you're a lower-wage worker, you're much more at risk of having your job replaced by automation and if you're teleworking, only those who are in higher-income brackets are the ones who are able to telework.

I also want to substantiate my argument around the environment and clean tech a little more as a key growth opportunity. I have a climate activist in my community who communicates with me all the time about every step we take. He was one of the founders of Pollution Probe and is the manager of sustainability at the region, or was, until he quit out of protest because our local region wasn't doing enough, in his opinion, to address the climate disaster that has long been predicted.

He reminds me that our government's work on climate change and climate action is progressive. It's increasingly ambitious, but it's not enough yet. We have to do more. We have to push ourselves and I think we're going to continue to do that. One of the things that he reminds me of is that we can't just look at.... We've said over and over again that the environment and the economy go hand in hand, and I do believe that's true. I believe the economy can grow when there are significant under-recognized or under-leveraged opportunities right across Canada to grow our economy and address climate change at the same time.

What he reminds me of constantly is yes, but it's just not about that. It's not just about growing the economy. We can't see addressing climate change as just embedded within the same economic model. We have to address it with the immediacy of a global crisis. What's interesting about that is, and I come back to what this pandemic is teaching us and has taught us, and it's we can't be stuck looking in the rear-view mirror. We have to be ahead of the curve and truly make progress on these global crises that we know are coming. Climate change is coming. Climatologists have been telling us the same story for 30 years. We're headed towards a wall. We are staring in the rear-view mirror and we can't afford to do that anymore.

This pandemic is teaching us to be resilient, to adapt more quickly, to change our systems and the way we work. It is teaching us to be more collaborative and more responsive and to listen faster and be attentive to the movements bubbling up from the grassroots and to be able to catalyze that momentum more quickly into direct action that's supported by all layers of government.

The pandemic has taught me that we need to do a better job of that. That's going to take a lot of work and a lot of transformational leadership, which is not the same as organizational leadership.

The chief statistician's report documents that the growth potential is highest in clean electricity, clean-technology goods and services, research and development in this space, construction services, and support.

I have all kinds of examples from my community of entrepreneurs and businesses that are doing great things. A gentleman has started a business that has created, essentially, a battery pack that attaches to your electrical panel. It can be hooked up to a solar panel on your roof. It will store energy to run your entire house and to get you through a blackout period for two to three days. If there was a natural disaster of some kind, you would be able to run your entire household.

I remember back when I was in university in Ottawa, we had the ice storm and it took out all the power lines. We had no power and heat for over a week. It's no big deal compared to what we're living with today, but I remember it was pretty shocking for people to live through. This gentleman and his business have come up with this great solution. It also saves people money because they can run off their battery pack during peak times when there's peak pricing. That's the type of pricing we have in Ontario. I'm not sure about other provinces. It's a really helpful energy retrofit to a home, for example.

There are so many other examples of great work that we can be leveraging. Ontario Tech University is in the riding beside mine, which is in Oshawa. Whitby is beside it. Almost 50% of their student body is from Whitby. I think I got that wrong; I might have overstated that. Anyway, there are a large number in some of their programs. They have partnered with a bunch of organizations to develop a battery cell centre of excellence where Canada can become a leader in developing advanced battery cell technology.

This is a really big thing when you think about what's ahead of us and how we need to electrify almost our entire use of electricity. We have to electrify cars. We have to electrify everything. We need renewable energy to be the source that we use to generate all electricity. That transition is going to take quite some time. I think solutions like the ones I'm talking about are things our government is looking to support.

Going back to the chief statistician's report, 3.2% of GDP overall is a fair amount. It could be more, for sure. Clean electricity makes up 40% of the GDP in the overall sector, so that's good. ECT—I guess it's the term used for this industry—offers 320,000 jobs across Canada. The jobs are relatively high paying and highly skilled. Of those, 92% are full time and 8% are part time. The average annual wage for ECT jobs is almost \$75,000, whereas the national average is \$53,000. Two-thirds of ECT jobs employ workers with some post-secondary education. Of these jobs, 72% are taken up by men and 28% by women.

I think this is a real problem. It's a problem that again points to the inequities we see. Even in the areas where we've identified growth opportunities, we need to also be looking at how we can further women's equality—and equity for all equity-seeking groups, in fact—to take part in the new green economy, which I'm passionate about building.

Again, I think these opportunities have been well documented. I'm sure the Minister of Finance, given the budget and the \$17.6 billion that has been dedicated to this in many respects in the current budget.... To speak to those investments, and how the evaluation and re-evaluation of our agenda at the time of prorogation led to all these things, I have to acknowledge that some of this stuff was not entirely new, because our government had committed to many of these things prior to prorogation. But I think there was a lot of re-evaluation that was done and a lot of lines that can be drawn.

I definitely have more to say, but I think I've made my case for the moment in terms of why I think we need to build a sustainable economy, and why I think the amendment I made is more than reasonable, that prorogation was completely rational and justified. The outcome of prorogation was a new agenda, represented by the throne speech, and then built on through successive steps afterwards. I think that is all very consistent with what our government, our House leader and our report that's been tabled in the House and referred to this committee have said. I've tried to justify why I think the Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister could be reinvested to this committee to testify and why that makes sense, given the context and the rationale, as well as the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. I think that's rational.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time you've afforded me. I appreciate being able to make my remarks and my argument, and to back it up with evidence.

I won't apologize for repetition. I did repeat myself a couple of times, but it was purely for emphasis' sake, just to make sure that members, opposition members in particular, don't forget. Repetition is a rhetorical device that's used to emphasize and make sure that human beings, who forget things or sometimes don't listen.... All of us are naturally inclined to occasionally tune out. I think repetition is a good device. It makes things stand out in people's memories.

I hope I didn't repeat myself too much, but I did feel like it was necessary to drive home my argument.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

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

I'm going to cede the floor to Mr. Amos as he's new to our committee. I think he has some thoughts he wants to share with us.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Amos, welcome to procedure and House affairs. I know you've been here for the last several hours now.

Go ahead. The floor is yours.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

What a privilege to join you today.

[Translation]

I hope we'll have the opportunity...

[English]

The Chair: Oh, no, Mr. Amos....

Mr. William Amos: Is the audio not working?

The Chair: No. Your voice is echoing. It sounds like you're going, "It's nice to be here today, day, day, day." It's the same thing that—

Mr. William Amos: Oh, no, no, no....

The Chair: I don't think that was even a joke, but that was interesting.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, it's Justin, the clerk of the committee.

We should suspend. We'll try to resolve the issue again, but it's not clear if we'll be able to resolve it expeditiously.

The Chair: We'll have a short suspension, then, to resolve it. If not, unfortunately we'll have to go to the next speaker.

• (39725)

(Pause)

• (39735)

The Chair: Next on the speakers list is Mr. Amos.

Mr. Amos, I think your problem could be intermittent. It seems to be resolved at the moment. Hopefully it doesn't re-emerge. You can start, and we'll have to stop you if it does occur again.

Go ahead. The floor is yours.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the committee for welcoming me today. This has been a very interesting discussion already.

I want to note my appreciation for MP Turnbull and MP Duncan, whose learned and helpful comments I think are advancing the conversation around this amendment.

I'd like to start from a place that will lead into my comments around the pandemic and prorogation and the importance of this amendment. I want to start with the land recognition for the Algonquin nation on whose territory I sit here in the small town of Chelsea, Quebec.

[Translation]

It's a well-known fact across the country that Parliament, of which the House of Commons is a part, in the National Capital Region, is situated on unceded traditional land of the Algonquin people. Of course, all of us acknowledge the importance of the indigenous peoples, with whom we have a very special relationship. In the context of this pandemic, it's very important for me to greet the Algonquin people and rightly to recognize it, if only because we have learned a great deal from that people during this pandemic.

[English]

When we discuss prorogation as we discuss the amendment brought by MP Turnbull, which contemplates the bringing forward of two exceptionally important witnesses to help the public understand the relevance of a parliamentary reset at this critical juncture of Canadian history, it's important to understand how each of our communities is experiencing this moment.

MP Duncan did a fabulous job, I thought, of bringing the voice of her constituents forward to this committee to help us appreciate the importance of the amendment in relation to our constituents.

I would like to do the same, starting with the experiences I learned from with the Algonquin communities of Kitigan Zibi and Rapid Lake. These communities, along with so many, have been turned upside down and had to fundamentally reconsider what it is to be in a community, to provide security, safety and adequate health services to their people. That is what we're doing across the country. That's what we have been challenged with since day one, on that fateful day the pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization back in March 2020.

I think it is germane to the conversation of prorogation and to our government's desire to take a step back, assess the broader needs of the country, be accountable and step forward with a Speech from the Throne that would be reflective of that particular moment.

As we, as members of Parliament, have reflected on our constituents and their experiences, we've had the opportunity to bring this information back to the government. Certainly in the context of the communities of Kitigan Zibi and Rapid Lake, it has been very helpful to our government to understand the distinct experience they have had.

I'd like to underscore how particular it is on many first nations reserves across Canada. It is so particular because quite often the provision of health care services is a partnership between the community, health care professionals and the Government of Canada.

This is certainly the case in the Algonquin communities that I represent—whether it's in relation to the procurement of vaccines and the distribution of vaccines to these communities, whether it's in relation to the procurement and distribution of rapid testing in these communities, whether it's in the procurement and distribution of personal protective equipment. On all of these health care fronts, there have been distinct conversations that have been very challenging at times, because the communities recognize that the danger they face is a distinct one.

There are many elders whose knowledge of the culture and the language and whose health circumstances are so threatened. It doesn't just threaten human individuals and family members, which is tremendously serious, but it literally affects the nation. One can count the number of fluent Algonquin speakers—not on two hands, of course, but they do not number in the thousands, and many of them are older and most vulnerable.

These are the circumstances in which the conversations have come up around what the next steps are, what the needs are, and how we are going to move forward as a nation, as a Canadian nation, as an Algonquin nation. These are the kinds of conversations that have come up.

I have been particularly blessed to have the learning opportunities with my colleagues Chief Whiteduck in Kitigan Zibi and Chief Ratt in Rapid Lake as they have, themselves, struggled and wrestled with the implications of this pandemic.

There have been outbreaks, and those outbreaks have caused great consternation among the members of the nation, far and wide, and in communities that may not have been suffering an outbreak, because there are so many families that are connected in the language tradition, which is so linked.

I think we can all appreciate, as distinct members of Parliament representing different regions, that the lived experience of every Canadian through this pandemic has been one that is unique and distinct. Each one of us has a particular voice that is so important to bring forward, whether in the context of this standing committee or in relation to the government's broader performance.

Therein lies the relevance of the prorogation process, of that reset, that stock-taking—the ability to come together, assess, and project a vision forward that satisfies and maintains the confidence of the Canadian people. That, to my mind, was the fundamental significance and importance of prorogation.

I think the witnesses whom MP Turnbull prioritizes for this motion are altogether the appropriate witnesses. I'm not going to get into the partisan dimensions of it. At the end of the day, this committee is the master of its undertakings. It can determine at a later point if further witnesses may be needed, but I think it would be a great start to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister and finance minister and from Minister Chagger. They can shed important light on what was going on in the run-up to prorogation, and certainly we now have the benefit of hindsight. MP Turnbull spoke to this in the latter stages of his commentary. We are all well aware now of the chain of events that started with prorogation and then went through the Speech from the Throne, into late November and a financial update, and then through the budget process, culminating recently in the federal budget.

All of these critical elements ensure that Canadian views are incorporated into a governance plan that makes clear what the government's priorities are and are not, which I think leads Canadians to an appreciation of how their values are or are not being reflected in the government's priorities. I think we saw some very important things in the Speech from the Throne pursuant to that prorogation, which made it very clear that the government did want to take a series of significant steps forward in a series of significant new directions that Canadians needed to understand clearly, that they needed to appreciate and assess in relation to their own priorities.

I know that my constituents in the fabulous and vast riding of Pontiac wanted to have their say. They wanted to convey their pre-occupations, because they had lived, as we all had, through six months of pandemic—a lifetime of pandemic, it felt like, at the time—and they wanted to know where our next priorities were.

I can think of no better witnesses than those proposed by MP Turnbull. I look to the Speech from the Throne. I look back with hindsight and I see so many distinct priorities that did require elucidation through that Speech from the Throne to ensure that Canadians were being brought along in understanding where our government was going. For example, I don't take it as a given that every constituent of mine in the Pontiac was aware of our government's priority of reforming the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. I don't take that as a given at all. It was important to indicate clearly that this was a direction our government was going to go in.

If I take a further step back, because I would like to return to that theme of clearly identifying to the Canadian public priority areas where our government was going to move forward, I think it's important to recognize that the government was in a situation where there was a pandemic to manage as the number one priority, and everything else was going to be secondary. That's what the Canadian people expected.

The economic challenges associated with the pandemic were to be another top priority—understood—but Canadians such as my constituents in the Pontiac, whether they're from small towns in the upper Pontiac like Chichester, L'Isle-aux-Allumettes and Sheenboro—tiny places, some of them, of 200, 300 or 400 souls—or whether they're in the suburbs of Gatineau, which I also represent, also sought assurances.

They sought assurance from our government, and clarity in direction from our government, around our ability to not fall victim to

what Mark Carney referred to as the “tragedy of the horizon”. In my riding, we sometimes like to say it's being able to walk and chew gum at the same time. Some people like to text at the same time as they do those two things.

The point is that they wanted to know that we would be able to manage a pandemic and cope with the economic struggles that so many are facing, whether it's small businesses, workers, distinct sectors or family units. They wanted to know that we could cope with the immediate crisis related to health and the economy while still being able to focus on the future and while maintaining our gaze on those issues that are top priorities for the country at any point in time—issues such as climate change. We all know the climate change crisis is not going away. We all know it's real. We all know we need to bring measures forward to deal with it.

The whole purpose of the prorogation process was to ensure that focus, that clarity of direction, and that ability to indicate exactly how we were going to deal with the pandemic. The fundamental approach that the Prime Minister adopted since day one was to stand behind all Canadians and to have their backs. It was also to be able to progress on files of significance that have a relationship with the pandemic but may not be strictly the pandemic and the economic recovery.

To go back to that logical sequencing of prorogation—the Speech from the Throne, the fall economic update, and through to the budget—we now have that hindsight, of course. We can see clearly the purpose of prorogation being to clearly outline these priorities.

MP Turnbull was very kind to point out a passion that he and I share, and that I know so many of us collectively share, around environmental protection. The Speech from the Throne was abundantly clear. In fact, there was an entire section dedicated to the new and stronger directions our government would be taking on a fact-first basis, on an evidence-based basis, to address climate change and to tackle toxic regulation.

[Translation]

I'd like to continue along the same lines and discuss the prorogation issue and its impact because I consider this discussion very important.

One of the impacts of the prorogation was the new plan to address climate change. That plan had been promised in the Speech from the Throne. Late in the fall of 2020, two months later, we delivered the most detailed plan in the history of Canada, one that outlines historic investments and combines industrial policy and economic transformation with environmental protection.

A few days later, we introduced Bill C-12, which is designed to create an accountability framework for the implementation of the federal plan and the objectives to which we have committed internationally.

There followed a budget detailing historic investments and planning by milestone years. There is the net zero accelerator of the strategic innovation fund, but several other things as well. However, now isn't the time to discuss the budget because I don't want to stray from the subject covered by our amendment. What I'm trying to do, however, is demonstrate the unifying theme of Bill C-12, from the prorogation process and Speech from the Throne to the climate change plan and fiscal investments to ensure climate change accountability.

International targets were recently revealed in an announcement that our Prime Minister made together with President Biden. We can see how the prorogation helped clarify the direction in which we as a government want to take Canada. It's essential that we show where we're headed, how we'll get there and through which processes and consultations. All that was revealed thanks to the prorogation.

I think it would be of vital interest for this committee to have an opportunity to hear the observations of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in particular and to ask her questions. The prorogation has obviously helped more clearly shape the direction in which the government would like to take Canada in a pandemic context.

[English]

I appreciate that we are now in a third wave and Canadians are looking to today, looking to tomorrow, and they want to know when they will be able to get back to normal. If they haven't had their first vaccine already, they're looking forward to it. These are the conversations, which are future-oriented, that Canadians want us to have, because they know we prorogued Parliament at the end of the summer so we could reset, get ourselves aligned, project forward our priorities, not fall victim to the tragedy of the horizon, be able to focus on the here and now, on the medium term, the long term, and that's exactly what has happened.

Canadians are now past that moment of the Speech from the Throne. They have absorbed it, and by and large I believe they have appreciated it. Certainly in the riding of Pontiac I've heard some very positive feedback. They have absorbed the fall economic statement. They are aware of how our government has gone through the process of procuring vaccines and distributing them to the provinces, and they are now witnessing before their very eyes the great lift, the massive acceleration. They're optimistic and wanting to focus on the future. I think we're all wanting to focus on the future.

I think that Canadians are also recognizing that the prorogation process ultimately, as MP Duncan so rightly pointed out, is fact-oriented, evidence-driven and, above all, science-focused. I tip my cap to MP Duncan for her incredible leadership, not just during the pandemic but well prior, putting in place the building blocks of scientific institutions in our Canadian governance system that have greatly assisted this government.

We need only look at the significant contributions of our chief science adviser, Dr. Mona Nemer, whose consistent advice, both to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, is there because of MP Duncan's solid work as Minister of Science in our previous mandate.

I take the opportunity to recognize that, as prorogation was being contemplated, our government was in a state of constant review of advice that the chief science adviser was providing, which is ongoing today. Most recently—and this is available for the public and for MPs to review—I would commend to you the March 31 report by the chief science adviser related to scientific considerations for using COVID-19 vaccination certificates, an important discussion that many of our constituents bring forward. I see correspondence on this issue regularly. This issue has been canvassed by our chief science adviser and by the network of Canadian scientists across so many institutions—academic, research and otherwise—who are bringing forward the best possible evidence and considerations as our government evaluates next steps.

Let's step backwards in time a bit to look at some of the important considerations at a scientific level. These all fit into a context of the importance of stock-taking, pressing pause on parliamentary proceedings and restarting in a timely manner, which was done through prorogation.

Back in September 2020, there was a report—again, available on the chief science adviser's website—on the role of bioaerosols and indoor ventilation in COVID-19 transmission. We read about these issues in the news now, but we can't be blasé about the fact that so many Canadian experts in the field of bioaerosols and indoor ventilation came together to work with the chief science adviser to deliver pertinent information that has helped our government in the context of the Speech from the Throne, in the context of the measures identified in the fall economic statement and so on, which have helped define the path forward that our government has chosen.

Back in the summer of 2020, the chief science adviser issued a report on long-term care in COVID-19. It was a report of a special task force that brought forward considerations around the improvement of long-term care. Having been beset by this pandemic for over a year, I think all Canadians will agree that we need our best and brightest non-partisan scientists, researchers, long-term care providers and medical experts. We need them bringing their most clear assessments and their recommended course of action to our government. We needed it then. We received that in the summer of 2020. Through the process of prorogation and subsequent Speech from the Throne, great clarity has been provided in relation to what our government's commitments are to improve care for our most vulnerable seniors.

Prorogation has enabled the consolidation of our best expert thinking and of external scientific expertise being brought to bear in a non-partisan, even-handed way, and of course for discussion with our colleagues and partners at the provincial, territorial, municipal, Métis, first nations and Inuit governance levels.

I think it's fundamentally important that we appreciate what MP Turnbull's amendment is all about. It recognizes that it's a good thing to discuss prorogation. It's a good thing to be accountable to Canadians for decisions related to prorogation and the subsequent pivot into a Speech from the Throne, which was a renewed direction being made clear to all Canadians.

It's so important to appreciate a very appropriate offer of key members of the government's executive—Minister Chagger and Minister Freeland—to be available. I think it would be a good thing for this committee to move forward on the basis as proposed by MP Turnbull. I think it could help bring us to a place where there is perhaps a greater appreciation of some of the items that were incorporated into the Speech from the Throne. These may not have been part of the public dialogue or the set of issues that were being debated through the spring and summer of 2020, when the focus was just so entirely on COVID and the economic ramifications. I think these witnesses are entirely well positioned to discuss this.

Having regard to the way the Speech from the Throne clearly identified.... I referenced this earlier in my remarks and I do want to allude back to this, because it's a matter of current interest and a matter of personal and Pontiac priority. The Speech from the Throne clearly indicated that our government was going to reform the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, which is a law that ensures Canadians and their environment are protected from toxic substances. It ensures that such substances are properly regulated and stringently assessed for their impacts on humans and the environment.

This law has not been amended in 20 years. The Speech from the Throne clearly indicated to Canada that this is where our government is going. We are going to improve it. We're going to strengthen it. We're going to have regard for the experts, and we're going to have regard for the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, which came forward with a committee report in 2017 that incorporated 87 recommendations.

The government said it was moving forward with this, and now here we are, in late April 2021. A couple of short weeks ago, I had the distinct privilege of announcing with Minister Wilkinson the tabling of Bill C-28. It is another instance of our government delivering, in a forthright and very clear fashion, on commitments made in the Speech from the Throne.

Bill C-28 would bring toxics regulation in Canada back to the cutting edge, where it needs to be to protect humans. Again, I'll bring up the metaphor of the "tragedy of the horizon". It's so important that our government demonstrates its vision to look beyond the pandemic and demonstrates to Canadians that we're capable of focusing on matters that ultimately go to our children and grandchildren and to all living organisms in the future. So many toxic substances are persistent and bioaccumulative and have long-term generational impacts.

Bill C-28 was tabled just as promised in the Speech from the Throne and just as enabled by prorogation. I'm sure the two witnesses whom MP Turnbull has proposed would be able to comment on the importance of that moment in helping bring us to the tabling of Bill C-28.

[Translation]

Let me see if I've forgotten anything.

In conclusion, I'd like to note that we've included in Bill C-28 a very important partial reform of environmental rights in Canada. We propose to add the legal concept that every individual in Canada has a right to a healthy environment. Perhaps my col-

leagues from Quebec, Mme DeBellefeuille, in particular—I don't know whether she's still here—know that section 46.1 of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms grants Quebecers that same right to a healthful environment. It isn't provided at the federal level, however, and that's a significant deficiency. We've just included it in Bill C-28.

I know that the citizens of Quebec, more particularly my fellow citizens of Pontiac, Vallée-de-la-Gatineau and Collines-de-l'Outaouais, expect us to guarantee increased environmental protection. They expect us to manage simultaneously the pandemic and resulting economic turmoil, the problems associated with contaminants and climate change and privacy in this digital era. They expect us to be able to juggle these various public policy issues.

And that's what the prorogation has enabled us to do. It has helped us set the record straight and rely once again on various scientific views and evidence that lead us to take action and step up efforts in certain directions. It has enabled us to be accountable to Canadians by telling them where we now stand, what we've done to date and where we're headed.

[English]

I would conclude on a note of appreciation. It's rare to have an opportunity before colleagues to share an understanding of the importance of one particular moment, a moment of prorogation, as a matter of parliamentary procedure. It's rare to have the opportunity to consider a particular moment that of course has important consequences. It stops the business of Parliament and requires a restart.

It's so important to be able to reflect back on that moment and understand the why, and to then be able to shift our focus towards what happened thereafter, why that prorogation was so relevant, and how it enabled where we are now. It's fundamentally important, because where we are now is in a much stronger place, with an economy that is rebounding faster than the vast majority of economists ever expected. We still have work to do. We still have jobs to recover. But month by month, quarter by quarter, the acceleration of our GDP growth is nothing short of remarkable. Don't take my word for it. You just have to listen to the latest pronouncements from the Bank of Canada or any of our major banks.

We're on the right path. We're getting vaccinated. Canadians are optimistic about this summer. They're appreciative of the fact that we laid out a clear path through prorogation and through the Speech from the Throne to deliver on commitments that go beyond health and the economy, to link in matters of environment, to link in matters of indigenous reconciliation, and to link in matters of the transformation of Canadian society towards one that is much more appreciative of the important contributions to our future productivity that bringing in more workers can provide, whether that's through immigration or through a child care plan that can benefit so many people. We have the benefit of hindsight to see what prorogation was all about. It's so much easier to understand why we're in a strong posture now.

Once again, I thank my colleague MP Turnbull for making me feel so welcome, occasionally making me laugh, and making me feel as though we are in this process together. I think we can all recognize that not everyone on this committee is going to share the same views and that we're going to have sharp debates. That is good and appropriate, so long as we all treat each other with common decency and respect, which on occasion has lacked. We know that we are all in this together. Our constituents expect us to work hard together.

Thank you for the opportunity, Madam Chair, and thank you to my colleagues for their patience.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Amos.

Next up is Ms. Lambropoulos.

Welcome to the committee. Please go ahead. The floor is yours.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

It's actually my first time speaking at PROC, even though I have attempted several times to speak at this committee. We always happen to adjourn right before my turn, so I'm really excited to share my thoughts on this with you today.

Today we continue to debate an amendment brought forward by my colleague Ryan Turnbull, which I've had the opportunity to take a look at, as well as the original motion on the floor, brought forward by MP Karen Vecchio.

I want to take this opportunity to comment and add my two cents to the discussion at hand, and why I support the amendment. I apologize in advance if I repeat anything that has already been said, as I have not heard everything that has been said before my arrival. Luckily, I did come in time to hear several of my colleagues at the last few meetings. I agree with a lot of what certain of my colleagues have said.

During these unprecedented times, I think it's completely normal and completely expected that the government would have prorogued Parliament last summer. The removal and replacement of a finance minister, the most important role in cabinet, makes it very obvious why we would need to prorogue and why people needed to set their priorities straight for the year ahead, especially during such unprecedented times. I don't see why we're really continuing to talk about this a year later.

To the first point in the amendment, regarding the removal of point (a) from the motion, I do agree that this would be a good move. It seems to me that the Prime Minister has a lot to do and is working hard for Canadians.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister has truly done his best to assist Canadians across the country since the start of this pandemic. It is extremely important that he continue that essential work, and Canadians want him to do so.

[English]

Frankly, rather than living in the past, Canadians wish to know that the Prime Minister and the government in general are working for them during this time of crisis.

The number of cases in Canada is at an all-time high in some provinces, such as Ontario. It just seems to me that the Prime Minister is probably quite occupied with helping us survive this pandemic and seeing how our government could further help Canadians and their businesses during this time of uncertainty.

I really don't see how requesting his presence for a minimum of three hours, as the original motion proposes, to discuss why Parliament was prorogued a year ago, would be an overall benefit to Canadians. As I mentioned at the beginning, it's obvious, and it should be an obvious enough point. Once again, the finance minister needed time to set her priorities for the year ahead, and that's pretty understandable.

As for the removal of point (e) from the motion, I agree with that as well, with regard to the production of records—as stated in the motion, “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 2020”. In general, I just don't think this is a path that we should want to go down. There's a reason why the Access to Information Act has certain exclusions and exemptions, as it strikes the balance between the citizens' right to know and the need to protect certain information in the public interest.

With regard to cabinet confidences, in order to make important decisions on government policy, ministers meet to exchange views and opinions on policy matters in order to come to a consensus. This decision-making process has an impact on all legislation, including the legislation that has been adopted at a quicker pace, luckily, during this pandemic to bring help to Canadians when they needed it most. For this decision-making process to be fully effective, it is important for cabinet ministers to be able to have full and frank discussions and exchanges among themselves and, of course, to have the assurance that these exchanges will be protected. The privacy of these deliberations is protected by the privilege associated with cabinet confidences.

When ministers are sworn into office, once they've been appointed, they take the privy councillor's oath, which requires them to maintain secrecy of the matters they discuss in council, and I think this indicates just how important these cabinet confidences are.

The Supreme Court of Canada referred to cabinet confidentiality as “essential to good government” and to the inner workings of government:

The process of democratic governance works best when Cabinet members charged with government policy and decision-making are free to express themselves around the Cabinet table unreservedly.

While I understand that in politics sometimes people choose to play games and sometimes they choose to find creative ways to make opposing parties look bad, when it comes to matters as important as this, matters that affect the way government is run—especially at a time when the government has done its absolute best, I would argue, to support Canadians through COVID-19—it seems to me to be completely irresponsible. It just seems that by asking to produce documents that are protected by cabinet confidentiality, that should be protected by this confidentiality.... We have to make the public aware of what the implications of this could be for our country.

Again, our system of democracy depends on electoral, parliamentary and decision-making processes in which political parties and political considerations play a vital role, and these processes require confidentiality in order to function effectively and fairly.

On a completely separate note, in relation to the removal of points (f), (g) and (h), with regard to WE, I have spoken about this on different committees, because obviously at different points this year similar motions have been moved in different committees. It's something that I want to repeat, because it's really important to me in particular.

WE is an organization that I knew as a high school teacher before coming to Parliament. I personally know students who have benefited directly from activities organized by WE. What WE has recently gone through because of politics is completely unfortunate. They really do great work and they've helped thousands of students over many years get really great experience that would prepare them better for their future. At a time when young people are making such a huge sacrifice to help us get out of this pandemic more safely, a pandemic we're still very much in the middle of, they need our support, our help. They need programs to help get them out of the house and into the workforce and into new opportunities that will allow them to grow.

So many of my constituents have told me how difficult it has been to keep their teens at home recently. While schools are open, they're not open for everyone every day. There are often closures of classrooms due to outbreaks within a class or within a school.

Students who have just begun their university experience are doing it from home. I'm sure everyone on this call remembers what university was like for them, what their university years were like, and that they were life-changing. I met most of the friends I have today at university, yet these kids, depending on their age, may never have that opportunity. They'll possibly never get to experience that and they're taking classes online. They're building friendships behind a screen, if they even have the opportunity to do so. Their lives have been significantly disrupted in so many ways, yet we're making this a political issue.

For teenagers, and I'm speaking to this again because I was a high school teacher, the restrictions we're facing have meant months and months—we're past the year mark—of virtual learning, more time isolated from their friends, the cancelling of important school activities.

[Translation]

Extracurricular activities everywhere have been cancelled. Students are following strict rules at school as a result of the pandemic. Even if they go to school every other day—if it's not shut down as a result of the pandemic—they can't enjoy themselves the way they used to. It's a very different life. They're afraid. Most of the students who are trying to obey the rules the government has set are afraid to be at school, but they're there. They're living in fear.

[English]

They are literally living in fear because of this pandemic. They are afraid of getting out of the house. At home, what do we talk about? The only thing we talk about is COVID-19 and how many cases there are and whether or not there are outbreaks in the school. These kids have had their lives changed from one day to the next, and these are extremely important years for them. They're developmental years. This has left them so much more susceptible to declines in psychological health.

The government tried to do a good thing. It wanted to partner with a very well-established organization that was ready to give thousands of Canadian youth leadership opportunities that were so very needed at this time. I was very saddened to see what WE Charity went through for political reasons, sad for a great organization, sad for the young people who didn't get to take advantage of an amazing program.

That's why, more recently, I was so happy about the companies and organizations in my riding that luckily this summer will be able to hire so many students and young people through the Canada summer jobs program, so at least there is a silver lining in some areas. We have some other great plans for youth in the coming year, thanks to budget 2021, so things are starting to look up.

Committees have already seen the Prime Minister, the founders of WE, and pretty much everyone else who's listed in the original motion put forward by MP Vecchio. I don't really see how we would have any value added from a meeting like this or from a study like this.

My colleague Ryan Turnbull has come up with a great amendment that would still allow for some of the questions in the motion to be answered. I can live with that. Again, I don't think it's necessary to talk about the same thing over and over again. I think Canadians definitely want us to be focused on things that are more important, on moving forward on the programs we're going to continue to offer them to help them get past this.

Literally zero of my constituents have reached out to tell me that this is what they want the Prime Minister to spend his time doing right now, talking about last year's prorogation—not a single one of them. What Canadians across this country want to know is that our government is there for them during this pandemic and that we will help them get through it, whether we're talking about supports to businesses, help getting back into the job market if they aren't already, financial support when they fall sick or when they need to quarantine because they've come in contact with people who have tested positive for COVID-19, or getting access to vaccines so they can finally get back to their lives. The one thing everybody wants right now is to get back to normal. Rehashing something from last year just isn't really moving in that direction.

Again, I think most Canadians understood why we prorogued. Even when we prorogued last summer, not one person out there complained to me that we had prorogued. They were very understanding of the fact that it was necessary at the time in order for Minister Freeland to be able to properly plan, with the Prime Minister and cabinet, to see what the priorities were going forward and what types of extra supports they could give to Canadians during this unprecedented pandemic. This is an unprecedented time we've never had to experience in the past, at least not in my generation and not in the generation of most of the people on this call. Canadians want to know we're there for them.

Getting access to vaccines is top of mind right now. I know in Quebec that's the number one thing people are speaking to me about when I make calls during days when I call my constituents. That is the main thing they're concerned about. Today it was announced that people in my age bracket will finally be getting access to vaccines in early May, so I'm really happy about that, and all adults will be able to get vaccinated, at least in Quebec. I don't know how it's going in the rest of the provinces.

I think these are the things that Canadians want us to focus on, and finding out whether or not we're going to be able to supply our own vaccines in the coming year. We've obviously invested a lot of money in our budget 2021 to be able to do biomanufacturing here in Canada. I think those are the most important issues right now. That is what they want the Prime Minister and the government to be focused on.

I don't know how many times I can say it, but I really support my colleague MP Turnbull's amendment to the original motion. If it were up to me, not even that would be done, because I think this committee could be utilizing its time a lot better than talking about this motion and doing this type of study. I think we definitely have a lot more important things that we could be discussing at a time like this.

I just wanted to add my two cents to this discussion. I thank you all for allowing me to speak today.

I may be back; we don't know. Your speeches may inspire me to come back and maybe add more. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos. It was really a pleasure to hear from you.

Next we have Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: Good afternoon, Madam Chair, and good afternoon to my colleagues.

I didn't have the opportunity to do a sound check, so I want to make sure that I'm set up okay for the interpreters. Can somebody give me a heads-up or a hands-up?

The Clerk: You're good, Mr. Long.

The Chair: Yes, you're good.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

It's a pleasure to be back on PROC. I certainly want to thank MP Lambropoulos for her wonderful input and speech. It was uplifting and very thought-provoking. Also, MP Amos, that was a wonderful speech. I don't know if MP Amos is still here. Prior to that, obviously, was my good friend and rookie MP, MP Turnbull. It's great to have him back. His speech was fantastic. His hair looks good. He's on point. As always, it was a very thought-provoking, sincere speech.

We're here again. We're talking about many things, obviously. We're talking about prorogation. We're certainly talking about MP Turnbull's amendment to MP Vecchio's motion. For those tuning in this afternoon and listening with great interest to what their parliamentarians are doing, I've just pulled up a few articles here. I just want to go back a bit:

What is prorogation?

A prorogation of Parliament suspends all parliamentary activity, including all legislation and committee work. This clears the way for a new session of Parliament and a relaunch of an agenda that can only begin with a new speech from the throne.

This clearly has happened.

I think this is probably my fourth or fifth time speaking on PROC. Just let me throw it out there for all of us to consider. The Conservative Party wants us to study prorogation, and that's fair, but just let me quote.... I have a lot to say here. MP Vecchio's motion called for the Prime Minister to come.

Let me quote this:

We are proroguing Parliament to bring it back on exactly the same week it was supposed to come back anyway, and force a confidence vote. We are taking a moment to recognize that the throne speech we delivered eight months ago had no mention of COVID-19, had no conception of the reality we find ourselves in right now.

Who would have thought?

It continues:

We need to reset the approach of this government for a recovery to build back better. And those are big, important decisions and we need to present that to Parliament and gain the confidence of Parliament to move forward on this ambitious plan. The prorogation we are doing right now is about gaining or testing the confidence of the House.

Who said that? Whose quotes were those? Those quotes were from the Prime Minister. That's what the Prime Minister said.

The Conservative party wants to call in the Prime Minister and ask him about prorogation, yet the Prime Minister has already talked publicly about prorogation. He has already answered why we prorogated and why we needed to move forward. We've heard from the Prime Minister.

As I said the last time I spoke, I don't understand what anybody thinks they will get from the Prime Minister, other than what he has already stated. We've heard from the Prime Minister. We've heard from the House leader, who testified right here before committee after tabling a comprehensive report. Those who are looking and saying that government hasn't been responsive and isn't accountable.... That is absolutely not true.

If we had a situation where, as in previous governments that came before 2015, there was a deliberate ducking of the question and avoiding the press, that's fair fodder. That's different. The Prime Minister has already stated why he wanted to prorogue.

Let me compare it to this, for those who say that he shouldn't have prorogued, shouldn't have reset, didn't need to reboot and what have you. Let me bring this to terms that I'm familiar with and that I can deal with.

A typical Quebec Major Junior Hockey League season is 68 games. It used to be 70 games. I actually voted against cutting it back to 68; I wanted that extra home game. Anyway, it's 68 games. Let's just look at the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, the OHL or the WHL. These are the three leagues that make up the CHL, as we all know, to compete for the Memorial Cup, which very sadly has been cancelled this year. Who would think that for two years straight now we wouldn't have a Memorial Cup? We did win it in 2011, as I'm sure you would remember me saying.

However, I'll go back to my point on prorogation. Obviously, you wouldn't call it that in hockey or other sports, but that's what happened in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. That's what happened in the OHL. They didn't continue on as normal. They didn't just say that since they have a 68-game schedule, they're just going to continue to play and not address, change or reboot. No. They prorogued, in hockey terms. They stepped back. They did a reset. They reorganized.

They didn't think they'd be dealing with COVID-19. I'm sure if you interviewed the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League commissioner, Gilles Courteau—he's actually a friend of mine—he would say that when we started the season of 2019-20, nobody knew about COVID. Nobody was dealing with COVID or a pandemic. Nobody understood what it was.

Sure, you can be oblivious. I think it's irresponsible to continue on as if everything is normal and just do what you need to do and ignore the fact that things have changed.

Things did change, and our league did have to reset. That was a responsible thing to do. They reset. They got a new mandate from the owners of the league. They rejigged the schedule, which has unfortunately been rejigged about 20 times now, but that's what they had to do, and they did it.

Again, I go back to this—what would you call it?—amazement by the other side that we needed to prorogue. I'll get to this after,

but I'll compare different instances of prorogation in parliaments back over many, many years and how some were obviously okay at that point, but when we did it in the middle of what I'd call one of the greatest health challenges—one of the greatest challenges our country has ever had, full stop—we need to study it.

I was going through my notes last night and that's when it hit me. What hit me was that the Prime Minister did comment. He did give his reasons for prorogation. As I've asked before, with the greatest respect of course, does anybody really think they're going to get any answers different from what the Prime Minister has already given? No, of course they're not. I can state that clearly for him. He's already stated it. Now, he could say the same thing, but we already know what he said.

The fact that we needed a new mandate, a new throne speech, the fact that we as parliamentarians, as a government, all of us, needed to step back.... None of us knew. Yes, I know I've talked about this before, but none of us were prepared for what we were going to be faced with when we came back to our constituency offices in March 2020—it seems longer than that right now. None of us knew. None of us knew the crisis that all of us, as political leaders in our constituencies, would be facing and would need to be there about.

None of us knew what CERB was—or CEBA, or the Canada recovery benefit and all those benefits that we would have to produce. Again, I apologize for always trying to compare it to the Major Junior Hockey League or my days in salmon aquaculture, but what happened in businesses, leagues and industries across this world was that they had to step back. They had to reassess. They had to sit around tables and say, "Look, we've been dealt something that we didn't expect. How do we plan for this?" How do we come forward with benefits? How do we, as a government, make sure that we have Canadians' backs?

To me, that was a responsible thing for us to do, for every one of us.

Look, we all know how challenging it's been, and we all know how difficult it's been. We all know how tired all of us are—physically, mentally, emotionally—but we needed to prepare and we needed to be ready to respond to Canadians' needs, and we have done it. We're not done yet, but you know what, we have been there for Canadians. When we talk about prorogation and we talk about.... Obviously, all of us, where we are right now.... The fact is that the Prime Minister has already spoken. The fact is that Minister Rodriguez has already testified.

I want to go back to my friend MP Turnbull's amendment. I will not torture anybody by reading MP Vecchio's motion; we all know very well what it was. It was certainly detailed. I'll say that, it was detailed. It certainly had a lot of people invited, production of records and communications, and of course WE was in there, coincidentally. We had to get WE Charity in there to make sure we got another pot—we get the pot, we stir the pot and we throw WE in there, we throw some prorogation in there, we throw some bad government in there and we stir that pot around and hope that we can brew something that's going to be controversial, or something that's going to grab Canadians' interest. No.

It's almost a running joke now outside my office. I'm outside and I have my mask on, of course. I'm safe and I'm socially distanced. I'm out there with my book. I have some notes, and constituents are walking back and forth in the mall. We have a wonderful mall here, Market Square. MP Vecchio has been here, and MP Petitpas Taylor has been here. MP Morrissey has his hands up like he's been here. If you were here, I wasn't here, so maybe you were moonlighting as the Saint John—Rothesay MP. It's great to see my friend Bobby Morrissey, whom I have so much respect for over there in Prince Edward Island. With all those rock star MPs over there, it's like Mount Rushmore. I always look at Prince Edward Island as the Mount Rushmore of MPs. There's Lawrence MacAulay, who has been an MP since about 1925, and you have Wayne Easter, Sean Casey and Bobby Morrissey. I tell you, you have some depth there, man. It's crazy.

Because I want to keep on topic here, I'll go back to MP Turnbull's amendment. I think he did the right thing. He spent time on it. I know he's very collaborative, and he works across the aisle. He's not partisan. He's an MP who, number one, loves his constituents, loves his riding. You can see it in how he operates. We certainly missed him for a week there when he was a little under the weather. It's good to see he has some colour in his face. My screen on the computer probably isn't high-definition, but you're certainly not that pasty grey that you were earlier in the week. You have a little bit of colour, my friend. Your hair is good. That's a good sign.

All that being said, the amendment to the motion.... I can tell that our chair is looking at me saying, "Stay on point." I am going to stay on point, Chair. I'm going to keep it relevant. I want to talk about MP Turnbull's amendment. It's a very fair amendment. I know he did a lot of work on it.

We're renewing invitations to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth. We renewed invitations issued to Bill Morneau, Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger. There's a lot there. This is not trying to sweep something—which, by the way, doesn't exist—under the carpet. It's there. If you got the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland, I can't think of anybody who would have more answers and a higher profile than MP Freeland. But no, obviously, that's not going to work. I know MP Turnbull is disappointed. I think we're all disappointed.

I go back to this. When I did my poll this morning—quickly, but there's a lot of traffic out there going back and forth to Tim Hortons—I was grabbing people and saying, "Look, real quick, give me the top 10 priorities you want me to work on. What are the top 10 things you're concerned about? Give me the top 10 things you

like about our government, or you don't like about our government." I want to hear it all, always.

That's what good members of Parliament should do. They should work with and get feedback from their constituents. They should be open to listening to their constituents. I got a lot of good feedback. Keeping it honest, some I didn't want to hear. You know what? Any feedback is good feedback, because we can all learn from that. We can all be better. I try to be better every day. You know the old adage, that to stand still is to go backwards. You always need to be evolving, moving forward and challenging yourself. The status quo doesn't work for me, ever. We need to always try to continuously improve ourselves and those around us. You always have to try.

I got the feedback. Some people talked and were very thankful that we extended the wage subsidy, the rent subsidy, the recovery benefit and the sick days benefits. These are benefits that Canadians need at this time. There wasn't one comment—again, this is the fifth time I've done this—about prorogation or PROC. I'll be honest, as I always try to be. I don't think I've had one call in my office, ever, about why we prorogued. If I did, we would explain why and somebody would say, "Oh, well, that makes sense to me."

I go back and I appeal to members of the committee. I think I'm just talking to my Liberal friends right now, but it's not an issue that Canadians are seized with. It's not an issue, to be blunt, that Canadians really care about. As I said to all of you before, while looking at a lot of still pictures here, a lot of freeze-frames.... I'll tell you a story about the freeze-frames here in a second, but that's what disappoints me. Canadians want us seized with, dealing with, business that Canadians want us dealing with, and that is being good representatives, leading good government, being responsive, advocating for our constituents and getting more vaccines.

In this riding, we are very fortunate. It's a wonderful riding, but we all see even things like vaccine hesitancy and false stories spread. All of us political leaders need to show, by leadership, that vaccines are safe and that vaccines will help us win this battle. I was thrilled to see the Leader of the Opposition get his vaccine and the leader of the NDP get his vaccine. I can't say whether the leaders of the Green Party and the Bloc have received their vaccine—maybe they have and I just haven't seen that—but that's what we need to do. These are the things we need to be doing as members of Parliament. We need to be leading. We need to be calming fears. We need to be there when constituents need us, whether it's programs, benefits or fighting for them. These are the things we need.

Just to cap that off about my informal poll, again, I ran 0% interest about PROC and prorogation and those things. People want to know what we are doing as a government. People want to know what we're working on.

I think all of us, every single one of us on this committee, can be very proud of budget 2021. I think that budget is a budget that will transform our country. We have made strategic commitments that will change the face of Canada for the better.

The fact is that in Saint John, the average cost of day care is, give or take, \$500 to \$600 per child, and the fact is that we have made a commitment to reduce the cost of child care by 50% in 2022 and then strive for \$10-per-day day care by 2026. That is transformational. I don't think I'm wrong in saying—although I was corrected and I was a little hesitant—that this is going to help so many women get back into the workforce. But it's not only women; it's caregivers, men, parents, whoever. We certainly see in New Brunswick that we're desperate for people to enter our workforce. We are desperate.

The fact that a child care program can make it easier for caregivers—moms, dads, whoever is looking after children—to get back into the workforce is significant for us. I heard that upwards of 40,000 people in New Brunswick alone could re-enter the workforce because of our child care program, because so many people just can't afford to go to work because of the cost of child care.

Obviously, my constituents want us advocating for the delivery of things like child care, which was in the budget, or the 10% raise for seniors over 74 years of age, the most vulnerable seniors. Let's be very clear, these are the most vulnerable seniors, who have the highest costs because of health care, because of extra care. They're the seniors who are the most vulnerable. That was in our platform. We ran on this in our election. That shouldn't be any surprise to anybody. That was in the platform. I say that to people. I campaigned on that. Other commitments, as I said before, are the top-up of the trade corridor funding and the top-up of the rapid housing initiative.

Another item in the budget that I think has totally flown under the radar is the help for students. I had a meeting this week with student executives from my old university, UNBSJ, the University of New Brunswick Saint John, of which I was the student union vice-president, where I got my first taste for politics. I met with the student executive of the university. We talked about our changes to student loan repayment. There are sensational changes.

Very quickly, then, I'm going to get back to MP Turnbull's amendment to MP Vecchio's motion.

The fact that we raised the repayable loan from \$25,000 to \$40,000, the fact that we reduced the maximum payment from 20% of income to 10%.... If you made \$50,000, that would reduce your monthly payment from \$486 to \$90, give or take. Think about that. Think about those changes. Students are thrilled with those changes. They're unbelievable. We've doubled the student grants—from \$2,000 to \$3,000 initially, and now from \$3,000 to \$6,000. These are unbelievable changes. I know that CASA, the student alliance, is thrilled with those changes. I told the student executive that's why they lobby. That's why they have Hill days, why they lobby MPs.

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

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Although I'm really grateful for Mr. Long's talk about our youth, because I think that's really important,

there are a few different things we can look at. I think it's very ironic that we're talking about our youth as we're talking about prorogation. Perhaps that's why we're here today as well. But the fact is that the Canada summer jobs was done in April 2020, so that's pre-prorogation. The Canada summer jobs was already announced, so it's not even budget. I'm just saying there is full non-relevance here.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

The Chair: Mr. Long, do you care to respond as to how that's relevant?

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes, I would take that point.

It's always great to see MP Vecchio, of course.

Truthfully, I didn't even mention Canada summer jobs. It didn't come out of my mouth. I talked about the student loan repayment and then the Canada student grant, but I will say, really quickly, on Canada summer jobs.... When I came into this riding in 2015, the Canada summer jobs allocated by the Conservative Party to Saint John—Rothesay were 152. We doubled that. There are over—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, seriously...relevance here.

The Chair: I think you've given Mr. Long some ammunition to respond to your question.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Fair enough. I've been listening to a lot of this, and a lot of the things.... I'm quite concerned. If he really wants to talk about youth, then let's go back to my initial motion and we can talk a little bit about youth.

Thanks very much.

Mr. Wayne Long: Just to finish that sentence—and I certainly appreciate MP Vecchio's intervention—it went from 150 to 320, and this year we upped it again. Saint John—Rothesay received 425 Canada summer jobs. That's an investment of \$1.3 million in this riding for students. It's incredible.

These are the things we should be talking about. These are the things we should be working on, not “Why did Prime Minister Trudeau and the Liberal government prorogue Parliament? We need to study this.” Again, what frustrates me.... Look, I would be the first one—trust me, some of my colleagues would know—to say, “Hold on here. Look, the Prime Minister may need to say something here.” But no. No, no, no. He's already said it.

MP Turnbull's amendment is more than fair, because the Prime Minister has already given the reasons he was proroguing Parliament. Again, what's the right word? I need to research that for the next time. It's looking for a question instead of the answer, or a problem for the solution. Let's call a spade a spade. The real issue here is that the Conservative Party doesn't have the answers they want. It's not that there haven't been answers; they're just not the answers that they think work for them.

I'm not sure who is in the rooms giving advice or doing the polling, but I guess there's somebody somewhere in the Conservative Party on somebody's shoulder, or a pollster or somebody somewhere who is saying, "This is an issue for you. This is an issue that Canadians care about. This is something you need to keep moving on."

You know the adage that it's already baked in. We've talked about this. The public has seen it. The Prime Minister has testified.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): I think he's on mute.

Mr. Wayne Long: Oh, my lord. I'm devastated. How long have I been on mute?

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): You'll have to repeat it. We missed those important lines, Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: How long was I on mute?

A voice: Not long enough.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert Morrissey: It was at least 10 minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long: Well, look, hopefully you'll indulge me here. I don't know how that happened.

At any rate, what frustrates me is the fact that the Prime Minister has already talked about why he prorogued. The Prime Minister has already testified. Minister Rodriguez has testified. Again, we talk about that big pot, about throwing everything in the pot. The Kielburgers have already testified. The Perelmuters have already testified. I sat on the ethics committee and watched the testimony. For the life of me, I can't think of what more anybody reasonable thinks they will get.

Now, as I said earlier...probably when I was on mute. I apologize for that. It certainly wasn't my intention. I'm sure a few of my friends weren't disappointed by the mute, but anyway, things happen.

I just don't understand the reasoning on the Conservative side that they think there's something they're going to get that hasn't already been stated: "Let's ask the question again. Let's try to get a snapshot or a freeze-frame or a 5 o'clock quote on the news."

You know what? I'm going to give some Wayne Long free advice: People have moved on. We should too. We should move on. There are so many important things we could be doing.

Madam Chair, do you mind if I get a drink of water?

The Chair: Go ahead if it's quick. It's there at your table, right?

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes. It's right here.

You know, I really wish, if you want to talk about prorogation, that my friends on the Conservative side would kind of reset, regroup, and say, "Look, you know what? We've gone as far as we can go on this. We've pushed it to the wall. We've made MP Turnbull come up with an amendment to MP Vecchio's motion."

As I said, that had everything in it but the kitchen sink. MP Turnbull came back and said that we should compromise, that we should come up with something we can work together on, and that we should get this moving. It seems fair to me. But here we are.

I have a few more things I'd like to say, if I could.

I think, Madam Chair, I have a bit more time. Is that okay?

The Chair: Yes, of course.

Mr. Wayne Long: That's good, because there are a few more things I want to get on.

I think the Prime Minister stated clearly why he needed to prorogue and the reasons for it. I have clearly shown how the hockey leagues, which I obviously know and love, prorogue, if you will, to get a new mandate, to reset their schedules, to reset travel dates and a president's cup and things like that. It's normal. We needed to do it. It was the proper thing for us to do.

The fact that we need to study it and hear from the Prime Minister.... Let's call a spade a spade. That's what it's about. It's about hearing from the Prime Minister when the Prime Minister has already clearly stated the reasons for prorogation. Anybody who thinks they're going to hear anything different from what the Prime Minister has already stated is, I think, missing the mark, to be perfectly blunt.

He has already said it. Why would he say anything different from what he has already said? I just don't understand that.

Again, we're here. We should be seized—every one of us, every minute of our day—with looking after our constituents, with doing the work we've been elected to do by our constituents, which is representing them, standing up for them in Parliament, advocating, challenging, pushing and debating. Those are the things we should be doing.

I think this PROC committee has done great work. I think there has been a lot of collaboration and a lot of good effort, in a bipartisan way across the aisle and what have you. We all have so many common interests, all of us, but instead of being seized with vaccines and, as I said earlier, fighting vaccine hesitancy and promoting the fact that we're getting vaccines.... More and more are coming. Our procurement has been outstanding. We have millions more vaccines coming. Within the G7, our number of vaccines administered per 100 people is rising.

We should be proud of that. We should be proud that we are starting to lessen curves. I'm certainly not going to understate the challenges that some of my colleagues in Ontario and Alberta and Quebec are obviously facing, but those are the things we should be doing. We should be trying to look forward. We should be trying to focus on Canadians and on making sure we're there for Canadians.

Also, each and every one of us in every party should be focused on recovery, getting ready for the recovery, making sure that our ridings receive proper investments in infrastructure, investments in housing and so on. These are the things I am working on. As I said, I have one eye on the pandemic, making sure that the residents and the constituents of Saint John—Rothesay are being looked after, but I also have one eye on the future and on making sure that Saint John—Rothesay is poised and set for success once we get past this.

I've dealt with Conservatives, in my riding even, who say we were too generous with the CEBA and with the CERB, that the wage subsidy shouldn't have been as long as it was and the ratio shouldn't have been as generous. To be perfectly blunt, I don't know where we would be as a country if we, as a government, didn't provide the support that was needed.

I appeal to you, my friends and colleagues on the committee. I want everybody to please step back and do your own proroguing. Step back, reconsider, reset and come to the next meeting, or later in this meeting, with a new attitude and a new way to get this done. There's a way out of this.

This is the last thing I'll say, for now. I'll quote, very quickly, MP Turnbull's amendment. It says to replace paragraph (b)—and I won't read MP Vecchio's paragraph (b)—with “renew the invitations issued to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance”—which is obviously Minister Freeland—“and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, each to appear separately before the committee for at least 90 minutes”.

MP Turnbull is basically saying that the Deputy Prime Minister will come before this committee for 90 minutes, yet that's not good enough. We need the Prime Minister to come, when he has already stated why we prorogued and why we had to reset. No, that's not good enough.

Madam Chair, I thank you for allowing me to speak again today. I certainly do have a lot more I'd like to say, but I see that five of my wonderful friends' and colleagues' hands are up who also would like the floor. I don't want to take too much time.

Hopefully I'll be able to come back sooner than later and speak some more. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Long.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, may I ask for a five-minute bio break before I start my speech? Could we suspend for two minutes, even? I'm not looking for a long time.

The Chair: That's fine. It's been some time and we haven't had any kind of a break to eat or anything.

A lot of people are saying five minutes. I'll say 10. I think everybody will be okay with a 10-minute break. It gives everyone some more time.

• (39930)

(Pause)

• (39945)

The Chair: I will bring this meeting back to order.

We had Ms. Petitpas Taylor before we suspended temporarily.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, you have the floor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you so much for allowing us to have a short bio break. It has been a long afternoon, as was last night. I think we're probably all feeling a bit of the late night vote we had. Getting up at three o'clock in the morning is not always my favourite thing, but having done a lot of on-call work in my career, I'm lucky I'm able to get back to sleep, so that's a good thing.

Again, we are back here debating the motion of my friend and colleague Mr. Turnbull.

Ryan, we're so happy to see you in good form. Everyone's commenting on your hair today. Your hair always looks fine, but anyway, it makes me laugh that everyone has commented on that today.

I also want to take a moment to thank my good friend and colleague Dr. Duncan for her really thoughtful remarks today.

Kirsty, every time you speak at PROC, you educate us. I know you work really hard in all of your speeches that you prepare, and you stay up late at night in doing that, because you truly care about your folks in Etobicoke, and you believe in the science. This is your area of expertise, and when you speak, I truly believe we all need to listen. As the government, as parliamentarians, we are really better because of the contributions that you make, so I really want to take a moment and say thank you.

On that note as well, I would be remiss if I did not give you a shout-out on your motion 38 that you're putting together hoping for a standing committee on science. I think it's fantastic, and again, a continuation of the work you do. We're so proud of you, so thank you for that.

I also want to thank you, Ryan, for your thoughtful comments again today as always. Again, there's a lot of passion, and we really appreciate all the work you do. You may be a new parliamentarian, but you're an old soul, I have to say. You certainly contribute a tremendous amount to our committee.

Will, our friend and colleague, is gone, but, again, it was really great to get Will's perspective as well. I should probably call him MP Amos, but we're amongst family and friends here. He gave some really great comments.

Emmanuella, finally you had a chance to speak today. You have been with us on several occasions and we seem to always be cutting you off, so thank you for sharing your thoughts on this.

Finally, last but not least, is MP Long. Wayne always has an awful lot to say, and we always appreciate his sharing his thoughts and also speaking about—not the Wild Cats—the Sea Dogs. I better get that straight. He will be quite offended if I don't get it right.

Over the weekend I was thinking about this whole debate we have been having over the past several weeks now. Perhaps some of it sounds a bit redundant or a bit of a refresh, but when I was thinking over the weekend.... It's funny how I wrote something that my friend and colleague Ryan said today about the willingness to be influenced when we have a debate.

I wrote that down today when you said that, Ryan. I thought to myself that you were absolutely right, because this weekend, when I was reflecting on the motion before us.... For those of you who have been at committee for some time, you have heard my comments indicating that I was really prepared to go straight to writing the report.

If we look at the witnesses—and there are many new members with us today—in preparation of this prorogation study, we have heard from a number of witnesses who have appeared before PROC. We heard from many academics. We also heard from parliamentarians like Pablo Rodriguez and also staff from the Privy Council. With the thorough and thoughtful comments they made, I was really of the position that I thought we were prepared to go straight to writing the report. But, again, Ryan has brought forward an amendment, and, again, trying to be the mediator....

I always consider Ryan to be a bit of the mediator amongst us, always trying to find a spot for us to be able to agree upon. I started thinking over the weekend, though, yes, I conceded that I would agree with Ryan's amendment, but this weekend it dawned on me, and I don't know why I knew this, but it dawned on me that Minister Freeland is not only the Deputy Prime Minister, but she is the first female Deputy Prime Minister, I think, in Canada. She's certainly the first female finance minister, but even more importantly, why I think that Minister Freeland should be called before our committee is that she chaired the cabinet committee on COVID for a number of months, so who better than Minister Freeland to appear before our committee to really talk about the issue as to why government prorogued?

Ryan, to your point when you talk about the willingness to be influenced during debates, you know what I mean, to really challenge our thoughts, I think, more than ever, I absolutely agree with. Not only did you have to coax me, but now I say, yes, we absolutely need to have Minister Freeland appear here, because in actual fact, I truly believe that she'll be able to contribute an awful lot to this discussion. Again, she's the second in command, if you will, but more importantly, she chaired the cabinet committee on COVID. Over the past year and a half we know that our government has really been seized with this.

This morning, I have to share with you, I was speaking to one of my former colleagues who worked with me when I was in the health department. He called me regarding something. He had a ba-

by a year and two months ago. I was asking him how his baby was, and he was telling me how she's growing up, but he shared with me something today that is relevant to this. He shared with me today that his daughter, at this point in time, is starting to talk a bit. What is she doing when she's playing with her dolls right now? She's taking a thermometer and checking the temperature of the doll's forehead, because when she goes to day care every day, that is what they do.

If we stop and think, just a year and a half ago, we would have never thought that our children would be playing with their dolls and putting a thermometer on their forehead to check their temperature. I just mention that short story, because when he said that it really made me reflect on how life has truly changed in the past year.

Again, when we look at the relevance as to why we're talking about the issue of prorogation and why that.... Again, I truly feel that we've done a great study, but we know we certainly can add the Deputy Prime Minister and also Minister Chagger. I guess I'm still stuck with the point that I know that many of our opposition colleagues have already prejudged the study. They've already made their points of view known. Even yesterday and over the past week or two I've been fortunate that I've had a lot of House duty, a lot of long hours in the House, and I've been able to listen to many debates.

Again, I'm hearing time and time again members of the opposition talking about the WE issue and making the link between that and prorogation. Again, I just feel it's a bit of a fishing expedition, and I truly believe that with the work we've done so far, we are prepared to move on.

With that being said, I think that we also have to recognize that when we look at the realities of when we entered an election campaign in 2019 and when we came up with our throne speech, that was the reality of the time, and that was pre-pandemic. None of us anticipated that we would be dealing with this situation. We've been dealing with it over the past year and a few months, but, let's be frank, we know this pandemic is going to be with us for many more months to come, and we are going to have many challenges ahead for months, if not years.

Now, if last August was not the time to prorogue and to do a reshuffle and a reassessment or retooling, if you will, I really don't know, again, what would justify proroguing Parliament. When I hear my colleagues.... I'm going to quote the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île when he said last year, "What purpose did...prorogation serve? It was used as a diversionary tactic, because the government was in a conflict of interest with WE Charity." Another member, that same month, the member for Berthier—Maskinongé indicated, "The main reason for the prorogation was to put a lid on the WE scandal."

If I truly felt that our colleagues were looking for more information with respect to why we prorogued, and if we really want to get the reasons for prorogation—the true reasons—I think we would have to look at having someone like Minister Freeland come to the table to share her knowledge with respect to all of the work that was done during the pandemic months and what we needed to do to move on. She's probably even better positioned to do so, because she was the captain of the ship, if you will, in many ways when it came to the COVID cabinet committee. I think she would have a lot to share with us.

[Translation]

Now I'm going to make a few comments in French.

We've heard many comments from our fellow citizens about the priorities the government established and included in the 2019 Speech from the Throne.

I'm going to speak in French now. I have a few more comments to make.

Let's talk about the priorities the government outlined in its 2019 Speech from the Throne. We really were inspired by what our fellow citizens had told us and established many themes for the Speech from the Throne. They included the themes that we had campaigned on but also the important ones our fellow citizens hoped we would address.

In my riding, the fight against climate change was a major issue. My fellow citizens are clearly very concerned about the situation and it's a priority for them.

The other theme we heard a lot about was the need to support the middle class and to help people who are trying to join it. We talked a lot about that.

We also talked about the path to reconciliation with indigenous peoples as well as the health and safety of all Canadians. It was an absolute priority for me as a former health minister to ensure that good programs were in place and that Canadians would have access to health services.

We also wanted to ensure that Canada had a good international image, and we campaigned on that theme.

These were all absolute priorities in 2019, but the situation quickly changed in 2020, as we all know. We all remember Friday, March 13, 2020, when we had to leave Ottawa. We flew home and many of us haven't been back to the capital since then. I was fortunate to be able to attend meetings in person for four weeks. Since my province was shut down, I had to self-isolate for two weeks before I could get back to my family. I was only able to be in Ottawa for four weeks.

As my colleagues mentioned, upon our return, we really had to make sure we met our fellow citizens' needs. We asked them to stay at home, practise social distancing and comply with public health measures. We asked them to do that and we also made sure we provided them with the necessary resources to pay their bills, feed themselves, pay their rent and so on.

The government and members of all the parties worked hard. I clearly remember receiving two or three calls a day from our col-

leagues. We discussed various issues. Sometimes we conducted a critical examination. We really wanted to ask the right questions so we could develop appropriate social policies. Members from the opposition parties asked appropriate questions. Lastly, we developed good policies. They may not have been perfect, but they were good.

I'm not going to review all the themes that were addressed in the 2019 Speech from the Throne, but, generally speaking, we did it all. Then the pandemic hit and we had to address all the related issues. We obviously didn't have the magic formula for managing a pandemic, but together we were able to do our best.

Then the pandemic hit again in August 2020. Many programs had been proposed and we had to continue putting assistance in place for Canadians. Since Parliament was prorogued at that time, the Deputy Prime Minister was available and we asked her why the government had prorogued the session.

Personally, I think it was the right time to do it. If you think back to the situation in August 2020, COVID-19 cases were starting to decline. We knew that a third wave might be imminent. We were starting to develop vaccines and there was some light at the end of the tunnel, although we knew there was still a lot of work to do to help and support Canadians.

I think it was the right time to prorogue Parliament. We subsequently consulted Canadians and asked them what they thought we should do. We also reset our 2019 agenda since it didn't reflect the reality of 2020-2021. So the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament.

I think all the members at today's meeting have spoken with people in their communities, with young people, and have conducted consultations. The Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe Youth Council in my riding meets every month. When I met with them during that period, we discussed what we should add to our new throne speech. I have to say that the young people in my riding are more politicized than others elsewhere, but they didn't know what a throne speech was. It was a great opportunity to explain to them what it was and to ask them what they thought we should do and what we should add to it.

I make telephone calls to my constituents every month—as I imagine many of my colleagues do—to ask them what their priorities are. In 2019, we heard a lot about their priorities. I really think the 2019 Speech from the Throne actually reflected what we had been told and what I'd heard from the citizens of Acadie and New Brunswick. They thought we should continue focusing on pandemic-related priorities and post-pandemic preparation. In the end, that's exactly what we did.

I've heard some colleagues say the Speech from the Throne wasn't ambitious enough. On the contrary, I personally thought it was very ambitious. It's a grand roadmap indicating where we stand right now and what we should do to help Canadians.

Providing assistance to Canadians during the pandemic was a central focus of the Speech from the Throne; it was the key message. We wanted to ensure that Canadians knew we were there for them for the short and long hauls. I feel the throne speech clearly outlined that plan.

I'm not going to talk about the budget that we introduced a few weeks ago, but I will say this: there was a subtle difference between the Speech from the Throne, or roadmap, and the budget. What we were going to do in an attempt to help Canadians was very clear: we wanted to help Canadians get through the tough times.

We introduced many economic programs for Canadians. I know that the citizens of my beautiful region, Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, wanted the government to be there for them and to continue working for them.

Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe is the best riding in Canada, but I'm sure all members think the same of their constituencies.

[English]

To give a break to my anglophone colleagues, I'm going to speak in French and English today. I'm also trying to speak slower for interpretation because I know that sometimes when I get going I can speak very quickly.

Madam Chair, I hope I'm doing better today on that note.

The Chair: You're doing fantastic. I'm sorry I had to stop you the last time. You're doing great.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: When I get on a roll, it's bad.

Anyway, I've always said I'm a very good listener and when I was a social worker.... I've always been, I have to say, a good listener, but when I have an opportunity to talk, my gosh, just give me the stage.

Coming back to the matter at hand, among my constituents in Moncton, Riverview and Dieppe during this pandemic, during the whole issue of a new throne speech and the issue of prorogation, no one spoke to me necessarily of prorogation. But when we talked about readjusting and retuning and redefining what our goals and objectives were, my colleagues, my constituents wanted to make it clear that, front and centre, they wanted their government to be there and to continue to be there for them during the pandemic and post-pandemic.

I can tell you that when we talked about the Canada emergency response benefit, and when we all think of when we first started....

I'm looking at my friend, Irek, here and I'm sure that we asked him a lot of questions, as he was the parliamentary secretary to the minister responsible, I believe. We certainly had a lot of questions with respect to what CERB was going to look like. Again, the program may not have been perfect, but we certainly were there to help millions of Canadians.

When I look at the CERB, the Canada emergency response benefit, in my province of New Brunswick alone that program helped 165,000 New Brunswickers. In my little province, we have a population of 757,000. When you stop and think that 165,000 New Brunswickers benefited from that program, that's about one in five New Brunswickers, when you break it down.

More importantly, a lot of women were the ones who had to leave the workforce and had to use those benefits. Yesterday I met with a group of people in the care economy. I shared with them that 63% of the people who had to leave the labour market were women. Again, a lot of them were negatively impacted, so we certainly have to be there for them.

The Canada emergency response benefit certainly helped a lot of people in our province. People want us to be there for them in the short term and the long term.

The other pillar that we have to look at when it comes to the economic programs that have been put in place is the Canada emergency business account. Again, why did we prorogue, why did we feel that we had to get things back and to look at the priorities because of the pandemic? I don't know about you guys, but folks in my riding, in small and medium-sized businesses, were really grateful for that program.

There's a small vendor here in Moncton called the Starving Artist. I don't know if I have mentioned it before, but it's a really great co-op, a small business. Actually it's quite a big shop and many local artists go there and sell their pieces of art. It's a mom-and-pop shop but if we weren't there to provide them with the business account, that organization would be closed. They actually support over 200 local artists. If ever you come to Moncton, Mr. Long... I know you're always talking about Saint John, but come to Moncton and look at the Starving Artist shop. It's quite a neat spot. Over Christmas I tried to support local as much as possible and got all of my Christmas gifts there because they were just really great.

Again, those types of benefits that have been put in place have really helped these small and medium-sized businesses. Again, when we look at proroguing and what we needed to do in the short term and also post-pandemic, we have to look at all of that.

The other program as well that I know of, which I heard a lot about this summer as well, was the issue of the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program. That's another program that many—

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, I'd like to raise a question of privilege. Is that possible?

The Chair: A question of privilege—that's unusual, but I'll hear you.

Ms. Leah Gazan: On my question of privilege, I want to point out that I'm currently not able, as a member of Parliament, to attend the HUMA committee where we're discussing matters related to housing, might I add, in the middle of a pandemic where people are dying, certainly in my riding where people are burning up in makeshift shacks, in order to accommodate this gross level of privilege.

It is a total disrespect to our electorate and people who are expecting us to keep them alive during the pandemic to play these games. I want to point out what a serious matter this is when people in my riding and around the country are dying, and we see this gross level of privilege here. Especially as members of Parliament, upon whom people are counting to keep them alive, I see people around this circle, when I am supposed to be in committee, snickering and laughing. I don't find it funny.

I am wondering what we can do about this, because my privileges as a member of Parliament to fight for my constituents and Canadians whose lives are on the line are being violated.

The Chair: I can survey the committee to see if there is consensus to suspend at this time, or members are free to move to adjourn. Those are two options, so I will survey.

Ms. Gazan brings up some very serious points. I'm sure the work that she's doing there is very important.

Those are the only options I have at this point.

Would the committee be interested in suspending until our next scheduled meeting spot?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, I just wanted to ask if I could ask Ms. Gazan for a little more information.

The Chair: What information are you looking for, as to her HUMA committee?

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm finished my remarks. I have nothing left to add.

Thank you.

The Chair: She says there is important work going on at the HUMA committee and that, right now, because this committee is going over time, they're having to cancel or delay that committee, as far as I've heard.

Is there consensus to suspend at this time until the next scheduled committee date?

There's no disagreement. I guess I need to ask this question a different way. I'm just getting blank stares. Is everyone okay with it? If no one speaks up, then I will consider everyone being okay with it.

We're suspended until next Tuesday. Thank you.

[The meeting was suspended at 4:15 p.m., Thursday, April 29.]

[The meeting resumed at 11:02 a.m., Tuesday, May 4.]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Good morning, everyone. It's nice to see everyone's lovely face.

We're resuming meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This meeting started on April 13, 2021.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the order of January 25, 2021. Therefore, all members can attend in person or virtually. I believe at this point we are all attending virtually.

This is just a reminder not to take screenshots or photos of your screen and also to mute and unmute your mikes. Make sure you've selected your interpretation channel.

Also, try to refrain from speaking over top of each other. Make sure you are wearing your boom mike and that it's positioned in the right spot so that we can make things as easy as possible for the interpreters.

If anybody attends the meeting in person, I may remind them of the rules that are in place in the room.

Having said that, we are not at an unfamiliar place. We are resuming from where we left off in the last meeting. We are on Mr. Turnbull's amendment on the issue of prorogation.

We had a speakers list last time. Ms. Petitpas Taylor had the floor when a point of order was made. After her, we have Dr. Duncan and a couple of others who are currently not here, so we'll drop them from the list. Then we have Mr. Long, who is here, and then Mr. Turnbull, and then another NDP member who is not here right now.

Everyone who is not here will be dropped from the list. The list currently would be Ms. Petitpas Taylor, Dr. Duncan, Mr. Long, Mr. Turnbull. Then anyone else who wishes to speak or make any other comment or raise a point of order can just state that they have a point of order, or if you wish to speak, you can raise your hand in the participants toolbar section.

Mr. Lauzon, you're also on the speakers list.

We'll start by giving the floor back to Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Before I begin, I wonder whether Justin would be able to confirm that my sound is okay, because we were having a few issues at the beginning. I want to make sure that the interpretation—

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Petitpas Taylor. I can confirm that your sound is good for the interpreters.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Great. Thank you so much, Justin.

Once again, thank you Madam Chair for allowing we to speak again regarding the amendment that was brought forward by our friend and colleague Mr. Turnbull.

Before I continue with my comments, I would also like to take a moment to say welcome back to Stéphane Lauzon. We're happy to see you in good form and happy that you're recovering. PROC seems to be difficult on some of our members lately. Hopefully this isn't going to continue.

We're really happy, Stéphane, all kidding aside, to have you back.

I believe that last Thursday was the last time we were here in PROC. I'm not going to get into all of the comments I made last week, but to recap very quickly, I indicated at one point that when it came to the main motion, I made it very clear that I felt we were prepared to move forward with writing the report, because I feel that we've heard from a substantial number of witnesses. Again, though, I want to give consideration to Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Once again I have to indicate that I was willing to be influenced by hearing the arguments that were brought forward. I truly believe, now more than ever, that welcoming our Deputy Prime Minister, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, to appear before committee in actual fact makes a whole lot of sense.

I have to take a few steps back, I guess, because not last weekend but the weekend before, when I was reflecting on this motion and on this amendment, it struck me that Minister Freeland in actual fact was the chair of the COVID cabinet committee for a number of months.

Again, I know that different parties have different points of view, perhaps, as to why a prorogation was called, but I truly and firmly believe that it is because of the pandemic that we had to readjust our agenda. In Ms. Freeland's case, we certainly recognize that Ms. Freeland's being in charge of that COVID cabinet committee, it would make a lot of sense to ask her to come forward and to explain to us the reasons behind it.

[Translation]

As I previously said, the pandemic forced us to review our priorities; the ones from 2019 had to be changed. I won't read the entire throne speech, but, broadly speaking, if you look at the key themes from 2019 and priorities for 2020, you'll see that many changes were made. As a result of the pandemic, many adjustments had to be made to meet the needs of all Canadians. If Ms. Freeland testified before the committee, we could ask her questions. Who would be in a better position than her to explain the government's priorities and the reason for the prorogation, especially now that she's Minister of Finance?

The fight against climate change was an absolute priority for the citizens of my riding during the election campaign. I assume that's also true of the people my colleagues represent.

We wanted to help people in the middle class and those working hard to enter it. That was one of our priorities, and some programs have in fact been established to assist them.

The Speech from the Throne also addressed reconciliation with indigenous peoples and issues related to improving the health of Canadians. I think those were the priorities in 2019. I'm not saying they're no longer priorities in 2020, but some adjustments had to be made as a result of the pandemic.

I repeat that Ms. Freeland would be in a very good position to discuss that with us. Mr. Turnbull has laid out his arguments, and I think his testimony was very helpful. We could also ask him some tough questions.

The programs we established obviously weren't perfect. We were honest in our efforts. We did our best to respond to Canadians' immediate needs. The priority in the 2020 Speech from the Throne was to protect Canadians during the second wave of the pandemic. Today we sometimes forget where we stood in 2020. The situation has vastly altered since then, and changes have to be made.

In August 2020, we suspected there might be a second wave. Many scientists and experts even told us to prepare for a third and possible fourth wave.

The long and short of it was this: no vaccines were available in August 2020. We had hoped vaccines would soon be available, but that wasn't yet the case. A lot of things changed quickly from August to the following May.

Minister Freeland could come and testify before the committee to explain the reasons why we opted for prorogation. I think she'd be able to answer some very specific questions.

Many programs have been established to assist Canadians, but I won't name them all. However, I would definitely like to ask Minister Freeland how her government went about introducing the financial assistance programs.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I was just communicating with the clerk. Mr. Lukiwski has dropped off.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, he just got back into the meeting.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Justin, can you hear me at all?

The Clerk: Mr. Lukiwski, we can hear you, although your connection doesn't seem to be great.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's the problem. I've been working with IT for the last 20 minutes. IT can't seem to figure out why the audio coming through my headset is not working. I can hear the audio from the meeting perfectly clear through my headset, but you're not receiving my audio through the headset. IT can't seem to figure out the problem.

The Clerk: Mr. Lukiwski, I'm being told by the technician here in the room that your microphone is properly selected.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Okay.

The Chair: So you mean that you can hear him through his headset.

The Clerk: That's right. We can.

The Chair: Okay. So things are good.

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: We're golden.

The Clerk: I think your problem is resolved.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: All right. Thank you so much.

Sorry for the interruption, everyone.

The Chair: No problem.

If there are more issues like yours, I'll suspend temporarily to resolve them.

Go ahead, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I think I'm jinxed. Last Thursday this was the point I was at, and there was a point of order. There must be something in the air.

The Chair: Maybe.

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: To continue, I clearly said...

Mr. Alain Therrien: Can you hear me?

I can't hear you. I...

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Therrien, you're on mute. We can't hear your point of order.

We have just had Mr. Therrien drop off.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, do you want to suspend for a minute or so while we try to figure out what's going on? He may just have dropped off and will try to come back, but we'll try to ascertain that.

The Chair: Yes, we'll suspend.

• (51510) _____ (Pause) _____

• (51515)

The Chair: Let's resume. Madam Petitpas Taylor has the floor.

[Translation]

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

I'm going to continue saying why I really think Minister Freeland should appear before our committee.

First of all, she could explain to us once again why the Prime Minister and cabinet decided to prorogue Parliament. Even more important, she could answer questions since she chaired the cabinet committee responsible for the federal response to the coronavirus disease, or COVID-19. She could also answer questions on the funding programs she introduced since she's also Minister of Finance.

[English]

Again, very briefly, if we are privileged, and Minister Freeland appears before the committee, if we all agree that would be a good idea—

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

I fully agree. I'm listening to member Petitpas Taylor and I appreciate this, but we do know an invitation had already been sent to her several months ago.

I'm wondering if the clerk could advise us as to whether the invitation has been responded to. Have any members of the Liberal Party and the government talked to them to say we're waiting for them to respond? Maybe they picked up the phone and asked them to come to committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Justin.

The Clerk: Madam Chair and Ms. Vecchio, an invitation has been offered to both Minister Freeland and Minister Chagger, among others. We have yet to receive a formal response.

I have periodically checked with both their offices to see if they're any closer to a response, but I still do not have a formal response from either, or from any of the other witnesses.

The Chair: I will give the floor back to Ms. Petitpas Taylor. Maybe she'll have something to add.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I would like to thank my colleague, Ms. Vecchio, for that question. It's an important question. I think we could also possibly follow up on that matter to see if there's a reason for the delay, because, again, we are making some good arguments as to why we feel she should be here and could answer some important questions with respect to the whole issue of prorogation, why there was a reset and what the thought process behind all that was.

Thank you so much for that, Ms. Vecchio.

I'll come back to why I think having Minister Freeland here.... As the member of Parliament for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, a proud Atlantic Canadian and a proud New Brunswicker, I would really have a lot of specific questions to ask her with respect to the whole restart and, as I've indicated, the economic programs that we've put in place to help all Canadians during this very difficult time.

We have indicated that we've asked Canadians to stay home. We recognize that we are not out of the woods yet when it comes to COVID-19. We know that, yes, vaccines are not just on the horizon; they are here. However, not everyone is vaccinated. As a little side note, I'm extremely pleased and thrilled to say that my husband got vaccinated last night. He got on an emergency list and was able to sneak in. Again, I'm very, very grateful. He's had no side effects. He's a trooper. I have to say, we need to get to herd immunity, and it's going to take some time before we get there.

I would have a lot of questions for Minister Freeland. We've asked people to stay home. We continue in some areas to ask people to stay home, to continue to follow the public health guidelines. Many of my friends in Ontario are going through a very difficult time right now within their communities, as are our colleagues in Alberta and British Columbia. The programs that have been put in place have been put in place for a reason and that is to keep Canadians safe.

If Minister Freeland came to committee, I would certainly have questions with respect to, first and foremost, the Canada emergency response benefit. In my province alone, in my little province of New Brunswick, of 750,000 New Brunswickers, 165,000 have benefited from the CERB. I'd have some questions for her with respect to all of that. I'm sure that many of you would have questions with respect to what has been done in your province and how your constituents have been impacted by it or not.

Again, the whole issue of moving forward with continuing some specific COVID response programs related to the pandemic but also related to prorogation would be key.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, for today, I just want to try to stay on topic as much as possible. We're talking about the prorogation, and although we can talk about these great programs with Minister Freeland, perhaps we can do that in the finance committee. Right now, we're supposed to be studying prorogation, and so those questions we should be asking her should be regarding the prorogation. I don't think we need to ask her about CERB or any of those programs.

Could we get back on topic of the prorogation, please?

The Chair: I think that may be a slight bit of debate there. If Ms. Petitpas Taylor can explain how it's linked to prorogation, then it would be in order. I'll give her the opportunity to do so.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Once again, Madam Chair, I think we all have different points of view with respect to why we prorogued. I clearly believe that the reason for prorogation was that we were in the midst of what we hope is a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic. The issue for prorogation was really to look at not just programs, but the priorities of Canadians during this time.

As I have indicated, if we look at the priorities of 2019 and 2020, and if you ask my constituents, they were really different. Some of them were similar, but some of them were different in protecting the health and safety of Canadians, making sure that Canadians stayed home, encouraging them to protect themselves and protect others.

We had to be there for them. When I say "we", I mean all of my colleagues, because we all had a role to play in putting together these programs.

I absolutely appreciate Ms. Vecchio's point, and I absolutely do want to stay on topic. I will continue to stick to the points I want to raise with Minister Freeland in order to ensure that we can get these questions answered, because I truly believe this was a big part as to why we prorogued Parliament at that time.

There are some other programs that I would like to ask her about. Again, some programs were elaborated during prorogation. There was the whole issue of wage subsidies. Many people in our riding still continue to benefit from those types of programs at this point in time. In my little province of New Brunswick, we have a whole lot of people that have applied for that program. We have been very fortunate that many of our establishments have been able to benefit from it, so I would have some questions with respect to that, as well.

The whole issue of rent subsidy support during the lockdown would also be an area that we should explore with her. We could get a sense as to why the government moved forward and continued with that.

The list continues with respect to the programs. I'm not going to continue to harp on that, but someone indicated that repetition sometimes can be helpful. Sometimes we need to make the point that these programs were put in place.

A reset was needed because of the pandemic. The only way we could really get that reset was to make sure we prorogued, that we consulted Canadians, that we consulted folks on the ground, and from there we could come up with the priorities.

[Translation]

It has also been said that the opposition parties felt our new throne speech perhaps wasn't ambitious enough. However, I would say that our Speech from the Throne was very ambitious since our absolute priority is still to be there for all Canadians.

I'd like to make a comment. As I noted earlier, we want to invite Ms. Freeland because she's the Minister of Finance as well as the country's Deputy Prime Minister. She plays a very important role and I'm certain the Prime Minister consulted her to determine recovery priorities during and after the pandemic.

I'll make sure I speak slowly. When I speak in French, I tend to do it very quickly. I'll do my best for the interpreters.

Earlier I mentioned that Minister Freeland chaired the cabinet committee responsible for the federal response to the coronavirus disease, or COVID-19. In all the work that was done over months, Minister Freeland really played a central role in all decisions. I'm very grateful to her for that and I think she could provide us with a lot of information on the subject.

Canada has constantly adapted its response based on new scientific data since the start of the pandemic. The sole purpose of all the government's decisions is to protect the health and safety of all Canadians.

Canada is literally being hit by this third wave right now. All members of the committee discussed the potential third wave, but we're all somewhat surprised by its scope.

Like many other countries, we've had trouble maintaining public health measures due to concerns about economic and social consequences.

Once again, we're telling people to stay at home, and I know that people are concerned about the economic aspect, their businesses and our economy in general.

Once again, we want to be there to protect them and the only way to protect ourselves is to follow public health guidelines while we wait for our vaccine.

As in many other countries, the number of cases in certain provinces has risen with the relaxing of certain public health measures and the arrival of the new variants.

Once again, even here in Atlantic Canada, we've done a very good job of managing the pandemic to date, but we can see that we too are beginning to have concerns in Nova Scotia and even New Brunswick. We're starting to see a gradual rise in the number of cases. We really have to do everything we can to protect ourselves.

Increasing case numbers have obviously led to rising hospitalizations and admissions to intensive care. Even more worrisome, hospitalization rates reflect not only seniors, but also young people and very young children who are winding up in hospital, and the health systems of certain provinces have now reached capacity as a result.

It's therefore more important than ever—and I want to emphasize this—that we minimize the spread of the virus in order to lower the infection rate as far as possible.

Once again, I come back to Minister Freeland because she chaired that committee, and I think she could really explain the processes that have been put in place to ensure we're there to protect Canadians during the second wave and the third wave as well. We hope there won't be a fourth wave, but that could happen too.

We all know what has to be done to protect the public. The variants haven't changed the actions we take to stop the spread of the virus. Despite daily increases in the number of people vaccinated, we must continue protecting each other even as we see the light at the end of the tunnel. As I said, it's truly motivating to see that part of the population has been vaccinated, but we still have a long way to go to reach the percentage where we're all protected.

We can all sense that the end of the pandemic is approaching. That's why we have to put appropriate measures in place so we can make it safely through this crisis. We have to do it all together. The number of young adults who are infected with COVID-19 and must be hospitalized or sent to intensive care is constantly rising, and that reminds us that, regardless of age, we can all catch COVID-19 and develop serious illness.

I'll stop there, Madam Chair.

As we've said, I think we all know what we have to do to avoid catching or spreading COVID-19, but, once again, we, as a government, must provide Canadians with programs and social policies.

I think Ms. Freeland could come and inform us about the government's decisions and the reasons why the session was prorogued at the time.

The number of cases in the country has more than doubled in the past month. However, every newly infected person can in turn infect many more. That's how the pandemic continues to expand in scope. If we're to believe the forecasting models, there may well be a resurgence if the most worrisome variants continue to spread at the same rate and public health measures remain the same.

That's why we must all limit our contacts as much as possible because we need to reduce the risk of being infected ourselves and unintentionally passing the virus on to others.

On another, more positive note, we're starting to see the effects of vaccination. As I said, the news isn't all bad; there's light at the end of the tunnel, but we still have a lot of work to do.

As of April 10, more than 84% of seniors 80 and over had received at least one vaccination against COVID-19. The number of complications among the 80 and over age group has fallen sharply in the past few weeks and risen more slowly in the other age groups. The number of outbreaks in long-term care homes is still declining among seniors and the most vulnerable. The more vaccination efforts advance, the more the public will see their impact.

Once again, Madam Chair, I think that Ms. Freeland, as chair of the cabinet committee responsible for the federal response to the coronavirus disease, or COVID-19, can explain to us all the programs that have been established to assist seniors in our provinces and territories and to tell us what we have to do to really slow the spread of the disease.

The growing number of variants is worrisome because they're associated with more serious consequences. The number of variant cases in Canada is still rising sharply and nearly doubled in one week. In addition, this spring, many governments are still reporting variants of concern during the third wave. On April 20, 70,000 variants of concern cases were reported in Canada, and they now represent the majority of cases in the four largest provinces.

Atlantic Canada isn't safe from the variants. As I was saying, there's been an outbreak of cases in Nova Scotia, just next door to New Brunswick. It's very disturbing, and people are very concerned about the variants.

If Ms. Freeland came to see us, we could ask her the questions that trouble us all and ask her to explain the reasons for the decisions that were made and the reason for the prorogation.

With the emergence of variants of concern in late 2020, the Government of Canada established a strategy to detect and combat those variants. The government invested \$53 million as part of that strategy. What will the strategy be? Its purpose is to expand capacity and sequencing across Canada to shorten the time it takes to achieve results. That will assist in taking prompt public health measures and creating a robust, results-based research network. We will thus be able to understand these new variants and their impacts in very short order. This work is being done in partnership and cooperation with the provinces and territories and has helped expand sequencing capacity, which has gone...

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, on a point of order, I recognize that we're being very lenient, but we are getting into details of some programs and some options now. Our path has gone miles outside of the actual motion that's on the table right now.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll remind the member to rein it in.

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Of course, Madam Chair.

I think Minister Freeland has a lot of information to pass on to us since she chaired the cabinet committee responsible for the federal response to the coronavirus disease, or COVID-19. I won't go into any of the details here. I'm simply providing an overview of what the minister had to consider, including investments, in dealing with COVID-19-related problems.

Once again, I appreciate Ms. Vecchio's comments. I'll continue.

The Government of Canada has also cooperated with major networks such as the COVID Genomics Network and the Canadian Public Health Laboratory Network using current and new sequencing capacities for the rapid introduction of public health measures.

I'm thinking in particular of the development of rapid screening tests for known variants and a national sequencing strategy that combines outbreak investigations, monitoring, Canadian trends and targeted tests such as those related to travel. Canada now requires travellers returning to the country to undergo a screening test and positive samples are sequenced. This measure helps us monitor variants that enter Canada and provides us with another measure to support our border policies.

All these decisions, all these programs and all these directions didn't simply appear overnight. The cabinet committee and all the consultations it had to conduct focused on what had to be done. That explains, once again, why I think Minister Freeland could provide us with information that would be very useful in developing our final report.

Canada's vaccination strategy is clear. We're trying to vaccinate as many Canadians as possible, starting with those at greatest risk of being sick and hospitalized if infected. This approach helps protect both the persons concerned and those close to them.

Vaccination is definitely still the absolute priority, but we're nowhere near that yet. It's our ultimate goal, but first we have to ensure that Canadians get the assistance they need to stay at home when they're sick.

Since we're receiving increasing quantities of approved vaccines, Canada is well equipped to ramp up vaccinations and optimize public protection even more quickly. We know that millions of doses have been administered to date and that this work is being done in close cooperation with the provinces and territories. As I mentioned earlier, the provinces and territories all operate differently.

My husband was on a waiting list yesterday evening and was able to get in quickly. We're saying that the provinces and territories

have all established their priorities and we're working in close cooperation with them.

In cooperation with our partners, we're monitoring the situation as it evolves and learning a great deal in real time about the efficacy of the vaccines and the best way to distribute and use them. We're relying on all the information we have, while of course ensuring everyone's safety and protection.

Studies conducted in Israel and the United Kingdom show that two doses of mRNA vaccine provide excellent protection and are more than 90% effective in preventing asymptomatic infection, symptomatic infection, hospitalization, serious forms of the disease and death.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: What is the relevance of this? We're still talking about Mr. Turnbull's motion regarding the prorogation study and hearing from Madam Freeland as well as a few others. Perhaps we could get back to that. We are now going very off key. I would hope that, as the chair, you would keep the comments relevant.

The Chair: I'm in a difficult spot because, I guess you're not seeing the link, but I can see the link as to why one might prorogue. Ms. Petitpas Taylor is continuing to explain that this is her view of why prorogation happened. Maybe on the details of the programs and all of that, I can see how that may be seen as going off on a tangent a little bit, but I can surely see the linkage, so it's difficult for me to make any direct ruling.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, perhaps you can give us a framework, maybe, of what would be relevant and irrelevant. I'm wondering if there are timelines and things that have led up to prorogation. We seem to be talking a lot about things that....

I'm really happy that Ginette's husband is getting the vaccine—my husband has it as well—but I think we really need to talk about the actual motion, the prorogation motion. We are talking about everything we could see in every single standing committee right now, and although I think this is great, we are watching now almost 40 hours of filibustering. I'm just wondering when we're going to actually get to a vote or if we're going to just continue to do this.

I mean, honestly, if you're going to allow there to be anything said as long as it's under the Government of Canada, I question that. I really want to ensure that we're staying on the motion. As the weeks have progressed, I'm finding that we can talk about almost anything as long as it has to do with the Government of Canada and COVID. That is not what this study is. We are studying prorogation, not the response to COVID-19. We are studying the reasons for prorogation. That's what we should be getting back to. When the minister is here we can ask her those questions. Unfortunately, she has yet to even respond.

The Chair: I take that point.

As for a framework, I'll think on that and see if I can come up with something. That's an interesting request. I'll see if that's possible.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, can I speak to that point of order?

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Is it not the case that COVID-19 was the reason for prorogation? If that's the case, then Ms. Petitpas Taylor is bringing up, I think, relevant information, data and examples of how COVID-19 may provide the rationale for prorogation, which is something that I think our members have maintained all along.

I fail to see how this is not relevant, to be honest. I'm sorry to differ with Ms. Vecchio, of course, but that is the nature of debate.

The Chair: I'll take both points into consideration and see if, after talking with the clerk maybe at a later point today, there is more or better advice on the side that I can guide you all with.

At this point, I'll give the floor to Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

[Translation]

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

I want to thank my friend Ms. Vecchio once again for her comments. She mentioned that we're here to discuss the reason for the prorogation. As my other colleague and friend Mr. Turnbull clearly said, I think the reason for the prorogation was the global pandemic. The comments I'm making are related to this issue.

I realize that my comments today are somewhat lengthy, but I think it's very important that Canadians understand that we're now debating the reason why the government chose to prorogue Parliament in August 2020 and that that reason was the global pandemic. As I said, I genuinely hope we never have to face this kind of crisis again. However, this crisis was the reason why the government prorogued Parliament. I'm going to try to keep my comments short, but I nevertheless want to present all the points in the speech that I worked on. These are points that I want to present to the committee.

We know that public health measures are effective while we wait for the vaccines to be distributed. Experience in other countries shows that we must comply with strict health measures in order to control the rapid spread of epidemics and to allow countries the time to vaccinate their citizens. Lastly, some countries that have high vaccination rates have experienced equally high rates of spread as a result of relaxed public health measures. Once again, with regard to the policies we need to develop, I think it's important

to hear from Minister Freeland so she can explain the reasons why the government made certain decisions.

Since many Canadians have yet to receive any vaccine and some have received only their first dose, it's still important that everyone, whether vaccinated or not, continue following public health guidance. We must continue practising physical distancing, wearing a mask and avoiding gatherings, especially indoor gatherings. That will help us keep the epidemic at bay. Public health measures are still extremely important while vaccines are being distributed because they guarantee a degree of protection among the population. As we've seen in other countries, if measures are lifted before enough people have been vaccinated, outbreaks may occur and require repeated adjustments to control the rate of infection. That was actually one of the preliminary findings from Israel's vaccination campaign.

Information is circulating at an unprecedented rate. Of course, we're using the information, evidence and local epidemiological data that are coming in at a rapid rate to guide our approach. We have to continue complying with public health measures. We won't be able to relax them until the data show that a gradual increase in social interaction and economic activity doesn't put the population at risk. The determinant factors include the spread of variants, severity of symptoms, vaccine efficacy, the capacity of the healthcare system and the efficacy of public health measures to control transmission.

I'm going to take a short break, since I think Ms. Freeland plays a central role in all these measures that must be introduced, all the policies that have been established and all economic decisions. She was also responsible for deciding on a direction for all the departments that had to make decisions. Once again, I think it would be a very good idea for her to appear. It's important right now to rely on the work that has been done by taking measures based on evidence and cooperating with all levels of government.

The past year of fighting COVID-19 in Canada has taught us two things. Considerable effort is required to manage the issue. All levels of government and the public must abide by public health measures, take precautions and get vaccinated in order to limit the number of COVID cases.

Now I'd like to discuss the vaccination campaign in Canada. I think we could question Ms. Freeland on that subject. The Government of Canada has adopted an overall approach to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, and the vaccination plan is part of that approach. We're now entering the second phase of the vaccination campaign and vaccine deliveries should accelerate sharply starting this month.

As the Prime Minister recently announced, Pfizer plans to deliver doses earlier, in June. That means Canada should be well on the way to receiving some 50 million doses of vaccine by the end of June. As a result of those deliveries, all Canadians wishing to be vaccinated will receive their first dose by summer. Then we can provide second doses, which will afford greater protection against the virus, by late September of this year. Every eligible Canadian who wants to be vaccinated can be. Ms. Freeland could give us her observations on the vaccination strategy, its purpose and the decisions made with respect to it.

Canadians are somewhat relieved now that the warmer weather has arrived and vaccinations have started. However, they want to know what impact that will have on their personal situation. How will we be able to transition to a new normal? I believe we're all asking ourselves that question. What will the new normal look like? In the circumstances, we may be tempted to change our habits, but we must understand that the message for Canadians is crystal clear: this is no time to let our guard down.

We know the virus is still spreading at an accelerated rate in certain regions of the country, causing unprecedented problems for the health system. Our neighbours, friends and families rely on the co-operation of all of us. Ms. Freeland could come and discuss the path and approach we've taken to get here. There's light at the end of the tunnel. The vaccines are here; they've arrived. However, we will continue providing support programs to our citizens, to all Canadians, to ensure that everyone is protected until the desired vaccination rate has been achieved.

I don't want to monopolize the entire meeting today. I've been speaking for a long time. I'm going to yield to my friend and colleague Dr. Duncan, who will give us her comments on the subject. I always enjoy her comments.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

We have Dr. Duncan next, then Mr. Long, Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Lauzon.

Dr. Duncan, please.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Chair, I'd like to thank my honourable friend and colleague for her wonderful remarks.

Mr. Turnbull came back recently. I know he is eager to speak, so I will pass my time to my friend Mr. Turnbull.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Duncan.

Mr. Long is next.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon to all my friends and colleagues. It's certainly a pleasure to be back on PROC. I'm looking forward to the discussions today, but, Chair, at this time, I'd like to yield my time to Ryan Turnbull.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks to my generous colleagues who graciously gave up their spot in the speakers list to have me speak. I do appreciate that.

Madam Chair, I just wanted to tell you a funny story. Before PROC meetings now, I'm bringing my cappuccino maker into my office just so I have it on hand. I find I need extra caffeine for these meetings to keep me going.

I want to make a bit of a plea to my colleagues on the committee. We know that the finance committee is seized with a big responsibility right now, which is to review Bill C-30, the budget implementation act. They have to do this by the end of June. Pieces of that bill are being hived off and given to committees that have a mandate for different sections.

There's a section in particular which this committee would be responsible for if you look at the mandate of PROC. These are the changes to the Canada Elections Act. It's division 37. It's specifically the section that deals with publishing knowingly false statements that affect an election result. This is a concern that I have and that other members of this committee have expressed in the past. There's been quite a lot of debate in past Parliaments about this particular issue. The word "knowingly" is one of the hot-button issues.

With the recent Ontario Superior Court decision, I think there's some reason to study this. I think that the finance committee would have a very hard time if PROC doesn't undertake some work on this topic to help them meet their deadline. It is within our mandate and within the Standing Orders. I believe it's Standing Order 108(3)(vi). It basically says PROC is responsible for studying anything to do with the election of members of Parliament, so I think it is within our mandate.

In this regard, I think it's our duty to move on to doing some work on this particular issue. I think we could hear from witnesses and have some meaningful discussion about this.

I want to move the following:

That the committee proceed to the following motion: That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(vi), the chair write to the chair of the Standing Committee on Finance indicating that the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs wishes to conduct a study on the amendments to the Canada Elections Act contained in Bill C-30; that the committee shall hold a minimum of three meetings each for a minimum of two hours; that the first witness called shall be the Chief Electoral Officer; that the witness lists must be provided to the clerk no later than Friday, May 7; and that the report from the committee on this study shall be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance not later than the timeline received from the finance committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

If everyone on the committee would give me a second, I want to review something.

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

I think we would take this as a notice of motion. I don't think you can move a motion such as this when another motion is on the floor.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nater.

Just give me a moment, please.

Did somebody want to debate that point? Maybe I could then take it all back to the clerk.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I believe my motion is a dilatory motion that would move immediately to a vote, if I'm not mistaken.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll be right back if you could give me a minute.

Mr. Turnbull, can I ask you to email, if you have it in both official languages, a copy of that motion to the clerk and me?

At this point, having heard what you have said and what Mr. Nater has said, I view it as not being a debate on the actual motion, and that if the committee were to vote to move to a different order of business for the day, then you would move the actual substantive motion.

At this point, a vote to move to another subject matter is deemed as a dilatory motion that is not debatable, and we would just be moving to see if we are going to move to another order, but the substantive motion would not be moved until the committee agreed to move to that.

Mr. Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Pardon me. I don't know whether you can hear me.

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I find it somewhat surprising that someone wants to introduce one motion while we're debating another. I have two motions that have been on notice for a long time, and I'm waiting patiently. I had three motions to introduce but withdrew one. My two motions on notice would follow this one, but we're discussing another motion.

I have considerable respect for the work the committee is doing. Until we finish debating Ms. Vecchio's motion and Mr. Turnbull's amendment, I'll wait patiently out of respect for the committee's work. I don't know why the Liberals don't do the same.

[English]

The Chair: I hear your point.

Yes, you have three motions that have been properly put on notice—

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Yes, that's correct.

Pardon me, but I meant to say I would withdraw one when the time came. That's why I say I have two motions.

You're absolutely right. You're doing an excellent job, Madam Chair. I commend you for that, among other things.

[English]

The Chair: I've heard of that happening in other committees, and that is how I would interpret things if we got to that point, but you have properly put on notice three motions.

There are many other motions that the members have. There are approximately 10 motions on notice at this committee that could be moved to and, at any point, I believe, anybody could move a dilatory motion to move to those if they wished to, to move to another order of the day if they wished to. I think the committee would then be able to debate which order of business they'd like to move to.

At that point there would be a vote on whether you would like to move to another order, and at that point only Mr. Turnbull would have the opportunity to move his motion.

We have a couple of hands up. Ms. Vecchio and then Mr. Blaikie.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm sorry about that. I was trying to lower my hand. I wish to not be on.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you, Ms. Vecchio.

Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, I'm just trying to get a better appreciation of what exactly is going on. There seems to me to be at least two ways in which this motion is out of order.

In the first case, typically if you're proposing a new study or you have any kind of substantive motion—this is part of the routine motions we passed at the beginning of the committee—you have to give 48 hours' notice. I don't believe notice has been given. It's my sense that the motion is out of order, in that sense.

The second sense in which I think it may be out of order is that I don't see how it's a dilatory motion. There are a few kinds of typical dilatory motions which are outlined in House procedure. One is that the committee do now adjourn. Another is that the debate be now adjourned. The third is that the committee proceed to another order of business.

There is no order of business that's been given any notice for, so it doesn't seem to me that a dilatory motion can be used as a way to shoehorn in a new order of business that there's been no due notice given for. Otherwise, we could do this all day. We could just all bring whatever we want to talk about to the floor in the form of a dilatory motion, which I think would really undermine the routine motion that was passed in terms of at least giving notice. I think you'd find, with the number of motions on the table, that members may decide that being able to raise any potential issue of study in the form of a dilatory motion would become a way of doing business.

I would just offer that word of caution. I think the ruling here about whether this motion as it's being presented is in order can have a considerable amount of significance for this committee in this session of Parliament. Also, because the procedure and House affairs committee is the committee that other committees look to for guidance on how to conduct their business, this is the kind of ruling that could have a considerable ripple effect on the way in which all committees of the House conduct their business. I understand that this is not the only committee experiencing a filibuster.

I think your ruling is important in this regard. I think it's important to get it right. I would urge you not to rush. I don't think anybody can accuse the committee of rushing to anything recently, so I don't see any value, in this case, in departing from the culture that's been set. I would encourage you to take the time to reflect on the nature of this motion and the consequences of having us deal with it in the way that Mr. Turnbull is proposing.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie, you raise some really good points. Actually, you definitely have me thinking.

On moving to another order of business while we're in committee business, the notice requirement is not when we are generally in committee business. You can bring forward other motions without the notice requirement that's generally needed when we are in committee business, and since that's what we are in, it would be in order, but only if the dilatory motion were to be passed. I don't know; I don't foresee which way that would go at this point, anyway, but to move to another order of the day would be seen as a dilatory order....

Perhaps I'll have the clerk supplement what I'm saying or add to what I'm saying. Obviously, he can state it in a slightly different way, which might make more sense to all the members.

Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I don't necessarily have a lot more to add other than to reiterate the point about committee business.

Generally, when a committee is meeting under committee business—and currently for meeting 27 the item of business that the committee has been engaged in is committee business, even though the committee has been debating Ms. Vecchio's motion and Mr. Turnbull's amendment—that would suggest that other possible proposals for the committee to work on, such as the notices of motion that we already have, including now this new suggestion by Mr. Turnbull, would not need to meet the notice requirement.

The means that Mr. Turnbull is suggesting with his current motion would be to move to essentially another order of the day. That would, if successful, drop the committee back into committee business, which would open the floor for his new suggestion for a motion. The way in which he has proposed it would essentially replace the item that is currently under debate with his new suggestion that he has brought forward at this point. The first step, however, of course, is for the committee to decide, in fact, if they want to move to a new order of business.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, can you help with a vote on this, please?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, the question would be on moving to a new order of business.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We are back on the amendment and the floor is back with Mr. Turnbull.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm wondering about a couple of things.

Could we not go to a vote on this motion now? If the Liberals are saying they want to move forward, that they want to get off this, can we not move forward now?

The Chair: I can definitely survey the committee and see if the committee would like to move to a vote on the amendment.

Would the committee like to move to a vote on the amendment?

Is there a consensus to move towards the vote?

Some hon. members: Agreed

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Okay.

We still have a speakers list on the amendment. Since it's a debatable motion, we'll continue with the speakers list. Perhaps there will be a point where a speaker on the list will want to see a vote.

Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm just going to ask a question on a point of order.

After a vote, does the floor go to the next speaker or does it remain with the speaker who called the vote? I just know a lot [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] more now. It's just a question on this.

The Chair: The floor would go back to whoever had it.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That is awesome. I just wasn't sure. Perfect.

Thank you.

The Chair: If there was a vote on the amendment, we would drop our current speakers list on the amendment and move to the main motion.

Mr. John Nater: A point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: My understanding is that when a member moves a dilatory motion, the floor goes to the next speaker. I could be mistaken, so perhaps the clerk could clarify. I have been mistaken a few times in my life. For example, I cheer for the Leafs. That's usually a big mistake.

I just need clarity on that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's a point of order right there, Mr. Nater. Come on.

The Chair: A lot of people can commiserate with you and relate to you on that one, Mr. Nater. I could also be wrong, so let me double-check on that.

My apologies, Mr. Nater, you are correct. I guess there are only a few times that you have been incorrect.

Thanks for pointing that out.

Mr. Lauzon, the floor now goes to you.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you.

It's been a long time since I've spoken at this committee. Thanks, everyone, for all your kind words over the last few days and weeks. I'm so happy to be back at 110%. I'm in good condition and ready to debate.

I appreciate all the comments made by my colleagues who spoke before me, and the amazing job done by Ginette today. It was directly related to the situation that we are living right now. It's all about COVID-19. It's about the Speech from the Throne. It's about the Prime Minister's decisions. Today the debate relates to the amendment proposed by Ryan to the initial motion brought forward by Madam Vecchio.

It's all related, and today I would like to talk to you about a different thing. First of all, I want to indicate why we are here and why, today, we have to debate, again, this motion and amendment. After that, I would like to talk about what we could do at this meeting. It would be very valuable for us to go forward with different issues. At the end, if I have time, I would like to conclude with a wrap-up of the analysis I made since I started on this committee and why we should not invite the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

It's been difficult for me to step back and look at this committee without coming in and providing you with my comments.

I will now switch to French, because it is easier for me to speak for a long time in French, so you will have to switch to translation.

[Translation]

Having had to leave this meeting for some time, I had high expectations when I returned.

To be honest, given the situation I was in, I didn't contact my colleagues. I focused on my health and set everything else aside. It was an effort for me to come back. I've never experienced that in my career or in my life. I was in convalescence for the first time. I would never have thought someone of my stature could get sick. Let me tell you right off the bat: no one's invincible. Take care of your health. It's very important to do your work, but do it in good health.

I can tell you today that my greatest disappointment when I came back to the committee was that we were still discussing Mr. Turnbull's amendment. I have nothing against Mr. Turnbull, but a consensus should have been reached on this amendment. The committee could have moved on to something else and gotten things done. I had high hopes in that area.

When I became a member of the committee, the first thing I did was analyze everything that could be done in the course of our proceedings and to go through the reports and questions. As you know, I come from the private sector. Life in the private sector goes at 200 miles an hour. We work proactively. You have to be innovative and forge ahead.

You have to make quick decisions. You have to be part of the action.

Then you find yourself on a committee where you intend to do big things and you're faced with a situation like this one. I have to say I'm really disappointed to be debating this issue, one that's been discussed in many meetings of many committees and as a result of which the WE Charity scandal is still the main issue.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I just wanted to inform you that Mr. Kent has dropped off the call. I believe that we may have people coming back and forth. We are having some technological glitches here. I just wanted to inform you of that.

The Chair: Seeing what happened a little while ago, maybe we should wait for Mr. Kent to get back on.

Would that make you more comfortable, Ms. Vecchio?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I see that Mr. Williamson has joined, so perhaps Mr. Williamson has joined in place of Mr. Kent. I just want to know, because I'm seeing all of the different members going through these kinds of connection problems today.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Yes, I'm subbing in.

The Chair: You're subbing in for Mr. Kent?

Mr. John Williamson: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, so you have one. Mr. Nater just has his camera off. That's it. Yes, he's there.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Kent is just coming back on, if you see that too.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Nater doesn't want to see me.

Hon. Peter Kent: My apologies, Chair. I have a Rogers tech virtually at the door and we'll try to correct this, but that's it for now. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Kent, do you want me to repeat the introduction?

Hon. Peter Kent: No, I think I'm clear on that, thank you.

The Chair: Yes, no surprise there.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I was about halfway into my introduction.

The Chair: We'll resume, Mr. Lauzon, and it really is such a pleasure to have you back. Thank you for the reminder about not being invincible. You're so right about that. Thank you.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thanks, everyone, for your kind words also.

[Translation]

As I was telling you, to get up to speed, I had to reread all the reports and all the questions you had put to the witnesses during the committee's meetings. The questions were already about WE Charity at the time.

I'm well acquainted with political games because I've been involved in politics to varying degrees for some 30 years. Today, however, as I told you, the watchword is a simple one, and I'm prepared to debate the issue as long as necessary. Whether we like it or not, a government in power, even a minority government, is one that has chosen to make decisions. Whether we like it or not, the people chose the Liberals. I understand that the other parties are playing political games, but since we're in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, I think that, as parliamentarians, we should set aside partisanship and simply work on the extremely important issues we need to address.

When I came back, I took stock of the situation and asked the chair how many motions had been introduced. I had lost count and thought there had been six or seven, including that of Mr. Therrien, who wants to withdraw one. However, 10 motions have been introduced and we're still discussing Mr. Turnbull's amendment. At first, unlike Ms. Petitpas Taylor and Mr. Turnbull, I wasn't in favour of that motion of Ms. Vecchio's. We should simply have dropped it and moved on. However, every good member can give some ground, and after analyzing the matter and speaking with my colleagues, I decided to accept Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

We put many questions to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Mr. Rodriguez, and we're still saying that we want to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and that this question can be debated again today. That's unfortunate because, as parliamentarians, we should especially focus on the pandemic. Ms. Petitpas Taylor described the situation earlier as she explained the reasons why the pandemic is directly related to what we're doing.

It's late. The pandemic began 15 months ago and case numbers are still rising in my riding. We're in the red zone and many restaurants and businesses there have shut down as a result of COVID-19 because the hospitals are still full. The statistics on our seniors are improving, but we know the variants attack younger people. This week in my riding, all teaching staff will receive their first doses of vaccine. However, as Ms. Petitpas Taylor explained, you must not let your guard down even if you get a dose of vaccine because your entire system is vulnerable. We must make our decisions and move forward based on that fact.

Under the amendment that Mr. Turnbull introduced following discussions with the chair of this committee and that of the Standing Committee on Finance, this motion may address the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be entirely appropriate for us to take a break, analyze the situation and take another look at Mr. Turnbull's amendment. However, I understand the political games being played around this issue.

I want to discuss the fact that we're still in the midst of the pandemic. People tend to forget that because the temperature is rising. The nice weather makes people want to get together. In reality, Canadians rightly focus on much more important issues than those we're discussing right now.

I want to make a direct connection with the calls I make to people in my riding. Personally, I'm a fan of phone calls and telephones. I call the people in my constituency, and a team of volun-

teers is there to help me. Calling my fellow citizens helps me take the public's pulse.

I've made thousands of calls since last August. No one has spoken to me about the importance of proroguing Parliament for six weeks last August or told me that the Prime Minister should appear before the committee to talk about the prorogation. The opposition parties have formed their own idea of the reasons for the prorogation. Having made thousands of calls, all I can say is that no citizen is concerned about the situation we're in today. There's no better way to survey public opinion of the situation.

Canadians want to hear us discuss much more important matters, such as the measures we put in place to combat the pandemic. Canadians are focused on the millions of doses of vaccine and want to know when they'll get their second dose.

In Quebec, people want to book through a website. People call us to ask when their age group will be allowed to be vaccinated. That's what people talk to us about; they don't talk to us about the prorogation, amendments or the WE Charity issue. Canadians are focusing on the doses of vaccine that were administered this week. They want to know how many cases there are in the hospitals, how many deaths and what we're going to do to support industries. We're all affected by that.

There are businesses associated with the tourism industry, for example, in every one of our ridings. The riding I represent is quite rural and thus depends on tourism. The tourism season's nearly here. There are a lot of festivals in my riding. Festivals are an industry in themselves. Culture, music, entertainment and the outdoors are part of the culture of Argenteuil—La Petite Nation, but everything's on hold right now.

One of the concerns is whether day camps will open this summer. That's the question on people's minds. Can we send our kids to day camp this summer? Will summer jobs be available at the day camps? No one was wondering whether Ryan Turnbull's amendment was relevant to the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That's not the case.

Everything I'm saying is part of my introduction. I want to share a number of things with my colleagues. For the people in my riding, it's important that we discuss real business, things that affect Canadians. People today want us to discuss the economic recovery.

They want to talk about what the government can do to stimulate the local economy and the economies of every one of our ridings and provinces.

It's important to join forces to work toward economic recovery so we can have a strong Canada and create jobs. We have to work directly with people to help them get back on their feet after this crisis.

We aren't out of the crisis yet. It's dragged on for 15 months, and, as I speak to you, there's no indication that we'll be able to gather for the Christmas holidays or that life will be as it was. Things will change. Business models will be altered.

Governments must support people. As members of Parliament, we must devote all our energy to finding solutions to revive the new economy. These are words we aren't used to hearing because we only use them after pandemics, wars and disasters.

As Canadians, we must bounce back from this pandemic and move on to something else. We must get over it by accepting Mr. Turnbull's amendment. It's directly related to the prorogation and the Speech from the Throne.

Let's be clear. Ms. Vecchio, you have all my respect, but this motion is a democratic shell game, an attempt to keep the WE Charity scandal alive. Even after detailed examination by other committees of the documents and testimony on the subject, this is the latest attempt to corner the Prime Minister, who at the time was in a vulnerable position, one that's even being taken out of context today.

There's absolutely no evidence or proof that anything inappropriate occurred. I understand that angers the opposition parties. I know it's hard for the opposition parties to grasp that they've found nothing. I understand that they were trying to find something. There has been little or no publicity about this, and they'd like to test the waters in an attempt to revive the scandal. But it's not working. That's a shock to the opposition parties, and I understand that. However, this game has to stop at some point.

Instead of focusing on problems that actually affect Canadians, since the list of issues the committee could address includes some important matters, Mr. Blaikie said earlier that the new motion should appear on the initial list. My answer would be no, because politics evolves.

For example, who would have thought that the chair of the Standing Committee on Finance would have had an important item on the agenda, one that would have an influence on Elections Canada if an election were to be called? We don't have a crystal ball. We're engaged in politics and we evolve from day to day.

The purpose of the motion that Mr. Turnbull introduced today is to do our government a favour. However, we aren't doing our government or the public any favours today by allowing the Standing Committee on Finance to make a decision that could have been debated here in our committee. That decision might have been relevant in a completely different way before it was sent back to the Standing Committee on Finance.

Today we have before us a motion and an amendment the result of which is that all these issues prevent us from moving forward. As regards the prorogation and Mr. Turnbull's amendment, I'll come back later with a list of issues that should be dropped, decided or voted on so we can move on to matters we care about.

The actual situation is that the opposition members are finding it hard to accept that all the time and energy they've spent since last fall have led virtually nowhere. I can understand that's hard for the opposition. We can sense it here in the committee, but that's not the case among the population, where this isn't the reality. The fact that

we're debating an amendment requiring that the Prime Minister testify before the committee on matters that have been addressed in many committees and have led nowhere hasn't drawn a lot of attention from citizens in our ridings.

We can definitely sense the frustration now that all the witnesses have said the same thing in every committee. We would only be repeating ourselves, and that would ultimately be just an opportunity to add to the record a question that could be used to demonstrate an attempt to hurt the government. That's pure politicking in the context of COVID-19. Things might be different if the context weren't extraordinary. However, an election is coming and we have to make extremely important procedural decisions. Consider not only Bill C-19, but also all the rules we have to put in place for the House of Commons and Elections Canada. We must consider that as soon as possible, and that's what we need to discuss.

I understand that it would have been extremely important to debate the motion that Mr. Turnbull introduced today over two or three meetings perhaps. That would have been a small step toward a discussion of Elections Canada, but I'm convinced that we would have come up with more questions than answers after two or three days of deliberating. Addressing that issue would pave the way to a consideration of how to conduct the next election safely and in accordance with the rules prescribed by the government respecting Elections Canada so that Canadians can vote with complete confidence and show that they have a right to promote democracy safely and in their own way.

Officials and politicians have worked hard for 15 months. That's my analysis. Countless hours of work were devoted to the issue to ensure that programs were available to assist Canadians who were in difficulty and still are today. Nothing is perfect. We've made our comments in the course of many meetings and have listened to every pandemic-related question in the House.

We obviously made some adjustments as we went along. Our primary aim was to help as many Canadians as possible. Since nothing is perfect, mistakes were made, and the Prime Minister was the first to admit it.

It's important to debate the amendment so we can then debate some real issues. I was particularly struck by one of the errors that was made. One morning, I was bombarded by emails stating that a traveller voluntarily returning from the south would be entitled to compensation of \$1,000 upon returning. All the parties dropped the ball, not just the Liberals. That was debated in the House. I remember the motion, which contained three elements. One of them was that. We didn't realize that non-essential travellers would be entitled to that amount.

Officials were behind that measure, but I don't blame them. We're trying to reinvent the system. By discussing this motion and voting for the amendment moved by Mr. Turnbull, we would be able to get back to our business and get things done. We have to work together. For example, we have to find a way to conduct the next election safely.

Personally, as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Seniors, I will obviously defend seniors. In the next election, some seniors from my riding will have to travel 200 kilometers to vote. Some Canadian seniors live in remote regions. They aren't allowed to be driven by car; some don't have a driver's licence. We're currently in the red zone, but people don't always practise social distancing. Even if people wear their masks in their cars, they aren't two metres apart.

I have many questions I'd like to ask. I'd like to work with the committee to establish the best standards for Elections Canada.

It's fine to say we're going to move the polling stations closer and set them up in a school or community centre; those institutions aren't accessible in rural communities. Sending out a worker to build a makeshift access ramp doesn't make the school or community centre accessible. That's false. When you're on the ground, you see that the actual situation is different. Even if you install an outdoor ramp, there are still steps inside the building. You haven't solved the problem.

We have to come up with solutions that can help people. To do that, we have to be innovative and a committee has to examine the matter. It bothers me, but we've been debating the motion and Mr. Turnbull's amendment for 40 hours now. Why? Because, as you said, there's no way out, no other way apart from having the Prime Minister here in the committee. For that reason, we're going to be debating for a long time instead of making progress. We can't get things done that we don't want to get done.

I want to talk about the officials again.

I don't want to improvise because I might repeat myself. I tip my hat to the officials who worked during the prorogation and prepared the Speech from the Throne together with the Prime Minister's Office.

They've also been proactive throughout the pandemic. They've innovated and worked on the programs they designed using systems that were unsuited to such extraordinary measures. Simply changing the tax system and extending the deadline by one month are extremely complicated undertakings in the machinery of government. Imagine all the decisions that were made concerning all the programs that were introduced.

Earlier I mentioned the mistakes that had been made. They were collective mistakes that we made together in our attempts to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Sometimes you try to move a little too quickly and make mistakes. However, I want to emphasize that I'm absolutely not criticizing our officials. I am so grateful to the officials who have done a remarkable job during this health crisis.

They have proven that we politicians would be nothing without our officials. At any event, career public servants who have been working for 30 or 35 years have seen a lot of politicians. For them,

we're just passing through. As we do so, we try to meet the needs of Canadians as best we can while asking our officials to do the impossible, to adapt to the situation. Ultimately, we try, year after year, to improve the system based on the prevailing situation.

Today we have an excellent opportunity to improve the electoral system, for example. Mr. Turnbull's amendment concludes the motion by inviting an incredible person who has been here from the start. Ms. Petitpas Taylor accurately described Ms. Freeland, who is absolutely capable of answering all our questions, all the more so since she is the Minister of Finance.

I'm prepared to give Mr. Turnbull and Ms. Petitpas Taylor my support. Initially I didn't quite agree that the Deputy Prime Minister should appear before the committee given all that was said in the other committees. However, now I agree that we should have the Deputy Prime Minister so we can ask her the real questions, the hard questions. The Deputy Prime Minister is prepared to answer them and to testify before the committee.

Has she accepted the invitation? First and foremost, the members of the committee must adopt Mr. Turnbull's amendment for the Deputy Prime Minister to agree to appear before the committee. Since we're debating that amendment, she has no interest in replying to our invitation today. I can't speak on her behalf, but I propose that we first adopt a resolution, a motion. Let's vote in favour of Mr. Turnbull's amendment. Then we'll get an answer to our invitation from the Deputy Prime Minister. Then we'll be able to go ahead, address the tens of pending motions, analyze them one after another, debate them and move ahead on the issues I consider important.

I remember the first wave of the pandemic. We were very concerned at the time. We were already working at a frantic pace in many committees, the House and our ridings.

When the pandemic hit us, we wondered whether what we were experiencing was real and whether it would continue for a month or two. We could see what was happening in other countries. We could see the number of deaths.

The question on people's minds in other countries wasn't how many people would be saved but rather which of them would be saved. We wondered whether we would get to that same point in our country. Those questions were already on our minds.

Fifteen months later, we're still at the mercy of the pandemic and have just spent 40 hours advancing our files because we still don't want to invite the Deputy Prime Minister—the highest ranking government after the Prime Minister—who is also the Minister of Finance. I'm astonished.

Late last fall, following testimony from countless witnesses, the examination of thousands of pages of documents and the questions you asked during all the testimony before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I also went to see what was going on in the other committees. The questions were more or less the same, the witnesses the same and the accusations against WE Charity as well. The immediate question was whether the WE Charity scandal could once again be made the key issue. That's the way it was at the time.

However, that's no longer the case. Fifteen months later, it's something completely different. What's important today is to look ahead. We know that an election will be called. We know that an extremely important economic recovery is taking place in our ridings and that we're very much affected by it. We know that the green shift has to occur and that we'll be experiencing many significant changes in our society in the next few years.

Just imagine how lucky we are. Every single one of us is one of the 336 Canadian decision-makers who are able to take concrete action. How do we go about improving the situation?

I may not have the political experience that many of you have, but I can give you one piece of advice. The best advice I can give you to help get things done is to work, as my father always told me, and, in order to start working, we must adopt this amendment.

[English]

You can look me in the eye right now if you want to, but we'll never let the Prime Minister come to this meeting.

[Translation]

It's inconceivable. I can never let it happen. Have the Deputy Prime Minister appear if you wish; that's already a lot. I'm telling you that we will debate this as long as necessary. The best way to move forward is to work together.

I talked about the difference between what we're experiencing today and what we experienced during the first wave of the pandemic. The scenario is completely different today in both my riding and yours. Now we're facing an economy that has to recover.

We're experiencing all kinds of things: rising lumber prices, exponentially increasing house prices and extremely low interest rates, in particular. We're also seeing people take on more debt and families in difficulty managing to emerge from poverty thanks to government programs.

However, we could be facing a global economic crisis as a result of the pandemic.

We're immune to nothing. We have to prepare, we have to work hard, and we have to keep Canada strong so we can actually get through this crisis together.

After examining the testimony of thousands of witnesses before other committees and ours, the opposition has clearly understood that it overplayed its hand because questions went unanswered. The questions that were asked in this committee and others concerned a scandal that drew no response. The other committees quickly moved on to something else.

That's where we stand today. It isn't out of our own free will that we're discussing Mr. Turnbull's amendment, which clearly involves WE Charity. That has nothing to do with the prorogation.

During the discussions and testimony, we clearly showed that, even though they said that the purpose of the prorogation was to conceal the WE Charity scandal, the witnesses ultimately admitted that prorogation nevertheless had its place. The purpose of the prorogation was to reset the government's agenda and put it on a sound footing. We didn't know at the time that we would be spending 15 months in a pandemic, that we would still be vaccinating, that people would only have received one dose of vaccine and that we would be in the midst of a third wave.

I don't understand how the witnesses could have said at the time, even before the pandemic, that the prorogation didn't follow from the pandemic. If the pandemic wasn't sufficient reason to prorogue Parliament, what was the purpose of the prorogation?

It's so obvious. I want to choose my words here because everything is being recorded, but it was almost amusing. It was truly strange to hear questions directly related to WE Charity without being able to debate them, without being able to express opinions. The questions were plainly related to WE Charity.

As we heard from various witnesses during the committee meetings, under our constitutional conventions, the Prime Minister alone had authority to advise the Governor General on prorogation.

So that's the way it is. The Prime Minister may, as he wishes, request prorogation in an extreme situation. He's virtually the only prime minister who has ever decided to do so in such a way as to be able to prepare a report after the fact explaining why he did so. That could simply have put an end to the discussion and closed the loop. It would have meant that the Prime Minister was explaining to the public, to Canadians, why Parliament had been prorogued.

Now, I understand that the Prime Minister gave his testimony and also prepared his report. I understand that Pablo Rodriguez came and spoke on behalf of the government. However, that's never enough.

It's a form of political gamesmanship I really understand.

Prorogation was a new phenomenon I was unfamiliar with. There were some in the Harper era, but I wasn't there at the time. What I've learned is that the Prime Minister doesn't even need a reason to prorogue Parliament and doesn't have to appear before the committee to justify it. Constitutional conventions do not require the Prime Minister to justify a prorogation. And yet the Prime Minister did so out of concern for transparency.

Today, it's being suggested that he be invited to have him justify the prorogation. But that's not the main reason for the invitation. It's really to unearth scandals that other committees failed to find. It's the umpteenth attempt to test the system. It's an attempt to break the political system to find some bug that doesn't exist.

My understanding is that, historically, prorogation has been used in Canada to wipe the slate clean. As was explained, the purpose of prorogation is to end Parliament's work so that it can then start over from scratch. The period between dissolution and the new throne speech has varied over time. The August 2020 prorogation lasted six weeks but only prevented the House from sitting for two days.

It was important for public servants and politicians to work together to try to restart the economy and find ways to address the shortcomings. Today again, I learned about the closing of a restaurant in my riding. I am extremely disappointed that La Barque, a small village restaurant, is closing down because we've been unable to deal with the pandemic. Do we really need to know that a small restaurant in the village is shutting down? We need to find ways to work together. We need to find a way to adopt this amendment so that we, as MPs, can say that we can make a difference for Canadians. That's the main reason why we were elected.

I mentioned the period between the dissolution of Parliament and the throne speech. I find it interesting to see the opposition argue on the basis of this period that the prorogation was related to the WE Charity. The same questions were asked at the Standing Committee on Finance. I read over the evidence. Some witnesses said that we had acted too late, and that we should have cleared the snow before it had even fallen. We should have prorogued as soon as we knew that the coronavirus was spreading in other countries. Some people told us that we waited too long. According to the opposition, we always wait too long.

We have been working with our experts and with the Public Health Agency of Canada. The COVID-19 pandemic didn't come with an instruction manual.

I'm going to talk about how we might be able to work more effectively, and about how important it is for us to consider the post COVID-19 period so that we can be prepared to deal with any future disasters. As members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, it's important for us, in principle, to take the 10 motions on notice, along with various pending matters and some good ideas you may have had even before I got here, and to work on what I believe is the most important motion, which is how we can do better in any catastrophe, without having to mention the expression "COVID-19". We need to address this because it's important for Canadians. How can we as members of this committee make ourselves useful?

We could then say that we had made a difference, because we worked on a model, a guide. Canadians are relying on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to show them what it plans to do after studying ways of dealing more effectively with a pandemic.

It means looking at what we got right and what was unsuccessful. Feel free to look at what we got wrong, which means asking real questions of the proper witnesses—those who were affected by the pandemic.

One such witness is a ferryboat operator in my riding. He was never able to benefit from any of the programs for one reason and one reason only. The calculation for compensation was based on revenues for the year preceding the pandemic. Unfortunately, there

were floods that year. This meant much lower revenue than usual in July and August. The following year, in July and August, he was not eligible for the programs because his revenue had dropped dramatically the previous year. He was therefore never entitled to any compensation. Can't we do better than that?

I had to explain to this citizen in my riding that he had fallen through one of the cracks in the system.

I don't receive benefits because I'm a Liberal MP. Canadians are Canadians, no matter where they come from. The day after an election, we turn the page and serve all Canadians equally. I am a Liberal because of my convictions. The day after an election, I can turn the page and serve everyone, whether from Petite-Nation or Calgary. A Canadian is a Canadian.

Now, how can we improve the system? The best solution would be to move on to something else.

I understand political gamesmanship, but I'm not going to take the rap for it. As an MP and a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs—duties I take pride in—I would not say that I'm to blame if we fail today move forward and still find ourselves here after 40 hours of debate.

It would be unreasonable for me to say to a government that was elected by the people that I agreed with the idea of the Prime Minister coming here to testify before this committee after several attempts by other committees to do just that.

I digressed to address the economy, on which I would like to see some action. These procedures are very important to me.

What I just said made me think of something I'm going to tell you about. This proves that my speech was not written ahead of time. I'm going to describe what I experienced in order to explain why we should adopt Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Some municipalities in my riding experienced some flooding. As the Canadian government, we sent the armed forces to help out. We helicoptered people from their houses. They left behind their vulnerable animals, including horses, cows, dogs and cats. We were able to save the people, but not the animals.

These decisions were extremely difficult for us, as MPs. We worked with the armed forces to save Canadians. How can we do better?

The first thing these small municipalities did, even though they didn't add much staff, was to work with the RCMs to establish procedures. In 2017, we worked together to decide on the best ways of taking action if we were to have other floods. We wanted to be proactive. We wanted to look at the chronology of events to determine whether it would have been possible to get the farm animals out or to take specific steps to care for them. For some of the farms, it was not even possible to feed the animals because they couldn't be reached. Dairy farms had to dump milk into the river because the trucks couldn't come to pick it up. We therefore had to look at what had happened to see if we would be able to do things better and make better decisions if the situation were ever to recur.

And these small municipalities were in fact able, with the RCMs, to put together documents specifying procedures to follow in the event of a disaster. I worked with the small municipalities to find basic solutions, like sandbags and ways of dealing with the animals. This shows just how important it is...

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm not sure what the relevance is of all the animals—to *Old MacDonald Had a Farm* maybe, but not to the prorogation motion that we're talking about.

Perhaps you could remind the member to make it relevant.

The Chair: Okay, Ms. Gladu.

I remind the member to relate the comments he's making back to Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Chair, it is so relevant for me to give examples about exactly what's happened in my riding because, if we go forward with Ryan's amendment, we could make good decisions like the ones we make in my riding and give examples of what happened in my riding.

It's so important for me because, if we don't have examples, we can just stay on this amendment as long as we can talk, for hours and hours. For me, to give great examples that are directly related to Canadians is very important.

[Translation]

People feel important when they've worked with the community to establish procedures for the future.

And do you know what happened in 2019, two years after the implementation of environmental disaster procedures? We had another flood. We were hit once again in 2019. We had only had a break of two years. People hadn't even had time to rebuild their basements and fix up their houses. The builders were still working on sites where machinery was being used. We are still working with provincial representatives to identify flood-prone areas. We were still working on it when another flood occurred.

The first thing we did...

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

We are talking about flooding that happened in 2019, a long time before the prorogation and even before the pandemic.

I sympathize with you, Mr. Lauzon. There has been some flooding in my riding too. But I think it would be a more appropriate topic for another committee, or even the International Joint Commission.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Normandin.

Mr. Lauzon, I know it's important to you, and we can all see why this issue is important to you, but can you relate it back to the issue of prorogation in 2020?

That's 2019. Sorry.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: No, in fact it was in 2020.

[English]

The Chair: I'm so confused myself now.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I'd like to thank Ms. Normandin for having raised her point of order. It allows me to explain just how important it is to move forward and establish a committee like ours to develop procedures. If we were to adopt Mr. Turnbull's amendment, we could do that and establish post-disaster procedures. That's how this ties in.

It's a situation that I experienced on a small scale, of course, because it only affected a few hundred houses, farms and businesses in barely nine municipalities. Nevertheless, I feel that events like these are comparable, even though they did not occur at exactly the same time. I'm not talking about 1944 or World War II, but rather the situation today and what happened in 2019.

Not long after the flooding was over we went into a pandemic. The committee must do everything in its power to move forward and adopt Mr. Turnbull's amendment, because it's a situation that deserves our attention. We need to identify the failings in the system and determine how we can do better if ever another pandemic or any other disaster were to occur. We need to be prepared to deal with it.

One possible solution might be to create pharmaceutical centres across Canada to ensure that we are independent and have our own vaccine production capacity. That could be one solution. As it happens, we are in a good position to discuss this.

I'll now finish my comparison with the floods. The first thing the small communities did when the 2019 floods occurred was to get out the emergency flooding manual that had been prepared the previous year and began reading at page 1. The answers to just about all their questions about how to deal with the 2019 floods were there.

In 2019, crisis management went extremely well. We didn't have to send in helicopters to rescue people or deal with emergencies, and didn't need long lines of workers to pile up sandbags because we knew what to do. We weren't short of sandbags, workers or volunteers. We managed the volunteers and the meals. Everything was in place. Why? Because procedures had been established.

When a pandemic like the one we are living through at the moment occurs, it's clear just how a committee like ours is essential to finding solutions and demonstrating that it is doing important work.

I have a great deal of respect for all the work that was done by the committee. I also have tremendous respect for the witnesses who came to testify in connection with the various matters the committee has dealt with from the beginning of this Parliament. I'm sorry to have to say it, but if we are to be a genuinely responsible committee, we have to set all kinds of things aside, whether partisanship, emotions, or even the motion and amendment before us, and combine our efforts to deal as quickly as possible with the COVID-19 crisis. We have to begin thinking right now about what's coming.

To begin with, we know that elections are coming. We don't know when, but we know it's coming. However, as we now have Mr. Turnbull's amendment before us, no one here on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs needs to ask any questions about how Elections Canada will proceed during the next general election, or what health measures need to be taken in such a context. But I think the committee should be making these decisions and determining how we can do better after a pandemic.

Using the committee's time to make the most effective possible use of our energy can only be beneficial to Canadians.

It's been claimed that the reason for the long delay between the prorogation and the September throne speech was because of the WE Charity affair. However, this is no longer an issue and we've moved on to other things.

On another front, the former Conservative Prime Minister prorogued Parliament in the fall of 2008. I know that Ms. Gladu doesn't like me to delve too far back into the past to discuss events, but it's important to point out that there was a prorogation in 2008 and that the government took weeks before returning to the House. I find it ironic that some Conservative members who were part of that government at the time, and who are still here today, are now saying that there is no longer any reason ever to prorogue. That's trying to have it both ways. They say that at the time, there were good reasons and the government did not have to justify itself. Now they say that the pandemic was not a good reason to prorogue, even though the Prime Minister has explained why he did so. If the pandemic doesn't justify a prorogation, then I don't know what would qualify.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm sorry to cut off my colleague, Mr. Lauzon, but we've been going for a while now. Can I ask that we have a quick recess for a bio break for the committee members? They have probably been holding their bladders for long enough. Perhaps you wouldn't mind, just five or 10 minutes, max.

The Chair: I wouldn't mind, as long as all of the members don't mind suspending for 10 minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: As long as I have the mike when I come back....

The Chair: Yes, we're not leaving on a dilatory motion, like Mr. Nater pointed out before. I won't make that mistake again. You can have the floor in 10 minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Okay, 10 minutes.

The Chair: The meeting is suspended.

● (51720)

(Pause)

● (51735)

The Chair: Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Welcome back, everyone.

At this point, I see the time.

[Translation]

Would you like me to ask that the meeting be adjourned and we could start over on Thursday?

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'd prefer to get this done.

The Chair: I guess that's another dilatory motion, moving to adjourn. Do we need to have a vote on that?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I'm asking for a vote to adjourn today and come back on Thursday, because it's 1:38. If not, I want to continue, but I ask for the vote.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, I just wanted to confirm, when we're talking about adjournment—and this is one of my [*Inaudible—Editor*] Adjournment versus suspension, I want to make sure that—

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: It's a suspension. With a suspension, we come back on the same issue on Thursday.

The Chair: Now I'm in a procedural issue. Can we have a vote to suspend, Justin? Can you help us through that?

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

We have Mr. Turnbull next.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, colleagues, and thanks to my honourable colleague Mr. Lauzon for his thoughtful remarks. I certainly appreciate everything that he has to offer to this committee.

You were missed greatly while you were away. I was away before you—I was under the weather as well—so I really felt your opening remarks when you said we're not all invincible and we need to take care of our health. I appreciate that.

I want to go back to an argument that I've been making in every meeting we've had on this amendment. I've extended it and shifted the argument to support the amendment I put forward to Ms. Vecchio's original motion.

My argument really focuses on a couple of major points, which I continue to reiterate and then provide rationale and evidence for.

I know that members of this committee are often interjecting with comments about relevance. I thus offer the structure of my argument. Even though it's somewhat repetitious, because some members have heard it before, I offer it to ensure that you understand how the things I am saying relate to and are relevant to the argument that I continue to make.

The more I research and learn, the more I appreciate the fact that this extended debate has given me the opportunity to learn more and more about the deep economic, social, health and equity related impacts or inequities that the pandemic has caused.

Obviously there is no intent there. Although I'm told by a virologist that viruses are very smart, they're not thinking, rational beings as we are. Although their intelligence at a molecular, cellular level is quite something, we really have to take the time to understand the impacts this virus has had on every part of our society.

The amendment I put forward is a real chance to compromise. We haven't had any indication from members opposite on this committee whether they would vote in favour of my amendment at all. Generally we've seen that if there were a willingness to be adaptable, flexible, the members of this committee I'm sure would have vocalized their support for the amendment by now.

Mr. John Nater: On a point of order, Madam Chair, to Mr. Turnbull's point, I think I'm ready to vocalize my opinion on this. Perhaps the clerk could call the roll call vote and we could all vocalize our opinions on this amendment and get on to the main motion.

The Chair: Yes, the reminder is always helpful, but I think I've already asked this question several times now, so I know what the answer is going to be, unfortunately or fortunately.

Mr. Turnbull, go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

If I were to vote the Simms protocol, I would love to hear from Mr. Nater whether he is supportive of the amendment that I put forward.

Mr. John Nater: I appreciate the opportunity to use the Simms protocol, especially since our friend Mr. Simms is actually on the committee today.

I would say that I'm not supportive of the amendment.

I appreciate the opportunity to revive the Simms protocol, which has unfortunately during this filibuster by the Liberals been unused. I think it's great that we're getting back to using this protocol.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Maybe we'll see its use more in the coming...I don't know. I'm not even going to say days, because I don't want to say that anymore. I hope for the best.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Given that Mr. Nater obviously isn't convinced by the lengthy and rational evidence-based argument that I've been putting forward meeting after meeting—and I do under-

stand that sometimes politics seems to override rational, thoughtful debates—I will continue to make my argument in the hope that he will see the light and perhaps support my amendment. This is exactly why I continue to speak on this matter and to have thoughtful remarks that I've prepared that are supporting that amendment.

The main conclusion of the argument that I've been making meeting after meeting is that if a pandemic is not a good enough reason for proroguing Parliament, then nothing is. I've said this over and over again. This is something that is undeniably rational in my mind. We're in the middle of a public health crisis. We haven't seen this kind of public health crisis in a hundred years, and previous prime ministers have used their prerogative to prorogue Parliament when they've seen that it has been necessary to do so. Sometimes there is a bit of controversy around whether they've done it for solely political reasons, and I get that. I also think that the reasons most cited are the need to reflect, the need to reset the agenda, the need to re-evaluate, and the need to understand the impacts.

The main reason Stephen Harper utilized his prerogative to prorogue Parliament in 2008 and 2009 was the recession at the time. That was cited over and over again in the media. I understand that the recession was of deep concern. We could debate that prorogation. I know there are some members who feel strongly that the prorogation at that time was an abuse of power. In reality, the prime minister at the time had the prerogative and used it, and he cited reasons that I think were largely accepted and were rational, given the recession at the time.

What I've been saying for quite a number of meetings now—and I see that Mr. Nater is not convinced, but hopefully I'll get at least one other colleague to come around to the side of reason and rationality and to eventually support the amendment—is that the main argument is that the pandemic we're living through and trying to manage and support a country through has had an at least 10 times greater depth of financial impact than the 2008-09 recession had. If that's the case, then there was at least 10 times more reason to prorogue Parliament in between the first and second wave of the pandemic. There's lots of evidence to show how doing that made sense.

One thing I want to focus on today within that overarching argument is the reason—again which I think Ms. Petitpas Taylor said quite well, and my colleague, Mr. Lauzon also said quite well—we feel strongly that having some additional testimony from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in this case would be helpful for this study. That is the depth of economic impact that we've all witnessed and we've heard about from constituents across our ridings. I certainly have been staying in touch with my chamber of commerce and with the many small businesses that are members of the Whitby chamber as well as with the ones that are not members. There are many small businesses that unfortunately aren't members of the chamber of commerce.

I have a very strong small business community in my riding. There are at least 900 small business that are members. Many of them have shared with me over and over again in phone calls, round tables, consultation sessions and meetings that we've had with those stakeholders. The chamber of commerce has met with me to talk about their advocacy on behalf of small businesses that fall into different sectors and industries of the local economy here. I've heard what's working, what's not working and what their concerns are.

We can look at the chief statistician of Canada and the work that was done, which I've cited before. It is a substantive body of evidence that was collected. It's been updated since then. I found the updated version, which is "COVID-19 in Canada: A One-year Update on Social and Economic Impacts". I've been going through that. I don't know whether I'll get to that today, but certainly, if this debate is extended, I'm happy to cover a lot of what's in that report as well, because it does support the trends that we've seen from the first wave of the pandemic.

We saw between the first and second waves there were some industries and businesses that were hard hit but that were able to start to come back, yet not fully recover. Some industries did better in the crisis. I know that sounds strange. There are some that did better and were more profitable. There are others that suffered dramatically, but between waves when restrictions were starting to be lifted by provinces and territories, they were able to come back quickly. There are sort of three categories. There's another segment of businesses that were in industries that were hardest hit and that couldn't come back as quickly.

There's this resiliency that's built into some industries. I think it's important for our government, and was important at the time of prorogation for our government, to assess the level of that impact to see what industries were bouncing back on their own and to understand the structural barriers some industries were encountering that would limit their ability to recover just by virtue of the nature of their business model.

That's really important information to process. It was really important at the time for doing a deep reflection. In listening and talking to those stakeholders, we know that in every industry we have very strong associations that do incredible work to survey their members.

I have reports here from the airline industry, the food service industry and the tourism industry. I have some others from the hotel industry. They're all really substantive reports that those industries have prepared with their associations helping to survey, consult and collect data and really understand what those industries are going through. It's interesting. If we think of industry-specific measures and supports, that's part of some of the complexity of dealing with a global pandemic, how that pandemic has affected industries differently and how they're challenged by economic recovery in very different ways.

We know this with some of the steep losses in highest-impacted sectors. Let's look at net employment losses, for example. I have some numbers here. I like numbers. I'm not a mathematician by any means, but I definitely like backing up the things I say with data. I realize that data can be interpreted in different ways, but when

you're relying on the chief statistician of Canada, you're talking about a pretty reputable source of information. We can all question the data and evidence we find on the Internet from time to time, and I think we have to evaluate where information comes from and certainly do some due diligence, but I think there are trusted sources of information, and I try to use those as best I can when formulating the arguments I use as a member of Parliament.

Some of these hardest-hit industries—accommodation, food services, retail, construction, transportation, warehousing, manufacturing, information, culture and recreation—have been hard hit, but not all equally. These are statistics collected between when the pandemic first hit—let's say from about February or March 2020—to August 2020. It really only covers the first wave of the pandemic. There were 260,000 net job losses in the accommodation and food services industry. That's a pretty significant net loss of employment. In retail there were 120,000 net job losses. In construction there were approximately 120,000 net job losses. Transportation and warehousing was about 100,000 or a bit more than 100,000 net job losses. Manufacturing had 80,000 net job losses. Information, culture and recreation was approximately 100,000 net job losses.

If you add that up, you have—just off the top of my head—about 800,000 net job losses right there. There were probably more than that, but I think the statistics show that those were the industries that were most impacted in terms of net job losses.

Construction and manufacturing seemed to rebound to more than 90% of pre-COVID levels as businesses reopened. There's construction going on across the street from my house and there's a lot of development happening in my riding. Some of that construction has stayed pretty constant throughout this pandemic. I've been surprised that some of those job sites have continued and that workers are continuing to work. I suppose they've been social distancing and have been able to continue.

What's interesting to note here, Mr. Kent—I like to use members' names once in a while just to make sure they're still paying attention to me—is the 90% of pre-COVID levels in construction and manufacturing. That's between the first and second waves, so you could see that that industry rebounded a lot more quickly than accommodation and food services. By contrast, employment in their industry remained 20% below pre-pandemic levels, so it was less likely to rebound as quickly. I think there are reasons for that. Our government took the time to assess and reflect on those reasons, when you look at the throne speech.

Today my focus is on the hardest-hit sectors or industries and how the throne speech, I think, really reflected the consultation work, the evidence that was available and the information that industry associations were providing to the government at that time. It was very rational and very logical in terms of one thing following from another. There is a sort of chain of causality there which really backs up the interpretation that flies in the face of the narrative that I think opposition parties are trying to build, which is that somehow prorogation was some abuse of power.

I've heard members say that this was precedent setting. I don't agree that this was some abuse of power. I think it was done for legitimate reasons that show up and are evidenced by a whole bunch of factors, which I've continued to bring to this committee and represent as the more plausible and more rational narrative. I think if Canadians or, as they say in law, people who are rational judges.... The heart of the idea of a jury is that people have this ability to reason. If impartial, rational people were to judge the evidence that we've provided, the vast majority of them would side with the most rational explanation.

This is why I can't stop speaking to this amendment I have put forward. I feel very strongly that this rational argument we have been making is supported by data, evidence, research and consultation. It seems contradictory to rational argument to assume some other motive that is not backed up by evidence, especially when we know that much committee business in other areas that some of the opposition parties have been consumed by, or focused on, for some time has, in fact, continued.

It's really shocking to me to see that we can't get past this and move forward with other committee business. I have been trying to provide some alternatives in my remarks and some, I think, worthy studies and debate and discussion we could be having that would truly be beneficial to Canadians right now, beneficial to a future election process whenever that time comes. I really feel that PROC, because of its mandate, could be studying some of these other issues, such as hate groups registering in our election process, and misinformation online, people presenting that knowingly within an election process to affect the results. These are extremely important and concerning issues that I think we should be seized with rather than this, but I will get back to my argument.

I want to talk about the structural challenges in heavily impacted sectors. Again, I'm presenting information that was pulled together by the chief statistician and is in the report that I have referred to about five or six times now.

The transportation and warehousing sector employs one million people across Canada. Some 22.1 million tourists come to Canada from abroad in any given year. Obviously, that hasn't happened this year. Travellers spend over \$22 billion in Canada. Just think about the impact on our economy not to have those revenues or income for the many tourist-related sectors and businesses, everything from hotel stays to excursions to visiting.

We have all kinds of destinations in Ontario, from campgrounds to beaches. My favourite is Wasaga Beach. I have been going there since I was a kid. It's the biggest freshwater beach in North America. Just think about these small communities, often rural communities, how their economy has been drastically impacted by the pandemic through no fault of any government. I think the government is doing its best to implement public health restrictions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. In some cases, some provinces have been more successful than others for sure, and I have some critical remarks on that from time to time, but I will leave those for a moment.

Just think about the economic impact. The average spend per trip in 2018 was \$1,640. I did some work many years ago mostly on food-related or agri-food tourism. There is a lot of evidence to

show how even travel inside a province supported local economies, specifically around sustainable food and local food economies in Ontario but also across Canada.

Because people spend more on these small trips on food and accommodation, and that money really stays in local communities, it really helps support small family businesses and restaurateurs. My favourite is in Stratford county, the Savour Stratford festival, which I used to go to. It really demonstrated the power of food, agriculture and restaurateurs.

We have them all over Canada, and these are a big part of our culture. You can see how travel, food, accommodation and cultural recreation, all fit in some cases together, or at least intersect in a way to support local economies. They've been drastically hindered in terms of their growth or prosperity during the pandemic.

I think I've said this piece before, and I'm not sure if I've provided the statistics, but the decline in the airline industry from 9/11 was 26%, from SARS was 26%, and from the global pandemic was 97%. Again, you can understand the level of exponential impact that COVID-19 has had on our economy, and the airline industry is no exception.

There are many others. With public transit, ridership is down significantly, and rightfully so. We understand why. People are being asked to stay home. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, that makes sense. We understand that municipalities are having trouble running their public transit routes. Some of them have cut back on those routes, which I think is a responsible thing to do in a pandemic, but they are experiencing shortfalls.

Our government, through the safe restart agreements, offered them support. The local regional government here really benefited from those funds. Again, this is all part of a pretty thorough reflection and reassessment of our government's priorities during proration.

The commercial real estate industry in quarter two of 2020 fell by 3.1%. That may not seem like a lot, but it has a significant economic impact. This was during the first wave of COVID-19. Just think about how commercial rents would have been affected again and again.

The original version of CECRA, the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program, its initial iteration, I can definitely admit to committee members that it wasn't my preferred design for that program. I think our government did its very best to design a program that would help both landlords and small businesses that were renting space.

We know that some of the hardest-hit industries from COVID-19 are the ones that have the highest overhead costs. It's very hard to shift a business. Some businesses in my local community have even gone out of business mainly because of the overhead costs that are often tied to property, or a facility that they rely on. For example, we have those places that are like indoor playgrounds for kids. They work a bit like a child-minding place for parents, but you can have your kids go there and play with other kids. Obviously, they were shut down due to public health guidelines fairly early on, but many of them had significant costs associated with their overhead. Having a program for commercial rent assistance was extremely important to those businesses.

What I witnessed between the first and second wave, and exactly at the time of prorogation.... I actually had conversations with the Minister of Finance at the time about redesigning that program, and about some of the challenges I'd heard about from landlords who were not participating in the original version of that program.

That re-evaluation was reflected in the throne speech, and subsequently there was a re-engineered or redesigned commercial rent assistance program that was significantly improved. If we had not taken the time to reflect and check in with stakeholders, if that program hadn't been redesigned in such a way that really meets the needs of many commercial tenants, I believe that wouldn't have happened. Businesses in my community have now been able to access direct support instead of through their landlord. By the way, these are mostly small businesses, as far as I can tell, at least in my community.

I was getting a lot of feedback in and around the time that prorogation happened. It actually worked out well for relaying that feedback. That program was redesigned, and it now goes directly to tenants. It's indexed to the proportion of revenue loss for small businesses and gives them up to 65% rent support. It also adds a top-up, which wasn't there before, of up to 25% if the business is shut down due to a mandatory public health order.

These were such welcome changes in my community for the local businesses here, like the ones that I was talking about that are hardest hit: the small family-run restaurants as well as the small family-owned hair salons—I could use a hair salon, but I can't get a haircut these days. There are all kinds of others, such as the independently owned optometrists, etc. I have many examples of small businesses in my community.

Even in downtown Whitby we have the Fart Café. That's not their name, but it's the term they use. It's an art café, but it's often referred to in that way as a local joke.

The point is that the supports that were extended to the small businesses and were redesigned were really tailored based on the time that we took to reflect and gather evidence and data.

Many of the tenants who are in those commercial buildings, the ones who don't absolutely need space, may rely less on renting space in the future, or be reassessed about how they operate. We've seen a lot of that as well.

I've heard from local cleaners, for example. Some of them operate with the model where they actually don't do all the cleaning on site, but they have a separate facility to do the cleaning. They're of-

ten small family-owned businesses. Some of them have given up their storefront space, which is very small, like a small kiosk, where you walk in and drop off shirts to be cleaned, or have alterations done, or whatever. Those businesses have shifted their attitude to thinking that they really don't need a storefront and they'll operate online now. They've opted for an online model.

I have a local catering business that specializes in some really unique kinds of baking for people who have special diets. They're really famous in my community, and they've done a really great job. They shifted a lot of their work from having more of almost a delivery truck, and they just have a commercial kitchen facility and then deliver, but they do everything online now, other than the actual baking and delivery, which does require some physical space. They've looked at ways to shave off their operational model so that they rely less on space that they need to rent so they can reduce their overhead costs and remain viable during the pandemic.

Those are strategies that many small businesses have been encouraged to do. By necessity, they have had to alter their operations and business models and re-evaluate how they reduce their costs and remain viable during this global pandemic and get through this.

There's likely to be downward pressure on new office building lease rates, and longer-term impacts on commercial real estate that I think are going to be substantial. I think the evidence shows that. Again, I think that taking the time to reflect is important for our government, and I would welcome opposition parties to participate in the fruitful dialogues that I think can happen to ensure that we tailor supports for the hardest hit industries.

I want to say a few words about the retail sector and industry. At the time of prorogation, the retail sector had actually rebounded very quickly from storefront closures in the first wave. Many elevated their efforts based on e-commerce: having an online website where they could actually sell their products online. Our government actually supported initiatives for the Digital Main Street. I was very proud of that, because it allowed a lot of retail stores in my community, small ones that were like boutique shops that were doing all kinds of.... That's a lot of the heart of our local economies, especially in our downtown areas. Mine in Whitby is quite small. There are two actual centres in Whitby, Brooklin and downtown Whitby. They're filled with these small, local, beautiful boutiques that are family-run businesses. In some cases, they've been in the family for generations. In other cases, they've changed hands. Sometimes businesses have gone under and new ones have emerged, but in terms of really making a vibrant kind of downtown, I think it's really important that we don't lose that.

Many in my community at the two BIAs we have are very vocal advocates for ensuring that those businesses don't go under. What's interesting is that many of them needed support. I shouldn't say "needed", because I think entrepreneurs are very resilient and really innovative. When push comes to shove, they find a way to get through the hard times, but I do think that our government's support through that Digital Main Street initiative was really helpful in helping a lot of small businesses catalogue their inventory and move to online sales and marketing.

That gave them market access at a time when their physical locations were closed down. Some of them were able to.... I remember that back in the Christmas holidays—the holidays over December—which are such a big, important time for many of those types of businesses to generate their sales and carry them throughout the year, those businesses, despite the fact that COVID-19 continued in our community, did better as a result of having that digital platform, the e-commerce sites and the support that our government offered through the local chambers of commerce, which I think are pretty important supportive structures to help.

I really believe in the local chamber of commerce here in Whitby. I think chambers of commerce are fantastic. They're run by great people, a lot of business owners are involved. They really are a strong voice and don't give up. They really persist through the challenging times and the bumps in the road. They continue to be constantly in communication with me in my office and continue to inform us about how the different industries within our local community have been affected by COVID-19.

I see you unmuting, Madam Chair. I have a lot more to say, but I suspect you have something that you want to say.

The Chair: I could see you ending one thought process, so I thought maybe it was a good time, considering the timing, to just survey the committee. The clerk is also asking me, virtually tapping me on the shoulder, to see if the committee is going to decide to suspend at some point. This is around the time a decision has to be made.

I think the agriculture committee is the committee that would be using this space after us. I want to just get an idea. I also would have to suspend anyway a little bit before three, regardless of what the decision is at this point, for the vote that's going to happen, which I was going to remind you is coming up soon as well. There will be no bells for that.

Are there any comments from anybody on that?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, I think we all recognize the importance of all the committees' work, and by no means do I think that we want to end any of it. Perhaps we can have a vote before the end of the time. I believe 2:30 is the cleaning time. We are very aware of this and don't want anything else to continue to be impacted like last week's HUMA committee.

If we could go to a vote, that would be great. Is that something we are able to do?

The Chair: I can put the question again. There is a speakers list.

Would you guys be willing to go to a vote? Vote or no vote, I still need a decision.

Are you saying, Ms. Vecchio, that only if a vote is to occur that—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: No, I'm just trying to see where we are because honestly it's just.... We recognize this, but what we're going to be doing is what we're going to be doing from now until the election, as Mr. Lauzon had indicated months ago. Those are my concerns.

I think we're all good to suspend for the day, to be honest, because we understand the impact, but I do believe that at some point there must be a decision.

The Chair: As Ms. Vecchio was asking, is everyone willing to vote before the close of this meeting at 2:30 today?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: You mean a vote to suspend, right?

The Chair: No, not a vote to suspend. I think we have a consensus to suspend, but Ms. Vecchio just wants to put the question out there as to whether you're willing to vote on the amendment.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: No.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Turnbull, are you okay with us suspending at this point in your remarks?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sure, as long as I have the floor when we come back at the next meeting.

The Chair: Okay.

We will suspend until next Thursday's meeting.

[The meeting was suspended at 2:23 p.m., Tuesday, May 4.]

[The meeting resumed at 11:03 a.m., Thursday, May 6.]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

We are resuming meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13, 2021. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the order of January 25, 2021.

It seems that for now all members are participating virtually today. It seems that there are no members in the room, but I'll remind them of the rules for in the room if any members do wish to attend in person.

For the people attending virtually, I think a reminder is always helpful. Unmute your mike before you speak. Mute your mike after you speak. All of us sometimes forget that in every meeting we attend. That's just a reminder. Also, there are to be no screenshots or photos of your screen. Other than that, I will remind you to make sure your interpretation channel is correctly selected so you don't miss out on any of your fellow members' comments in committee. For anyone wanting to make a point of order, you can unmute your mike and make that point of order. Then there can be, obviously, debate on that point of order.

As for a speakers list, we do have one from the last meeting. Mr. Turnbull is at the beginning of the speakers list. Some of the speakers are not here yet today, but some are. I'm just going to eliminate the ones who aren't here, but you may indicate your desire to speak by using the raise hand option on the toolbar.

Also, I want to remind the committee that the deadline, which seemed so far away, for the main estimates is getting a little bit closer now. Maybe the clerk can let us know. He has already spoken to House administration and the relevant parties we would have to call to committee for that. As always, they are willing to appear.

I don't know, Justin, if you have any more updates as to where you would see that fitting into the calendar if we were to get it done by the deadline.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I do have House officials as well as officials from the Parliamentary Protective Service and Elections Canada on standby, so to speak, in case the committee did want to pivot to the main estimates at some point before the May 31 deadline. It is, of course, a hard deadline. At that point, if the committee hasn't taken up the main estimates, they'll be automatically referred back to the House. In many ways, the officials from the House, PPS and Elections Canada are in your hands. They are on standby. They are available to come. Probably more than 48 hours' notice would be best for them, but they can scramble on relatively short notice if that is required and if the committee does choose to go to the main estimates prior to the May 31 deadline.

The Chair: Okay. That's perfect.

My experience is that they do accommodate quickly, but 48 hours is usually appropriate, at least for us to be able to provide that. I just wanted you all to be aware that we should be providing a few days' notice before deciding to jump to that. We can't just plan to jump to that the day before, and of course not the day of.

There were some questions last time about relevance and repetition. There are no hard and fast rules for committees per se, but we look to the rules that the Speaker goes by when it comes to enforcing or reinforcing how to follow the rules of repetition and relevance. Generally, I take it that currently, since we are on debate on Mr. Turnbull's amendment, the debate must always be centred on the provisions of the amendment, and members must always relate their comments to the amendment. Determining relevance will be based on this principle. This is grounded in the procedural authorities set forth by the Speaker.

However, as you know, members are given leeway to relate what they are speaking on back to the amendment. You can alert me to any repetition. Generally—we have talked about this before, too—

any word-for-word repetition of paragraphs will not be allowed. If that is done and the person is reminded or alerted and continues to repeat previous paragraphs word for word, we will have to remove them from their spot and move on to the next speaker.

However, repetition for the purpose of emphasis, or short statements or sentences would be allowed but not repetition of the whole speech or of entire paragraphs. Is someone repeating the context or is someone trying to put emphasis on the context in a stylistic way by repeating certain things? There is a difference between the two, and you can definitely alert me when you think that difference has crossed the line into actual repetition, and I can rule on that at that point.

I just wanted to remind everyone about the framework that we have been working within all along.

We will go back to the speakers list on Mr. Turnbull's amendment. We are currently on the first speaker, Ryan Turnbull.

Ryan, you have the floor.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, thanks for those opening remarks and helpful reminders. Last time there were a few interruptions to different speakers on the basis of repetition, and I appreciate the clarifications you've made. I certainly feel that repeating some points within an argument for emphasis' sake is one of my stylistic preferences. It is not in any way meant to waste time or to be overly repetitive, but is simply to drive home very specific points that I think are key within an argument.

There is one that I would repeat again, which I've made over and over and which, I again hope, opposition members will take to heart and maybe reflect on. This is the heart of the argument I've been making and what I've been expounding on in many different ways, and that is if a global pandemic is not a good enough reason for proroguing Parliament, then I would say nothing is.

I've been continuing to make the argument that the economic impact of this global pandemic—and I understand that it is first and foremost a public health crisis, so we really should be focusing at all times on public health, because you can't have a livelihood without a life. We've seen the tragic loss of human life. We must never lose sight of the fact that every life matters. I say that for all of the people and families and communities that have been so deeply impacted. The grief is almost unthinkable for those families.

One thing we've become slightly desensitized to is seeing numbers and statistics and focusing on public health data and graphs. We have to realize that these hundreds and hundreds of deaths and individuals who are in ICUs and who are on ventilators are all individual human beings with networks and relationships. They have made massive contributions to their communities and their families. They're loved and they have this fulsome life that is being taken away by a virus.

It's no one's fault. We need to get away from the blame game. At the same time, we need to really cherish those lives and honour those lives in everything we do. When we're doing this work and this study in this committee, we tend to be focused on the rear-view mirror and on how the prorogation happened. It's almost a distant memory at this point. I have tons of information on the reasons for proroguing, but it's faded in my memory just because there are so many more pressing things for us to be paying attention to that are immediately in front of us.

It is very disheartening that we're continuing with this. I've continually tried to be appeasing and flexible and adaptable to the perspectives of my honourable colleagues from the opposition parties. With that intention, I proposed an amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion, that maybe we can do a little bit more study on prorogation but quickly move on.

We see that the opposition parties are not interested in negotiating or being flexible or really working with us on the things that I think are even more pressing. That's really unfortunate, and I really feel there's quite a bit of work to be done that is more immediately pressing.

The main estimates, which you mentioned, Madam Chair, are a pretty important responsibility for our committee. I think that would take one meeting. Perhaps that's an opportunity for us to fulfill some of our other duties.

Division 37 of Bill C-30, the budget implementation act, is an area that I've certainly been affected by and concerned about for some time. That's the prevalence of disinformation within election periods and just how much that can have an impact on our democratic institutions and some of the fundamental rights that we hold dear here in Canada. I really feel it's important for us to do the work on the pieces of the budget implementation act, Bill C-30, that are really required of us, if I were to be really honest about it. The Standing Orders define the parameters of PROC. This fits clearly within our mandate. I don't see how the finance committee will do that work, and the other pieces of their work that have to be hived off and given to other committees, if we don't do our part.

That's enough said on that, at the moment. I really feel strongly about that and Bill C-19. It's important for opposition members to realize that the adaptation powers for the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada come into effect upon royal assent of Bill C-19. Those adaptation powers would protect the health and safety of Canadians should opposition parties trigger an election, which they've been coming dangerously close to doing with some of the votes in the House. We're playing roulette at this point, or opposition parties are playing roulette, with people's health and safety, in my view, and I really think that's irresponsible.

I'll get back to the main argument that I've been making here. I have a lot more to say about the hardest-hit industries and sectors and some of the structural barriers to their recovery. They're no fault of any industry, or any industry players or businesses. Really, it's by virtue of the fact of how those business models are. I'll talk about restaurants or the food service industry. I spoke last time more about the airline industry. I covered a little bit about tourism, transportation, warehousing, public transit, commercial real estate and the retail trade. I left off talking about our local chambers of

commerce and some of the work that was done around the digital main street initiatives, which I really felt helped some of the retail businesses pivot within the pandemic.

Again, I want to make it clear, just for the sake of relevance, that I believe in making an argument that's relevant at all times. This is relevant because what I've been claiming and substantiating with facts and evidence is quite clearly that the economic impact of COVID-19 is, at the very least, 10 times greater than the recession in 2008-09. Again, the heart of this argument is to say that this global pandemic, because of the economic impact being so much greater, if we were to say that an economic crisis or recession were a reason to prorogue Parliament and to reassess and re-evaluate and reset the agenda, and that's been a valid reason to prorogue Parliament in history....

I think this provides evidence as to why our Prime Minister chose to prorogue, and to use the prerogative that he had, between the first and second waves of COVID-19. I've been speaking to how this is rational. It makes sense. The process was substantive during that time. It really got to gather evidence and qualitative feedback from many stakeholders, which then fed into a throne speech that reflected that.

What I want to focus on today in my argument is just the depth of the impact on some of the hardest-hit industries, and then some of the things that were extended and even added, with some of the programs and supports that our government offered and that were redesigned coming out of that re-evaluation period during the time when Parliament was prorogued.

Again, I have to say this, because I feel that opposition members have implied many times over that the government sort of took a break at that time and essentially prorogued to just sit around and twiddle their thumbs. They have also claimed that the Speech from the Throne had nothing new in it. This is so false. It's factually false. If you look at the throne speech, it reflects the data, evidence and consultation work that was done during that time.

If you look at how much consultation work was done, as I've said before, I went to at least 15 different sessions. In my community, I did hundreds of surveys and consultation sessions—just me, and I'm just one member of Parliament. I know that my colleagues did the same. When I step back from this, even when I am trying to be charitable to my opposition colleagues, I still cannot find any evidence of how the overall narrative and story that we have provided, which are based in reason and evidence, are somehow deficient.

There seems to be no effort to assess the merit of the reasons that were given. I don't know how we got to this place. In my view, our government has done everything it can to be there for Canadians every step of the way.

I'm not saying we're perfect. I absolutely would not say that. I'm not perfect; none of my colleagues is. I think we all have things we can....

I know, Mr. Amos, you might be the exception, my friend, but for me, I can certainly admit various flaws.

We need to assess the merits of the report that was tabled and look at it on face value and ask what is deficient about the rationale. I can't find anything that doesn't make sense to me.

Okay. I'm in the governing party and I'm a Liberal. I get that. But I try to step outside of my perspective and critically evaluate and ask if there is any charitable or generous way that I can interpret the merits and the truth of the perspective of those who oppose my perspective. That has to be a part of our democracy and our debates at all times, because if we can't get outside of our own biases and perspectives, then we truly have lost our way.

However, when I do that, I still cannot find anything that doesn't make sense based on what I've seen and the data I have at my fingertips. I don't know where opposition members are really coming from when they are pushing the narrative that somehow prorogation was done for some ulterior motives that they seem to want to push. It seems just like a partisan political agenda that has no basis in reality.

I'm sorry to say that but, honestly, that is how I feel. I don't see any argument the opposition has made that really holds any water. I will continue to provide more data and evidence and to back up the claims that I am making, because I think they are the closest approximation of the truth. Until opposition members can actually engage in a fruitful debate on that, I think we're at an impasse.

You have your narrative and preferred interpretation, which are not based in facts and reality, and I have mine, or our members have ours. The difference is that we are providing evidence, data and reasons that make sense. The process makes sense. The themes in the throne speech make sense. The timing makes sense. The report is consistent with that. The testimony given by the government House leader was consistent with that. So what is this really about, when it comes down to it? What is it really about? I would say to you it's not about Canadians.

We're here to serve Canadians. I want to do things that are valuable to my constituents and not waste precious time that we as leaders in our communities have. We have been afforded the privilege and honour of representing the people of our constituencies, and I take that responsibility seriously and with great pride and honour.

At this moment in time we have a third wave that is.... We had the emergency debate last night in the House. Madam Chair, you were there on House duty with me, and I'm sure some of my other colleagues were as well. At least in that debate, things that were being said were starting to get beyond—or at least there were moments when we started to see just a glimmer of hope of getting beyond the partisan politics and focusing on what Albertans need right now to get through this third wave. I would say that at those brief moments in which we seemed to almost transcend the partisan swordsmanship and jousting, I thought okay, let's just go a bit further, one step further, and collectively come together and do our job for Canadians. That gave me just a glimmer of hope, but it was gone so quickly, and here we are back in committee basically ensnared in the same political jousting that to me is just unfortunate.

It's more than unfortunate. It actually makes me feel sad. It really does. It's disturbing that this is what we're up to.

Anyway, I'll get back to my argument. Let me say a little bit about the retail industry. By June 2020, the retail activity had surpassed pre-COVID levels while payroll was 15% lower. This is kind of interesting just in terms of, again, understanding the impact on our economy and how unequal it is across industry. The retail industry in June 2020 was coming back. It rebounded very strongly. Retail activity surpassed pre-COVID levels, for a brief time, of course, because when we then had the full-out second wave, obviously that all changed again. Payroll was still lower, so in a way you would anticipate that in fact many retailers were more profitable in that time because their payroll was down but their sales activity was up, which is interesting.

Anyway, the point is that between February and May, sales had fallen by 18%, but e-commerce sales had doubled during the same period, which is interesting as well. I would say to you that many of the non-essential retailers were able to pivot to e-commerce, and I would link this back to our government's support. In my community, I know for a fact that the Digital Main Street initiative and the efforts made by our business improvement area in both our downtowns—because we're fortunate enough to have two in Whitby, in my riding—along with the work that the chamber of commerce did to help in the region of Durham, including my riding and others adjacent to mine.... They did incredible work to help local retailers move to online sales.

This didn't allow them to fully recover. It didn't insulate them fully from the impacts of COVID-19, of course, during the first and eventually second wave, but it did help.

It was interesting to note as well that many of the essential retailers, the retail stores that were deemed essential, continued to operate and actually increased sales dramatically. Again, just think about the equity issues here within the economic impact of COVID-19 and how important it is for our government to target support by taking the time to understand these dynamics and really listen to the industry associations that quite vocally were giving feedback.

Again, it was to inform our approach. Have we lived through this before? I haven't lived through a global pandemic. Has anybody here? Anybody here who has, please raise your hand. I see hands raised. Please give me a signal if you've lived through a global pandemic before. No. Nobody has.

Some of us may have studied global pandemics, but I would say that this one is not the same. It may have some characteristics that are clearly similar, which I'm sure Dr. Duncan can speak to, but I think that the state of our economy, the point in time, the moment in history, how this happened and the specific nature of the virus and how it's affected us are really things that none of us could have anticipated. I think it has had a unique impact in a way that we couldn't have comprehended before it happened.

It's interesting to think about it in terms of reflection and how important it is to learn from this, but also to realize that not every virus, not every pandemic and not every communicable disease is going to impact us in the same way. That's something else that we need to take from this. Being prepared for public health emergencies and other climate-related emergencies is going to take real adaptability and an ability to predict the various different ways in which things could unfold, based on different types of threats and risks, etc. I really welcome those conversations in the future to learn all we can from this experience.

Just to go back to my point here, we couldn't really have predicted that some businesses were going to stay open. In many respects, some of those decisions clearly were not within federal jurisdiction. We had provincial governments doing different things and doing them in a way that we couldn't. We weren't making those decisions. Sure, to some degree, we were providing some guidance and advice, but not always. Many of those decisions were made by provincial and territorial governments.

What I've heard in my community is that those really had impacts. The way that public health restrictions were rolled out and then rolled back, and how they were targeted to different industries and sectors, really had an impact on the different industries and sectors. Businesses were struggling with different scenarios. Again, how were we, as a federal government, supposed to understand that if we didn't take the time to prorogue, re-evaluate and listen to those stakeholders?

I find it hard to share in the perspective of some of my colleagues who seem to think that prorogation was not an appropriate or good use of time or was even for some other nefarious purpose. It just makes sense to me that you have to take time to re-evaluate. It's a lot of work to reflect and re-evaluate too. It's not easy. To learn and re-evaluate is not a holiday. It takes great commitment to ensure a good responsive government that is working for the people. It has to re-evaluate all the time. I would actually suggest that we probably need to re-evaluate constantly. I think we are, but perhaps there are ways to do that even better, too.

I'll get back to my argument here, which is that I've gathered some facts and figures from the hotel industry, as well, that I think are pretty important. These were collected in quarter three of 2020. The hotel industry or accommodations industry identified situational factors that I think we're all aware of that were really impacting them. Ongoing travel restrictions, obviously, were a big one that they identified. They also identified rising case counts, economic uncertainty, the Canada-U.S. border closure to non-essential travel, the reinstatement of gathering rules, the reopening rollbacks, the support program extensions. These were all situational factors. These were things they identified that were in the context they were dealing with.

I used to do strategic planning for organizations before getting into politics. With any organization, any large business, you would do a situational analysis—sometimes it was referred to as an environmental scan—before you developed a strategy. We did this work collectively, but I also did it with individual organizations. I think it's better to do it collectively, but it's more complex when you do it collectively because there are many different situational factors that are affecting different stakeholders within a system.

When you think about the complexity of doing this at a national scale with different levels of government, with many industries, with industry associations, with members of the public, with non-profit organizations, and the list goes on and on and on, just think about the complexity of how this virus has had ripple effects through our entire society. Just think about the challenges of different people, depending where you sit and stand in that system, and how what's relevant to you looks different depending on where you are. Again with those situational factors and that situational analysis, situational leadership depends upon that intelligence. Those are things that prorogation helped our government do. It helped it to stay attuned to those things, those factors and the differences of perspective out there. That, to me, is part of a responsible, responsive government.

You can't have good governance without being responsive. You can't. I mean, what does it even mean? What does good governance even mean if we're not listening to the various voices and stakeholders from across the country, especially in a 100-year public health crisis?

Again, we listened to the hotel industry. It had situational factors that it identified. The year-over-year change to occupancy for the accommodations industry in quarter one was down 10 points. In quarter two, it was down 49 points. That was when the pandemic hit. In July and August, it was still down 37 to 42 points. In quarter two, their revenues were down 82%. Basically, it started to get a bit better in July and August, but you can imagine that there was not a free-for-all. The pent-up demand—everybody wants to take a vacation, travel somewhere and stay in a hotel and—hadn't happened yet. In July and August 2020, we saw a moderate return of some revenues to the hotel industry, but they were very minor compared to what we saw in the retail industry.

Again, what I'm pointing to is the inequity of the impacts of the pandemic and the economic impact being greater—at least 10 times greater—than those of the previous recession in 2008-09.

Linking all this back for the sake of relevance, for my colleague Ms. Vecchio and others, these are all good reasons to have the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance testify before this committee and give us some testimony as to how she understood all of these various impacts at the time and how prorogation gave us the opportunity to re-evaluate some of our programs and eventually, I think, target more support for these industries. Some of that work is still ongoing, but lots of work has been done.

In particular, going back to the hotel industry....

Again, Madam Chair, I'm sorry for taking up so much time. I tend to be a bit verbose. Hopefully, as my political career continues, I may get more concise in the future. I struggle with this at times. I'll work on that.

Look, Madam Chair—

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

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Actually, Mr. Nater called a point of order, too. If you want to pass it to Mr. Nater, that's fine.

The Chair: Mr. Nater, do you have a point of order?

Mr. John Nater: Yes.

Very briefly, in response to Mr. Turnbull's comments about getting less verbose as time goes on, I would remind him of Mr. Blaikie's predecessor on this committee, David Christopherson, who used to say that a three-hour filibuster barely gave him enough time to clear his throat.

Using the Simms protocol, I just wanted to interject that. Mr. Christopherson was a wonderful member of this committee in the previous Parliament. I wanted to throw that in.

While I have the floor, perhaps Mr. Turnbull could inform us of whether he's had any conversations with Minister Freeland, inviting her to respond to the previous invitation of this committee from January or February.

The Chair: Thank you for sharing that memory of Mr. Christopherson. I myself have fond memories of him. I do really miss him. He had such a long and impactful career in politics. He definitely impacted all of us who served with him. Serving with him on this committee especially, in the previous Parliament, was quite interesting. I learned a lot from him. You're right that he used to make us laugh when he said that he was just clearing his throat.

At any rate, maybe Mr. Turnbull can help clarify your other question.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, but before I do that, I have to tell you that I wasn't part of this committee when Mr. Christopherson was here, but I heard the many stories. He's sort of a legend.

What's funny is that I did a lot of work in Hamilton with the YWCA Hamilton. Mr. Christopherson's wonderful, absolutely fantastic, lovely wife is the CEO of that organization. I know her very well. We are very good old friends. We worked together on a whole bunch of YWCA-related programming in downtown Hamilton, including their social enterprise café for women on the main floor. Prior to getting into politics, I wrote proposals and business plans for non-profits and charities, and they were one of them. They got

significant funding from some philanthropic private foundations to renovate their entire downtown location to have this café, a social enterprise that actually employs women who experienced domestic abuse or were living in their transitional housing.

Mr. Christopherson is a legend, in my mind, but through his wonderful, absolutely fantastic wife, who is a real community leader in downtown Hamilton. I just had to tell that story, because although I didn't know Mr. Christopherson on this committee, I really feel like I know him and his family. I really believe in their leadership and their massive contributions to Canada and their local community. This is a shout-out to them. Maybe I can clip this piece and send it to my friend, Denise Christopherson.

Anyway, sorry for that. That was a bit of an aside. What was I going to say?

Oh, yes. Mr. Nater had asked about the Honourable Chrystia Freeland. I haven't had a chance to talk with her. She's been very busy. I think Justin, our wonderful clerk, had reached out prior. I think that was mentioned before. I'm sure if opposition members are willing to support the amendment that I put forward, we could send an invitation and reinvoke both the ministers who are included in the amendment. I would certainly welcome the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. She's absolutely wonderful.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, on a point of order, the other day, Ginette Petitpas Taylor mentioned trying to reach out as well. Perhaps one of the members of the committee on the government side has had an opportunity to speak to the minister. Could we check on that? It was something that was said would be a point of action on Tuesday.

The Chair: Okay, I'll try my best. Anybody can email me as well. I can try to inform the committee if there's any progress on that. You're free to email each other as well, and then speak to each other about that.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm getting the sense that maybe opposition members are willing to support my amendment, given that the heart of it really is to have the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth come to the committee.

Is that the case, Ms. Vecchio? Maybe I can use the Simms protocol to ask you whether you're now supporting my amendment.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It's very interesting, because the original motion already had all these things in it. We appreciate the very first one. Let's take it to a vote. Why don't we find out, Ryan? This would be a great time to take it to a vote, if you're asking. If I say to you I would not support, that doesn't mean we should not continue this conversation. We should end it and end this filibuster of the last 14 weeks. I'm happy to go to a vote, and then we'll go from there.

If we look back at the January stuff, I recall that being in that subcommittee report we brought back to PROC, in which they were already invited. Thank you very much to the clerk for looking into this. We've already supported things in your motion. It's just that we would like more to it.

Let's carry on this conversation, if you want, or open the door to the vote, as we can do.

The Chair: Good. Thank you. Maybe we can make some progress through this dialogue.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That would be great. I would really appreciate that. In particular, I'm hoping that my arguments here have swayed my opposition colleagues to support the amendment that I put forward.

Perhaps I can continue to make my best effort to bring you on-side to the amendment. At any point, I hope you would express your willingness to support it, if I'm successful. I can only try my best. I understand that we all have our own perspectives and our own interests, etc., but I hope we'll get the support of some opposition members.

At any rate, I'll go back to my argument. That seemed like a long tangent. I want to continue to make my argument.

The hotel industry was impacted specifically in most of our urban centres most dramatically. I have here the statistics that were gathered by the hotel industry. This report here, from October 2020, is by CBRE Hotels, the world's leading hotel experts. It's specific to the Canadian impact of COVID-19. It's a substantive document. Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Vancouver, Niagara Falls, Halifax, Toronto airport, Calgary airport, Montreal airport and greater Quebec City were the areas where the hotel industry was the most impacted and we saw the biggest declines.

In addition to all of the situational factors I mentioned, there were also influences on recovery that kind of mirror some of those situational factors. They demonstrate what the hotel industry is saying will really impact how quickly they can recover. I've heard locally that the hotel industry and some of the other industries don't expect to recover for quite some time. It may take them two years or more to recover from the pandemic. This was their perspective after the first wave of COVID-19, in some cases, so I would say that this has only extended the hardship and the recovery time it will take for those industries to come back in full effect.

Again, we talk about this stuff, and it tends to almost dehumanize. It's not intentional, but when we talk about it, it's.... We're talking about businesses here, but what does it really mean when it comes down to it? There are people and families at the heart of these businesses. It's people's livelihoods we're talking about. I really think it's about paying attention and taking the time to really understand these impacts on people and families and communities and local economies. I'm talking about industries, and I'm bringing stats and information, but again, it's about the lived experience of families and workers and business owners. They're hanging on by a thread, at this point, if at all. I think some of them are not.

Part of this is due to the pandemic wave after wave and the fatigue that comes with that. I've maintained from the very start of this... Well, I wouldn't say it was from the start. That might be a lit-

tle too arrogant of me to say. I would say that somewhere along the way, I think between the first and second waves, or just as the second wave hit us, we came to realize that going through wave after wave of a pandemic is not the best public health or best economic approach. It's not.

In terms of mitigation versus elimination, I saw a recent study out of France, I think out of a university there. I have it somewhere here in my piles of paper. The study shows that the countries and jurisdictions around the world that focused on COVID elimination fared the best from a public health perspective. They also fared the best from an economic perspective, by far. It's undeniable, based on the evidence.

What's interesting is that in this case, we see differences of value, philosophy and so on between different parties at different levels of government, and we see a different approach at different levels. This has created more inequity in the impacts and, in some cases, multiple waves of the pandemic, which have exacerbated the initial impacts.

There has been an exponential impact and hardship on the families and people in the community I represent. They've expressed this to me over and over again. I can't tell you how many calls I've had with local business owners who are at the end of their rope and are hanging on by a thread. By that I mean that in many cases they've had to borrow money and access our government supports. Although we've continually extended them, most people are saying that supports are literally keeping them afloat. If supports come to an end prematurely or the pandemic continues for much longer, they don't know how they're going to survive and keep their businesses afloat. Really, the livelihoods of many small businesses are at stake.

I myself am a business owner of 12 years. I started a business with \$160 to my name and grew it over 12 years to a sizable firm with 11 staff and 30 contractors. It was a full-time 24-7 job, and it was gruelling and hard work to be an entrepreneur and grow a company. It's one thing to own a small company and keep it at the same level. It's another thing to try to build a bigger company.

You make plans as an entrepreneur to earn enough profit, even if it's just a bit as a small company, to reinvest back into your company so you can have better staff, can provide more training and professional development, can offer benefits and can do all kinds of things for the people who are the heart of your company. Some businesses can also invest in new equipment. Depending on what kind of company you have, sometimes you have a higher reliance on equipment and there is a need for operational expenses to increase. Those are big investments. There are all kinds of planned investments that entrepreneurs have as they try to build a business, and we should think about how these plans are shattered right now for our entrepreneurs and small businesses, for the family-run businesses that are struggling through wave after wave of the pandemic.

There's so much uncertainty for these folks. A lot of it has to do with the evolving science. Our understanding of this virus is evolving. I know that at times opposition members feel very frustrated with the fact that they want answers. I think Canadians do too. I'm not patronizing anybody when I say this; I really understand the frustration. We want to know the solutions right now. We want predictability and the answers right now. The reality in a pandemic, in an evolving crisis, is that we don't have that information and don't have certainty. That is really uprooting. It causes a lot of anxiety out there, and I can really empathize with how this impacts the businesses in our communities. Many of them have anxiety about reopening. When are travel restrictions going to be lifted? They have so many questions about economic recovery, about whether their customers are going to feel safe and whether there's going to be predictability in the future.

If you go back to what I was saying earlier about planned expenditures and growth, plans are integrated into the families of small business owners. This is as much about the growth of their company as it is about their livelihood. These things are so closely tied together. When you're the owner of a family-run business, you have a very close connection between your business and your family.

I can think about the optometrists I've talked to, or the accountants in my community, or the hair salons and the small shops along the main street corridor. All of them are these types of businesses. There's the local cleaner. There are so many of them. They don't all fit into one bucket. They're all these really committed, hard-working, entrepreneurial-type people who have taken on great risk to do something they love and believe in. Often, it's not really for profit, at the end of the day. It's for the stability of their family. They really are the ones who are impacted by this pandemic.

I've talked about the many workers and individuals who have been affected by this pandemic and the inequities across our society in terms of how that's played out. Today I'm really focusing on the small businesses and the hardest-hit industries. I want us not to forget that the economic hardships on them have been truly challenging at multiple levels, so I will continue.

In the food service industry, Restaurants Canada gathered statistics in October 2020 as well. They produced those. It took a little time to do the analysis, I'm sure, but I think just in general the food service industry really experienced a deep impact. They claim to be the hardest hit, and I think they are. I think maybe some other industry groups may say they are the hardest hit, but I don't think it's worth arguing; they're all the hardest-hit industries. There's no doubt in my mind that they are all in need of attention, support, empathy and targeted measures to help them recover. I think the only way we get those is by listening to them and by valuing their perspective. Again, taking the time to prorogue and listen to those stakeholders I think was essential for our government. I fully support taking that time.

Some 800,000 food service workers were laid off or had their hours cut to zero during the first wave of the pandemic. While many industries could bring people back to work, they were hovering at between 1% to 10% below pre-COVID employment levels as compared with February 2020. There continues to be a significant gap in the food service industry. They are one of the hardest hit for

sure, with employment 21% below February 2020 levels. Those were statistics from October 2020 or just before then.

Again, I'm trying to use information that was relevant at the time of prorogation. In this case, I think the data that was analyzed had covered the summer of 2020 but was analyzed into the fall. It was still really relevant. I know that these associations were in dialogue with our government at the time and I'm sure they gave us the feedback. Although I wasn't in those conversations with the national associations, I was definitely hearing the same things in my local community from my chamber of commerce and the local chapters of some of these associations.

Over half of restaurants planned to, and still probably plan to, reduce their table service. This is a huge deal, obviously, for them. Many of them, of course, will want to open as soon as they can open patios so that they can earn some revenue.

This, to me, really inhibits. Social distancing really has an impact on them, because when you get the business model of a restaurant that often had pretty razor-thin margins.... I've done about 15 different business plans for restaurants, catering and café businesses of different kinds. I mentioned the one earlier that the YWCA runs in downtown Hamilton called At The Table café. It's a café and catering business and wholesale baking business. What I can tell you from doing very detailed financial analyses of these types of businesses is that they do have very thin margins.

It looks like my Internet might be slowing down. Am I coming through clearly, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You are.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay, great.

Essentially what I'm saying is that, even as the economy starts to recover, or as public health restrictions are safely lifted in the future.... I really must stress that they need to be safely and slowly lifted to ensure there isn't a fourth and fifth wave. We need to be extremely careful at all levels when doing any reopening.

What's important to realize about a restaurant or food service business, which includes more than just restaurants, is that their margins are thin already. Within the pandemic, their operating costs have gone up slightly due to some of the equipment and public health measures and protocols they've had to implement. Some restaurants have put the kind of plexiglass, or whatever it's called, around the booths where people sit in the restaurant, but even the social distancing and not having as many people.... Everything depends upon how many tables you turn over in a day. Most of these businesses literally count down their cash at the end of every day.

Am I still coming through? It seems like I'm pausing.

The Chair: No, you're coming through okay.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: For me, it seems like I'm pausing. It looks like I'm getting a bit of an Internet issue right now.

The Chair: We hear some static now. We're seeing it at your end a little more quickly than we were.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): I can confirm that it seems like time is standing still, yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Was that Mr. Calkins? We haven't heard from him before, but thank you for your comments.

The Chair: He's listening. He's letting you know.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Speaking of standing still....

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It looks like you're in the middle of a stream there.

The Chair: I think the clerk was also having some Internet difficulties a little while ago.

Mr. Clerk, can you let us know if Mr. Turnbull's Internet connection is stable?

The Clerk: Madam Chair and Mr. Turnbull, I'm just checking now with the IT techs in the room to get them to assess your connection. It does seem to be occasionally catching, but I think everyone can still continue to hear you okay.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I will close down some other windows and then keep going. Sometimes that helps. Thank you for that.

Where I was going with all of this is really that the restaurant industry, because of the unique challenges with reopening and how dependent they are on volume and expenditure, sort of the average spend per table that they turn over in a restaurant, they're really going to struggle to essentially turn any kind of profit or have any margin as they recover.

As much as we want to help them, I think there are significant structural barriers for their industry that are unique because of the reliance on the physical space, the dining experience and how they normally operate, which creates some very unique challenges for the restaurant industry that I think we need to recognize and support.

I know that they feel like some of the provincial public health restrictions that have been implemented.... They've voiced this to me, many local restaurants in my community.

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

We are now talking about getting into the provincial stuff as well. I know that we've all enjoyed this, but just about 15 minutes ago when Ryan opened the door for perhaps negotiations, they seemed to drop very quickly and went back into a filibuster speech. I'm wondering if this is a time where we can really actually negotiate and say who wants what. I'm happy to bring this to the table. I'm happy to have these discussions. I thought Ryan was actually going to go there and start talking about how they really want to have Minister Freeland. We understand that. We hear that. However, perhaps there's somebody who we might want to see and not just who the government wants to see. If we're really negotiating, perhaps we could say, "Yes, we're happy to see this person if we can see that person."

Ryan, perhaps you're willing to negotiate. I'm just wondering if you're going to continue with the talk, or if we really want to get down to the core of what this motion is and start dickering away at it and get it done. Let's get this stuff done.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I did hear what Ms. Vecchio said, but my Internet seems to be skipping and stalling. It's really not working well. Perhaps I need to log out and log back in. If you can still hear me, I appreciate Ms. Vecchio's comments and would welcome some conversation about that, certainly.

Perhaps I can ask for a quick.... I can either cede the floor for the moment to one of my honourable colleagues.... I think I need to log out and log back in to try to reset my Internet connection here because it's really not working for me.

The Chair: We can pass the floor to Mr. Amos. You can disconnect and reconnect, and we'll wait for you.

I'm glad that you appreciate what Ms. Vecchio said. Maybe it will take us somewhere. You can have the conversation, obviously, however you like, whether it's in committee or off the record. It's whatever you guys choose to do, but I definitely encourage the conversation.

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

I thought the entire idea of having a business committee meeting was to discuss it, and this is exactly where we are. We are at a committee table where we are discussing committee business. This is committee business about how we can negotiate on who is there and who is not. I'm sure that everybody has read the Hill Times. I'm sure that everybody has read that publication and has seen where we're at. If the public knows, I believe that the NDP, the Bloc—and perhaps they will speak on this—and the Conservatives.... There are many things for which we are saying let's talk about this. Perhaps Daniel or Alain can say what they would like to see as well, but let's actually start negotiating. Let's actually say that, yes, we respect that you want to see Ms. Freeland—we absolutely respect that—but in exchange, we would like to see the Prime Minister. Let's call it what it is. We would like to see the Prime Minister. If we want to look at other things that we can start breaking down, let's go for it, but let's stop wasting time.

The Chair: You're right, Ms. Vecchio. Absolutely, I stand corrected. This is the place to have the conversation. Hopefully, that conversation does begin to evolve more quickly than what we have seen. I appreciate your making that interjection.

As Mr. Turnbull has to log off and log back in, I am going to give the floor next to Mr. Amos at this point. Perhaps Mr. Amos can shed some more light on this and maybe continue rolling that ball forward.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As an irregular participant on this committee, I do greatly appreciate the opportunity to contribute and to learn.

I'd like to tip my hat to Mr. Turnbull, whose contributions this morning have been illuminating.

I'd also like to appreciate that MP Vecchio is seeking to transact parliamentary business as between the parties, and I'm sure that the proper individuals on our squad will ensure that conversations happen, as appropriate. Being an irregular member, I don't want to interfere in any way that would be untoward, of course.

Members may recall when I had the opportunity last week to reflect on the relevance of prorogation and the particular point in the pandemic where we were late last summer. Obviously, we've moved to a different place now, and I think there is actually a fair point to be made that this entire exercise is a moot one. We're long past late summer.

As we appreciate it, we responsibly prorogued for a brief period of time in order to come back with a Speech from the Throne that could lay out a concrete vision in a moment where Canadians were looking for what are the next steps. We felt that was the responsible measure to take, as a government, and that's exactly what we did and why we did it.

That moved directly into a fall period of significant parliamentary activity, leading right up to the fall economic statement, which laid out a large number of concrete measures. I want to get into some of those today because I think one can only understand the relevance and the importance of the prorogation component by appreciating exactly what it led to: the Speech from the Throne, which recommenced parliamentary proceedings; going straight into a fall economic statement; and then of course more parliamentary debate through the winter, leading to the budget. So there is a continuum here.

I think it's important for Canadians to understand that this is all regular and dutifully conducted parliamentary process that is required as part of good governance and it's required as part of our Westminster parliamentary democratic tradition. I think we're all well aware of where prorogation fits into the tradition that we come from, as part of the Crown's various reserve powers.

We all appreciate that we are no longer at a point in history where all of governance is the product of royal prerogative. Nowadays there are very few such royal prerogatives, including prorogation. Centuries ago, when pandemics wreaked havoc on many societies, in both the Commonwealth and beyond, we lived in an era when the king or queen owned all the lands, made all the laws, raised armies to defend the people and attempted to conquer new territories to increase the wealth of the kingdom, and enforced the laws and then meted out justice. Over the past four centuries, those royal prerogatives have been whittled away and now we are at the point where Parliament controls virtually everything. Our democratic system is much more robust and there are very few powers, as I said, prerogatives that reside in the Crown, and one of them is prorogation. That is why the Prime Minister is required to bring to the Governor General that request for prorogation, and it was done responsibly.

I think that MP Turnbull and my learned colleagues have repeatedly articulated the rationale for this, and obviously the motions on the floor would seek to bring some greater level of clarity and accountability around the prorogation decision.

As I have said before, my own opinion is that this is a moot discussion. Canadians would want us to focus on the future and the future of vaccines, the future of economic recovery, the future of a return to normalcy for Canadian families and for seniors like those at St-Joseph's Manor, who I visited this morning via Zoom, who want nothing more than to say hello to their families in person.

I'll pause on this tangential point just because it is such a lovely thing. I learned this morning that the good residents at St-Joseph's Manor in Campbell's Bay got their second shot this week. That's stupendous news for those good people in Campbell's Bay on the north side of the Ottawa River, maybe 80 kilometres west of Gatineau.

That's what people want to be focused on right now. They want to focus on what we are doing to get to the next point of bringing us back, and that's what our government has been doing all along. Every single moment, every single decision has been focused on how we are contributing to making sure that Canadians can return to seeing their loved ones and can spend more time doing the things they want to do with fewer restrictions, how we can invest in the necessary fashion to procure and distribute vaccines to rebuild our biomanufacturing sector, how we can render more robust our overall health care system, how we can assist other levels of government, and how we can collaborate with other levels of government to bring about additional supports at critical times of need.

I think our hearts go out and our support is extended to those regions of the country that are, right now, really struggling, that are so challenged by this third wave, whether it's Peel Region, Nova Scotia or Alberta. We have regions that are really just focused on the here and now, and rightly so, because that's what matters.

I think many of my constituents in the Pontiac would express great frustration at the notion that there is a national debate to be had around prorogation decisions made late last summer with a view to enabling a pivot after the first wave and before the second wave took hold.

Let's take a quick step back, and think about what prorogation enabled. This is why it's so important to focus on MP Turnbull's amendment, and what he would propose that we focus this committee's work on. If indeed there is to be time spent staring in the rear-view mirror, let's focus on what prorogation enabled.

[Translation]

The prorogation allowed us to come up with an action plan for the second phase of the pandemic by means of a throne speech. Everyone knew that this second wave was coming, because we had seen what was going on in Europe.

We knew that we had to prepare for it by providing assistance to our workers, our small and medium-sized businesses, and our communities, which were suffering seriously as a result of the pandemic. The throne speech clearly indicated what emergency measures our government would be introducing. Additional protection was needed for our municipal players, and more funding.

That's what led to the throne speech and the 2020 fall economic statement. A wide range of measures and economic analyses of the situation were presented. In November 2020, the 2020 estimates had not yet been tabled because of the pandemic. It was therefore both necessary and important for our economic players to properly understand the situation through reliable data so that they could plan the April 2021 estimates.

My colleagues are no doubt aware of the contents of the 2020 fall economic statement. The information therein was about priority problems for the Canadian public. Table 1 showed the number of doses of potential vaccines obtained per person. Last fall, the discussion was about the number of doses that Canada had obtained from various companies, including Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Novavax. It's interesting to see how the discussion has evolved since then.

We are now in a completely different position. On my Twitter account, I tweeted that in terms of the number of doses administered per 100 persons, Canada is now one of the leaders, along with Germany, the United States and Great Britain. The situation has changed considerably. We were in a very good position with respect to access to vaccines as soon as they were approved by Health Canada. After only a few months, 35% of Canadians had received their initial vaccine, and this percentage is increasing daily.

I will now return to the 2020 fall economic statement.

As you can see, we have turned the corner. The statement was about what had happened in the spring and how we had got to where we were in the fall. It mentions the deployment of the Canadian Armed Forces in Ontario and Quebec to protect the health and lives of our seniors. It also discussed contributions from the Red Cross and the ongoing efforts of the Canadian Armed Forces.

During the first wave of the pandemic, public policy and economic action evolved.

[English]

When we look at the different measures that were put in place, from the Canada emergency response benefit to the Canada emergency wage subsidy to the Canada emergency business account, there was an evolution with the collaboration of opposition members. There was an evolution of emergency policies all designed to bend the curve to protect our frontline health care workers and to help people to stay at home and stay healthy while continuing to pay their employees, pay their rent, pay their mortgages, stay on top of their bills and put food on the table.

By the end of summer 2020, we were in a different place. I think we can all reflect back. MP Shanahan will recall—

Sorry to disturb you out of your stupor. I know sometimes I can drone on. MP Long is looking at me as though he's paying great attention. That's well appreciated, MP Long.

MP Shanahan will recall how we had planned a Quebec caucus trip to les Îles de la Madeleine. We were looking forward to working hard together to discuss what could be done as we emerged out of the first phase and pivoted, knowing that there was a second phase to come. History being what it was, we weren't able to meet, which was too bad. We are all looking at Quebec caucus members

to go back to les Îles de la Madeleine and to be greeted by MP and Minister Diane Lebouthillier to consider next steps for now. I recall at that moment we were looking at going there just so that we could take stock, step back and assess what had just transpired and then look to the future.

At the time we weren't even 10 months into a mandate. The government was in exactly the same position. The government, along with governments across our country in our provinces and territories and municipalities, had confronted the urgent necessities of this pandemic and had put in place the bricks and mortar programs that could sustain families, businesses and workers. It was the moment to look forward to what would be next. What did we need to do to improve the supports? How did we need to invest more? What did we need to do to address revenue issues and expenditure issues? That's what the Speech from the Throne enabled.

Canadians in my riding of Pontiac demanded to know where we were going, and rightfully so.

As I see the fall economic statement, I think about the importance of enabling the presence of our Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister, Chrystia Freeland before this committee to discuss that continuum of how we were going to be pivoting from the first phase of the pandemic into the second phase. I think it would be entirely appropriate for her to bring us through that moment, if this committee sees fit to continue to look in the rear-view mirror and to continue to examine the past.

I would argue that my constituents would rather we focus on the future, but that's a separate matter. I will focus on the amendment at hand. You'll pardon my underscoring of the fact that my constituents would much rather we focus on the what's next of parliamentary procedure, as opposed to what was in our past.

I am looking now at, and would refer my esteemed colleagues to, the second and third charts of the fall economic statement, focusing on the one hand on real GDP and employment rate respectively. Note the distinct difference between real GDP without direct support measures on the one hand and with direct support measures on the other hand. It makes very clear, literally, in black and white, in a bar graph, what the measures implemented by our government enabled in terms of GDP preservation and employment preservation. The third chart indicates that without the direct support measures, unemployment would have reached nearly 20%. Those kinds of numbers are inconceivable for most Canadians.

Due to the direct support measures implemented during that spike in the spring of 2020, the unemployment rate was kept somewhere around 13% at its peak, as opposed to 19%. The Statistics Canada information is clear, but it's not just the Statistics Canada information. This is from the Department of Finance survey results from private sector economists. It is the norm with all Department of Finance efforts in the context of the economic statements and budgets to seek that external data input to ground-truth what is being published.

That's a significant indication to the Canadian public, being provided in a transparent way, of the importance of the support measures that have been implemented. They've prevented us from falling into a situation of nearly 20% unemployment and, rather, keeping us between 10% and 15% and then that unemployment rate to declined significantly. I might add, it was much faster than the vast majority of our OECD partners and our G7 partners. We were able to make sure that the employment rate was maintained.

That's important in a future-oriented perspective, because what was happening, particularly through the wage subsidy, was the maintenance of a connection between the employer and the employee. The effort was to incentivize the maintaining of employment to keep the employer-employee units strong so that there would be fewer pieces to pick up.

Of course, our finance minister is far more eloquent than I am. Who you have here before you is a mere member of Parliament from Pontiac stumbling through the fall economic statement as best I can. I know that our finance minister would do far greater justice to the plan for protection of jobs and protection of Canadians' employment and then the pivot into a plan for growth once the virus is under control and the economy is prepared to absorb it. The plan, as articulated in that full economic statement, is to deploy a three-year stimulus package to jump-start the economy.

That's exactly what has just happened this past spring. I'm just pointing out a thread that everyone knows and sees as being entirely obvious. Everything seems obvious in hindsight, and of course we're engaged here in an exercise in hindsight. The finance minister indicated abundantly clearly that this is where where we were heading. We are heading towards consistent supports on rent subsidies with wage subsidies to our municipalities and to our provinces, procuring billions and billions of dollars of vaccines at federal expense to distribute to the provinces so they can manage their own prioritization processes of vaccinating so many millions of Canadians, which is turning into the great success of 2021.

That generation of Canadians will look back on the achievement and say, "Wow, I was there. I remember that moment. I remember how it felt so dark at Christmas at how frustrating it was to be separated from family. I remember being challenged in my mental health through the winter of 2021; it was dark." It wasn't as cold as some of the winters; it was still cold, but not as cold. It was a tough start to 2021, and then all of a sudden the vaccines, which had been procured so carefully by Minister Anand and her Department of Public Works, started coming online as planned. There were variations week by week here and there, but month after month the numbers came in, far greater quantities, far larger amounts, because the contracts were well negotiated and because the portfolio was diversified. We didn't pick just one winner; we bet on all of the horses. Now those horses are racing into the stables, and we are able to work with our provincial partners to accelerate the pace.

I think what we're going to see in years to come is that we're going to say that was the moment we remember being able to say, "Kids, you can go to a movie." We're just looking forward to that moment. We're going to be able to have that backyard barbecue. We're going to go and enjoy a spaghetti dinner with our community. We're going to visit the seniors residence. These are all the things

that are going to be made possible through the massive injection of so many doses of vaccines to Canadians.

All of it relates right back to that important and necessary decision to prorogue, to reconvene Parliament under the banner of a Speech from the Throne that could clearly indicate to Canadians that this is the path; here is where we're going, and to bring forward a fall economic statement that put the fiscal meat on the bones of that plan.

[Translation]

I'd like to end by thanking my colleagues for being willing once again to consider assessing the relevance of a discussion about prorogation. We could even discuss the relevance of prorogation, given that we all want to focus our efforts on things that really matter.

I hope that the right decisions will be made, because that would enable the committee to have useful discussions.

I'm very grateful for this opportunity to discuss things with you today.

[English]

I will conclude with that. I greatly appreciate the time that I've been afforded by my esteemed colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Amos.

Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity. This is my first time in PROC and we're discussing a very important topic. This is new to me, so if I sound out of the ordinary on this, please let me know, Madam Chair. I would appreciate that.

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

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It's great to have Mr. Sarai here for the first time.

Perhaps we can let him know what the motion is so that we can actually stay relevant.

The Chair: Yes, I think Mr. Sarai has all the—

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I have your motion, Ms. Vecchio, and I think it's the amendment to that by Mr. Turnbull, so—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes, it's on prorogation. I just want to ensure that we're actually on the right topic today. Thanks.

I've heard a variety of things, I think even a HUMA motion that was presented to us, and then presented to HUMA last week. Whatever we can do....

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, thank you for your vigilance.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: The first thing that came to mind when I saw this was what are my constituents thinking? I am the elected representative of my constituents. What are they talking about? I have 120,000 constituents. I have a lot of young constituents. I have a diverse background of constituents. I have a riding that's been held by virtually all of the parties. It was the legendary Chuck Cadman's riding. It was held by Penny Priddy, a legendary NDP member of Parliament and MLA, and minister. For the first time since 2015 it has been held by a Liberal, me, so it's had quite a variety in its tenure.

I tried to see how many have actually asked about the prorogation. To be honest with you—and I have one of the busiest constituency offices, and I know all of you have a lot of activity—when it happened, a couple of people had questions, but I have had zero comments since then. I will tell you that's because most people are worried about the recovery and they want to get back to things.

Then I look back—

The Chair: I'm so sorry to interrupt.

I am having some difficulty with your sound going in and out, and phasing out a bit. I'm wondering if the interpreters are having difficulty as well.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Okay, I'll try adjusting my—

The Chair: Maybe we could just pause for a second.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Is it the Internet?

The Chair: It's much better now.

Mr. Clerk, is that better? You haven't had any complaints from the interpreters, have you?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we haven't had any indication yet that it is a problem, although when Mr. Sarai started speaking again, it did seem to dramatically improve. It may have just been the positioning of the mike.

I'll check with the techs in the room to see if there are any connectivity issues that Mr. Sarai might be experiencing on his end.

The Chair: Thank you.

It improved a lot when you moved your mike, so that's great. I don't want to strain the interpreters. I was straining myself, just trying to hear, so I can't imagine what they are going through.

I'm so sorry to interrupt.

Go ahead, Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

I've closed some windows. Hopefully I wasn't consuming too much bandwidth from the Internet that might have been making this a slower, choppy experience.

I was getting to what my constituents asked, and that's what I'm elected to do: address their concerns.

As I was saying, since being re-elected in 2019, and even after the prorogation of Parliament in 2020, I have had maybe two people, at the beginning, who wanted to know why, who actually wanted to know the semantics of it. Otherwise, I've had no concern about it. In fact, what my constituents have been asking about is

how to get vaccines. How do we get vaccines into our arms? How do we get businesses back? How do we save jobs? I think that has been the focus of the government.

Then I look back at the history of when prorogation has been used. I hate to say this, but it's funny to see who's calling the kettle black, or however they say it. Prorogation was used before to save a government from falling apart when three parties actually opposed it. In this case, it was a very contrarian version. We have a pandemic, which, as my colleagues Will Amos and Mr. Turnbull have said, nobody has seen in the last 100 years. I think 1918 was the last time. To go back, I've had to jog people's grandparents' memories, and even they have only heard about it, or when they were very young had very vague memories of it to actually relate that experience.

To continue in government as if nothing has happened and as if nothing is going wrong, with commitments that were made in a particular direction in an election just months earlier would be very unfair. It would be very inappropriate. It would not be what prudent Canadians would expect a government to do. Prudent Canadians would expect a government to be nimble, to quickly change, and to quickly figure out what needs to be done on the fly, immediately. They would want a reset.

If there was ever a time when prorogation was justified, was needed, was essential, that was the time. That was the time when Canadians wanted to forget about everything else. They wanted to know how they were going to be safe, how their children were going to be safe, how their kids would go to school, how they would be able to continue paying their mortgage or rent, and how they were going to put food on the table.

The government had to reposition and rethink things. This was front and centre for me.

Then we look at the length of time and the actual number of times. I think this committee has hashed over the length of time and the number of times that the previous Conservative government used prorogation as a tool for their own personal benefit when it was convenient. This time it was done in a pandemic.

Just look at the days that were postponed. There were months, the time before, that Parliament didn't sit. In this case, I think it was maybe 10 days or about a month of prorogation. In actually sitting days it was just 10 or 12 days.

What we came back with and what was given back after that period was a great reset. There was a fall economic statement that painted a blueprint or a road map of how we were going to survive this tenure and how we were going to sustain our businesses, jobs, and economy. Also, the question was how we were going to do a road map into recovery afterwards.

If you talk to any Canadian, anybody on Main Street, on Bay Street or in the airline industry, as well as the thousands and thousands or workers who are unemployed, that's what they wanted to hear us debating. They did not want us to debate other motions that were there from the past. Nobody cared about those at that time. They wanted us to debate how we were going to help.

The first calls I got were what most of you got: "What's happening with my job? Is the government going to be there for us?"

The second calls I received were from employers, who said, "I know I'm going to go through a pretty rough patch, but please don't let me lay off my employees. I barely got them. These are some of the best workers I've had. It takes a long time to nurture them. Can you figure out a way whereby I can still pay them a little bit? I want to and am continuing to pay them, even if I don't have much work. It would be great if the government could assist me in that way."

The government responded in that way and was able to keep millions and millions of employees working even though revenue had dropped in those businesses. After that, when I brought up with my constituents, who would call, or call via Zoom, because we couldn't meet in person, whether they were having an issue with prorogation, or had any concerns on this, they said no. They didn't want to talk about that. They wanted to know what we were doing about their rent. Their businesses had been closed down.

In Surrey Centre we have a lot of banquet facilities. We have a lot of other facilities that were shut down, gyms and whatnot. They said, "Who's going to pay my rent? I have a huge footprint. Who is going to support us in this?" That is what they wanted to hear the government discussing at that time. That's what they wanted to hear in the debates in the halls of Parliament, or on the screens of Parliament, which we have switched to. That's what they wanted to see, and we came through. We said we'd give 65% to those who were hurt financially, but 90% to those that were shut down by public health notices. Right now the calls I get from them are thank yous and about the optimism going forward.

Prior to March we were on track. We made a million jobs, had the lowest unemployment rate prior to the pandemic in 2020.

I'm not in an affluent neighbourhood. I probably have one of the lowest family mean incomes in the Lower Mainland. If you turn right or left out of my office door, you would see "help wanted" signs in the windows of London Drugs and Starbucks. In fact, I have a non-profit employment centre next door that helps people get employment. Quite frankly, they had very few to send over there because everyone was getting jobs and everyone was doing better.

I think prorogation is a very important tool. It should be used very scarcely. This government has only used it once, only for a few weeks. It was a time to have cabinet, have government, have the Prime Minister rethink. In this case it was a minority government, so everything had to be done with all of the other parties. You had to have them on board. This was not a unilateral execution of power or abuse of power. This was something that you had to work on in co-operation with the parties, House leaders, opposition leaders, because you could face an election at any time. All of the mea-

sures were done in that pattern prior to prorogation, and after that, and every party virtually voted for almost all of those measures.

What were those measures for? They were measures for Canadians to get through this. They were measures that we needed at that time. They were not Mickey Mouse, as my colleague Mr. Amos just said earlier. We were able to hedge the most procurement of vaccinations in the world for every single person. My skeptics, family and friends, all of us, have interesting Zoom conversations or chat groups where people are saying, "Are you really going to get vaccinated? I'm not going to get vaccinated until 2022." I think our colleague, Ms. Rempel, the health critic, has said a lot of things about children getting vaccinated, the third world getting vaccinated, before—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, perhaps we could get back to the relevance of this, please.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio would like you to refer back to how this links to prorogation.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: It absolutely links back. The relevance, Madam Vecchio, is this: What is front of mind of Parliament? We're all here for the citizens of Canada, for our stakeholders, for this country's betterment. What was the focus? The focus was vaccination. The focus was job recovery. The focus was saving jobs. That's why prorogation occurred.

Prorogation is an essential tool when used right, and quite frankly, that's why Canadians do not care about this. We've had our parliamentary committees look into everything prior to that. They're looking into some of the stuff again, which they have every right to do.

Our parliamentary committees are very powerful instruments. They have gone through every program, every controversy, every issue that has popped up since then, and they continue to do that. Therefore, I think a prorogation of four weeks and several days for a government to come back, to create an agenda, a set of legislation that would be there for a global emergency, a global pandemic, a global epidemic, is what was needed at the time, what was essential, what was expected by Canadians and what was delivered for Canadians.

Even after that, if you see what happened after prorogation, right away, the House started very quickly. The fall economic statement was given right after that. Debates on that fall economic statement were done. Tweaks were made. Amendments were suggested. Parliamentary debates resumed. Parliamentary committees resumed. Parliamentary committees challenged us. New committees were set up, including one that I am on, the Canada-U.S. committee to deal with that issue that came out: the protectionism of the U.S. We are debating, and we are continuing to do those things. A new budget was given, which is being debated as we speak, to deal with exactly those issues that are relevant to this day.

This is why Canadians elected this government. This is what Canadians expect in times like these.

That's what I want to share with this committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sarai.

Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Chair, I see that our colleague, Mr. Blaikie, has his hand up. I would be happy to cede my place to Mr. Blaikie.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Shanahan.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Is Mr. Blaikie there?

You probably didn't think your turn would come so soon, did you?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I am indeed here. I am pleasantly surprised to get a turn a little earlier than I thought. I raised my hand when there was some talk of how we might have a discussion to move past this.

Obviously, there is a lot in Ms. Vecchio's motion about the WE Charity scandal, but what's important to note is that my Liberal colleagues on the committee have also made this about the WE Charity scandal, because they refuse to have a vote because they are trying to protect, presumably, the Prime Minister for sure and others who were mentioned in the original motion from having to come to discuss the WE Charity scandal. All that is to say it's very much the Liberals on the committee who, as much anybody else, have made this about the WE Charity scandal.

What I've tried to propose is a way forward that puts the focus back on prorogation. We've heard many times—and I don't think it's in dispute—that the Prime Minister effectively.... While it's the prerogative of the Crown to prorogue Parliament, she does that on the advice of the Prime Minister. It's effectively the Prime Minister's prerogative to decide when Parliament is prorogued.

There are obviously differences of opinion about the reasons for the Prime Minister's prorogation. We've heard also some disagreement, and I think some real questions. We've even heard from Liberals at committee that, well, you know, the length of the prorogation might have been different, and maybe they didn't quite get that right and the timing of when it began.

There are some questions about the nature of the prorogation. We know that the Prime Minister is the decision-maker. I've offered many times on the record and off the record to various folks on the Liberal side that we could bring this back to the topic of prorogation by having the Prime Minister at committee for an hour and, as far as I'm concerned anyway, dispense with the rest. I know there are other committees pursuing the WE Charity question, and rightly so, but for as long as my Liberal colleagues are going to continue to filibuster in order to defend other Liberals from having to talk about the WE Charity scandal, this is what it's about.

If we're going to end up voting on this motion, then I'm going to support the Conservatives' motion. There's no doubt in my mind about that. The question then becomes, can we get back to making this about prorogation? That means having the sole decision-maker on prorogation come before the committee. I know that I'm not saying anything that's actually new here, but I think it's important because we've heard so much, so many words, from other colleagues that I think it's easy to lose the thread here.

The reason we're having this study is that the Prime Minister himself proposed this as a mechanism to prevent political abuses of prorogation. There can be legitimate reasons for prorogation. I think I've said here before—maybe I haven't—that the Manitoba legislature routinely prorogues. Every year, they come back with a Speech from the Throne. There have been uncontroversial prorogations in Canada's history. There were several, I think, in the Chrétien era. Nobody has talked about them, because they weren't interesting.

There are a lot of ways to prorogue Parliament. I'm not disputing that it is a tool that can be used. The pandemic is clearly all-consuming, so the idea that there might be a prorogation having to do with that is not outlandish. It's just that it happened to be announced the day after the minister of finance resigned right in the middle of a scandal and the day before a whole bunch of documents were due that might have shed some light on that scandal. I think any right-thinking person might think that there really is a connection there.

Yes, there may be questions for the Prime Minister about the WE Charity scandal, but also about the timing of the beginning of that prorogation. There are also questions about why the Prime Minister saw fit not to end it earlier, for instance, and to have us come back in order to have a far more fulsome discussion than what took place in Parliament about the expiration of the CERB program and what would replace it. We know, of course, that the legislation ended up being rushed through and there were some problems with that legislation.

Again, when we talk about the sickness benefit and then people later using that in order to quarantine from international travel that they had taken against the advice of the government, that was something that.... All parties agreed to that legislation and didn't identify that as a problem, but in fairness to opposition parties, I'll say that we didn't have a lot of time with that legislation. It was tabled and had to be passed in a matter of days, because the CERB deadline was there, despite the fact that I know I can say with certainty that New Democrats were calling for the House to sit in the month of September so that we could have that longer discussion.

There are a lot of legitimate questions about the timing and the nature of the prorogation that belong rightly with the sole decision-maker in respect of prorogation in the context of a study that has come about as a result of his own proposal for how best to prevent abuses of prorogation.

It makes perfect sense to have the Prime Minister here for one hour, and we could move on. I am putting that back on the table. I welcome a discussion about why it is that people don't think one hour of the Prime Minister's time, in order to make good on his own proposal for how to prevent abuses of prorogation, the kind that we saw in the Harper years....

I would like some of my Liberal colleagues to say, if they think it's true, that had this mechanism existed in the Harper Parliaments, they would not have thought it was appropriate for Stephen Harper to come before PROC and defend his government's position. Then maybe explain how this mechanism is actually supposed to prevent political abuse of prorogation if the only decision-maker doesn't actually have to defend the decision in questioning to committee, because then I don't think it's a very good mechanism.

Of course, people at this committee will know that I think the best mechanism would actually be to have Parliament vote on prorogation because in instances of non-controversial prorogations—as I have said, there have been more of those than not in Canada's history—I don't think it would be difficult to get Parliament's assent to a prorogation. But in cases where it is controversial, then I actually think it's Parliament that should decide whether Parliament rises. It's Parliament that should decide whether all the work of committees is suspended or not. It's Parliament that ought to decide whether the legislative agenda gets cleared or not.

If a government doesn't want to move forward with certain legislation, it's always their prerogative not to put it up for debate on any given date. We saw that. Bill C-27 was a bill, a bad bill, I might add, that was presented by the Liberal majority government in the last Parliament, and I don't know that it was debated at all, in fact. I was relieved. I would have preferred that the government just withdraw it to give people peace of mind about their pension. That always hung over people's heads in the last Parliament, so withdrawing it would have been a better way forward, or dare I say, even a prorogation mid-Parliament.

There were times in the last Parliament that I did say that I thought we were about due for a prorogation. There was a lot of stuff on the Order Paper that the government clearly wasn't interested in moving forward with and I thought it would be good to just have the government reset its direction. Then the government picked the most controversial moment that it possibly could have, raising the spectre of political abuse for prorogation after over five years in government. So yes, we have questions. That's fair. That's what Parliament is for. That's what the accountability function of Parliament is all about. It's a principle of responsible government that elected parliamentarians be able to pose questions directly to decision-makers within government. Let's get the Prime Minister here and let's get this study over with and let's move on to something else.

Thank you to Mrs. Shanahan for allowing me to make that intervention sooner rather than later.

Thanks to the committee for listening to that again.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

It was nice to see your little one there for a little bit, making a special guest appearance. I think it always lightens everyone's day and mood to see the little ones.

Next we have Mr. Long.

Maybe we can come back to Mr. Long afterwards if he's not there. Is there a technical issue?

Okay, it is more of a technical issue.

We can hear you, Mr. Long, but we can't see you.

Mr. Wayne Long: Okay.

The Chair: There we go. It's all good.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's great to be back. I apologize for the technical glitch. I'm not quite sure what happened there. Maybe somebody was telling me that they didn't really want to hear what I was going to say, but it's great to be back to talk to all of you, my colleagues, my friends.

It's great to see Randeep, here.

It was a great speech, MP Sarai.

Will gave another great speech.

Obviously, Mr. Blaikie, when you came on, I had my fingers crossed that you were going to give us something that was new and something that we could actually ponder, but it wasn't to be.

I have lots to say, again, but I just want to ask MP Vecchio straight up, not to put her on the spot at all, are you moving off calling the Prime Minister to this committee at all?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much for asking that, Mr. Long.

As we have heard from all of the opposition parties, including Mr. Blaikie just moments ago, I think the one person we are looking for is the Prime Minister.

To me, the biggest sticking point we have is that we're hearing from the government that the Prime Minister will not come because he already testified at committee last summer. That was before prorogation. We're asking why he prorogued on August 18. He never answered any questions about prorogation because he went to committee prior to prorogation. That's one of the things.

I've heard Mr. Blaikie speak about this many times. The Prime Minister is who everybody is looking for on the opposition side. I'm sorry, I don't mean to speak for the Bloc or anyone else, but I think that is the holding point. Until they can come to something—everybody on the government is saying that the Prime Minister will not come because he has done this before; that is incorrect—we're just going to continue to filibuster.

Obviously, I don't know what the final solution is. I just know that the majority of the committee would like to hear from the Prime Minister. The reason this continues is that if we go to a vote, the majority of this committee would vote to have the Prime Minister here. I know that is the bottom line.

Mr. Wayne Long: I just want it to be crystal clear because we're all here, we're all friends and we're all trying to find a way forward. I just thought that maybe you'll move off, or maybe.... I just wanted to see where you were and where everybody was.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Perhaps there's some protocol. Maybe, Mr. Long, you can explain to me why the Prime Minister.... Everybody is talking about this. If we're saying no to the Prime Minister, why are you guys fighting so hard and saying he's been here before? He hasn't been here before.

I'm just asking. He hasn't talked about prorogation to any committees. That is what we're fighting for.

Mr. Wayne Long: I respect that. I obviously don't agree with it.

I think the issue for me on this, MP Vecchio.... I think we've all talked about this and compared then prime minister Harper to this prorogation. MP Simms certainly talked about the prorogation in different Parliaments around the world if you will. We can certainly [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for former prime minister Harper proroguing to avoid an election and defeat of his government and so on and so forth.

We can cite all of those examples. We would say that the Prime Minister—and I'm certainly going to get into that when I start my actual speech—prorogued for a completely different set of circumstances and reasons than previously. I know you would say that doesn't really matter because we are here and now.

I'm just trying to keep it real here before I start my speech. Is MP Blaikie on? I'm not sure he is. Do you really feel you're going to hear something different? I'm going to get into what he said here in a second in my speech, but we're all kind of in that Ottawa bubble. We all think we're going to get a different outcome. I'm just trying to find a way forward.

Obviously, Minister Freeland was, I believe, chair of the COVID committee and so on and so forth. Maybe this is the appropriate time to actually start my speech. That's what I wonder. I just wonder if you honestly, or if my Conservative colleagues would—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: All opposition colleagues.

Mr. Wayne Long: All colleagues would think they're going to get a different outcome.

I'll start by reading what the Prime Minister said:

We are proroguing Parliament to bring it back on exactly the same week it was supposed to come back anyway and force a confidence vote. We are taking a moment to recognize that the throne speech we delivered eight months ago had no mention of COVID-19; had no conception of the reality we find ourselves in right now. We need to reset the approach of this government for a recovery to build back better. And those are big important decisions, and we need to present that to Parliament and gain the confidence of Parliament to move forward on this ambitious plan. The prorogation we are doing right now is about gaining or testing the confidence of the House....

I think all of us didn't expect, and how could any of us expect, what we have faced since March 2020. The curveball we were

thrown as parliamentarians, as MPs, as a government, and as an opposition, was unprecedented, obviously. We talk about a generation, a once-in-a-hundred-years event that hit all of us. The fact that we felt, the Prime Minister felt, that we needed to step back, regroup, strategize, and come up with new plans and priorities....

I know we say we needed to do that, and obviously, we did need to do that. Canadians agreed that this is what was needed to be done. I respect very much that the other parties don't agree with that. They don't think that was needed to be done.

I will now come to the motion, and I won't read it. The motion wants to study the government's reasons for prorogation. I spent some time last night actually pulling that back out again. It's getting a little wrinkly, and I should make a new copy.

All Canadians, parliamentarians, government officials and departments were getting kicked in the gut and had our feet taken out from under us by this, hopefully, once-in-a-generation pandemic. No one knew what they were dealing with. The fact is we had to do what we did.

The motion wants to study the government's reasons for prorogation. The Prime Minister clearly gave his reasons. You may not agree with the reasons, and that's fair. The opposition has a role to play in our government. The government doesn't work without a great opposition. The motion was to study the government's reasons, and we went through paragraphs (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (g) and (h).

I apologize for saying this again, but it wasn't just the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister who knew. It was Bill Morneau, Katie Telford, the Kielburgers, the Perelmutter, with memoranda, emails, text messages and documents.

You can take a few steps back and ask Canadians, in particular, why did we prorogue? I always talk about how I do a little survey just to gauge if I'm way off or if my line of thinking is right, because sometimes you get so close.... You know the old saying about how you get so close you can't see the forest for the trees. Prorogation—and I pulled this up—“in politics is the action of proroguing, or ending, an assembly, especially a parliament, or the discontinuance of meetings for a given period of time, without a dissolution of parliament.”

I asked people, first off, if they knew what prorogation was. It's taken me about a month and a half now to actually say "prorogation" correctly. I still kind of stumble a little bit. I asked people today, and last night, if they knew what prorogation was. I had two out of maybe 20 who even knew what it was, but then I explained to the other 18 what it was for. To be fair, this wasn't to avoid our government falling or anything like that. I asked if they felt it was necessary for us to reset, given the curveball that we were thrown with respect to COVID-19. It was certainly not an accurate poll, but basically 100% of them agreed that, yes, we did need to reset.

What troubles me with respect to the motion and then MP Turnbull's amendment—I want to make sure I stay on topic here with respect to the amendment—is I felt that.... I know that when you make motions you will make sure you cast as wide a net as possible. I wasn't there, but we would have done that, too, when we were in opposition. I get that, but there was a lot in there. I think that maybe at some point there may be a "Yeah, okay, we did throw everything but the kitchen sink in there. We wanted to make sure we had all that covered, everything" as I read from (a) to (h), but then MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion was what I deemed a compromise.

Yes, straight up, the Prime Minister is not on it, but I'm still having a really hard time understanding what anybody on this committee won't get from Minister Freeland, who chaired the committee. I fail to understand what you're not going to get from Minister Freeland that you would get from the Prime Minister. I don't understand that. You may say, "Well, we will probably get the same thing, but it's not the Prime Minister; it's Minister Freeland. We want that time with the Prime Minister sitting before this committee instead of Minister Freeland."

I have been accused of sometimes not being as buttoned down as a lot of other MPs with respect to procedures, policies, motions and things like that. That's not my strength. My strength is just a passion for representing my riding and for connecting with people here.

I always use the words, "I want to keep it real." I want all of us on this committee, as I've said before, to prorogue themselves for a bit and step back and say that we want the clip or the photo of the Prime Minister testifying before this committee, knowing.... Of course, I respect everybody on the committee very much, but we all know—all of us—that we won't get anything different from the Prime Minister than what he has already said. We all know that—every one of us. As I look around at some of these boxes, every one of us knows that.

We may have the ability to say, after it happens, "Oh look. He didn't give us what we wanted, and the Prime Minister said exactly what he said prior." Well, yes, that's fair, because he has already said it. He is not going to say—and I'm probably stepping over my speech here a bit, but I am obviously not speaking for the Prime Minister—anything that is different from what he has already said, because those are the reasons why he prorogued.

To me, I feel it's important for the committee to re-evaluate what's important here. MP Blaikie has every right, of course, to call the Prime Minister. I know that MP Blaikie is an honourable man and extremely intelligent, and he knows the ways of these commit-

tees. I have a lot of respect for MP Blaikie. I sat on a committee with him and I was wowed by his knowledge, insight, thoughtful comments and questions. I know that MP Blaikie also knows—I know he knows—there's not going to be anything different with the Prime Minister being called before this committee—no way. Come on. He knows that. I know he does.

We're trying to find a way forward. To be perfectly frank, I haven't really started my real speech. This is kind of a preamble, if you will. I don't have a book. What do they call that? A prologue.... I don't really read books. I have trouble reading books, to be honest, unless there are pictures in them. It's my ADHD. I can actually read a chapter of a book and be done with the chapter of the book and say, "What did I just read?" I learn visually and through talking things out and watching things. I have a lot of trouble reading.

Look, I believe there is a way forward here. I believe that MP Turnbull's amendment.... As a lot of you know, I love to talk, but it's hard to talk about the same things. I certainly don't want to tell MP Turnbull what a great MP he is, because I already told him that at the last meeting or the prior meeting, but he is a great MP. I know that he is extremely passionate about what he does and what he brings. I know that this amendment.... I apologize for the scribbles. You can see at every meeting I do a few extra doodles, except when MP Turnbull speaks, because I listen to every word he says. It's so thought provoking.

I believe his amendment is something that, for the Conservative Party, the NDP and the Bloc with MP Normandin, is a fair compromise. MP Turnbull's amendment moves us forward. Maybe when we move on to the next study or what have you, my days at PROC will quickly come to an end, but I want to see PROC be what PROC should be and doing great work.

As I said to you before, I've subbed in many committees. Obviously, I've spent a ton of time in HUMA. When we're first elected, we get our little checklist of what committees we'd like to be on. I remember looking at the list and asking what all those things stood for? What does HUMA stand for and what does PROC stand for? Of course, everything has a shortened name. I checked off HUMA and I was on ethics. Actually, MP Calkins is there somewhere.

Blaine, I don't know what you're holding. Is that an Arctic char? What's in that picture? Maybe he's not there, but anyway, his picture is there.

MP Calkins chaired ethics. I was on the ethics committee. I think back, and there was me, Nate Erskine-Smith and Joël Lightbound. Maybe sitting beside Nate rubbed off on me a bit.

What I'm getting to with respect to ethics is that we got a lot of great work done. We did. We did a lot of great work. Our chair, MP Calkins, did a great job as chair. We collaborated, we compromised and we got some good stuff done.

Certainly my committee in HUMA, chaired by Brian May, who I got to know very well, got some good stuff done. He was a great chair. Now in HUMA, chaired by Sean Casey, again there's lots of collaboration, lots of working together, and we got some good stuff done.

If you want the pecking order of senior committees and committees that people are on, PROC is right up at the top. The work that PROC does is fundamental to the workings of Parliament, but not right now, no. We're stuck. We're in a stalemate. We're not moving, not moving forward.

Canadians aren't engaged with this. They're not concerned about this. It's not that they don't care. Look, it's not that they don't care about the workings of Parliament and committees and all that stuff, but they're not seized with this at all.

We all reference at times “for those Canadians who are watching,” and “those Canadians who are tuned in to this right now”. I always wonder how many people are actually tuned in to this and this is a big part of their daily lives.

It harkens me back to a previous life. It was always an enigma to me. I was involved with a major junior hockey team—I think you all know that—and we had radio broadcasts. Anyway, it was a negotiation. The broadcaster was putting the price up to carry the games. We dug in. We really dug in to how many people were listening to our games on the road and at home, and to how much it would cost for an ad, and all those things. We dug in, and we were actually shocked as to how few people listened to us on the radio. I won't give you the number, but we were like, that's it?

Where I'm going with that, Madam Chair—and thanks for giving me a little latitude on that—is here we are in PROC. I know we are addressing Canadians and we're talking to Canadians, but how many people do we really think are tuned in to this and listening with bated breath to every word that Wayne Long is going to say, or MP Duncan, MP Turnbull, MP Normandin, MP Kent, MP Calkins and MP Amos, what have you? Do you think they're all tuned in with their little notepads, taking notes and saying, “Look at these guys go. Look at them go on this. Look at them going back and forth. They're filibustering, and they're doing this and that”? No, they're not. I can tell you straight up that they're not. That's a cold reality for everybody. They are not. They're not seized with this. Let me say it again, Canadians aren't seized with this.

Sure, as MP Blaikie has said, we have a right to study. In terms of MP Vecchio's motion, of course, we have a right to study—how is it actually worded again— “the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020”. Okay, that's fair. We have a right to study it. So let's dig in and study why they prorogued, when the Prime Minister has already said why he has prorogued. Government House leader Pablo Rodriguez, I believe—I'm not even looking at my notes—has testified and given reasons for prorogation. Officials have said why.

What Canadians are seized with is the uncertainty that this pandemic has brought into their daily lives. I had no idea when I signed up to be a member of Parliament in 2015...and then, obviously, I was lucky enough and fortunate enough to serve for four great years, where we did wonderful things as a government and as a

Parliament. I was fortunate enough to run again in 2019 and win my seat, the only red dot in the southern part of New Brunswick. I wear that as a sense of pride. We have some work to do, obviously, but when you draw that line across the province, it's all blue, except for little old me down here in this little red dot. Again, I wear that with a sense of pride.

What I'm getting at is that none of us knew that we all would be faced with something that was to change our lives forever. It's not to say that we're all never going to be good again, or we're not going to heal, and we're not going to move forward and recover, but we will never be the same. I don't say that like it's devastatingly bad—I don't mean it like that—but we have all changed in a certain way our thoughts, our outlook on things and our outlook on the future.

Look, I love going to school classes to talk to students—love it, can't get enough of it—from, honestly, kindergarten right up to grade 12. I used to go in before this pandemic, and we would talk about Parliament, governments, world order and so on and so forth. I always used to say—and always still say—to the students, “Look, one bit of advice is, don't ever think that history is done changing.” Yes, from the Second World War until now, we've had flare-ups, but relatively stable world order. Don't think that just because from the late 1940s until now that it is always going to be the same and that things will never change.

Change will happen. Change will come when we least expect it. Boy oh boy, when we ran in 2019, all of us with our beliefs and our passions and our ideologies, what have you, none of us were prepared for what came at us in 2020, none of us. Give or take when we saw cases of COVID-19, the coronavirus, start in—I apologize, I'm going to be off here—probably November or December, and then we came back, and we were back up in Ottawa at the end of January, fresh off our elections, and we didn't know what was hitting us. We didn't know what was coming. Then some cases came to North America and Canada. Then it got closer and closer to home. Then we got more and more concerned. I can remember talking to my wife, Denise. Denise was here in Saint John and I was in Ottawa, and she asked what was happening, and more importantly, what was going to happen.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, I enjoy listening to my colleague.

It's worth reminding ourselves from time to time where the crisis began, but we didn't talk about that much today. Beyond the background to the crisis and the fact that history is happening before our eyes, the sticking point in the discussion really seems to be the Prime Minister's presence here to explain the reasons for the prorogation. There is also Mr. Turnbull's amendment, which is currently under discussion.

Could my colleague Mr. Long stick to one thing or the other, but ideally to the presence of the Prime Minister? In view of the discussion, that would appear to be the heart of the matter.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Normandin is raising a point of relevance, so this is just a reminder to the member.

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes, Madam Chair, I'll get back to MP Turnbull's amendment.

The point I'm making, and I'll just close this up on this point, is that what was said to me moved me: "What's happening? What's going to happen? When are you coming home?" Obviously that Friday night I came home and the rest is history with respect to what happened after we got home, and the numbers and so on and so forth.

My point is that with MP Vecchio's motion to study the reasons for prorogation, how can you reasonably wonder why we prorogued, when we literally had to, using an old football analogy with the Buffalo Bills, "circle the wagons", as they used to say, and regroup, and make sure that we came out with a new throne speech with the proper policies and plans to support Canadians.

Again, I go back to MP Turnbull's amendment to MP Vecchio's motion. I read it, and I had a few other people read this too. Look, if you're really not vested as a Liberal or Conservative or Bloc or NDP or Green or an independent, and you read the motion, anybody objectively reading this motion would say, "Oh boy, there's something going on here. There's some smoke here, and where there's smoke, there's fire. We've got something here, and we're going to get to the bottom of why they prorogued...production of records, communications with WE and memoranda and emails." I believe that people who are objective, in not doing it for partisan political reasons....

Again, let me jump in quickly here. I know this happens on both sides of that fence. I don't know; I should take that back.

When we were in opposition, Her Majesty's loyal opposition was there to keep the government's feet to the fire, to challenge and to make sure.... We all know why we prorogued. Canadians, to put it bluntly, I don't want to say they don't really care, but they're not concerned about prorogation. They're not. We prorogued because we needed to reset. It's not like we were trying to run away from it and sweep it under the rug per se.

MP Turnbull has come back with an amendment saying that, okay, these are fair points, and you want this and this. Okay. So we're going to propose this. I respect very much that we, obviously, have taken out the Prime Minister, but we still have in that amendment the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth. We're still saying, look, these are senior people. These are senior people in our government who chaired the COVID committee. I don't think anybody here, or really anybody in Canada, would argue that Minister Freeland is a prominent and involved minister in our government. Again, I don't want to be too far over my skis here, but I would have a hard time thinking that she wouldn't have the answers to the questions that the opposition parties want to ask.

But then I will go back to this, and I believe this. At times it feels as though it's not just about getting answers. It's getting answers from the Prime Minister when he has already given the reasons that he, we, the government or what have you prorogued.

I think MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion is well thought out. I will be honest with you that when I first read it, I thought "What?". I didn't actually call or message MP Turnbull. I thought, "Are you sure you meant to keep the Deputy Prime Minister in there? Are you sure?" But, yes, he did. Geez, look, I thought it was a mistake when I first saw it to be perfectly honest. I thought it was a mistake. I thought, "Oh, no, they don't mean to have Minister Freeland in there. Oh, yes. Yes, there she is."

I know all of us know that there won't be a different answer. There won't be a different sentence than what has already been said.

Then we go back to, okay, why is inviting the Prime Minister such a stumbling block?

I go back to how it's because of the optics and the perception of calling the Prime Minister when he's already said the reasons why.... I know that Canadians are seized with getting through this pandemic. We have such great news with respect to vaccines and the number of vaccines that are coming into this country. I very happily got my AstraZeneca vaccine three weeks back. My wife Denise did too. I suffer from some very mild asthma and things like that, but I faithfully get my flu shot every year.

As for the euphoria, the excitement, the gratitude and the thankfulness I had at getting my AstraZeneca vaccine, I can't describe it. I'm not going to say that I was emotional to the point where I went outside and cried, but I will say that I was like, "You know, thank God the vaccine was available, thank God that science is winning over and we have the capability to produce something that can literally save millions of lives, and also thank God that we have a government."

Look, of course I'm a Liberal member of Parliament, and I'm proud of my party, our policies and our leader and so on, but it made me thankful just for Canada and the fact that we have those systems in place and we have a government, a strong government that can look after us in times of crisis and need. We hadn't been through this. I'm very thankful. Obviously, all of us are politicians and in the political world, but my view of government, political people and politicians has changed. I have a newfound...and this may sound crazy....

We have MP Kent there with his binoculars. I don't know if there's a good view out there or what's going on.

Hon. Peter Kent: I'm looking for the end of the filibuster.

Mr. Wayne Long: Hopefully those binoculars are strong and you can see for a long way, but all joking aside, this has given me a profound respect and thankfulness for our system, our politicians. Yes, there have been mistakes made. Yes, I know that if various politicians could do different things, they would, whether provincially or federally. Yes, there's been some partisanship, and there's been this and that. I get it all.

Do you know what, though? Everybody is trying, to the very best extent they can, to deal with an unprecedented once-in-a-generation pandemic. When there's a study proposed to study the reasons for prorogation, and the study is very detailed—my, oh my, the only thing missing is a couple of backbenchers like me testifying on this thing too; I mean, everybody was included in this thing.... I think MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion is a way out. I believe that. It's a way out.

I ask again, and people can jump in, is there anybody on that screen? As I said, sometimes, like Chewbacca, I show my age on this, but I think about *The Brady Bunch*, and the only thing missing is that I need Brenda to turn this way, and Karen to turn that way, and then you're looking at each other, and we need the music going, and I need.... What was the maid's name, again? Can anyone help me with that?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Alice.

Mr. Wayne Long: Right. My, oh my, I never missed an episode of *The Brady Bunch*. MP Blaikie probably doesn't even know what *The Brady Bunch* is. There's the discrepancy in age, right there, between me and MP Blaikie. He probably doesn't even know what it is. He may get it on the old.... What's the channel? I mean the flash-back channel, whatever it is. I think it actually was in colour, not black and white.

What I'm getting at is this. I believe that it's incumbent on every member of Parliament who is on this committee to step back, do their own proroguing for a couple of minutes, and say, MP Turnbull's motion is good enough to move us forward.

Perhaps MP Normandin may think that. She's pondering. She's not saying no. Maybe she is saying no. Darn.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, on a point of order, perhaps this would be a good chance to see where everyone is on this, yes or no. I know Mr. Long is wondering where everyone stands, so perhaps we could do a roll call vote and see for sure where everyone stands on it and solve this once and for all.

The Chair: Mr. Long, it's up to you.

Mr. Wayne Long: No. I appreciate very much MP Nater's intervention, and I apologize if you've been on screen the whole time. I didn't know you were there, with a black screen. I know some of your colleagues.... I was trying to talk to MP Calkins about what kind of fish he had in that picture, but I'm still not getting an answer. I think it's a char, to be honest, an Arctic char.

Mr. John Nater: Relevance?

The Chair: I think you're right on that one, Mr. Nater.

Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: With respect to MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion, MP Normandin or MP Blaikie, I would say that you should really consider this as a good way forward, that we can move forward, that we can do good things on PROC again. We—I shouldn't say “we” as I'm just making a guest appearance here—you can get back to doing things that Canadians care about.

I know each and every one of us wants to leave work at the end of the day.... I know we can't leave our work. I know that's not what we signed up for, of course, but I know I want to leave and say,

“Look at the work we did. Look at the impact we had, and look at what we delivered for Canadians.”

I can't be more proud to talk about things that we as a government, or MPs, or our party have done for Canadians. A case in point, with respect to MP Turnbull's amendment to the motion, look at what was delivered in budget 2021. Look at the transformational stuff we delivered in budget 2021. Who would think?

I'm so privileged and honoured to be a member of Parliament, be part of a government that is moving forward to \$10-a-day day care, that is investing in green infrastructure, that's replenishing trade corridor funding and funding for housing. There is not a MP on this screen who doesn't need affordable housing in their riding. We came forth with the rapid housing initiative, direct federal funding. All of us are always asked those questions: “Can you do this funding project? Can you do this housing project?” Sometimes we have to go back and say, “We really would like to, but the provinces control housing.”

With respect to MP Turnbull's amendment, what I'm getting at is this. The reason the amendment was proposed, obviously, was to find a way forward. Now, this is where I'm going to get myself in trouble with respect to procedure. Don't worry, everybody. I'll apologize in advance if I totally muff this and get this wrong.

He didn't have to propose the amendment. He could have just been talking about MP Vecchio's motion for ever and ever, and debating that and going back and forth, but no. It didn't happen. The Liberal MPs of PROC got together. I wasn't there because I'm not a permanent member, although I hope we will be invited to the next barbecue or Christmas party in the future. They got together and said, “Let's go back with something palatable, something reasonable.” They didn't have to.

To be perfectly honest, and I know I've talked about it before when I first read it, I was thinking he must have made a mistake; he has the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in here, and the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth.

Think about this just for a second. Let's ponder this. That amendment could have come back and MP Turnbull could have proposed this without them in there. This could have been proposed, or tabled, or however it is, by MP Turnbull who could have come back to PROC and said that he would like to propose an amendment to MP Vecchio's motion. He could have taken out the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

He could have taken them right out and just proposed everything else. The opposition then—I'll be honest—would have had the ability, might have had the right, to say, "Hold on. Whoa. You took everything out. You whitewashed this. This is not fair, no, not at all." The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth were included still, and that's where I took this as—not a third party observer obviously—someone not totally on the front line of the PROC committee, and looked at it and thought that's a very fair amendment to the motion. I would have called and talked to MP Turnbull who proposed this amendment. I would have said, "Ryan, come on. Come on. You're making an amendment to a motion. Come on. There's no meat in this. There's no meat on the bone. There are no teeth to this." But there are teeth to this. There very much are teeth to this.

Madam Chair, would I be allowed to propose a five- or 10-minute break?

The Chair: Yes, of course.

Does everyone need a bio break for 10 minutes?

Mr. Wayne Long: I would very much appreciate that.

The Chair: Okay, I see some nodding, so will it be just 10 minutes then?

Mr. Wayne Long: Sure.

The Chair: We will suspend.

• (56610) _____ (Pause) _____

• (56625)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

There are a couple of things I want to inform the committee about.

I did not know this before we suspended for the 10-minute bio break but learned near the end of it that our interpreters have to switch over. Generally we've been doing a rolling switchover, but for whatever reason, they are not able to do it in that fashion right now. They have to do a complete switchover, and that takes about half an hour, so, at the very least, we would have to suspend for that half-hour, until three o'clock. They would be starting now at 2:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.

I also want to let you know that we have the same issue of the agriculture committee being here after that. They would need to take over the room at 3:30 in order to prepare, if they are going to have that committee today.

Those are the two pieces of information I wanted you to know. If we were to suspend for translation, that would take us to 3 p.m.. That would give us from 3 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., at which point we would have to make a decision about whether agriculture or whatever other committee would go on or not.

I want to just put that out there for you guys, so you can let me know what you'd like to do and whether you'd like to suspend for translation. We have to do that. There is no choice on that, but if you want to return at 3 p.m., I guess that would be your choice, and we would make our next decision after that or perhaps you'd just like to suspend until the next scheduled meeting.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, I know that many of us understand that ending at 2:30 is something that will need to be done in order to allow—

The Chair: Is it just me? No, it's Ms. Vecchio, okay.

You cut out. We have to hear what you said all over again.

Ms. Vecchio, we didn't hear any of it. We still can't hear you.

Mr. Wayne Long: She's frozen on my screen.

The Chair: You are going in and out, but we can't really make out anything.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Can you hear me now? It's probably because I put my iPad on so I could watch QP. That is why, so I apologize. If I turn that on, I have too much going on for the Wi-Fi.

We all recognize there is great work being done on other committees, and we don't want to see anything being delayed on the agricultural committee.

That being said, I believe we would all agree to suspend, but before we do, there is a huge concern that we'll be coming back to just more of this, so I would ask that true negotiations take place, out of which we can actually come to a resolution. All parties have played on what we don't want, or what we do want, and right now, until anything can go to a vote, we are stuck here on Ryan's amendment. If you really want to go forward with real negotiations, we should be doing that and not just be stuck on Ryan's amendment. We all recognize that no one on the opposition side is voting for this. Even with Ryan speaking for hours and hours, I do not believe he is going to get his wish of changing anybody's mind. We know we're there, so let's face the facts and come up with a resolution.

The Chair: Okay. I think everyone respects you, Ms. Vecchio, and your position on that. Definitely there is some take-away, and I encourage all of you to come to some agreement. Of course, it has been difficult on all of the members not being able to do the good work, as Mr. Long put it, that PROC is supposed to be doing.

We will suspend until the next meeting and hopefully that will take place.

[The meeting was suspended at 2:30 p.m., Thursday, May 6.]

[The meeting resumed at 11:06 a.m., Tuesday, May 11.]

• (68305)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. This is a resumption of meeting 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13, 2021. Today's date is May 11, 2021.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. Members are therefore attending remotely at this time. No one is attending in the room, but members are free to do so. The proceedings will be made available on the House of Commons website. Please be aware that the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

I would like to remind everyone not to take screenshots or photos of your screen. Also, please unmute your mike when you have a point of order or wish to speak, and remember to put your mike on mute when you're not speaking.

I have a speakers list from the last meeting. We are still on Mr. Turnbull's amendment. As I have done before, I want to mention a few things at the outset.

The main estimates are due to be returned to the House at the end of this month. We do need to give fair warning to the officials if we want them to have a meeting here. Ideally, I'd like to know today. If you'd like me to schedule a meeting for the main estimates, I would need to get going on that.

We did hear from the Speaker on the question of privilege that was before the House. The Speaker ruled that he didn't find it to be a prima facie question of privilege, so we won't have that coming to our committee.

We have Bill C-19 in the House. My understanding is that will be voted on later today, so that will be referred to this committee.

I want everyone to be aware of the different expectations for our committee right now. Those are a few of the things on my radar at this point. As always, I will let you know when we have various different motions on notice as well.

Does anybody have anything they'd like to say on these issues, as to the main estimates or Bill C-19, before we return to Mr. Turnbull's amendment?

Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, we do know that Bill C-19 is going to be voted on after question period today. Could we find out the order of precedence? Could the clerk share this with us? I do know that many of the members, even members from my team.... What takes precedence? What is the order they need to go in? We've been on a filibuster since February 23. Does that stall it out? How does this go?

I'm looking for some procedural guidance. I would like to be able to have a follow-up question if needed after hearing from the clerk.

• (68310)

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, I guess you can help us here.

The Clerk: Ms. Vecchio, the usual practice when a bill is referred to a committee is the committee tends to give precedence to legislation that is referred to it from the House. That's not a hard and fast rule. It is ultimately the committee's decision as to how it wishes to order its work. However, you can probably call it a convention. Committees do tend to give precedence to legislation that comes forward. As I said, it's up to the committee to decide how it wants to prioritize its work.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much, Mr. Clerk. That's wonderful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anything else on the order of different events?

Is there anything regarding the main estimates? Is it going to be the decision of this committee to not deal with the main estimates? Should I consider that to be the members' choice or should I bring it up again in the next meeting? What would you like?

Mr. Turnbull, you raised your hand.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I want a point of clarification on that. Isn't it part of the parliamentary standing committee's duties to do that work on main estimates, generally speaking?

The Chair: Generally speaking, PROC has always returned the main estimates. This would be a first for me, but I haven't been around forever, so we'll have the clerk answer that.

The Clerk: Mr. Turnbull, the House does refer estimates periodically to committees for that exact purpose, to allow the committee to look at the estimates, to hear from relevant witnesses on those estimates, such as, for example, a minister or, in our case for the House of Commons, the Speaker or the Clerk of the House.

However, again, it is up to the committee to make the determination whether they want to take up those estimates. Should the committee not take up the estimates, perhaps because they made a decision not to or because they didn't have the time to do it and other matters got in the way, those estimates are always automatically reported back by a specified date.

In this case, for the main estimates that were referred to PROC, that date is May 31. If the committee doesn't choose to take up the estimates by that date, they will automatically be referred back to the House and they will no longer be available, so to speak, for the committee to look at.

However, there is a bit of a caveat to that. Committees in the past, sometimes not being able to meet the reporting back deadline, have chosen to do a subject matter study of the main estimates. It is just like when they refer to any main estimates, with the limitation that they cannot make any suggestions on changing the actual totals, the dollar totals in those main estimates. They can still choose to invite witnesses. They can proceed with questioning witnesses on the same basis as if the estimates were still fully before them. They just can't make any recommendations to reduce the amount of dollars that are associated with each of the votes in those estimates.

The Chair: Okay. So essentially they wouldn't be able to change the estimates at that point, just make recommendations from their study.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, even at that point, they wouldn't be making any type of recommendations. It would merely provide an opportunity to the committee to hold a meeting with witnesses to discuss what was in the main estimates.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there anybody else on this issue?

Mr. Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Excuse me, Madam Chair.

It seems to me that we did that already last year. Am I wrong?

The Clerk: Mr. Therrien, I can answer that.

Last fall, the supplementary estimates were sent to the committee. The committee then held meetings with the minister, the Speaker of the House and the Secretariat of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians.

The committee did in fact examine the main estimates and referred them back to the House without any changes.

• (68315)

Mr. Alain Therrien: That's what I thought. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for the clarifications, Mr. Clerk.

We will move on to—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm sorry, Ruby, I was just thinking—I was going back and forth.

This might not be normal, but because we know there are other things to do.... Never mind. I don't think we can. I was going to ask if we should try to schedule some extra time. We know that these things have to get done. Of course, we don't know if we'll need extra time, because the conversation, or the discussion, or the filibuster just may continue to go on.

My only concern is that if we did want to schedule more time, we don't know if that time would be used effectively or not.

Never mind. I thought for a moment I had this great idea.

Sorry.

The Chair: I will let you know that even within our regularly scheduled times, at this point, if we were to make the decision, we do have the time. Essentially, if I was given direction, I could book a meeting for witnesses to appear on the main estimates. We have a constituency week next week, but we would still have enough time.

That's why I brought it up today.

You can let me know later on if your idea changes.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I can also let the committee know that I have been in touch in a general way with the various entities that have main estimates before PROC, letting them know there is a possibility that an invitation on very short notice could potentially be proffered to them. They are in fact getting prepared in case there is an invitation from PROC, and they should be able to appear on relatively short notice.

Obviously, it is still within the hands of the committee to make some sort of determination as to whether they want to go forward with that, and if they do, then to look at possible scheduling dates when that kind of meeting can occur, or those meetings could occur.

The Chair: That's all I have for general information and announcements.

I guess we'll move back to the issue that we're on for committee business for the time being, and that's Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

We do have a speakers list. A few people have fallen off the speakers list.

Next in line I have Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much. I'm not going to take up very much time this morning. I know it's really important that we have lots of things coming to us. There's Bill C-19 of course. I'm going to speak a little bit about the mandate, but I think it's really important that we figure out where we're going in these next few steps. I know that right now there will be Bill C-19, and we do want to look at that here in this committee. It's very, very important that we look at this bill. We do have a hurdle and we need to get over that hurdle today, and that is the amendment brought forward by Ryan Turnbull.

I'm just bringing this forward because—let's not kid ourselves. Let's call it what it is. It's a filibuster and it's been a filibuster since February 23, so let's just get over that and see how we can get to a decision on where we want to go. I'm going to put it right out there, and I think we've always said so. Speaking to all opposition parties, I know that with our prorogation study we are focusing on hearing from the Prime Minister, who ultimately would have had the opportunity and who ultimately is the person who called for the prorogation. At that time, in our initial motion, we also looked at the chief of staff, Katie Telford. I'm unsure whether anyone will want her to go to any committees right now. Honestly, I know that it's a hot thing, so it would be a very hot topic to invite her to this, so I don't necessarily want to go there. The Prime Minister is ultimately who we want to hear from.

There are lots of different asks here. There have been discussions about trying to bring in WE Charity. Well, perhaps we can negotiate. That's what I'm saying. I am letting you know that if you're looking at the entire motion, whether it's the original motion or the amended motion, ultimately, there is one person everybody wants to see. That is why I would be voting against Mr. Turnbull's amendment, because it does not include the Prime Minister or even representation from the PMO, including documents. That's why I would not be able to support that, truly, just on the fact that the one key person everybody wants to see on this matter is the Prime Minister, and his name does not appear in that amendment. Therefore, I cannot support it.

When we look at the original amendment, we can also recognize that some people from my original motion are in this amended motion, and that's fine. I'm not saying let's drop it all. I'm saying when the only thing we want is for the Prime Minister to come to this committee and we're asking—originally, I was asking for three hours. Perhaps Mr. Blaikie will join in this conversation to talk about some of those discussions, but I've heard Mr. Blaikie say, "Listen, I want him for an hour." I don't know if that's a perfect quote, but that's a Daniel Blaikie quote for you. Daniel would like to see him as well. I've heard the same thing from Alain Therrien. I don't know if he'll want me to do it in French today, but I will make sure I will do it in time for him.

Ultimately, we want to see the Prime Minister. I don't know if you've heard any of us talk about the Kielburgers in the last two and a half or three months. There hasn't been much discussion coming from this side. Let's call it what it is. We want the Prime Minister at this committee. This amendment does not include the Prime Minister. The original motion doesn't include the Prime Minister. Hopefully we can get through, knowing that all opposition parties are asking for one thing and one thing clearly, being the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, to come here to committee to explain to us about the prorogation and his decisions.

We have not set out a time frame. I'm looking at my guys. I'm looking at John, Peter and Tom. I'm looking at you guys and saying, "Sorry. I'm really going out there, but we just want the Prime Minister. That's what we want."

Daniel has offered one hour. We've said three. Let's get down to real negotiations. Let's get this filibuster done and say, at the end of the day, that this is what we want. We're not asking to see the budget. We're not asking to talk about, necessarily, what the Speech from the Throne said, because I know a lot of times people are referencing that. We are asking for that date. If we can go back to August 2020, what were the thoughts and the decisions that led up to this? You can indicate it was the throne speech. That's great, and perhaps we can just hear the Prime Minister say that. That would be wonderful as well.

Let's be honest. Do I think we're going to get answers from the Prime Minister? We're probably not. We don't see that in question period. We don't see that anywhere. Let's just call it what it is. Let us at least ask these questions, and I think that's the one thing. We are being told that we'll not be allowed to ask the Prime Minister of Canada these questions. Yes, he is the Prime Minister, but he is also a member of Parliament who chose to prorogue the Parliament of Canada during the biggest pandemic that our generation has ever seen.

• (68320)

Yes, of course, it was at a very difficult time, but rather than having every Liberal member of Parliament speak on his behalf, perhaps the Prime Minister could speak for himself and share that with parliamentarians.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vecchio.

We have Ms. Petitpas Taylor next.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, I have some comments and remarks prepared today.

Since we're talking about negotiations and whatnot, I just wonder, if we're talking about wanting to get some questions answered by the Prime Minister, if there would be an option of perhaps submitting a list of questions to the Prime Minister and having him respond to them in writing. Would that be sufficient for the opposition parties?

I'm putting that out there in good faith and wanting to negotiate to see if there is a way we can reach some type of a consensus here.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, I guess that's a question for you. Is that something you'd like to interject on?

Mr. Therrien also has his hand up on that.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'll be honest. Golly gee, it's lovely and it's a really nice suggestion, but I do not think it will get to our ultimate goal.

I prefer to pass that over to my other opposition members, including Mr. Therrien, Mr. Blaikie and members of the Conservative caucus as well.

The Chair: Does anybody else wish to speak to that?

Mr. Therrien, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I haven't yet spoken about this.

Things did happen. Prorogation deserves to be studied and I had previously suggested this to the government. I am the House leader of the Bloc Québécois, and I know what's going on with the Bloc when we're in Parliament. The government House leader should really tell us what he knows about what happened. He's supposed to explain to us why Parliament was prorogued.

When Mr. Rodriguez came to the committee, he didn't say anything. He just kept repeating that he didn't know, and that he had no idea why it had been prorogued. He seemed to be defending himself by implying that he was not the one who made the decision.

While listening to Mr. Rodriguez, I came to the conclusion that only one person could answer our questions and shed light on prorogation, and I believe it's clear who that is.

Mr. Rodriguez told us that he didn't even know that Minister Morneau had resigned on August 17 or that Parliament had been prorogued on August 18. We are therefore not even close to understanding a political event that occurred. And it was an important event, because Parliament was shut down.

What I'm saying is that I don't see how, without the appearance of the Prime Minister, we are going to get the kind of information that will help us understand the reason for this prorogation.

That's why I have been supporting Ms. Vecchio's approach from the outset. The only person who needs to come here to explain the situation to us is Mr. Trudeau.

Through his non-answers, the government House leader showed us that the decision was really made by the Prime Minister. That's my opinion.

• (68325)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, I think Monsieur Therrien put it quite well.

The nature of some of the responses that were offered by the government House leader essentially highlighted the fact that the Prime Minister is the main decision-maker. Anyway, I won't try to quote him, because I don't have the quotations in front of me. He said things at various times in his testimony, however, that suggested it really was the Prime Minister, at the end of the day, who made these calls.

Nobody knows the mind of the Prime Minister but the Prime Minister. That's why it's important to have him here. One important function of Parliament is to be able to question people, whether it's in question period or at committee. It's a very different kind of questioning that takes place. That's why it was not acceptable that Stephen Harper wouldn't meet with the press gallery. You get different kinds of answers and different kinds of interactions when you have live questioning as opposed to written responses. It's why Order Paper questions are not an adequate substitute for question period. It's why writing the Prime Minister a letter, I don't think, is a substitute, really, for having him here at committee.

I think it's important that the committee establish—this is not news to the committee—the right precedent for this kind of study, if this is indeed a mechanism that's going to persist in our parliamentary culture. If it's the best we can do to try to mitigate political abuse of prorogation, I think it's important that we get the mechanism right. I would thus like to see the Prime Minister here at committee.

What I think is clear from Ms. Vecchio's comments, which I think put it quite well this morning—or this afternoon, I guess, depending where you are in the country—is that the amendment itself that Mr. Turnbull has proposed is not doing the work of a compromise allowing the committee to move forward. I think that has been made clear by the length of the proceedings since its introduction.

What I am hearing is maybe a little bit of movement or willingness to have a conversation. Whatever that conversation is going to issue in will likely be a compromise that does not look like Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

What I would propose, then, is that we have a vote on Mr. Turnbull's amendment, which does not close the debate on the motion overall. What it would do is clear the floor and make it possible for somebody else, at some future point, hopefully after some productive conversation, to propose another amendment that might serve the purpose that Mr. Turnbull had in mind when he presented his originally.

This would allow us to at least have one vote, dispense with one item, and as I say, open the floor to other ideas that might come out of what I think is maybe the most productive conversation we've had at this committee in several months.

That would be my proposal. Maybe we could have a vote on the amendment, clear that, and then allow for this seemingly more productive conversation to take place. Then we could try to move to a solution that much more quickly, if one emerges out of that conversation.

The Chair: Is there anybody else who wishes to speak to the oral testimony versus the written testimony? Then we can move back to the amendment and to whether there's a vote on it.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

• (68330)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, I'm wondering whether perhaps Ms. Vecchio and Mr. Blaikie would be prepared to put on paper what it is they're proposing. We could perhaps work

with it and then from there see what, if anything, we could come up with in respect to possible movement.

I don't know whether this would be an option that both Mr. Blaikie and Ms. Vecchio would be prepared to use. I'm just wondering whether we could have a proposal on paper and be able to look at it, and then from there perhaps continue this conversation.

The Chair: Do you mean a proposal that would be a subamendment or an alternative amendment, and then you can decide whether you'd like to have a vote?

Go ahead, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much, Ginette. I really appreciate it.

I should be honest. I know that being the mover of the original motion, this is something I cannot do, because it can't be.

Right now the bottom line is that we're coming up with a counter-proposal. I would personally like to see us get off this amendment. What we're doing is talking about this amendment and missing the whole idea of this prorogation, because we're talking about other things. Let's get back to what our function is, what the mandate of the report is supposed to be, and get off this amendment and back to the original and make alterations.

I know that for Daniel—and I'm looking at some of our own team—it's a question of how we can do this. We want to get this work done.

Thank you, Ginette. I really appreciate your openness and appreciate Daniel and everybody else. I'm looking at Kirsty moving her head, asking where we are going with this. I really appreciate everybody's having a true conversation today. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Petitpas Taylor, the floor goes back to you.

I was just thinking that it's good to have the conversation back and forth, but the floor is yours, really, at this point.

Mr. Blaikie has something to say.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: If I might comment just on process, I wonder if we could agree on this much, Madam Chair.

If it seems like we're not going to develop a solution today on the floor—which is fine, it's sometimes hard to do—perhaps we could agree that at the end of this meeting we'll have a vote on the amendment, so that the floor is clear for the beginning of the next meeting. We'll still be on the motion, so nothing will have been decided ultimately, but we can dispense with the amendment one way or the other at the end of this meeting. That would allow the parties some time to speak in the lead-up to Thursday's meeting, knowing that there is an open floor for amendments to this motion if that comes out of those conversations. It may not, but it would allow us at least to do something novel for the first time in a few months by making a decision and clearing the way, as it were, for something on Thursday.

That would allow members, who I know have more to say on the amendment, to do that today. We just heard some arguments in the House yesterday about the importance of debate, but also the importance of deciding things in respect of Bill C-19. I think some of those arguments also apply here. Perhaps we could at least do that in respect of the amendment. Then we can see where we can get to in time for Thursday's meeting, whether we can find a more fully-somely productive way forward by the end of the week.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Vecchio and then back to Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I fully appreciate the idea of where Daniel has gone with this. Perhaps we can do something like that. The only concern I have, of course, is that we have not stayed within the committee time recently because none of these have been suspended. If we come to bells like we have today, I fear that we would go directly to bells, suspend and not get back to this issue.

We have some concerns—or I personally have concerns—because we haven't seen a two-hour committee meeting in months. If there is some kind of time frame.... I just know that we have bells today. We have a variety of things that could then interrupt the great work and great idea you have, Daniel. That's my only concern.

The Chair: I'm afraid I don't really understand what you mean, Ms. Vecchio. We haven't seen a two-hour committee meeting?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm referring to all of the meetings that have been going far over time. Usually debates just end at one o'clock. It's just that we've not been able to ever end on time. That's by no means your fault, Ruby. It's just that our committee work continues to go on during that time.

I do know that today there are other events on our schedules that would end up suspending this meeting due to our duties in the House.

The Chair: Yes, there are votes at 3 p.m., I think with no bells leading up to that.

Thank you, Ms. Vecchio. Maybe this discussion will help lead us on a slightly different path today. Let's see.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, maybe you can respond to some of that.

The floors is yours really, as it was at the beginning of the meeting. We're on Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

• (68335)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, I just want to understand. Maybe I've missed something here.

With respect to the proposition of having something in writing, is that a definite no? Is it not on the table? I just want to understand that because it would just help our caucus and my Liberal colleagues to look at and reflect on what exactly the proposal is. From there we would be in a better position to respond. I just want to get a sense of whether that is off the table. Is that still an option?

I'm sorry, Karen and Daniel, I may have missed that.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: No, I think everything is on the table right now. That is a great opportunity for us to start having those conversations. I'll do whatever I can to help on those efforts.

The Chair: Great, Ms. Vecchio.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. Likewise, I think it's hard. There is no proposal that preceded today's meeting, so it will just take a little time to kind of sit down and hammer out what that might look like. I'm certainly happy to provide a proposal in whatever format is most useful.

In respect of today and in response to Ms. Vecchio's concerns, I would be prepared to agree right now to have a vote on the amendment at five to one eastern time and end our meeting at the usual time, so that the way is cleared for Thursday.

We are, as I said, closer than we have been in a while to a position of having some meaningfully productive conversations. Unless my Liberal colleagues see a lot of virtue in extending the time of today's meeting, I'd be happy to have a vote on the amendment five minutes before our regular meeting time would end and end the meeting on time. Then we'd try to come back on Thursday with some kind of game plan for how we move forward.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Again, nothing is planned here. We're just really trying to negotiate. Perhaps we're trying to work through things.

This is just a thought. Would it be appropriate to suspend and allow the Conservatives, the NDP and the Bloc to prepare in writing what they suggest? Then from there we could see it before any further direction would be taken. Then we would know what is being proposed, and perhaps we would be more comfortable in moving forward from there.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I appreciate that, Ginette. I understand that. But I think, really, we're now being asked for the solution. The solution, all this time, lies on the steps of the Liberal Party. We are happy to bring forward some ideas for you, but I don't think this should be a yea or nay. I don't think there should be a yea or nay on that, if you know what I'm saying. I think we all have to work together on this.

There's a trust thing. If we don't vote.... If we vote his down we still know there's an opportunity now for an amendment to be there. At this time we don't have an opportunity to put an amendment there at all because Ryan's is taking that spot. Right now it's....

Yes, I hear what you're saying. At the end of the day, it's either going to be that we talk about Ryan's or we talk about my motion. That's how it will roll out. I think that, at the end of the day, we know we're going to be voting against Ryan's. We know that you will not be supporting ours and that this will continue as a filibuster.

As we continue to work back and forth on this, we know, at the end of the day, there's going to be something coming from opposition parties, probably about the Prime Minister being the person who needs to come to this committee meeting. Ultimately, that's what the holdup is.

We will work on these types of things and ensure we all know where we're going, but let's get that going. I don't know. I think there's going to be a lot of work done on the Liberal side as well. I don't know if suspending or actually just having this conversation right now, where we're actually talking about it, is more beneficial. I'm not sure, so I'll just pass it on.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, I would add that I think it might take a little bit of time for us to agree. As I say, nobody came to this meeting, I think, even anticipating that there might be the degree of openness to the new conversation we're seeing. I think it's going to take a little time to hammer something out. I'm loath to try to do that within the meeting time. I think, after it's taken a very long time to get to here, it feels like a bit of an artificially urgent deadline. I know that there are so many Liberals on the committee who have more to say on the amendment, who thought that they were going to have a lot more time than it turns out they may.

I don't want to catch anyone off guard or foreclose on an important opportunity to say what has not yet been said, so I think that giving it the rest of this meeting, having the vote on the amendment, and then being able to come back on Thursday is the best way to proceed.

• (68340)

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I was just going to say, in follow-up to Ms. Vecchio's and Mr. Blaikie's comments, I think, really, we have tried to put forward what we thought was a reasonable compromise. I realize that you don't necessarily see it that way or share that perspective. I understand that, but I really think the impetus is now on the opposition parties to say what is a counter-proposal. You obviously can put forward a subamendment. As Ms. Petitpas Taylor said, I think rightly, what do you want to see the outcome of this to be?

It sounds like there have been several opportunities here to compromise even on having written submissions with the Prime Minister, and to get answers to the burning questions that you have. That's fine, but it doesn't sound like there's an interest in that potential solution.

I'm just wondering if we are still at an impasse or if there is a genuine, concerted effort to compromise here. That's not really what I'm hearing. I'm hearing quite a bit of talking about it, but how do we get past this? If you really want to get past it, then put forward a substantive amendment in writing that we can have some confidence in.

I've put forward a substantive amendment in writing that we're now debating. I have lots of reasons left to speak to that and the rationale for why I think it's reasonable. I think some of my colleagues do, as well. In an effort to try to get past this moment of deadlock that we seem to be in, it would be great to have that in

writing, if possible. Whenever the opposition members are ready to put something forward, I think it would be great. I'm very open.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Time out: Am I understanding that, after two months of filibustering, you're asking us to get you out of the filibuster, because we need to come forward with an amendment? We've put ours forward. Why don't you withdraw your amendment and we can start where we're at?

To be honest, Ryan, I felt that the conversation was going very, very well until just moments ago. We have been working on this. We have all been working on this. Unfortunately, for months you guys have known that you're not getting the support over this. You've known. The leader on this committee has known. So please don't put that false pretense out there. No one on this committee can say that the opposition members will vote for this amendment. That's why this filibuster has continued now for two months. Let's not be disingenuous about this. The fact is that it is not up to anyone on the opposition. I am saying that where there is important work to be done....

I'm looking at the people I've been negotiating with in the past couple of minutes. The fact is that we all know that there's important work to get done. We need to get there.

Here's the idea: You're asking us to perhaps withdraw this and then maybe come up with something. Do not put this on all our shoulders. You've been speaking on this for two full months. Do not put this on our shoulders to provide you an amendment so that you guys can get out of this filibuster. Withdraw your amendment and let's put forward a proper amendment, or let's do what Daniel had said earlier, but please do not think that for the last two months opposition parties have not tried to negotiate multiple times.

We have not taken the floor for more than probably an hour in the last two months, unless you're talking about the number of times you had a call of repetition. Let's be honest here. If we want to get to something, if you want to withdraw this motion, then show us that you guys really want to negotiate. Don't put it on us.

Show us, Ryan, that you guys actually want to negotiate, then. If you're questioning the fact that this is where we're at, take this motion down, then, seriously, and let's do real business, because we've wasted our time on this motion.

• (68345)

The Chair: Dr. Duncan and then Mr. Blaikie.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Friends, I'd like to begin by thanking Ms. Petitpas Taylor for coming forward with this and starting a good conversation. I think we need to take this as a good conversation. We actually seem to be talking to one another. Might I suggest that we take a half-hour suspension and do some talking as opposed to, well, you know...? Let's continue on this. We'll go back to deciding that this will happen after the committee meeting. We're actually talking to one another.

Friends, as I've said before, we have done good work together in the past. We have done really good work. What we were able to do with protections in Parliament and remote voting, and what we did on the pandemic, coming forward with real recommendations—that was good work. I think it would be worth it to suspend for half an hour and talk to one another.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Sure. If I may say so, I think we're at a delicate moment, and there is some promise of progress, which I certainly don't want to lose. I think it is important to start from a place of not impugning motive.

There are, it seems to me, two proposals from my Liberal colleagues for going forward, which I think are not consistent. The committee has to choose one way forward. On the one hand, we've heard Ms. Duncan's plea to have a bit of a suspension and a conversation among all the parties on how we might move forward. On the other hand, we have Ms. Petitpas Taylor and Mr. Turnbull, who have asked for something in writing from the opposition. Of course, the opposition is not monolithic. We're three different parties with three different interests, and quite often, three different points of view. Sometimes we agree on certain matters—we've agreed on the substance of Ms. Vecchio's motion—but other times we do not agree on many things.

If the Liberals on the committee would like something in writing or a concrete formal proposal from three different parties working together, that will take some time. I don't think that's something that's going to happen with a brief suspension of this meeting. It's something I'm open to offering if the three parties that I just referred to can find a common proposal. I'm hopeful that we can, but there is no guarantee at the outset. That's its own process.

What I think would be productive for us to do, if the government members want something formal from the three opposition parties, is for us to have some time in order to do that. There is time between today's meeting and the next meeting. In the meantime, as Mr. Turnbull said, he's very excited about offering more thoughts on his own amendment. He can do that today up until five minutes to one, eastern time, at which point we should have a vote and decide on that amendment, and then enter into that period between meetings in which the government has asked the opposition parties to speak and to see if we can come up with a common proposal, which we will bring to Thursday's meeting.

At that meeting, we will already have cleared the way, so to speak, for some kind of new attempt at a compromise. It may end up not being any more successful than Mr. Turnbull's first attempt, but at the very least we'd be trying something new and working towards some kind of new compromise. It might precipitate a second productive conversation.

That's why I think it would be best to go with the idea that the opposition parties are going to try to propose a way forward. We will do our best. That is going to take some time. I don't think it will happen during a suspension of this particular meeting.

As a sign of the progress of today's conversation, dispensing with the current amendment would be a good way to conclude this meet-

ing and have the kind of maximally open posture at the beginning of the next meeting to try to get towards some kind of compromise.

The Chair: I believe, Ms. Vecchio, you had raised your hand as Mr. Blaikie was speaking. Do you want to respond?

• (68350)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Honestly, I feel like saying, “Thank you, Dad,” as in, thank you, Daniel. You've done a great job. If you were at the head of my family circle, those would have been exactly the types of words my father would have said.

Thank you, Daniel. You've done a great job. I really appreciate those words.

The Chair: All right, we have a speakers list. We went down an off-ramp for a little bit there, which was probably a good thing. I have been keeping track, and so far on the speakers list are Ms. Petitpas Taylor, Mr. Turnbull, Dr. Duncan, Mr. Kelloway and maybe Mr. Blaikie, but I'm not sure. That was probably a hand that was up and down. There were a lot of hands. Okay, Mr. Blaikie is not on the list.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, you have the floor. It's back to you.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, I guess I'm going to get back to my reflections on the extended debate we're having on the amendment Mr. Turnbull brought forward.

Before I get going on my comments, I first of all want to thank the members who are joining us today. Mike Kelloway is subbing in for one of our members. As well, Andy Fillmore and Robert Morrissey are here. It's always great to have our colleagues with us. I have to say I feel as though I have the Atlantic Canada brigade with me today, so that's always great.

As well, before I get going, I know we're talking about the amendment Ryan has brought forward, and I think perhaps there are two camps.

I think there's one camp that certainly believes the reason for prorogation was related to WE. That is the argument that continues to be brought forward. Again yesterday in the House of Commons—I was fortunate that I was there on House duty—a lot of the comments again made reference to exactly that.

On this side I have to say that I am truly convinced, and my opinion is still that if a global pandemic is not the time to set an agenda, then I don't know when an appropriate time to move forward with setting new priorities would be. I truly believe that if we look back to August of last year, we knew what the situation was back then. Many of us spoke about a possible second wave or third wave, and, hopefully not, fourth wave. Those were the types of things we were talking about, knowing very well that they could be a possibility.

I have to say I'm extremely pleased and proud that our government chose to reset that agenda. I really want to reflect on where we are today and make reference to how, if we didn't make the changes back then, we would have been really ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that many Canadians are faced with.

I know that my honourable colleagues sometimes don't like to hear me talk about where things are right now, but I think we can't forget. Sometimes we do forget. Last year we thought we were in a bad situation. We never thought we were going to get to where we are. Maybe some of us did. We had to make sure that the plans were in place.

I want to talk a bit about the justification, and again why I feel that Minister Freeland and Minister Chagger would be well placed to provide us with some information as to the thought process that was involved in putting together a new throne speech and in resetting and recalibrating to move forward to deal with, really, a huge reality that we had to face.

[Translation]

We have to begin by reminding ourselves that the COVID-19 pandemic is not a partisan matter and that no political party is involved. Honestly, COVID-19 is not interested in political division. Most of the time, the COVID-19 pandemic exploits such divisions. It recognizes that we are not always capable of working closely together, and it takes advantage of this.

I hope that we'll be able to continue to work closely together as parliamentarians to put an end to a global pandemic that has had such a negative impact on so many people. I think that we have all been affected in one way or another and we now need to recognize that we all have a role to play in putting an end to this pandemic.

My sympathies go out once again to all Canadians listening to us today. I understand their concerns for themselves, their community, their province and everyone affected by the pandemic.

Like them, I am very worried. I worry for my fellow citizens, my neighbours in Nova Scotia and people in every province affected by COVID-19. Combatting COVID-19 has reached a critical point, and the third wave is already hitting many regions from one end of the country to the other.

• (68355)

I'm going to use my friends in the province of Nova Scotia as an example. A month ago, COVID-19 cases were under control in Nova Scotia. But as we can see, the situation can change quickly.

That's why it's important to make sure that Minister Freeland will be able to come and speak to us. If you recall, I had mentioned that Ms. Freeland was not only the Deputy Prime Minister, but also the chair of the Cabinet Committee on the federal response to the Coronavirus disease, COVID-19. She could come and tell us about what the members of this committee think and how they were able to develop programs to help Canadians. Through her many discussions with members of cabinet, she would be in a good position to tell us why they developed a new plan and explain the decision to prorogue Parliament.

The number of hospitalizations and admissions to intensive care has been breaking all records. Unfortunately, it is true that this third wave is hitting Canadians hard. As I mentioned earlier, the situation we are in is unprecedented. We need to respond together quickly through special measures.

The government has truly helped all of Canada. We are of course continuing to be there for all citizens. We have recently taken ac-

tion, as we did for all of the provinces that were experiencing an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. We are collaborating on an ongoing basis with our provincial government counterparts to exchange information and provide support that would strengthen the provinces' capacity to combat the pandemic.

I won't review all of the programs that were introduced over the past year, but I think that Minister Freeland could give you a lot of information on that score. I repeat that she should give us her views, as well as what her colleagues and the Prime Minister think.

We are continuing to deliver vaccines to the provinces as they extend their vaccination programs. According to the numbers available to me, approximately 18 million vaccines were delivered across Canada and approximately 16 million doses administered. The situation has been progressing extremely well, but as the vaccination process continues, we need to continue to protect one another. The virus has repeatedly shown that it can be cunning and insidious, and that it can spread very quickly if we don't take it seriously.

As I mentioned earlier, COVID-19 is non-partisan. It tries to gain a foothold in our communities, and that is why we need to do everything we can to prevent it from doing so. I will reiterate that having Minister Freeland and other potential guests come and speak to us could help us write our final report on the prorogation.

We need to stay on course to reduce the number of infections, protect one another and ensure that people remain safe in their communities. We can all admit that we are tired, but we need to continue to follow public health guidelines and do everything possible, individually and collectively, to stop the spread of the virus.

Vaccination may be the finish line, but until we have all been vaccinated, we need to protect one another. Companies, governments, families and communities need to do everything possible to reduce the risk of transmitting this virus.

Last week, I mentioned that my husband was privileged to receive his vaccination. I am pleased to announce that mine will be at 1 p.m. tomorrow. I'm not going to miss the opportunity and I'm looking forward to it.

Health Canada has authorized four COVID-19 vaccines, Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. Only last week...

● (68400)

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Petitpas Taylor, the interpreters are hearing some popping of your microphone. It seems to be positioned very well. I don't know what to suggest, necessarily. We had Mr. Blaikie fold it inwards. Maybe you could fold it a little bit outwards, or move it outwards a bit. Then the popping might stop.

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I'd like to ask the interpreter if it's better now.

The Clerk: Ms. Petitpas Taylor, according to the interpreter, everything's working properly now.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Good. No one wants to make things difficult for our interpreters. I'd like them to tell me if there's a problem. I'll try to speak more slowly than usual.

[English]

The Chair: I never like to interrupt the flow. I think you were on which vaccines had been approved.

[Translation]

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

I'll pick up where I left off.

Health Canada has authorized four vaccines, Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. Only last week, we received some very good news. Health Canada has authorized the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children aged 12 to 15 years. There are a lot of very happy people in my riding.

All approved vaccines have been highly effective in preventing hospitalizations and deaths. As I mentioned, vaccine distribution in the provinces and territories is moving ahead quickly. More than 18 million doses of approved COVID-19 vaccines have been delivered to the provinces and territories, and over 15 million Canadians have had their first vaccination. These figures are from last week, but they continue to increase steadily. We are on the right track.

Last week, we received two million doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. It's a major shipment from this manufacturer. Last month, my colleague, Ms. Anand, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, announced that Canada had secured COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer for 2022 and 2023, with options to extend into 2024.

As we have repeatedly stated, we will be there for Canadians to combat COVID-19 by providing them with everything required for as long as it takes. We expect Canadians who are eligible for the vaccines and who want to be vaccinated will have access well before September 2021. This is part of our commitment to the provinces and territories, and we are working closely with them to combat COVID-19.

The Cabinet Committee on the federal response to the Coronavirus disease, COVID-19, has worked tirelessly over the past year and a half. It could comment on the whole vaccine distribution issue. I think Ms. Freeland could give us her thoughts on the matter.

We are going to continue to work together with our colleagues and offer them any help they might need to keep outbreaks under control and to keep the entire population of Canada safe. This could, for example, involve purchasing and distributing vaccines, personal protective equipment, and rapid detection tests, and facilitating their use, or calling upon private companies to distribute rapid tests in order to more thoroughly trace people who may have been in contact with someone who tested positive.

The government of Canada is providing \$8 out of every \$10 spent on combatting the pandemic. Once again, I'd like to point out that we have contributed an enormous amount of funds because we want to make sure that Canadians are protected. The number of things we have asked Canadians to do is unbelievable, and we are still asking those who live in a region where there has been an outbreak to stay at home. That's why we need to be there for them. We have always said that we will be there for Canadians. We need to make sure that the programs that have been established are accessible.

As for prorogation and the new throne speech, I would say that we did it so that we could take the time to think things through and make sure that all of the programs were in place to meet the needs of Canadians.

Much of the support now in place stems from the rapid surge capacity support initiative, which, in addition to the safe restart agreement, provided more than \$19 billion to the provinces and territories so that they could increase the capacity of their health institutions, intensify contact tracing and provide epidemiological support and a variety of other services to all Canadians. This would enable the provinces and territories to respond more effectively in the event of an outbreak and reduce the spread in hot zones, where the pressure on health systems is strongest. They could also provide places to go for families and people who become infected by Covid-19, who have been in contact with someone who is infected or who could not isolate otherwise. Needless to say, this money could also be used to consolidate existing services where needs are greatest.

● (68405)

We need to acknowledge that the provinces and territories all have different areas of jurisdiction, and that circumstances vary enormously from one area to another. I am happy to say that here in New Brunswick there are only 142 active cases. Touch wood! However, as we know, things can change overnight. We therefore need to make sure that the provinces and territories have some control over funds and over future national health policies. We are there to support them through this process.

In its COVID-19 response, the Government of Canada introduced rapid surge capacity support for eight existing services: testing assistance, outbreak management, contact tracing, laboratory services, testing equipment, voluntary safe isolation sites, public health response teams and human resource recruitment. These priority measures were put in place to help the population, and did not exist when the 2019 throne speech was delivered. We only succeeded in establishing them after careful consideration.

We were recently able to provide assistance to health systems in trouble, including Ontario's, through health human resources assistance measures, including reimbursement for the costs associated with the temporary transfer of health human resources from one province or territory to another. These funds will help support specialized care services by deploying staff when and where the need arises, including intensive care nursing staff and doctors.

Since it's National Nursing Week, I'll take this opportunity to congratulate all nurses from the bottom of my heart for their outstanding work in our wonderful country. They are front-line super-heroes, and deserve everyone's thanks.

I'm very pleased to see that Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia sent staff a few weeks ago to help Ontario in these difficult times. We are all Canadians and all members of the same family. We're there to help one another. I felt very proud about the fact that Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia sent people to Ontario to help out.

Every province and territory will be eligible for up to \$20 million for the deployment of resources to areas in need. It's truly an opportunity for team spirit to come to the fore countrywide. The provinces and territories are prepared to help one another. The federal government will be deploying the financial resources needed to send health human resources where the need is greatest.

I'd now like to discuss testing, which, together with public health measures, are the main ways being used to slow the spread of COVID-19.

So far, over 25 million rapid tests have been shipped to the provinces and territories. By combining these with the federal tests, up we have calculated that over 41 million rapid tests have been distributed across Canada. Several provinces and territories have announced that these types of test would be available for their companies. This is a follow-up to the successful distribution of over 1.2 million rapid tests to long-term care centres, hospitals, homeless shelters and areas where there are rapidly spreading outbreaks of the virus.

• (68410)

The rapid tests are useful, because they can detect presymptomatic and asymptomatic cases, isolate people earlier and slow the spread of COVID-19, particularly in workplaces.

As I said before, the government continues to work closely with all the provinces and territories to make sure that they have the tools they need to fight the pandemic, including buying PCR and rapid tests for them to use at testing sites. These can be combined with other public health measures. It's an additional layer of protection that can contribute to the safety and health of workers.

We also work closely with the provincial and territorial governments to strengthen the health care system and adjust to the problems encountered in delivering health services during the COVID 19 pandemic.

The 2021 budget that was just announced includes \$100 million for a three-year period to promote innovative health care measures. We know that many groups have been affected disproportionately by COVID-19, including health care workers, front-line workers, young people, seniors, and Canada's indigenous, racialized and black populations.

My friends, over the weekend, I visited my aunt Lilianne at her home in Moncton. She is 99 years old and is doing very well from the cognitive standpoint. She has received both doses of the vaccine and is very happy and grateful, but still feels that she is very much a prisoner of her care home. She is waiting for life to return to normal, because it has been a difficult year for her. It's clear that young people and seniors alike have been experiencing stress and suffering mentally from the pandemic. We mustn't forget this.

There are so many unbelievable community organizations in Canada, and in our provinces, that are close to people and know better than anyone else how to provide these services. We want to help them, particularly at this time, because we can see that demand for services like these has increased. I said early on in this pandemic that there would be a tsunami of mental health problems. That is what is now happening, and we need to cope with the situation. Fortunately, we are still seeing a marked decline in the number of breakouts in long-term care institutions. We want to make sure that residents and caregivers in long-term care institutions receive proper support.

In the 2020 full economic statement, we earmarked \$6.4 million for the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement, which has been using these funds to extend its long-term care program to increase its capacity to act in the event of a pandemic. It has been doing excellent work in helping long-term care institutions in Canada better prepare for preventing infections and taking other measures to protect residents. This is really our priority. Over 350 long-term care facilities and retirement homes are receiving assistance under this program.

I'd like to finish with a few thoughts about the importance of public health guidelines.

Vaccination is moving ahead quickly, but as we said earlier, and as we can all see, we are not yet out of the woods. Even vaccinated people like my aunt Lilianne must continue to follow the basic public health guidelines that have kept us safe so far. Even though the vaccination rate is increasing daily, most Canadians have not yet received both doses of vaccine. In the meantime, public health measures are what will continue to contain the pandemic and production protect the entire population.

• (68415)

If we lift the restrictions too quickly, the number of cases will spike, as shown by statistical models from the outset. The scientists were right. If we remove the restrictions too soon or do not enforce them strictly enough, people will get sick and some will die.

That's the truth of the matter. Even though it's tough on morale, and even though we might all be exhausted, this is not the time to let our guard down. We all need to continue to enforce public health measures, because they have proved their worth. There are no magic recipes. We know what we have to do and we have to continue to follow the guidelines.

We decided to prorogue Parliament because we wanted to make sure that we could introduce programs that would meet the needs of Canadians during the second wave, and even the third, which we are now experiencing.

Madam Chair, I'm not sure how long I've been speaking. I don't want to use up my colleagues' speaking time, and will therefore give the floor to my friend and colleague Mr. Turnbull.

I'll continue later, if time allows, with some further comments.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague Ms. Petitpas Taylor for her important remarks. I appreciate several of the things she chose to focus on. In particular, the importance of the grassroots organizations across our communities to help people who are vulnerable is something that struck me as important for us to remember. Also, there's the importance of the public health measures which, when lifted too early or not applied as rigorously as needed, can lead to spikes in cases and waves of COVID-19 that certainly, at this point, I think, have become....

I don't know what the right word is, but I'm certainly ready for COVID-19 to be over. I'm sure all of us are. I know the constituents in my riding are at their wits' end. Their lives have been so dramatically impacted on so many levels that it's really the challenge of a lifetime that we're all living through. I want to bring empathy to the challenges associated with this on every level, but also work across the aisle with my colleagues to find a way forward in the important work of this committee.

I appreciated the opening discussion that we had, which was impromptu. It seemed to be on a cross-partisan scale such that maybe we could find a bit of a way forward. That's always encouraging. I relish those moments when they occur in our Parliament today and in our committee work as well.

I've been making an argument for quite some time that I feel is important and worth making. It's really an argument for the amendment that I put forward to Ms. Vecchio's original motion, which, as most of you know by now, was an attempt to compromise. I understand that the opposition parties still are clinging to seeing the Prime Minister appear.

That wasn't in my amendment. My amendment focused on providing further rationale and evidence and testimony from witnesses who I think would be able to give us additional perspective. The Prime Minister's perspective has been shared with us through the report that was tabled concerning prorogation, which I probably don't need to remind anybody at this point was a change to the Standing Orders that our government implemented in the last Parliament and which I think is a positive step forward.

I know my colleague Mr. Blaikie talks about its being precedent-setting that our committee is delving into the reasons for prorogation. I think it's great. We really have set precedents, both in requiring a report to be tabled in the House and referred to this committee, but also in the willingness our government has shown to study the reasons for prorogation.

Further to that, the two main witnesses who, I think, based on every bit of information I've been able to gather, would be really helpful are the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. I've made a pretty detailed argument as to why I think they're important and why I think these two witnesses can offer some testimony that could enhance our ability as a committee to finish our report and make recommendations.

To me, that's the nature of the study we were undertaking when Ms. Vecchio put forward her motion, which looked as though it was just trying to assume a motive—a rather nefarious motive—on the part of our government for proroguing Parliament, whereas I think there's a completely rational explanation for why it was necessary and why the time was well used to connect with stakeholders and reset the agenda the government had at the time.

• (68420)

I want to continue with that, because what I find again and again—and I will repeat this point for emphasis' sake, because I really do think it's important that we recognize that really, if a global pandemic is not a good enough reason to prorogue Parliament, then, really, nothing is. I stand by that claim. I've made it in every single speech I've given in this committee since Ms. Vecchio put forward her original motion. I have focused on arguing that it really is the crux of the matter, in my view, which is that, for some reason, opposition parties don't see the global pandemic as a good reason for the Prime Minister to use his prerogative—or her prerogative. In this case, it is “his”, but I hope that one day in the near future we will have a female prime minister in Canada. I would just say that the global pandemic has been deeper and more severe in terms of economic impact, and I'm not even focused, in this particular debate, on the health impacts, which are far greater and should be the primary concern, and I've said that as well.

I've focused my arguments and all the data and evidence gathering that I've done to make my argument on understanding the depth of the economic impact, the severity of that, how it impacts different segments of the population across Canada unevenly. It disproportionately impacts people who may be historically disadvantaged in some way or who may be from an equity-seeking group of one kind or another. I've gone to great lengths to demonstrate that to this committee in the hopes that the members opposite would see the light and come around to hopefully supporting my amendment.

That may seem like a vain hope, but I maintain there is good reason and rationale to support hearing from two more witnesses, i.e., the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. I will say that the recession in 2008-09 really pales in comparison to the global pandemic and its economic impact. I've gathered some additional information on that, which was relevant at the time. I've been using a lot of detailed statistical data that was gathered by the chief statistician of Canada for a report that was published in the early fall of 2020, so it was right around the time of prorogation that this information would have been utilized to make decisions, and we really see that it informed the throne speech.

I have also done a little bit of research in my spare time, of which I have tons. Ha, ha—that's not true, but I have found quite a bit of really good information to substantiate how different and deep the current economic crisis is in comparison to the 2008-09 financial crisis, sometimes referred to as the great recession, which really seems like kind of a blip at this point compared to what we're going through today.

I'm going to refer to a document published by First Policy Response on June 3, 2020. It highlights the differences between 2008 and 2020. The subtitle of the article—it's a compilation—is “What's different this time around?” It had several contributors. I'll quote some of them. They're all very renowned professionals. One is Kevin Milligan, who is a professor of economics—

• (68425)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, perhaps you could ask Mr. Turnbull if he could cite what he's reading. I think he's reading a study that was from before prorogation and

why it was different, and I'm just trying to get the date to see how this lines up with this motion. Perhaps he could just tell me when this was actually written, because I don't know if it's actually talking about the 2020 prorogation at all. That's why I'm asking. I don't think if it was written prior that it would actually be talking about the 2020 prorogation and have anything to do with this amendment.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Maybe I can speak to that, Madam Chair. I'd be happy to answer that question from Ms. Vecchio.

The Chair: Sure, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I did just say June 3, 2020, was when it was published. My point is that, at that point, this information was relevant. All the stakeholders who are quoted in this publication would have been renowned economists who said things about the 2020 economic crisis that we're living through still today that substantiate the claim I've been making, or the argument I've been making, that the economic impact of COVID-19 is many times greater than the economic recession in 2008-09, which, I would add, Stephen Harper used as his excuse, or his reason, I should say, or rationale for proroguing Parliament twice, once in 2008 and once in 2009.

I really think this speaks to why we would hear from the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, who I would think has heard from some of these stakeholders. Probably even her team of highly trained professionals would have been aware of this document, which I think helps highlight why this economic crisis is both unique but also far greater than the one that occurred in 2008-09. I would think that would be relevant information. It certainly echoes many of the other things I've been saying in this committee. Also, I think it supports in many ways the data that the chief statistician of Canada had gathered, which was slightly later but did include this time period as well. I think it helps us understand the first wave of COVID-19.

Going back to what I was saying, Kevin Milligan, a professor of economics from the Vancouver School of Economics, said that the main difference between the 2008-09 financial crisis and today's pandemic-induced recession is which side of the economy was hit, the demand side or supply side. He said that public health restrictions have shut down entire markets for goods and services, and it's not a lack of spending power from the demand side as it was in 2008; in fact, in this particular crisis, consumers have a lack of ability to purchase the same basket of goods and services, whether it be because of a fear for workers or consumers or because of public health restrictions in place.

The economic crisis we're in is very different in kind from the 2008-09 crisis, which was a demand-side shock. We're seeing a supply-side shock as a result of this pandemic, which is very different. It means that because so many workplaces have been closed down or work stoppages have been so far-reaching, in fact, there's a real shock to the supply side of the economy. This really informs how we should move forward. It informs how we can't simply ap-

Again, to Ms. Vecchio's point, this is a reason that a government would need to stop and reflect from time to time on what its priorities are and how it understands this crisis from a health perspective, an economic perspective, a social perspective, and so on. I think that's exactly why prorogation was used in this case.

To me, it's all very relevant and rational. I use that word a lot. I'm sorry to say that, but I keep saying it's rational. It makes sense. It lines up. There are reasons and evidence.

I studied formal and informal logic. I believe debate is supposed to be about argument and reasons and evidence, and not just saying things that are untrue or trying to persuade people to believe something because it serves your political interests. I believe we're actually being evidence based.

I totally get that no government is perfect. Especially in a pandemic, when you're in a public health crisis and there's a virus that's not completely understood, things are going to change. Evidence is going to evolve. Scientific research is catching up to a virus that's mutating in a way, and is almost surpassing human knowledge in terms of its ability to grapple with what that virus entails.

● (68430)

Again, the point I'm trying to make here is to take some time to understand that this economic crisis that is caused by the public health crisis is different. It's very different. You couldn't take the fiscal measures and even the framework or the understanding of the previous 2008-09 crisis and just apply it to this one. It would not work. It would not be successful, and there are many reasons for that.

For example, in 2008, the strategy to deal with the economic recession at the time was to restoke demand by promoting investment, injecting cash into households and to ensure financial sector balance sheets could support the resumption of lending. In the pandemic we know that family income and business cash supports are necessary to keep the economy just idling at a point so it prevents bankruptcies. This is why I think our government implemented things like the commercial rent subsidy and helped to work on making mortgage payment deferrals accessible, and provided small business supports and loans. This was to prevent bankruptcies right across our economy.

We also know that in the pandemic we wanted to prevent excessive debt that weighs down demand going forward. This is the rationale probably for direct payments to families, which we saw a lot of during this pandemic, in particular, the CERB. We all know why that was so important for families out there.

However, the demand-side measures will not get the economy back to full speed as long as the virus restricts economic activities. We can continue to try to bolster demand, but in a way we still have these very large supply-side adjustments. The ways of working are different, and they will continue to be different for some time. Workplaces may need to maintain a level of social distancing for some time. I don't claim to know all of the answers for that, but I will say that based on the evidence around the time that prorogation happened, or just before, there were quite a lot of economists saying that some of these supply-side adjustments are going to be in

place for quite some time. This has a bearing on how the economy might recover and what measures would be helpful.

I'm justifying that it takes time to reflect on that, just as Mr. Blaikie said earlier in his comments that he needed time to reflect and have conversations with other parties to come up with a potential amendment that might be a counter-proposal that could move this committee forward. It takes a bit of time to reflect and work through those conversations. I think that's quite natural when you're undertaking a once-in-a-lifetime or once-in-a-hundred-years crisis of epic proportions.

I will get back to what I was saying, which is that the supply-side adjustments with the ways of working are different. The ways of households, caregiving and working from home have changed, and even consumption patterns, the ways of consuming for Canadians, have changed dramatically. You have these three levels—work, household and consumption patterns—that are all changing, and these are all supply-side adjustments. They're daunting, because it's hard to understand the costs and challenges that those create. Again, I made previous arguments as to how the economic impact actually affects different industries differently as well. There's inequity even in how industries are coping and in some of the structural challenges that some of the businesses had.

● (68435)

I think about businesses in my community. A few of them that have had to shut down seem to fall into a category where they have a very high overhead cost, often due to a facility they run. For example, one of the places is like an indoor playground for kids. They have a very high overhead cost to run their business. Restaurants would be another example where the overhead cost is quite high. Imagine not being able to generate revenue and still having some of those costs. This is exactly why our government put in place the commercial rent subsidy, which we've talked about before.

I want to quote Kevin Milligan, a professor of economics from the Vancouver School of Economics. He said, "The best way to minimize these costs is to strongly support public health measures needed now to suppress the virus sharply." I find that just the fact that I could find that quote as early as June 3, 2020, sort of provides even more evidence to back up what my colleague Ms. Petitpas Taylor was saying, which was that the public health measures are some of the most important tools in our tool box for suppressing the community spread of the virus. Also, they're the best economic recovery measures because we know that, wave after wave, the small businesses and many of the industries are struggling because they can't get a foothold back into doing business again.

We sometimes see different leaders across the country lifting those public health measures prematurely. I think what we need to all do is encourage those to stay in place to get the case numbers down as low as possible. The primary reason is that it's the right thing to do to save human health and ensure that this virus doesn't mutate beyond the effectiveness of our vaccines, but it's also the best thing to do from an economic perspective as well. It's not just good for human health. I mean, we shouldn't need any other reasons, in my view, but if you do need other reasons, it's also better for the economy.

I read a paper a while back on the sunk cost fallacy, which I thought was really interesting because I'm a bit of a nerd when it comes to fallacies. For anyone who doesn't know, "fallacies" is this word we use in philosophy that refers to mistakes in reasoning. They're common mistakes. They're mistakes that people make a lot. There are all kinds of different fallacies out there. There have been books written that explain all of the different types of fallacies, all of the mistakes in reasoning that we can have as human beings, and there are a lot.

The sunk cost fallacy is an interesting one because it really applies to this pandemic. Seeing the economic hardship that is brought about by public health restrictions can really impact leaders' willingness and ability to make decisions about imposing those measures in a successive wave of COVID-19. This is called the sunk cost fallacy because you're projecting the cost of the previous wave into the future wave, but you're not looking beyond that. I think this provides a bit of a rationale. I have a lot of empathy for leaders who are in those positions of decision-making and power and who have to make those difficult decisions, although in many cases I think the decisions perhaps have fallen prey to the sunk cost fallacy.

I'll leave that, and I would be happy to provide anyone with a link to that article, too. If Ms. Vecchio would like to review the sunk cost fallacy, I would be happy to provide it. At any rate, I will move on.

I want to speak about another prominent expert. I don't know this individual personally, but his name is Mike Moffatt. He's a senior director at the Smart Prosperity Institute.

• (68440)

This goes back to my argument that the current economic crisis is much greater and more substantial than the 2008-09 economic recession. Mike Moffatt agrees, in the paper that he wrote, that we are definitely going through a supply-side shock, but he also talks about how there are demand-side implications, or even shocks that are triggered by the supply-side shock. I will tell you what I mean by that.

He uses the example of a tornado in the U.S. Midwest. This is hypothetical. It hasn't happened, but you could very easily see it happening at some point. It's a possible scenario that could be real, but it's hypothetical for now. If a tornado in the U.S. Midwest were to take out assemblers of automobiles, it would create a demand-side shock in Canada for auto part suppliers. We have big auto part suppliers. Obviously, the demand for their supplies or auto parts would be dramatically impacted if all of sudden two big auto assemblers in the U.S. were to be hit by the tornado and not be able to

function. That's one scenario. Another is to imagine if the tornado hit, God forbid, southwestern Ontario and took out auto assemblers in southwestern Ontario. This would create a supply-side shock but also a demand component, because auto suppliers would still take a hit.

I think what's important to recognize is that the current crisis we're in is not as simple as just saying the economy has been hit by a supply-side shock. There are ripple effects across our supply chains that also create demand-side shocks as well. I think that's his main point.

Adding to the previous expert I was mentioning, Kevin Milligan, the professor of economics, this individual really speaks to how we have to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how our economy has been impacted and understand what measures to put in place to actually help it recover. I think it's very rational to think that you might want, as a government helping lead a country through a massive hundred-year crisis, to take some time and reflect on what really is the impact of this current crisis so that you can target measures of different kinds to the real situation we're in.

You know, I talk about situational leadership. I've had several people tell me that there are different assessments of what constitutes situational leadership. In my view, it's a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness to the very particular circumstances, the changing circumstances, in a given situation and showing leadership. Within that is the ability to assess, evaluate, gather information quickly and make sense of the many different aspects of a crisis or any situation. Obviously, the need for situational leadership is heightened within a global public health crisis, of course, or any form of crisis. I think crisis management in general requires situational leadership.

That's a bit of a tangent. I'm sorry about that. I certainly will get back to my remarks here.

In terms of my argument, each view of the world, like the supply-side shock or the demand-side shock, which was 2008-09, or some mixture of the two really has an impact on how large the economic decline is, what inflation will look like, how interest rates will reflect that or impact that and whether stagflation is an issue or not. In the 1970s there was a sort of stagflation that came out of the supply-side shock then. It led to moderate economic decline, substantial increases in nominal interest rates and inflation pressures that either forced the Bank of Canada to abandon the 2% inflation target or caused them to hike interest rates even further.

• (68445)

In our case, I think what we're seeing—and this is changing—is a much larger economic decline than in 1970 and a relatively modest impact on inflation and interest rates. Pressure is upward or downward, depending on the relative magnitude of the shocks, and there's been no stagflation to date.

Stagflation, by the way, in case people are wondering—I hate using academic-sounding words, but sometimes I do—is characterized by slow economic growth and relatively high unemployment.

I see my colleague Ms. Petitpas Taylor smiling, and it's making me smile, and I am sorry for using these academic buzz terms.

Again, stagflation is characterized by slow economic growth and relatively high unemployment, which obviously is economic stagnation, but at the same time accompanied by rising prices, inflation. You're seeing a stagnation in the economy but an inflation of prices. This is why stagflation is something of real concern or potential concern.

I have lots more to say, but I am also conscious of time. Before I finish up, I have a few other things that I really feel I need to say, and I think there are two other really important contributors to the compilation that I am quoting from and using as some of my evidence base for my argument today.

One person I would refer to is David Macdonald, senior economist at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. He said, "The job losses during the great recession of 2008-09 were a garden party compared to what has happened since March 2020. You have to go back to the...thirties to see anything like it but, even then, the comparison stops after the first month."

I did a bit of an analysis of this graph that was shown in this paper, and it's really interesting to see how the job losses compare. This gentleman, David Macdonald, took five of the top economic crises, recessions, depressions—however we refer to them—the recession of 1991-92, what he called the "dirty thirties"—I don't like that term and I'm not sure why it's called that, but maybe someone else can tell me if they know a bit more about that history—the great recession, which was 2008-09, and the recession of 1981-82. I know that the thirties refer to the Great Depression.

When you look at these four in comparison to the COVID-19 pandemic, the only one that even comes close to comparing is the recession in the Depression, and it only compares for the first month or two, and it's only about a decline in job loss of about 5%; whereas, at the point in time when this paper was written, on June 3, 2020—this was really early in the pandemic—the crisis we're in is almost a 16% decline over the first two months in terms of job losses. Again, it's from 5% to almost 16%.

• (68450)

I think the Minister of Finance has mentioned a V-shaped recovery. The V-shaped recovery refers to.... The drop in job losses has been so great and so many times greater that it looks like a cliff. The idea is that if our fiscal measures are working, we could see a rebound of that economy, a V-shaped recovery, which is a very steep incline of job gains. We started to see that recently before the third wave was really upon us. The job numbers were incredible. There were 300,000 jobs gained in one month. The previous month was a similar number. That was February, if I'm not mistaken.

The rebound of the economy is impressive. I think it actually provides another point of rationale that's now obviously in the future compared to where we would have been at the time of prorogation. When you look at what happened as a result of prorogation and then tie it back to the information that was accessible at that time, I think it actually helps to show that what the government has done was evidence informed. On top of that, it's working.

I don't mean to sound arrogant at all; I'm just literally saying that this seems to make sense to me. It adds up. It's rational. It's targeted. It took time to reflect. This gentleman, David Macdonald said, "This represents a seismic shift in how we fight recessions when private debt is high and interest rates are low: instead of encouraging debt, we put money into people's pockets at an unprecedented scale."

In the contributions he makes in the article, he basically points to how the thing that's different about this crisis—and others have said it's both supply-side and demand-side shocks at the same time—was there was already a level of debt out there in our economy leading up to this crisis that was perhaps beyond what we've seen in other recessions, or other crises of this proportion. Again, this one doesn't even measure up.

• (68455)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, it's 12:55. We had a great conversation earlier and I'm just wondering when we will be coming to that vote as we previously discussed.

The Chair: I guess we are on the perfect person right now.

I will hand it back to Mr. Turnbull since it's his amendment. Perhaps he'll want to share that with us.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm not finished my remarks and not prepared for a vote just yet.

I'm still hoping that we get a counter-proposal from the opposition parties in writing that we can look at. I will leave that to them to figure out.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, what I understand is that right now, although we had previously discussed it, Mr. Turnbull is choosing that we're not going to go to a vote as we had previously discussed, though we have already said we're working towards a solution.

I don't want to lose faith, but I thought there was a bit of a consensus that at 12:55 we were going to work together to find some sort of solution. I'm looking at Daniel and Alain as two other opposition members. I'm just wondering if this filibuster is going to continue rather than getting to what we really want, which is a solution.

You can't hear me now?

The Chair: It's not so much that we can't hear, but you're cutting out.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm so sorry.

Working in good faith, I think that's what many of the members were doing this morning when we were trying to have a very open, transparent and accountable discussion. We had talked about going to a vote at 12:55. I think that was very fair.

I'm looking at the members of the opposition parties. It was mentioned for us to do something. I know that in good faith that has actually already started, which is fantastic. We're trying to get somewhere. I'm just wondering why the speaker is not allowing us to go to the vote. If we are doing our part, why can we not go to a vote now?

I'm just confused.

The Chair: By speaker, I'm assuming you're speaking about Mr. Turnbull, who has the floor.

It was definitely discussed. I will let Mr. Turnbull see if he's ready, or the other members. We need to see if all of the members are willing to not take their turn to speak and move to a vote at this point.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate Ms. Vecchio's comments in that we had a great discussion at the beginning of our meeting, but I don't recall anyone agreeing that there would be a vote.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Oh my God.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I know it was suggested by Mr. Blaikie, but I don't think there was any agreement that we would move to a vote. I am certainly open to.... I think all members of our party are willing to have discussions about how we move forward, but I don't recall any commitment to have a vote today.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much, Mr. Turnbull. I have lost [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] faith, because I thought we were having a rational discussion this morning where we were coming up with a solution. I'm sorry, but in good faith, I believe we were going to go to a vote at 12:55.

I believe that all [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for a resolution, and I'm really concerned that... Perhaps one of the other members of the opposition was also expecting to speak.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, you were just cutting in and out. I'm not sure if the translators have even been translating what you were saying, because there was so much cutting in and out. I don't know if all of the members can benefit from what you were saying with that happening at this point.

Mr. Clerk, can you let us know if there was translation for Ms. Vecchio?

You can kind of make out what she was saying, and you get the gist of it, but I don't know if the translators were able to follow.

• (68500)

The Clerk: Madam Chair, the interpreters were able to catch what Ms. Vecchio was saying. There does seem to have been some lag with the Internet connection, however. It was sort of cutting in and out, but the interpreters did get the gist of what Ms. Vecchio did say.

The Chair: To the interpreters, excuse me for using the incorrect terminology. Of course, you are interpreters.

Ms. Vecchio, do you still want one of your colleagues to—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Perhaps John Nater can take the floor.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Point of order, Madam Chair.

Mr. John Nater: Yes, it is a point of order, and it's a point of order about what's been suggested.

We've been talking about compromise. We've been talking about coming to a solution on this. I think a suggestion has been made that we dispose of this amendment, and that would bring us back to the original motion.

That would clear things up for today, and then on Thursday, we can come fresh with the original motion, and go from there in order to come to a solution and dispose of this matter.

The opposition is willing, ready and able to act in good faith, and to move forward on this, but if the Liberals are going to continue with filibustering for the next two months, or how ever long they feel like filibustering, then here we are.

If Mr. Turnbull is not allowing this to come to a vote, I think that's most unfortunate, and we'll go on listening to them filibuster their own amendment.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, on the same point of order, really, I just want to say that I think this is a bit of a delicate moment. I appreciate Mr. Turnbull's point that it may be that a decision wasn't made to have a vote at 12:55, but there was clearly a call to test the committee and I don't think the committee was tested on that. The fact that it wasn't previously doesn't mean that it couldn't be now, and I think it would be an important act of good faith on the part of government members of the committee who have said that they want to try to conduce towards a solution to allow that vote to happen and the meeting to adjourn.

Mr. Turnbull stated earlier that time is precious. There isn't a lot of free time for members of Parliament at any time, particularly not now. We're all very busy. Spending the next couple of hours in this meeting is a couple of hours that we can't spend doing those other things in the next 48 hours where we also are trying to work in an exceptional meeting among the opposition parties in order to have a productive conversation that leads to a formal proposal for the government. I think that's the kind of lack of time and good faith that might poison the well and cause this otherwise good and opportune moment to pass us by without having produced a solution.

Therefore, I would beseech my colleagues on the government side of the committee here to allow the vote on the amendment to take place and the meeting to suspend afterward so that we have, on the other side, the time to do what they've asked us to do, which is to discuss among ourselves. We're not a monolithic group. As I say, it's three different political parties that require some time to have that conversation. The idea that it was going to come in writing during this meeting was certainly optimistic, but also equally unrealistic. We're asking to be able to have the vote, suspend the meeting, take the time and come back with a proposal.

Of course, if the government doesn't like our proposal, there will be time for Mr. Turnbull to move another amendment. This one is clearly dead in the water, so if he wants to take another run at it, that will be his business. In the meantime, the opposition parties will work together to try to come up with what we think is a next best offer.

I would just really exhort my colleagues to not waste what I think is a good moment, and to allow things to wrap up on the current amendment, which is one proposal and a negotiation that I think has clearly not gone the way the mover intended—and fair enough, that happens in a negotiation—and to make way for a new proposal that might succeed or might not, but at least we'd be talking about something new. That in itself would be significant in a process now that has taken a very long time with very little movement.

The Chair: I don't know if there are responses to the point or order or debate on that point of order. It's hard for me to tell, because there are hands up to speak to the regular speaking list and I don't want to miss anybody.

Mr. Turnbull.

• (68505)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I'll continue with my remarks because I wasn't quite finished what I had prepared.

I want to get back to another one of the individuals who contributed to this particular paper that I was referencing, Alex Himelfarb, the former clerk of the Privy Council. He said:

History provides no perfect analogy for the combined health and socio-economic catastrophe we now confront. Certainly not since the Depression have we sustained such a broad and deep economic hit. We've rightly spent a lot to provide relief and we're going to have to spend more—depending on our ambitions, possibly a great deal more.

I thought that was a really good quote to bring to this committee to, again, substantiate how I think the economic impact of COVID-19 is far greater than many of the other recessions we have been through, and even greater in kind and in magnitude than the Great Depression. Alex also said:

Many of the aid programs will have to be extended, some may have to become permanent, further public investment will be needed to meet the urgent needs of municipalities and get the economy moving. We can expect debates about objectives – whether simply recovery or also repair of cracks tragically exposed, or whether to refashion a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable economy.

Why I bring these two quotes as some of my final remarks to substantiate everything I've been saying is that I think the former clerk of the Privy Council was really, at the time, grappling with, and even recommending and foreseeing, that many of our aid programs would have to be extended. This is precisely what the government did, and some were slightly redesigned. I know that I've spoken to those before.

What's interesting is that he mentioned this key debate at the end of the quote that I used, which is, “We can expect debates about objectives, whether simply recovery or also repair of cracks tragically exposed, or whether to refashion a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable economy.” That's a really interesting conversation about whether we're just going to build back in the same way, in other words, almost reinstall the same inequities that we've experienced throughout this pandemic, or whether we're going to try to address those.

I think our government's evaluation and resetting of its agenda and the considerable time that was taken to do that, which I know only really compromised one sitting day of Parliament, was really on the mark in terms of what it amounted to, where it focused its

attention, and I think it's supported by these remarks from the former clerk of the Privy Council.

I've tried to provide more evidence and data to substantiate why it would be helpful for us to hear from the Minister of Finance and to renew that as a plea to the members opposite to hopefully support the amendment that I put forward.

I'll wrap up there for now and I thank all the members for the time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues before me for their important words. I really would like to thank Ms. Petitpas Taylor for her speech. There's a reason she devoted her life to social work. I would like to also thank her for her work as our former minister of health, and particularly the good work she did on the food guide, and her work with thalidomide survivors. I will just say one last thing. Thank you for accepting the motion for a standing committee on science and research. It's really important that you were included as you've been a tireless champion for health science and research.

Mr. Turnbull, thank you again for your always rational argument. We are in a once-in-a-century pandemic, with huge economic and health impacts. That's why it was so important to prorogue, but of course, colleagues, we're here to debate why it's important to invite the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth to come to our committee and ultimately to discuss why it was necessary for the government to prorogue to deal with the greatest public health crisis in a century.

As you know, I've been speaking in detail about COVID-19 and its impacts on Canadians. After all, what can be more important than how the people we serve are getting through the pandemic, whether they are healthy and safe and whether we are doing everything we can to protect their livelihoods? I think it's important to always remember the lives lost. Members of families and communities are grieving and they're hurting. I think it's also important to remember our frontline health care workers who are fighting the virus tirelessly.

As you know, it's Nursing Week, and it's an opportunity to thank nurses for their work, their life-saving work, their work at the bedside. I know, in my own family's case, I was extremely grateful when they would take my father's arm and listen to his stories. Thank you to all of our nurses.

I would also like to thank the essential workers who have worked through the pandemic to keep our communities and our country going. I will make the point that last week more cases of COVID-19 had been reported globally—this is really important—in the previous two weeks than during the first six months of the pandemic. We are now seeing a plateauing in the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths, with declines in most regions, including the Americas and Europe, the two worst-affected regions. It's an unacceptably high plateau, with more than 5.4 million reported cases and almost 90,000 deaths last week.

Today I'm going to use my time to focus on prorogation and the pandemic and why we should be taking the important step of bringing forward the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth to hear why it was necessary to prorogue during a once-in-a-century pandemic. We have been at this amendment for weeks. Our colleagues across the way put forward a motion and we put forward an amendment. Negotiations involved some give-and-take, and I hope we are going to see more movement in the coming days. As I have said before, I absolutely support having the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth coming to this committee to explain why it was necessary to prorogue during the greatest public health crisis in 100 years.

Let me start by saying that prorogation is a long-standing feature of Canadian parliamentary government. In fact, by 2010 there had been over 100 prorogations. Let me repeat that: Prorogation is a long-standing feature of our Canadian parliamentary government. There have been many prorogation requests by former governments and prime ministers. In the early decades of the Canadian Parliament, the practice was to end a session of Parliament by prorogation rather than a lengthy adjournment.

• (68510)

In 1982, I believe, the Standing Orders were introduced to establish fixed sessions, which have resulted in approximately 2.1 prorogations for each Parliament. Most Canadian federal and provincial governments prorogue at least once between elections.

I think it is really important to note that our government was exceptional in not proroguing at all in its first term from 2015 to 2019. Regardless, I think it is important to have the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth come to answer questions about the prorogation report: why it was necessary to prorogue during the greatest public health crisis in 100 years.

I've been here a while and I remember very well the 40th Parliament. I had just been elected and I was so excited to serve the people of Etobicoke North, a place where I was born and raised, and to serve all Canadians. I didn't get to serve very many weeks in the people's House in that Parliament because there was the most famous prorogation—perhaps more accurately, the most infamous prorogation—in Canadian history in 2008 undertaken by former prime minister Stephen Harper.

In that minority government situation, the three opposition parties publicly agreed to defeat the Conservative government in an upcoming vote of non-confidence. Instead, former prime minister Harper went to the Governor General of the day and requested a

prorogation. It was granted, and the Conservative government narrowly escaped defeat. Mr. Harper outmanoeuvred the opposition's attempt to democratically unseat him and form a coalition government.

According to Maclean's magazine, Mr. Harper's "failure to frankly explain why he should be allowed to postpone facing a confidence vote in the House—the bedrock source of a government's democratic legitimacy in the British parliamentary system—seemed evasive".

As stated, "The highest duty of a Prime Minister...is to uphold the Constitution of Canada, which includes the rights and privileges of the House of Commons and the duties owed to the Queen's representative in Canada."

While prorogation had been routine, the 2008 prorogation was not. Let me be clear. Mr. Harper never had to write a report explaining why he prorogued and, oddly, in the context of today's discussion, I simply cannot recall any Conservative members who asked him or any other minister to appear at committee to explain his decision to Canadians. We, on the other hand, think the ministers should come and talk about the prorogation report, a reporting mechanism that our government put in place, and ministers should explain why they think prorogation was necessary during the greatest public health crisis in a century.

The government House leader has come in front of this committee, and we think the Deputy Prime Minister and finance minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth should also come.

I think it is important to point out that previous Conservative and Liberal governments have prorogued for much less—

• (68515)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair—

The Chair: Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm just checking. Ms. Duncan has mentioned the other two ministers very often. Can we get an update from the clerk on whether anything has happened since the ministers have been asked and if they have responded yet?

I know that a week and a half ago there was a discussion that members were going to see what they could do. Have we heard anything on their invitations and their RSVPs?

The Chair: I can confidently say that the clerk updates me on any communications that we receive. The answer would be the same as it was during the last meeting, that invitations had gone out initially, many months ago now, but that there has been no response to those invitations.

This is a perfect time for me, since we've already made a small interjection here, to update you all that the clerk and the team in the room reached out to me just five minutes ago. I was just waiting for a good time to make the announcement that we have a similar situation with the interpreters needing to switch over at 2 o'clock as we had last time. I guess it is due to a shortage of interpreters that we are seeing this. We haven't necessarily seen this in other meetings we've had. At 2 o'clock, they will need half an hour to switch over if we do want to resume at 2:30. At 2:30, the cleaners would have to come in if we were to allow the agriculture committee to proceed from this room at that point. At 3 o'clock, we will have votes with no bells.

I just want to inform all of you of that. You don't have to decide immediately what you want to do, but I wanted to put that out there since I just heard from the clerk that this is the situation.

If anyone wants to respond to what I've just announced, feel free to do so at this point, since I have interrupted Ms. Duncan's speech. I will have to suspend at 2 o'clock so the interpreters can switch over. I will let you know a little before that, and at that point, before we suspend at 2 o'clock, you can let me know how you want to proceed.

Dr. Duncan.

• (68520)

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

It is important to point out that previous Conservative and Liberal governments have prorogued for much less than a once-in-a-century pandemic and have not even had to explain themselves in a report or otherwise, as our government has done.

I would like to talk about former prime minister Harper's use of prorogation, which wasn't followed by reports from the government of the day. The recess for Mr. Harper took Canada into uncharted constitutional territory and created a political vacuum at a time of global economic crisis.

I'd like to quote from The New York Times:

Canada's parliamentary opposition reacted with outrage on Thursday after Prime Minister Stephen Harper shut down the legislature until Jan. 26, seeking to forestall a no-confidence vote that he was sure to lose and, possibly, provoking a constitutional crisis....

The opposition fiercely criticized the decision to suspend Parliament, accusing Mr. Harper of undermining the nation's democracy. "We have to say to Canadians, 'Is this the kind of government you want?'" said Bob Rae, a member of the opposition Liberal Party. "Do we want a party in place that is so undemocratic that it will not meet the House of Commons?"

That sentiment was echoed by constitutional scholars, who lamented that the governor general might have created a mechanism that future prime ministers could use to bypass the legislature when it seemed convenient.

This was the first time any Parliament members or constitutional scholars here could recall the manoeuvre being used in the midst of a political crisis and over the objections of Parliament.

"This really has been a blow to parliamentary democracy in Canada", said Nelson Wiseman, a professor of political science at the University of Toronto. "It has lowered the status of the elected Parliament and raised the status of the unelected prime minister."

Canadians were outraged by former prime minister Harper's use of prorogation, with reports noting how thousands took to the streets to protest:

Thousands of people attended rallies in towns and cities across Canada...to speak out against Prime Minister Stephen Harper's decision to suspend Parliament.... More than 60 rallies were planned across Canada....

Thousands of protesters gathered at Yonge-Dundas Square in Toronto to protest the suspension of Parliament. Some took the demonstration onto the street, chanting and waving placards as they marched down Yonge Street....

"It's about the masses and their voice being heard," Sonya Stanger, 18, said. "You know, representation of the masses, and that's not what's happening right now."

Mr. Turnbull's amendment is just meant to bring more focus, to bring the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth to the motion of Mrs. Vecchio and allow us to move on to something substantive.

Again, let's look at reactions to prorogation. I would like to quote briefly from another story:

In a display that was anything but apathetic, thousands of Canadians of varying political stripes clogged city streets across Canada demanding Prime Minister Stephen Harper reopen Parliament and get back to work.

Hordes of protesters crammed Toronto's downtown square, cradling signs denouncing the Prime Minister's decision to suspend Parliament.... More than 3,000 people closed down a busy section of Yonge Street to sing, march and chant....

A more subdued Jason Young, 36, stood quietly besides the chanting protesters. He said he was not a partisan person, but had begun to resent Harper's interpretation of democracy.

"I hope there are a lot of people who would identify themselves as conservatives here today, because all Canadians should be concerned about this," he said.

• (68525)

Another small group had their own dramatic interpretation of the suspension of Parliament. Several pallbearers dressed in black walked behind a bag piper and carried a coffin with poster of parliament inside, hoisting a sign that read "democracy is dead."...

"I came to Canada to escape dictatorship", said Massoud Hasson, 66, an immigrant from Pakistan who was attending his first public rally.

The point is, thousands of Canadians protested proroguing Parliament. It was a crisis that shook the nation. There was no accountability and no need to explain to Canadians why the prorogation was necessary.

Again, in the words of Maclean's, Mr. Harper's "failure to frankly explain why he should be allowed to postpone facing a confidence vote in the House...seemed evasive."

Again, in stark contrast—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have point of order, if I might, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: We're now about half an hour past when I had hoped we might come to a vote on the amendment.

I wanted to mark the occasion by drawing members' attention to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* in respect of amendments at committee. I'll note that only one amendment can be considered by committee at one time.

In other words, if there is going to be some other kind of solution and if Mr. Turnbull's amendment is not the way forward.... I think after some 30 or 40 hours, it's fair to conclude in an evidence-based way that his proposal is not the way forward. In order for there to be any point or purpose to opposition members of the committee convening a meeting between now and the committee's next meeting to talk about what another proposal might be, we would have to clear the air on this one.

If we're going to continue to waste time speaking to an amendment that's dead in the water and we can't have a vote at least to decide that, then I don't see any point in my colleagues on the opposition and me taking time to work towards a solution to bring on Thursday, while Liberals reserve the right to bullheadedly insist on a failed proposal.

Either we're working on something new or this moment at the committee where we might move forward is over. If we continue talking about this amendment without a vote for the next half-hour, an hour or two hours, I'm telling you, the moment is over.

If the Liberals want a five-minute suspension so they can get it together and talk about whether they're serious about having this committee move on to more important business, so be it. I'm not going to sit here and pretend that somehow this is a constructive committee working towards a solution when I have people yammering in my ear about a failed proposal. We're either trying to move on or we aren't.

What is it going to be, and how are we going to decide that?

• (68530)

The Chair: Does anyone want to respond to that proposal?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, I really would like to take Mr. Blaikie's point on taking a five-minute break. Perhaps our Liberal colleagues can just chat about this. I don't think it's a bad idea to be able to do that.

If my colleagues agree, I would really like to take a few minutes to be able to chat with my colleagues.

The Chair: Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Are you asking for five minutes to speak to your colleagues?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Per Mr. Blaikie's suggestion, I just want to take him up on that.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I think it's at the will of the committee. I am 100% where Daniel is coming from, so let's just get our stuff together. I totally understand.

It's truly up to the will of the committee, but thank you very much, Daniel, for bringing that forward.

The Chair: We will suspend for five minutes, and I will see you back.

• (68530)

(Pause)

• (68540)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I also wanted to let you know that the clerk informed me while we were on our suspension that there was a slight error made in terms of the timing of interpreters having to switch. They said that they can go until 2:30 before they need to switch. Originally I had announced they would switch at 2:00, but it's 2:30. That's the same time the room needs to be switched over for the agriculture committee.

I expect to be suspending at 2:30 or sooner, if there's some kind of resolution to today's meeting.

I will give the floor back to Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our colleagues. We've discussed the issue, and what we're asking for—I'm sure people can absolutely appreciate this—is to see something in writing. We look forward to seeing that. That's just good negotiation on all sides. You always want to see something in writing. I thank my colleagues.

I will continue. I was talking about the 2008 prorogation. It was the crisis that shook the nation. There was no accountability and no need to explain to Canadians why—

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

We had that five-minute break, and the decision was that you want something in writing. I just want to ask for clarification before you continue. There was a request for something in writing. Can I ask what we're going to get in turn? Are you guys going to stop filibustering? Is that what comes in turn? I'm listening to this, and the negotiations, if we're going to negotiate.... Daniel has asked, "What are the plans?" You guys have said, "We want something in writing." Please share with me. Is this what's holding you up, having something from us in writing, for us to figure out how to get you guys to stop talking on this filibuster? I just want to ensure we're all on the same page here.

As I said, this morning I really thought there was good faith. I'll be honest. I recognize we're in a political theatre. I get that, but I can tell you in good conscience that I have been trying—and I do believe many others have been trying—to find a true right to negotiation. Let's not continue to filibuster. Why don't we talk this out rather than listening to this garblegoop? It's very important information, but if I chose to read the reports that Ryan read to me today, I could have chosen to read those reports. Instead, I've listened to them.

I prefer to talk about what the procedure and house affairs committee is supposed to be doing, how we're actually going to get to a vote and how we're actually going to get our report done. It's funny. If the opposition decides to sit on their hands, we will be doing this until Parliament is adjourned. Is this what I understand? I just want to see.... Is there going to be no closure? Is that the plan?

● (68545)

The Chair: Would any member like to respond? It can be any of the members.

We'll hear from Dr. Duncan and then Mr. Lauzon. He put his hand up as well.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Friends—and I do consider all of us friends and colleagues—I think we started out in a good way today. There seemed to be actual dialogue, and it would be nice to be able to get back to this. I think we would all like to get back to this. It's unfortunate that we've hit a stumbling block. I think everyone was hoping—I know everyone on our side was hoping—that if we suspended for half an hour or so today the conversations that needed to happen could happen. I think it's fair to ask if it's possible to see something in writing. I just think that's a fair and decent way to go forward.

This committee has done good work together. Daniel, you said earlier that there have been disagreements and there always will be. However, the work we did on having an election during a pandemic was good work. It was actually good work. We made Canadians—their health and safety, and the health and safety of everyone—paramount.

I know my colleague Mr. Lauzon would like to comment. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Lauzon.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Ms. Vecchio, for your very apt comments. Our decisions are indeed made as a multipartite committee, but we have responsibilities as the government.

There's nothing unusual in the course of negotiations to request a written statement so that there is something concrete on the table. Of course, in a five-minute meeting, we would not be able to thoroughly debate the matter raised by Mr. Blaikie. However, we were able to agree that we needed to continue to debate the amendment put forward by Mr. Turnbull. Through this amendment, we've put a little water in our wine by agreeing that the Deputy Prime Minister could come and represent the government.

We know that there's a disparity between what you are requesting and what we proposed. That's why we would like to continue to debate it..

As I was saying a few weeks ago, we sincerely believe that the presence of the Prime Minister is not justified in the context of the prorogation for all of the reasons we mentioned in our comments. There is no need to repeat them.

That in fact is what Ms. Duncan is trying to do, by clearly demonstrating why we have enough work in hand to move forward on things like Bill C-19 and other extremely important issues.

That's why we are insisting on having something in writing so that we can compare your requirements to ours. That's why we're going to continue to debate Mr. Turnbull's amendment, for as long as is required. We believe that it's extremely appropriate to continue.

● (68550)

[English]

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

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie, go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: To be perfectly honest, it's hard for me to get beyond two possible interpretations of what's happening here.

By insisting on the idea that they want a written proposal, which is something that we've agreed to as an opposition.... We're already trying to negotiate some time in the next 48 hours for us to meet the government's demand that we would propose something in writing. Either the government is being deliberately misleading, which would be unfortunate, about the fact that we're somehow denying that we would make an effort to put something in writing or they don't realize how toxic what they're doing right now is. What we've said is that we will, as an act of good faith, meet to discuss in the very way that members on the government side have asked us to do. We're already undertaking to do that by making those arrangements through our offices even as we speak. We've committed to that.

As a reciprocal sign of good faith, we ask that the government not even itself recognize that this proposal towards a compromise, which Mr. Turnbull put forward and that we've been debating for a very long time, is dead in the water. We don't ask that they say it's a bad idea. We just ask that they allow us to have a vote on it so that when we come back for the following meeting, the slate is clear.

They give up nothing in terms of whatever it is they're doing, whether they're protecting the Prime Minister from appearing at committee—I hope not, because I think he belongs here properly in a study of prorogation, and we can disagree about that—or whether it's protecting the government more widely on questions of the WE Charity scandal. Whatever it is they've been doing here, and they've been doing it for a long time, they give up nothing by having a vote on the amendment, because we'll suspend the meeting and we'll come back and we'll still be on the main motion. They don't surrender their own right to move another amendment, or if a Conservative or a Bloc or a New Democrat moves an amendment on Thursday, they haven't given up their right to move a subamendment to that. There are all sorts of possible ways to proceed. What we're asking for is a minimum show of good faith in a recognition that this particular proposal in Mr. Turnbull's amendment isn't going to be the one that gets us beyond a compromise.

We've already done the good faith thing. We've already undertaken, as three different political parties on the opposing bench, to get together in the next 48 hours and try our best to produce something in writing that the government folks can look at.

When we ask for a small gesture of good faith, the answer we get, after you've had some time off the record to talk about it, is.... The word I have for that, that would be used on a job site, is not appropriate in a parliamentary context, but I'll tell you, the message is received.

I think if we want to get to a point where we can start with a clean slate on Thursday, and have the best possible proposal that three different political parties can bring together jointly, it's important to decide on the issue of the amendment today. If we can't get that minimum act of good faith, I think it's pretty presumptuous of the government to say, "Well, we want something in writing and we want this and we want that." That's fine, if we're working in good faith towards a solution. All we're asking is for what I think is a pretty bare minimum sign of good faith from the government side that we would at least dispense with this amendment, and then we'll get to the work of proposing something new.

The government wants to have its cake and eat it too. They want to keep their own proposal, which has had more than its fair share of time at this committee by now. Do you want to talk about how much time we're giving to different solutions? Mr. Turnbull's amendment has been on the table for weeks. We've debated it, if you can call it a debate, for hours and hours. All we're asking is that we put that one away with a vote, and who knows? Maybe it will go the government's way. It's not likely, but who knows? We can't know until we have the vote.

We're just asking to have the vote on it so that we can start talking about a new potential solution on Thursday—that's it. I don't think you're going to find.... I'm going to find it hard to muster the goodwill to talk earnestly about a solution that we could propose to the government if they can't get it together to at least allow us to have the vote on an amendment after tens of hours of debate on it.

I really think this is poisoning the well. I hope it's only happening because people on the government side don't realize what they're doing. Perhaps if they take another moment to reflect they will realize that they are making it impossible to come to a solution if they carry on in this vein, and change their minds.

• (68555)

Otherwise I will be forced to accept the other interpretation, which is that this is deliberate and that they would rather keep pissing away the time of the procedure and House affairs committee, as has been happening for a long time, but then that's on them. That's on them, because what's being asked for here would not cause a big political loss. It doesn't jeopardize the Prime Minister. It doesn't bring him to this committee. It just clears the air for Thursday so that the opposition parties can do in good faith what they were asked to do by the government and bring forward a proposal which the government will be at liberty to accept or not as it sees fit. At least then we could spend our time debating something new. We're not going to get there if this amendment is still on the table at the end of our meeting time today.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: On this point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie, for your comments.

[Translation]

I'd like to address two things from your comments, Mr. Blaikie.

Firstly, you said several times that this amendment is dead in the water. You don't believe that the amendment is appropriate or valid, and that it is dead in the water. However, nothing leads us today to believe that Mr. Turnbull's amendment is dead, or that it is not valid.

I respect what you are saying, but we also need to respect the government's position, whether it is a minority or majority government. The government would like to conduct this study, but we disagree entirely with the idea of having the Prime Minister appear, and that's what we are debating at the moment.

As for the second thing from your comments I would like to address, which mainly concerns the technical aspects of the negotiations, I'd say that what we are asking for is not really impossible.

I was not here for the first 50 minutes of the meeting, but you said that you had nevertheless had a good debate over the fact that we could obtain consensus on a new proposal that the opposition might present Thursday.

There's nothing dramatic about requesting this motion in writing to continue discussions and possibly consider the new motion or proposal that might be made to this committee.

Nevertheless, as we are speaking today, given the two points I've just raised, what we really want is Mr. Turnbull's amendment. It's not dead in the water and we don't need to move on to other matters. That's your opinion, but it doesn't reflect our discussions.

We said that we were prepared to listen and come up with other proposals. I heard about a few of the discussions from the first 50 minutes of the committee meeting and that there were even some recommendations. Could we not simply put them in writing? It's no big deal. We could then continue discussions and see where everything stands on Thursday.

For now, Ms. Duncan has the floor. In view of all the respect we have for one another on this committee, Ms. Duncan could continue to explain why we should move forward and adopt Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

• (68600)

[English]

The Chair: Madam Normandin.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I'm going to take a few minutes to comment on this point of order.

You haven't seen me yet this morning, but I was watching on ParlVU. When Mr. Therrien told me that something might be happening on the committee, I said to myself that I should go and listen to the discussions. To be honest, almost nothing has happened for two months. While listening to the discussions, I thought that something constructive might happen to get us out of the deadlock we were in. Then the obstruction started again and I became less focused on the conversation.

I joined the meeting at 1 p.m. when Mr. Therrien was no longer available. Had I not been there this morning, everything I heard from 1 p.m. on would have given me the impression not only that the discussion had stalled, but that it had even regressed. If I don't comment on the positive aspects of this morning's discussion, it's because I find that the Liberals are asking us to present a written motion for the simple purpose of asking us to present a written motion. They've said they might not even look at it, because the only thing they are interested in is the amendment that we are debating, and which they are systematically obstructing.

We showed that we were receptive and put some concrete proposals forward. If the Liberals are asking us to present a written motion without showing any interest in it, then I find that insulting. I hope that all the committee members want to achieve something constructive. However, that will require more than simply asking us to present a motion in writing.

The Liberals will have to show that they're acting in good faith. Everything that I saw from 1 p.m. on was a step backwards, as the systematic obstruction continued, so consistently that we were getting used to it. That's how I see the situation after having heard a portion of the discussions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Normandin.

Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On the same point of order, thank you very much, Christine, for noting.

Thank you very much, Daniel. I really do appreciate it.

Also, Stéphane, I really do appreciate your words. I do know that you've been in and out of committee, but you have done this as well.

I think we are all getting to the point where we are wondering where our timeline is. This morning the reason this conversation started was that we know that we have an important piece of legislation that was rushed through Parliament just the other day, to be honest. It was rushed through Parliament, and it will be on our doorstep tomorrow because we'll be voting on it today. I look at the fact that we know this is coming, so today what is the plan? What are we going to be doing? As of Thursday, we will have another piece that is being added to our agenda, that we need to start looking forward on.

Are we going to continue with Bill C-19? Are we going to do our estimates? What are we going to be doing? I just see that the last 40 hours has truly been spent on that and, honestly, I can tell you my intention was to try to open up a pathway so that we could look at Bill C-19. I know there is a lot of pressure to look at Bill C-19, so I'm asking for the government to come up with a way for us to look at Bill C-19. All that's happened today is that all of the good-faith bargaining that was done this morning is going to be lost, because when we come back on Thursday, we're going to be told, "Here is your written amendment." Then will we be told that it's not good enough and we're going to continue?

Maybe those are some of the things, because we don't know. If our amendment is not good enough, that means we're going to continue with Ryan's or we'll accept this amendment but we'll continue to filibuster.

There are so many unknowns here, and I think logically we need to look at what the priorities of this committee are. We need to get to Bill C-19. If we have the opportunity to look at estimates, we should be looking at estimates, but ultimately we're listening to these speeches on this amendment just to waste time.

I really appreciate Stéphane and his comments, but when the majority of committee members have said outright that they will not be supporting it, we are beating a dead horse, and every person in this committee today knows that. This is a dead horse, and it's extremely unfortunate.

Let's get back to doing some work. Daniel has already indicated that we are working on this, and we really are. We really are working on this. I would really like to see some movement from the Liberal members rather than their just reading prorogation speeches into the record on Tuesdays and Thursdays every week as they have been doing for the last three months.

Thank you.

• (68605)

The Chair: Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: First of all, I want to thank everyone for their candid comments today and for being honest. We should have been doing this probably several weeks ago.

I do have to say, though, that I really believe that we all came into this conversation this morning in good faith.

Karen, you came forward and said, what's the plan for today. We need to come to a compromise. We need to get somewhere. We need to get to a vote.

To say that nothing was brought forward is a bit unfair, because after that was brought forward, from there we spoke about whether a written response would suffice. From there, there was a bit of conversation about that. From there, the issue about perhaps the opposition members coming up with exactly what they're looking for was discussed as well.

We have to make it very clear. We had a discussion at the beginning of the meeting. I think it was a good discussion, a robust discussion and an honest discussion, but let's be frank. There was never a decision that was made and we just continued on with the course of business.

I need to be clear. I know for myself and I know many of my colleagues want to negotiate in good faith. We want to find a path forward here, and to your point, we have a lot of really important work that is waiting for us.

To say that there was a decision that had been made by the end of the meeting, no decision had been made. We talked about it. We discussed it, but we didn't come up with a consensus.

I feel compelled to say that. At the end of the day, to come up with something on paper and then from there to vote on it next week, I don't know really what is the issue with this short delay in order to allow us to properly reflect on what's been brought forward. I just don't understand why that is so difficult. Maybe I'm missing something, but I felt I had to share that.

The Chair: Is there anyone else on the same point of order?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm not sure what she's referring to, the delay on what, specifically?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: The point is that you want the vote to be absolutely today. I don't know why it has to be today before the end of the meeting. Why can't it be next meeting once the three opposition committee groups get together and decide exactly what it is that you want? That's it.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: What I'm looking for is perhaps you guys can give us an agenda or a plan on what you see us doing.

Tomorrow we will be meeting because we all are on board to meet. Every single member of the opposition wants to get this over with as well. We will be having a meeting. We will be providing some intel.

Now what happens? We've provided you intel and what is the Liberal government going to do now in committee? That is my greatest concern. We are working in good faith as well and, absolutely, I have said three times now that Bill C-19 will be at our doorstep as of Monday. You and I both know how long it takes to get legislation through. It will come here. Then it will go back to the House, and then it will go to the Senate.

Let's not kid ourselves. We will probably be going to the polls in October 2021. We have five full sitting weeks after next week. That means our piece of legislation needs to get done in committee with the witnesses. Then it will need to go back to the House, and then it will need to go to the Senate.

The more this is delayed, the more we won't have our legislation in case of a pandemic election in place, and I would actually say it has a lot to do with the continuation of the filibuster. We would probably be able to get to a bill if we had good faith also in the Liberal members knowing that we could get both things done. Right now, we have an either-or situation. We can either get the report done or we can get Bill C-19 done.

We need to get both done, so we need to find a way of doing that. Those are some of my concerns. Perhaps it's just because I really

believe in saying, what is our target? Our target is that we have legislation passed and ready. I do not want to see a single voter have a problem when they go to the polls during a pandemic election if one gets called. We need to ensure that voters are safe, just as Dr. Duncan illustrated in her comments, throughout that period of time.

The option is to get the work done to ensure that Canadians are able to vote. Let's ensure that the committee is actually doing its job. Stop the filibustering and let's get our work done. For me, it's where I'd like to see all of us work together to get these things done. We know that we have a deadline. How are we going to get both the report done with the witnesses as requested, and how are we going to get Bill C-19 back to the House of Commons for third reading?

● (68610)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'd be happy to add to that point, Madam Chair, if I could be permitted.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I think the issue here is this. We're trying to conduce toward some kind of solution. We clearly don't agree on everything. I mean, if you look at the position of the Conservative Party and the Bloc on the time allocation vote, for instance, on Bill C-19 yesterday, it was different from the NDP vote. We've been willing to work with the government to try to get it to committee, because that's something that we think is really important to get under way.

The government has casually asked three different political parties with three different views, including on some of the business that either is before or will be coming before this committee.... That's a fair bit of work. There's no guarantee of success. It's something that we're prepared to do if the government is open to new solutions. But they make that request and then they come back to the table and say their preferred solution is their solution: It's the one on the table.

Monsieur Lauzon disputes the idea that this proposal is dead in the water. That's fine. There's a way to decide that. There's a way to figure that out. It's to have a vote. That's how you figure out what has majority support or not. If the idea is to find some kind of consensus on a path forward, I can tell you that it ain't a consensus. It's going to get decided on a majority basis. The only way to know if it has majority support or not is to have a vote.

In terms of what we're asking for, we've signalled a willingness to reassess and look at things, and to do that in a way that crosses party lines, which is not always an easy thing to navigate, particularly when there may be differences of opinion on Bill C-19 when it comes to committee. There are different political agendas at play in respect of that bill and the wider question, but that's not worth doing if the government isn't open to another solution. What you're signalling, by insisting on the amendment that we've been debating for months, is that you're not really open to it—unless it's something you like behind closed doors. What you want is a written statement jointly by three different political parties with very different interests to be considered behind closed doors. Then you'll decide whether you like it or not. It may never grace the committee floor.

I'm sorry, but that's not coming at a negotiation as equals. It is not going to succeed. I think it's a waste of my time to try to work with two other political parties to come up with a proposal that might satisfy a third, and not even have the space at the committee table to deal with it, because we can't get a vote to resolve a question that's been open for months. If the government isn't prepared to offer a vote on its own amendment as a sign of good faith towards getting toward some kind of compromise, it ain't worth doing the work on our side. It's not worth the time. It's not worth the time. If the government wants to show us on the opposition side that it's worth our time to do the hard work that we'll have to do amongst ourselves to hammer out some kind of common proposal forward, then they need to show that they're willing to move on from this amendment one way or another.

Monsieur Lauzon says maybe it's not dead in the water. I say let's find out. The way to do that is to have the vote. If the government would at least allow the committee to decide the question, then we would know that it's worth doing the work to find another alternative. What we're hearing right now after all of this, after the conversation earlier this morning, after the five-minute recess, is that the government's preference is to continue to talk this out for as long as they possibly can, without giving an inch, unless the three opposition parties together pitch something behind closed doors that they happen to like.

Well, I'm sorry, but that's not a real negotiation. That's not a sign of good faith. I'm not somebody's puppet who's going to play along like a moron. Unless I actually get a sign from the other side that it's worth my time, I have other things to work on, frankly. I have people I'm trying to get back to in my constituency. I have meetings that I would like to hold. I'm trying to fit that all in while I sit on three different committees, some of which are going quite a bit better than this one, I might add.

I'm not going to invest the time to try to get the government out of its own problem if they can't even allow us just to have a vote on the very proposal they put forward. It's not like we haven't given it a lot of time. How much more time do they think it will take, in the context of today's conversation, before anyone on the opposition side decides it would be a good idea to back this motion?

I think we're ready for the vote, Madam Chair. As a sign, a minimal sign, of good faith, let's have that vote. Then we can be solutions-oriented. As long as the government is going to try to have its

cake and eat it too on this committee, that is not going to be a way forward. I guarantee it.

• (68615)

So what are we doing here? Are we working on a path forward or are we digging in? I can dig in with the best of them. I'm pretty tempted right now. Are we going to let this moment pass us by, or are we going to get dug in?

The Chair: Dr. Duncan, go ahead.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Chair, I'm going to try to bring us back to this morning.

Ms. Petipas Taylor came in good faith. I know Ms. Vecchio is coming in good faith. I really feel our colleagues, all of us, are trying to find a way through this. I don't think the language helps at the moment. I think we need to try to come together, to come back and find that feeling that there is a way through.

Daniel, I hear what you're saying. I think that lines have been drawn. We really need to get back to what we felt this morning and see what's possible. I'm hearing from Karen and Daniel—I'm Kirsty—that people are meeting, and we're trying to see if we can move past this.

I look across the screen. I see my colleagues and friends. Some of you I've known a very long time. I'm wondering if we can lower the temperature, see if we can talk this through, and see if we can get a proposal that all of us can agree to, dear colleagues, dear friends.

The Chair: Emmanuella, go ahead.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Madam Chair, I know that Mr. Blaikie is frustrated with what's going on. I understand. I don't think that working with other parties is ever a waste of time. That's what all parliamentarians should strive to do, to work together for the best outcome for Canadians.

Working alongside our colleagues from other parties is sometimes a way forward, to get the job done in a positive way that benefits everybody. For the amount of time that we've spent debating the amendment that's on the floor—I wasn't here during that time—and previously, on the original motion by Ms. Vecchio, I think it's a normal request to see something in writing. I don't think it would take up a lot of time.

It's something you guys could probably do while we're taking part in this debate. I don't see a lot of additional time being had, especially if you guys claim to be on the same page. If that is the case, I don't see how bringing forward a potential solution next week would be problematic.

The Chair: I think we've exhausted the speakers on that point as far as I'm aware.

Mr. Lauzon, go ahead.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I want to add something to Dr. Duncan's comments.

[Translation]

I'm speaking to the whole committee, but more specifically Mr. Blaikie. I didn't get into politics to do what we are doing now.

● (68620)

[English]

It's also a waste of time on my side, because we have more to do.

[Translation]

You know, Mr. Blaikie, in politics, we often do our best. What's happening today is how committees have sometimes always operated. It's been done by your party, the Conservative Party and others.

In politics, we don't always accomplish what we would like. I understand you, I understand your frustration, and your desire to do more more. Bill C-19 is before us, and it's extremely important for us, for you and for others. As Ms. Duncan said, despite all the frustrations and everything that happens in committee, we can feel the pressure building hour after hour. We have an opportunity to step back and focus our energies on Bill C-19.

I consider Bill C-19 to be an opportunity to set aside what we are experiencing right now. I know that we won't reach consensus. You've already stated your point of view, Mr. Blaikie, and have said that you would no longer join the opposition if we were to ask for something in writing by Thursday.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have just a quick clarification. It's not if you ask for a written proposal that I wouldn't think it was worth it. It's the fact that you insist on not having a vote on the amendment and clearing the deck so that a new proposal could be put forward on Thursday. It's not the fact of asking for a written proposal that I find objectionable. It's the fact that you won't let us have a vote on the proposal that's been on the table for months to decide that question and clear the air so that we can move on to a new solution. That's what I find objectionable.

I'm quite happy to work with the other parties to put something in writing. I've done that many times in this Parliament. I've sometimes done it with other opposition parties. I've sometimes worked with your government. In fact, before the pandemic struck, I worked with Chrystia Freeland in order to amend the trade policy for the country. That was a process that involved lots of things in writing between parties. I'm very happy to do that kind of work.

What I want to know is whether there's good faith on the other side, and I want more than words. We've had a lot of words for the last month. What I want is an action, a signal, that there's good faith. That signal is letting there be a vote to let the committee pronounce on the amendment that's on the floor. That would be a sign of good faith that would show me that the work with the other parties is worth it and it's not just the government making busy work for their political opponents while reserving the right to tell us to get lost if it doesn't like the outcome. That's what I'm talking about.

I just want to be clear so that you're responding to the right thing.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I understand, Mr. Blaikie, but it goes both ways. That's what they call negotiation, and that's what we're doing right now. It is important for us to go forward with Bill C-19.

[Translation]

Today, you are proposing that we agree on a solution, and that's what we've always wanted. We are asking you to present something in writing on Thursday, and that would perhaps enable you to find an acceptable solution. Perhaps we will be able to simply vote on it and introduce a new motion so that we can end this study.

We need to be honest in all this. Right now, we have a pandemic, Bill C-19, and all the other issues under consideration. We do indeed need to think about the post-pandemic period, even though the pandemic is not over. Everybody knows this. We all know that proration is no longer an issue, and Mr. Blaikie knows it too. We believe that it's time to put it behind us.

No, it's not dead in the water. We absolutely want to move forward, like the other members of the committee. We want to move on to something else.

What's important is that there were negotiations and progress today. As Ms. Duncan said, we had some good discussions. We are not being reluctant and we don't want to be in a worse position than we were at the outset. We made progress today, whether you wanted us to or not, because we began to discuss solutions. Collective negotiations between a party and a government can go on for years. We are trying to negotiate quickly with respect to an amendment on Ms. Vecchio's original motion, but we can't agree on it. That's what negotiations are. Like it or not, when people can't agree on a point, they continue to negotiate and debate.

We are simply exercising our right to debate an amendment that we know you oppose. It's not fair to say that in order to know the outcome, a vote is required, because we already know the outcome. We want to demonstrate why the Prime Minister should not appear before this committee to discuss his decision to prorogue Parliament. The primary goal of this request is not to discuss prorogation, but to establish links between the Prime Minister and the WE Charity. This question has been addressed by other committees and we're not going to change our minds.

By asking you to present something in writing for Thursday, I believe we are showing that we are perfectly willing to collaborate, contrary to what you're saying.

● (68625)

[English]

We're in good faith, and we want to get work done, so let's do it together like a team.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'd like to be clear on something, Madam Chair.

The government is willing to jeopardize trying to move forward on this for the right to continue to filibuster on their amendment, as opposed to the right to filibuster on the main motion, which from a practical point of view has no difference that I can identify. I'd be very happy if someone from the Liberal government could provide a compelling explanation as to why, from the point of view of not hearing more about WE Charity and not hearing from the Prime Minister at committee—it is very clear that's not something they want—it matters whether they filibuster on the amendment or whether they filibuster on the main motion.

What's being asked for is what I think is a small act of good faith to dispense with the amendment, to clear the way towards some other possible solution. They're not willing to do that, so there has to be a reason why it matters that they filibuster on the amendment as opposed to the main motion. I can't think of one. I don't see it. We're not asking them to give up any kind of material advantage. We're asking for a symbol of openness towards a proposal that isn't the amendment that we've been debating now for, I couldn't tell you how many hours. It's a lot. It's more than I've debated just about any other motion in my parliamentary life so far. It's a lot.

I don't what rides on that, except for me I know what rides on that. I know that's an important symbol of the government's actual openness to consider a new way forward, so presumably there's a good reason why they're not willing to offer that up.

Mr. Lauzon likes to say it's a negotiation. Yes, it is. What we're saying is that as an act of good faith we're willing to convene a meeting between three different political parties to try to come up with a written proposal by Thursday that the government may find pleasing or may not. In exchange we're asking that they be willing to filibuster on the main motion instead of the amendment. If they're not prepared to do something even that insignificant from a practical point of view as a sign of good faith, then the good faith is not there, because the increment that you would need to measure that minuscule amount of good faith is one that is beyond my capacity. I don't have a tool to measure things that small.

That is what's at issue. I just want everybody to understand that before we leave here today. If there isn't a written proposal for Thursday while the amendment stands on the committee table, I want everybody who might be listening to understand why. It's because we couldn't get a basic minimum act of good faith from the government side, who apparently are more interested in filibustering on an amendment than getting towards a solution, in particular when we have important items coming up.

I'm particularly concerned about Bill C-19. There are lots of things we could talk about. We have over the last 30 or 40 hours talked about many things that we might talk about if we weren't talking about this, but Bill C-19 clearly is very important. I voted with other New Democrats to expedite its passage to committee. I've heard government members say they think it's very important

that it be considered at committee. We're trying to clear a path. There is no path without dispensing with this amendment.

Whether it's that this amendment passes, and Monsieur Lauzon himself has said there's no question even in his mind whether it would pass or not.... If this amendment isn't going to pass, then it has to be some other kind of amendment, right? If this isn't the amendment, it has to be another one, or something else, like voting down the motion, having another proposal, whatever. But if this ain't gonna be it—and Monsieur Lauzon just said as much, that he knows it's not going to pass, which is why he's avoiding the vote—then in order to move forward we have to get on to something else. We can only do that once we clear the table of the unsuccessful proposal that's there.

That's not a knock on Mr. Turnbull. It wasn't for him to come up with the solution ex nihilo out of his own mind and slap something down on the table that was going to suddenly wow everybody. That's not what we're doing here. That's why the three opposition parties are going to meet. I bet the first idea that gets uttered in tomorrow's meeting, if it happens, isn't going to be the one that gets accepted because that's not the way things work.

What I can't fathom is why the Liberals on this committee won't allow us to move on into a space where people can propose other solutions. That's what is happening here and I just want that to be crystal clear on the record before whatever's going to happen next happens.

• (68630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Seeing the time, I'm going to suspend until the next meeting.

Thank you.

[The meeting was suspended at 2:32 p.m., Tuesday, May 11.]

[The meeting resumed at 11 a.m., Thursday, May 13.]

• (73100)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

It is Thursday, May 13, 2021. We are resuming meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13, 2021.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. Therefore, members can attend either in person or virtually using the Zoom application.

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee. As always, this is just a reminder that no screenshots and no photos are permitted of the screen.

Just to verify, we don't have anyone in person. Is that correct, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk: That's right. No members are in the room.

The Chair: Everyone is attending virtually.

I would just remind you to select your interpretation channel. If you haven't already done so, choose gallery view. Remember to unmute your mike when you are speaking and mute your mike after you're done speaking.

We do have a speakers list from last time. I'm going to drop the people who aren't here. Ms. Lambropoulos is not here. She was second on the speakers list. Mr. Lauzon, who was fourth on the speakers list, is not here. That leaves us with Mr. Kelloway being first on the speakers list and Mr. Blaikie being second. That carries forward from the last meeting. Then, of course, we'll have whoever else wishes to speak.

We are still on Mr. Turnbull's amendment at this point. You can use the "raise hand" function in the toolbar if you wish to speak to that.

Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Madam Chair, I'd like to give my time to MP Turnbull, please.

The Chair: If you want to give up your time, the appropriate thing would be for me to go to the next speaker, and then Mr. Turnbull would be added to the bottom of the list.

Mr. Blaikie, you would be next.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, but I'm happy to be taken off the list for now.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Turnbull, go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's really great to be back on PROC today. Welcome, everybody. It's good to see you.

I know our last meeting was certainly a bit frustrating for people. I sensed that among many of the members. I'm hoping today we can have a very productive meeting that's focused on how we move forward.

I know, for me, I have quite a few desires and concerns about Bill C-19. I've been thinking about the importance of that. We've been engaged in an extended debate for quite some time, which really focuses on an issue that happened many months ago. From my perspective, it would be great if we could move on from that.

I know the opposition parties, despite some of the differences of opinion, were looking to propose something today. We had asked for that in writing. I know those conversations were likely being had between the last meeting and this meeting. Maybe we'll hear from them today as to what they would propose. I don't know if they're ready to do that today, but I certainly was hoping and optimistic and really looking forward to having an open discussion, with the hopes of moving beyond this moment, where I think we have a little bit of a deadlock in our conversation.

I just wanted to say that I'm really looking forward to, hopefully, hearing from opposition parties, if they're prepared for that, and would welcome any of those comments from my colleagues.

Thank you.

• (73105)

The Chair: We have Ms. Shanahan, and then Mr. Blaikie.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I'll be happy to cede my place to Mr. Blaikie.

The Chair: Sure. Sometimes it's helpful to hear from another party.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

What I think I can report is that, as requested by members of the government side, there has been some discussion among the MPs of the other three parties on the committee. We don't yet have a proposal in writing, as was asked for, but we are still committed to preparing one.

We had offered to try to come to a final proposal in time for today's meeting, provided that the way was clear, as of the end of the last meeting, with the amendment dispensed with one way or another. Of course we did not have that vote, which we take to mean we have a longer deadline in order to come to an agreement.

We had indicated that sometimes those talks do take time, and indeed they do. We will be happy to share what we have when we have it, but that time is not now. Of course, we always welcome a vote on the issues before the committee, but if that is not the desire of some members, we are prepared to continue hearing debate on Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

I don't know if there is anyone else who would like to speak to this, but I am glad to have the opportunity to speak further to Mr. Turnbull's amendment to the original motion. Indeed, I think it goes to the heart of our parliamentary process. I find it's really a privilege for me to be able to contribute to that debate.

[Translation]

I'm going to continue my comments in French.

As for Mr. Turnbull's amendment, to delete point (a) of the motion, on inviting the to the Prime Minister to appear, I fully agree with it.

As we know, there is a well-established tradition according to which the prime minister can rely on his entire team of ministers to represent him. My understanding is that the government House leader, Pablo Rodriguez, came to explain why there was prorogation in August, and it was perfectly appropriate for him to do so. That's the transparency principle, and I believe that's what our colleagues here are asking for. They want to understand the reasons for the prorogation.

However, Madam Chair, I believe that we were here together once before when my Liberal colleagues gave reasons for the prorogation. When Mr. Rodriguez came, it was not simply to answer a few questions; a report had already been tabled in the House on the reasons for the prorogation.

The first reason for the prorogation was the pandemic. It's the most significant event in this century. If our opposition colleagues do not want to accept the fact that proroguing Parliament was essential to give the government the opportunity to completely alter its approach and its priorities, then I can't really think of a better reason for prorogation to suggest to the committee, other perhaps than a war.

I understand those who would like the Prime Minister to appear before this committee and request that he do so. However, he gave evidence before the Standing Committee on Finance last year. I think that all the committees would like to have the Prime Minister appear because it's good publicity for them. However, it runs counter to our parliamentary system, which makes only one person responsible for the government's decisions. The entire cabinet is responsible. The Prime Minister is the leader of the cabinet.

When Mr. Rodriguez appeared before this committee, he said that it was obvious that the environment last summer was completely different from the context in which we found ourselves in 2019 following the elections.

As the Prime Minister himself said publicly, and completely transparently, when announcing the prorogation in August, it was a decisive moment for Canada. Not only would we have to deal with the crisis, but also plan for the position we would be in after the crisis. Putting ideas forward is one thing, but it's also important to have a plan for providing guidance to Canadians in the future.

I think there are others who would like to speak, and I will stop now to give them an opportunity to do so.

• (73115)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Shanahan. I don't see any hands up, and I wasn't expecting you to end your speech there, so I'm caught a little off guard.

Since I don't see any hands up, I take it that the will of the committee is to move to a vote on the amendment.

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

I guess that was an expected outcome, so that is that.

We are back to the motion.

Mr. Turnbull, do you have something to say?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, on the main motion, if I may.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I'm really sorry that my colleagues didn't support my amendment, which I thought was an attempt to be reasonable and appease some of my colleagues from across the aisle, but obviously that didn't carry.

I still have quite a few concerns with the original motion. It focuses on an extraordinarily burdensome production of documents. It has all kinds of other things in it that are pretty significant issues that I take issue with and would like to express my views on.

Also, we know that opposition parties seem to be focused on prorogation and trying to link it to the WE Charity. I will just note that a recent media report came out on the ethics commissioner's investigation of this, which has said that the Prime Minister was not in a conflict of interest. Therefore, it sort of goes to the heart of what our members have been saying for quite some time, which was that prorogation—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I just want to ensure when we talk about these things that we are not misleading anybody, because the report indicated one thing. It did find the former minister of finance in breach of ethics on three counts.

I just want to ensure that as Mr. Turnbull is talking about this report he does not mislead the committee and ensures that. Yes, the Prime Minister may have been waived on some of these things, but the former finance minister was found in breach of ethics on three counts.

The Chair: Okay. You can put your hand up, Ms. Vecchio, if you want to speak to that more afterwards, but that is a point of debate.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Are we allowed to mislead, though? I guess that's my question. It's misleading.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull can explain in which part you may feel he was misleading, but I think he's speaking to the PM. You're free to also speak to this issue. I'm sure it will give everyone lots of material on that point, if you wish.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I don't take offence, Madam Chair. I don't take offence because I would never mislead anyone intentionally or even unintentionally. Obviously, I'm not perfect, but I'm really reporting what the media is reporting, which is that the Prime Minister has been cleared of any conflict of interest, which is what I just read.

If you want me to refer you to the article in the media, I'm sure you could look it up yourself, Ms. Vecchio. I'm just reporting to the committee what I've just heard. This is breaking news, and it's good news. It also, I think, speaks to the heart of what we've been debating for quite some time: that opposition parties have been really adamant about sticking to wanting to hear from the Prime Minister on prorogation. Really, from my perspective anyway, it seems like that really centres on an argument that somehow prorogation was used to cover up something nefarious, so I think this is relevant.

What I've been trying to say all along is that we've tabled a report for the first time ever that gives a rationale for prorogation, and this is a decent rationale. It really makes sense. It's supported by evidence. The timing was right. We could quibble about whether the timing could have been better, but I really feel that the timing was right. It did give the government an opportunity to reset, to re-evaluate and to essentially move forward in a way that was more relevant to the changing context within a global pandemic. That, to me, seems very rational.

We've been staring in the rear-view mirror, looking at prorogation and studying that, talking about that for quite some time. I really feel at this point—and many of the members on our side have said this in the past—that we really have important business before us. We just had Bill C-19 referred to us from the House. I know this was voted on. I think it wasn't quite a unanimous vote, but it was very close to it. I think there was only one member who voted nay on that bill.

I think we have important work to do that really, to me, is pressing, given the fact that opposition parties have numerous times over the last month or two voted that they don't have confidence in our government, and this could trigger an election.

I think that the health and safety of Canadians within a general election should be our highest priority right now. I really think that Bill C-19 deserves our attention. It is within our mandate as a committee to look at anything to do with the election of members of Parliament. I really think that it would serve the interests of Canadians. I really feel that leadership in government should always be focused on the interests of Canadians, especially during a global pandemic when opposition parties seem to be trying to take down the government or at least are threatening to do so from time to time. To me, this could very well put our democratic process at risk. Canadians' ability to participate in a fair and democratic process could be jeopardized to some degree. By that, I mean if the Chief Electoral Officer doesn't have the powers that are within Bill C-19, which are adaptation powers. There are several, I think, around long-term care. We've all expressed concerns, and we did some great work on studying this. However, I think we need to move on from this particular debate and get into the work on Bill C-19.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we would.... Ms. Vecchio's motion would still be on the table to return to.

• (73120)

Given all this rationale that I think is quite substantial in my view, I move that the committee proceed to study Bill C-19.

• (73125)

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, can you help us with that?

The Clerk: Yes, I can, Madam Chair.

The Chair: In case everyone's wondering, we are voting on the motion to move to Bill C-19. Bill C-19 has already been referred to our committee. An email was circulated to all members. I want to verify that you got that email and all of the information that was contained within it. There were a lot of links on the bill and material for all of you.

At this point, we would be voting to leave Ms. Vecchio's motion as is. It would still remain there. We'd be moving to a discussion on Bill C-19.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

We're back on Ms. Vecchio's motion.

We have a speakers list at this point. I have Mr. Blaikie, Mr. Turnbull and Ms. Shanahan.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, those dilatory motions are non-debatable, I know, but I did just want to say that I do think it's

important that we find a resolution to the impasse that we have gotten into over Ms. Vecchio's motion before moving on. I do think that if the Prime Minister's own proposal for how to try to curb political abuses of prorogation is going to work, this committee has to get it right on the first go. We're the ones setting the precedent for how that mechanism works.

I've said before that I don't think it's the ideal mechanism. I think that a debate and vote in Parliament on prorogation is actually the best way to try to avoid political abuses of prorogation. However, this is what's currently on offer, and I am committed to trying to make it work as best as possible.

I don't think that a situation where PROC doesn't report back to the House is a great situation to be in. I do think we need to try to solve this impasse rather than simply move on, so that the record shows some kind of path forward for how to make this a meaningful mechanism rather than just a platitude that was written into the Standing Orders and that essentially leaves nothing unchanged.

In Mr. Turnbull's previous remarks, what came out for me very clearly was that the request for documents in Ms. Vecchio's motion is a sticking point for Liberal members of the committee. That's helpful information that may inform some other discussions that are taking place.

What I also heard, however, was an emphasis on the idea that somehow the desire to have the Prime Minister appear is just about the WE Charity scandal. It is also about the WE Charity scandal, but it's clearly.... We heard in testimony from people who believe there is a link between the political circumstances of the WE Charity scandal, and if not the ultimate decision to prorogue, which may have been in the works anyway, although we haven't seen any evidence of that.... I believe that when the government House leader was here and was asked when the government began asking questions about what a prorogation would look like and how far in advance of Bill Morneau's resignation did that take place, the answer was a matter of days, not a matter of weeks or months. It does show there is a connection of the timing there.

I won't belabour that point. What I'll say is that the real importance of having the Prime Minister come to this study, which is quite different from appearing on just about anything else, is that the Prime Minister alone is the decision-maker in respect of prorogation.

This isn't about how another minister made a decision within the department that it's their job to defend. It isn't even about a decision around the cabinet table. Ultimately, prorogation is a decision of the Prime Minister. We've heard that very clearly. In fact, Liberals on this committee have used that fact more to state a defence of the Prime Minister by saying that at the end of the day, it's up to him, and a prime minister doesn't even need to give a reason. We've heard that verbatim out of the mouths of Liberals at this committee. Fair enough. That's why it makes sense to hear from the Prime Minister.

If we want to take the emphasis off WE Charity—it doesn't go away because it is part of the story—and put it on prorogation, which is what the study is about.... Mr. Turnbull earlier said the opposition seems very focused on the question of prorogation. Indeed we are, because we're very focused on the topic of our study. I know that some Liberal members have kind of lost their way on relevance, but we are actually studying prorogation, so we are actually interested in prorogation, and we listen to the testimony, taking note of the fact that the Prime Minister is the decision-maker.

This study calls for the Prime Minister's presence in a very unique way that is not true in the general way that Ms. Shanahan was referring to when governments make decisions as a collective and ministers are there to represent not just their department and their own decision-making but the collective decision-making of government. For decisions around prorogation and also about dissolution, which is also an important and relevant topic at the moment, as Mr. Turnbull highlighted in his own remarks about the possibility of an election, these are powers that rest with the Prime Minister alone, and that's why it's really important to have the Prime Minister here. It is very much about prorogation.

Yes, there will be questions about WE Charity. I'm sure there will also be questions from committee members about the circumstances of the pandemic and how that contributed to a decision. The advantage of having the Prime Minister here is to get to know the mind of the decision-maker, because we all have our feelings about why prorogation happened, why it happened when it happened and why it lasted as long as it did.

• (73130)

The point of having the person at committee isn't the way we have an impartial jury at a trial. It's an accountability function. We test the decision-maker by asking questions and hearing their answers. The benefit of that isn't just for the parliamentarians at the committee.

Mr. Scott Simms: Madam Chair.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: The benefit of that is for the Canadians we represent—

The Chair: Is that—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: —who then have an opportunity to read or hear those arguments.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Blaikie, just a moment.

Do you have a technical difficulty, Mr. Simms, or is it a point of order?

Mr. Scott Simms: Well, that's an ongoing situation, since I'm in a rural location, but no, that's not my point.

Can I pull out the Simms protocol?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Absolutely, yes.

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm just looking for a point of clarification on an issue. I'll try to make this quick.

He mentioned that he has, and I know that he does have, on the Order Paper a motion regarding the procedures of dissolving Parliament. Is it also to deal with this issue on prorogation? I thought it was one and not the other. If it's both....

He did mention that he wants to bring this to the House, but I understand from what he just said that it's already in the House waiting to be debated. Is that correct?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I think you may be referring to a motion that I put on the Order Paper in respect of the confidence convention. That is very much about dissolution.

What I think is important here in the context of this study is that we report back on prorogation. While those powers aren't identical, they are similar in that they are both an instance where the Prime Minister has a unique prerogative. Technically, it's the prerogative of the Crown, but we all know that the Governor General only acts on the advice of the Prime Minister in this respect. It's a similar power that has very much to do with the efficacy of Parliament and the ability of Parliament to meet and the ability of Parliament to hold the government to account. The Prime Minister can dispense with that either by proroguing Parliament, as we saw late last year, or by dissolving Parliament altogether and trying to have a new Parliament.

I would say that the questions of prime ministerial judgment are similar with regard to how he exercises a certain power in relation to Parliament's capacity to meet, but they're not the same. I'd be very happy to have that study of the confidence convention and to see the committee make some recommendations in that regard as well. But what we can do right now, because it's before us, is the question of prorogation.

I just want to be clear that the interest in the Prime Minister isn't about the WE Charity in and of itself, as it stands alone. The interest in having the Prime Minister here is because he alone is the decision-maker in respect of prorogation, and we heard that. I believe the government House leader even said something to the effect in his testimony that you could have a debate about the timing, but at the end of the day those decisions are up to the Prime Minister. Well, yes, they are. That's why we should really have the Prime Minister here to have that opportunity to ask questions.

Asking questions is valuable, even if we think we already know the answer. Sometimes surprising things happen at committee. Sometimes you get a slightly different answer. Those things do matter. I don't think a written submission is an adequate substitution for that. I don't think it honours the tradition of parliamentary accountability, where decision-makers are subject to questioning. That's why I think there really is an important case for the Prime Minister to come.

I do hear that one of the sticking points for the other side is the request for the production of documents and having a lot of witnesses. That's an important thing for us to hear as we try to hammer out a way forward, looking towards our next meeting, where we're going to start with a clearer deck now that we've been able to have a vote on the amendment. We're taking in all this information. I certainly am. It will help inform discussions on how we move forward. It seems to me that everyone is anxious to move forward.

It's a question of who has the ability to break the logjam here. When we figure that out, we'll be looking to that person to show some leadership and get us beyond this impasse.

Thank you.

• (73135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I appreciate the remarks of my colleague Mr. Blaikie. As always, he's very insightful and obviously very learned about parliamentary rules and procedure.

I don't share some of the perspectives, I'm sorry to say, but I'd like to just make a bit of a plea here.

Mr. Blaikie, you've sort of said that it really is about almost the subjective mind of the Prime Minister that you're interested in questioning or somehow holding accountable. I get that. I get the preoccupation with the Prime Minister's state of mind. That's fine. I understand that's Mr. Blaikie's perspective and perhaps that's shared by some others on this committee.

I just want to be clear though that from my perspective—and this is my understanding—no government in history, no prime minister in the history of Canada who's used the prerogative to prorogue Parliament, which we know is quite a regular practice, has had to table a report that gives a rationale. Not only did our Prime Minister and the government in the last Parliament change the Standing Orders to require this but the Prime Minister and the government followed through with tabling a report. At no time have I really felt as though opposition parties have entertained the merits of that report.

I really believe that we have been very forthcoming, rational and transparent about the reasons why prorogation made sense and why the timing made sense. All of the themes and the data that was available and the consultations that took place all showed up in the throne speech and really demonstrated that the work of our government ultimately can lead back to what was gathered during that time. We lost one sitting day.

I will also say that, just from the perspective of being on this committee, we did not try to block in any way doing a study on this. We fully supported the original motion to do this study, so we did a study. We submitted witnesses, and again opposition parties all had the opportunity to submit their witness list. We undertook multiple meetings. We heard from the government House leader. We heard from other key officials, academics, procedural experts, historians, and the list goes on.

We did look at and hear from witnesses, and at this point it just really feels as though we're stuck, but we're stuck, in my view, not because the government hasn't been transparent and willing to be held accountable or entertain the thoughts, opinions, narratives and perspectives that are as diverse as members on this committee, but really, it seems, this is an attempt to push an agenda that the opposition parties have. It's not rational. It's not supported by the evidence or information. I've been arguing this for quite some time and I've done my absolute best to bring forward evidence, arguments and statistics, all that show that direct line and relationship between the timing, prorogation, resetting of the agenda and what was then worked on as a result of that, which shifted and changed as a result of reflecting, re-evaluating and resetting the agenda.

I just feel as though opposition parties have never once entertained that this might actually be the reason for prorogation, which is a very legitimate reason, and we heard that from academics and procedural experts. We heard it loud and clear. That is one of the main reasons that prime ministers and governments prorogue Parliament. It's completely legitimate.

• (73140)

At the moment in time that we're in, we know, having spent many months reflecting on the past, that we are in the middle of a global pandemic, the third wave of this pandemic. We know that opposition parties are pushing dangerously close to triggering an election, although they keep saying that we want an election. We're going to keep focusing on the health and safety of Canadians. I'm thinking that it feels like we're playing roulette or they're playing roulette with people's health and safety.

I think we really need to move on with the work of Bill C-19 to make sure.... We can come back to Ms. Vecchio's motion—fine. If the opposition parties want to continue on that, fine, but let's not hold up progress on immediately pressing legislation that impacts the health and safety of Canadians.

This is important work. If an election is triggered and our Chief Electoral Officer does not have those adaptation powers.... We know that with the ways of a pandemic, with different variants and with all kinds of factors that are related to this, people's health and safety are on the line. We really owe it to Canadians to protect our democratic institutions and to protect that process.

I move that the debate be now adjourned.

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

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I know that this is a dilatory motion, but when there are other members on the speaking list and we had wanted to adjourn the debate, I'm just looking for why we're going to a vote when we've been asking for this debate to end for the last two months.

The Chair: You were asking for a vote on the amendment previously.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It was the vote. Okay, got it. Thank you so much.

The Chair: I'll just let you know that it does not do away with your motion, Ms. Vecchio. Just like I mentioned before, your motion would still stand. It's just to move to a different topic of discussion.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

We are back on the same motion, Ms. Vecchio's motion. We have Ms. Shanahan next on the speaking list.

• (73145)

[Translation]

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

If I have understood correctly, we are returning to Ms. Vecchio's motion. I am happy about that because I'll be able to continue to explain my concerns with respect to point (a), about inviting the Prime Minister to appear before this committee. I don't think that it's at all necessary, particularly as people in my riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle have for months been speaking to me every day about other problems, and no one is asking me any questions about prorogation. On the contrary, people are happy that we have been focused entirely on the crisis since the beginning of the pandemic. They are also pleased about the new direction we have taken for the future and about our focus on delivering vaccines, which have now in fact been delivered.

We are very pleased with the progress that has been made in Quebec on the vaccination rate. As the premier said this week, we are expecting a single dose for everyone by the summer, which means that we will be able to consider organizing activities with families and friends in our communities. Needless to say, we will have to continue to comply with a number of health measures, but we will be much safer than we have been over the past months. Our goal, is to have given a second dose of vaccine to everyone who requests it by the fall. I am hoping that the vast majority of people will do so, and that we will be able to truly restart our economy.

It's precisely the August 2020 prorogation that enabled us to reboot the entire machinery of government. I recall that opposition MPs were worried because Parliament was not sitting as usual in the early days of the crisis. That was inevitable because we were in isolation. We were holding meetings, but not in accordance with the usual parliamentary procedures. We had to explain clearly to Canadians what our plan was for surviving, fighting and beating the pandemic.

Some of my colleagues who are members of this committee are more familiar than I am with the House Standing Orders and could explain to us how requiring that the government explain its reasons for prorogation could be considered innovative.

• (73150)

While we understand that the decision is solely the responsibility of the government, I would fully agree that it is reasonable for the government to explain its reasons for the prorogation.

I have the report in front of me. It's very clear. I don't think that a prorogation had been planned for the first term. Nobody could have anticipated the pandemic. However, changes to Parliament's standing orders allowed a report explaining the reasons for the prorogation to be written.

I think that it's a good idea because it never hurts to learn more and it's always possible to explain our system more clearly to people. We are very often influenced by what happens elsewhere, particularly in the United States, and we are not always aware of our own parliamentary traditions.

I think that everyone will have understood that the December 2019 throne speech was not at all applicable during a pandemic. The priorities in the 2019 throne speech were mainly economic investments, in addition to environmental expenditures and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

While it's true that these aspects of the throne speech were important, the priority quickly became fighting COVID-19. I'll speak later about what our priority is now.

The throne speech that was delivered after the prorogation stated clearly that in spite of our convictions and our fundamental principles, when the house is on fire, it's not the time to redecorate do housecleaning. The important thing is to put out the fire.

The 36-page report gives details about all the reasons why Parliament was prorogued. That had never happened before. I may be wrong, and if so feel free to correct me, but prior to the changes made to the standing orders, the Prime Minister made the decision and did not have to justify it or explain it.

The Prime Minister said:

[English]

The Prime Minister said:

We are proroguing Parliament to bring it back on exactly the same week it was supposed to come back anyway and force a confidence vote.

• (73155)

[Translation]

In a crisis, it's important for all members of Parliament to indicate whether or not the government has their confidence.

[English]

The Prime Minister continued:

We are taking a moment to recognize that the throne speech we delivered eight months ago had no mention of COVID-19, had no conception of the reality we find ourselves in right now. We need to reset the approach of this government for a recovery to build back better. And those are big, important decisions and we need to present that to Parliament and gain the confidence of Parliament to move forward on this ambitious plan.

[Translation]

I have trouble believing that the opposition members were against the idea of indicating whether they had confidence in the government. That was when they had the opportunity to do so.

The throne speech was delivered a few weeks after prorogation, which was declared on August 18. We returned to the House on September 23, 36 days later. We're not talking about six months or even six weeks. We took the shortest possible amount of time to prepare the new plan that we were going to present to Canadians. The Governor General delivered the throne speech on September 23. The speech said that the government's top priority was to implement measures to continue to fight the pandemic and save lives. It was a question of life and death. It was definitely an emergency.

The speech also said that the government's objective was to invest all possible technological, research and resources on testing and on distributing tests to Canadians. Emergency measures like the CERB were introduced for individuals, along with assistance for Canadian businesses experiencing serious needs. We at least had to help them avoid bankruptcy.

It's not easy to implement these assistance measures, and public servants had to do an extraordinary amount of work to get it done. The situation also required leadership and we had to have the confidence of the House to implement these plans.

● (73200)

Some vulnerabilities also came to light. We all know what happened in long-term care facilities, which resulted from a lack of investment. As we saw, women hold many essential service jobs. In Canada, with the exception of Quebec, there were problems with affordable and accessible child care centres. For the first time in ages, people got together and showed solidarity, in the Black Lives Matter movement, for example. We were all experiencing the same health crisis. People could see that there was social injustice. The will was there and it still is.

In the Châteauguay—Lacolle riding, groups of young people, businesspeople and citizens got together in support of more vulnerable groups like visible minorities and low-wage workers. We expect other gatherings; it's important to keep these feelings and this determination alive in the future. Right now, we have a little more hope for the future. From now on, people will understand what a crisis like the climate crisis really is. We have no control over mother nature. As human beings, we have to do everything possible to prevent crises like these because something that happens in one part of the world can affect the whole planet.

I saw a documentary about Greta Thunberg, and what this young lady did during the year of the pandemic. She continued her work. It was inspirational to see what she accomplished. I think we now have an opportunity to change our behaviour, not only to become more healthy physically, but also environmentally.

The thrust of the throne speech was the importance not only of coming up with a plan, but also a vision to inspire Canadians. The first wave was in September. We had hopes of getting through it, but we were not sure.

● (73205)

And, as we all know, we had a very bad winter, followed by an equally difficult third wave.

I can't see how the government could have continued last year to work on the basis of a throne speech that was no longer relevant. The fact that the government and the Prime Minister decided to put their cards on the table and ask the elected members of Parliament whether they had confidence in their actions was also proactive.

Some did not have confidence, and it's up to them to explain why. However, we were fortunate to have enough people placing their trust in the plan we came up with. We followed the plan, which guided us as we dealt with the situation. It was sometimes difficult, even extremely so. We didn't have a crystal ball. We didn't know which way to turn, or what should be closed or left open.

It was like being in an experimental laboratory. Different parts of the country took certain approaches and we'll soon know which worked best.

That was the idea behind the prorogation discussed in the report tabled by Minister Rodriguez in the House of Commons. As far as I know, the Minister also appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to field questions.

Some are saying that it was not enough, and that they needed to hear from the Prime Minister, and that Mr. Rodriguez was not who they wanted to see.

I myself always strive to get to the bottom of things and I like to examine the terms of reference for the committee I am sitting on to understand what we really have in front of us. Sometimes we are not discussing the right topic or trying to do something that has no relevance to the work to be done here.

However, this is certainly the committee where we can speak about the government in power and about the fact that ministers can indeed, in accordance with the concept of cabinet accountability and solidarity, provide answers.

● (73210)

I would even say that it's up to the government House leader, Mr. Rodriguez, to explain the reasons for the prorogation to MPs, to present the prorogation report and to provide explanations. As for procedure, he is the person responsible for explaining things and answering questions.

[English]

The Chair: I just want to check with the interpreters. For a while I've been noticing a problem with the sound, but I haven't heard them say anything. Is it okay for them?

I hear the interpreter coming through fine, but your original sound seems to be crackling going in and out, Ms. Shanahan. I'm just wondering if they're waiting for me to pick up on it or if it's fine for them.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, they've indicated to me here in the room that everything is fine on their end.

The Chair: Maybe it's just on my end. I continue to hear her sound cutting in and out. I figured that since nobody else said something I would let it go, but it was getting worse for me so I thought I would say something at this point. If it's fine for the interpreters, then it's okay. The interpretation part is coming through quite clear to me. It's just the original sound that keeps cutting in and out.

I'm sorry, Ms. Shanahan. I hope you still know what spot you were at. I'm sorry for the interruption.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: No problem.

[Translation]

It's important for the interpretation to be working properly.

I'd like to refer to a document prepared by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat in 2005. It's an overview of ministerial responsibilities and accountabilities. It's interesting. I'm going to quote a few excerpts.

[English]

It states:

Ministers, who together as the ministry form the government of the day, exercise executive authority in this system.

Here, "this system" is the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy. It continues:

These ministers...are accountable to Parliament both individually and collectively. All accountabilities in Canadian government flow from ministers' individual and collective accountability to Parliament.

Although Parliament does not exercise executive authority, it is the principal guarantor of the government's accountability, scrutinizing the government's policies and actions and holding it to account. Parliament has a spectrum of tools for doing this, ranging from its role in the passage of legislation to the review and approval of public expenditure to the interrogations of Question Period.

I'm going to get back to question period in a bit. You'll see why it's relevant. It continues:

But while the specific tool may vary, the environment remains constant—that of partisan politics.

This is in a Treasury Board document. It continues:

Parliament and its processes are inherently political.

Here's what I would like to say there.

[Translation]

I know that the concept of partisanship can have a negative connotation for many Canadians, but all it really means is that most elected representatives are members of a party and take a apolitical approach. They believe in a set of ideas, values and policies, and a way of seeing the world.

Within each of the political parties, there is a shared vision of how the organization is run, how to deal with problems and how to govern society. There's nothing wrong with that. You can't mince your words. If a partisan reason is given, then that needs to be pointed out. To be sure, most parties focus on having their members elected. However, I can tell you that's definitely not the goal of the Bloc Québécois...

• (73215)

[English]

The Chair: I don't know about anybody else, but I'm not getting interpretation.

[Translation]

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

The interpretation isn't working very well. I hear Ms. Shanahan and the interpreter speaking at the same time.

I'd like to congratulate Ms. Shanahan on the quality of her French, and particularly for speaking French most of the time. I'm very grateful for her efforts. It's great and I'm pleased about it.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Well, I did to study history at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi...

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay, that explains it.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes. The member can understand.

Mr. Alain Therrien: I saw the name Concordia University in the background.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: That's right, the word "Concordia" is there. The Université du Québec à Chicoutimi degree is right above it.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Okay. I couldn't see it.

Good.

Thank you, Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: For the interpretation, it might be my fault. I shouldn't switch back and forth between English and French.

[English]

The Chair: No, I don't—

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we seem to be getting the translation fine here in the committee room, but perhaps the members participating through Zoom are not getting the interpretation feed.

The Chair: Yes. Mr. Therrien and I are having the opposite issue, but in a way the same issue. That means there is something going on.

I have my proper channel on. I don't have a problem hearing Ms. Shanahan anymore at all. Actually, the sound got clearer; I just lost the interpretation part.

Maybe you can test it out.

The Clerk: Yes.

You may want to suspend for a minute while we test this out.

The Chair: How about we suspend for five minutes for just a quick bio break. I'm biased. I kind of need to take one. Please let know whenever somebody else does.

We'll suspend for five minutes.

• (73215)

(Pause)

• (73225)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. There are a couple of things before I give the floor back to Ms. Shanahan.

At around 12 o'clock today, I got an email from Minister Leblanc's office. They have reached out to appear before the committee on the urgent matter of studying Bill C-19.

They stated:

As you know, the Opposition has voted 14 times for an election in recent weeks, and it is the responsibility of all parties to make sure that the necessary protections are in place if the Opposition send Canadians to the polls.

That is what they wrote. I'm just reading what they wrote. I just want to let you know that. It's up to the committee, really, at the end of the day who they want to see as witnesses and whether we move to that study. However, I just want you to all be aware that I did receive that email. I forwarded it to the clerk as well.

Also, our window is narrowing on the main estimates. We still have those witnesses on the sidelines waiting if you want to call them.

Considering what Mr. Blaikie said earlier and the reason I'm stating it, maybe it gives parties the time to have some space before they move on to whether they're having a vote on this issue or moving on to another study. It might make some space to do something else in the meantime, but it's really up to the committee again.

Last time, on Tuesday, I felt there was no desire to even undertake the main estimates. I'm not sure if those were the thoughts of everybody. Nobody really verbalized it. I just got a lot of no responses to the question, so my guess was that there was not that much interest in doing the main estimates. However, I don't want to mistake that by you just not wanting to start them this week versus, after the constituency week, maybe there is interest in taking up the main estimates. Just let me know if you are interested, once again, because we have those witnesses on standby.

Those are the two announcements: the email I received and the main estimates.

Hon. Peter Kent: Chair, I wonder whether you're open to a discussion of the message from the minister.

• (73230)

The Chair: If the committee wishes, yes, I am open.

Mr. Kent, would you like to speak to that?

Hon. Peter Kent: Sure. I'd be delighted, if you accept.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Hon. Peter Kent: Certainly I believe everybody on this committee wants to get to the consideration of Bill C-19, and we are reminded often by Minister Leblanc, other ministers and the Prime Minister that committees are the masters of their agenda and of their decisions.

If I can offer to Mr. Turnbull's earlier remarks and Ms. Shanahan's remarks, I believe in the Westminster system of government any efficient and effective minority government needs to govern

with a certain pragmatic humility. We have seen, for the past two and a half months, Liberal members filibustering, filibustering still today, refusing to accept the will of the committee.

We could quite easily move on to Bill C-19 and the estimates with a vote and the committee accepting the will of the majority of our members to call a certain witness to complete our study on prorogation. I think that's really where we are right now, and Minister Leblanc's urging notwithstanding, it's time for a bit of that pragmatic humility and for Liberal members to accept the will of the majority of the membership of this committee.

The Chair: Mr. Kent, thank you for that.

Is there anybody who wants to speak to that issue?

Mr. Blaikie and then Mr. Bagnell.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: If I may, on that same topic I would certainly echo Mr. Kent's call for what he is calling pragmatic humility, which is a nice turn of phrase.

I would also just say that I'm a little confused by the message. The minister insists that the opposition has voted for an election on a number of occasions. There seems to be a running together of some pretty significant lines. It seems to me that if the entirety of the opposition, that is to say all three official parties, had voted for an election, we would be on the hustings right now and not at a Liberal filibuster. There's an incongruity between the minister's message and the truth of the matter.

Of course, there are opposition parties that have been working very hard to try to avoid an election, recognizing that that takes some willingness on the part of the government to negotiate and to not act as if it had a majority. To the extent that we have been able to succeed in that endeavour so far, that's been a good thing for Canadians. That is something that ought to continue in some way, shape or form.

The NDP may not always be the dance partner. We saw on a pretty critical piece of legislation for the government, legislating Montreal port workers back to work and denying them their collective bargaining rights, that Liberals have been able to find partners with others, like the Conservatives. Depending on the issue, it's a different partner.

That is the way minority governments work, so I find the minister's statement to be misleading in that if all of the opposition parties voted for an election at the same time, we would have one. They haven't. In fact, we're in the House today debating.... I also appreciate the opportunity to explain to my colleagues that I had to leave for a bit in order to participate in that debate in the House on whether it makes sense to have an election during this pandemic.

I had the opportunity to hear, in the small amount of debate I was able to listen to, representatives of all the opposition parties explain that they don't want an election and to make a point that the only path to an election that continues to persist is the Prime Minister's prerogative to dissolve Parliament unilaterally. That's the path right now to an election. It's on the Prime Minister alone to close that path by making a clear, public commitment that he won't use that power to trigger an election.

Despite all the many occasions he has been offered by the opposition to make that commitment, despite not needing one, he could just walk out of his front door and hold a press conference, as he has done many times during this pandemic, and make that statement. We've tried to provide opportunities, just in case he hadn't put that together himself, and yet, even in those opportune moments, the Prime Minister has declined to make that commitment.

Again, I am puzzled by the minister's message and am not quite sure how it helps move things along here. I would certainly hope that not only the members of the government on this committee but that members of the government at large would be seeking to help us resolve this impasse rather than complicating matters further.

• (73235)

The Chair: Before I recognize the next speaker, I would like to state that when I was reading the email, I was questioning whether I should just convey the concept, or whether I should read out the email, for the most part, the way it was written. I figured maybe I should just read it out the way it was written, and you can take from it what you will. I know Mr. Blaikie had pointed at the messaging. There are some things that you may have heard a couple of times. I figure it's fair, if you're going to hear it later on today or in QP or somewhere else, that you hear what and how it's being framed.

That is how it's being framed. There it is. Make of it what you wish.

We will now go to Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

I'm very disappointed, because I have to leave in a minute. It was great to be back on PROC with Mr. Nater—some good times—and I always appreciate listening to Mr. Blaikie. I have to disagree, though, or I don't understand his point about it being the only route to an election. We've been very close to an election, less than 30 votes, a number of times recently.

The point I want to make is that I've been in Parliament since the year 2000 or so. From what I understand, it's a tradition in Parliament, a procedure we follow by rote, that when bills are sent to committee, that's a priority on the committee agenda. Certainly, there are different opinions on the study and where a study's at. If there are certain motions with unreasonable clauses that could take a long time, I would think that the precedent in committee, the standard normally followed, is that the committee move on to the debate on what has been referred to them, especially in an urgent situation where Canadians are at risk.

As I said, we've been less than 30 votes away from an election a number of times. It's not inconceivable. I just wanted to make that point before I have to leave. Hopefully, I'll get back. I had a whole

bunch of things I wanted to say today, back on the motion, but I don't think we should be saying them right now. We have an urgent bill before us that will affect the safety of Canadians and will affect the ability of some older people to vote.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: On the issue of the email still, Ms. Vecchio, would you like to speak to that? I'm not sure if I have the correct speaking order, but I think Mr. Bagnell was the last one.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes. That's perfect.

Back to the email, with all due respect, I do recognize that the Bloc today has a motion put forward as well. I totally appreciate where the minister's coming from, but I do believe it's the members of this committee who ultimately need to make the decision here. This decision has been delayed for over two and a half months.

I recognize that it's easy to throw the onus on the people who have not spoken for the last two and a half months while filibustering, but I think we've all said that we recognize we need to get to Bill C-19 and that it is important. We know there have been a lot of concerns of going into a federal election. I've heard Dr. Duncan speak of that and I've heard us all speak of that, concerned about the safety. I don't think that's neither here nor there. I think part of the thing is that we know that it's one of the most important things to get to. But we've known since February that this bill was coming forward. For the last two and a half months we've been wasting time. That is exactly what we've done. We've wasted two and a half months instead of getting to the work that we need to do.

I do know, as I've heard from all other opposition parties, that there still seems to be one thing that's outlying. I've heard Ms. Shanahan refer to part one, being the Prime Minister, of our original motion. I think these are just really big concerns. Bill C-19 can get to be studied if we actually find a final decision here. I think that's what we're waiting on, a decision on this motion. It's going on three months and we're still waiting for a decision.

• (73240)

The Chair: Absolutely. I definitely reminded the committee after reading the email that it is up to the members of the committee and your will on whether or not you wish to invite the minister. It's up to all members, the opposition members and the government members included.

I think that's all we have for the email for now. If you're okay, I'll give the floor back to Ms. Shanahan.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Is the interpretation working now? Can you hear me on the English interpretation channel?

The Clerk: Yes.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Good...

[English]

The Chair: Hold on just a second.

Dr. Duncan, are you having a problem?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Chair, I have no interpretation.

The Chair: Did you have it when the discussion was happening earlier? Did it just happen when Ms. Shanahan spoke? You probably didn't need it earlier.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Try again, please. My apologies.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I'll be happy now to continue with my comments.

I'm not a permanent member of this committee. I heard the comments from members of the opposition. We just ruled on an amendment and a motion. If these had been adopted, we would have been able to end the debate and begin studying Bill C-19, which is extremely important. However, the opposition members voted against the amendment and the motion.

I must say that I did some research, because it's a subject I'm interested in. I'd like to continue to talk about the principle of ministerial accountability and our roles in the parliamentary system, in accordance with Westminster traditions.

[English]

I will be citing in English for clarity from the Treasury Board of Canada report of 2005. I was speaking before about the roles of minister:

[W]hat is clear from this overview of responsible government are the distinct and finely balanced roles of each of the system's different players. Ministers exercise executive authority on the basis of the political support that they receive from Parliament; they therefore have political accountability to Parliament. Parliament, in turn, does not exercise executive authority, but it ensures that executive power is properly exercised. Its mechanisms for doing so are political and partisan.

[Translation]

I like the idea of in-depth debate on the whys and hows of our presence here.

It may not be linked directly to the matter at hand, but the issue in the report was the role of ministers and public servants. In many of our discussions, we talked about the accountabilities of officials and ministers, and attempted to determine who should appear before the committees.

[English]

Mr. Wayne Long: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I'm sorry to interrupt MP Shanahan, but the translation is coming through at the same level for me. That's a change. I'm hearing French and English at the very same level.

• (73245)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Shanahan. Ever since you started, someone or another has been having trouble with translation.

Mr. Wayne Long: Is anybody else having the same problem?

The Chair: I don't know. It's really hard for me to make the call of whether it was the same level, but it was a lot noisier.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, it's coming through fine here in the committee room.

For Mr. Long, I wonder if it might be one of the settings he has. Let me get some advice from some of the technicians in the room.

Madam Chair, do you want to suspend briefly while we're trying figure out what the technical issue is?

The Chair: Let's suspend for five minutes.

• (73245)

(Pause)

• (73250)

The Chair: The meeting is resumed.

Ms. Shanahan, you have the floor.

[Translation]

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

I hope that the problem my colleagues were having has been fixed.

I'll continue with a number of quotes in English that I feel would be of interest to the committee.

[English]

As the Clerk of the Privy Council observed in the "Twelfth Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada"—that was some time ago, in the early 2000s, I think—"we cannot build systems based on distrust."

This is just going to this whole accountability and what we're trying to have as our rules. It continues:

We cannot go backwards, building layers of hierarchy and rules governing each transaction. And we cannot treat all errors in the same way. Errors made in good faith are inevitable, especially in an organization that values innovation and creativity. Accountability requires that we report honestly and accurately, including the errors, and demonstrate that we have learned from the mistakes and have made the necessary adjustments. But accountability cannot become mere blaming.

[Translation]

I'm pleased to be reading this quote for you because, as we have seen over the past few months, parliamentarians do indeed have the right to ask questions. We want them to ask questions and to demand explanations.

The government, which is the executive authority, is accountable. It's important to ask whether the government is acting in good faith and whether it has our confidence. Allow me to repeat the fact that parliamentarians can indicate whether or not they have confidence in the government. Since the start of the pandemic, there have been several confidence votes. As my colleague mentioned earlier, not all parliamentarians voted to keep the Liberal party in power, although some thought it was a good idea. It makes sense to believe that those who voted against the government wanted an election to be triggered. So what's the current priority? I believe that it is to adopt Bill C-19 in order to implement measures that would allow us to hold an entirely safe election, if it were to prove necessary.

• (73255)

I would now like to return to the concept of ministerial solidarity, which is an important, unique and essential factor. All members of cabinet swore an oath and accepted the responsibility not only to maintain confidentiality, but also to express the will of the government and present its policies.

[English]

It states:

Collective ministerial responsibility [of cabinet] refers to the convention requiring coherence and discipline of the ministry in deciding policy, managing government operations, and speaking to Parliament with a single voice.

[Translation]

Cabinet members must be able to speak in Parliament with only one voice. We see this in question period. While the questions are often for the prime minister, the prime minister is not necessarily the person who will answer the question. In accordance with this long-standing convention, another minister, who may have more information about the question or who has a higher level of responsibility for dealing with it, may answer. It can also be someone completely different. The cabinet members decide which ministers will answer the questions during question period and these answers are treated as if they came from the prime minister.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, with apologies for the interruption, I wonder if Ms. Shanahan might accept an intervention according to the Simms protocol, which I was very happy to accept earlier from Mr. Simms himself.

The Chair: Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I am nothing if not flexible.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, there is an interpretation problem now.

The Chair: Yes, I think I'm having it too. I can't hear because everything is so loud.

What I was trying to say, Ms. Shanahan, was to ask if it is okay for Mr. Blaikie to interject.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, if I have the floor after his interjection.

The Chair: Yes, you would have the floor.

Let's just wait to see if the sound issue is resolved.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, it should be resolved now.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Am I coming across okay for all the members of the committee with translation?

The Chair: Can you speak in French, Mr. Blaikie?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Yes, I can speak to you a little in French. However, I would like to read a quote and I can't do that in French.

[English]

The Chair: It was just for the sound check. I wasn't demanding that you carry on in French. I know you can, so I figured you could do it for the sound check.

• (73300)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Right on. Am I coming across okay, Madam Chair? Am I okay to go?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I just want to say that I appreciate Ms. Shanahan's discussion of the nature of collective responsibility for cabinet. I would draw her attention to page 30 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. It talks a little bit about this, but also emphasizes that ministers do have individual responsibility as well. We read on page 30:

In terms of ministerial responsibility, Ministers have both individual and collective responsibilities to Parliament. The individual or personal responsibility of the Minister derives from a time when in practice and not just in theory the Crown governed; Ministers merely advised the Sovereign and were responsible to the Sovereign for their advice. The principle of individual ministerial responsibility holds that Ministers are accountable not only for their own actions as department heads, but also for the actions of their subordinates.... Virtually all departmental activity is carried out in the name of a Minister who, in turn, is responsible to Parliament for those acts. Ministers exercise power and are constitutionally responsible for the provision and conduct of government; Parliament holds them personally responsible for it.

If you then go to page 392 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, under the discussion of prorogation and dissolution, it reads:

Prorogation of a Parliament, a prerogative act of the Crown taken on the advice of the Prime Minister, results in the termination of a session.

In the note on that, 110, it reads:

See decision of the Committee of the Privy Council, PC3374, on October 25, 1935, "Memorandum regarding certain of the functions of the Prime Minister", which stated that recommendations (to the Crown) concerning the convocation and dissolution of Parliament are the "special prerogatives" of the Prime Minister.

Indeed, if you go to that order in council, what it will tell you is that this is a special prerogative of the Prime Minister specifically delineated by cabinet as an exception to the normal convention of collective responsibility, which is not to say that cabinet ministers aren't required to defend it, but it is to say that the Prime Minister plays a unique role here. It's listed alongside things such as the appointment of cabinet ministers.

Now, I don't think that we would want to say that the government House leader or any other minister is somehow responsible for the decisions of the Prime Minister on the composition of his cabinet, yet the decision to prorogue is laid beside that very prerogative of the Prime Minister, so I think that it's very clear that, in addition to collective responsibilities, members of cabinet have individual responsibilities, and when we talk about prorogation, it is a very special prerogative of the Prime Minister that's been singled out by the Privy Council itself as laying firmly on the shoulders of the Prime Minister and not as a collective decision of the cabinet.

I would invite any reflections Ms. Shanahan may have on those authorities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

The floor goes back to Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Indeed, and I thank Mr. Blaikie for that, because that leads me to my next point, which was exactly the role of the Prime Minister, and bear with me, if you will. I am not a lawyer, but I was a student of history, and I find that in the lessons of history, which we are making every day, we see there is theory and there is practice. This is where I want to go now, because we also see, again in the same report, which, I see in the references, calls upon not only, of course, procedures and practice but on many experts in the field.

Let's turn to the role of the Prime Minister in the assignment of responsibility:

The leader of the political party that appears able to form a government that will have the confidence of the House of Commons—normally the party with the largest number of seats—is asked by the governor general to form a government. This is the defining responsibility of the prime minister: to select the ministry and to organize the Cabinet both as a decision-making body and as a mechanism for setting the broad direction of government policy and operations. Ministers are accountable to the Prime Minister, who is, in effect, the steward of the collective responsibility of the cabinet.

You cannot separate one from the other. The Prime Minister does not operate independently of his ministry.

• (73305)

[Translation]

In other words, we could have said that a prime minister can decide to act as the leader of the whole country, does not have to appoint other people around him and can make all decisions alone, like a dictator. But that's not the case. The prime minister is responsible, but with the assistance of cabinet.

Ministers are responsible for the mandate they receive from the prime minister to perform certain duties. For example, Mr. Rodriguez, as the government House leader in the House of Commons, needs to deal with the other parties in the House, provide explanations, and answer questions about House activities. That is what Minister Rodriguez did when he presented the report to Parliament about all the reasons for the prorogation. So everything has already been done. The objective of Ms. Vecchio's motion, particularly with respect to the first point, has already been met.

I want to end with the following quote from the Treasury Board Secretariat report on instances in which there is mismanagement or abuse, or when things are not working properly.

[English]

It states:

It was pointed out that Parliament has a somewhat blunt instrument for sanctioning mismanagement. It cannot apply personal sanctions to individual ministers (beyond political censure), and withdrawal of support for the government (via a vote of non-confidence) is a significant threat only in the case of minority governments.

[Translation]

That's in fact where we're at. We have a minority government. The purpose of the prorogation was to give the Prime Minister and his cabinet the opportunity to present the government's plan in the September 2020 throne speech.

In this instance, of course, there wasn't an election campaign right before the throne speech. We were in the middle of a health crisis. It's because of the prorogation that we were able to present the government's new plan, giving parliamentarians the opportunity to demonstrate whether or not they were satisfied with the government's management.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, prorogation is not a serious issue in my riding. The COVID-19 pandemic is what everyone is talking about. People want to know how we're going to get out of it.

Fortunately, we have a plan, and the different levels of government have been working together, even though it's not easy for everyone to agree because there are different ways of addressing the problem. I'm someone who believes in communication and cooperation on behalf of citizens. That's why we were elected; to represent the citizens in our ridings.

If, in response to the pandemic, the government had taken all sorts of inexplicable and inconsistent measures that were not based on science, if I had been a member of the opposition, I would have wanted to take the opportunity to force a vote on censuring the government.

We were absolutely clear: that would have been the time to do it.

Mr. Blaikie nevertheless said what he wanted. And I'm very fond of listening to the exchanges between Mr. Blaikie and Mr. Simms, among others, because they focus on the details of the rules and on how to amend them. Does the prorogation deserve a study? I don't think anything is preventing this committee from pursuing a study of this prorogation. However, we are facing an emergency, namely the possibility that we will no longer have any dance partners. Historically, governments have been overthrown for all kinds of reasons. It can happen because of a mistake or because someone failed to receive a memo.

Particularly on this committee, when there is an order of the House, we have to study it...

• (73310)

[English]

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

I'm just not sure what the plans are today. I'm seeing there's a list of speakers who are going to continue to speak. We have postponed lots of things. If we're just going to continue to filibuster, I think that's one of the things I'm looking at.

I would like to move for suspension so that we can come back and actually have a real discussion, rather than continuing this filibuster. Perhaps everybody can go back and decide what they're going to be doing, because we do have a motion on the floor that could be voted on. We could open that as well.

This might be a good opportunity for the government members to decide what they want to do. They know what we're asking. I know that's the case, but we're continuing to filibuster so I would like to put forward an opportunity to suspend at this time.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, is that a point of order? Can I speak to that?

The Chair: You can definitely speak to it, because I was going to put it to the committee to see if there is consensus on suspending.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Members of the committee were considerably frustrated last time with the fact that they wanted to clear the deck, as Mr. Blaikie had put it, and propose an amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion. Obviously, we're still in debate on that, because we haven't agreed with that from the beginning.

If we suspend today's meeting, I wonder whether the opposition members are actually going to put forward an amendment, because that's exactly what I thought was supposed to happen today, but it did not happen.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Ryan, it was supposed to have happened on Tuesday.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Sorry, I wasn't finished speaking.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Sorry, I just want to correct it. It was Tuesday that we asked for that, but that's good.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: If I may finish, I was just saying that between meetings, I understood that was forthcoming. Based on a sincere effort to want to move forward, we sort of allowed the amendment that I had put forward, which was a compromise, or at least we felt it was, to go to a vote. It was voted down, and that is fine.

I want to clarify whether opposition members are really interested in working with us in putting forward a good faith amendment that we can work on. Is that forthcoming?

• (73315)

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie, go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: What we committed to do last day was to sit down together and to develop a proposal in writing for the government. We are working towards that goal. We didn't take that as being a deadline for today, because we weren't able to dispense with the amendment on Tuesday which was the sign of good faith we had asked for at that time. I'm pleased to see that happen today. I'll certainly be doing everything that I can, and I take from our discussion so far that other opposition members.... Not wanting to unduly speak for anyone, I think there is a real good-faith attempt on our part to develop a way forward, to propose something to government in order to break the logjam. I'm optimistic that we'll be able to de-

liver a written proposal for how to move past this before our next meeting.

Of course, if Liberal members of the committee are really anxious to get other things on the record today, they're certainly welcome to do that; but I think, given that we are on the cusp of trying to get to a new proposal, if members would prefer to suspend now so that we can get to question period on time and do other things in our day, I'm certainly happy with doing that as well.

What we can't do while we're listening attentively to committee, as we do, is have those discussions to try to get to a final conclusion on the opposition bench. It's really up to folks on the committee what they want to do, but I certainly would support a suspension at this time. I think you'll find there is a proposal in writing to government prior to our next meeting, unless we're unable to come to an agreement, in which case that will also be an interesting fact about this process.

The Chair: Having heard two or three different points of view on this, unless there are any other points of view, is it okay if I suspend until the next scheduled meeting?

Okay. We'll suspend.

[The meeting was suspended at 1:17 p.m., Thursday, May 13.]

[The meeting resumed at 11:01 a.m., Tuesday, May 25.]

The Chair: I call this meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. This is a resumption of meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13, 2021. Today it is May 25, 2021, 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. Just so you are aware, the webcast will show only the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee. So far today, we don't have anyone attending in person. Everyone is attending virtually.

Just as a reminder, raise your hand using the tool function, which is located at the bottom of your screen. No taking photos of the screen or screenshots is allowed. I would remind everyone about that. Other than that, I guess we always need a reminder to mute and unmute ourselves. Somehow we all tend to forget that. Remember to turn your translation on if you need it. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name.

I do have a speakers list. We are on Mrs. Vecchio's motion. There was a speakers list for that, when we suspended last time, consisting of Mrs. Shanahan, Mr. Turnbull and then Mr. Blaikie, who wishes to speak.

Mr. Blaikie also informed me, just before the meeting, that he would like to report on some developments, perhaps, so keep that in mind as well. There may be some new information that could hopefully progress movement in this committee.

We'll hear what Mr. Blaikie has to say, but first I will hand it back to the speakers list.

Mrs. Shanahan, you are first on that list.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's truly a pleasure for me to be here with my colleagues at today's meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

My colleague Mr. Therrien spoke about what we in Quebec call National Patriots' Day which was celebrated on Monday. It's called Victoria Day in the other provinces, but we commemorate true patriots, and I always take pride in the distinction. I have nothing against Queen Victoria, who even played an important role in eventually, after five years, granting a pardon to our exiled patriots in Australia.

Quebec's patriots included merchants, notaries and doctors. These were educated and dedicated men who had been fighting for a democratic government. Their rebellions were not only in Lower Canada, but Upper Canada too, as you know.

These events were not spontaneous. At the time they occurred, there were British governors in the colonies. There was also a movement within Canadian society, more specifically in what was then called Lower Canada. Other colonies had been established in the meantime. Chèvrefils, Chénier, Nelson and others were demanding a form of justice and governance that met the needs of the citizens. Because they were still citizens of Great Britain who had rights, such as having representation and seats in Parliament, they were demanding the same rights here. Historians agree that reprisals against Quebec's patriots were much more severe, and some were even hanged.

Others were exiled to Australia, enduring a harrowing six-month trip to a prison colony in Longbottom. The British authorities rather than the Australians were at the time in charge of this colony, where the French Canadians were forced to do hard labour. When they realized that these men were educated, basically peaceful, and reasonable, they were gradually entrusted with administrative and even governance duties. In fact, the influence of these Canadians on Australia can still be seen to this day.

After five years in the colony, they were rather well off. They worked for merchants and for the government. They afterwards asked for a pardon and worked in order to pay for their trip home. Most of the Canadians finally returned to Quebec, although the governor had asked them to stay if they wanted, because he would have liked them to do so.

Joseph Marceau stayed, and he, along with his descendants, contributed to Australian democracy. An incredible account of this story was written by François-Maurice Lepailleur, one of the patriots who returned to Quebec from Australia.

Deke Richards made a documentary as a tribute to this democratic link between French Canadians and the creation of Australia's Parliament. As a result of these tragic events for the Canadians exiled in Australia, if you visit Canada Bay in Australia you can take a stroll along Chateauguay Walk. Here in Châteauguay, there's a museum dedicated to the history of the patriots. There is also a *Marceau Road* in Australia named after Mr. Marceau, who had 11 children in Australia and made a genuine contribution to Australian society. He played an important role in Australia's history.

I mentioned all of that in order to talk about the principle of accountable government, which is central to our discussion today. How can we make sure that no matter what the situation may be, the government is always accountable to the people of Canada? When an emergency changes the circumstances, and if the economy, following an election, is no longer in the shape it was during the campaign, prorogation becomes a mechanism that allows the government to submit a new plan. It also enables parliamentarians, who represent all Canadians, to say whether they have confidence in the government.

As I mentioned already, I'm an amateur historian and I completed my first bachelor's degree in Quebec history at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi in the 1970s. It was a rather turbulent period in Quebec's history, but our professors taught us that history is not always made up exclusively of major events and great men. I learned that it was not always the men in charge who masterminded key historical events, but rather the men and women who, on an everyday basis, generated activity and vigour in all sectors of society. They are also the people who decide whether or not it is legitimate to be governed by these great men and women.

Queen Victoria reigned over the British Empire. Before her, there was Queen Elizabeth I. Today, it's Queen Elizabeth II. It's interesting to note that women were on the throne during the greatest periods of the British Empire. However, that's something for another day, and perhaps even another committee.

I'd like to get back now to the prorogation mechanism contained in the April motion. The motion seeks to determine why the government decided to prorogue Parliament in August 2020. It's not the first time I've mentioned this motion. There is nothing the matter with looking into the government's reasoning, and it is in fact worth doing.

In the past, governments in power have sometimes been asked why they prorogued Parliament. Was it really because the circumstances under which they were governing had changed? Was it for economic or public safety reasons, a pandemic, or some other important reason, or was it rather for purely partisan reasons?

That's why the government, from the moment it took power, introduced a mechanism...

Mr. Alain Therrien: Excuse me, Madam Chair...

I'm sorry for interrupting you, Ms. Shanahan.

I'm on the French channel, but I'm hearing the interpretation in English. Can someone check into that?

The Clerk: Mr. Therrien, I believe the problem has been dealt with.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Excellent. Thank you very much, Mr. Therrien.

It's truly a pleasure for me to be able not only to discuss the motion before us, but also to recall the history of how our Parliament has evolved. Not only do we have a piece of paper to guide us, but the entire history of its development.

Let's get back to what we can already do to manage prorogation more effectively. We said that the government, through the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons or someone else, once the Prime Minister had decided to prorogue Parliament, had to provide an explanation within 30 to 60 days, as I recall. In any event, a report had to be written.

As I pointed out in a in another speech, I found the report really thorough. I was able to go through it and saw that the report had been tabled in the House as required. It explained the reasons for the prorogation to the House.

Don't forget that the confidence vote had already been held. When the throne speech was delivered was when the opposition parties had the opportunity to indicate that they were dissatisfied and did not have confidence in our government. The vote was held, and the report tabled and released.

However, some people were not satisfied with this process. So here we are at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, looking at a motion introduced by Ms. Vecchio requesting further discussion and a review of all the reasons for prorogation, completely ignoring all the debate on the amendment put forward by Mr. Turnbull, which in my view was altogether reasonable. Using the original motion as a starting point, Mr. Turnbull made suggestions that would keep the essentials and make them acceptable to all members of the committee.

I am disappointed that the opposition parties did not agree to this amendment. We could have come to an agreement. We could have addressed the key components of what my opposition colleagues wanted to examine. We could have moved on to what is important, by which I mean the fact that we are still in a pandemic management situation.

If the opposition parties had voted against the throne speech in September, elections would have been triggered without any proper safety measures in place to manage the serious circumstances we were facing in 2020.

The situation is still serious, even though the vaccination rate has risen to over 50%, and we are very happy about that. In Quebec, vaccination is going well and people are pleased about it. I

spoke with my neighbours and some people who were walking, properly distanced, in the street this weekend and I did some cycling. I found that people were satisfied with the progress, but didn't want to do anything foolish. In fact, no one wants to go backwards.

I'm back here after spending a nice weekend celebrating our historical heritage in very pleasant weather. It was a harbinger of things to come. But back here we find ourselves exactly where we were a few months ago, studying the same motion from Ms. Vecchio. I'm going to keep my comments about the motion for later, because I have a lot to do. I already spoke about paragraph (a) of the motion. Having looked at the contents of the other paragraphs, I can tell you that I'll have a lot to say about each of them. As I just mentioned, I'm going to keep it all to myself for now.

That concludes my remarks.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Shanahan.

There are a couple of things I feel I should have probably said at the beginning of the meeting just as a refresher, because we were all on a constituency week as well. We have had Bill C-19 referred to the committee as of May 11. It's been some time. We had the constituency week in between, obviously, which took up time. This is a government bill, so there's no time limit for the committee to consider the bill, but generally, legislation is given priority by committees.

If the committee chooses to move forward on that, there are some things the committee will have to keep in mind. We would need to decipher how many witnesses to have, which witnesses and the dates for those witnesses. Those suggestions need to be sent to us. Just keep all that in mind so that we can schedule them. There are always scheduling difficulties, so we need to know that stuff as soon as possible if we wish to make any amendments to the bill. Then we would need to determine a date for clause-by-clause and basically an overlying deadline for that.

As another reminder to the committee, the next meeting, on May 27—today is May 25—would be the last date for us to consider the main estimates. Otherwise, on May 31, they will revert back to the House. That's just a reminder on the main estimates as well.

I will move to Mr. Turnbull, and then Mr. Blaikie right after that.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate your reminder about Bill C-19 being a government bill. These usually take precedence in committee business, or at least I think that's the informal practice that's generally followed. I hope that today the committee will see some movement on Bill C-19.

That's my hope. I'm stating that outright. It might be because we had a constituency week, but I'm coming back to the committee with renewed optimism. A little bit of sun on my face and—I don't know why—it has invigorated me. I'm looking forward to today's meeting. It's good to see everybody.

I appreciate Mrs. Shanahan's comments. I especially appreciated the story she told about the significance of the holiday, which I think exists differently within different cultural contexts. I appreciated that very much. I thought that was insightful.

I also appreciated your speaking to the amendment that I had put forward, even though we're not on the amendment. It was an attempt to appease some of the opposition parties and, hopefully, to move forward. I know the committee voted that down, so I won't cover anything having to do with that today, but I do want to quickly frame where I think we are as a committee. Then I look forward to hearing from Mr. Blaikie.

I've said this multiple times, but I really think it's important to emphasize. From the very beginning of this particular conversation, which started a long time ago, we as a committee agreed to study prorogation. We heard from witnesses. We heard from quite a number of witnesses. I think the government in general has been very transparent when it comes to prorogation. I've said from the beginning that if a global pandemic is not a good enough reason to prorogue Parliament, then I don't believe any reason will satisfy the opposition parties. I have to keep stating that, because I really feel that's the grain of truth here that I'm holding on to: that eventually the opposition parties are going to realize that, yes, given a global pandemic, given a government that's been as responsive as possible, there was a need to re-evaluate and reset the agenda. That's exactly what happened.

I've argued this point over and over again, and I'm not going to go through all the data and the evidence I've provided for how the throne speech reflects all the consultation work and the incredible data-gathering that happened during prorogation. I already got that. The opposition parties, as far as I can tell, don't care about that argument. They're not listening to that reasonable explanation, which is, to me, a rational explanation that makes perfect sense, given the context of a global pandemic.

I also want to speak to the fact that, from my perspective, we are now debating a motion on WE Charity. Look at Mrs. Vecchio's motion. It has in it the Kielburgers, the Honourable Bill Morneau, Katie Telford, the Perelmutter and the speakers bureau. It has massive, huge requests for documents that would have to be produced and translated. WE Charity is mentioned multiple times. Sections (f) and (g) of her original motion specifically reference WE Charity. There's absolutely no doubt.... Well, there can be no doubt out there, for anybody watching or anybody on this committee, that the motion is to try to connect WE Charity to prorogation as some ulterior motive, which I think the opposition parties have been trying to prove.

We heard from witnesses. Some of them speculated. Most of them said that there has always been a potential political motive for prorogation throughout history, and that there are always multiple narratives on why prorogation happened, but most of them also claimed that, given a global pandemic and the context, it was actually a pretty good reason to prorogue.

What I find strange, though, is that we're still stuck on this motion after the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's report has come out. I took a little time over the week that we were in the constituency, when I had a little time in the mornings in between

meetings, and I read a good portion. I don't think I pored through every single page, but I read a lot of it, and I found it really interesting to see the analysis that was done by the Ethics Commissioner, Mario Dion.

What shocks me and surprises me.... The Prime Minister has been completely exonerated by that report of all counts that the opposition parties have been claiming over and over again, taking up committee business in other committees. Fine, I got it. They wanted to "hold the government accountable", which is what opposition parties are supposed to do, so I got that. But, at this point, at this juncture, at this moment in time we're still in a global pandemic, and opposition parties are voting against the government, in many cases coming dangerously close to triggering an election, and yet they don't seem to be willing to move on to study Bill C-19, which would ensure that Canadians can vote safely, that their health and safety would be protected and their democratic right would be protected if an election were triggered.

I'm still feeling like, can we just face reality here? The reality is that the WE Charity supposed scandal is not a live topic anymore. It's a closed book. The Ethics Commissioner reviewed all the evidence and data. They reviewed it. I'm going to read you the conclusions here, just in case people haven't taken the time to read that document.

There are three major sections of the ethics code, or the Conflict of Interest Act, that were said to be the sections that were pertinent to the study that was done, or the report that was written. Section 7 is one that "prohibits public office holders from giving preferential treatment to a person or organization". Now the Ethics Commissioner.... This is in the executive summary, so I'll just read the quick conclusion. I could go into more detail if people want, but I don't think that will be necessary per se. This is on page 2.

The evidence also shows that Mr. Trudeau had no involvement in ESDC's recommendation that WE administer the CSSG. I am satisfied that Mr. Trudeau did not give preferential treatment to WE.

That's one conclusion. Now the other section, subsection 6(1) of the act, "prohibits public office holders from making or participating in the making of a decision that would place them in a conflict of interest." On this one as well, the Ethics Commissioner concludes, "I am satisfied that there was no opportunity to further Mr. Trudeau's own interests or those of his relatives from WE's role as administrator of the CSSG or from its Social Entrepreneurship proposal."

That's one conclusion. There's another related to this:

WE's private interests would have to have been furthered improperly. In my view, there is no evidence of impropriety in relation to Mr. Trudeau's decision making in relation to WE's Social Entrepreneurship proposal or WE's administration of the CSSG.

Those are two quotes that demonstrate that there are clear conclusions that the evidence has been reviewed. This is the Ethics Commissioner we're talking about, who has done the due diligence and found and ruled that the opposition parties.... I know this is disappointing to the opposition parties, because they wanted a scandal out of this, but there is none. The Ethics Commissioner's report is very clear.

The other section I would just quote quickly is section 21, which requires recusal “only in instances where the public office holder would be in a potential conflict of interest.” In this one as well, the Ethics Commissioner says, “I therefore found that Mr. Trudeau did not contravene subsection 6(1), section 7 or section 21 of the Act.”

Just take a step back for a second, please, committee members. I'm appealing to your better interests here. Take a step back.

For months and months, opposition parties have been trying to claim that prorogation was tied to WE Charity. We now have conclusive evidence, and all the due diligence has been done, that says there was no conflict of interest. The conclusions are clear, based on a really in-depth assessment of all the evidence and facts.

How, then, can we possibly continue to debate a WE Charity motion at this committee, when we have business that this committee needs to attend to, to protect the health and safety of Canadians? Members of this committee, tell me, do you feel that's responsible for us to do?

All of us are responsible for this work to continue forward. We have a government bill that has been referred to our committee, Bill C-19. We need to get on with studying this bill. That's my plea to you. I don't know how we can not face reality and debate this whole WE Charity and prorogation link, because it's non-existent. If there was no conflict of interest, does it even make sense for opposition parties to try to tie the two together? It doesn't even make sense anymore. Give it up, and let's move on to Bill C-19, please.

I move that the committee proceed to study Bill C-19.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Clerk, can you help us with a vote on that, please?

The Clerk: The question is on Mr. Turnbull's motion to proceed to another order of the day, which would be Bill C-19.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Blaikie.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, excuse me. Before we get started—I'm sorry, Daniel—I am beginning to have a technical challenge, because I can't get my video on. I want to let you know that I'll mess around with it. I don't know if you can see anything in the room.

The Chair: When you voted, it kind of went on for a moment.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'll continue to play with that, just as an FYI.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, could we have someone from the tech team call her?

The Clerk: Mrs. Vecchio, we'll have an IT ambassador reach out to you to assist with the problem.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Blaikie, go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

I wish Mrs. Vecchio the best of luck in correcting technical difficulties. I had one of my own this morning. That certainly has been

a frustrating feature of virtual Parliament. I hope she's able to get that sorted out.

I thought I might begin by addressing some of the comments that have been made already this morning. I will start with Mrs. Shanahan in terms of responsible government.

I took the gist of the argument that Mrs. Shanahan was making to essentially mean that if opposition parties don't vote to have an election in the face of things they don't like about the government, it means there's nothing to criticize or that the government can do whatever it wants. It effectively has carte blanche until opposition parties decide to trigger an election.

I want to propose to Mrs. Shanahan that I think this is an important misunderstanding of the principle of responsible government. We have question period. We have committee work. We call ministers to committee. We have all sorts of tools to interrogate the government about its course of action. We do that because there is more than one way to hold the government to account.

In fact, sometimes an election is exactly the wrong way to hold the government to account, particularly if you're trying to focus in on specific decisions of the government. As we all know at this table, elections are very general affairs. There are a lot of issues that come up in an election. There are many kinds of issues that rightly preoccupy the attention of voters during an election. While voters may be very dissatisfied with the government in respect of some of its decisions, that may not ultimately be the vote-determining issue.

Just because a particular instance of government wrongdoing isn't the ballot question at the ballot box, that doesn't mean the government's behaviour is justified. It doesn't mean there isn't still a need to hold government to account. In fact, that is the function of Parliament.

The function of Parliament isn't to cause elections. The function of Parliament is to hold the government to account between elections. A number of mechanisms have been developed to do that, including calling ministers to testify before committee about decisions they have made.

What's been tying us up hasn't been the fact that the opposition refuses to call an election. Even in ordinary times, it's not clear to me that that would be the right solution for this particular scandal. What's been tying us up is that government members haven't been allowing a committee to proceed in using some of the normal tools of accountability in order to hold decision-makers to account for something they have done.

In this case, the thing they did—that the Prime Minister did—was prorogue Parliament in the wrong way for the wrong period of time. That is not to say that it was wrong to prorogue at all, but we have heard that there are different ways to do a prorogation and there are different periods of time. We have heard very clearly in a number of ways that this was ultimately the Prime Minister's decision.

We have heard, as Mr. Turnbull indicated earlier, that it's a decision that is often political all the way down. I think that means that it stands to reason that members of Parliament would care to interrogate the only decision-maker about his political reasons for prorogation.

What's at issue is whether the predominant concerns had to do with the pandemic or whether they had to do with getting out of the political heat on the WE Charity scandal. The only person who can answer those questions is the Prime Minister.

Nothing untoward has been going on here at committee with opposition members supporting a motion to get the Prime Minister and a number of other players who were involved in what is also quite plausibly a major reason, not just for the prorogation itself. I agree there can be multiple reasons for prorogation. Often in government there's more than one thing going on in a decision. In fact, the art of government, arguably, is to balance competing demands and competing interests. Very often, when government makes a decision worth taking note of, it's because it is complicated because there are a number of things at play.

I do think it is quite reasonable that even if the WE Charity scandal wasn't the only reason for the prorogation, it affected the nature, duration and timing of that prorogation. That's fair game. The only person who can really settle that question for the committee is the Prime Minister. I submit to you that the government House leader did a bad job of that, and people are free to disagree with that. I'd love to hear from the person who made the decision, and I really don't think that is unreasonable. It's just not something I can accept, that, first of all, it's unreasonable to insist on hearing from the principal decision-maker with respect to a file.

The last time Mrs. Shanahan spoke about responsible government, prior to today, I tried to highlight for her some of the ways a decision about prorogation or dissolution is a special.... I mean, this is the language right out of the order in council; I'm not making up new terms. Since 1935, at least, decisions about prorogation and dissolution have been a special prerogative of the Prime Minister. That is something that, by order in council, that is, by a decision of the entire cabinet, has been set aside for the Prime Minister to make alone. That's in keeping with the Prime Minister's special role as an adviser to the Crown.

There are many people, I'm sure, who would have loved to be in the meeting in one controversial prorogation I can think of, where former prime minister Harper met at length, for hours, with the Governor General on the eve of a prorogation. There was some debate in the lead-up to that meeting, and in fact during the many hours of that meeting, live on radio and the 24-hour news cycle and all that good stuff that politicians watch with fascination at times like that.

There were lots of people who would have loved to be in the room. The government House leader wasn't in that room. Staff from the whips' offices weren't in that room. I'm not even sure the Prime Minister's chief of staff was in the room. That was a meeting between the Prime Minister and the Governor General. To me, that just highlights the nature of that special relationship and the nature of the special decision-making authority of the Prime Minister and the extent to which nobody can stand in for the Prime Minister

when it comes to decisions having to do with either the prorogation or dissolution of Parliament.

I thought that was important to state, if I haven't been clear enough about that in the past. I don't think that's a viciously partisan interpretation of the facts. I think that's a pretty good exegesis of parliamentary process and a little bit of parliamentary history, for that matter.

The idea that, when the opposition is dissatisfied, responsible government calls for an election is a broken idea. It's broken at least because it would mean that we have no responsible government in majority parliaments. I think that's a pretty clear implication. If responsible government demands that the opposition trigger an election any time they think there's something seriously wrong with the way the government has behaved, and they don't have that power in a majority Parliament, then that means we have no responsible government in majority parliaments.

I'm sure that's not what Mrs. Shanahan intended to imply. That would certainly shed a different light on the last Parliament, I would think. Although I could appreciate it if some people wanted to maintain we didn't have a proper kind of responsible government in the last Parliament, I doubt it would be Mrs. Shanahan and her colleagues in the Liberal Party. I'm happy to be corrected on that point at any time if someone would like to claim otherwise.

Those are some things I think are important to say.

With respect to Mr. Turnbull's comments, I would say this. The timing and the nature of the prorogation are important to me for a couple of reasons, as I've said before. They're important because there was a pending deadline for CERB, and millions of Canadian households were depending on that program and didn't know what was coming down the pipe. The government made an announcement about what it intended to do at the end of CERB the day after prorogation. That is to say, they chose when to prorogue, and they chose when to announce that package. They chose to announce it at a time when there could be no meeting of Parliament for parliamentarians to ask questions in the House.

We had another scheduled summer session. In fact, it was going to be within seven or eight days of the Prime Minister's announcing that prorogation. I can't for the life of me, in any of the testimony that we heard or any of Mr. Turnbull's best arguments, see why that prorogation couldn't have at least waited until the day after the last scheduled sitting of Parliament in the summer.

Those four sittings of Parliament were negotiated among the parties, recognizing that there was a pandemic, recognizing that there was an important role for Parliament, not just the government but for Parliament during the pandemic. The Prime Minister unilaterally decided to break that all-party consensus to have Parliament play that role and cancelled the last scheduled sitting of Parliament in the summer. I think that was a serious mistake. I think he did something wrong when he did that.

I am not satisfied by the answers of the government House leader as to why. It's not an on/off switch, prorogation or no prorogation. The Prime Minister also made decisions about when to prorogue. I want to ask him about those decisions, and I do believe that the WE Charity scandal, and trying to protect himself and his government from that fallout, played a role in the timing of the prorogation. I'd like an opportunity to press him on those issues, because I think they matter.

I think it matters that an all-party consensus to have Parliament meet biweekly during the summer was unilaterally quashed by the Prime Minister. There would still have been weeks for the government to consult, when Parliament wasn't scheduled to sit. Why was that last summer sitting cancelled, after the work of getting all the parties of the House on board? That was something that was done, if I recall correctly, by unanimous consent. Not only were the recognized parties on board, but that meant that the independent members and members of the Green Party also supported that consensus.

I don't think it was appropriate for the Prime Minister to act against Parliament in that way, and that's the way I see it. Frankly, that's not something that's really been addressed in the hours of debate that we've heard from Liberal members. Nobody has spoken directly to the issue of why the prorogation had to occur on the day it did. That's fine. I don't really care to hear Liberal members opine about that, because I know who made that decision. The Prime Minister made that decision, so I'd love to hear the Prime Minister opine on that.

I'd love to hear him give his reasons, not for prorogation in general but for prorogation on that day and why he saw fit to upend a unanimous decision of the House of Commons to meet twice in August—four times overall over the course of the summer—and why he would choose to cut that sitting off to announce the package for the replacement of CERB, which was likely to be controversial, in the non-pejorative sense of that term. That is to say, it was very reasonable to expect that there would be different opinions about what that would look like from the various political parties and that there would be some discussion required in order to get to something looking like a consensus.

Why take away the opportunity for parties to question the government about what that consensus might look like, with enough time for that to actually be hammered out, not at the eleventh hour when households are wondering what the heck they're going to do next month if they can't make rent? It could have been done progressively over the course of four or five weeks, or at least there could have been an initial conversation on the record that allowed the parties to stake out their preliminary positions and thoughts on the government's proposal.

To me, that's a matter of significance. It cuts to the question of how the Prime Minister handles the prerogatives of his office—dissolution and prorogation—and it's quite topical. I know the Liberals want to say that everybody has moved on. There are still people, incidentally, who are upset about the WE Charity scandal. If the Liberals don't hear much about them, then I think they should at least do a little more listening in western Canada, where I'm from, because I certainly hear about it, and I know it's a common criticism of the Liberal Party that they don't listen enough in western

Canada. Maybe it's just a regional thing and you guys aren't hearing it, but if it's the case that Ontario has moved on—and I doubt that too—it's certainly not the case that people west of Ontario, I can tell you, have moved on from concerns about the WE Charity scandal.

It's topical even if people have moved on from the WE Charity scandal—which, as I said, I don't think they have. What they haven't moved on from is wondering whether we have a Prime Minister who's going to act unilaterally to call an election at a time when Canadians really don't think we should.

I've been part of efforts to demand an answer from the Prime Minister on this. The NDP asks very openly in the House whether the Prime Minister will commit to not calling an election unless he actually loses a vote of confidence. I've seen him sidestep that issue repeatedly.

If Canadians don't have confidence in the Prime Minister's ability to use that prerogative well, then I think having him at the committee is an opportunity for him to better explain how he used the prerogative of prorogation. That might give Canadians some insight into how he intends to use the prerogative of dissolution. It's very much a topical conversation, because those two powers are intimately connected. They're both mentioned in the order in council from 1935 that I made reference to earlier today and in my remarks on the last day of the committee meeting.

We are very much in a time when Canadians have every right to wonder at the way in which the Prime Minister uses those special prerogatives of his office. I think examining his decision on prorogation is an important part of examining his use of those special prerogatives overall.

Again, I don't think this is a viciously partisan argument. I think it's actually pretty straightforward. I think it makes a lot of sense, if the committee is able to put the focus squarely on the Prime Minister, instead of this becoming about WE Charity writ large, in the kind of investigation that Mr. Turnbull has rightly mentioned has been pursued at other committees—in fact, with more success than we've seen here. A number of the requests that are in this motion have already been made successfully at other committees. The sky didn't fall and the world didn't end. Frankly, with the benefit of hindsight, although I have supported the motion all along, I think we could say that if we had just passed the motion and heard from those witnesses who were willing to appear, we'd be a lot further along by now than we are.

Putting the focus on the Prime Minister means making it about prorogation. It's not about an on/off switch—prorogue or not prorogue—but about why he chose the timing that he did. Why did it follow immediately upon the resignation of the finance minister? Why didn't he give it several extra days to ensure that Parliament could get the additional sitting that was agreed to unanimously by all members of the House? Those are good questions.

Mr. Turnbull has suggested that we don't need to explore any of those questions because the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has ruled that there was no conflict of interest for the Prime Minister. I wish he had also read the conclusions of the second report that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner filed at the same time. I'm sure members of the committee know that report has to do with the role of Bill Morneau, who, at that time—and through the entirety of the last Parliament, I think it's fair to say—was the Prime Minister's right-hand man. I think there's clearly an affinity between them in terms of how they think about issues. Bill Morneau was trusted to lead many aspects of government. We know the importance of finances. We know the importance of money. We know that the person who's put in charge of that for the government is somebody who has the total trust of the Prime Minister.

I can also tell you that many times during the pandemic when there were negotiations between New Democrats and the Liberals, it was very clear that many things were going back to the finance minister. In fact, the finance minister was often cited above the Prime Minister in terms of whose sign-off was really needed. I think there were some good things that didn't happen, as a matter of fact, as a result of that particular finance minister's involvement.

One of the things that didn't happen was getting students on CERB at a rate of \$2,000 a month. One of the reasons was that there was going to be this great new jobs program that was going to help top up the lower CERB rate under the CESB that students received. That was a great idea that came out of the Department of Finance and former minister Morneau, among others.

Those extra jobs and that extra funding never came to pass, because a scandal developed. How did the scandal develop? Well, it had a lot to do with the involvement of the finance minister, who, incidentally, as was omitted in Mr. Turnbull's earlier intervention, was found to have breached the Conflict of Interest Act on three separate counts.

The idea that somehow the Prime Minister isn't politically responsible for that kind of mismanagement by his own government is wrong. I accept the finding that there was no personal conflict of interest in the case of the Prime Minister, but that doesn't mean there's no political accountability.

I think this ties back to what I would say is a mistaken concept of responsible government on the part of Mrs. Shanahan. Political accountability is not the same as a narrowly defined legal sense of accountability. That's why we have a Parliament. That's why we don't just leave it to the courts. If the only way people could fail in political leadership was according to the law, then we would hardly need a Parliament for the accountability function. We might still have a Parliament to supplement the legislative intentions of a government and challenge some of the legislative initiatives that it intended to move forward with, but in terms of accountability, we would just leave that to the courts. I think that would be a deficient system, because it would fail to capture a lot of really important things.

This is something we've seen develop over many decades. It used to be the case that, if you had a serious case of mismanagement under a file, you would see ministers take individual responsibility for that. Individual responsibility for that, most often, would look like a

resignation. That would happen when things went really wrong. When or if a government took a position that somebody seriously disagreed with, it used to be that you would more frequently see the resignation of individual ministers. You don't really see that anymore. Instead, there's more of an emphasis on collective responsibility, but somehow the guy at the top doesn't bear responsibility. It becomes quite unclear who is responsible for the bad decisions of government.

When Bill Morneau left—although I truly believe that he left not to pursue a new executive position with an international organization, but because of the way he had mishandled the WE Charity file—he didn't take responsibility for it, though. You saw that again, the failure of a minister to accept individual responsibility beyond the collective responsibility.

As it is, by the Liberals' own telling, nobody has accepted responsibility for the WE Charity scandal. There's been no minister who's left government as a result of that scandal. That's what I hear from Liberal colleagues, anyway. If that's not true, I'd love to hear it. I'd love to hear that Bill Morneau left because he had mismanaged the WE Charity scandal. They recognized there was a problem, and he accepted responsibility for that, and that's the reason his political career ended, but I haven't heard that. I heard he was off chasing a job with OECD, which he quietly announced a little while later, to no one's surprise except maybe some Liberal Party faithful. He was abandoning that pursuit.

We are in this awkward situation where there was a major mismanagement of a big file that had serious material consequences for thousands and thousands of Canadians who were registered as students, who really ought to have seen themselves rolled into the CERB program, but instead were offered a discounted program on the promise of jobs that never came, because the finance minister, who did breach three sections of the Conflict of Interest Act in terms of his own conduct on this file, mucked it up. He made a political mess of what should have been straightforward aid to students, particularly in light of the fact that the government already runs the Canada summer jobs program, which is a perfectly acceptable way to provide employment to students. It was never clear why a third party organization was required, when the infrastructure for administering Canada summer jobs was already there and could have been supplemented instead.

Excuse me if I think it's too much to call coincidence the fact that the finance minister appeared at committee and wrote a \$40,000 cheque to WE the night before, because he suddenly remembered that he owed \$40,000 to an organization, which is not the experience of most people. Most people I know who have a \$40,000 debt are very aware of it and they don't have the ability to write it off in an evening as an afterthought off the side of their desk. I think that showed to a lot of Canadians just how out of touch one of the principal decision-makers in Justin Trudeau's government really was. I think that was unbearable and he had to go. That just happened to coincide with prorogation.

Yes, a pandemic can be a reason to prorogue Parliament, but the timing? Mr. Turnbull acts as if this is some kind of terrible surprise. I've said this before. In fact, he's repeatedly misquoted my attempt to say that before and he likes to bring it up, where I've tried to indicate that there can be more than one reason, that the pandemic may have been important in the decision to prorogue, but there are many of us who feel that the timing and the nature of that prorogation, which unilaterally busted up a consensus in Parliament to meet four times over the summer, had everything to do with the WE Charity scandal and getting out of political accountability for the WE Charity scandal.

Political accountability and legal accountability are not the same thing. If there was an opportunity to see some political accountability over the WE Charity scandal, it would have come if Bill Morneau had fessed up in terms of his real reasons for leaving government. He didn't do that, so we're still in this place where there hasn't been any political accountability for a major mess-up by the government that had real material consequences for a lot of students from coast to coast to coast.

So yes, I've been happy to support Mrs. Vecchio's motion. I continue to be happy to support Mrs. Vecchio's motion, but I also recognize that there's an imperative to get on with studying Bill C-19.

Why is it important to study Bill C-19? It's important to study Bill C-19 so that, hopefully, we can make some changes to the way elections unfold before the summer, because it's very likely that the Prime Minister, just as he used his special prerogative for prorogation last summer in order, I think, to further his political interests, which incidentally aren't covered by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's report, because they're out of scope by law, as they should be..... That's fine. We're not asking the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to weigh in on questions of political accountability. That's what Parliament is for.

Last summer, the Prime Minister used his special prerogatives to prorogue Parliament at a time that was in his political interest. We're now coming up against a summer where there's some real suspicion he is going to use a similar special prerogative to call an election because it furthers his personal political interests and the political interests of his party, even though Canadians don't want an election. All we would like the Prime Minister to say is that if we get to the end of June without his government losing a confidence vote, he's not going to call an election in the summer. He won't say that.

The question is, how can Parliament not be working in the summer, when it's not meeting? It seems to me that a Prime Minister who was really interested in listening to Canadians, who overwhelmingly are not interested in having an election right now, would be willing to say that if the opposition gets us to the end of the session in June without triggering an election themselves, he'd be happy to do his part and not trigger an election until Parliament resumes and we see how it goes after the summer.

Mr. Peter Kent: Just enough for one bath or a shower.

The Chair: You're not on mute, Peter.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Talking about the Prime Minister's behaviour often makes me want to shower as well, Peter, so I appreciate

your contribution and I take it as being quite on theme. Relevance is a rarity here on committee.

It's because of the fact that there are questions as to the way in which the Prime Minister exercises the special prerogatives of his office that we need to have a timely study of Bill C-19. If the Prime Minister would just say that he is not going to call an election during the summer, we'd have lots of time to study Bill C-19. It's not a problem. We could study it over the summer and we could have something that the House could be prepared to vote on in the fall. The urgency for studying Bill C-19 comes directly as a result of the behaviour of our Prime Minister, and I put it to you that it's a false sense of urgency.

Canada does not require an election this summer. There shouldn't be an election this summer. Canadians don't want an election this summer. All of the opposition leaders have pledged not to trigger an election before the summer because they've all pledged not to trigger an election during the pandemic.

Certainly if we can get through these next five weeks without the opposition parties voting non-confidence, there could be no reason for the Prime Minister to decide to trigger an election in the summer, other than because he considers it to be in his own political interest. The opposition parties can't obstruct a Parliament that's not meeting. If there's a way to do that, why don't you let me know?

I'm looking at Mr. Turnbull there, because it seems to me that if Parliament is not meeting, opposition members can't obstruct it. Therefore, it seems to me that it would be perfectly reasonable for the Prime Minister to say that if we get to the point where Parliament is not meeting, he's not going to be the one to call an election. We can't get that. That's where the sense of urgency comes from on Bill C-19.

It would be a mistake to simply move on from this study. I do think we need to get to the point where we report back to the House. Look, PROC has spent a completely disproportionate amount of time debating how to proceed with this study. I think it would be an awful shame if we didn't report anything back to the House on that.

Simply moving on to the study of Bill C-19 and not coming to some kind of agreement as a committee on how we might proceed is a mistake. I recognize that it's challenging. I know that government members have dug in on various positions over the course of the debate, and I recognize that opposition parties don't always agree and that it can be difficult to carve a path forward. That's something I mentioned last time in the context of committing to try to do that, as the other parties did. We did indeed meet to try to find that way forward.

Again, we've seen what can happen to a committee when the interests of one political organization are at play. We've been going through dozens of hours of debate because Liberals don't want to have a vote on the motion that was put forward, despite the fact that there seems to be a majority consensus on the committee to move forward in the way proposed in Mrs. Vecchio's motion. Then you try to take three different political organizations, with different goals and different thoughts about where to go and how to do it, and that discussion certainly can become quite difficult as well.

However, we have been having that conversation over some time because I don't think anybody wants to hold this up. I don't want to speak for anyone, but certainly my impression in the discussion with the other parties is that I don't detect a real desire to be holding up the study of Bill C-19. However, I did also hear loud and clear that there needs to be some kind of resolution to this study.

I want to remind Liberal members on the committee that the reason we're in this study is because of a mechanism that the Prime Minister brought forward. As members here have heard me say before, it's not my preferred method for how to deal with questions on prorogation, or even dissolution. Again, I think those are very related powers, and they should be dealt with in a related way.

The best way that is not outlandish or coming from nowhere...In fact, the United Kingdom, which is where our model of Westminster parliamentary democracy comes from, has adopted a provision, so that it's actually Parliament that makes decisions about prorogation and dissolution.

Unfortunately, those more democratic ways of navigating the questions of dissolution and prorogation have not yet come to Canada. There are some reasons why it's more difficult to implement in Canada, but like many politically difficult situations, provided there's adequate supply of political will, there's usually a solution.

When it comes to prorogation, for instance, I've heard that Canada may even need to go so far as having a constitutional amendment in order to allow the House of Commons to make a decision about prorogation as opposed to leaving it uniquely up to the Prime Minister.

There have been some really interesting witnesses here. I think of Hugo Cyr, for instance, who was here talking about prorogation. Some witnesses essentially proposed workarounds in recognition of the fact that, by convention, it seems to be a constitutional power of the prime minister, and therefore, needing some kind of constitution-level intervention in order to change the way that prerogative would be exercised.

I think the best way to deal with prorogation...That would get us around the need to even have this study, because we would have a fulsome debate in the House of Commons, and then a decision by elected members of our Parliament on whether to prorogue or dissolve earlier than a fixed election date. That's the gold standard.

However, that's not the one the Prime Minister chose. What did the Prime Minister choose? The Prime Minister chose to say that the government would table reasons for prorogation, and that those would be deemed referred to PROC. Presumably, that didn't mean, "Let's refer them to PROC, so that PROC can use the file as a door stop." As is often the case, when things are deemed referred to a committee for the purpose of study, just as the estimates are typically deemed referred, a committee typically deals with them if it's a well-functioning committee, and they are not held up in filibuster over what is a pretty straightforward motion.

That was the Prime Minister's solution, and that's why we're here. So, yes, Liberals did agree to have a study of prorogation. I take that to mean that they agreed to honour the Prime Minister's intent when he said that political abuses of prorogation were real.

He recognized, in that proposal, the political dimension of accountability, that is to say, the dimension of accountability that goes above and beyond, strictly speaking, legal questions of the kind that a conflict of interest commissioner might rule on, for instance.

Here we are, and we're undertaking that study. We're undertaking it for the first time ever. I say with some measure of embarrassment, not individually but as a member of this committee, that when people look back to the founding study at PROC on reasons for prorogation, in some future instance where a prime minister is alleged to have prorogued for political reasons above other kinds of more altruistic reasons, or political reasons in the pejorative sense...There can be political reasons in a good sense, as well, and some of those may have been at play with respect to the pandemic, but they were used as cover for some other kinds of political motivations.

Fair enough, let's get the guy in here. Let's talk to him about it. That's the whole point after all.

Here we are, and this has been the kind of launch, if you will, of Prime Minister Trudeau's idea about how to stem political abuses of prorogation. I don't think it's gone very well, but I don't think it's beyond redemption.

It was very good until the filibuster started. We heard from people that we ought to have heard from. I'd have been happy not to have heard from the Government House Leader, though, and go straight to the Prime Minister, because, as I say, it was very clearly a decision for him to make, and that he did make.

We did all of that. It was going very well and then there were some reasonable proposals for other witnesses that had to do with some of the alleged reasons for prorogation. Suddenly, that wasn't acceptable to the government, so here we are stuck in a filibuster.

I think it's really important, in terms of setting a good precedent, that the Prime Minister appear. I think it's even more important that the upshot of this entire process not be that PROC fails to report back and that the Prime Minister uses a similar special prerogative to end the Parliament before PROC ever has a chance to report back. It would be a really bad precedent to say that these reasons are going to be flipped to PROC, that they might start to study it and hear from some good voices, but then they descend into a completely unproductive, months-long period of debate and never emerge. I think that would send the wrong message.

I would hope that if the Prime Minister or some of his folks are listening or some Liberals on the committee report back, there would be some sense of duty to this proposed solution so that we don't end up in a place where we don't even bother reporting back. How sad would that be?

I do think it's incumbent upon us to work towards some kind of resolution to what has been a very frustrating ordeal. That's why members of the opposition parties have been discussing what a way forward might look like. It's an odd position of reverse onus.

I've been part of opposition filibusters. If you're in an opposition filibuster, usually you see it as your own responsibility to find a way out of the filibuster.

With respect to Mr. Turnbull for having tried, it didn't really work. We haven't seen a lot of flexibility in terms of what the government might be prepared to accept or not accept. We had an up-and-down offer from Mr. Turnbull. I'm appreciative of the fact that we finally got to vote on that. I think that was good. As I say, it kind of clears the space for trying to find some other kind of alternative.

We may have to cycle through several attempts. If we can get into a place where we're proposing things and dealing with them without having to debate each proposal for months at a time, I think the committee would be well served. I think this special mechanism of the Prime Minister would be well served because it might actually get us to a point where we break the impasse.

If the model is that we're waiting on one person to propose one solution that's automatically going to rally everyone and if it doesn't, we're stuck in a months-long filibuster, we don't have enough time to make that model work. Arguably, even if we had another two years, we might not have enough time to make that model work. I'm just basing that on the precedent we've already set with the length of time we've spent considering Mr. Turnbull's amendment. That all gets hard to do.

I would definitely encourage, as we work through these things, a spirit of voting within a few meetings on any one proposal, so if it's not the one that's going to do it, we can dispense with it and move on and hear some other proposal. I think that might be a nice way to break the deadlock. There is definitely going to have to be some deadlock-breaking at this table, it seems to me.

I don't know that we're going to be able to negotiate something behind the scenes that brings everyone aboard all at once. The rhythm of the committee has to change because it's been quite slow. We need to move from what we've been doing in a couple months to doing in a couple meetings. I'm willing to make some proposals and not take their passage or failure personally. I think one is always disappointed if one makes a proposal toward resolution and it doesn't pass—at least in the sense of being hopeful for a resolution.

I would rather know that something I propose isn't going to work within a couple of meetings than to have to take a couple of months to get to a rather obvious conclusion.

In any event, I do now want to propose something. I know it may not be the thing for which everybody suddenly says, "That's amazing, I love it, obviously, why didn't we all think of this months ago?" I want to throw it out there as something for consideration. I would urge members to take a reflective approach to the proposal. I do think that there are advantages and disadvantages for all in this proposal. I certainly don't want to be causing any knee-jerk reactions.

I think it's fair to say, and other opposition members can correct me if I'm wrong, that I don't think we have a fully formed three-party proposal that's going to come forward today, so I'm going to put something out there that I think probably won't be shocking to anyone, but with an adequate period of reflection I think may be the

solution. If it's not the way forward, then perhaps we could vote on it next day and dispense with it, so that the table can be clear for somebody else to put something forward. Maybe in the meantime there will be some discussions that help shepherd us all towards a common solution. I would certainly invite that and be happy to talk to people about what that might look like, if it's not the thing that I'm going to propose.

would like to propose an amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion. I would move that the motion of Karen Vecchio concerning the committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020 be amended by 1) replacing paragraph a) with the following:

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;

2) by deleting paragraphs b) through h).

I want to talk about some of the advantages of this proposal. One of the things that we have heard loud and clear at this table many times is that the government takes exception to the idea that the procedure and House affairs committee would be for lack of a better term—I'm not sure I like this term—but relitigating the WE Charity scandal in the way that it has been dealt with at other committees.

We have heard that very clearly. It's something that I'm prepared to do, because I still think there's a dearth of answers. As I say, I don't think the government has really adequately been held to the kind of political accountability that I think the WE Charity scandal demands. That's why I've been very happy and comfortable about supporting Ms. Vecchio's motion.

I do hear that the government doesn't want to do that. For me, the question about the WE Charity scandal in the context of this study isn't about all of the details of the WE Charity scandal. We have seen the ethics committee deal with a number of those questions and hear from a number of the witnesses who were in Ms. Vecchio's motion. Rather, for me, the interest of the WE Charity scandal, as I say, has to do with the timing, the length and the nature of the prorogation that the Prime Minister in fact executed. Why did he prorogue on the day that he did? Why did he cancel a unanimous decision of Parliament to have four summer sittings? Why did he not heed calls by at least some opposition parties—I'll speak for the NDP here—to resume earlier in order to have some time for parliamentary dialogue about the replacement of CERB?

These are all important questions. I think the details of the WE Charity scandal do bear on those issues. I do want to talk to the Prime Minister about those things. Do I need to talk to the Deputy Minister and Minister of Finance, and to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth? Even though a lot of the parliamentary dialogue certainly, and a lot of the media conversation and the evidence, points to their involvement in the way that the WE Charity scandal unfolded, they aren't the decision-makers when it comes to the timing and the nature of prorogation.

While I would like to hear from them here, and while I think their interventions may have some light to shed on how things happened, I don't need to hear from them in the same way in a study on prorogation. If I have to prioritize one witness in the entire motion by Ms. Vecchio, the Prime Minister is clearly it—for political reasons, sure, in the best sense. He was the decision-maker. The very kind of political accountability that Parliament is at least in part established to deliver rests with him. He is the appropriate person to ask about those issues.

I don't think I'm going to learn more about the nature of prorogation from the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth than I am from the government House leader. Those are two people who are part of a cabinet that the Prime Minister might have spoken to about the decision, but they aren't ultimately responsible for it. I do think that in the case of the Prime Minister, there's cause to believe that we might yet learn something. Even if we don't learn something new, it will have been a valuable exercise. That is how political, as opposed to legal, accountability operates. The decision-makers have to answer questions about what they did and why they did it.

Likewise, I think it would be very interesting to hear from Mr. Morneau about what his reasons for resigning were and why he thinks his resignation happened. I dare say it was “precipitated”...but I won't use that kind of prejudicial language, although it did happen right before prorogation. Does Bill Morneau think there's a link between those two things? I'd love to hear whether he thinks so or not.

The point remains that it wasn't Bill Morneau who decided to prorogue Parliament. It wasn't Bill Morneau who went down to the Governor General's residence when he did—because he didn't. The Prime Minister did. He made that call.

It would be useful to hear from Katie Telford, who I'm sure was involved in the decisions that led up to the Prime Minister exercising his special prerogative in the way that he did. Is it strictly necessary in order to better understand prorogation? It is not anywhere near to the same degree that the Prime Minister is.

The Kielburgers clearly had something to do with WE Charity, had a role to play in the proposal that WE Charity was pursuing with the government and had relationships with government that landed Bill Morneau in a conflict of interest. Did they decide when Parliament would be prorogued? No, they didn't decide that. Only one person could decide that, and that was the Prime Minister.

In a study of prorogation, who is it most important to hear from out of all these witnesses? It's the Prime Minister. There's no big surprise here, but I think it's important to reinforce. I recognize that the Kielburgers weren't the ones who made that decision. By saying we're going to limit the scope of this motion, does that mean there will be no questions about WE Charity for the Prime Minister? Absolutely not. If the Prime Minister appears, those questions will be properly directed at the decision-maker on prorogation. They can be asked in a way that gets to the bottom not just of the fact of prorogation, which obviously happened and is obviously a prerogative of the Prime Minister to prorogue, and nobody has ever disputed that....

The question is how he has used that prerogative and whether he has used it appropriately. There you have to get into the details of the actual prorogation. While many of these witnesses can help us get into the details of something that I think still calls for answers—that is, the WE Charity scandal itself—they can't give us any kind of privileged information or insight into the nature of the prorogation.

The same would go for the Perelmutter, who have testified at other committees that were looking directly, and rightly so, and I'm glad for their work.... I'm grateful to Charlie Angus for the leadership he showed in that study and the work he did along the lines of holding the government politically to account for what was a serious scandal, but I don't think that the Perelmutter are going to have a lot of insight into the nature of prorogation. Again, while I think it would be helpful to hear from many of the witnesses in this motion in order to better understand the WE Charity scandal, which might help us better understand some of the motivations of the Prime Minister, if we're looking to try to wrap up this study now on an expeditious basis after spending a lot of time on it, I don't think they're the one witness that we need to hear from in order to get that work done.

Likewise, there was a call for the production of a lot of papers, papers that I think ought to be produced, papers that I think would give more insight into the WE Charity scandal that Canadians deserve to know about, but those papers are not going to shed light on the question of why the Prime Minister decided to prorogue Parliament the day after the resignation of his finance minister, which apparently had nothing to do with the WE Charity scandal or his, at that time, very recent appearance before another committee of the House where he was held to account for the fact that he actually had a debt of \$40,000 to the organization that was being sole-sourced for a large government contract that he had only cleared the night before.

Are we really supposed to believe that none of these things are connected? I'm sorry, Madam Chair, but I wouldn't be doing my job if I accepted such a facile explanation.

Even all those things considered, there's still a question, as I say, when you consider all of the needs of the pandemic and the desire of many government backbenchers to spend some time consulting with their constituents on what might be in the Speech from the Throne. I would note, Madam Speaker, that we only had one scheduled sitting day over the time of that prorogation, but that one scheduled sitting day also happened to coincide with the deadline for documents like the ones called for in this very motion that we've been debating.

Our Liberal colleagues would like us to believe that it's a coincidence. Coincidentally, the timing of the prorogation just happened to rub up against the deadline when documents like the ones in this motion were actually due and which the government clearly doesn't want to provide.

Again, we have this odd coincidence about the timing and the nature of that prorogation, how long it lasted and the effects of proroguing at that exact moment, on the heels of the resignation of the finance minister after embarrassing testimony on the WE Charity scandal and on the eve of an important deadline for the tabling of documents that would lay out many details about that scandal.

Despite the recent finding that the Prime Minister wasn't in a legal conflict of interest, what we do know is that his right-hand man was. We know that political accountability has a broader application than legal accountability and that the Prime Minister does share in the political blame for this fiasco that even the finance minister refuses to take responsibility for. If he has taken responsibility for it somewhere, then I would urge my colleagues to point us in the direction of where that happened, because I haven't seen it yet.

In fact, I think the predominating quote in response to inquiries about the recent conflict of interest report by the former finance minister, Mr. Morneau, is "no comment", which has been what I've seen. If he has commented more extensively on that, I haven't seen it. I might have seen something that was a prepared statement that was to the effect that it was in the past and it doesn't matter anymore. Of course, we all remember Rafiki's compelling refutation to Simba in *The Lion King* of the claim that actions of the past don't matter anymore.

I'm just trying to generate some interest on the committee, Madam Chair. I am beginning to suspect they might be losing interest, so I thought maybe a reference to *The Lion King* would spice things up, but it's a tough crowd. I appreciate that, and I appreciate the reasons for that.

What am I saying? What I'm saying is that this particular amendment offers, I think, a real and significant olive branch to members of the Liberal Party on the committee who have spent a lot of time telling us how irrelevant many of the witnesses are. While I don't agree with them in that assessment, what I am offering here is to dispense with all of that. Not only am I dispensing with that, or proposing that the committee does, I am also reducing the amount of time that the Prime Minister would have to appear from three hours to one.

Essentially, everything that Liberal members of this committee found objectionable in the other motion disappears except for one hour of the Prime Minister's appearing. That's, I think, pretty good, because, if you were to make a list of what the Liberals didn't like about this motion, to have everything off the list except for one thing, and to have the length of that presentation be reduced by two-thirds, is a pretty good offer.

I won't speak for the other parties on this, but what I will say is that I think I'm not alone in feeling that it is very important that the Prime Minister appear in this study.

I won't be alone in asking some questions about the WE Charity scandal in that hour either, but my questions will certainly revolve around the circumstances of the prorogation, as I see them mattering to Canadians who were concerned, while on CERB, about having a better sense of what was waiting for them on October 1. Having then participated in the rushed debate that occurred at the end of

September in Ottawa, I can tell you, that would have been time well spent, having heard from tons of Canadians from coast to coast to coast in the lead-up to that deadline about the anxiety and the uncertainty they faced. I can tell you that it would have been productive to create more space for Parliament to hash out what the agreed-upon way forward at the end of CERB would have been.

Having heard from students who were very disappointed that the NDP's proposal for a student benefit was cut down and didn't match what was on CERB, and the fact that those extra jobs that were supposed to top up that income support didn't happen, I can tell you that this was a decision that is very real to a lot of Canadians and had an impact on them in a very difficult time.

Folks on CERB ultimately did get an answer. We, the NDP, were ultimately able to maintain the benefit level. Even last summer, the government was looking at cutting the benefit level. We were able to avoid that. I was happy for that.

Students, on the other hand, never did see that income they lost made up. When you're a worker and the only thing you have to sell is your time, that kind of lost time really matters. It's not that easy to bounce back from. There's no extra cheque coming for the time you couldn't spend working and getting paid a wage. That's why this continues to be a very relevant matter.

Again, I know this is not totally new. I don't know that any committee member is going to get particularly excited at the proposal. In my experience, the fact that nobody is particularly overjoyed is usually a sign that some kind of meaningful compromise is afoot. I can tell the committee that I share that feeling in respect of this amendment, but I do think it's a way forward. We clearly need a way forward.

Before the constituency week, we were building some momentum to a way forward. I appreciated that Liberal members of the committee allowed us to have a vote on the amendment that had been before us for a very long time, to clear the way to have a discussion about another proposed solution. Given the fact that we spent months on the last solution, I think it would make sense to spend at least this meeting on the current solution. I'm quite open to having a vote on it at the next meeting. I think that might be useful. If folks want to talk about it a little bit more, I'm obviously happy to do that.

If this isn't going to be the one to do it—which I hope nobody will decide today because in these kinds of delicate conversations, time for reflection is important—then I do think that we can try to dispense with it relatively quickly the next day or at some subsequent meeting in the not-too-distant future.

I'm trying to honour here what I perceive to be an important need to conclude this study. I really think it's important that we report back to the House somehow. I'm satisfied that if we hear from the Prime Minister, we can at least report back. That's something we can get done. That's worth an hour of the Prime Minister's time. I think it would be worth it, anyway.

Frankly, I think there's a duty here, as the decision-maker, for him to appear. It's a double duty because I think he also has a duty to honour what he proposed as the solution to potential political abuses of the power of prorogation. He proposed that decision-makers answer for that. Of course, he is the decision-maker. That's important and that allows us to get on, conclude this study and report something back before the end of June. I think it is very important to do, so that when people look back on this....

I appreciate that, clearly, Liberal members feel there was no political abuse either in the fact of having prorogation or, apparently, even in the details of the prorogation, such as the nature, the length and the timing. That's fine, but that doesn't mean that at some future point they aren't going to suspect another prime minister of having abused that political power to prorogue Parliament. Indeed, I can find some common ground with Liberal members on the committee about past abuses of prorogation.

The question then becomes what we think is a good process for how to introduce some meaningful political accountability into that. I think having some written reasons tabled and forwarded on to PROC, which hears from some academics and then just buries it as a testimony item rather than reporting back to the House, would be a mistake. That's what we're at risk of doing if we don't find a way to wrap up this study.

I think the quickest and most straightforward way of doing that is to have that opportunity for political accountability with an appearance by the Prime Minister. That allows us to move on quickly, if the Prime Minister is prepared to do that in the spirit of his own solution.

The other reason it's important to try to find some kind of conclusion to this is that I want to see us get on to the study of Bill C-19. I want to see Bill C-19 sent back to the House with enough time for it to pass before summer. Again, to be very clear, I mean that I want that because I don't trust the Prime Minister not to call an election during the summer.

If the Prime Minister would do one of two things, it would help the situation at the committee a lot. If the Prime Minister would appear, I think this would reasonably resolve our issues here at the committee. If the Prime Minister would say that he's not going to call an election during the summer months when Parliament isn't meeting, then that would give us more time to consider Bill C-19 and again would help with the work of the committee.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that it's an odd scenario to have government members filibustering a committee with an expectation that the opposition is going to help them break their own filibuster. As I say, in the filibusters I've been engaged in before, we talk about what our end game is and we talk about how to get out of it if it's not producing what we want, because we recognize that the people who start a filibuster are the people who have the obligation to finish it.

We're in this odd moment where I think government members are trying to shift the onus onto the opposition to break their filibuster. They can break it at any time. I'm not the one, with the exception of a longer intervention today—and I appreciate the patience and interest of members of the committee with my interven-

tion today—who has been filibustering for the last number of months, so it's not for me to end it. I can't end the filibuster just by stopping talking, which is normally the power of somebody who is engaged in a filibuster, and it's normally up to that person who has the power to end it by stopping to find a way forward.

It's a very odd position to be in, with having colleagues imply that somehow it's the responsibility of the other side of the table to find a way out of their own filibuster so that we can consider their own legislation. I hope the Canadians who are listening appreciate what an unlikely and broken kind of situation this really is. I've done my best in good faith to try to bring about an end to this filibuster on a number of occasions, but it's true that I have not been willing to compromise on the importance of getting the Prime Minister here, because, significantly, I believe there are some really important non-partisan parliamentary reasons for having the Prime Minister at this committee, and I'm not really prepared to bend on those.

This amendment brings us a long way towards getting rid of what government members found most offensive—if you take them at their own word, and we should here—in the motion. In fact, I think just prior to my own intervention, it was Mr. Turnbull's contention that one of the things that was so objectionable about the motion was this litany of witnesses and documents. With this amendment, that's gone. It's a request for the Prime Minister to appear for an hour. All of the additional stuff that government members have said is a fishing expedition that has nothing to do with prorogation—all of that is done. All of that is gone with this amendment, if it passes.

This is a real opportunity for government members to be able to take out of the motion the lion's share, and I'm talking everything but one hour with the Prime Minister—all of the witnesses who are only being called because they have a connection to WE but don't have a clear connection to prorogation except through WE. We hear that Liberal members aren't interested in exploring those connections, even though I think those are connections that ought to be explored. We take them off the table.

The only call here is for the principal decision-maker in respect of prorogation, which is of course what we are studying. How do we know he's the principal decision-maker? Because you can go back to 1935, when cabinet said, by special proclamation, that those decisions—the decisions around prorogation and dissolution—rest with the Prime Minister alone as a special prerogative.

That is to say it is different from many of the other prerogatives of his office that he often jointly exercises with cabinet. It's not to say there wasn't a discussion at the cabinet table, but it is to say that, at the end of the day, he is the sole decision-maker.

It's why the NDP has asked the Prime Minister, not the Deputy Prime Minister, not the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, not the Minister of Finance, not anybody else. We've asked the Prime Minister to commit to not calling an election during the summer, because we recognize it is a special prerogative of the Prime Minister to make that call or not. We haven't asked that question of any other member of cabinet. Why? Because no other member of cabinet makes that decision. Cabinet does not make that decision collectively. It's the Prime Minister that does it.

We heard many things about how far-reaching the motion was, what a fishing expedition it was, how we should be talking about prorogation and not going down rabbit holes. While I say to my honourable colleagues on the other side that I don't agree with that analysis of the motion, for the sake of having five weeks left and in the context of a Prime Minister who won't commit to not calling an election during the summer, we need to get on Bill C-19. We need to do it in a way that, above all, sees this committee report back on the issue of prorogation.

It's not for the reasons of this Parliament but for the reason of future parliaments, which is what, presumably, the Prime Minister wanted when he pursued a change to the Standing Orders because he recognized that the prerogative of prorogation was sometimes abused. He wanted a mechanism in order to create the context for political accountability.

If the Prime Minister is really comfortable in his reasons for having prorogued, when and how he did, then he ought to be willing to come to PROC for an hour to allow the work of a senior committee of Parliament to continue. Particularly, in light of the fact that our next bill and the consideration of that bill.... It's a bill of his own government. It's a bill that has a sense of urgency attached to it, because of the way he carries himself in respect of a special prerogative—just like the one we are studying.

When it comes to proroguing and dissolving Parliament, the power is the same. It rests uniquely with the Prime Minister. Bill C-19 is urgent, because he refuses to say that we're not going to have an election during the summer. That has everything to do with his exercise of the prerogative that's at issue in the report we're doing.

Like I say, with no pretension that this is a perfect solution or that it's going to satisfy everybody.... In fact, it will be dissatisfying to all of us in some way, shape or form, but it might be the way that we can move forward on this. Before anybody makes any hasty decisions, it's important to have some time for reflection. It's important to have time for news of this proposal to work its way up to the Prime Minister and the people around him, so that they at least have an opportunity to consider whether they think this is worth it. I do think that the way out of this quagmire is through prime ministerial leadership.

While I may have my own doubts about how on supply that really is, I want the opportunity to be proven wrong in what I think about the Prime Minister. I want to give him the opportunity to come to this committee for an hour and explain his reasons for prorogation, so that we can file our report and move on.

My proposal to you, Madam Chair, seeing that we happen to be at our normal ending time for meetings.... I know my Liberal colleagues are great believers in coincidences, so this is just one more for them to believe in.

I would propose that we suspend our meeting at the normal time, so that we can come back on Thursday at 11 o'clock. Perhaps by then, people will have a sense of where they would like the debate on this particular amendment to go. If at that time, members would like to have a vote so that we can dispense with it, that would be great.

With that, I'll cede the floor.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

I believe your remarks, miraculously, ended at the right point in time.

If I have consensus from the committee, we can suspend for today.

Seeing no one who said “no”, we are suspended.

[The meeting was suspended at 12:59 p.m., Tuesday, May 25]

[The meeting resumed at 11 a.m., Thursday, May 27]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. This is a resumption of meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13, 2021. Of course, as we have been doing for some time now, we are meeting in hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021, and therefore members can attend in person or via the Zoom application.

For now everyone in this committee hearing is attending virtually, except that we have our wonderful staff and our amazing clerk and our interpreters there in person. Actually, I don't know if our interpreters are there. I don't think they are.

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Chair, they're here in the room.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you for all of the help you've given us throughout these hybrid sittings.

This is a reminder to everyone that taking screenshots or photos of your screen is not permitted, and everyone in the room, of course, has to maintain that two-metre social distance, wear a mask at all times when possible, and maintain hand hygiene.

For those participating virtually, please don't forget to select the language you need interpretation for, if you do, and remember to mute and unmute yourself.

Since we are continuing from our last meeting, we have a new amendment on the floor. We no longer have Mr. Turnbull's amendment. We have a new offer on the table, I guess you could call it, by Mr. Blaikie, and hopefully everyone has that amendment in front of them. It is an amendment to Ms. Vecchio's main motion. It was circulated on Tuesday by the clerk when we started discussing it.

Does everybody have that amendment? Let us know if you don't have it for some reason. We can send you another copy of it.

That's what we're on, and we have a speakers list. Mr. Blaikie had the floor when we last suspended, and after that we have Mr. Lauzon and then Mr. Turnbull, and that's it for the speakers list.

Mr. Blaikie, do you want to pick up from where you left off? Did we have a vote at the end of the meeting? No, I think it was just by consensus, so you have the floor. Go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I had concluded my remarks last time, so I'm happy to have you proceed down the speakers list.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Go ahead, Mr. Lauzon.

[Translation]

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

Once again, I'd like to thank everyone for being here today.

We made progress as members of this committee and can now see some daylight. Before giving you my own comments, I'd like to thank Mr. Blaikie. He took the time to give us a clear explanation of why, in his proposed amendment to remove the paragraphs following paragraph (a), he wanted the Prime Minister to appear in the week following the adoption of the motion.

I took note of a number of points in Mr. Blaikie's comments because he took the time to properly explain things. He clearly said that he wanted to know whether the prorogation was tied to the WE Charity or to the pandemic. That was at the beginning of his statement. The committee did look into this from the outset, with witnesses, with the presence of Pablo Rodriguez, and with all of the questions we had to deal with about whether the WE Charity or the pandemic was the reason for the prorogation.

Things have changed since then. Time moves quickly in politics. The Ethics Commissioner's report clearly showed that the Prime Minister had no links to the WE Charity, which in turn had nothing to do with the prorogation. The report cleared the Prime Minister, leaving us with the other option—the pandemic. If the pandemic was not a good reason to prorogue Parliament, I now find myself wondering what other reasons for doing so there could possibly be.

If I remember correctly, Mr. Blaikie also came up with an argument about a confidence vote that doesn't hold water. Allow me to explain. Mr. Blaikie mentioned that Canadians did not want an election. He also said that no one wanted an election in the summer and that these were all things for which the prime minister is accountable. However, that's not really the way things work. It's true that a minority government always depends on a vote of confidence or a vote on a budget or a budget statement, a throne speech or various other reasons for opposing a government. One can be forced to call an election, and it is the prime minister's prerogative to go to the Office of the Governor General to request one. However, it's wrong to say that it is solely the prime minister's responsibility.

If the parties work together, an election during the pandemic, and during the summer while waiting for people to be vaccinated, can be avoided. That's not only a prime minister's responsibility, it's the responsibility of the government, and the opposition has an extremely important role to play when it's a minority government.

Everyone knows that political jousting is involved and that the prime minister is not the only person to decide when there will be an election, which is why Bill C-19 is so important.

No one around this table wants an election or an election campaign to begin next week. However, if there were one, then as a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I would feel irresponsible not to have gone ahead with the study of Bill C-19. I believe that it's very important.

I'd like to speak to you about something that is essential to the proper operation of Parliament under a minority government. We really all want the same thing, which is to provide better support to Canadians. It's extremely important for the various parties to work together effectively. We currently have an amendment before us. From the outset, I have argued vehemently that the Prime Minister is in the middle of managing a crisis caused by a pandemic. The Prime Minister has an extremely busy schedule. We could always knock on his door and ask him to come and speak to the committee, but doing so at such short notice is almost impossible for him. The wording of the amendment and the motion makes it extremely difficult to require the presence of a Prime Minister who is tied up dealing with a pandemic.

I'm not closing the door. We are continuing with our work, Mr. Blaikie. My colleague Mr. Turnbull demonstrated this clearly in his amendment with respect to the Deputy Prime Minister, who is also the Minister of Finance. That would have shown that we were very open to suggestions. Mr. Turnbull's amendment showed that there were many possible ways of getting answers to our questions and producing a good report. We would have had a better chance of getting the Deputy Prime Minister to appear, even though she too is very busy during this pandemic. She is of course also very busy as Minister of Finance. Wearing two hats is very demanding.

We were ready to move ahead. It's simply a matter of governing properly. I respect all the decisions that this committee will make. We voted against Mr. Turnbull's amendment and I have already moved on to the next one, from Mr. Blaikie.

This pandemic has gone on for just over a year now, and we could not have predicted where we would be now. I gave a presentation this morning about tourism and people were saying they would like to have a longer-term outlook. We would, six or seven months ago, liked to have had long-term forecasts so that we could better plan things like tourism and reopening the borders.

A pandemic doesn't come with an instruction manual. We're here to make decisions based on public health recommendations and we are going to continue to do so.

When we found ourselves in the middle of a pandemic, we didn't think that the priorities of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs would still be the same as those on the list, which we were lined up to deal with at the outset. The priorities are no longer the same today. Sixteen months ago, who could have guessed that the top priority now would be Bill C-19 in the post-pandemic period?

We need to begin working on how to manage a future pandemic or disaster. We need to focus on those areas where we are likely to be successful. We need to write down what happened now, because it's still fresh in our minds and we're still living through it. Now is the time to finalize the reports, and to archive the committee's data and experience so that it can become better in future at managing another pandemic, or even a flood, like the one that occurred in my riding.

We can learn a lot from what we did. Bill C-19 remains a priority.

I understand why Mr. Blaikie is saying that he would like to turn the page, but from that to wanting the Prime Minister to appear here within a week is rather a stretch. He's all over the place at the moment. Everyone wants to see him. He has an extremely busy schedule. You can't mess with the Prime Minister's schedule like that. I would rather have him managing the country than appearing here before the committee to answer questions about the scale of the pandemic or about the WE Charity. People say they want to know whether he's guilty, even though we all know that he's been cleared by the Ethics Commissioner. I'm still standing my ground, but I agree with Mr. Blaikie when he says we need to vote, at which time I'll decide how to vote. That's all there is to it.

Lately, unfortunately, some people appear to have forgotten that we're in a pandemic, and I find that deplorable. Not only that, but Dominic LeBlanc sent a letter to the leader of the official opposition about the importance of collaboration among the parties because, as we all know, the Conservatives used procedural tactics in the House to slow down debate over Bill C-19. And here we are with Bill C-19 is now before us.

As I was saying, Bill C-19 is upon us. The bill will make it possible for Canadians to vote safely if there is an election. I've heard people speculating about specific dates for the election. We don't have an election date. We don't even have an election calendar. Some are saying that the election will be held this summer, while others are saying that it will be in September. Many journalists have been making predictions based on their own analyses. I'm amused by all this, because I don't have a date. Our priorities are the safety of Canadians, managing a country, and having as many motions as possible adopted before the end of this parliamentary session. This committee has important work to do. We all know that time is slipping by, which means that it's important to prioritize the various matters at hand. I'm pleased to say that thus far, in spite of everything, we've been able to move ahead with this bill.

We've set aside Mr. Turnbull's amendment. I've got over it already. Now, there is another amendment on the table. We need to discuss it because I feel that what Mr. Blaikie has suggested is a compromise. He worked very hard on it, not only in terms of docu-

ment disclosure, the hours and weeks of work that were required, testimony from the two Kielburger brothers, etc.

We know now that Mr. Blaikie has put some water in his wine.

I'm worried about the timing. It's very difficult for us to ask the Prime Minister to change his schedule and appear here within a week. He needs to meet provincial representatives on a regular basis. We are still negotiating various things with the provinces and territories. There is also the status of the indigenous territories and we are all aware of the Prime Minister's involvement in this issue. In the House this morning, there was another speech at 10 a.m. It never stops. The Prime Minister is in great demand. I'd like him to come and pay me a visit, but he can't. His schedule is too busy.

I'm still of the opinion that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, could have come and spoken to us at greater length about the need to create a recovery plan and a collaborative approach by the parties that would help Canadians. She's an extraordinary and open-minded woman who generates optimism when she speaks. I'm certain that the Honourable Chrystia Freeland could add some very interesting points.

I'm convinced that she could have spoken to us about the need to step back and develop new priorities for Canadians.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I really appreciate Mr. Lauzon, but could we perhaps get on to this amendment? Three or four times he has referred back to the old amendment. We have heard for the last couple of months about why Chrystia Freeland should be here. That is not on the docket today. Today's docket is the Prime Minister. That's the amendment.

Perhaps we could stick to the Prime Minister's presence. Specific to the amendment, there is only one thing that needs to be discussed here, and that's the Prime Minister.

The Chair: Thank you for that reminder. I think Monsieur Lauzon was for the most part talking about the Prime Minister, but sure, I guess a reminder never hurts, Ms. Vecchio.

Carry on, Mr. Lauzon.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: In response to the point of order, we are today discussing Mr. Blaikie's amendment, but I'd like to link it to an amendment the committee voted on and rejected. This would make the arguments in favour of requiring the presence of the Prime Minister still valid today. I am not talking about Mr. Turnbull's amendment, but rather about what we might have been able to gain compared to having the Prime Minister appear.

Mr. Blaikie also clearly indicated at the beginning of his speech that what he wanted to ask the Prime Minister was whether the decision to prorogue was based on the events surrounding the WE Charity or because of the pandemic.

It mustn't be forgotten that after a prorogation, a prime minister is the only person who can submit a report explaining the reasons for it. The Prime Minister did that, without any obligation to do so. No one has forgotten that the Conservatives had prorogued Parliament for no good reason without ever giving an explanation. We agreed to the prorogation criteria on that occasion.

This is really not the time for partisanship. It's time for everyone to work together to help Canadians get through this crisis. I understand what Mr. Blaikie has been saying. He also clearly explained in his intervention how important it was to study Bill C-19 before the end of the parliamentary session. He did say so. There's a simple way to do just that, and that is to proceed with the study.

Let's allow enough time for the Prime Minister to come, but proceed with the study of Bill C-19 in the meantime. I think that's the best approach. We have important things to discuss with respect to Bill C-19. We need some thorough discussions with the whole team, all the committee members. For example, there is the matter of having polling stations open on two additional days, Saturdays and Sundays. There are some good points to be made on this topic. I have some good points to make. Keeping polling stations open for eight hours on Saturdays and Sundays and 12 hours on weekdays requires a lot of volunteers. This needs to be discussed and an effective structure is needed.

I'm keen to discuss Bill C-19 because I have some ideas. I've done my homework. It's important to talk about the changes requested by Elections Canada, the scope of the Chief Electoral Officer's powers and how these powers can be extended.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I just want to get back on topic, which is this amendment. I recognize that Bill C-19 is sitting at the door, and it is this filibustering that is holding up all of the opportunities to get to Bill C-19, so perhaps we can get back to Mr. Blaikie's motion, or considering his amendment to that, and get back to it.

I understand that this will probably be overruled, but at the same time, let's get back to the real business of what we're doing on this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vecchio.

Carry on, Mr. Lauzon.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Once again, this is directly linked to the amendment suggesting that the Prime Minister appear next week. First of all, we all have good reasons to move on to something else and secondly, it's impossible on such short notice for the Prime Minister to come. We appreciate Mr. Blaikie's work, but the time periods are unreasonable or even impossible.

To manage a national pandemic in a country like Canada requires negotiations with other countries, like the United States at our borders, and with indigenous peoples. That's significant. It's extremely important to speak about the things we need to address and allow the Prime Minister enough time to come. I admire Mr. Blaikie's work. He has previously stated the reasons why he wanted the Prime Minister to come and also said that he wanted it to be in the

week following the adoption of the motion. No responsible government could demand that from its prime minister.

The third wave we are currently experiencing, in spite of a vaccination process that is going extremely well and is even accelerating, shows how important it is for us to continue to work together and to set partisanship aside for the good of Canadians.

Madam Chair, I'm not going to change my mind on this. You may tell me that it's not related to the motion that was introduced; but I'm sorry, the information I have in hand shows that the motion should be delayed so that we can do other extremely important things.

There are some facets of Bill C-19 that we need to analyze quickly. If I remember correctly, there is a voting period of 13 days...

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

I enjoy listening to what Mr. Lauzon has to say, and he knows it. However, an amendment has just been proposed and I'd like to go around the table. I'd like to speak. I certainly haven't taken up much time so far. I have some comments to make about the amendment introduced by Mr. Blaikie.

Having listened to Mr. Lauzon's comments, I fully understand his position. That's good. He is entitled to speak and we have heard him. Nevertheless, it seems to me that we could go around the table to hear what other MPs have to say, because this amendment has been introduced. With respect, I just want to point out that I'm on the list. I may be a little impatient, but I'm finding that things are moving rather slowly.

Before we move in the direction that Mr. Lauzon is advocating, I think we should quickly go around the table to see what the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois think. I believe we have understood where the Liberal Party stands, which proves that Mr. Lauzon has done his work properly.

However, before going into this in greater depth, I would have liked to hear from Ms. Vecchio or another Conservative Party member and would also like to hear the Bloc Québécois' position. We could then continue to discuss things at greater length if the Liberals wish. I think you understand where I'm headed, Madam Chair.

With respect, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: That's fine, Mr. Therrien.

[English]

The Chair: I absolutely do. It is a good suggestion.

I'm bound to follow the list. Right now we have Mr. Lauzon, Mr. Turnbull and then it's you, Mr. Therrien. Perhaps now that you have intervened and made your suggestion, it will be up to the next speakers on the floor to maybe keep their comments short and pass it on to you if they wish, but that's the speaking order I have right now.

Mr. Lauzon has the floor. Then it's Mr. Turnbull and then it's you, Mr. Therrien, followed by Mr. Long and Mr. Simms. If Mrs. Vecchio wishes to speak, she could be at the end of that speakers list as well, or whoever from her party.

I will also just let everyone know that on the issue of the prorogation study, the draft report—the incomplete draft report, if you want to call it that—is complete thus far, so don't get too upset. I'm not saying it's the final report that I'm about to submit or anything like that. Of course not. It's just that the translators have translated what the analysts have compiled for us thus far, and that is ready to go.

If more witnesses are to be added, those would have to be added and then translated. Everything we've done up to this point is ready for us to view. If the committee wishes to view it thus far, that's something you could do as well. I'm just throwing that out there as something we could do if the committee wishes.

Of course, as the speakers have mentioned, Bill C-19 has been referred, but of course we have the amendment and main motion to take care of, I believe, before we get to that point.

I just thought I'd make a bit of an announcement to let you guys know that both of those things are waiting for us on the sidelines, if we want to take a look at them.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, I just want to ask specifically about the report.

I know we haven't given drafting instructions or anything like that yet. Right now, I take it that Andre—I see him right there in my camera and know what a great job he does—has all of the data and information that we have received and has already put it into reports for right now. It's waiting to go to translation and then we will look.

Is that the plan?

The Chair: I believe that everything that's been compiled so far has already been completed and translated, just to save on time.

Is that correct, Andre?

Mr. Andre Barnes (Committee Researcher): Yes, that's a correct summary.

Laurence and I thought it would be a good idea just to stay on top of the work by summarizing what we had heard so far and waiting for further instructions from the committee.

The Chair: I haven't seen what we have thus far in the report. I just know that it's done. When it gets circulated to everyone, I would see it at that point as well. I just know it is there and I wanted you to know as well that it's there and is fully translated thus far.

I'll give the floor back to Mr. Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Therrien.

I'm going to show that I'm acting in good faith. You may have noticed that I don't have any notes, and I don't need any today to say what I think about what we're going through, and we've ac-

quired enough experience. In the speech I just made, I may have mentioned collaboration a few times. The best I can do with respect to that is give each of you a chance to express yourself on this amendment before I speak again. And of course, I'll raise my hand when I want to speak and wrap up my comments.

Mr. Therrien, I'd like to begin by giving you the floor, because Ryan is next. We need to take into account what Mr. Blaikie talked about for almost 20 minutes. He clearly explained the reasons previously given for the presence of the Prime Minister. I'd also like you to ponder allowing the Prime Minister only a week to appear here before us. I didn't say that I was absolutely against calling on him, but I did say that a week wasn't long enough.

On that note, Madam Chair, I will give the floor to the next person to hear what they have to say to the rest of us. I will raise my hand right away when I'm ready to conclude what I have to say on this matter.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon. I appreciate it.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon, my friend and colleague. I really appreciate your remarks.

I also want to express my gratitude to Mr. Blaikie for his attempt at this, I think, really quite good amendment. I certainly appreciate the effort that was put in and the thoughtful remarks he made last time. I thought he spoke very eloquently, as he always does.

I'm not buttering you up; I really believe that. You spoke very eloquently and expressed your point of view quite well, and at length, I would say, as well, which sort of made me think it would be great to have some time to express some of my thoughts related to this amendment.

I have a few points to make here. I won't take up too much of the committee's time. I definitely want to express the things that I feel very positively about in terms of this amendment. One of them is the way that it really cuts out a lot of the things that, from my perspective, were main issues. Those things really have to include all the references to WE Charity, the documents, the very large document requests that were made within the original motion put forward by Ms. Vecchio, as well as calling the Perelmutter and the Kielburgers, who I know have already testified in other committees, multiple times if I'm not mistaken. I know that must have been challenging for them, especially the Perelmutter. I think we heard from one of my other colleagues, Ms. Shanahan, when she was subbing in on this committee. She was part of the committee that questioned the Perelmutter. I know they went through quite a bit of hardship as a result of that. It's great that many of the things related to WE Charity are taken out of this and I feel very good about that as a positive step in the right direction.

I will just say, before I move on from that, we know that the Ethics Commissioner's report came out, and I referenced that last time. We know that the Prime Minister has been completely exonerated of all conflicts of interest, both real and potential, in that regard. Under the three different sections of the act that were relevant and the extensive documentation and evidence that the Ethics Commissioner reviewed, I thought that investigation and report were substantive and really took all the pieces of evidence and data into account, which is great. I think we can lay that to rest, and hopefully opposition parties will abandon their preoccupation with trying to link prorogation to WE Charity, which is more than rational at this point. This might be a vain hope that I have, that opposition parties will not try to undertake that line of questioning in the future. They're free to question and make whatever accusations they would like, but I think those are unfounded at this point and really show an attempt to link something to prorogation that is just patently untrue.

I feel much better about this amendment for those reasons. I really appreciate Mr. Blaikie's having cut those pieces of Ms. Vecchio's motion out, so I'm feeling very good about that.

I think Mr. Blaikie and I differ in terms of perspective at times. In the lengthy remarks and speech that he gave last time, I found myself at times shaking my head.

I remember I made a comment ages ago about how coming to debates in good faith is really being willing to give up a portion of your perspective in order to adopt the more rational point of view that someone else brings to the conversation. I felt at least with Mr. Blaikie's comments in our last meeting that I definitely shifted in terms of my perspective. I will say that I appreciate that and I think I learned something and definitely moved in terms of my perspective on this.

I have to say there are a couple of areas where I'm still feeling a difference of perspective may persist, at least in my reflections on this. There are two points that I would like to make around this. One is that Mr. Blaikie has said many times over—and maybe we'll have to agree to disagree on this—that this is precedent setting, that this situation of studying prorogation is precedent setting and that the Prime Minister needs to come before this committee so committee members can ask tough questions and hold the Prime Minister accountable. He has said that the Prime Minister was the key decision-maker. That's my synopsis of what I think Mr. Blaikie has argued in the past. I see it a little differently though.

I see that the precedent setting of this particular moment in time is that we're in a global pandemic, which we all agree is unprecedented. The standing order change that required a report to be tabled in the House and then referred to this committee was a change to the Standing Orders that this government implemented in the last term of Parliament. I think that was a good change.

I think for me the precedent-setting nature is that standing orders were changed to require a tabled report. The government used the prerogative of prorogation and then followed through with a detailed rationale and report. I think that's precedent setting in itself as a higher degree of transparency around the reasons and rationale for prorogation.

I also think this committee has shown a willingness, I would say.... I don't remember our members pushing back at all on studying prorogation, which I understand was not a requirement. Just because the report was tabled and referred to this committee, it didn't require us as a committee to decide to study that. Of course, we did decide to do that together. I think our votes were unanimous on that. I really think that was positive. There's another degree of willingness to show transparency, look at the reasons and study some of those reasons.

I also think that with the witnesses we called to come before the committee, we all put our best foot forward. I don't think our witness list was all that long from our side. I know that opposition members had quite a lengthy witness list. I understand that some of the witnesses were not available in the time frame. That's a bit of a bone of contention, perhaps, with the opposition. Again, what I'm saying here is that there's been a willingness all along to up the level of transparency around prorogation and the reasons for it. I think that's positive.

In terms of setting a precedent, I guess what it comes down to is a slight disagreement on whether the Prime Minister needs to appear or not in order for us to get a sense of his assessment and mental state at the time of making decisions around this. From my perspective, when you look at all of the other information that's been provided to this committee and the other witnesses, I guess my thinking is this: Is the Prime Minister really going to give us a unique perspective? Has he not already in many ways given us the rationale?

I'm not saying I'm not supportive of this. I think this is a really good amendment. I'm just expressing some of my thoughts and reflections on it. It just sort of assumes that there's something else to be had. That's where I still wonder, really, if we're going to get anything more than what we've already gotten through this extensive work study and this lengthy debate that we've had. Those elements still persist for me as slight variances in perspective.

I also want to say that I think Mr. Lauzon pointed out quite well the things about the amendment that I'm still a little uncomfortable with, including the timeline of "within one week", just given the Prime Minister's schedule and the importance of the work he's doing leading this country. There are lots of demands on his time. I just wonder whether one week is really sufficient in terms of this motion. A response to appear within one week is a very, very short time frame.

That's one part. The only other part that struck me as...when I read through the wording carefully, was the last part, stating that "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."

I don't know how to interpret this. Perhaps this is the wording—and maybe Mr. Blaikie could even speak to this—but I feel that this almost feels a bit threatening. I don't know whether it's intended that way, but it feels like a veiled threat, perhaps. I just wonder whether that's the way I should be interpreting it. Maybe that's incorrect, but that's the way I read it. It's imposing almost a consequence to not complying with a one-week time frame, which seems a bit unreasonable from my perspective.

Those are some of my thoughts related to the amendment. I appreciate any perspective that my other colleagues will provide and any clarification on that from Mr. Blaikie.

Thank you for listening to me and giving me the opportunity, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Monsieur Therrien, we caught you exactly at the best time, after you waited for so many meetings.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Yes, thank you.

I'd like to begin by thanking Mr. Lauzon for being kind enough to give others the opportunity to speak. I appreciate it.

My apologies to Mr. Turnbull. I hadn't noticed that he came before me on the list, and that's why I did not mention his name. I'm really sorry.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Therrien, before you carry on, there is an issue with your sound. You haven't unplugged or anything, have you?

Mr. Clerk, can you help us as to what the problem might be with the sound? It sounds a bit better now.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, everything appears to be okay now. I'm getting a thumbs-up from the interpreters.

The Chair: Okay, we're good to go.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I'll repeat what I just said. I'd like to thank Mr. Lauzon behalf of everyone for having given us some time to speak. I know that he had a lot to say, but I'd like to thank him for having passed the puck to us. It was very kind of him.

My apologies to Mr. Turnbull because I hadn't noticed earlier that he came before me on the list. I hadn't intended to take his place. Quite the contrary, because I always like to hear what he has to say.

I'll be brief. I think that Mr. Blaikie's motion is a step in the right direction.

The number two person in the government did in fact come. My view is that on matters like these, the House leader is really number two. I have a lot of respect for the Deputy Prime Minister, but the House leader is responsible for House procedures. I have a great deal of respect for Mr. Rodriguez. Unfortunately, when he appeared before the committee—and I already mentioned this, but simply want to reiterate what I said—he was unable to answer the existential questions that needed to be asked to understand why the government had prorogued Parliament.

. This leads me to believe that if number two cannot give us the information we need, then we need number one to come and see us if we are to do our work properly. We have a mandate to study the prorogation, and I know that here on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, we are professionals and know that

beyond partisanship, we have work to do. If we want to get it done, then the Prime Minister has to come and answer our questions.

I commend Mr. Blaikie's approach. If we could meet with Mr. Trudeau for at least an hour, we could wrap up the study of the prorogation and then move on to Bill C-19.

That would suit me. I believe it's important and it would open the door to the only opportunity we have to do our work as well as possible. Having Mr. Rodriguez here convinced me that without Mr. Trudeau, it would be impossible to do an intelligent analysis of the prorogation.

That's all I wanted to say.

[English]

The Chair: That was very concise and gives us your intention as to which way you're leaning on the amendment. Thank you so much for that.

There are no speakers to this amendment at this point, and so I guess we can call this amendment to a vote.

Go ahead, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I had just put mine up because this is something that we've been discussing. I really do thank everybody for doing this.

From what I understand right now, the only holdup from the government would be the time frame. They are saying they would be happy to have the Prime Minister here, but the time frame of one week seems to be the only issue. I wanted to get clarification on that to ensure that's the only holdup.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull spoke to that a little.

Is there any clarification you would like to provide, Mrs. Vecchio?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm thinking that if people are talking about this, I know...there are lots of things. I really do respect the great work Daniel has done. I know he knows that. He has done a lot of this. He's been really great to work with.

Something we were talking about was the documents. I understand from listening to government members that the documents are not going to be considered by them. I'm not sure on that. I want to see where we're at and where we're going here.

Those are just some questions on that. I just really want to know. We're looking at this and it's one week that we'd be able to see the Prime Minister. Is that the motion?

Maybe we could read the motion out again. Let's just get to this.

The Chair: Since we might be moving to a vote on this amendment, Mrs. Vecchio, do you need the motion in front of you?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: No, I have everything that's in front of us. I just want to ensure that it's the one week that we're talking about.

The Chair: We can have the clerk read out the amendment. That will help us all make sure we're on the same page if we go to a vote.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I'll read it out in English first and then I'll read it out in French for the benefit of the members. It's that the motion of Karen Vecchio, concerning the committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020, be amended:

I. by replacing paragraph (a) with the following: "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 one hour, 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;

II. by deleting paragraphs (b) through (h).

The Chair: Everyone seems to be present.

Mr. Clerk, could you help us with the vote?

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

Mr. Lauzon, you have your hand up.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think that Mr. Turnbull and I will have to be brief. I would in fact like to commend the committee for having adopted this motion. However, it will be very difficult in only a week to have the Prime Minister appear. Let's be realistic. Because we want to do effective work that would be good for the committee and for Canadians, I too would like to move an amendment to Karen Vecchio's new motion.

I'll explain my amendment. According to the motion, the committee:

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 one hour, 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.

I am therefore proposing the following amendment to the motion:

That the motion be amended by substituting the following for the words after "one hour": "that the non-appearance of the Prime Minister would be noted in an annex to the Committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020."

The amended motion would then read as follows:

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

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 one hour, that the non-appearance of the Prime Minister would be noted in an annex to the Committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020.

The document I just read can be sent to you.

[English]

The Chair: Let's take a minute, just because we didn't have a lot happen, and now that we have had a lot happen, I want to make sure that, procedurally, everyone is on the same page in their understanding of where we are.

Yes, Mr. Turnbull, go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I wanted to make a suggestion. Perhaps we could suspend briefly to discuss this new amendment and to allow

all the members of the committee to consider it while we send it around.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, I think the person we need to speak to is actually Mr. Lauzon, because he is the person to whom the questions will go on this amendment. I would like to get the amendment in our hands so that we can actually start asking Mr. Lauzon these questions, because I, to be honest, as to the breakage.... If we could get that amendment sent out....

The Chair: That's why I wanted a minute, just so that we could maybe see the actual copy of this amendment. We voted on one amendment. That would essentially become the main motion as amended.

Mr. Clerk, maybe you could help us procedurally. We have that main amendment now. We haven't voted on that, and before that, Mr. Lauzon moved an amendment, which I guess would now be the first amendment to what we just adopted to become the main motion.

Does that make sense to everyone? If not, I think Justin can help clarify that.

At the same time, Mr. Lauzon, I request that you or your staff circulate the motion to us in both languages, if possible, so that we can circulate it to all the members of the committee.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes, of course, I will send the motion in both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you.

The clerk will then circulate it to all members, so that we know exactly what's being talked about here, because I was having some problems following this myself.

Mr. Clerk, please make sure that everyone is on the right page.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Could you send that to me, Mr. Lauzon? I could then distribute it to the other members if you have it in both official languages.

Thank you.

[English]

Madam Chair, to clarify some process issues, the committee considered Mr. Blaikie's amendment, and it was adopted. Mrs. Vecchio's motion now takes on the form of the modifications that Mr. Blaikie's amendment suggested.

That would include part A of Mrs. Vecchio's motion. It is reworded along the lines of what Mr. Blaikie's amendment put forward, which was to have the Prime Minister appear for the one hour as opposed to the original three hours that was in Mrs. Vecchio's motion. All other parts of Mrs. Vecchio's motion have now been removed from her motion. Paragraphs (b) through (h) have now been removed.

The current motion, as it now stands, prior to Mr. Lauzon moving his amendment, would simply include paragraph (a), which calls to reinstate the Prime Minister for the one hour. Should he not appear within that week, it still provides the ability or mandates the chair to report that fact to the House. If the House were then to concur in it, it would provide the chair and the committee with the ability to have the Prime Minister appear from time to time.

That's where we are right now, on the cusp of Mr. Lauzon moving his amendment, which will obviously further change the original part A, if that is what the committee wishes.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, have you received the amendment?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I'm still waiting for the document from Mr. Lauzon.

The Chair: Mr. Lauzon, do you know if you have that document?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I'm just fixing it right now.

Can we take a little break before I send it to the clerk?

The Chair: Sure. It's 12:09 right now. We can have a 10-minute suspension.

In that 10 minutes, I think the amendment will have been circulated.

Please check your inbox during that time.

- (106805) _____ (Pause) _____
- (106825)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We have just received an amendment to the main motion at this point, the amended main motion. It's a new amendment proposed by Mr. Lauzon. Everyone has received that amendment. I hope everyone has had the opportunity to take a look at it.

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor. You had it when you moved the amendment. Now I'm wondering if you wish to elaborate on the amendment.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes, Madam Chair, thank you very much.

To be consistent with the changes we've just made, I'd say that I enjoy politics, but only when it's done well.

We've introduced an amendment that would require us to ask the clerk to officially request the Prime Minister's presence.

I believe that the Prime Minister has the prerogative to decide whether or not to accept, and we need to leave the door open to the possibility that the Prime Minister could not appear within a week, as Mr. Blaikie has requested. In the event of non-appearance, I understand that we would add an annex on the non-appearance of the Prime Minister to our report. That would enable us to move ahead and work on Bill C-19 and, potentially, take stock of how the COVID-19 pandemic is being managed.

I now give the floor to any other committee members who would like to comment.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

We have Mr. Turnbull and then Ms. Vecchio.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for the opportunity.

I appreciate the amendment from Mr. Lauzon. I really appreciate the thoughtfulness and the preparedness that he has shown in introducing this. I think it's quite good. It addresses a couple of concerns I had, which I think were relatively minor given how far we've come in this conversation in what I would say is a relatively short period of time.

Relative to how long we've been debating the original motion that Ms. Vecchio put forward, we've come a long way. It's great. I really appreciate Mr. Blaikie's amendment and now Mr. Lauzon's amendment, which is on the table before us. This is a step in the right direction. We're very close, I think, to resolving this. I think this is great progress.

I just wanted to say thank you to all the committee members and express my sincere gratitude for all the hard work we've been putting in. The ability to compromise a little along the way is really going a long way, so thank you for that.

I will allow my colleague Ms. Vecchio to speak to this now. I may have a few more words in just a moment, but I'm still reflecting. Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thanks very much.

I appreciate that Mr. Lauzon has put forward this motion. It's very concerning though, because it seems to me that all this motion—like the Liberal committee members today—is saying is, “Yes, we'll put this carrot in front of you to say that we'll put the Prime Minister there. We're going to invite him. The invitation might be lost in the mail, perhaps, because in one week, when he still hasn't come, we'll be writing the report.”

I have great concerns with that as well. I've looked at the fact that this committee has been willing to filibuster since February 23, knowing that all of this work could be done. Now we're saying there is not enough time to invite the Prime Minister so we need to put this to the annex. We'll get to Bill C-19 knowing that this report is going to indicate that for three months, members of the committee filibustered to ensure the Prime Minister was not here, and we did every single thing we possibly could to negotiate.

It's interesting because during that time there were very few negotiations. I don't think any of the opposition parties really spoke other than to intervene and talk about relevance. When I'm looking at this, I see these government reasons for proroguing. What we're doing once again is saying, "Prime Minister, you don't have to come. We're going to put on that little back page that we sent you an invitation and unfortunately, you did not appear." I just look at this as understandable, but let's not kid ourselves. There has been ample time for this Prime Minister to appear over the last three months. We have all been busy, each and every member of Parliament. The Deputy Prime Minister, whom you're willing to bring here, was able to come. All of these things are happening.

I just think, "Wow, we're going to invite the Prime Minister but he's not going to come." It seems like almost a waste of time. We're already saying that we know this is a failure. I wish the members on the government side would recognize that all they've done here is say, "He's still not coming. We have approved of this vote to say we'll invite him, but we've invited him several times—or we've shared this concern several times."

I know Mr. Lauzon has spoken to the PMO and the Prime Minister has no intention of coming. I just sit there and wonder, "At what point are we going to be accountable to Canadians? At what point should this Prime Minister be coming? Is it okay with every single member of this committee that the Prime Minister does not have to report back? Would we allow this if the tables were turned and this was a prime minister from the Conservative, NDP or Bloc parties?" I think what I see here is a really, really great veil. People were talking about veils earlier. It's a great veil to say, "Look how helpful we're going to be," but trust me, the Prime Minister's still not coming. Regardless of how good the goodie bag, he's still not going to show up to the birthday party, or to the PROC meeting for one hour.

I look at the amendment put forward by Mr. Lauzon as saying, "We have failed, failed, failed. The Prime Minister does not have to be accountable. We know that he's not going to come. We've put this annex in because we don't want to waste any more time."

We know we need to get to Bill C-19, which I am happy to get to. I know there are lots of amendments that have been written up. They're very, very good, well-written amendments, so I think that's super. We need to get to this. For this committee, however, I really fear that once we actually start writing this report, because everybody's happy that we'll be putting it in the annex.... I want to see a show of hands from all members of this committee who think we will be going through Bill C-19, going through the report, going through the amendments, doing the first and second drafts and actually having the report tabled before June 23, when this House rises.

Right now, I think I'm looking at a whole bunch of people who know the timeline is not going to succeed, and therefore, allowing today's motion to go through is truly just a case of smoke and mirrors.

Those are some of my concerns. I wish I knew that the government committee members would ensure that something is actually tabled and that we can actually talk to Canadians about the fact that the Prime Minister has failed to come for the last three months.

This is an area where transparency and accountability seem to be gone.

As a former chair of a committee, looking at the schedule and watching what people have done for three months, I know that every single person on this committee is able to talk and to talk out the clock, and therefore, the report won't get tabled. The report should include the absolutely disgraceful fact that after three months and four days—February 23 to May 27—we came up with the conclusion...but it doesn't give you anything in the first place. It's like going for a job that you don't get paid for. Yes, you're not getting paid; he's not coming.

I'm really concerned about this. I'm really concerned that if we agree to this, you will once again just pull the rug from under our feet and we won't get what we need. We are truly trying to negotiate here. I just don't trust members of the committee who for the last three months have filibustered. I do not trust that we will get that report.

I respect Daniel. He wants this report tabled, because it should be tabled. I do not know if that will be able to be done. I do not trust the members to not filibuster, and to ensure that Canadians see this report. I'll be honest.

I'll pass my time on. Hopefully, people can say, "Yes, we can be trusted. We didn't waste the last three months and four days filibustering for nothing." I want to hear it.

The Chair: Okay.

Well, a lot has happened today. I feel like we're making some positive progress towards something. Obviously, there are so many things before me as chair right now, including legislation. I truly feel that legislation is important and we should get to it somehow. I am feeling optimistic that perhaps maybe we will get to it, at some point, but there's a lot before us; it's not just that.

Ms. Vecchio, your point is taken that the prorogation study report is currently before us. Hopefully, that report can be completed as soon as possible.

I have a speakers list that is growing. I know that sometimes you see the speakers list a little differently than I do. I have experienced that on other committees as well. I'll mention who is on the speakers list, according to my order: Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Lauzon, Ms. Pettipas Taylor, Ms. Duncan and then Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Lauzon.

[Translation]

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

I'd like to thank my colleagues for their comments.

Unlike those who say that the invitation will get lost in the mail, I think it's reasonable to say that the clerk is responsible enough to get the official invitation to the Prime Minister's Office and to ensure that the information gets to the Prime Minister's Office.

If it gets to the Prime Minister's Office quickly, then it's still possible for him to appear before this committee in a week. If his schedule makes it impossible, then we can put that in the non-appearance annex.

We need to move forward. I think that this is a step forward. I understand your concern, but we are all here for the same reasons and we all want to move ahead with the issues and motions we deal with on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

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

I have been quiet today. I just want to put something on the record. First and foremost, I want to go back to the last PROC committee meeting.

Mr. Blaikie—again, I'm not just saying this—you brought forward a very reasonable amendment. I really want to thank you for that. We have been talking and really negotiating over the last meeting and this meeting, and I think we're getting closer here to where we all want to be.

I for one will be very honest: I want to find a path forward for us to be able to get to Bill C-19. We all have a duty as parliamentarians to make sure we look at that and do the work that needs to be done, but I also appreciate that we want to finish this study on prorogation before we can get to that. I really want to see us move forward with respect to that. I can see that we are just so, so close. I appreciate also the comments made by Monsieur Lauzon.

Stéphane, I appreciate what you brought forward.

Again, I think we all truly want to make sure we finish this study, but when it comes to the study of Bill C-19, we can't put that aside. Ethically, we all have a role to play in protecting Canadians. I take that role and that responsibility very seriously, as well as making sure we do the good work that is needed there.

I truly hope that today we will be able to find some common ground and from there move forward to do the important work we have been called upon to do here.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I too will be brief.

Mr. Blaikie—Daniel, if I may—first of all, thank you for bringing forward this amendment. I think everybody wants to find a way through this impasse. You've brought something forward that everyone agreed on. I see that as real progress, and I think we owe you our thanks for doing that.

Dear colleagues—and I mean that—we work together. In the House, you really get to know your friends and colleagues. This committee has done really good work in the past.

I come back to what we did last spring. I come back to what we did on how to prepare for a pandemic election, should we have one—and no one wants that. We want to protect Canadians' health and safety, and we want to protect our democracy.

I too, like Ms. Petitpas Taylor—like Ginette—would really like to see us move past this and get to that work that needs to be done. I want to ensure that, should there be an election during a pandemic, we have done the hard work and everything possible to protect the health and safety of Canadians in a democracy.

With that, I'll just say that we're making progress, friends. Let's keep talking. I think we're getting to where we all want to be. Let's keep talking and reach across the aisle.

Once again, Daniel, I really want to say thank you. You've moved us in a good direction.

Thank you, colleagues.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie is next, and then Monsieur Therrien.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to say thanks to the entire committee, because, as we've seen over the past few months, it really does take everyone being on board to be able to make progress. Otherwise things stall out pretty quickly.

What I heard in Ms. Vecchio's remarks, which I appreciate, was some concerns about it sometimes being hard after months of disagreement and filibustering for the committee to build that trust back up. I've had the good fortune of serving on committees in which there's been a high level of trust, and I've also had the experience of serving on committees in which there's been a relatively low level of trust across the table.

I think part of this exercise is that as a committee we're finally coming together and working in a way that Canadians would expect to see their public officials work across disagreements.

I think maybe there's a way we could further qualify this amendment in order to build some of that trust that Ms. Vecchio was referring to.

I would propose the following subamendment, Madam Chair:

That the amendment be amended by adding after the words "Government's Reasons for Proroguing Parliament in August 2020", the words: "and that all questions necessary for the finalization and tabling of the report be disposed of before the end of the day on June 8, 2021 and that the final report be tabled no later than June 11, 2021.

That would give a pretty concrete deadline for Ms. Vecchio and frankly others on the opposition side who may still be experiencing some of those trust issues that come out of long periods of disagreement, and give some certainty to the committee that the report will indeed be filed before we rise for the summer. I would just add that I think if we can build that trust and get to the point where we dispense—and I realize with the subamendment and amendment and a main motion that there are at least three votes before the end of this process—that would allow us then, while we still will have a *devoir*—I'm thinking of the French word—a duty and a task, so in the double sense of that word, to complete the prorogation study even as we embark on our study of Bill C-19. Once we embark on that study of Bill C-19, which could happen as early as Tuesday if we're able to dispense with all three votes today, then I think it would be incumbent upon us as committee members to talk to our respective whips' and House leaders' offices about the possibility of perhaps having additional meetings for the procedure and house affairs committee for the purpose of studying Bill C-19. I think from what we've heard from all parties—not just at this committee but in the House as well—that there is agreement regarding the sense of urgency of this piece of legislation.

If we could dispense with the three questions today, that would open up some possibilities as we embark on the study of Bill C-19. We'll have certainty about tabling a report on prorogation in a timely fashion, but then we can really start talking about the work we need to do in order to get all the voices that we need to hear on Bill C-19 and try to get it back to the House in a way that gives it time to be dealt with in the House and, I hope, also in the Senate before June. I'm speaking personally here, but in my opinion, the Senate shouldn't have much to say about it. If the House can agree, they don't deal with elections, so they are not subject matter experts as far as I'm concerned. If we can get it through the House, there should be a way to get it through the other place relatively quickly.

I present this subamendment in the spirit of building that sense of trust and hopefully helping us get to a conclusion on this so we can start that study and then maybe talk about the meetings we have. As Ms. Vecchio rightly pointed out, we probably don't have enough meetings on the roster right now in terms of timeline, so if all the parties agree that this is a priority, how do we do that extra work in a timely way? We have to get to the point where we can dispense with these motions so that we can get started on that study in order to have that logistical conversation about how we make time for those additional meetings.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'll be sending that wording immediately to the clerk as well.

The Chair: I was just going to ask for that. Thank you for that.

June 11 is the tabling of the report, and the June 8 timeline is for what?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: June 8 would be to dispose of all the questions required to finalize the report and prepare it for tabling, and June 11 would be the tabling date.

The Chair: Okay, that's perfect. Thank you for clarifying that.

It will be circulated. Are you sending it to the clerk right now?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I just received it. I'll be sending it out momentarily to the members.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

Monsieur Therrien, you're next.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I only heard Mr. Blaikie's amendment, but I haven't read it. I will therefore only comment on Mr. Lauzon's amendment.

I'm completely against it. What we have here at the moment is vaudeville and I find it very sad that this should be the case after all the debating we have done...

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I have a point of order. I'm sorry, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Translation, could you let us know whether you can translate that after the fact for us, or whether there was a problem and you didn't actually hear what Monsieur Therrien had said?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Is it better now?

[English]

The Chair: We can now hear you.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: As I don't know when you lost me, I'll repeat what I said.

I won't discuss Mr. Blaikie's subamendment, because haven't received it, but I will talk about Mr. Lauzon's amendment.

I sadly realize that the debates we've engaged in for such a long time have had very little if any impact on this committee's usual energy. I would very humbly say that we've been watching a vaudeville act.

I can't see how we could possibly adopt this amendment, which I find ridiculous.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for your clarity, Monsieur Therrien.

Monsieur Lauzon.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I respect my colleague Mr. Therrien's comments. I get on with my work humbly, and very seriously. I introduced this amendment only after careful thought. I too am eager to move on to subjects other than prorogation.

In any event, there is a new subamendment to the one I introduced, and so, Madam Chair, can we take time once again to read the subamendment carefully, in French and English, and then pause so that we can examine the amendment carefully and return for a well-informed vote on it?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I just want to get a sense from the committee, because it's 12:51 p.m. If we were to take another 10-minute suspension, are you proposing we come back and talk about this, or are you proposing we talk about it at the next meeting?

What are the thoughts of the rest of the committee?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: We haven't received it yet. We should receive it very soon.

The Chair: It just came in.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Chair, I think that we should just suspend the meeting until Tuesday.

It would simplify things. We've only just received it, and this would give us time to read it and make up our minds. I think that coming back on Tuesday would be better. We could then perhaps have a constructive debate.

[English]

The Chair: How does everyone feel about that?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Personally, I've received it and read it. I'm ready to vote immediately on this amendment. All the discussions were about the motion I introduced. This is simply an addition, a subamendment.

It doesn't bother me, we could postpone it until next Thursday. That would give us time to look at it more carefully. I'm ready to vote, but I'm also ready, as a good team player, to consider Mr. Therrien's request, and postpone it until Thursday morning.

[English]

The Chair: It would be Tuesday. I think that was just an error.

Is everyone okay with our coming back with, hopefully, the intention to dispose of these amendments?

I'm just going to put that out there. That is what everyone has on.... That's the way, hopefully, we can move to make some progress.

We'll come back on Tuesday at 11 o'clock, on the subamendment that's been proposed by Mr. Blaikie.

[The meeting was suspended at 12:54 p.m., Thursday, May 27]

[The meeting resumed at 11:06 a.m., Tuesday, June 1]

The Chair: Okay, let's get started. I call this meeting back to order.

We're resuming meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13. We suspended the last meeting. Today is June 1, 2021.

Today's meeting, like we have been doing, is meeting in hybrid format. I believe everyone is participating virtually thus far. The

room is available for those who may want to sub in, but I don't believe there are many subs scheduled for today.

I would like to just give you a couple of reminders. Make sure your interpretation channel is selected. Make sure that you mute and unmute your mikes. If you want to raise a point of order, then unmute your mike and say you have a point of order. If you want to speak to a point of order or the debate on the floor, then raise the hand in the toolbar.

I want to let you know that there has been a strain on our support resources, so you may have heard from your various whips that things are very tight not just for our committee but for all committees that are taking place. We have many people from our support teams who are not available right now. That includes interpretation and perhaps others as well, part of the technical teams. There will be a hard stop at one o'clock today. That's been agreed to by the whips of all the parties and I believe all committees will be limited to the two-hour time. I'll keep updating you on that. I don't know if it's just for today or if that is something we may have to deal with for some meetings to come.

Where we left off last time is that a subamendment was presented by Mr. Blaikie. Mr. Blaikie had the floor at the time and Mr. Therrien had his hand raised.

We could go back to you, Mr. Blaikie, if you want to refresh our memories on your subamendment. I'm sure everyone has it in front of them. Maybe this is a good time for you to let me know if you don't have Mr. Blaikie's subamendment so that we can forward it to you again.

Does everyone have the subamendment? Okay.

All right, so we are on that subamendment. After Mr. Blaikie we have Mr. Therrien on the list.

Mr. Blaikie, go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

As you say, just for the benefit of the committee I'll recall that the subamendment I proposed really puts some time limits on reporting back on the issue of prorogation to ensure that it does happen and that it happens in a timely way. I think that if we do pass this subamendment and then the amendment and then the main motion today, effectively we'll be in a position to perhaps even begin studying Bill C-19 as early as Thursday.

What I think we'll need a little bit of time to do is to discuss how we can proceed to conclude the report on prorogation according to the timeline in the subamendment. I do have some thoughts about that, but I'm anxious to see if we're going to get to that resolution.

I hope that if we do, we might then make some time to talk about how we can finalize the report a week from today. Of course, I think we all understand from last day that there is a draft of the report already prepared. If the Prime Minister does appear, then that would be the only thing that would need to be added. I hope he will, but in the event that he doesn't, we will have a report that will include that omission and a process where the committee can ensure that we're voting on everything that needs to be voted on to get that report done and get in whatever the committee wants to get in about this journey we've been on together.

I'll leave it at that.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: You are absolutely correct. It does present some challenges in terms of the timeline. There is a timeline crunch. If it was to pass, we would have to quickly figure out how we are going to accommodate getting everything done within that time frame. If we also get to that point, you are correct that we have the report up to this point prepared and translated. That can be circulated to all of the members if we reach that point.

Mr. Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We've had systematic obstruction from the Liberals for over two months now, and the key issue has been the presence of the Prime Minister.

Ms. Vecchio's motion included several items in addition to his presence. Basically, Mr. Blaikie's proposal was an olive branch because it dropped all the rest and kept only the invitation to the Prime Minister for him to appear. It was therefore a step in the right direction.

The key point has always been the Prime Minister's presence. So we have experienced over two months of systematic obstruction as a result of wanting to require his appearance. I don't want to draw this out any longer, but it was obvious, and it still is, that we want to do some intelligent work with respect to the prorogation. Mr. Rodriguez's presence was the decisive moment in getting us to where we are.

By this I mean that until we have had the Prime Minister appear before this committee, it will be impossible to shed any light on the prorogation.

Do these people have something to hide? I don't think so. Would the Prime Minister be free to spend an hour with us? I think that democracy requires it, and that he ought to find an hour in his schedule to do just that. I understand that he's the Prime Minister, but he is accountable, and should come and explain to us why an extremely important measure in a democracy—the prorogation of Parliament—was used at a time when we should have been sitting because there were a lot of problems to deal with.

The three opposition parties agreed on that. The Liberal Party systematically obstructed it because they did not see that it would be useful for the Prime Minister to appear before this committee, which we understand.

I have previously heard the Prime Minister in committee. I believe that he could present us with some interesting ideas. It's not an inquisition. We don't want to burn him at the stake. We don't want to make the Prime Minister another Joan of Arc. We just want to ask him some questions about what might be the most significant thing he has done over the past year, which was to prorogue Parliament.

We are getting to the end of the systematic obstruction, as we have all understood that he had to be called or invited to appear for at least an hour. This means that the opposition parties have taken a big step forward. The Liberals are now saying that if the Prime Minister comes, that's all to the good, and if he doesn't, we could simply mention that fact in an annex to the report.

It's not serious, and they're trying to lead us up the garden path. But we won't be duped. I'm very surprised that my NDP colleague appears to have been taken in by the idea. It's very unusual. I've been in politics for eight years now, and I can tell you that I've never seen a U-turn like that. Never. I'm impressed. Not only did my NDP colleague say that it was a good idea, but that he was going to set a deadline for discussions on prorogation, when we've been blocked for over two months because of the Liberals' systematic obstruction. We've just dealt with the systematic obstruction and you're telling us that the problem needs to be dealt with by June 8. It's a joke. We've been stymied for two months, and just when we're seeing a bit of light at the end of the tunnel, we've got a knife at our throat telling us that we have to sort out the situation no later than June 8.

That means we have today's meeting, the Thursday meeting and next Tuesday's meeting before June 8. We have to discuss Mr. Blaikie's amendment, we have an amendment from Mr. Lauzon, and we don't know what other amendments might be proposed. I have a feeling that there are going to be others. You're telling us that we need to get to work so that everything can be settled by June 8.

Honestly, I find it insulting. Insulting in terms of the work we still need to do and insulting to the serious approach that this committee has always taken.

From the very outset, we got along well, worked as a team, worked hard, working effectively, and came up with some good ideas together. Now, we're being told that we've lost enough time and that it needs to be tabled on June 8, on grounds that we need to move on to Bill C-19. I'm telling you that there is no way I'm going to stop doing intelligent work just because a few MPs are saying that we need to wrap things up by June 8.

What does that mean? Does it mean that if it's not finished by June 8, the meeting will have to be extended, perhaps more than two hours? If that's the case, what does it mean? Does it mean that the IT people will be able to support us during this extension? Does it mean that we'll have to push back other committees? There are others still sitting and we are at the end of the session. The other committees are also overwhelmed. They are pointing a gun at our head and setting a June 8 deadline. Seriously, I don't agree with having a knife at my throat on on grounds that we have to study Bill C-19.

Given that we had a bill to study, a very important one at that—I'm not saying that it isn't—perhaps the Liberals shouldn't have engaged in such systematic obstruction for over two months. Perhaps that's where the problem lies.

We, however, are being condemned to completing all our parliamentary work on prorogation in only a week. I still have a lot of questions to which I have not received any answers. Parliament prorogued on August 18, 2020, and Mr. Morneau resigned. When I asked Mr. Rodriguez what had happened on August 17, he couldn't give me an answer. So the government's number three ^x resigned.

I can hear something. I don't know what's happening. I'll continue, unless someone stops me.

Mr. Vaive, is everything okay?

The Clerk: Everything's all right, Mr. Therrien. Please continue.
[English]

The Chair: Yes, you're good.
[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: So Mr. Rodriguez said he didn't know what happened on August 17. Seriously? He's supposed to be the key person in the whole process of analyzing the prorogation. He came to see us in committee and told us with a straight face that he didn't know what happened on August 17, and there was a prorogation on August 18.

I'm sorry, but how stupid does he think I am?

I'm not saying that Mr. Rodriguez is lying. Not at all. But what I am saying is that he hasn't shed any light on the whole prorogation issue. I'm sure about that. At one point he said that *Technical difficulty* close the books on August 18. It took nearly a month for Parliament to reopen. Mr. Rodriguez said that there was nothing unusual about this, that a prorogation took some time, that some studies had to be carried out, that a throne speech had to be written, and so on. Then some specialists came and told us that a prorogation could be done in three days.

You can prorogue on a Thursday and start a new session on the following Monday. Everything Mr. Rodriguez told us by way of explanation was not even close to the truth.

You're trying to tell me that I should be content with Pablo Rodriguez's visit for my analysis of the prorogation. Ms. Duncan mentioned several times that she was a doctor and repeatedly added that it was important to be serious and rational. As for me, all I have is a Master's degree in economics, no Ph.D., but I can tell you that if you want things done properly, you need witnesses and substantial, rock solid, sources to be able to do leading-edge scientific work. As Ms. Duncan would put it, you need the right information.

Until we have it, we won't be able to draw any conclusions as to why there was prorogation. Mr. Rodriguez came to the committee and said things that were not accurate, and he also lacked information. If the government number two comes here and tells us absolutely nothing, then we have a serious problem. If the number two is unable to provide clarification, then we need to wait until number one shows up.

It won't be an inquisition. We have deep respect for the institution and it's the Prime Minister of Canada. Clearly, if we are given the honour of asking him questions, we will do it in accordance with the rules and with the respect appropriate to this type of exchange. We are well aware of this. I certainly am and I'm convinced the Conservatives are aware of this, as are the NDP and of course the Liberals.

I'm wondering what they're afraid of. What do the NDP and the Liberal Party have to fear from the Prime Minister's appearance here?

We're not executioners. We are people who want explanations for the most significant event of this Parliament, which was the prorogation. It's an unusual and major event, and we have the mandate and the responsibility to shed light on the situation. That's what our fellow citizens expect of us.

Members of the other parties, including the Liberal Party, have been telling us that people have not been talking to them about prorogation. The people who have been speaking to me have talked about the WE Charity. They spoke to me about it before and they're still doing so. Despite what my colleagues may think, we're still hearing a lot of talk about it.

To establish a cause and effect relationship, you need to begin with a statistical association. An event occurs at the same time as another. One event, the scandal pertaining to the WE Charity, occurred at the same time as another event, namely prorogation. In science—I'm sure Ms. Duncan will agree with me on this—this is called a statistical association.

For a statistical association to be a cause and effect relationship, you require one thing to lead to another, and to influence it. A causal relationship raises the following question: was the prorogation caused by the WE Charity scandal? In order to answer this, discussion, information and analysis are required.

Until such an analysis has been completed, we will continue to study a statistical association, namely two events that occur jointly without knowing exactly whether there was a cause and effect relationship.

So, if Ms. Duncan and the Liberal Party are in agreement, it's because they do not want to see certain information. I find it very worrisome to have to report this fact to a committee like the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which has an excellent reputation. We have to do our work seriously.

I am reaching out to you. Do you want to remain limited to a botched analysis or do you really want to get to the bottom of things, in an intelligent, well-structured, polite and highly respectful manner towards the office of prime minister?

Mr. Trudeau is a prime minister. We owe him respect and I have respect for him. I don't know what he's afraid of. I don't know what the Liberals are afraid of.

Mr. Turnbull discussed this at length. He has carried out some extensive studies *inaudible*, as has Ms. Duncan. Do you want to stop at concomitance, at two events that occur without knowing whether there is a causal relationship? Is that what academics like you really want? I would argue that we need to go further and work...

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm sorry about that and I apologize, Mr. Therrien, but the audio levels are identical. In other words, I cannot hear either Mr. Therrien or the interpreter, because they're cancelling one another out. If I'm listening in English, I would prefer, obviously, the French to be muted somewhat, so I can clearly hear the English interpretation, but that's not happening.

Could you speak with an IT specialist? I don't know if it's only my computer or others, but it's very distracting, since both audio levels are the same.

The Chair: Do you have your mute original audio selected?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Everything is working as it should. For some reason, when Mr. Therrien is speaking, his audio levels are fine, but the interpretation is at the same level, and they're blocking one another out. It's very difficult to understand what's being said.

The Chair: Was it happening the whole time, or did it just start now?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It was in the last few minutes.

The Chair: Is everyone else experiencing the same thing with interpretation?

Are you, Ms. Duncan?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, it appears that Dr. Duncan and Mr. Lukiwski are having a similar issue, if I understand correctly. Are any other members also having that problem?

The Chair: I wasn't.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Chair, like Mr. Lukiwski, I really had to struggle. I was paying attention to what Monsieur Therrien was saying, but it was difficult.

The Chair: Let's suspend for a few minutes.

• (118725) _____ (Pause) _____

• (118735)

The Chair: Let me call this meeting back to order and give the floor to Monsieur Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Unfortunately, I've been noticing that when I speak not everyone can hear me properly. If you can't hear me very well, tell me right away. Then I can stop talking. It's too bad that some can't hear while others can. Don't hesitate to stop me if there are any problems. I won't get mad, because the Canadiens won yesterday. It would take more than that for me to get angry.

I haven't said anything for a few weeks. I'd like to return to what I said before.

Two things are clear from the motion, the amendment, and the subamendment.

The first is that we're asking for Mr. Trudeau to come and explain the reasons for the prorogation. That's one thing that's in the motion, the amendment, and the subamendment. We are all agreed on that. It's what we've been saying for months. We're persisting because we believe it's important.

The motion became possible because the Liberals agreed for Ms. Vecchio's initial motion to be shortened and streamlined to some extent. This was done out of collegiality. Collegiality certainly applies to the opposition in general. It began with Ms. Vecchio accepting Mr. Blaikie's motion, as I did, and even the Liberals voted in favour. We all agreed that Mr. Trudeau should appear before the committee. That's what the motion says.

Right after that, Mr. Lauzon proposed an amendment saying that he would be invited to appear, but that if he didn't come, it would just be noted in an annex.

That's when things start to get crazy. It makes no sense to do things that way.

It would mean that we literally wasted two or three months. We wanted to require him to meet us so that we could do things properly. To get there, everything else got dropped. But then a way was found to get around inviting him by saying that if he didn't come, we'd note it in an annex.

I'm going to make a prediction. I'm an economist, and economists make predictions and forecasts.

With that kind of amendment, I can safely say that Mr. Trudeau will not come to the committee. That's what it means.

So the Liberals don't want Mr. Trudeau to come to the committee, but those who want Mr. Trudeau to come to the committee are going to say that he should come. Well, not quite. Mr. Blaikie seems to feel that his failure to come would not be particularly serious and that the important thing is to table the report on June 8.

Seriously? The important thing is tabling it on June 8 and it's no big deal if Mr. Trudeau does not appear before the committee?

Not only is it no longer serious for him not to appear before us, but the report needs to be tabled by June 8?

There is a subamendment, an amendment, and a motion, and there will be others, and we haven't finished writing the report. So on top of everything else, we are muzzling ourselves.

I can't speak for the other parties, but the Bloc Québécois completely disagrees with this. It makes no sense at all.

I won't repeat myself. I don't want to repeat myself too often, even though in education repetition is supposed to help people better understand various aspects. Mr. Turnbull has already said it and he's absolutely right. But I won't repeat it here, because we've already talked enough.

I simply want to return to the fact that the government number two did not provide enough clarification for us to avoid wanting to see number one come before the committee. I'd have to review the minutes, but at some point, Mr. Rodriguez said that he was not the one who decided to prorogue. It was decided in the Prime Minister's Office. He said so himself.

Mr. Rodriguez told us that if we wanted to study the prorogation, we would have to invite the person who decided. We can't go off in all directions; we have to invite Mr. Trudeau. That's why we took the positive step of reaching out.

Ms Vecchio's motion was substantial, impressive and important, but everyone agreed to change it. We don't want to be partisan, but do wish to meet the Prime Minister for an hour to ask him some questions, with all due deference. The Liberals will challenge the amount of time. We won't be cross-examining him and we're not going to burn him at the stake. We don't want to turn him into another Joan of Arc. We just want to ask him some questions about prorogation.

That's where I'm at and I'm really very disappointed. I know that I haven't spoken a lot and that I may have exaggerated a bit. Unfortunately, I don't have as much experience as many of you. Even though I'm old, I only have eight years of experience, and just learning to walk, but I'm saying that in politics I've rarely seen anything as twisted as what I've seen this past week. I even told my wife that what I'd gone through made no sense. I had to let it out, because I couldn't believe it. My wife was discouraged and told me that what I'd been through made no sense. Even my wife finds that what we've been through is crazy.

I have to say to you, Mr. Blaikie, that I've rarely seen an about-face like that in my entire life. I'm giving you all three stars at the end of the hockey game. You're the Carey Price of motions and amendments. I'm impressed.

I may speak again later, but for the time being, I've said what I have to say. I'm saying it in friendship, because I have a lot of respect for each and every one of you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Therrien.

I definitely had some of those emotions at PROC in my first term. There were things that surprised me, but not too much surprises me anymore, I guess. I haven't been in politics for that long either. I have a similar number of years—a bit fewer than you, actually—so you have plenty of experience.

Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thanks very much.

I won't be speaking too long, but I wanted to comment, because I do really appreciate where Alain is coming from. I understand where he's coming from because, yes, we are pushing on the Prime Minister to be here. I also have great respect for Daniel, though. I do know that Daniel wants this report to be tabled. My problem is that both of these things could have happened if we hadn't filibustered for three months and three days. We're seeing ourselves in these last few weeks having to crush down on where we need to go,

and it's all due to the fact that, for three months and three days, there was a filibuster.

Now, I'll be honest. You saw every single person vote to gut this motion, so I cannot support Mr. Lauzon's motion. Thanks very much, Stéphane. I can't support that, because to me, it's just so weak. It's, "Here you go, I'm going to invite you, but you don't have to show up."

There is no way the Prime Minister is going to show up. For three months and three days he hasn't shown up. This has been going on for some time. I've heard many of my colleagues on the government side indicate that the WE Charity issue has gone away and all of these types of things. You can say that it's gone away, because I'll be honest, you're representing....

I can look at my mail. Were there a lot of people asking about WE? No, I'll be honest. Not a lot of people asked about WE, but there were people asking about prorogation. There were people asking about the obstruction by this government. There were people asking about transparency and accountability. When I talk about what I want to bring to my constituents, it's the fact that, once again, while this government was elected in 2015 to be transparent and accountable, it is not being transparent and accountable. Perhaps in 2019 their new slogan was "no longer accountable and transparent". Maybe I missed that.

Those are the issues I have here. I understand where every party's coming from.

I'm looking at the Liberals. Protecting the king seems to be what everybody has to do. We've seen it in every committee, whether it's ethics or defence or whatever it may be. They cannot let Trudeau appear there. Maybe it's because we don't know what he might say, because he makes slips all the time, or maybe it's because he just can't come and speak to the members of the PROC committee, who are all members of Parliament, just like him. He is the Prime Minister. You know what I call that? That's just....

I'm sorry. We're in a democracy. We're supposed to be able to talk here. We should be accountable, and it does not matter who the prime minister is, whether it's Trudeau today, or O'Toole tomorrow or whoever. There should be accountability from our leaders. That is something we have not seen at all. I look at the members of the government saying you wasted time for three months and three days. You're now saying we have an amendment here that gives him an RSVP, which was put on Thursday of last week, meaning even for that invitation to go out, we're talking about very few days.

I want to switch and talk a little bit more about Daniel's amendment. Daniel has put something out there, because he really does believe there needs to be a report tabled. I also share in the feeling that there should be a report tabled. We've worked for three and a half months on this. There should be a report. I'm looking at these committee members and saying I wish I believed there will be a report tabled. That is why I can't support these motions from either—

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, I'm so sorry. Would you adjust your boom mike just a little bit?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I sure can.

Just speaking about those things, the one thing I'm really concerned with is that we have seen reports that were supposed to be tabled already this week by committees. The ethics report was not tabled. The defence report was not tabled. These timelines were negotiated just like we see today. I really feel like it's not the members here who are in charge of this committee, but it is the whips, who I know are all watching to see what we do. It's basically people being told that we're not going to have the Prime Minister, so continue to filibuster.

I know that the members of this committee do not have a choice on whether the Prime Minister comes or not because he is in his little circle of "he does not have to come". I just wish we had the accountability. That's why I sit here and say that I don't know why everybody will just fold on not having the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is absolutely the person who has to come here.

I understand that Daniel wants to get this report tabled. Some good information has come from this report, but without the Prime Minister speaking, this report is just a paper clip at the back saying that the Prime Minister decided not to come. That's really what it is. For three months we heard about how we could invite everybody, although not one of those people we spoke about even considered coming to this committee. Those are concerns that I continue to have.

I will let my time go now, but I understand where Mr. Therrien is on this. For three and a half months, we've listened to issues on relevance and repetition and all that kind of stuff. Now, as he indicates, the clock is ticking. We know there are only a few weeks left. This minority Parliament has not been successful at getting legislation through. It's been very much a joke, if you're looking at even the work that's been done in previous minority governments or the fact it's this length of time. I recognize that we're in COVID. We all know that. I just sit here and ask once again, even if Bill C-19 comes to committee, what then? Is the Senate going to sit through the summer? Is that what's going to happen?

It all comes down to the fact that three and a half months were wasted on this filibuster. At the end of the day, as Mr. Therrien has said, he feels like there's a knife to his throat. I get it. I understand that. I understand why Daniel is doing this as well. I really hold it to these members. I would like to ask the Liberal members of this committee whether or not the PMO will allow them to report on this.

This report is going to be damning of the fact that the Prime Minister had no intention of coming to committee even though he was asked several times. No members of the government were willing to come to this committee, with the exception of Pablo Rodriguez, the House leader. He is a great speaker. I have great admiration for Pablo. I've never seen anybody so smooth. I think I've told him that as well.

At the end of the day, it's not the decision of this committee. It's the decision of the PMO. I just sit there and I think, wow, the PMO sure is powerful. That's very concerning. There are 338 members of Parliament and we have one guy who just won't come to committee because he doesn't have to be held to account.

I will leave it at that. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vecchio.

Monsieur Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I'm back to Ms. Vecchio's initial motion. I'd like to go over this lengthy motion briefly. There were several paragraphs, from (a) to (h).

Point (a) was to request Mr. Trudeau's appearance for three hours. We reduced that to at least one hour, a major compromise. As I was saying earlier, the Prime Minister must come if we are to do intelligent and rational work that is worthy of our mission and the committee's.

Point (b) was to renew the invitations issued to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. We agreed to drop this and not invite them. We said that we wouldn't engage in partisanship because we weren't sure that they would have any information beyond what Mr. Trudeau could provide to the committee.

Point (c), to renew the invitations issued to the Honourable Bill Morneau, Katie Telford, and the Kielburger brothers, was dropped. We agreed that it wasn't serious and that if the Prime Minister were to appear, that would be all we would need to go over the reasons for the prorogation. We didn't want to be partisan.

Point (d) was to renew the invitations issued to Farah Perelmuter and Martin Perelmuter to appear before the committee. We decided to drop that. We did not want to be partisan because that was not our goal. Our mandate mentioned the reasons for the prorogation, and that is what had to be the focus. We would engage neither in partisanship nor in petty politics.

Point (e) was to issue an order for the production of all memoranda, emails, text messages, documents, notes or other records from the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office. We dropped that because it was not what we wanted to do. We did not want to play politics with our work on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, whose members are expected to be people of good will working to discover the truth and improve the efficacy of our institutions. When we talk about institutions and prorogation, I think it's clear that if we understand why there is a prorogation, it move things forward by providing an understanding of why we analyze the structure and vitality of our institutions.

Point (f), to issue an order for the production of records of all communications between the government and any WE Charity organizations, was dropped. This was another step in the right direction, in fact more than a step—a great leap forward.

Point (g), to order the WE Charity to produce all memoranda, was also dropped. That, then, is what we did. We made huge strides in demonstrating that we were acting in good faith.

The Liberals have confidence in their Prime Minister, and I can understand that because he is their leader. I, on the other hand, have total confidence in my leader, Mr. Yves-François Blanchette, and his ability to answer questions and take action. If the Liberals have confidence in their Prime Minister, why are they refusing to have him appear for an hour?

Just have a look at the members of this committee: Mr. Lukiwski, Mr. Kent, Ms. Vecchio, Mr. Blaikie, me. I won't name everyone. I don't see a Dracula or a Frankenstein here, but only MPs who want to work as part of a team. We're nice people and I know it. We just want to ask some questions in order to get some clarification, and we can only get that from the Prime Minister.

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, I have not had any interpretation for the last 15 to 20 seconds.

The Chair: Okay.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we'll look to see whether the issue is on our end. Just stand by.

The Chair: The interpretation is there now. It had dropped off for about 10 seconds or so.

Monsieur Therrien, I'm wondering if you could repeat your last sentence.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I was talking about Frankenstein.

I was sending a message of friendship to our Liberal colleagues...

[English]

The Chair: We don't have interpretation.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we'll try to figure out what the issue is. It's not completely clear yet from our end what the problem is.

The Chair: Interpretation is there again. It's just that the delay seems to be very long, or longer than usual. There is always a delay, of course, which makes sense, but it's a very lengthy delay.

The Clerk: We'll try to continue for now and see if it corrects itself.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: May I speak?

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I thought the word "Frankenstein" was unparliamentary and that I was being cut off because of that.

I'll briefly summarize what I was saying, because I don't know when the interpretation cut out.

I was just telling my Liberal colleagues that they ought to be proud of their leader. He is the Prime Minister, after all. I'm con-

vinced that they have confidence in him and know that if he were to appear before the committee, he would manage nicely. I'm sure that if my leader, Mr. Blanchette, were to appear before this committee, he would handle it well.

I'll close by saying that I think the members of this committee will get things right; all we're doing is looking for the truth. We will ask questions about it. I'm sure that the Liberals will also get some satisfaction from his presence. They no doubt have some questions of their own.

When I listen to Ms. Duncan, Mr. Turnbull, and others, I'm convinced that people want to know the true story behind the prorogation. Maybe we'll be able to tell our children and our grandchildren that we managed to find out exactly why the government decided to prorogue Parliament in 2020.

We have a challenge and a responsibility towards our fellow citizens.

I'll stop there.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Therrien.

We have no more speakers on the speakers list. By that, I am assuming that everyone is ready to move on to deciding on the subamendment put forward by Mr. Blaikie.

Would you like a recorded vote on that? Okay.

Mr. Clerk, could we have a recorded vote?

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Chair.

The question is on Mr. Blaikie's subamendment.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, I can hear members answering "yes", but I didn't hear the question.

The only audio I'm getting is a one-word response.

The Chair: The question is on Mr. Blaikie's subamendment. Would you like us to read out the subamendment?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: No, I'm fine. I know what the subamendment is. I'm just not getting any audio other than a response of one word from, in this case, the Liberals.

I won't even know when my name is called to cast my vote.

The Chair: You're not hearing the calling of the names.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: No, I'm not.

The Chair: You're not hearing the feed from the clerk, then.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: No, I'm not.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, can you say something so that we can test it?

The Clerk: Yes. We can test it from the room.

Mr. Lukiwski, can you hear us?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm not hearing a thing, Madam Chair.

The Chair: He's not hearing anything.

The Clerk: Apologies, Madam Chair. We'll probably have to suspend to try to figure out what the issue is.

The Chair: Can you hear me, Mr. Lukiwski?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I can hear you. I cannot hear the clerk.

The Clerk: Are other members having difficulty hearing me now, as I speak?

The Chair: I can hear you.

Mr. Robert Morrissey: Yes.

The Clerk: Okay.

Just stand by. We'll try to see if it's an issue that's emanating from—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: If the clerk is speaking now, I'm not hearing anything.

The Chair: Someone will be calling you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we will have an IT ambassador call Mr. Lukiwski. I don't know if you want to suspend while we're doing that, seeing as Mr. Lukiwski is not able to hear what I am saying.

The Chair: Yes, we'll suspend for two minutes.

• (118800) _____ (Pause) _____

• (118800)

The Clerk: The vote is on Mr. Blaikie's subamendment.

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

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Nater, you have your hand up.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, I assume we're back on the debate on the amendment as amended.

The Chair: We are on Mr. Lauzon's amendment as amended by Mr. Blaikie's subamendment, yes.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will be brief. I don't believe in stretching out discussion any more than it needs to be to get a few points on the floor.

The Chair: You must have changed your beliefs, Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: It all depends on whether I'm speaking on a matter of grave importance that needs me to flesh out many clear details, but it reminds me of something. Going back to filibusters of days gone by, usually there's a purpose, and often a noble purpose, in doing so. In the filibuster in the previous Parliament, we did so with the support of our colleagues in the NDP to prevent unilateral changes to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. We felt very strongly. That was the purpose of that.

The Chair: You're allowed to change your mind.

Mr. John Nater: In this case, however, it appears that our friends in the Liberal Party are filibustering to protect one person and one person only, being the right honourable Prime Minister, but I do digress.

Very briefly, what we see now is we have an amendment as amended. The first amendment from Mr. Blaikie gutted the entire

motion to one hour of the Prime Minister's time and now we see that the Liberals can't even see themselves supporting one single hour, 60 minutes, of the Prime Minister's time.

I recognize the Prime Minister is a very busy person. He is the Prime Minister of our country, but 60 minutes within a 24-hour day is not [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] responsibilities that are out there. In the mandate letter of each minister of the Crown, it was stated that they would make themselves available to parliamentary committees when required and when needed.

This is certainly one of the important parliamentary committees and the Prime Minister has been seen as the only decision-maker on this matter. We've heard that from experts. We've heard that from witnesses who have come before the committee. The government House leader was not the decision-maker. From his testimony, the government House leader was not involved in the discussions prior to a matter of hours and no more than days before the decision took place. It is the Prime Minister who made the decision and we've heard that throughout the process.

We all know what's going to happen with this motion if it passes as amended. The Prime Minister will not show up and we will have, as Ms. Vecchio said, a paper clip at the end of the report stating that he didn't come. It's pretty lame, for lack of a better word, when we spent all this time, first of all, on this filibuster, but before that, hearing from witnesses on this matter to get to this point that we're really not going to see much of that going forward.

What I would do is make the suggestion that we amend this amendment slightly, so I'm introducing a subamendment. I will email it to Justin to send it to the committee so that the committee has it in both of our country's official languages. I move:

That the amendment be amended by replacing the words "the non attendance of the Prime Minister be added to an annex to" with the following: "a recommendation that this Committee be empowered to order the Prime Minister's attendance be included in".

I'll send that so committee members have the context of what this is saying, but what we're suggesting with this subamendment is that there be a recommendation in the report that the committee be given the authority to call the Prime Minister to have his appearance before the committee and that would be part of the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] when it's finalized.

I'm not going to say anything more than this. I think the committee knows where I stand on this, knows where we stand on this, and as soon as I cede the floor, I will push "send" on that email so it goes to Justin, our clerk, and he'll be able to distribute that subamendment to the committee.

I will end my comments there, Madam Chair, and cede the floor back to you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nater. Obviously, I was just kidding and joking around with you. I feel that I can do that with some of the members I've known a little bit longer.

Thank you for that subamendment. We'll wait to get that in writing. I think all the members, seeing how everyone has been operating in the last few meetings, will probably want to take a look at that.

Basically, you're adding a recommendation, based on a preconception you have, of what you want to see in the report. Okay.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just want to say that I appreciate the levity you bring to our meetings, Madam Chair. Your sense of humour is appreciated by me and I'm sure by many other colleagues.

With regard to Mr. Nater's proposed subamendment—I'm not sure if it's an amendment or a subamendment, but I think it's a subamendment—would we be able to take a short suspension when we get it, just to have a quick read, please?

The Chair: Would the committee be okay with a 10-minute suspension to take a look at it?

Mr. Nater, have you already emailed it?

Mr. John Nater: Yes. It's been sent to the clerk. Hopefully, it is working its way through the interweb as we speak and will get to him shortly.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I have just received it now. I will send it out to the members' P9s momentarily.

The Chair: Okay.

It's 12:10 right now. We'll suspend for 10 minutes.

• (118810) _____ (Pause) _____

• (118820)

The Chair: We'll come to order.

We have just been presented with a subamendment by Mr. Nater. Everyone has received that subamendment. Hopefully, there were no problems and no one was left off the list.

Has everyone received it? Okay. You have had a chance to look at it. You were given time to do that over the suspension.

I think the natural thing to do at this point is to vote on the subamendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't want to take up too much time. I do want to say that for me, anyway, the important objective of today's meeting is to get to a point where we know that the committee is resolved to issue a report next Tuesday so that we can go on to studying Bill C-19. One thing that I think is different about what Mr. Nater is proposing, from what he intends to remove, is that in Monsieur Lauzon's amendment....

I mean, while I very clearly share, as I've been stating consistently for months, Monsieur Therrien's and other opposition MPs' desire to see the Prime Minister at committee, I also share their express pessimism about the idea that he will appear. They've been very clear that they don't think he will come. The question, then, is how do you generate some political accountability for that? I believe that's best done with filing a report.

If indeed the Prime Minister doesn't come over the next week, Monsieur Lauzon's version makes a descriptive claim about that.

Right now we're really just talking about adding a fact to the report, which won't be in dispute at that point. The Prime Minister will either have come or not come. What Mr. Nater's amendment does is leave the descriptive realm, if you'll excuse a philosopher's definition here, and move into the normative. It starts making claims about what the report, one that we haven't even agreed to yet that we're going to get done, will say. I think we need to resolve the question about whether we are in fact committed to getting a report done before we start discussing the recommendations of the report.

That's why I won't be voting in favour of this amendment, although I'm quite open to a discussion about what the content of the report might be and the kinds of recommendations we'll be making in respect of what I think is a failure of leadership on the part of the Prime Minister not to be here. That's a discussion for what goes in the report once we know we're making one. We have to get there first.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Monsieur Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I'd like to come back to what Mr. Blaikie said. Words and actions are two different things. Words can describe things, but actions are much more compelling.

I've read the amendment and would like to have its scope explained to me, because the French translation is not convincing. I can see the difference between the subamendment and what we voted on just now, but can someone explain the repercussions? Would it be possible, Madam Chair, to do that?

I'm still new here and unfamiliar with House of Commons parliamentary procedure. I'd like someone to explain the implications of this subamendment if possible.

[English]

The Chair: Monsieur Therrien, would you like Mr. Nater to explain the implications? I think maybe it's best if Mr. Nater explains those implications, if he wishes. If there are any gaps, maybe I or the clerk can fill those in.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Please.

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. John Nater: Sure. I would be happy to do so.

I apologize that I will be explaining it in English. Hopefully, the translation comes through. I don't feel as comfortable explaining this in my second official language.

Very simply, the original amendment from Mr. Lauzon basically said that the non-appearance of the Prime Minister would be noted in the report as an annex. My amendment would provide a recommendation that the committee be given the power to compel the Prime Minister to appear at the committee. If this report goes to the House of Commons, concurrence is moved and the House concurs in the report, the committee would therefore have the power to compel the appearance of the Prime Minister before this committee. It's a little more meaty. There are more teeth to this subamendment to compel the Prime Minister's testimony before this committee.

I hope that clarifies it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, thank you. You clarified it quite well and explained the implications. I appreciate that.

If we get to the report stage of the study, then at the report stage we would either look for the government to respond to our report, once the report is adopted and tabled in the House, or we would not look for a response. In that case, there would be an opening in the House to move concurrence in the report. Parliament could vote on those recommendations and could then, as Mr. Nater said, force that recommendation or the Prime Minister to appear.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Can the clerk confirm that with Mr. Nater's amendment we would have the power to compel Mr. Trudeau to appear before the committee? Madam Chair, would it be consistent with procedures for me to ask the clerk about it?

[English]

The Chair: We wouldn't have the power necessarily, but I can ask the clerk to clarify.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Essentially, Mr. Therrien, if the proposal is adopted and the motion itself ultimately adopted, then a recommendation that uses the wording Mr. Nater is about to propose would be included in a report sent to the House.

It's a two-step process. Once the report is back in the House, it could consider a motion for concurrence. If the House concurs in it, the report recommendations become House orders, meaning that if there is a recommendation in the report like the one described by Mr. Nater, and it is concurred in by the House, then the recommendation becomes a House order.

I don't know whether that properly explains...

Mr. Alain Therrien: That's very clear. Thank you. I'm sorry for having slowed the others down, but I'd rather make sure I understand than pretend I'm smart. That's okay by me, and of course I'm in agreement with Mr. Nater's proposal.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Therrien.

Ms. Vecchio, please go ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thanks very much.

Perhaps we can go into the Simms style, because I have questions for Mr. Nater as well.

I know we have talked about this a little bit. With this, we'd be putting forward this motion. It goes into the report and at the report part we move concurrence and have the discussion about the Prime Minister coming once again, in which case it should come to a vote in the House of Commons to get the Prime Minister here.

We've seen what happens here. Is there any likelihood that even in the House of Commons it wouldn't come to a vote, like we've seen here?

Mr. John Nater: I'm happy to respond, Madam Chair.

It would depend on the will of Parliament. A concurrence motion is scheduled in the House typically for three hours, unless an intervening dilatory motion prevents that. That would be, for example, a motion to move to orders of the day, a motion to adjourn the debate or a motion to adjourn the House, which would be less than likely. After three hours of debate on a concurrence motion, it would then be put to the House to vote upon it.

It is a time-limited debate in the House, so there is not an opportunity to put up multiple speakers to filibuster it to no end. Once the debate is completed, it would then be put to the House.

Obviously right now we're under special orders that the vote be deferred until the time prescribed, typically the next day after question period. That would be the process, so there would not be an opportunity for the government members, or any members for that matter, to filibuster a committee report.

There would still be the option for any member to move a dilatory motion to prevent that debate from being completed.

Hopefully that clarifies it. I enjoy parliamentary procedure. I don't say that I'm an expert on all aspects of it. I've learned over the years from people who are far smarter than I am, including one of our well-known experts, Mr. John Holtby. He is the co-editor of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms*. He is one of the wonderful people who provide advice to us from time to time. I learned from those people and I try to put as much of it into the back of my head as possible.

Hopefully, that clarifies it for you, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes. Thanks very much.

That's why I want to talk about this. I'm thinking of the subamendment. That's really positive. Now we can take it to the greater whole, because we have watched this filibuster for three months. If there's only a time frame of three hours, that's a very positive thing. This motion may give us what we need at the end of the day, which is the Prime Minister.

Thanks for bringing this forward.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie, please go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, I have a further question about the process, which I would direct either to you or to the clerk, whoever you think is best suited to provide a response.

I also have a slight preamble.

First of all, what's important to know about the process is that first the committee has to decide that it's actually going to get on with doing up a report. Unfortunately, we're not there yet. I'd like to get there today.

Then we have to determine the content of that report. There's an attempt here by Mr. Nater to begin that discussion, I think maybe somewhat prematurely, but nevertheless, there are some good ideas on the table. Then that gets reported back to the House. Then there's the matter of a concurrence debate. Then there's a vote in Parliament, which could turn a recommendation of the report into an order of the House.

Then there's the question of parliamentary privilege. We know that MPs can't be compelled or don't have to accept invitations to appear and there are certainly lots of examples of that. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister himself is a current example of that.

However, it seems to me that, if you look at chapter 20 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, it's an open question as to what happens in the event that an order issued by the House to a member of Parliament to appear is not followed. It seems to me that there are some examples cited from 2008 where, on a couple of occasions, there was this kind of recommendation by a committee to try to get the House to order a witness. In fact, when committees had made that recommendation back to the House, it was not actually dealt with. The House either chose not to deal with it or, in the second case, as referred to in the footnote, Parliament was dissolved before the issue was decided.

I think the further aspect of that, which is relevant, is the timeline that we're on, in terms of the end of June. Again, my frustration is that we're on that timeline really because we have a Prime Minister who seems very likely to call an election in the summer and refuses to say he won't. That means that if we want to be able to report back on some of this, it has to happen by the end of June.

Presumably an order of the House, once it were determined, would then provide some time for the Prime Minister to arrange an appearance. It would only be after he didn't appear that we would then have to settle the issue, which would mean coming back to the House with some other kind of motion in order to devise some kind of sanction against the Prime Minister for not having appeared.

The question is whether all of that can be done before the end of June. If it can't, that means that not only did the Prime Minister not appear, but PROC never even reported back about it. I think that would be egregious. I share the outrage of other members of the committee who are upset that the Prime Minister isn't coming. I do think that shows a lack of leadership. The question is what you do about it. I think what you do about it is report back to the House. As I say, I'm open to that longer road, but I think we need to get there first.

Could the clerk comment on how the issue of privilege could interact with an attempt for the House to order the Prime Minister and what some of those timelines might be if the House wanted to pursue it vigorously?

The Chair: Yes, it's very interesting that we're discussing the mechanisms of procedure in this way. I think that's good learning for everyone. The clerk and I were talking about different privilege

matters on Monday and going through different things that could occur.

Daniel, your question is very good. The clerk has written extensively about these types of issues. He has looked into them before and is an expert for our committee.

Justin, please go ahead and give us a little bit of your wealth of knowledge on this issue.

The Clerk: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll make one point right off the top. My understanding of the subamendment that Mr. Nater has put forward is that the report would still be presented to the House. There would be a recommendation along the lines that Mr. Nater is proposing that would be embedded into the report. There would be a report presented to the House. Once it's presented, if it were concurred in, the recommendations, including the one that Mr. Nater is putting forward, would become an order of the House.

You are right in the sense that, for any member of Parliament or senator, the Governor General or the Queen, committees cannot summon those people to show up at committee or, essentially, compel them to appear. However, there is the mechanism of having the House order a member of Parliament to attend a committee, and be available to provide testimony for that committee on any number of reasons, or any number of studies that a committee is engaged in. The committee can't force that; only the House can.

You're right in the sense that if there is non-compliance of a member of Parliament to attend, then the committee can also report that fact to the House. It becomes a matter for the House to then deal with, and determine an appropriate remedy or response.

As you indicated, the ability for the House to go to that next level has perhaps not been fully tested in the past, or there may not be several examples of that, or examples that can instruct your work here today. There is no problem with an order of the House at this stage requiring the attendance of a member of Parliament to attend a particular committee.

If the member doesn't attend, that's a matter for a future step where the committee could then consider anew what it wants to do about that. Maybe the committee doesn't care about that. Maybe it's not a problem, or maybe some other issue intervenes where it no longer requires that member to attend.

However, if the committee is of the view that it is still required, as I said, it can report the fact of the non-appearance by that member. It then becomes a matter for the House to determine and figure out what it wants to do, and if it wants to take any further steps in requiring that member's appearance.

The Chair: Next we have Mr. Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll call once again on our colleague Mr. Vaive. After receiving the very clear explanation of what was involved in the amendment proposed by Mr. Nater, I re-read the French version and I'm not certain that the two versions say the same thing. What I'd like to ask our clerk is whether his reading of the translation matches the interpretation he just gave me, or whether some translation work still needs to be done? I'm not casting aspersions on the translators; on the contrary, I find that they've done extraordinary work. However, sometimes there is a fine line when additional clarification is required to make sure versions match perfectly. I'm just asking the question, and not blaming anyone.

[English]

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I could respond, if you would like.

The Chair: Go ahead.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Mr. Therrien, based on my reading of the English and the French, they suggest the same thing, which is that a recommendation be made in the report to give the committee the power to compel the appearance of the Prime Minister before the committee. As I mentioned, the committee cannot order any such thing, because only the House can order him to appear. In this instance, as the chair and Mr. Nater suggested, if this recommendation were included in the report, and if the report were tabled in the House, and if the House were ultimately to adopt it by means of a motion, then the recommendation would become a House order obliging the Prime Minister, in his capacity as a member of Parliament, to appear before the committee.

Mr. Alain Therrien: In short, then, you find that the translation conveys the same meaning as the amendment proposed by Mr. Nater.

That's all I wanted to know.

So you're all right with it?

You're telling me that it's okay. Is that right?

The Clerk: In my view, it's good.

I am obviously no linguist. However, my understanding—Mr. Nater can always correct me if I'm wrong—is that what we're talking about is a recommendation in the report which, when tabled and adopted by the House, creates an obligation for the Prime Minister to appear before the committee. The House, in doing so, gives the committee the authority to compel his appearance.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you very much, Mr. Vaive. I really appreciate it.

[English]

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, sorry—

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, is it okay if Mr. Nater interjects?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Certainly.

Mr. John Nater: I just want to clarify and to thank the clerk. His explanation is consistent with the meaning of my subamendment.

To Monsieur Therrien, I thank him for his interventions on this. I do take both official languages very seriously, so I do want to make sure that when we do have these translations—and we did have this

translated by the translation bureau—they are consistent. I was the vice-chair of the official languages committee in the previous Parliament for nearly two years, so I do have a special understanding and appreciation for our two official languages. I did just want to clarify that.

If there were any translation errors—and we all make mistakes—I would fully take the blame for that.

I appreciate the clerk's explanation, and that is consistent with the subamendment I moved.

I will leave it there. I don't think there's anything more to say, but I appreciate the interventions on that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, please go ahead.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Chair.

I will be very brief. I just want everyone to know what the consequences will be as a result of a vote on Mr. Nater's subamendment, should we get to a vote today.

If the vote is defeated, the reality is that the Prime Minister will never appear before our committee. I'm reading the political tea leaves a little bit here in anticipating that Mr. Blaikie will be voting against Mr. Nater's subamendment, but that would have the effect, as I've just said, that the Prime Minister will never appear. He may be asked to appear, but he will not be compelled to appear. Only Mr. Nater's motion would have a possibility of compelling the Prime Minister to appear. Everyone should be very aware of that: a vote against Mr. Nater's subamendment means we will never see the Prime Minister at this committee to answer any questions about prorogation and his reasons for bringing forward prorogation when he did. That, in my view, would be extremely unfortunate. I'm choosing my words carefully. I would have other words to choose rather than “unfortunate” but, being observant of parliamentary decorum, I will leave it at that.

Colleagues, make no mistake. What the Liberals have been doing for the last three months during their filibuster is to prevent the Prime Minister from appearing at this committee. If this committee votes against Mr. Nater's subamendment, and in favour of Mr. Blaikie's subamendment, which we've already voted on and passed, the reality is the Prime Minister will never appear. We will never hear from him, and that is more than just unfortunate. Frankly, I think it's shameful.

That's the reality, colleagues. I'll cede my time to the next speaker.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Kent, please go ahead.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As we move toward the inevitable, in this very long and unnecessarily prolonged discussion, I'd like to reflect on what's been going on for the past three months plus.

We have dealt with one another in this committee very respectfully and collegially, with a certain amount of humour, but at the same time have recognized that the Liberal minority on this committee has been acting to protect the Prime Minister, preventing the will of the majority of the members on this committee.

Basically, it fulfilled an objective that was described very eloquently in the *Globe and Mail*, regarding the behaviour of Liberal minority membership on committees right across the House. It was essentially to prevent accountability on any number of crucially important matters that should be considered, examined, and be open to consideration in every standing committee, and special committee for that matter, of the House of Commons.

The Chair: Mr. Kent, could you adjust your boom mike up a bit? There's that popping noise again.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you. I apologize.

I must say that Mr. Blaikie was passionate throughout the three-month filibuster until today, until this week, until the end of proceedings last week, when there was a sudden apparent backroom liaison between the NDP and the Liberals, and Mr. Lauzon suddenly came up with a confected, on-the-fly motion, which is still under consideration here today. I think Mr. Blaikie laid out very well, from his point of view, as Mr. Therrien, Ms. Vecchio, Mr. Nater and Mr. Lukiwski did, the opposition's desire to call the only individual who can fully explain the decision to prorogue Parliament last August.

I regret the fact that by running out the clock, unfortunately successfully with this filibuster, the committee has been placed in a position where backs are against the wall and where priorities are bringing us to the point where the united opposition has been effectively defeated by the Liberal filibuster's running out the clock.

I agree with Mr. Blaikie that whatever motion might have been passed by this committee calling on the Prime Minister, inviting the Prime Minister to speak for three hours, for one hour or to just show up, that was highly unlikely. I think that it is the responsibility of committees, as we often hear from the Liberal House leader, to stand with a mind of its own, accountable to the constituents who elected each of us individually and to the appointments by our respective parties to deliver accountable, responsible performances in the activities of the various committees.

In this committee, the mother of committees, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, it is exceptionally disappointing. This is one of the most disappointing moments I've had in 13 years in elected office in the House of Commons, where the will of the majority members has been defied by a minority for the most venal of reasons.

I'll leave it there. I know that we won't get to a vote today. The time for a complete and thoughtful report of this committee, I think, has already run out. I suspect that Mr. Blaikie, in making a report essential to his position to vote with the Liberals, has more to do with the supplementary or dissenting report that he, the Conservatives and the Bloc will be enabled to attach to the report, which has been, I'm sure, competently assembled by our analysts.

I think that is a false victory. It's an imperfect victory, and I think we should all hang our heads in shame at the way this committee has been dysfunctional over the last three-plus months.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm surprised that you think you might have to write a dissenting report. I feel you'll have a lot of support on many of those recommendations that you might wish to move, but I guess only if we get to that point will we know that. I don't know. I'd be surprised. I think the Conservatives would be happy that they'll probably get a lot of recommendations they want to see in the report.

Ms. Vecchio, you're next.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

Carrying on with Peter's words, I do fully respect the fact that we have seen in the past.... I'm looking at some of the types. Minister Qualtrough has come to committee and has been put in as one of these things to come to committee. We've also seen these in other committees—with the China-Canada committee—where they're asking for people to come. There are lots of things we should be doing here.

I really do respect where John has gone on this. I think at the end of the day, there's only one person who needs to speak on this report. It's very unfortunate that his voice will not actually be in this report because he chooses not to come.

Perhaps I can ask the clerk.

Has an invitation actually been sent to the Prime Minister, and has there ever been a response? If you can [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the time frame on that, since this all started, has anything ever been sent to him? Has there ever been a response? What can we look at there?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I can answer.

The Chair: Go ahead. It's the same answer, though. It was sent at the very beginning when the request was made and—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Could I actually get dates and know when he was asked and when he actually replied? What follow-up was done? I would really like to know that. For months I listened to how Chrystia Freeland had come, yet no one rapped on her door to say, "Chrystia, can you please come to our committee?"

I want to know what's actually happening. I want to know the facts and how much true intention was given to having any of the Liberal ministers actually come.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I can answer Ms. Vecchio.

The original invitations to the Prime Minister and the other witnesses the committee had identified and wanted to hear from go back to a steering committee report. I don't have the precise dates off the top of my head, but back in February, the steering committee recommended a whole series of witnesses be invited. They included the Prime Minister, Minister Chagger, Minister Freeland, the Kielburger brothers, Mr. and Mrs. Perelmutter, and Bill Morneau. The recommendations for those witnesses had been ratified by the main committee also back in February. Invitations were sent out to all of those people.

When it comes to ministers of the Crown, such as Minister Chagger, Minister Freeland and the Prime Minister, we go through departmental contacts, parliamentary relations people who work with the minister's office, or in the case of the Prime Minister, with the Prime Minister's Office through PCO, to coordinate a response. Now, in the case of the Prime Minister, Minister Chagger and Minister Freeland, the invitations were made. As of today, I still do not have formal responses to those invitations. I did remind them, even as your motion was moved back at the end of February, that despite the fact that you had a new motion you were proposing to reinstate these people, the original invitations were still live, and that they can get back to me at any point with a formal response indicating yes or no.

Periodically, through the intervening three-plus months, I have checked in with each of those departments and the Privy Council Office to see where they were in responding to the invitations, but as I indicated, I have not received a formal response to any of the three invitations.

Some of the witnesses the committee had called for who weren't cabinet ministers or ministers of the Crown did get back to me definitively. Mr. Morneau got back to me definitively and declined. Mr. and Mrs. Perelmutter also got back to me definitively and declined, as I indicated to the committee some time ago. As for Marc and Craig Kielburger, I went back and forth with their representative as to a date, but they never settled on one. We never heard back in a formalized way regarding those two witnesses.

The Chair: We could always add that to the report. If we move on to the report, we could give the analysts.... It's up to you guys. It can always be added to the report, if you want that.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I was just checking to see. Honestly, we filibustered for three and a half months on inviting people who had already been invited.

The thing is, as we're looking at the motion that John put forward today, once again, I know that the Prime Minister will not be coming. Therefore, it is imperative that the House of Commons, where the majority are not in government and where the majority would like to actually hear from the Prime Minister.... Regardless of how things end up in this committee and regardless of this vote, I know that every opposition member wants to hear from the Prime Minister. This is what we're trying to do today, to force the Prime Minister to come and to be accountable.

I will end by saying that accountability is what should be leading this country, and it's not.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Clerk, can you help us with the vote on Mr. Nater's subamendment?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It's 12:59. Will we have time?

The Chair: Yes, I think so.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

Would it be possible to move to Mr. Lauzon's amendment right now?

There are a few hands up.

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, not to prolong this, but I do have a second subamendment. This is very simple. This will require that the committee table this report, and table it before we move forward with any other business of this committee.

I have seen, we have seen and Mr. Kent mentioned his reading of the Globe and Mail about what is happening with us and with other committees' business making it through to the House of Commons.

This would be a fairly simple subamendment. I will read it out. I do have it in both official languages. I will email it directly to the clerk once I've finished having the floor. I will read it out at this point:

That the amendment be amended by replacing all the words after the words "disposed of" with the following: "before the Committee begins consideration of Bill C-19".

Again, very simply, if we're going to go directly to drafting this report and tabling it in the House of Commons, we need to do this before we move on to the next business of this committee. I do not want to see the past number of months wasted by having a filibuster on a committee report when we do the line-by-line review. We've seen that happen in other committees where there's a draft report left uncompleted for very important and very serious matters that are before those committees.

That's my subamendment.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Excellent.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Karen.

I will cede the floor at this point. Just give me the 30 seconds or so for me to click "send" for both the English and French versions of that subamendment.

The Chair: Your subamendment basically just says that....

Mr. Blaikie's subamendment which already passed already requires there to be a tabling of the report on June 11. You're just saying that's fine, that the tabling will happen on June 11, but we can't start anything before that time.

Mr. John Nater: That's correct, Madam Chair. The purpose of this subamendment is that the business of the committee will proceed with this committee report prior to taking up any other business, namely, Bill C-19.

I will cede the floor and send out that email immediately so that everyone has it, and we will go from there.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, I wanted to take the floor just to express some real disappointment with the way that today's meeting has gone, because I had really hoped that we would get to the point where we could get on with issuing a report. The timeline was tight as it is. My Conservative colleagues know that. They've spent a lot of time talking today, after spending months saying they were tired of hearing talking and that we should vote on issues before the committee so that decisions can be rendered, and they've found ways to extend this debate without us getting to actually making these decisions.

I appreciate the tightness of the timeline. I know that. I'm not happy about it. I get that Liberal members of the committee got us here by filibustering for some time and I appreciate the frustration. The question is whether at some point you want to decide to get anything done or not.

After listening for months to one party that has a Prime Minister about whom there are allegations of political abuse of prorogation, we finally get to the point where there might be a decision taken on how to proceed as a committee. Let the committee speak. That's what we've been hearing from Conservatives, rightly, for months now, and now I'm watching the other party that has had prime ministers who have been accused of political abuses of prorogation take up the filibuster where the Liberals left off, because we have two parties that aren't interested in building in meaningful accountability on how the Prime Minister uses the powers of prorogation and dissolution. That's what's going on.

I'm sorry. I forgot Monsieur Therrien. It's just hard to know where the Bloc is at on any given day.

Before Bill C-19 was sent to the committee, the NDP reached out to other parties to say that we wanted to—

[Translation]

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

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: —work with other parties to find a way to move this—

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Chair, please.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Does someone have a point of order?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Your microphone is on mute, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. Go ahead on the point of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: We were supposed to finish at 1 p.m. Would it be possible to end the meeting, entertain Mr. Nater's subamendment and discuss it together on Thursday? That would prevent us from having to listen to Mr. Blaikie's sermons. I don't think he's in a very good position to give them.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I thought you liked my sermons, Mr. Therrien. I'm disappointed.

Mr. Alain Therrien: No, not at all.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I'll just let Mr. Blaikie end and then we'll suspend.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much.

When the NDP reached out to other parties to say, we want to find a way to get Bill C-19 to committee without time allocation, it was a non-starter from the Bloc. Then we got Bill C-19 to committee and then it was the Bloc leader who sent a letter saying they wanted to talk about how to move Bill C-19 forward. We've had many reversals of position by the Bloc. It just seems to depend on the day, Madam Chair, so you'll forgive me if I can't quite decipher the logic of their position.

However, I think it's pretty clear when it comes to the Conservatives. Here we are. We have the opportunity to move forward with a report to make some concrete recommendations about how to improve a standing order in order to prevent future abuses of prorogation, and the Conservatives have picked up the filibuster where the Liberals left off.

I put it to Canadians. Send me your suggestions on how to break this impasse. I would like to put rules in place so that if we have an election during the summer, which the Prime Minister has made it all but clear is his intention unless things are so cataclysmically bad that he can't pull it off, there are some rules in place so that we can have a proper election.

What we've seen here are more delay tactics and efforts, not only to push this report back into the summer where it will cease to exist, but also Bill C-19.

Come on, guys. At a certain point we have to make some decisions here and we do have timelines. I don't like them either, but I'm not the one responsible for the situation we're in either.

I hope at the next meeting people will come actually ready to get on with it. We're probably going to have to look at changing the timelines in the motion, which is obvious to any one with half a brain who's been paying attention—and I know you all have at least half a one. We all know what's going on. When is it going to get fixed [Technical difficulty—Editor] there's an opportunity [Technical difficulty—Editor] pass.

For all the lectures on political this and political that and insinuations and accusations people want to make about me today, I think everyone should go home and look in the mirror before they go to bed tonight.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Because we do have to suspend in about a minute, I just want to ask all of you, would you like me to circulate the report as it's done so far so that everyone has some time to review it so that we can get going on it?

I see some nodding. I'll email that so that you can take a look at the prorogation report.

The other thing is, if we do get through at the beginning of the next meeting disposing of the motions we have before us.... As Mr. Blaikie said, things are getting tighter and tighter. I thought by the end of this meeting we'd get through it all.

You should be thinking about recommendations if you do want to move to completing that study. Ideally, what the clerk and I had in mind was if things were to get to that point today, it would have been nice to have everyone's proposed recommendations in by Friday. Of course, you don't have the report but the report will be sent out to you just to have in the back of your minds to start thinking about those recommendations if we do make progress in the next meeting.

Is that good?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, I was just going to say that I respect where Daniel is coming from. There is no opportunity to vote right now. I'm just wondering if we're going to go to a vote on this one. Daniel is talking about timelines. This is something that's important, and perhaps we have time to vote. I don't know.

Obviously, the one o'clock was just one o'clock, but it's not really one o'clock, and I was very happy that we got through the last vote. I'm hoping perhaps we can vote.

The Chair: It was one o'clock. I am having the clerk tell me that there was a minute here or there, so that's why I was trying to give it, to resolve the situation. But now we have two to three votes to get through at this point, and I think we'd have to get through them at the beginning of the next meeting. I think we can.

We will circulate the report to everybody and hopefully come prepared to vote on all of it, dispose of it, and get started on Thursday's meeting with the report.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: With the report. Okay.

The Chair: Yes. Is that good?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's awesome, I think, for us. I'm happy about that report. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Great. Thank you, everyone.

The meeting is suspended.

[The meeting was suspended at 1:10 p.m., Tuesday, June 1, 2021.]

[The meeting resumed at 11:01 a.m., Thursday, June 3, 2021.]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

This is a resumption of meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which started on April 13, 2021.

Today's meeting is taking place in hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25. Therefore, members can attend virtually and in person.

Everyone is attending this meeting virtually, so I'll remind you to make sure your interpretation is switched to the correct channel, to

make sure that you mute and unmute yourself and you know the rest of the drill.

I'd like to get back to where we left off in the last meeting. Mr. Nater had just moved a subamendment. We are on the prorogation study at this point. There are three motions before us that are in order. Hopefully, we can dispose of these as quickly as possible. My intention is that, depending on what happens, if we do get to the point where we have voted for or against all of these motions, we can move on to the draft report that was circulated to all of you last Tuesday, June 1.

Has everyone received the draft report?

If we do get to that point, we will have to switch to in camera, since consideration of draft reports happens in camera. That link has been circulated to you with the public link as well.

At this point, let's move back to Mr. Nater's subamendment, which was put forward close to the end of the last meeting on June 1. It states:

That the amendment be amended by replacing all the words after the words "disposed of" with the following: "before the Committee begins consideration of Bill C-19".

I was going over this with the clerk because I want to make sure that everybody knows what decisions they are making, where we are on all of the motions and what the final motion will end up looking like after all of the amendments that we've had. At first glance, when I saw it, I thought the impact of this subamendment would be to make sure that we do not move on to C-19 until the prorogation study is completed. That's a completely understandable desire that Mr. Nater is putting forward. I can completely understand why he would want that.

However, when you put it side by side, it's replacing the words of Mr. Blaikie's previous amendment, which puts in place a timeline. In order for me to know what kind of timeline we're working with, when we remove the words after "disposed of" in Mr. Blaikie's amendment that was already adopted, that is the portion that actually states....

I'll read it out to you and maybe I can have the clerk also read it out for you in case you're not following me.

Mr. Blaikie's subamendment had said:

, and that all questions necessary for the finalization and tabling of the report be disposed of before the end of the day on June 8, 2021 and that the final report be tabled no later than June 11, 2021

If we were to replace the words after "disposed of" with Mr. Nater's subamendment, "before the Committee begins consideration of Bill C-19", it does essentially remove the timeline that Mr. Blaikie had proposed and that the committee had voted in favour of in a previous meeting.

I'm just wondering, Mr. Nater, if you can explain to the other members and to me if your intention was to remove the timeline or if your intention was just to add it to the timeline.

Mr. John Nater: The intention was to replace it with that: Basically, let's get this done. My concern is that with the way things are going, as some members maybe want to do, we will basically eat up time over the next two and a half meetings so that the deadline comes and goes, there is no report, and then we move on to Bill C-19 without ever having tabled this report.

So yes, it does get rid of those timelines. The theory is that before we do anything...and there's nothing preventing us from meeting the timeline of Mr. Blaikie. That would obviously be our preference. I just don't want to see us hit June 11 and have missed our own deadline, which we set whether we voted in favour of it or not. The thing is that we want to finish this report and have the report tabled before we go to the next order of business. It does get rid of the timeline, which hopefully we can still meet, but I do not want to see the next three meetings—if we have extra meetings, obviously I'm okay with that as well—eaten up by debating the minutiae of a report for the sole purpose of killing time to get beyond that deadline.

I live in constant optimism that our friends from all parties will meaningfully come to the table, present their suggestions to the report, and not spend two hours debating a comma or a period, but we shall see. Obviously, I am one of four official opposition members of the committee. I can count relatively well, so obviously it's the will of the committee. That's where we're at.

Madam Chair, I will leave my comments there.

The Chair: Thank you.

So your intention is to complete the prorogation study, but you believe that in order to do so, the timelines must be removed.

Maybe the clerk can help us better understand the timelines that are in place according to what's been adopted through Mr. Blaikie's previous timelines. Would the committee then be obligated by those timelines to submit a report by June 11? I think that clarifies things. I do believe, from my conversations with all the members in this committee, that it's everyone's intention, just as Mr. Nater wants, to complete this prorogation study and to see it tabled.

Through discussions in this committee, that's what I gather as well, but we can also hear from the members who have their hands up.

First, can you clarify this for us, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes, of course, Madam Chair.

Procedurally, there is no problem with maintaining those timelines. In normal circumstances, when all members would be meeting in the room, those timelines would likely be very achievable in the sense that the committee would be able to sit for as long as it takes in order to consider all aspects of the draft report and make a final decision on the draft report.

However, knowing the constraints in terms of resources that not just this committee but all committees face, and the ability to continue sitting possibly indefinitely, if it does end up taking quite a bit of time to go through the report on June 8, we may not, as we know, have full control over the ability to continue sitting indefinitely. We know that generally a lot of these types of decisions are now made in conjunction with the whips and the House administra-

tion based on the allocation of resources that committees need to run.

I am reminding everybody in terms of expectations that, despite the will of the committee to potentially want to do this if this ultimately gets adopted, we may not have full control over our own timetable that would necessarily permit the committee to spend as much time as it wants in adopting it.

On June 8, if the report can be processed within the kind of two-hour window that is generally allotted to committee meetings, then it, obviously, shouldn't be a problem, but, as we know, we don't know how long it might take for the committee to consider the report. Then it does create a problem in terms of timelines in order to finalize it.

Before turning it over to you, Madam Chair, one last point I will say is that, in regular times, this type of motion would mean that the committee would start sitting on June 8 and would continue to sit without adjourning until such time as all of their work is finalized on the report. That is the area where we're having difficulty right now because of the allocation of resources. We may not have all the time that might be necessary for the committee to finalize the report.

One last thing I will say about the June 11 portion of the subamendment, which gives the deadline for the chair to present something back to the House, is that one of the questions that's necessary to dispose of the report comes at the very end, when the committee is asked if they want to adopt the report. Obviously, if the committee was of the view that it didn't want to adopt the report after having gone through the whole thing, there would, obviously, be nothing for the chair to report on June 11.

The Chair: That could happen in either situation, I think. It depends on the will of all of the members of the committee to want to get that report completed.

I do believe that, in the past, we have seen that, if we do have strict deadlines, the committee is more motivated to try to get its recommendations in, get a vote on those recommendations, move forward and get it done, but I do understand the constraints.

Also, I did want to let the committee members know that today we do have constraints because of House administrative shortages. I have directed the clerk to try to find us that extra time for the meeting on June 8, and I am hoping that we can get through everything. If we do go to a vote today, we would move into the draft report, take a look at the content of the draft report, perhaps have a day or so to submit proposed recommendations by all the different parties, give the analysts time over the weekend to insert that into the draft report, and then we would have a completed draft report to look at and would vote on all of the proposals in the next meeting.

Next we have Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Madame Chair. I just wanted to take an opportunity to put on the record some thoughts about Mr. Nater's subamendment and his most recent comments.

First of all, I think there is at least a mild incoherence in the idea that we're more likely to meet a deadline if we don't set a deadline. I think the best way to meet a deadline is to set a deadline. I think the deadline, by virtue of the wording of the subamendment that was adopted, is actually quite strict in that it requires decisions to be taken.

The problem at PROC for a long time now is not that the committee couldn't get through a vote if a vote were held. It's that we haven't been having the votes. The concern that the Conservatives have raised—which is a concern that I share, having looked at other committees and the way some of them have operated in terms of finalizing reports—is that we might not get to where we make those decisions, and therefore the report gets talked out. That's why the subamendment is very clear that the questions necessary for finalizing that report have to be put by the end of the day on June 8.

I respect that there are administrative constraints in this Parliament. In fact, one of the things I've found frustrating, being a member of three committees, is that I find members on those committees often don't take into account.... They want to go on with business as if it were perfectly normal and don't really recognize that there's a duty on members of Parliament to organize our work, to be able to accomplish our legitimate goals within the resources that the House is able to provide in the circumstances. I think we're often asking too much of the House to provide resources to support normal decision-making procedures and timelines that don't recognize where we are. I think that members of Parliament can do that, however, if they're not motivated by other political reasons, perhaps, for delay—in this case whether in respect of not wanting to see a report on prorogation or not wanting to see progress on Bill C-19.

As a New Democrat, I want to see us make progress on both. That's why I think adopting a strict timeline, getting on to consideration of the draft report.... I'm not going to reveal any details, but I've seen that draft report. Overall, I think it's a pretty good reflection of what the committee has heard. I don't think that the main report language ought to be very controversial, frankly. There'll be a question as to recommendations. I think that if we can submit our proposed recommendations by Friday and come prepared for a discussion on Tuesday, we should be able to organize our work to assign a legitimate amount of time to each recommendation and then hold the vote. Once all the votes have been held, we'll have the content of a report that we can then vote on, as the clerk has indicated. If the committee makes the decision that it doesn't want to report to go back to Parliament, that's a horse of a different colour. At that point, it's the committee deciding it doesn't want that.

That won't be my option. Unless things unroll very differently than I imagine they will, I think on balance it's really important for PROC to be reporting back to the House, but I believe that if we want to, we can organize our work to come to a final decision, even within the context of a two-hour meeting on Tuesday. I don't think that it should take us eight or 10 hours if we all behave like grown-ups and do our preparatory work properly. This is something we can do as professionals in a professional workplace. The question is whether we want it done, and the first way to signal that we do want it done is to accept a rigorous deadline, and we have one as it stands.

If we adopt Mr. Nater's subamendment, we will not have a rigorous deadline. In fact, we won't really have any deadline at all, and then I think we run the risk of not only not reporting back on prorogation but also of not reporting Bill C-19 back to the House. That's just an unacceptable outcome to me. I want both, and I think it's still within our power to do both.

I won't waste any more time with my comments, but I wanted to have those on the record.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Turnbull and then Monsieur Therrien.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I do appreciate the opportunity to say a few words and reflect on this.

Certainly, relating back to some of the things that Mr. Blaikie just shared, which I think are quite reasonable, upon first blush when I saw the subamendment I thought that I could support this because it's really prioritizing prorogation and getting that work done before moving on. I think now that it's been clarified, this impacts a reasonable timeline. It certainly is ambitious, but, as Mr. Blaikie said, I feel that it's something we can accomplish.

I think the main body of the report, which I took the time last night to review, is quite good. It does reflect the testimony that was given, so I feel that the onus is on us as members to put together our recommendations in a timeline that I think is reasonable and to utilize our time next week on Tuesday to go through those recommendations from all the various parties with due consideration given and to vote on those as necessary. I really do support the fact that we need to finish this work, wrap up the prorogation study and complete our work on Bill C-19. I feel very strongly that we have a duty to complete both.

I think it was important for me to just share some of those reflections. I really do think we can accomplish this if we set our minds to it. I agree that we're all professionals and the onus is on us to complete this work.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Monsieur Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Greetings to everyone.

I apologize for being a little late. It's the first time it's happened to me. I got caught up in some unusual circumstances.

I have two comments.

The first is about the French version of the subamendment. I'd like to ask our dearly beloved clerk whether he thinks the word "élimination" is really an appropriate translation of "*disposed of*" and whether it might not be preferable to use the verb "*régler*"?

The Clerk: You're absolutely right, Mr. Therrien. A translation problem may well explain this choice of words. As you pointed out, the verb "*régler*" should be used instead.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Very good.

I'll be brief. My NDP colleague said that our work would have been a waste of time and that we had to present our report to Parliament. I can understand why he would say that and I find that extremely important. The work is not useless and must not be. We need to table our report, but the report has to be well written, well thought-out and in accordance with what we've been hearing for a long while, as the NDP member mentioned.

I'm coming back to the fact of presenting the report to Parliament. I don't think that the dates June 8 and June 11 are critical. We could still take the time to submit it to Parliament. Not being able to do so before June 11 would not endanger the report. That argument is therefore not a good one.

We've also gone through three months of obstruction from the Liberal Party MPs because they did not want Mr. Trudeau to come. And then Mr. Blaikie told us that it was not serious for the Prime Minister not to appear and that we should move on to something else. If he had taken this position from the outset, there wouldn't have been three months of obstruction. If he wanted to support the Liberals, he should have done it three months ago. If he had, we wouldn't find ourselves with a tight deadline. We're facing this problem because we—by which I mean the Bloc Québécois, and also the Conservatives, if I have understood correctly—absolutely want Mr. Trudeau to appear, and this hasn't happened. That's why we're in this position. We mustn't forget it.

As for the report, I've read it, and it's impressive. I, like my colleagues, I would imagine, have lots of comments I could make about it. I'm saying that in friendship. I may be wrong, but I firmly believe that the June 8 deadline is too tight. Given our deliberations, I don't think we'll get there. We need only recall that we tabled our "Final report : protecting public health and democracy during a possible pandemic election", but it took us a long time to get there.

We now have a precedent. We are writing history. It's the first time this has happened. I would also like to congratulate the Liberals, because they reached the following decision: in future, when there are prorogations, they must be studied, the government must prepare a report, and the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs must consider it. I heartily commend them. It's the first time we've done that.

Once we have finished with the amendments and subamendments, we will write the report. We need to take the time required to do it properly. I'm not saying it will take a month, but I think the June 8 deadline, next Tuesday, is too tight. I would have trouble agreeing to get it done for that date. That being the case, I would prefer it if we could postpone the deadline so that we can do the work properly, because that's really what people expect of us.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Therrien.

Mr. Clerk, I believe the words that were used instead of "*à l'élimination du*" were "*au dépôt du*" in the original.

Could we replace that in the French version?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, to understand Mr. Nater's subamendment, we have to go back and also look at Mr. Blaikie's subamendment, which was adopted in the last meeting.

The Chair: Yes. Mr. Blaikie uses the different language.

The Clerk: The issue is in the French. None of it is wrong. Let's look at Mr. Blaikie's subamendment.

[Translation]

It says: "...et que toutes les questions nécessaires à la finalisation et au dépôt du rapport soient réglées..."

[English]

Mr. Nater's subamendment is aiming to change the words after the French word "*réglées*". But, in the subamendment that Mr. Nater has put forward, instead of referencing the word "*réglées*", it references another combination of words, "*élimination de*", that doesn't feature anywhere in the French translation of Mr. Blaikie's subamendment. It appears there's some kind of translation issue or something, but clearly the intention is to change the words in French after the word "*réglées*".

The Chair: Could we go to a vote on this at this point?

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, I'm not delaying the vote. I'm just confirming what the clerk said.

The subamendment was drafted on the English version and then sent for translation to the translation bureau. Obviously, there was a mix-up there, but, yes, "*réglées*" is obviously the right word, if it's the one that appears in the original French version.

That's all I have to say about that.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Depending on how the vote goes, then we can have that translation amended.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, that's right. In fact, when I prepare the minutes for this meeting, I'll make sure the proper word is in there, "*réglées*" as opposed to "*élimination de*", so it will be taken care of there.

The Chair: That's perfect.

Could you help us with the vote on this then?

(Subamendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

Next we will move on to Mr. Lauzon's amendment.

Monsieur Therrien, do you have a comment?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I'd like to introduce a subamendment which I think would reflect what we all want. When we were talking about Mr. Nater's amendment, we said there was no deadline and we were somewhat afraid about not having enough time to table the report in Parliament.

I have a subamendment to propose. It's very straightforward because all that's involved is a change of dates. My colleague will send the French version to the clerk. I am proposing that the words "be disposed of before the end of the day on June 8, 2021 and that the final report be tabled no later than June 11, 2021" be replaced by "be disposed of before the end of the day on June 15, 2021 and that the final report be tabled no later than June 18, 2021".

In other words, we would have an additional week to do the work involved in drafting the report.

I would not, of course, agree to accept the report as it stands; it will be subjected to proposals and amendments. I believe that having an extra week and an actual deadline will be somewhat reassuring to my colleagues who voted against the other proposal. My NDP colleague had said that without a deadline, things could get difficult and we might find ourselves unable to table a report.

So that's it, and I think it's straightforward. The debate has already taken place. We simply need to give ourselves an additional week to do the work. Compared to the three months of systematic obstruction, I think that it's reasonable and that we could get it done. If we finish earlier, then so much the better. We are giving ourselves more time, but we're not required to use it all.

[English]

The Chair: That's fair enough, Monsieur Therrien.

Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's actually just the case. Let's say we actually do get done on Tuesday. We would be able to go to Bill C-19. There would be no delays. Is that correct? I just want to ask Mr. Therrien, through the clerk.

This just provides us more time. We could get on to other business if this was fulfilled. Is that correct?

The Chair: Well, yes, we don't have Mr. Nater's subamendment that he had put in place, so it wouldn't prevent the committee, if the committee wished to do something in between or do something when it has completed the prorogation study. That's correct, Ms. Vecchio.

It's always up to the committee, and there's nothing that is stopping the committee from moving on to other work if this work is completed.

Perhaps we can move to a vote. I don't see why this would be too complicated or we would need any kind of suspension for this. It's simply going to replace two dates. The dates that we had first adopted through Mr. Blaikie's motion were June 8 for the completion of the report and June 11 for the tabling. Monsieur Therrien's subamendment now proposes June 15 for completion of the report and then June 18 for the tabling of the report.

Monsieur Therrien and Mr. Blaikie, do you have some comments?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: You've explained it very well to Ms. Vecchio, Madam Chair. We are indeed not required to continue until June 18. If we finish earlier, that's all to the good. However, I've read the report and would like to make several comments and proposals. I'm therefore not at all certain that we could complete the report as quickly as the NDP member would like, and that's what worries me. I agree with you about the need for us to do quality work. After hearing comments from the committee members, I think that adding one week more would make the deadline acceptable.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, I just want to state the obvious, which is that when this subamendment was first presented, I believe it was last Thursday, I had hoped that we might get to a vote on it. We didn't even manage to get to a vote on it on Tuesday. What has become an unreasonable delay in part because of a lack of being able to get to a decision—not delay but *délai, en français*—has become a tight deadline. It was not a tight deadline when it was first proposed. In fact, it largely mirrored the deadline that Mr. Therrien is now proposing. I'm happy to have a slight extension of the time allowed for the prorogation report provided that we can, nevertheless, start some meetings on Bill C-19 in the time in between. It seems to me that we could.

Mr. Therrien, of course, disagrees, but I think if we wanted to we could get it done. It would be difficult to get it done, but if we could finalize the report by Tuesday, I certainly think that we could do that by the 15th. I think we could do that while allocating some of the intervening meetings. We're talking about the meetings now on the 8th, the 10th and the 15th. I think only two of those or one and a half of those would actually have to be spent on the prorogation report itself. That would also, perhaps, provide a bit more flexibility to the House, which is under some administrative constraints, I understand. Perhaps we could find time for an extra meeting somewhere in there as well.

I think that this is reasonable. I like the fact that we still have a deadline both for finalizing the report, deciding all the questions and then tabling the report. I would not want to do this if it meant that we weren't going to begin our study of Bill C-19. I think this timeline provides time for us to be able to do both.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Therrien, you raised your hand again.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: First, my NDP colleague said that I was against Bill C-19. I don't know what this was based on.

I would also like some clarification. Am I to understand that my NDP colleague would be agreeable to the June 18 deadline on condition that we spend some time studying Bill C-19 between now and June 18? I want to make sure that I've understood properly. It would mean, for example, that next week we could work on the June 8 report and then, on June 10, work on Bill C-19. He would agree to that on condition that we meet the June 18 deadline. That's how I understood it. Am I right?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'd like to clarify something briefly. I didn't say that Mr. Therrien was opposed to Bill C-19.

Apart from that, Mr. Therrien, you've understood. If we spend a little time between now and June 15 to begin our study of Bill C-19, then I don't care whether the deadline is June 8 or June 15. I think that it's important for us to complete our report on the prorogation and to get going on our study of Bill C-19. We could get this done by agreeing that we are going to table a report on the prorogation before the adjournment of the House at the end of June and then refer Bill C-19 to the House of Commons as soon as possible. That's really what I want. You are therefore correct, Mr. Therrien.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you for that clarification.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Perhaps this is more a point of order.

It's an interesting proposal that Mr. Therrien has put forward. I do appreciate this. I think the amended timeline.... I have some concerns about it. I'm also somewhat supportive, so I'm sort of in between. If possible, would we be able to have a quick 10-minute suspension to have a bit of a team huddle on our side? I think all members might be able to take that time just to consider this.

If that would be okay, Madam Chair, I would certainly appreciate it.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, before we go there, can we just go through the list? I have about a 10-second intro on the types of things we can consider as well.

The Chair: Sure, Ms. Vecchio. Go ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I was just going to comment that I think this proposal is a great idea. We have to recognize that there will be translation. There will be different things like that. As we're waiting for the report before it can be tabled—because it will need translation services and finalization—that would give us the opportunity to invite the minister and to invite the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada as well. Then, during that time, even if it's not actually tabled right there, the opportunity to start that study is possible.

I just wanted to leave that with everybody.

The Chair: Absolutely, it is possible, and we've done that in the past when we've done some things simultaneously.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Would we need a subamendment for that?

The Chair: Would you need a subamendment for what?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: To continue to do the two studies simultaneously.

The Chair: No, just the committee would decide. We've never actually had amendments or formal motions when we decide to move towards something. Sometimes we have a subcommittee report back to the main committee and we vote on the decisions they've made, but as we've always said, the committee is the master of its own proceedings, so it can do whatever it wishes to do in that regard. You don't need to have formal motions or subamendments put forward.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Okay.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I just wanted to add to that.

With the subcommittee, these are the things that we do need to look at—the witness lists—so perhaps a subcommittee should be scheduled so that the preliminary work on Bill C-19 could get started outside of the regular committee. That's another suggestion as well.

The Chair: Yes, if you wish to have a subcommittee meeting, just let me know. Maybe at the end of today we can decide on that.

Mr. Turnbull had—

The Clerk: Madam Chair—

The Chair:—asked for a brief suspension.

Would you still like to have that brief suspension?

Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, if I may, I'll just cut in here on a couple of points.

On the suggestion for a subcommittee, unfortunately, again, if the subcommittee does want to meet, it will have to use one of the usual allotted PROC committee slots. Again, it's not like.... I can definitely check to see if there's a way to get extra time outside of our usual meeting slots, but generally speaking, subcommittees have been meeting in the meeting slot that's reserved for the full committee. That may impact your decision, because it could potentially inadvertently remove some of the time that the committee has to look at the report—

The Chair: That's a good point.

The Clerk: I can definitely check to see if a time outside of the committee can be obtained, but I might get told no.

The second point I just want to—

The Chair: No, thanks for that reminder. Also, any time the subcommittee decides that it has to come to the main committee in order for something to be adopted, sometimes if it is something small, it could be a redundant process. We could decide that at the end of committee.

I'm sorry, Mr. Clerk. I think I cut you off.

The Clerk: I'm sorry about that. I'll be quick.

The last point I wanted to make is that if the committee wanted to consider the draft report according to the new suggested timelines as suggested by Mr. Therrien in his subamendment, with the deadline of reporting back on June 18, which is a Friday, it would mean that there would be an open meeting slot available on June 17, because the last date on which the committee would be considering the adoption of the report would be the 15th, which is a Tuesday. There would then be an open meeting on the 17th before the chair is in a position to present the report back to the House.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair—

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull—

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: No, no. Mr. Turnbull had his hand up. I'll go after him.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Turnbull, and then you, Mr. Nater.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Mr. Nater.

I just wanted to clarify. In terms of this discussion about dates and how we use time and organize our work, we're basically saying that on June 8, we'd work on the report. On June 10, we'd work on Bill C-19. On June 15, we would finalize the report and table it on June 18.

Am I understanding that correctly?

The Chair: There's been no decision on that timeline.

Ms. Vecchio was suggesting that after the report is done, in that period while translation and stuff is happening, we could have a meeting. We could do what you have proposed, but I feel like we're putting the cart before the horse right now. This is stuff that we're supposed to discuss after we've passed these motions and we start the study. If we do find ourselves having it completed, then of course we could move on to Bill C-19 very quickly. That is something we can discuss in terms of timelines and how we organize ourselves, at some point.

We have a link set up for an in camera meeting today, and hopefully we'll get to use it for some review of the body of the report.

Mr. Nater, you had a comment as well.

Mr. John Nater: That was effectively where I was going. We do have the meeting on the 17th. Ideally, I think we'd want the minister, but why don't we get through this process first and then perhaps in the next day or so.... If we get through this process, we'd begin sending in suggestions for that meeting. We know who the first ones would be. Obviously, the minister would be top of the list.

I was going to suggest that we do a lot of this offline, to get some of those names in sooner rather than later, after we dispose of our current business before the committee.

The Chair: Just to be clear, Mr. Turnbull, as to your question before, I don't think there's been any agreement here today. There's just been a lot of ideas, that this could be done or that could be done. I don't know if you're going to find the members agreeing to the schedule you had suggested right there.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, if I could just clarify, I wasn't intending to propose a timeline. I was actually trying to confirm that this seemed to be where the conversation was going and that my understanding was correct that maybe some consensus was building around that. Perhaps I was wrong.

I think what you're saying and what I've heard back is that no decisions have been made yet and we need to discuss that after dispensing with this. I'm obviously a little concerned about whether this delays the work on Bill C-19. That's something I'm reflecting on. I think that's really important. It does seem that it may have that effect. That's what I need to think through and perhaps talk about with my colleagues.

Thank you.

The Chair: Absolutely, it could. That's why I wanted to...although comments have been made, I would not take that as meaning we have a certain agreement on a schedule at this point. I feel like I cut you off at the end. I apologize for that. My intention was to not get ahead of ourselves and think we have some kind of agreement, when really it's just loose conversation happening regarding how things could work.

Did you still want that five-minute suspension?

Okay. We will suspend for five minutes, and then we'll come back to vote on the subamendment that Monsieur Therrien has proposed.

• (123545)

(Pause)

• (123555)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

We left off at Monsieur Therrien moving a subamendment to alter the dates we currently have for the prorogation study deadlines to June 15 and June 18 for tabling.

Seeing that there are no more comments on this, Mr. Clerk, could you help us with the vote?

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

We have a new timeline to work with.

Next we have Mr. Lauzon's motion before us.

Mr. Clerk, could you help us with the vote on that?

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

Now we are back on the main motion as amended.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I would like a recorded vote.

Could it be stated so that we all know what we're voting on? I know it's on the last one, but that would be awesome.

The Chair: Sure. I went over that with the clerk earlier today, because I knew that would probably be a request. I probably should have proactively done that.

Mr. Clerk, could you help us read the English and French translation of what we're voting on now as the main motion.

The Clerk: Yes, absolutely.

Members of the committee, this is the wording of the motion as amended. I'll start in English, and then I'll move to French.

That, in respect of the Committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020, the Committee 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 one hour, the non attendance of the Prime Minister be added to an annex to the main report on the study of the government's reasons for proroguing Parliament in August 2020—

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, I'm so sorry to interrupt, but Mr. Blaikie has just informed me that he dropped off. Perhaps we could pause for a moment. I think he would probably benefit from hearing the final motion as well.

The Clerk: Do you want to suspend briefly?

The Chair: He's joining in with his phone, he said.

Let's suspend until we see him pop on, and then we'll unsuspend, so don't go anywhere.

• (123600) _____ (Pause) _____

• (123600)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Mr. Clerk, could you read the new amended motion we are voting on from the beginning?

The Clerk: Yes, I will.

The English version of the motion as amended now reads:

That, in respect of the Committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August 2020, the Committee 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 one hour, the non attendance of the Prime Minister be added to an annex to the main report on the study of the government's reasons for proroguing Parliament in August 2020, and that all questions necessary for the finalization and tabling of the report be disposed of before the end of the day on June 15, 2021 and that the final report be tabled no later than June 18, 2021.

The Chair: Now that everyone has heard the final amended motion, we will have a recorded vote on that.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

During our suspension, we had a request by Mr. Therrien to dispose of the motions that he had previously put before the committee. There were three motions.

Mr. Therrien, can you clarify which of those three you are withdrawing?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Since I don't have the third motion in front of me, I will speak to you about the motions I'm going to keep.

We're presenting routine motions. We are doing what is already entered in the proceedings. We just want to sort everything out. I believe you have already received the first motion, which reads as follows:

That the clerk inform each witness who is to appear before the Committee that the House Administration support team must conduct technical tests to check the connectivity and the equipment used to ensure the best possible sound quality; and that the Chair advises the Committee, at the start of each meeting, of any witness who did not perform the required technical tests.

I believe that the clerk does this systematically. In fact I have mentioned to my colleagues that I'm on the best committee because of this. We are presenting this motion on all the committees. I'm really only introducing it here for consistency.

Should I develop this further or is it acceptable as is?

[English]

The Chair: No, that's good.

Maybe we can go to a recorded vote on this motion, or maybe there's consensus. I know there's been consensus on these in other committees.

Ms. Vecchio, go ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I may be wrong on this one, but on the linguistics revision, are we talking about that? I'm looking at the summary of this.

The Chair: No.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay.

Is that going to be a part to your motion, Alain?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: No, not for this one.

[English]

The Chair: We haven't gotten to that one. This is the one just for the witnesses.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Fantastic.

Thank you.

The Chair: Do we have consensus to pass this motion? I see consensus.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you. That's very good of you.

The second motion is as follows:

That all documents submitted for Committee business that do not come from a federal department or that have not been translated by the Translation Bureau be sent for prior linguistic review by the Translation Bureau before being distributed to members.

Would Ms. Vecchio like to comment?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, this is what you were referring to.

Ms. Vecchio, go ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I would like to look at a potential amendment so that we can add members' offices as part of that group of being excluded from needing to be reviewed by the translation bureau, if that's possible. I know Alain recognizes that I—

The Chair: You would wish to add, “that do not come from a federal department or member's office”?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes, “a member's office”, that they are excluded from needing to be reviewed by the translation bureau.

The Chair: Has this addition been proposed in other committees as well?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes.

The Chair: Monsieur Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: It's a simple problem. Languages are often subtle. When a message is translated, it's not always clear and this could lead to confusion. I think I may be the only person here who does not systematically read the English version; I always read the French version. It can as a result be very tricky to come up with arguments and comments that sound intelligent—I hope that my colleagues think I look intelligent at least some of the time.

To avoid potential confusion, the translation bureau should ideally translate them to ensure that the versions match. Of course MPs can exchange missives, but documents presented as part of our work need to be revised by the translation bureau. I think that's the best way to do it. Personally, I'd like to keep this motion.

It's not that I don't approve of your efforts, because I know that you do a lot and I'm grateful for it. I recently exchanged information with you and you've always been very courteous, which I greatly appreciate. However, in order to make sure that everything is done properly, that's what I would request while the committee is sitting. I believe there are only three weeks or a month left.

[English]

The Chair: Perhaps we'll have to have a vote. I don't know if we have full agreement on the amendment that Ms. Vecchio has proposed to Monsieur Therrien's motion.

Is that correct, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I don't think there's consent to it. If the amendment is to proceed, it should go to a recorded vote.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just wanted to see if Mr. Therrien was amenable to the Vecchio amendment, which I understood was adopted at other committees. I wasn't sure what his response was on that. It seemed to be friendly, but I wasn't sure. Perhaps we could just clarify that before we go to a vote, if possible. Other committees adopted that, I think. What Ms. Vecchio suggested didn't seem to be unreasonable to me, but I'll leave it to him.

Thanks.

The Chair: I believe Mr. Therrien wishes that the members' offices also compile and have their stuff done through the translation bureau.

Mr. Therrien, maybe you can explain it better.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I agree that there are amazing resources in our MPs' offices, but translation is a profession.

We need to make sure that the words convey exactly the same message in French and English. We work to a high standard and that requires accuracy. Our arguments require a high level of precision.

I can understand why people might say that staff at members' offices can do it, but if we want the best possible translation, then it's too bad because there's no alternative to having professionals do it.

For example, I frequently ask our clerk, Mr. Vaive, for additional details. If the translation were done by professionals, I might not have to do so as often.

I'd like to believe that we have two official languages and that this is one of the reasons we boast about Canada's merits, but there are consequences. One such consequence is that we have to make sure that messages are accurate and exactly the same in French and English. For the good of our committee, I am very humbly requesting this. Whether or not other committees do so is irrelevant. But if you're claiming that your country is bilingual, then I think it goes without saying.

[English]

The Chair: To be clear, you don't give consent to this amendment to include members' offices. That's how I see your comments.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I just need another point of clarification, because I wasn't sure whether.... This was a good conversational exchange. I totally agree.

I just want to be clear. Did Ms. Vecchio move an amendment? That's what I wasn't clear on. If she did, then I guess we have to dispense with that first.

I wasn't sure whether we were going to vote on the main motion or whether there was an amendment put forward.

The Chair: I saw it as an amendment being put forward to include the words “or members' offices”, so we would just vote on Ms. Vecchio's amendment at this time, since it hasn't been incorporated yet into the main motion. Mr. Therrien has not seen it as a friendly amendment.

We will vote on the inclusion of those words. Then we will move to a vote on the main motion.

There are more hands up. We'll go to Ms. Petitpas Taylor and then Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, I just want to know what we're voting on right now.

Could you read Ms. Vecchio's amendment? That would be great. I think we are a bit confused or perhaps I'm confused.

The Chair: The clerk can read out to you the motion with the amendment in both official languages. We would be voting on just the amendment.

Mr. Clerk, could you help us with that?

The Clerk: Sure, Madam Chair.

Ms. Vecchio's amendment is to add the words "members' offices" after the words "federal department". That would end up reading as follows for the full motion:

That all documents submitted for committee business that do not come from a federal department, offices of Members of Parliament, or that have not been translated by the Translation Bureau be sent for prior linguistic review by the Translation Bureau before being distributed to members.

The Chair: A lot of our stuff is translated through the translation bureau. In this motion, there has been an exception made for stuff that comes to committee from federal departments.

Ms. Vecchio wants that same exception to be made for stuff that comes from members' offices. I am assuming, from some of what Ms. Vecchio has said, it's because of the added burden that may impose on members' offices. Obviously, the stuff that comes from the

translation bureau would not have to go through the linguistic review, but everything else would.

Does that make it clear? Okay.

Let's move to a vote on Ms. Vecchio's amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 9; nays 2)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

We have disposed of those motions by Mr. Therrien that have been put on notice for a long time. I appreciate the co-operation in doing so.

At this point, we do have a fair amount of time still. Let's move in camera so that we can take a look at the draft report.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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