



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 005

Wednesday, August 12, 2020

Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg



Standing Committee on Official Languages

Wednesday, August 12, 2020

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

First of all, I want to welcome you to the fifth meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages. I see a few new faces, new members who are replacing others. I want to give them, too, the warmest of welcomes.

The committee is meeting today because a meeting was requested by four members of the committee pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) to discuss their request to undertake a study of the government's decision to select WE Charity, an anglophone organization, to implement the Canada student service grant.

[*English*]

Today's meeting is taking place in person, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

[*Translation*]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow. First, Occupational Health and Safety have requested that we limit our movement in the room and wear a mask unless seated. Floor markings indicate the path of travel, which goes counter-clockwise, starting at the right. Individuals should respect physical distancing and remain two metres from one another, particularly when unmasked. Seats and microphones have been placed in manners which respect physical distancing, therefore we ask that they remain in the same location.

[*English*]

To respect physical distancing, you will note that limited personnel have been permitted to attend today. Staff have received a phone number by which they can listen to the proceedings in real time.

[*Translation*]

Please note that there is usually a break between the appearances of the various panels, but that won't be necessary today, since there are no witnesses. Lastly, you will note that no paper documents have been distributed. All documents have been distributed electronically to members. Should you require a copy of a document, please advise the clerk of the committee present.

Before we begin, I'd like to return once again to the agenda, according to which the committee is meeting today because a meeting was requested by four members of the committee pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) to discuss their request to undertake a study of the government's decision to select WE Charity, an anglophone organization, to implement the Canada student service grant, the CSSG.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

• (1205)

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm always happy to see you again, today especially, since we haven't met in a few months. We've been through part of the pandemic. So I welcome my colleagues from all parties. I think it's important to greet each other in the halls and talk about what we've been going through in our ridings, where we have been very present in the last few months.

Before going any further, there's something I'd like to check with the group. An amendment to the motion was distributed yesterday. Before we begin our discussion, I'd like to ask everyone to go directly to the notice of amendment, which encompasses the main motion.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, under normal circumstances, a motion would have been distributed. Normally, we would discuss the motion, unless there are amendments to it.

Mr. Joël Godin: The amendment that was sent yesterday refers to the main motion, which was stated in the request of the four signatories.

Would it be possible to seek unanimous consent of the committee to proceed directly to discussing the amendment to the motion?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mrs. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Chair, according to Standing Order 104(1), when a meeting is requested by four members of the committee, we have to start with that request, but that isn't what we did. So, we have to deal with the meeting request before we can discuss the motion before us.

Thank you.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: In this case, Mr. Chair, I will yield the floor to my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent so that he can talk to you about the main motion.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, the floor is yours.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to see you, someone I've sat with at other times and in another place, the Quebec National Assembly.

Welcome to all my colleagues.

The motion before us today refers to an urgent event, which is why we have called the committee members together. We believe that there is an urgent need to act, to understand and to hear from the key players in this situation involving WE Org.

The motion reads as follows.

That the Committee undertake a study of the government's decision to select a unilingual anglophone organization, with no presence in Quebec, to administer the Canada Student Service Grant;

That the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Melanie Joly, be invited to appear for at least two hours and before August 21st, 2020;

That other witnesses include, but are not limited to:

The Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, the Honourable Bardish Chagger;

b) NATIONAL Public Relations;

c) WE Charity;

d) The Commissioner of Official Languages, Mr. Raymond Théberge.

The reason we asked for these people to appear is the following. All Canadians are aware that when the pandemic occurred, emergency measures had to be taken and choices were made, sometimes quickly. We understand that. However, there were some ground rules that still had to be followed. We all know that for over 50 years, Canada has been a country with two official languages. Each of its policies must therefore reflect that reality. There's a reason that a minister's primary responsibility is to protect these two official languages.

We have learned that the government decreed that a unilingual English organization with no presence in Quebec would be responsible for a contract worth more than \$912 million. We aren't talking about a \$16 orange juice, but rather a fairly large amount. So we want to understand what happened and why it happened that way.

There is an urgency to act because the government is setting the stage as we speak and will soon be bringing forward other programs to help Canadians. We aren't against those programs, and we aren't against helping Canadians. Of course we're in favour of that, but it has to be done in a way that respects who we are as Canadians and as a country. We need to understand why the government rushed into this situation and how it happened, what steps were taken to get there and what steps weren't taken, so that this doesn't happen again. We're here to help the government not make the mistakes that were made in this case.

That's why we believe there is an urgency, and we invite the government and the key players in this debate to come and tell us what happened. We want to give the government a chance to explain.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

If you want to speak, let me know.

Go ahead, Ms. Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I completely agree that the organization should be present across Canada and do its work in both official languages. That's why I am a little confused as to why we're here today. WE Charity does indeed have a presence in Quebec. Not only does it have an office in Quebec, but it works with our students.

I was a teacher before entering politics. In my school in Quebec City, students were supposed to go to Ecuador to be part of a project that WE Org had organized. So it's not true that this organization has no presence in Quebec. The truth remains that it is present. Furthermore, WE Day Montreal is an event that took place in February. WE Org's last major event took place in Montreal, and it was held entirely in French. The music may not have been completely in French, but everyone who spoke at that three-hour event did so in French.

I don't know where you got your information that this organization is unilingual and that it has no presence in Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): I have some comments to make, but I also have an amendment. Would it be better for me to move my amendment first?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I consider there is, indeed, an urgency, but there's no fire either.

To give us time to call witnesses, among other things, I propose that the minister be invited to testify between August 24 and August 28, or starting August 24, rather than before August 21.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, excuse me—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm talking about Mr. Godin's motion, which states, "That the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Melanie Joly, be invited to appear ...".

The Chair: We're now discussing the first motion, under Standing Order 106(4).

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

It seems to me there was a date, wasn't there?

The Chair: No, there was no date.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In that case, then, I'll make some comments.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It seems to me that WE Charity is a unilingual anglophone organization. It appeared to have an office in Quebec, but it's closed. In any case, we went to knock on the door of the office, and it was closed. We phoned the other offices, including the one in Toronto, but they answered in English only. There was no option in French. I'm not familiar with WE Charity, and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA, aren't familiar with it either.

So I think there's a need for an investigation. It's unacceptable to give a mandate like this to an organization that can't speak French without using an outside firm and that doesn't seem to have a network among francophones, whether in Quebec or elsewhere in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mrs. Romanado, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to add to my colleague's comments. In my riding, students from the Marie-Victorin school board attended the WE Charity event. More than 200 young people attended in 2018. So, it's very well known on Montreal's south shore, in my riding of Longueuil-Charles-LeMoine. WE Org has a real presence in Quebec.

I just wanted to support my colleague's argument.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

• (1215)

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the premise of the motion really bothers me, and I'll explain why. I'd like my colleagues to understand what I mean, without feeling offended.

First of all, I'm not from the province of Quebec. We, francophone members of Parliament from all walks of life who aren't from Quebec, are in a minority here. Look around the table.

Being from New Brunswick, I can tell you that a very superficial search on the Internet about WE Org shows that the organization is present in Quebec and that it has held many activities that many young people have participated in over the past few years. I say that with some reservation, because I'm not from Quebec.

Mr. Chair, if I say that the premise of the motion bothers me, it's that we're telling the Canadian people, since we are in committee and we represent the Government of Canada regardless of our political affiliation, that WE Charity is unilingual, which we don't really know. I'd say that this organization is bilingual. It has a bilingual presence, and its website is bilingual. When I consult it, it appears in French, without me even having to change the language.

So the premise really bothers me, because by passing this motion as written, we'd be telling the Canadian people that we've already determined that WE Org is a unilingual English organization that has no presence in Quebec. That's what we're telling the Canadian people in front of everybody, and that really bothers me.

However, before even studying the content and purpose of the motion, we need to know whether or not WE Org is a unilingual organization, even though we will never know for sure since it no longer has a contract. We know the history. So how does launching such an inquiry advance official languages? First, we have to determine whether or not WE Org is unilingual and whether or not it has a presence in Quebec. That's the starting point of the motion. Until that's established, the rest is futile.

The premise of the motion really bothers me. I can already tell you that, as the first sentence is worded, I'm going to oppose it. We'll come back to that.

I repeat, through this motion, we are telling the Canadian people that we have determined, without any serious investigation, that WE Charity has no presence in Quebec and that it is unilingual.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Go ahead, Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, I don't know if my colleagues are aware of the events of the last 10 days. We learned that a public relations firm, NATIONAL, had been specifically mandated by WE Charity, without a call for tenders, to basically deal with francophone cases across the country and in the province of Quebec. So, we conclude that the organization is not in a position to assume this responsibility.

We're not the ones saying it. Indeed, WE Charity felt the need to award a contract, without a call for tenders, to a private firm to look after Quebec and the francophone community. If these people were so good and so bilingual, why did they ask NATIONAL to take care of Quebec and the francophone community? They could very well have asked NATIONAL to help them do this work across the country.

Earlier, the hon. member mentioned an event that took place in Montreal. I imagine she was referring to the one that took place at the Théâtre St-Denis on February 3 and which brought together 2,000 people. I just saw the list of speakers. One of them was the Prime Minister's mother. I say this in passing.

Was she paid for this work and if so, how much? Is that part of the \$350,000 given to the family?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mrs. Lalonde, you have the floor.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Excuse me, dear colleague, but we're here to discuss a motion by your colleague Mr. Godin. Why are we talking about the speakers? I think it would be more appropriate to stick to the agenda.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I was just clarifying what the hon. member said earlier. She's the one who mentioned the events that took place and the fact that all the speakers spoke French. I am pleased to recall the presence of some of the people who spoke, including the Prime Minister's mother.

If WE Charity is fundamentally Canadian, has roots in Quebec and looks after francophones, why did it ask NATIONAL to look after francophones? It's precisely to answer this question that our motion asks that the people from WE Charity appear before the committee and explain why they asked NATIONAL to provide services. This would be a good thing, since we wanted to ask the people from NATIONAL why they accepted this task and what they did.

I could quote Joël-Denis Bellavance's article published last week in the *La Presse*, but as a parliamentarian, I prefer that they come here and answer specifically the questions of my friend Mr. Arsenault, who I respect and appreciate. He's absolutely right when he reminds us that the francophone community doesn't just mean Quebec. I tip my hat to him and thank him for that clarification.

We must determine why WE Charity awarded a contract, without calling for tenders, to a private public relations firm to look after Quebec and the Francophonie. If these people were so Canadian, so bilingual and so rooted in Quebec, they might not have had to do it that way.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lambropoulos, you have the floor.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I'm going to clarify one point.

[*English*]

WE has also contracted PR firms for English Canada, so it's not something new to them. They have done it for French Canada, and they have done it for English Canada as well.

[*Translation*]

In terms of Mr. Beaulieu's point, I think during the pandemic, the majority of organizations and businesses closed their doors. Even my constituency office is still closed. So I understand the situation. Having said that, we have to look at how these people are doing their business online right now. WE Charity's website is fully bilingual. I think that's very telling.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Green, the floor is yours.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you all today. I've been through a lot of these meetings. I'd like to begin by hoping that points of order can remain points of order—real, true points of order—not just interruptions, because that's been the case in the past.

Comments were made earlier about a superficial look at the francophone nature of this organization. I would agree there has been a superficial look, although not by the motion, but by the government in its lack of due diligence. Of course, it's just my first day, but anybody could pick up the mandate of this committee that says the Standing Committee on Official Languages shall include among other matters the review of and report on official language policies and programs.

It would seem like a very basic, generally accepted fact that a national program of this scope and of this nature would fall under a program. I think the revelations alluded to earlier by my friends down the way on some of the facts that have come out.... My interest in this particular motion is on the due diligence, the very basic and simple due diligence or lack thereof, because I think that at the heart of the WE scandal is the position of the opposition, and particularly me, that this is a question of whether or not the government did its due diligence in protecting the very basic rights of francophone Canadians across the country.

It's very germane to this mandate and it has also been noted that in yesterday's ethics committee meeting, the former Ethics Commissioner Mary Dawson stated that ancillary discussions or investigations, in fact, help put on the public record for the Ethics Commissioner additional information that could be germane to their investigation. I do believe that in the format of this committee and its mandate, this particular aspect of protecting the rights of francophone Canadians is germane to the investigation, and it is certainly about defending the rights of both official languages. I'm surprised there's even this much robust discussion about it because this is the mandate of this committee.

Again, to reiterate the fact that national public relations was called in at such a time leads me to call into question the authenticity of the claim that proper due diligence was done, because I can share with you that in my past work, both as a city councillor, somebody who sat on the Hamilton Community Foundation, somebody who distributed funds through our enrichment program, that if a program came purporting to represent both official languages—if you tried to apply for the Trillium grant or something of that nature—due diligence would be put in place to ensure that that was actually the fact. It would be part of the request for qualifications in the initial application.

I have a hard time believing that was the case, and if that is not the case, then it again begs the question around the political nature or interference into the awarding of this contract, or for lack of a better term, the term that's being used is “contribution agreement”.

I'm very keen to see if that is the case and if some of the shortfalls in due diligence may also fall under section 18 of the Conflict of Interest Act, which is the anti-avoidance clause. Is the hiring of national public relations part of the avoidance of even getting to qualify for a program of this size and scope?

Thank you.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

[*Translation*]

You now have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In fact, I'm surprised to hear the questions from the other side of the table. The committee has a responsibility to be vigilant about respect for official languages in the exercise of Parliament's functions and procedures. A number of issues have already been raised. The other side of the table is arguing that WE Org is bilingual. For our part, we're wondering why it needed to turn to a national organization to ensure francophone representation to Quebecers or francophones outside Quebec. These are already questions that need to be answered. The study will enable us to obtain answers to these questions.

We must not take exception to the fact that the premise of our notice of motion is misrepresented, quite the contrary.

The fact is that WE Org was awarded a contract, supposedly by mutual agreement because it was the only organization that could provide this service in a country where there are two official languages. The members of the party opposite may not have realized that this organization wasn't bilingual, but the organization's representatives had the wisdom to recognize that they didn't have the skills to offer their services in French. So they simply gave that contract to someone else. However, if another firm had the characteristics necessary to provide those services in English and French from coast to coast to coast, and if NATIONAL could do so, there were surely several others.

So what did the Minister do to protect one of the two official languages—French—in awarding a government contract by mutual agreement?

That's one of the questions the committee has to ask, and I think it's a very legitimate one. We have to remember that our purpose is to allow the committee to make recommendations. Right now, we're in the midst of a pandemic. We've been living it for a while, and we'll continue to live it, but we don't know how long it will last or how it will go. There will be other programs; I hope the current government is creating programs to help Canadians. However, in the course of creating those programs, there may be other situations similar to this one.

Our goal is to protect both official languages. In this case, it's French, but in another case, it could be English. Understandably, there are fewer francophones in Canada than anglophones. That's why there is an official languages act.

It is very relevant that we act quickly by giving the committee the tools it needs to be able to make recommendations as quickly as possible, in order to protect the interests of anglophones and francophones.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. G n reux, it's your turn.

Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd just like to remind all members that the Minister of Official Languages, Ms. Joly, has mentioned several times that the committee is completely independent and that she even did so in the House of Commons.

Once everyone is aware of this, we can make the decision to undertake a study as a committee, as we have done several times in recent years.

That we don't like the premise of the motion is one thing. I'd like to ask Mr. Arseneault if he has a proposal to make. As I understand it, he is not bothered by the substance of the motion, but his premise is troubling. We could accept an amendment that would change the premise.

It isn't a question of judging the motion itself and how it's written, but rather of bringing all the players together to really get the answers to the questions raised by the controversy about WE Org. We'll put the question to its representatives. Let them come out and prove to us that they are bilingual and capable of providing bilingual services across Canada. Unfortunately, it takes more than a website to do that.

Mr. Arseneault, do you have a different premise to propose? We're open to the idea of an amendment to change the premise of the motion. We'd like our committee, which is independent, to go ahead and vote to undertake this study starting next week or on one of the dates mentioned by Mr. Beaulieu. We're not three days away. The date isn't an issue.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. G n reux.

[English]

Mr. Chong, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I fully agree with my colleague, Mr. Godin. I'll support this motion. It's very important that this committee study this urgent issue.

[English]

The government has maintained two things throughout this whole WE issue. The first is that the bureaucrats recommended that the government proceed in delivering this program through the WE Charity and that the government, the Liberal cabinet, were just simply passive bystanders in this recommendation and simply accepted the bureaucrats' recommendation.

Initially, when this whole issue came up, Minister Ng's office, for example, said that she had not met with the WE Charity. It later came to light that she had met with them on April 7. Minister Chagger initially said that she had had no conversations with the WE organization, and then it later came to light that she had spoken with them on April 17. In fact, I think that came to light yesterday.

The WE organization initially delivered a proposal to the government on April 9, well ahead of the cabinet meeting that took place later in May, a month and a half later. Then we found out that Minister Morneau's office contacted WE to rework the application, clearly working with them quite closely in order to produce this memorandum to cabinet and the proposal from the WE organization.

This has all come to light and runs contrary to the government's assertion that it simply accepted the bureaucrats' recommendation.

Then the second thing the government has maintained throughout all of this is that the WE Charity was the only organization in this country, including the largest employer in this country, the Government of Canada, the public service, capable of delivering this program. Then we found out in recent days that they couldn't deliver it to a quarter of this country's population, to the 25% of Canadians whose mother-tongue official language is French.

I think this committee should be seized with this issue. I've sat on this committee for a number of years, and I can tell you, Mr. Chair, that we have been seized with issues far, far smaller than this. This is a billion-dollar program that was being proposed that would affect Canadians from coast to coast to coast, 25% of whom speak French as a first language.

This program is of the scale of the road map for official languages that we've had ever since Monsieur Dion proposed the first federal action plan for official languages, called the "Dion plan", some 15 years ago.

That action plan was for a billion dollars, and we held, I think, easily dozens and dozens, if not 100, meetings studying those plans and coming up with reports on how to improve the next five-year action plan on official languages. Surely we can spend a few meetings looking at the impact on official-language minority communities and official-languages communities of a billion-dollar program that would have been delivered by an organization that couldn't deliver it to a quarter of this country's population.

For those reasons, I hope that the committee supports the motion and that we get some expeditious hearings on this to ensure that we protect French-language minority rights in this country.

It's at times of crisis that our institutions are tested, and they either endure that test and come out stronger because of it, or they crumble. We've already had incidents during this pandemic where official-language communities are not being respected. We had an issue when Health Canada waived francophone, French language, requirements for health devices. It may be excusable because of the pandemic, but we have a responsibility as a committee to protect French language minority rights and majority rights in this country, as we do for other official-language minority communities in Canada.

Therefore, I hope this committee supports this motion.

Thank you.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

[Translation]

I now give the floor to Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am very touched by the sensitivity expressed by the Conservative Party with respect to bilingualism. I think it's unfortunate that this isn't reflected in the French debates of the Conservative Party leadership candidates.

Going back to what my colleagues Mr. Godin and Mr. Deltell were saying, I never said that WE Charity was fully and completely bilingual; I never said those words.

If, following the testimony of WE Charity representatives, we learned that they can indeed offer services in English and French everywhere in Canada, regardless of whether people are perfectly, moderately or weakly bilingual—we don't know, and that's the premise of the motion—all the rest of the motion would fall apart.

Let's be logical. I don't accept the premise, because I don't know the answer. I don't know whether WE Charity is perfectly capable or totally incapable of providing services in both official languages in Canada. That's what we have to determine first. If we were to find out that they are, in fact, able to do that, the whole rest of the motion would fall apart. Let's be logical. That's the premise of the motion.

I'll take the opportunity offered to me by my colleague Mr. Généreux and ask the following question: Should the Standing Committee on Official Languages not be concerned, or at least study the way in which bilingual services, regardless of the type, are provided to third parties in Canada? How are bilingual services and their performance ensured? How is performance measured? I have no idea.

My colleague Mr. Généreux and I have been on this committee for five years. We've studied many issues and produced many reports, but never a report like this. Why not take this opportunity, in this context, and ask the right questions, regardless of to whom? That's what the Standing Committee on Official Languages must do.

I would say to my colleague Mr. Chong that I'm part of a linguistic minority in Canada and that I am committed to defending the 25% of francophones in Canada, as he said. That doesn't include francophiles and allophones who are also learning French. That's not the issue. The issue is that we're taking for granted a truth that we don't know, here, in order to question ministers. That's the truth. That's the reality of the opposition party.

Let's be logical. If we really want to do this, what's the point of determining whether WE Charity can offer bilingual services or not, when there's no longer a contract out there? We're wasting our time.

Let's take Mr. Généreux's opportunity and make this motion a winning motion for the Canadian government and for the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Let's study how to ensure respect for official languages when the Government of Canada delegates its powers to a third party organization to provide services on its behalf. That's what I'm proposing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Ms. Lambropoulos, you have the floor.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to make a comment.

[English]

I'd like to speak to the comments made earlier by my colleague across the way.

All of the issues that were mentioned by Mr. Chong are already being studied by three different committees. That's not why we're here today. Today we're here because we are trying to make sure that organizations serve Canadians in both English and French all across the country.

The reason I have a problem with the motion, just as my colleague said, is that I don't think it's true. We're basing it on an assumption that it is not present in Quebec and is only offered to English speakers.

I worked in a school in Quebec where my students benefited from WE, so I cannot sit here and say that this isn't a lie or that it is not a false assumption. I have first-hand experience with this organization in my school in Quebec. I don't understand how much clearer I can get on that.

There are 400 schools in Quebec that are with WE and have somehow taken advantage of programs offered by WE. There are 948 teachers in Quebec who have worked with WE. They have worked with their students in leadership to bring kids to countries to build wells and help with international development, so I have a problem with this.

Every single person watching this committee today, and every single person on this committee, can go on WE's French Facebook page, UNIS, to see a three-hour conference taking place in French, with four French speakers, four Montreal French youth. These are the people benefiting from this organization. About 115,000 young people in Quebec benefit from WE, whether they are French or English, and not one English person at that conference would have understood what was being said, because it was all in French.

That's fine. They're across the country and they offer services in both languages. We cannot sit here and put a motion forward, or vote on a motion, that is a literal lie, and in my view it is, because I know the facts.

• (1240)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

If anyone wants to speak, just let me know.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I've been wanting to speak for a long time.

The Chair: For now, here's the list of the next speakers: Ms. Lattanzio, Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Lalonde and Mr. Godin.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor.

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

Good afternoon, dear colleagues. I'm glad to see you back here today.

I would like to respond to a few comments that were made by my two colleagues, including those of Mr. Beaulieu, first of all, concerning the WE Charity headquarters in Montreal, Quebec. It's

on Saint-Hubert Street. Minimal research shows that the head office is still there. This company hasn't been closed; it continues to operate.

If you unfortunately didn't get an answer the day you chose to knock on its door, Mr. Beaulieu, it may be, as my colleague said, because people aren't answering the door right now, as many of us in our constituency offices. To my knowledge, the head office of this company is still on Saint-Hubert Street, as mentioned on the WE Charity website.

Before going any further, I'd like to respond to the comments of my colleague Mr. Green.

[English]

Saying that it has no presence in Quebec is not only false, but we should also raise the argument that if we follow this logic, an organization that is only headquartered in Quebec could never run any national program no matter what and whom they partnered with. That, being a Quebecker, would sadden me, to say the least.

With regard to the question of due diligence raised by my colleague Matthew Green in relation to the language, it would not be the ministers who would want to answer these questions with regard to due diligence, but actually the staff of the ESDC, because we have a contract. I dug up the contract and I have it here before me. I don't know if my colleague took the pain of looking up the contract, but the contract is in both French and English, and I have both copies here. I'm going to draw your attention to section 37 of that contract.

I'm going to cite section 37.1 for the benefit of our members here today.

Where the Project is to be delivered to members of either language community, the Recipient shall:

- (a) make Project-related documentation and announcements (for the public and prospective Project Participants, if any) in both official languages where applicable;
- (b) actively offer and provide in both official languages any Project-related services to be provided or made available to members of the public, where applicable; and,
- (c) organize activities and provide its services, where appropriate, in such a manner as to address the needs of both official language communities.

It is in black and white. It is crystal clear. On the contract that was signed, both the participants knew full well that the services that needed to be delivered needed to be in French and in English. Further, I draw your attention to some of the activities that needed to be done in both official languages. I'm going to give you, as they say in French,

[Translation]

—an overview.

[English]

We can find some of those activities or some of those projects that needed to be done in both languages throughout the contract, and more specifically in clauses that pertain to such activities. I'm going to draw your attention to some of those

I don't mean to be wasting anybody's time, Mr. Chair, but I just want to be thorough. They appear in schedule A.

When we look at the activities in schedule A, we see that:

The specific objectives of the project are to:

Place up to 40,000 students in WE volunteer service opportunities across Canada, including those from vulnerable [and] underrepresented groups and official language minority communities...through the 'I Want to Help' platform;

It continues:

Ongoing from May to September 2020:

Validate and post volunteer service opportunities in bilingual format from Not-for-Profits partners and other Not-for-Profits through web-based input module and electronic feed to ESDC's 'I Want to Help' platform;

and further on:

Provide bilingual supports to Not-for-Profit partners to ensure they have the capacity to train and safely onboard volunteers to WE service opportunities;

Provide bilingual supports, youth skills training, and COVID-19 training to volunteers in WE service opportunities;

● (1245)

We can go on and on. For instance, under "June 2020", we see "Launch a bilingual online WE Platform to register and intake volunteers for WE opportunities".

Therefore, to say here or to have a premise in this committee that when this contract was contracted, no due diligence was done with regard to ensuring that the programs and projects would be done in both official languages is, I think, very far from the truth. I think there were documents that were legally binding to such an effect. If we're going to have that conversation here in this committee, I think we need to move beyond the scope of just this organization and make it broader, as my colleague MP Arseneault has mentioned. I welcome the extension of the olive branch from our colleague MP Généreux, because I think the mandate of this committee is to ensure that, be it this organization or any organization that contracts with the government, both French-language and English-language minorities receive the services they so deserve.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On the one hand, I don't want to talk too much about content, but I want to correct some information. Yesterday, someone went to 3736 Saint-Hubert Street. We found the location, even though it isn't mentioned on every platform. When he knocked on the door, there was no answer. A man was waiting in front of the door and said he was the owner. According to the information we have so far, it isn't that the company has closed its doors and the employees are teleworking, but rather that the company has broken the lease. We'll be able to do further checks.

On the other hand, if WE Charity had also hired English-language communications firms, I don't think it would be to help it communicate in English or because people in the organization have difficulty speaking English. In the case of NATIONAL, it seems that it was explicitly to help the organization contact francophones, among other things.

Many Liberals seem to be very close to WE Charity and very familiar with its activities. I've checked around and nobody knew about it; nobody had heard of the organization. It seems to be a fairly small network.

This is an important example. We've seen a number of indications, including the issue of product labelling. Initially, it wasn't considered important for francophones to be able to read the safety instructions on health products. There were all kinds of easy measures, which were finally taken. The government revised its position and said that it would have been very simple to require companies that order these products to label them in French once the products arrived. There are all kinds of ways to do this.

There are a whole host of examples that show that it is a bit of a facade of bilingualism. Services in French are often inadequate. We saw this week that Fisheries and Oceans Canada didn't send out all its calls for tenders in French. We could list a number of examples where even government agencies flout the Official Languages Act.

This is a good example to get to the bottom of the issue and see what action has been taken. Then we'll be able to generalize and see what measures are taken to ensure that programs are always accessible in French. I won't do that, but if there were an amendment to be made, it would simply be to add the word "presumably" before the phrase "unilingual anglophone". In any case, it's important to get to the bottom of this issue.

It's one thing for WE Charity to be able to organize events where there are talks in French, but it's another thing to have people within the organization who can respond in French and who can really provide services in French, not just at a talk at a given time.

● (1250)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mrs. Lalonde, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I very much appreciate the conversation we are having today.

I really liked what my colleague said about the contract that was signed in terms of the federal government's commitment and its obligation regarding official languages. If you are at all familiar with my background at the provincial level, you know how important I see bilingualism, here in Canada and particularly outside Quebec.

Someone talked about seizing the opportunity. I would like to try to start a conversation with a view to improving the original Conservative Party motion.

Mr. Chair, if I may propose an amendment to the initial motion by my colleague Mr. Godin, for whom I have a great deal of respect, perhaps that will provide Mr. Green with an answer. We have not really had a chance to talk to each other because of COVID-19. Furthermore, I am new to the federal government.

I will read the amendment in both official languages.

Madam Clerk, I would like to submit copies.

Mr. Chair, may I read the amendment I am proposing?

The Chair: Yes, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: We would improve the initial motion by adding a context for Mr. Godin's motion. The motion would begin as follows:

That the Committee wishes to ensure that both the due diligence and contractual obligations are sufficient to ensure that any outsourcing of Federal Government programs or services requires delivery of programs in both official languages to the same level as if the Government had delivered the programs and services itself.

That the Committee study the language requirements associated with the outsourcing of federal government responsibilities and hold at least 4 meetings on the subject and hear from relevant witnesses and report back to the House on the issue.

I would like to continue by reading my colleague's motion.

Would you like me to read it in English, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Wait a moment, please, Mrs. Lalonde.

I would just like to make sure that this amendment is in order.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Where is the amendment added?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: It would be added at the beginning, and the rest of the motion would follow.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I would like a clarification, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Did Mrs. Lalonde say that we would start with this addition and that it would be followed by our motion, word for word?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Yes.

• (1255)

The Chair: Mrs. Lalonde, as presented, this amendment is actually in order, but I see a number of hands raised.

I would ask you not only to read the amendment, but also to specify where it would be placed in the motion, so that we can clearly understand.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I apologize to my colleagues for this misunderstanding.

The initial motion would begin with the amendment I am proposing. Then it would read:

[*English*]

“That the Committee undertake a study on the government's decision”.

[*Translation*]

Everything else would follow.

That is what I propose as context. We have talked about diligence and the idea of seizing the opportunity to study not only an organization, but also how the government is holding its own with respect to official languages.

We have talked about the importance of bilingualism in Canada and the role of the government in awarding contracts. We have talked about section 37, but the Standing Committee on Official Languages should also look at the issue a little more generally at the same time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

Next on the list are Mr. Godin, Mr. Green, and Ms. Lambropoulos.

The discussion is now on the amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I had asked to speak before Mrs. Lalonde made her presentation.

The Chair: No, no, no.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, yes.

The Chair: No. When hands are raised, I check, I look, I write it down, and I verify it as well.

Mr. Joël Godin: You mentioned my name when you made a series of—

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Four names were mentioned. My turn came after Mrs. Lalonde's. You said so, Mr. Chair. I don't want to contradict you, but this comes as a surprise.

I cannot comment on what Mrs. Lalonde said before I analyze it.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: You could comment on it, and then after—

Mr. Joël Godin: No. Actually, I don't want to comment on that right now.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: But that's the way things are done at the committee.

The Chair: I just want to assure you that it is the right order, based on the way I saw the hands coming up. That's why earlier—

Mr. Joël Godin: I agree with you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Joël Godin: I agree with the order.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Joël Godin: But I cannot comment on the amendment. I had asked for the right to speak before the amendment was moved.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: You wanted to speak on something other than the amendment.

The Chair: Is that so?

Mr. Joël Godin: That's right.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: We will draw up a secondary list, that's all.

Mr. Joël Godin: That's not what the Chair is saying, Mrs. Lalonde.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, according to the Standing Orders, once the amendment is introduced, we have no choice but to discuss it.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay. I will discuss the amendment, Mr. Chair. I will follow the procedures.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Joël Godin: However, Mr. Chair, you will understand that I had asked for the right to speak before this subject was added.

In fact, I simply wanted to go back to the objective of my colleague Mr. Arseneault. We both agree that the process of awarding contracts to third parties must be evaluated. There is already an obligation in the act. So he and I have the same objective in terms of how it is applied, even if we don't go about it the same way because we don't come from the same place. I agree with my colleague.

Please understand: I do not want to go after WE Charity. Instead, we must use this situation to urgently consider how to adapt to it and how to equip ourselves to make the most of protecting the rights of both official languages.

I find it interesting to do so today after yesterday's release by the Office québécois de la langue française, which is worried about the survival of French. Even the Premier of Quebec was talking about it in a media scrum yesterday, saying that he is worried about the results that have been made public.

So I was going to move an amendment, but Mrs. Lalonde moved hers first. I have not analyzed it, but I am prepared to introduce my own.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, unfortunately, we have to continue the discussion and complete our study of the amendment proposed by Mrs. Lalonde before moving on to another amendment.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, thank you for giving me the right to speak; I will come back later.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Green, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. There's never a dull moment. If I had known it was this much fun, I would have been here way earlier in the term.

I want the opportunity to respond to the amendment, because there's some really interesting language being used, both by the mover of the amendment and by previous speakers from the government side, and that's this language around a "contract".

I would argue that had this been in an official contract, due diligence would have been in place and we wouldn't be in this situation. However, that's not what happened.

Let's be very clear about what happened. What happened was, as has been touted, there was a contribution agreement made that circumvented a lot of the basic practices and principles that have led to not just the language issue but a myriad of ethical issues that call into question the Conflict of Interest Act, call into question "gifts", call into question all sorts of improprieties around this particular deal.

It was suggested that ministers in fact don't have to look at or do due diligence around this. That is, again, not the case. It is true that in testimony, Minister Chagger was very clear about what due diligence was done on the file and what wasn't.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: Let's make sure it's a point of order, though, because I've sat through four meetings of this. Please name the point of order.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Madame Lattanzio.

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

The point of order is quite simple. We're making all kinds of assumptions here—

Mr. Matthew Green: That's not a point of order. That's debate.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: That's not a debate. You're bringing in what's happening in other committees with regard to testimony—

Mr. Matthew Green: That's debate.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: —that is being rendered at different levels, conflict of interest—

Mr. Matthew Green: You're a lawyer. You should know better.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio, I'm sorry, but that's not a point of order.

I'll go back to Mr. Green.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: We are drawing conclusions when it's not—

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, I'm going to go on the record and say I've sat through four days of this. I've been on the Hill for six months. I'm a former city councillor and I know the basic rules of order, and to use it as an attempt to continue to disrupt—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I'm going to—

Mr. Matthew Green: —my democratic right to be at this table is also—

You can't just continue to disrupt me.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I have a point of privilege.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Lattanzio.

[*English*]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: We all know each other, Mr. Green, and this is not about "I was" and "I know" and I whatever. I'm a former city councillor myself, a school board trustee—

Mr. Matthew Green: That's also not point of privilege.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Yes, it is, because you are saying—

Mr. Matthew Green: That's not a point of privilege.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: You are saying that I don't know what the rules are. That is my point of privilege.

Mr. Matthew Green: I didn't name anybody.

These are tactics.

The Chair: Please,

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lattanzio had the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: I sat through filibusters, so could I please have the floor back?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

I want to go back to the point at hand, because this is what has been happening in my experience. I can speak to my experience, by the way, as a member of Parliament. I have a right to sit at this table. I have a right to sit at this table and debate in real ways and in good faith, and that's what I'd like to do here today.

Going back to this language of “contract” that has been used repeatedly by members from the government side, that's not what happened. We know that to not be what happened, because the whole thrust of their defence against this scandal is that it was a contribution agreement and therefore outside of the parameters of typical contracts and typical due diligence.

I would argue through you, Mr. Chair, to the mover of the amendment and to folks around this committee that there's been a quarter of the public service on furlough and the sole-source contracting, if we can use that language of “contract”, is in fact the privatization of public services. I would argue that we have thousands of members of the public service ready and willing to deliver this, just like they did with CERB, just like they did with the wage subsidy, just like they did with the rental subsidy, but that's another story for another day, I suppose.

To suggest somehow that the contract that was put forward, the annexations, all these other things.... I think Minister Qualtrough was quite clear in her testimony that she had nothing to do with this. Minister Chagger was quite clear in her testimony that there were gaps in the due diligence.

When we talk about due diligence—and this is germane to the difference between a contract and a contribution agreement, which is germane again to the amendment—we had the Clerk of the Privy Council admit in committee that there were specifics he didn't know about. We had the chief of staff, Katie Telford, testify in the finance committee that she didn't even know the contract was to the WE Charity Foundation. Basic levels of due diligence have not been met on this file. This is just another one of those instances.

I won't be supporting the amendment and I hope, Mr. Chair, that if we're going to proceed and if I'm going to be in this committee in these ways, maybe we can have a list of the applicable points of order and a list of the applicable points of personal privilege present-

ed to the committee just to make sure that we're all debating around the same terms.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We now have two people on the list, Ms. Lambropoulos and Mr. Godin.

Ms. Lambropoulos, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: It's been a while since this was going to be my point, but I'll say it anyway.

[*Translation*]

My colleague, Mr. Beaulieu, said that,

[*English*]

in his surroundings, not too many people have heard of WE, and allow me just to throw it out there that WE does—

Mr. Joël Godin: I have a point of order

[*Translation*]

,Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, you asked me to speak to Mrs. Lalonde's amendment. I do not understand—

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Godin, but it's a fairly broad discussion. We've heard Mr. Green name a number of people, for example. As long as it touches on the subject, I think Ms. Lambropoulos can continue her comments.

[*English*]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: WE, as an organization, services young people, services youth, and I know them because I'm a teacher—not because I'm an anglophone, but because I'm a teacher—and I have a lot of younger friends and I'm also one of the younger members of Parliament, so it's not too far from my generation, to be honest with you. That's why I have a better knowledge of this organization.

It seemed as though he was suggesting that even though anglophones know of WE in Quebec, francophones don't know of it, which I don't think is the case, because there are way too many schools that are currently involved or that have been involved with WE, so it wouldn't make sense for that to be the case.

Even so, what are we saying? I mean, we are on the official languages committee. Our mandate is to protect the official languages in Quebec and in the rest of Canada. As an anglophone Quebecker, I personally have a problem with saying that anglophone Quebeckers may know about WE but that it's not considered to be present in Quebec. I think it's wrong to say that it's not part of Quebec. To say that is to completely ignore the community of anglophone Quebec, of English-speaking Quebec.

I understand the importance of it being in French. Once again, that's why I was happy that most of the conference was in French, but I feel that saying that it's not considered to be in Quebec just because a lot of French-speaking people seem not to know about it is going a little far, and it's a bit of an insult to the English-speaking community. I don't think the current wording of... I know I'm talking about the motion, the original motion at this point, but I don't think it's representative of the reality.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

We'll now go to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I will be very brief.

I will speak to the amendment to the motion that was moved by my colleague.

Mrs. Lalonde, I think your intention is commendable. I sincerely appreciate it.

Nevertheless, in my opinion, the amendment is not in order. Therefore, I will not vote for it because it is contradictory. In the last paragraph, it says, "That the Committee...hear from relevant witnesses and report back to the House on the issue".

In her presentation, Mrs. Lalonde said that the amendment is grafted onto the initial motion, which asks the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, the Honourable Mélanie Joly, to come and testify for at least two hours.

You know my position on the next vote. I will not be able to grant the request.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Chong, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I'm not going to support the amendment either. I appreciate the member's bringing it forward, but I think it doesn't add to the original motion.

Now, I fully acknowledge that the original motion is not perfectly worded—very few motions are—but I think we should stick with the original motion and proceed on that basis.

Look, here's why I think this committee should be seized with this issue and proceed with a study over a few meetings on this issue. Parliament has essentially been suspended since March 13. When it has met, it has met for a few brief minutes before going into a special committee or committee of the whole. In those special committees, the House of Commons is not sitting; it's the special committee or the committee of the whole that's sitting, which has virtually no power. It simply has the power for members to ask questions, for members to give statements and for members to present petitions. The usual powers of Parliament—to present motions, to introduce bills, to hold the government accountable—simply aren't there.

This committee, though, has an opportunity for us to hold the government accountable on this important issue.

It's only a small slice, a \$1-billion slice of a \$231-billion stimulus package. However, the fact is that the government has been operating under extraordinary emergency powers, granted to it on March 13 of this year, and we have a job to do, as parliamentarians on this committee, to make sure that a portion of that money is being spent in the proper manner. In this case, we have a responsibility to look at exactly what happened to ensure that the other monies that are actually going out the door are being properly spent.

The money hasn't actually been fully returned. There was \$30 million transferred to the WE organization. As of the last news that I read, \$22 million has been sent back and some \$8 million is still waiting to be sent back.

The heart of the matter is this: The government has maintained from day one that the WE organization was the only organization in the entire country, including the federal public service—some 250,000 strong—that could deliver this program. Increasingly it looks like that's a falsehood. Increasingly it looks like that's not the case. They clearly couldn't deliver it to official French-language communities in Quebec and official French-language minority communities outside of the province of Quebec. That's why they had to enter into a contract and hire a lobbying group to do that.

It calls into question why this contract was let in the first place. It was signed on June 23 and backdated to May 5, even before the federal cabinet had considered it. We need to know why that was the case. It doesn't look like the government's story is holding up. It doesn't look like it had nothing to do with this: that this was all to do with the federal bureaucracy, which recommended this; that it wasn't involved in the early stages of helping to draft the proposal; and that it wasn't at all involved with creating this program and structuring it in a way so that WE Charity would get this program. It doesn't hold up that WE Charity was the only organization able to deliver this.

It calls into question why this whole thing came to be. Increasingly, to me, it looks like the Liberal government and particularly Liberal ministers were out to help their friends and supporters out there, using the cover of a pandemic and the extraordinary emergency powers they have to do this.

We cannot, as a committee, let the government get away with this. We have a responsibility, not just to the people who pay tax in this country but to the broader public, to ensure that there's good governance in this country and that we get to the bottom of this and hold the government accountable.

That's why I think we should have a few meetings on this, why we shouldn't accept this amendment and water down this motion, and get to the bottom of this. We want to ensure we understand exactly why this contract was given to the WE organization, exactly why that was done, despite the fact that they couldn't deliver it to 25% of this country, to some nine million Canadians whose first official language is French.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to correct the facts.

Ms. Lambropoulos, I did not say that anglophones are aware of WE Charity. I said that the Liberals are aware of it.

We seem to have really mixed things up. I have not.

I would add that the initial proposal already says that this “raises serious concerns about the way the government works and the compliance of the Official Languages Act by the federal government”. So this allows us to broaden the investigation and the study that we are going to do.

I too would reject the amendment. I think we have to proceed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Lalonde, you have the floor.

• (1315)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair

I would first like to clarify the following.

[*English*]

There are already several committees looking at this. Some of my colleagues and I have met in the last month for the issue about WE. Several ministers have attended meetings, and actually the Prime Minister of Canada spoke about it too.

Fundamentally, when I look at my riding, the great riding of Orleans, the best riding,

[*Translation*]

and the most beautiful in Canada, I would like to tell my colleagues that, when people call us at the office, they talk about the precarious situation that businesses are in because of this pandemic, which we are still experiencing today. Around this table, for example, we are not all close together because we maintain the two-metre distance. Moreover, we wear our masks when we talk to each other.

Outside the walls of this beautiful House, important issues are still at stake. People in my community are telling me about them.

[*English*]

When they're talking to me, do you know what they're asking? First they ask, “Are my kids going to be safe at school?” They also talk about their businesses and the wage subsidy. I was so happy to see that the government actually extended it. We've had this collaboration.

[*Translation*]

This committee is supposed to focus on the importance of the official languages. Some of my colleagues have been doing that for years. A lot of work has been done to get support from everyone.

The next national census will contain questions that are very important to us on this committee.

[*English*]

I'm going to read the amendment again, just to bring back the point that I was trying to make with it. I don't know if it's because it's an amendment by a Liberal that we feel threatened, but I will say to all of you that, actually, the amendment would examine the fear around the due diligence. This amendment would ensure that both due diligence and the contractual obligations are sufficient to ensure protection.

I have to say to members here, and to the rest of Canada, that sadly, kids across Canada

[*Translation*]

will never know about this program, because WE Charity, in the wake of the events we are familiar with, has released itself from its contractual obligations by withdrawing.

[*English*]

I'm going to read the amendment again, and I just want to make sure that my colleagues understand clearly that the amendment is for bringing in the context that I think our Conservative colleagues are trying to include, which is the importance of official languages inside any contract that the Government of Canada signs.

[*Translation*]

I'll read it in English.

[*English*]

That the Committee wishes to ensure that both the due diligence and contractual obligations are sufficient to ensure that any outsourcing of Federal Government programs or services requires delivery of programs in both official languages to the same level as if the Government had delivered the programs and services itself.

[*Translation*]

As we know, colleagues, several times over the years the Government of Canada has had to award contracts. In our committee, we must ensure that the contracts are respected.

[*English*]

The other part of the amendment says, “That the Committee study the language requirements associated with the outsourcing of federal government responsibilities and hold at least 4 meetings”—and I thought I was very candid in saying four—“on the subject and hear from relevant witnesses”. I hear the comments about the witnesses. You've listed some of them, but I always believe that witnesses should be discussed in subcommittee. The amendment ends with “and report back to the House on the issue.”

[*Translation*]

I would like my colleagues to reconsider their position. We want to improve the proposal in your motion, Mr. Godin and my Conservative colleagues. We hope to get your support again.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

There are now two people on the list, Mr. Arseneault and Ms. Romanado.

The floor is yours, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With regard to the motion, I'm taking a little detour to comment on what our colleague Mr. Chong told us. We talked about ethics. He talked about concerns about ethics, conflicts of interest, finances, public funds, and so on. I have no objection to discussing these things in a context other than the Standing Committee on Official Languages, which does not have the mandate to do so. There are committees that do have those mandates and they do it very skilfully and very well. They have done so particularly in recent weeks with regard to the WE affair. We all know that here.

The mandate of the Standing Committee on Official Languages addresses the application of and respect for language rights in Canada. The amendment proposed by my colleague is along those lines. We can start from the premise that WE Charity has caused some concerns about its capacity to be bilingual and to provide services, good, weak or average. In any case, a contract no longer exists. It would be pointless to stop at this study because there is no longer a contract. What would be the purpose of this study?

If we start from the premise that the WE episode has cast doubt in our minds about third parties who are contracted to provide services on behalf of the Government of Canada, if we start from that premise, there is doubt. How do we ensure that this is respected across the country and not just for one event or one organization? That is reflected in the proposed amendment. That is within the mandate of this committee. It does not preclude any colleague around the table from asking the ministers questions about WE or about other contracts. In fact, we are running with the ball; we are starting from a doubt that has been sown by one event and extending it to a topic that is fully within the mandate of this committee.

Mr. Chong, I would like to correct what you said earlier, with no ill intention: very few motions are perfectly worded. I have been a member of this committee for five years. Mr. Généreux may be able to correct me, but to my knowledge, all of the motions that have come through in the last five years have been tabled with amendments from all parties on both sides of the table, and always unanimously. Virtually every report that has been written in the last five years of the committee has been unanimous. So we make great motions in our committee; we make wonderful motions.

In fact, we are not in the process of doing something partisan. Our concern is that we want to know what we need to do to ensure that, under the umbrella of official languages, third-party organizations that get service contracts from the Government of Canada and that have to speak as if they were the Government of Canada, comply with the linguistic obligations of this great country.

That is the amendment on the table, as proposed by my colleague. Then, in subcommittee, we can decide whether we want to call other witnesses or whether we will stick with those already proposed. We had already decided to create a subcommittee to deal specifically with the witness list. We can do that later. We can limit

ourselves to those, but one does not preclude the other. I am wondering, on behalf of Canadians and taxpayers, what would be the point of the motion as put forward by the opposition, by the Conservatives. How would we be serving Canadians by focusing on a contract that no longer exists?

Why do we not seize the opportunity to address the doubt that has been cast on the linguistic capacity of third-party organizations by this event? Why not conduct a study that is consistent with the mandate of this committee, which has been a superb committee, Mr. Chong, for at least five years?

• (1320)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Mrs. Romanado, you have the floor.

[English]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My colleague Monsieur Arseneault stole some of my thunder there, but I want to get back to the focus, which is that we have an amendment in front of us. That's the focus of the conversation.

I'm subbing in. I have one of the nicest ridings in Canada. It has a borough in it that has bilingual status, which I'm really happy about. I make sure that my riding provides services in both official languages, because we're about service.

The point of this amendment, I think, captures a lot of what we're hearing today. We're all saying the same thing. We're all saying that it is incredibly important that Canadians be served in the language of their choice of the two official languages, and I think this encompasses that. There are concerns, whether it be a contract that has the capacity to provide services in French or a contract able to provide services in English. I think it's really important. If we're going to do this as a committee and we want to take seriously official languages and the importance of supporting both official languages, then I think this amendment captures that.

I like the idea that we've put in there four meetings. Maybe it's debatable how many we need, but I think we're all in agreement. That was where I was hoping to get to. The mandate of this committee and the amendment in front of us is to talk about the importance of supporting both official languages and making sure we do everything in our power to support those two official languages.

I know that my colleague Monsieur Beaulieu brought up earlier whether there was French writing on warnings on packaging or something. In Quebec, in my riding, in the middle of the pandemic, at the worst part of the pandemic, my anglophone community did not get any information from the Quebec government. It was only unilingual, in French. It took a couple of weeks before we got the notices in English.

If we're going to talk about providing services to Canadians and supporting both official languages, I think it is an absolutely non-partisan way to have Monsieur Godin's motion before us with an amendment to say.... If we're going to look at it, let's look at it. Let's do it right.

Thank you.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, I ask that we vote on my colleague's amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lattanzio.

The debate is still open. If there are no other speakers and if you are in agreement, we will proceed to vote on the amendment moved by Mrs. Lalonde.

(Amendment negatived: yeas 5; nays 6.)

The Chair: We are back to the original motion.

I briefly saw three hands raised, Ms. Lattanzio, Ms. Lambropoulos, and Mr. Godin.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I'm going to make this very brief.

With regard to the discussions here today, I think that, fundamentally, the common thread among all parties, all members around this table, is to determine whether WE had the capacity to deliver the Canada student service grant in both official languages. This is what I retained from the discussion here today, Mr. Chairman.

I'm going to propose that this be the amendment we incorporate into my colleague Mr. Godin's main motion, if we want. I think that's the undisputed, uncontradicted version of all the interventions that have been made, so I'm putting it out there on the floor. I'm suggesting that we incorporate that in the first paragraph as an amendment.

The Chair: Okay, you mean it as an amendment.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Yes, so it's "that this committee determine if WE had the capacity to deliver the Canada student service grant in both official languages across the country". That is what I'm putting on the floor as an amendment.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Do you have a copy of your amendment in both official languages?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: No. I only did it verbally, but I can send you one, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, it would be good to have it.

For everyone's benefit, could you take the motion, read it and tell us where your amendment is, please?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Yes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It starts: "That the Committee undertake a study on the...decision...".

What do you want to add before that part? Remind us, please.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: It's a study of whether WE Charity had the capacity to offer the program as such in both official languages.

• (1330)

[*English*]

Did the WE organization have the capacity to deliver the Canada student service grant in both official languages across the country? It's that this committee study that question, yes, undertake a study.

The Chair: It's that the committee undertake a study on—

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Yes, it's "to determine if WE had the capacity to deliver the Canada student service grant in both official languages across the country."

The Chair: That paragraph is going to come before, at the top.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: It would be the premise, yes. It would replace the first paragraph.

Basically, Mr. Chairman, it would go a bit to what my colleague Mr. Généreux mentioned before, in terms of opening it up. That way this amendment would give the committee the breathing space to do it.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: One moment, please.

Mr. René Arseneault: Is this a "comfort break"?

The Chair: Because we are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have rewritten the amendment to this motion, with the help of the clerk. I will read it to you.

If you want a copy, we'll have to stop so that everybody has one. If you tell me that you agree to debate this amendment, we can proceed with the debate. I must tell you that I only have it in English, but we also have the translation service.

The amendment reads as follows:

[*English*]

"That the committee undertake a study to determine if WE has the capacity to deliver the Canada service grant in both official languages across the country", and then after that we have, "That the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages", etc.

[*Translation*]

The rest stays the same.

I repeat the amendment.

[*English*]

"That the committee undertake a study to determine if WE has the capacity to deliver the Canada student service grant in both official languages across the country."

[*Translation*]

Is this amendment clear enough for us to debate it?

Ms. Lambropoulos would like to read the amendment in French, but I believe we have the interpretation.

[English]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: It's okay.

[Translation]

It's up to you.

The Chair: We have simultaneous translation, so it's okay.

Thank you.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay.

The Chair: We can debate it, but first I have a request to make, and that is a five-minute "comfort break".

Is that okay for you?

Mr. Joël Godin: Certainly.

● (1335)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: No.

The Chair: Well, shall we continue?

There were hands raised on this amendment. We ended with Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Lambropoulos, you have the floor.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: What I wanted to say is almost the same thing.

The Chair: Okay.

We'll go to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I wanted to table an amendment, but I will do so later.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, we are not here to take WE Charity to task, but rather to find out what the government did to arrive at this decision regarding the \$912 million. The Liberals may not know whether this organization is bilingual enough to manage the program, but WE does, because it turned to NATION-AL to solve its problems in Quebec and in the francophonie.

We are therefore totally opposed to the amendment proposed by our colleague. Who would have thought that one day the Liberals would want to go after WE Charity in a parliamentary committee?

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm also against it, because WE's ability to provide services is very theoretical. What we want to know above all is whether the government has taken the necessary measures to ensure that the services are truly equitable for francophones and anglophones alike.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

[English]

Mr. Chong, the floor is yours.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I cannot support this amendment, because it is clear that WE is not in a position to offer this program in both official languages. It's

in the contract, of course, but obviously they have to turn to another organization for their services.

[English]

It's clear that the issue here isn't whether or not WE Charity had the capacity to deliver the program in the French language. It's clear that they did not have that capacity. That's why they contracted with National. The issue here also isn't whether or not the contract signed on June 23, backdated to May 5, contained clauses that mandated the delivery of the program in both official languages. All federal contracts have those requirements as a basic standard. The issue here is "the government's decision", and the amendment would eliminate those two words from the motion. The issue here is the government's decision.

The government has said for weeks that the reason the WE organization got the contract was twofold. The first was that it was recommended by the federal bureaucracy, and that the Liberal cabinet ministers had nothing to do with it. It's come to light in recent days, even yesterday, that this was not the case. Liberal cabinet ministers were heavily involved in helping WE craft a second proposal to meet the requirements of delivering this program. The second thing the government has maintained, right from day one, is that the WE organization was the only organization in the country that could deliver this program. That's also clearly not the case.

The issue here is not the capacity of the WE organization to deliver programs in both official languages. It's the disconnect between the Prime Minister's assertion that the WE Charity is the only organization that could possibly have been able to deliver this program and the fact that it couldn't. It had to contract out the delivery of this program to a lobby group, the National lobby group, that would deliver part of these services to 25% of Canadians whose first official language is French.

That's the issue here, and that's the reason I cannot support the amendment.

Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Go ahead, Ms. Lambropoulos.

[English]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: This amendment would at least correct the motion so that it is no longer a lie. It takes away the fact that there is no presence in Quebec, when we've already stated that there is proof that there is a presence in Quebec. It states that, again, it's an anglophone organization.

We know that it has delivered conferences in French prior to the pandemic, which means prior to any decisions being made, prior to hiring National. Not only that, but their website has been in French since 2017. This is an organization.... Maybe the chairperson of the organization is an anglophone, but that doesn't mean the organization does not provide services in French; it does. It is clear. Anybody can go look up the website. Anybody can look up their Facebook page and see clearly that WE Montreal is solely in French.

I'm not sure how much clearer it could be that, as the motion was originally, it is just a lie. We're basically assuming that they would not have been able to do what we wanted them to do in both official languages. Before we even get to a motion like this, we have to study whether or not they would have been able to accomplish this goal. I don't understand why we have a problem with the amendment when it just corrects the facts. It just makes it a motion that isn't a lie. It makes it so that we can study whether or not WE had the capacity to deliver these services in both official languages.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lambropoulos.

The debate is still open. There's no one on the list.

Are there any further comments?

Hearing none, meaning that we don't want to debate it any more, Madam Clerk, please proceed with the recorded division on this amendment, as tabled by Ms. Lattanzio.

(Amendment negated: yeas 5; nays 6)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, I have an amendment to propose.

The Chair: The floor is yours, Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, we have been discussing this for quite a while now, and we have been sensitive to each other's comments.

I will read the whole text as amended.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead, Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: We propose that the Committee undertake a study on the government's decision to select WE Charity to administer the Canada Student Service Grant; that the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, the Honourable Mélanie Joly, be invited to appear for at least two hours before September 4, 2020.

The reason why we are proposing this, Mr. Chair, is that, first of all, in response to what the government members have said, we are removing the reference to "a unilingual anglophone organization with no presence in Quebec". We are sensitive to that statement and we are therefore acting on their concern.

We are also responding to the concern of Mr. Beaulieu of the Bloc Québécois about the date. We are therefore pushing August 21 back to September 4.

We are also proposing to add to the witnesses the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, the Honourable Bardish Chagger, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, President of the Treasury Board, the Hon-

ourable Jean-Yves Duclos, NATIONAL Public Relations, WE Charity, and the Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Théberge.

We therefore want to give other ministers, such as Mr. Rodriguez and Mr. Duclos, a chance to come and testify and give their version of the facts about this event.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deltell.

Again, since we don't have a hard copy, I want to make sure that all members of the committee understand the essence of this amendment.

I'm going to let you discuss it amongst yourselves. So I'm going to suspend the meeting while we clarify the motion. It seems to me that several amendments are being put together.

• (1345)

(Pause)

• (1355)

The Chair: Let us resume.

As I recall, just before the break there was some discussion on Mr. Deltell's amendment. To clarify the situation, I would ask Mr. Deltell to slowly resume reading this amendment, since we don't have copies available.

Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all my colleagues.

The motion reads as follows:

That the Committee undertake a study on the government's decision to select WE Charity to administer the Canada Student Service Grant;

That the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, the Honourable Mélanie Joly, be invited to appear for at least two hours between September 1 and September 11, 2020;

That other witnesses include, but are not limited to:

- a) the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, the Honourable Bardish Chagger;
- b) the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez;
- c) the President of the Treasury Board, the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos;
- d) NATIONAL Public Relations Inc.;
- e) WE Charity; and
- f) the Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Théberge.

The Chair: Thank you.

I understand the motion. There was an amendment from Mr. Godin. So everything we do now is on the amendment.

I have confirmation from the clerk that this amendment is in order.

On the list, I see Mr. Green and then Mrs. Lalonde.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green: Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mrs. Lalonde, you have the floor.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I spoke to you about this during the break, but I would just like to make sure of one thing.

I have a lot of difficulty including dates. We know that it depends on people's availability. We must not forget that September 1 is close to the long Labour Day weekend in Canada. We have to take that into account. It will be September 4, 5, 6 and 7. So it will be Monday. I do not know what to think of the date.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to propose a subamendment to the amendment for the minister and her officials. My dear colleague proposes that the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, the Honourable Mélanie Joly, be invited to appear for at least two hours.

I would therefore like her officials to be invited as well, and I would like to remove the dates, if possible.

Madam Clerk, I would like to move a subamendment that would invite “the minister and her officials”.

The Chair: So we have a subamendment.

First, let's remember the idea of the amendment. Now we have this subamendment that basically takes out the dates and adds officials to come with the minister.

Let us start the debate on this subamendment.

I will keep going through my list. Mrs. Romanado was next.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I am not going to comment because I wanted to speak to the amendment.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Beaulieu, your name was next on the list.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm told that our meeting is no longer being broadcast on ParlVu.

• (1400)

The Chair: I'll check with the technician.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Oh, it's on. Excuse me.

The Chair: Okay. We are back.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Earlier, there was a subamendment and I was wondering what the mechanism was. Is it at the discretion of the chair?

The Chair: No, not at all. In fact, there was the motion, then an amendment, then a subamendment to the amendment. That's the usual procedure. As the clerk was saying, some people wanted to continue the debate on the amendment, but because there is a subamendment, we have to debate it first. The subamendment removes the dates that were indicated and adds the minister and her officials.

Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Regarding the date, I would like to make a counter-proposal off the record. We may find common ground quickly.

As for adding, “the Minister and her officials”, I want to point out that the motion, in its current form, already allows for that, without it necessarily containing those words. The motion does say, “That other witnesses include, but are not limited to:”. That way, when the committee defines the list, it can add that if it decides to invite the senior officials of the minister in charge of official languages to appear.

We could talk about the dates again. I think we will manage to find common ground.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I really appreciate the door being opened, but you are already talking about several lists, and I would just like us to make official the fact that officials, when the minister will be here.... Respected colleagues, you have a pretty exhaustive list of people you would like to hear from. I understand that you do say, “but are not limited to”. However, I would like us to add, “that the Minister be accompanied by her officials”.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, I would just like to clarify something.

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you have the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I don't remember ever seeing a minister alone at the table. They are always flanked by senior officials. So I don't think it's necessary to specify that, especially as no limits are imposed.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: The clerk could perhaps enlighten us on this issue.

The Chair: I am being told that the minister is usually allowed to be accompanied by her senior officials when she appears.

[*English*]

Mr. Green, you have an intervention.

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes, I support the idea of having staff present. I think it provides the opportunity for us to have the same discussion at the same time rather than having the minister defer to their staff at a future date, and then have their staff defer back to the minister at a future date. I think it would be wise to have them both at the same place. I would support that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Deltell.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We have an amendment, a subamendment, and so on, and I don't know what stage we are at, but I think we can reach a consensus on the dates. It would be at least two hours in September 2020. That's a fairly broad period of four and a half weeks. It encompasses Labour Day and so on. However, it does provide us with a deadline, so we cannot put it off indefinitely. Therefore, the committee would meet in September. I think we can find common ground on that and on the availability of ministers.

Regarding officials, as the clerk specified earlier, when a minister appears before the committee, they are always flanked by their senior officials. I think we can reach our objectives. We have set aside the language that could be examined, not to say debated. We understand that. For us, the goal is to give decision-makers an opportunity to explain what led to this decision.

• (1405)

The Chair: Mrs. Romanado, go ahead.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank my colleague. As the chair of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, I know it is not always easy to have witnesses appear as soon as we want because of scheduling issues. Allowing for some flexibility helps. The amendment talks about urgency at the beginning. It is not as if the meeting will be held in December; it will be in September. I assume the clerk will appreciate that, as it allows her to plan while taking everyone's availability into account. I know that a number of committee members around the table have travelled for hours to be here today.

I thank my colleague for being flexible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Romanado.

We do have good cooperation on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I would like to address Mrs. Lalonde with regard to that.

Mrs. Lalonde, since this has been discussed with Mr. Deltell, you would first need to withdraw your subamendment, so that Mr. Deltell can revise his amendment taking into account the changes you discussed.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you for clarifying that, Mr. Chair. I am in fact withdrawing my amendment.

The Chair: Thank you. Mrs. Lalonde.

Mr. Deltell, go ahead.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Chair, as the saying goes, enlightenment comes when ideas collide. This is not called a Parliament for no reason. We have to talk to each other in order to understand each another. I think we have found an honourable common ground for everyone. Here is the motion.

Am I saying it right?

The Chair: Yes, but it's rather an amendment to the motion.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: We are talking about an amendment.

The Chair: That's right.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Just so we understand each other, I will read the amendment we are proposing, as subamended:

That the Committee undertake a study of the government's decision to select We Charity/UNIS to administer the Canada Student Service Grant;

That the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Melanie Joly, be invited to appear for at least two hours in September 2020;

That the other witnesses include, but are not limited to:

a) The minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, the Honourable Bardish Chagger;

b) The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez;

c) The President of the Treasury Board, the Honourable Jean-Yves Ducloux;

d) NATIONAL Public Relations;

e) WE Charity/UNIS;

f) The Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Théberge.

The Chair: Is this clear?

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: As it was said earlier, this is not a restrictive list. We could have other people appear. Correct?

The Chair: The amendment does say, "but are not limited to".

Ms. Lattanzio, go ahead.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, just to clarify, my understanding is that we don't need to follow the order set in the list. We can change the order people appear in, right?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: There is some flexibility, so witnesses will not necessarily appear in that order. They can appear in a different order, correct?

The Chair: That's correct.

• (1410)

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Thank you.

The Chair: Depending on how things unfold, the subcommittee may meet to set the committee's meeting schedule.

Are there any further comments about the amendment put forward by Mr. Deltell?

So we are ready to vote on this amendment, as put forward by Mr. Deltell.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11, nays 0)

We will now move on to the main motion as proposed in the letter signed by the four members.

Hon. Michael Chong: With the amendment?

The Chair: In other words, we are moving on to the motion as amended.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before going further, I want to thank all the committee colleagues. As my colleague Mr. Deltell said, we have managed to find common ground under these circumstances, and that's very honourable.

Mr. Arseneault, you have frequently said that the committee was often unanimous and had a nearly perfect score. Even now, we are managing to agree. I commend parliamentarians of all stripes.

I don't want to make a blunder with the clerk, but I must withdraw my motion.

Is that indeed what I must do?

The Chair: No, we will vote on the motion as amended. We have adopted the amendment, and the next step will consist in voting on the motion as amended.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: On the first motion.

The Chair: Yes, but on the first motion that was in the letter, as we just amended it. That's the procedure to follow. Essentially, what Mr. Deltell just read will therefore be the motion we will consider at future meetings.

Mr. Joël Godin: So I don't have to withdraw anything, and the process is compliant.

Is that right?

The Chair: That is right. The process is compliant, don't worry.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you very much for your cooperation, Mr. Chair and Madam Clerk.

The Chair: Are there any further comments?

As there aren't any, we will vote on the motion as amended.

I see that Mr. Généreux would like to say something.

Mr. Généreux, go ahead.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, could we make sure we can hear from witnesses fairly quickly? We do have a pretty exhaustive list, although we set a deadline to be able to do it. In other words, I'm talking about proposing dates and witnesses without delay to the extent possible.

The Chair: Before we go to a vote, Mr. Généreux, I have a suggestion to make, considering the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are meeting to express our desires regarding meetings. Afterwards, the clerk, the analyst, in some cases, and I will check the availability of rooms and technicians. We will take care of all the organizational aspects to ensure that the meetings are held according to our desires.

Go ahead, Mr. Généreux.

• (1415)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Could you tell us....

The Chair: Then it will be Mrs. Romanado's turn.

Continue, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Could you let us know until when we can add witnesses to the list?

The Chair: Can you repeat your question? I did not understand.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Could the clerk let us know when the cutoff is for adding names to the witness list, should we want to, as it is not restrictive?

The Chair: Yes.

I suggest that we come together in a subcommittee.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes.

The Chair: As we usually do, we could ask all the committee members to submit a list of witnesses they want to hear from by a specific date, and then we will decide.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Clerk would send us that date, right?

The Chair: That's right.

Mrs. Romanado, go ahead.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I just want to get clarity. We just voted on the amendment, and now we will go back to the original motion, but it's not as amended because we've just voted on the amendment—

The Chair: Right.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: —so now we're going back to the original motion, which is no longer what we just voted on.

I want to make sure that everyone's clear. I would like you to reread what you're going to ask us to vote on so that it's very clear to everyone what we are actually voting on, because we've just made an agreement to an amendment, and now we're going back to the original motion, which is not the same.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: No, not exactly.

Mr. Chong, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are going back.... What is on the floor of this committee right now is the motion as amended. That is the motion as amended by Monsieur Deltell's amendment. That is what's on the floor. When debate collapses, we'll have the vote on that motion as amended.

The Chair: Exactly. Thank you so much.

Before taking the vote, I would like to ask either Mr. Godin or Mr. Deltell to read that motion as amended again, please.

[*Translation*]

In any case, this will clarify what we are voting on.

Mr. Godin, go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, the amended motion reads as follows:

That the Committee undertake a study of the government's decision to select We Charity/UNIS to administer the Canada Student Service Grant;

That the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Melanie Joly, be invited to appear for at least two hours in September 2020;

That the other witnesses include, but are not limited to:

a) The minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, the Honourable Bardish Chagger;

b) The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Honourable Pablo Rodriguez;

c) The President of the Treasury Board, the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos;

d) NATIONAL Public Relations;

e) WE Charity/UNIS;

f) The Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Thérberge.

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

Mr. Arseneault, go ahead.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Chair, I just have a question before we vote. Is the number of meetings for a study normally set in advance?

My second question is about the allocated time. I know that we are in a crisis situation owing to COVID-19 and that the same rules don't really apply. We have already gone over the allocated time and we usually need to reach unanimous consent before we continue the meeting.

How will it work and how many days are planned for discussion? I don't know whether my question is out of order, but I feel it's necessary to ask it.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The motion has been read, but the preamble is staying the same. Correct?

• (1420)

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The motion, the original letter...

The Chair: No. It's strictly what Mr. Godin just read. That's all of it.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay. The entire preamble is removed.

The Chair: Exactly. What he just read reflects our whole discussion.

If there are no further comments on the motion as amended, we will go to the vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Arseneault, go ahead.

Mr. René Arseneault: First, there is the issue of the deadline concerning witnesses.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: We have to agree and decide until when names can be submitted.

The Chair: I would like to mention two things with the clerk.

First, in the current context, I would like to move the following motion:

That the Chair be authorized to set the schedule for the committee's meetings for the study of WE Charity and schedule them as soon as possible.

[English]

In English, it's "That the Chair be authorized to set the schedule for the committee's meetings for the study on WE Charity and schedule them as soon as possible."

Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Certainly without casting any aspersions, does that mean there's an open date? If it's up to the will of the chair, could it be the case that members don't make themselves available until October?

The Chair: Mr. Green, what I would like to.... It's not finished yet, but one of the proposals is that we're going to look at the agenda and what is available—rooms, technical, everything. Also, I think we're going to have a virtual subcommittee to discuss.... Is it not possible to have a virtual subcommittee? We have people who are going to have to travel. We're going to have to find ways to establish the agenda.

[Translation]

If I understand correctly, the committee members want this to happen as soon as possible. What is more, the amended motion sets a date in September. So we will respect the committee wishes.

Mr. Arseneault, go ahead.

Mr. René Arseneault: That's the date on which we will be able to hear from witnesses. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: It's rather when we can suggest witnesses.

The Chair: Yes.

As I said, we cannot say now how much time exactly it will take or when we will be able to do it. We have to check availabilities, and there is a lot of legwork to do.

However, we can decide today on a date when a representative from each party will send a list of witnesses we would like to invite to appear before the committee. We can choose a date so that we can set the meeting schedule.

Mrs. Romanado, go ahead.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Can we suggest a date, like August 30, by which the names must be sent to the Chair? That would give you about two weeks.

The Chair: Yes.

We do not need to vote, since we all agree.

So, you have until August 30 to send the list of witnesses you would like to hear from in committee, so that we can use the list as a basis for determining the number of witnesses.

The subcommittee's main concern would be to determine the number of witnesses per meeting. That is what we are going to discuss as soon as possible.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

• (1425)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I want you to know that you have my full confidence when it comes to the logistics of holding these meetings.

Now, as my colleague Mr. Arseneault said earlier, it would be good if we could decide on the number of meetings. Currently, we have six witnesses. So we will need at least three meetings. We also need to plan for other witnesses. Are we limiting ourselves? We should agree to four or five meetings.

In my view, four meetings would be fine. I do not know if my colleagues would agree.

The Chair: How do you feel about booking four meetings? Would that work for everyone?

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: I would like to bring up one last issue, if that is okay with everyone.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Because I am so far away, it is hard for me to attend subcommittee meetings.

The Chair: Yes, that is true.

Mr. René Arseneault: As a parliamentarian, I have to drive for nine and a half hours to come here, and Air Canada no longer flies to where I live. No other explanation is necessary. We could skip the subcommittee for now and rely on the Chair and the clerk. That is my opinion. I do not know if everyone agrees.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: I do not see why we need to meet in subcommittee, if "virtual" is no longer an option, of course.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I was going to say that we could do it virtually, but if that is not possible, I am willing to let the—

The Chair: Yes.

The clerk and committee staff members will be here to guide you. To sum up, we agree that, by August 30, a representative from each party will send the list of witnesses and then we will focus on four meetings to debate the motion as amended.

Mr. Joël Godin: It will be to do the study, right?

The Chair: Yes, to consider this motion.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault: I am going to back up a bit. Will the meetings be two, three or four hours long? Usually, they last for two hours and we need the unanimous consent of all committee members to extend them. How does it work with COVID-19?

The Chair: I understand what you are saying, but again, I cannot give you an answer. We will have to see what is available in terms of rooms, equipment, and so on. You will be informed as soon as possible of potential dates for the meetings. In addition, we need to think about calling witnesses and making sure they are available. All of these things come into play. Please know that we will act in good faith and that we intend to carry out this study properly.

With that, I adjourn the meeting, and bid you safe travels.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>