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Chair: Ms. Ruby Sahota



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• (1100)

[*English*]

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

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 26 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

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

The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee. I would like to remind all participants in this meeting that taking a screenshot or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and consistent with public health recommendations, all those who are attending this meeting in person... No members thus far are attending in person, but there are staff in the room. I just want to remind everyone to maintain a two-metre physical distance and to wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It's highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated. Everyone must maintain the proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the entrance of the room.

For those participating virtually, which is everyone thus far, members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for the meeting. At the bottom of your screen you have the choice of floor, English or French audio.

With the latest Zoom version you may now speak in the language of your choice without the need to select the corresponding language channel, although I think from what we have seen I would advise that maybe you take a two-second pause in your speech before you switch to using the other language. I think that can help with the changeover of the interpretation channel.

The “raise hand” feature is now also more easily accessible at the bottom of your toolbar. Since you are all participating virtually, you should just use the “raise hand” feature on the toolbar if you would like to speak.

If you want to raise a point of order, then just unmute yourself and state that you have a point of order. I will maintain a list for

anyone wishing to speak to that point of order according to the list that's generated through the Zoom application.

Where we left off, I'm sure most of us remember our last meeting. We adjourned that meeting, so I'm really at the will of the committee as to what we'd like to discuss today. We have Ms. Vecchio's motion. We also have three motions from Monsieur Therrien, and we have a motion from Mr. Blaikie on a possible study as well. All of those are up for discussion if you would like.

Ms. Vecchio, go ahead.

• (1105)

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

On February 23, I had put forward the motion regarding the pro-rogation study and requesting the witnesses. I believe that many members have had the opportunity to speak on this, and we've had over six hours of debate on it already. I believe it would be appropriate to call the vote on this motion as put forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are the members in agreement for that?

I see a hand up.

Monsieur Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Good morning, everyone.

Indeed, we still have things to add regarding this topic. We need to discuss it until we reach an agreement.

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't see that we have agreement to move to a vote at this time. Hopefully at some point we will get there.

Next up is Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am going to show my support for Mr. Lauzon and say that I don't believe [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] on this matter, unfortunately.

Since the last time we met, I have had quite a few thoughts on this motion. I'm displeased that we're continuing with this debate. Unfortunately, I think the opposition parties are intent on pursuing this matter rather than focusing on what I think is most important for this committee to be focused on these days.

There is one point I need to make more strongly, and I really feel a deep conviction for this. If the opposing members don't view the response to COVID-19 as a worthwhile reason to recalibrate the government's priorities, then what is a good reason? We know that COVID-19 has hit our economy and impacted the lives of people across Canada more deeply than the 2008 and 2009 great recession, as I think it's been called in the past. When you think about the impact, I have reports here—

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, I apologize, but is anyone else hearing an echo? It could just be me, because I think I am having some issues.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I have had this happen once before, and the last time it happened I unplugged and plugged back in my headset and it seemed to resolve itself. Maybe I could try that before we continue, if that's okay.

• (1110)

The Chair: So far, so good. I don't hear an echo right now.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It's better for me, so far.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): The echo is back.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive): We are getting an indication that there seems to be a weakness in your Wi-Fi, so it's not coming through perfectly clear. We'll get an IT ambassador to reach out to you to see if we can resolve the issue.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I tried it again. How does that sound? Is that working? I see that Ms. May is giving a thumbs-up. I don't seem to be echoing.

The Chair: Yes, it sounds good. Let's give it a go. It seemed that after the first minute, it started again.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Normally I have a pretty good connection here, but thank you for that. It might be resolved, but if it continues, perhaps I can get IT support. If it's necessary, I'll let someone else take my spot and then pick up where I leave off.

In my remarks, I was just expressing this heartfelt conviction I have that if proroguing during COVID-19 is not deemed to be a good reason, we have a real problem, because when you look at past prorogations, even the one in 2008 and then the one in 2009, when Prime Minister Stephen Harper used his prerogative to prorogue, all the comments made in the media were that these prorogations were the result of the government's need to assess the economic uncertainty and impact and reset the agenda.

I have several quotes from Dimitri Soudas. In 2009, in the Toronto Star, he was quoted as saying that with the recession easing, now “is the time to engage with constituents, stakeholders and businesses in order to listen to Canadians, identify priorities and to set the next stage of our agenda.” This points to the relationship between the economic recession we were under, which was starting to lift, and the need to then re-evaluate and reset the agenda, which is very consistent with what [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] testified to and consistent with the prorogation report we've all seen and read at this point.

It's just a parallel. In comparison, it seems that this rationale was good enough for the general public and members of Parliament back in 2009, and what we're dealing with is a public health crisis first, but an economic crisis that's 10 times greater, at least, than

what we saw in 2008 and 2009. I think that really underscores that the rationale provided should be, and is, a great reason for resetting the agenda and evaluating the priorities of Canadians and how to recover from this deep social and economic impact that COVID-19 has caused, and I would say, the public health measures that have been utilized to protect, to the greatest extent possible, human health and human life across Canada.

I would like to actually reference a document that I've been reading. I think it's really pertinent to our debate today. It's the six-month update, called “The Social and Economic Impacts of COVID-19”. It was published in September 2020 by the chief statistician of Canada. It's a sizable document, so I wouldn't blame anybody for not reading it, yet I found it very interesting. It's 134 pages, and it outlines the really deep social and economic impacts of COVID-19 that we were all dealing with at the moment in time when our Prime Minister decided to use his prerogative to ask for prorogation and re-evaluate the government's priorities and reset the agenda. I think anyone can access this document. It's publicly available, and it's extremely useful in terms of outlining the depth of the impact on our economy.

I draw your attention to a number of points here that are also really reflected in the throne speech. I remember that in our last meeting I spent quite a bit of time delineating how the consultation process during prorogation was really in depth and thorough.

• (1115)

It really engaged members of Parliament. It engaged other parties in the discussions. It really looked at what data and evidence we had and what the priorities should be. I feel that the throne speech, although with broad strokes, of course—with some continuity, for sure, from the original priorities that were outlined in the platform prior, even continuity with the previous throne speech—largely reflected the needs that were expressed by my constituents and, I believe, Canadians in general.

I would go even further today and say that the needs that were reflected in the broad strokes of that new throne speech actually respond effectively to the major impacts that were outlined by the chief statistician of Canada in this 134-page document that I think is an incredible body of work. I'm not sure how many people it must have taken to produce such an in-depth report. I'm sure there were a lot of people behind putting this together. It's really useful.

I would like to quote something from the forward that I think is really important to keep in mind. It highlights the need for an inclusive, equitable recovery. The chief statistician of Canada wrote this forward, so it's a quote from him. His name is Anil Arora. He says:

The crisis has also laid bare many of the social and economic hardships facing marginalized Canadians, raising fundamental questions about the inclusiveness of the recovery.

That's one piece, I think, of an important argument to be made, which is to look at that statement, look at the evidence and really look at how the throne speech responds to that and how it outlines an inclusive, resilient recovery plan—again, in broad strokes because a throne speech is, as we know, not a detailed plan. It doesn't outline every single thing that the government is going to do in full detail, of course. I don't think it would be reasonable for us to expect that in a throne speech.

I would also say that Anil Arora says:

Responding effectively to a crisis requires timely, credible information. COVID-19 has substantially increased the demand for data and analyses that illuminate the challenges facing Canadians as households, businesses, and governments gravitate toward a new normal.

There's a lot of really good information in this document. I would like to just start by highlighting a few of the key findings that I think are really pertinent.

One of the key findings—and this is on page four—is that:

The health impacts of COVID-19 go beyond the effects of the virus.

One statistic that I think is worth pointing out is that:

The pandemic has had unprecedented impacts on the quality of life of Canadians, who have reported their lowest levels of life satisfaction since data became available in 2003.

That's one point. People report, and that's self-reported data. I would say that people's perceptions of their life satisfaction is the only thing that matters when doing that type of research. It's their perception of their quality of life. It's a good indicator of how much this has impacted Canadians.

Also, it says:

Fewer Canadians reported being in very good or excellent mental health—with young Canadians registering the largest declines.

Also, the report points out what it calls “excess mortality”. That's kind of a strange term. Essentially, looking at population level data, we would be able to predict the anticipated mortality rate of Canadians, and it graphs that out. It shows how many more deaths there have been during this crisis than what would normally be anticipated in the normal cycle of life of Canadians. That's another statistic in here that I think is very important.

● (1120)

Another key finding is that the economic impacts of COVID-19 have been uneven across population groups. I think this is really important for us to realize. I know that many other colleagues feel just as passionately as I do about the importance of supporting segments of the population that are marginalized and that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

The report states:

The historic declines in economic activity disproportionately affected many vulnerable Canadians, including women, youth, new immigrants, visible minorities and lower-wage workers.

Visible minorities are overrepresented in sectors hardest hit by the pandemic, including food and accommodation services, contributing to high rates of unemployment.

We also see the research data pointing to the impact on indigenous populations:

36% of Indigenous participants reported that the pandemic had an impact on their ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs, compared with 25% of non-Indigenous participants.

That's a significant increase; that's 11% over non-indigenous individuals who participated. This points to the inequity we're seeing within the pandemic itself, and I think it's part of how the pandemic response needs to reflect the inequities that we see across the impacts.

Let me go even a little bit further here:

The impact of COVID-19 on economic activity has been unprecedented and highly uneven across sectors.

This is another point that the chief statistician said was a key finding of this extensive report. Again, think back to the throne speech that outlined supports for hardest-hit industries. I would add here that we're still trying to get that support through Parliament and to get some of the essential supports for the hardest-hit industries actually passed through the House of Commons. It is unfortunate that this is being delayed.

The report states:

The impact of COVID-19 on certain sectors, particularly those that provide consumer-facing services and rely more on travel and tourism, has been particularly severe. Lower-wage services have been impacted to a much greater extent than high-wage services.

This means that individuals who are staffing the firms that offer these lower-wage positions are ones that are also being impacted, because the economic impacts are hitting the service sector and consumer-facing services much harder. I think we've all seen that in retail, probably in our local communities. I've certainly heard it from my chamber of commerce and my business improvement area over and over, that these are the industries that have been hardest hit.

The report states:

The recovery in jobs will depend in large part on the ability of many businesses to adapt to changes in financial and operating conditions, including more uncertain demand for their products and services.

The report also goes into how this pandemic is having a “transformative impact” on existing business models. Similarly, businesses are having to digitalize. Obviously, more people are teleworking. In some instances, some of these lower-wage workers are also at much higher risk of having robotics or automation replace their jobs. This is a big trend within this report as well. In fact, there are many risks and many impacts on those lower-wage workers that the rest of us who are higher-wage don't feel and experience to the same degree.

● (1125)

Airline passenger volumes, measured year over year, remained down 94% in June. As of July, payroll employment in accommodation and food services industries was at about two-thirds of its pre-COVID level, so it was down one-third.

Again, these impacts were at that time. This report really outlines the impacts between when the pandemic hit, and basically, August. The report was produced in September, so it was actually used as a platform of foundational data that could then help inform the consultation process that was being undertaken at the same time.

If you keep drawing the lines between what the data tells us and what the throne speech says, I think you understand that we're not making this up. It made sense. It was rational. It was a good thing to do, to pause and reset the agenda and evaluate where we were at.

One of the other key findings that is important on the social impact side is that the social impacts have also been uneven. There have been greater impacts on those population groups with pre-existing vulnerabilities. This included immigrants and visible minorities, who, as I've already said, are overrepresented as frontline workers. They were also put at greater risk of contracting COVID-19, because many of them were on the front lines, working throughout the pandemic.

Also, it's important to point out that the data showed that visible minorities had perceived and self-reported an increase in harassment, attacks and stigma since the pandemic began. The rates were highest among Chinese, Korean and Southeast Asian participants.

I take this very seriously. Not only are visible minorities working in the pandemic on the front lines more hit by the economic impacts, putting themselves more at risk of contracting COVID-19, but they are also experiencing harassment, attacks and stigmatization as a result. Obviously, I'm really not happy about this. It's very hard to shoulder this and even process it, because it's exacerbating vulnerability on top of vulnerability and really providing evidence as to why we might see this resurgence in movements that are seeking greater equity for populations, or subpopulations, that are vulnerable and highly impacted by COVID-19.

Also, it's important to note that social isolation due to COVID had heightened the risk of family violence. From victim services, 54% of respondents reported an increase in the number of victims of domestic violence served between mid-March and early July.

Again, this highlights quite a few different important findings. If you look at the throne speech, again, you can make direct connections between what appears in the throne speech and some of the data that has been collected.

Another key finding is managing the pandemic, moving forward. Canadians are willing to take precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19, but there are differences across groups, and that was apparent from the data. One example was that 90% or more of Canadians said they would take precautions such as handwashing, avoiding crowds and wearing masks. What I found encouraging about this particular portion of the report was that it shows how much Canadians in general are willing to do in order to protect the health and lives of others. It was very encouraging to me to think that we have data that shows that.

- (1130)

That data was shown to fluctuate depending on the severity and the number of cases that people were aware of. Think about how public health keeps reporting our daily numbers and how some of our extremely reputable doctors are putting that data out there to keep us all informed. That actually impacts Canadians quite a bit in terms of their willingness to protect others and take the pandemic seriously.

It's really important that this data is put out there because the data that the chief statistician gathered shows that it does impact what people are willing to do and give up in terms of the disruption to their lives. They understand that as case numbers are increasing, they have to do more and they have to abide by these public health measures. There's a larger degree of compliance as a result of their being aware of the case numbers going up.

These are all important points for us to keep in mind when we're thinking about the rationale for prorogation and making the link back to.... I'm not being unreasonable here. If former prime minister Stephen Harper prorogued for a recession that pales in comparison to this pandemic, then certainly the economic impacts of COVID-19 would merit the same consideration and provide a perfectly reasonable rationale for proroguing Parliament.

There were other findings here that I think are important. I'll try not to repeat myself. On changes in Canadians' concerns and response to COVID-19, it says that, as restrictions are lifted and activities resume, social interactions increase, particularly among youth, Canadian born and those living outside central Canada.

There are some other findings here:

Concerns remain about resuming certain activities such as attending events, travelling by airplane, and gathering in large groups—particularly among seniors, immigrants, and Ontarians.

Many Canadians at high risk of severe outcomes due to COVID-19 said that they would try to continue to work from home.

There are many other findings, but I think we see that as restrictions were lifted, the compliance with some of those public health restrictions were less. As such, we've seen a second wave emerge and now we're probably on the cusp of what we would call a third wave of COVID-19, which is deeply concerning.

I wanted to make a few other points about the health risk of resuming activities and willingness to take precautions, which I think is important to highlight. It is important to note that the throne speech recentred on the health needs of Canadians. That's why the throne speech, if you actually look at it, really does focus and is structured in a way....

We all were quite excited between the first and second wave. I certainly felt an energy that we were coming out of this. Then it quickly came grinding to a halt when we realized for sure that there was going to be a second wave, which I think any person who has studied pandemics would have been able to predict. I don't think it was actually all that surprising.

I can definitely tell you that I was caught up in the thought of focusing on recovery and addressing the inequities in our country and many of the other issues that are going to be important coming out of this.

- (1135)

When you look at how the throne speech is structured, it has four foundations. The first one was protecting Canadians from COVID-19. The second one was helping Canadians in businesses through the pandemic, and then building back better.

I remember one of the witnesses calling it a catchphrase. I have lots to say about that. It's not a catchphrase to me. It's a really important concept that is an inspiring vision for a new economy that can emerge stronger, more resilient, more inclusive, more equitable and more sustainable for the planet. That is something I would work until the day I die to achieve. It's something I believe in.

Then the last one was to stand up for who we are as Canadians.

That's how the throne speech was structured, so it really centres on protecting Canadians, first and foremost, from COVID-19. It then talks about how to get Canadians and businesses through the pandemic, and then how we recover in terms of building back better and standing up for Canadians.

I really do feel that it reflects a lot of the data, even just in the way that it's structured.

I am going to make a few more points here about how concerns about overwhelming the health care system remained at that point and ensuring that we made workplaces safe. Approximately half of at-risk individuals who were employed rated their risk among employed individuals as higher. In terms of absolute numbers, sectors with the highest estimated number of workers at risk of adverse outcomes of COVID-19 were in health care and social assistance. That's not surprising given those folks were working on the front lines and caring for people during the pandemic in retail trade; manufacturing; construction; professional, scientific and technical services; and transportation and warehousing.

You can see how many of these were considered essential services, and those individuals were definitely at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 and, in many cases, were also at greater risk of having underlying health conditions as well.

I would just like to skip to another section in this report, which I think really speaks to the economic impacts and the depth of the economic impacts. This is on page 44. Maybe I'll just cover the summary. The summary is on page 43.

Regarding economic impacts and recovery related to the pandemic, "Output is recovering as businesses reopen" so, again, this was written in a time when some businesses were able to reopen to a degree, but there were "stark differences across sectors. Output in accommodation and food services in June was at 55% of its pre-pandemic level."

Another finding was that, "Employment is recovering, but steep losses remain in certain highly impacted sectors." Again, "Youth, less educated workers, women, recent immigrants, and temporary employees" were hit the hardest.

"Prior to the pandemic" is a summary, and I have more detail on some of these points that I think is important, but firm creation is in the start-up space. Before the pandemic, new businesses being launched were on an upswing. There had been a rise in the number

of businesses that were being started in Canada, and the financial position of the firms had been improving. It continues:

Closures rose dramatically during the shutdowns as employees left payrolls—62,600 business closures were observed in May, 29% less than in April but still 59% higher than pre-COVID-19 levels observed in February.

It's important to remember that those shutdowns weren't complete closures of those businesses. They were shutdowns due to the public health measures that were implemented by provinces and territories to protect people from contracting COVID-19.

- (1140)

There are also structural challenges in heavily affected sectors. The retail sector rebounded quickly from storefront closures, as companies developed and enhanced their online platforms. Some of them were able to move online and did rebound somewhat. Again, they were nowhere near their pre-pandemic levels, but it's a good sign that businesses can pivot, start to change their business models and rebound somewhat.

In terms of the unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on the economy, we can see unprecedented declines in output. There's a really great graph on page 44 of the report that I keep referring to. It shows what the output in our economy was from 2007 to 2020. You can see on the graph the size and scope of the 2008-09 recession. Annual GDP fell 2.9% in 2009. You can compare that with the economic growth over the period of 2018-19, and even prior to that there's considerable economic growth. You can compare that with the COVID-19 pandemic, with severe declines in household spending, business investment and trade, all of which amount to about five times the impact of the 2008-09 recession.

The chief statistician or the team that wrote this report.... I don't pretend that the chief statistician necessarily wrote the entire report; they probably had a team of people helping. It says, "As a purposeful, policy-based response to a health crisis, the COVID-19 restrictions brought about severe contractions in most industrial sectors, including in many service-based industries that typically support the economy during conventional downturns."

I have another note that I think is important to recognize. I have some other articles on the difference between the 2008-09 recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. There's a great article in First Policy Response that compiles a whole bunch of opinions from different experts who talk about how the economic impact of COVID-19 is far greater and much different qualitatively than that of the 2008-09 recession.

The 2008-09 recession was a demand-side recession. This is totally different from what we have seen during COVID-19, which is a supply-side shock recession. We would therefore expect it to be not only much greater, but different in kind. It requires a very different set of measures, a different way of thinking and a different set of policies and strategies for dealing with it. I won't go into depth on that right now, but I think that's important.

It's also important that the chief statistician outlines, "The road to recovery will involve major adaptations for businesses and households, which pose challenges for an equitable and resilient recovery." That's interesting when you think about how we've identified that the impacts of COVID-19 have not been equally distributed. In fact, they've impacted populations that were already much more marginalized or vulnerable. I think the chief statistician is saying that this creates additional challenges for our recovery.

• (1145)

The chief statistician's report also says:

During [the second quarter of 2020], household spending fell by a record 13% as families faced heightened levels of job and income uncertainty.

Employment earnings fell by almost 9% in the second quarter. At the same time, household disposable income rose by almost 11%...

This is really important for us to think when we are thinking about recovery. We saw that household spending fell by a record 13% as families faced the uncertainty of the pandemic and income loss, and employment earnings fell almost the same amount—not quite but 9%—in that second quarter. At the same time, due to our government's measures and supports, the COVID-19 relief, economic relief or financial relief supports, disposable income rose by almost 11%.

That's interesting when you think about the elasticity of market and the supply-side shock on the economy. When you put money into the pockets of Canadians to help them get through a crisis, and to some degree there's an increase in their disposable income, they're not spending it.

This pushed the household savings rate to just over 28%, up from about 8% in the first quarter of 2020. Again, when the Prime Minister keeps saying that the economy's going to come roaring back, this is what he's talking about. Why is it going to come back? We are already seeing the chief financial advisers for, I believe, TD and CIBC.... I've been putting these bits of information out there as I see the articles. They're already saying that the rebound of our economy is starting to happen. There's evidence of that.

Again, this is the result of severe declines in most types of economic activity, but in terms of our fiscal measures and support measures, I think we can see that they were targeted. Some of those were outlined in the throne speech. Some of them were continued on, but a lot of them were restructured around that time as well. If you remember, the wage subsidy, for example, was completely restructured to be indexed to the revenue loss of the businesses that are out there. That makes perfect sense.

I think opposition parties were in agreement that those revisions and adaptations of that support were important to not only support businesses to get through this but also to help the support be struc-

ured in a way that allows them to actually recover and lift them out of the pandemic. That has created an impact on their businesses.

To me, again, this just seems like it's all very rational and based in evidence. I know that's what I hang my hat on, that as a party and as a government, we've been putting the health and safety of Canadians first. We've been seeking evidence and consulting with key stakeholders across this country, including opposition parties, and attempting to implement measures that are the most effective at both protecting Canadians' health and safety, and helping our economy recover and Canadians get through the crisis. To me, that gives me reassurance.

Historic declines in labour market activity were another impact of COVID-19. It continues, "Employment losses totaled 3 million from February to April, almost 2 million of which were in full-time work." This is on page 47 of that report. "Employment rose by 1.9 million from April to August. Total employment in August was 5.3% below its pre-pandemic level." This shows how quickly businesses started to recover and unemployment started to decrease as we came out of the first wave of COVID-19.

• (1150)

It still was below pre-pandemic levels, of course, because we hadn't gotten through the crisis yet, and certainly we know now that the second wave of COVID-19 was much worse so the impact on our economy has only gotten greater as a result of managing this crisis through the second wave.

Now, perhaps we could have a third wave, which could be avoided, quite honestly. If we stuck with our public health measures and didn't lift them prematurely, I think we could avoid a third wave, which would benefit our economy and all of Canadians as well as their health. Of course, the most important part of dealing with a pandemic is the health and safety of people.

I was really heartened by the fact that the Prime Minister called for March 11 to be a day to observe the incredible loss of life during COVID-19. I don't know how many people have been impacted by this exactly, but I know that 22,269 people have lost their lives in this pandemic over the last year.

I think about the ripple effects on all of the people who were in their families, all of the friends, all of the communities that are experiencing those losses, and we need to remind ourselves that every life matters, every single life matters. We can't ever become desensitized to the loss of life that's occurred from this pandemic.

While most of my speech has focused on the depth of impact on our economy and on our society, I really think that the impact and the loss of human life is something that we can never lose sight of.

Maybe I'll leave it there for the moment because I have so much more to say and there are so many more good points in here, but this might be a good time for me to take a moment. I feel myself getting a bit emotional, which is I think is natural, given how hard we've all been working for so long and how long I've just spoken for. That's a heartfelt reminder of the loss of human life that's happened in this pandemic, which I take very seriously.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll maybe resume again after some of my colleagues have had a few words, but that is a good place for me to stop for the moment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

I could actually sense the emotion in your words at this point as well.

Thanks for your speech.

Monsieur Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Turnbull, your way of showing us the human side of this pandemic is incredible and truly touching. It's a wonderful way to approach the topic.

We couldn't be more appreciative of your explanation for why we're here and the importance of being in the government. This historic situation is also a life experience. We'll be part of history and we'll be able to say that we were here to make good decisions.

That's why I'll be speaking more about the importance of the prorogation and the fact that we're still discussing it as a result of a purely political motion. It seems to want to get us to where we should be putting our energy.

• (1155)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lauzon, can you raise your microphone just a little bit?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes. Is it better like this?

The Chair: Let's just verify it with the clerk.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: That's much better, Mr. Lauzon. You can continue.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you.

During the committee meeting on December 10, we spoke about this motion, which was introduced in the wake of the prorogation. Mr. Turnbull opened the door to debate by saying that, if a pandemic didn't warrant a prorogation, he didn't know what it would take to warrant one. As I told you before, that's why we'll be part of history.

Did we foresee these events a year ago? We had all been elected for a few months and we were full of enthusiasm, in every committee. In the House, we were together. There was life on the Hill and in the lobbies of Parliament. We never missed an opportunity to give each other a good handshake or a hug. Now we almost exclu-

sively meet virtually. A small minority of us are in the House. We can see the committee room, but it's empty. Only the staff are there. Right now, we all meet virtually. We're having experiences that no one could have predicted.

At this point, I think that our committee is more relevant than ever. We have a list of issues that we should consider significant. That said, the list must be modified, because the priorities are different from what they used to be. We've had the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of the procedures that we must implement.

Our committee should be one of the most active, after the Standing Committee on Health, of course, given that we're talking about a health crisis. It should be one of the most engaged and dynamic committees. We should be showing the public that our procedures are effective, and we should know how we can do better in a government during a pandemic.

However, nothing in the motion reflects this. The prorogation is being used as a symbol and the motion is being used as a way to prove that a prorogation wasn't necessary. Basically, this is undermining our fine government and parliamentary machinery and preventing us from moving forward on certain issues.

The members of the opposition parties tried to show that the WE Charity caused the issue, despite the many nuances provided by several witnesses. Some witnesses disagreed. They felt that it was necessary to prorogue Parliament in order to move forward with decisions on the pandemic and to give the government an opportunity to refocus on priorities that serve the interests of Canadians.

It's important to remember that we were the first government to propose a report after the prorogation. That public report was well received. We explained why, in this unprecedented situation, the prorogation was warranted.

I want to quote from the evidence given by Kathy L. Brock, a political studies professor at Queen's University. She said the following about the reasons for the prorogation last August:

First, yes, to reset, but also to emphasize what the government priorities are in a changed circumstance ...

• (1200)

Second, if you look at 2020, this was a government that was tired. This was a government that was under a lot of pressure. This is when a government makes very serious mistakes, and they are exposed to the public as failures of government, malfeasance or misdemeanours of some type, when in fact they're due to errors of exhaustion.

This gave the government and the public sector time to regain their energy.

I want to talk to you about this.

This may sound trite, but I wasn't fortunate enough to receive a high level of education in my youth. However, I enjoyed being a welder for 21 years, a good part of my life. Afterwards, I went back to university to become a teacher.

I want to talk to you about the most important issue, which is the psychological fatigue and human fatigue tied to the work environment. We experience psychological fatigue on a daily basis. Every day, we contact people, we work in committees and we meet with witnesses.

During a pandemic, almost nothing positive happens. We're all teleworking and staying at home. I think that this is extremely difficult on a psychological level. Together, we need to show the public that we're human, that we're here, that we're listening to our constituents and that we're strong, despite all the deaths.

Personally, this has affected me directly, since I'm the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors. During the pandemic, I was the one in office, and I still am. It hurts me a great deal when someone takes the opportunity to make political hay on the backs of seniors. It hurts me tremendously to hear someone say that the deaths are related to politics.

This pressure has been mounting for ages, and it just concerns the psychological aspect. I could go on and on. Our committees will need to do more work on social isolation and the psychological damage experienced during a crisis. As you can see, we're all very comfortable. Some people are working from their kitchens or the great outdoors, while others are working in offices or nice spaces. However, this isn't how things really are.

I've attended Zoom meetings. Sometimes, the presidents of certain associations had to move into a closet or a small room because their three children were running around the house. They had to seclude themselves in places where they could access the Internet. This doesn't even take into account family pressure.

I'll address the importance of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. At the last meeting, we opened a door, and it got me thinking. I wrote about anything that would support work-life balance and teleworking. I made a distinction between the two, but I'll save that for later. I really want to tell you how much talking to the members of the new committee made me think.

I now want to talk about my job as a welder.

When we felt psychological fatigue, it affected our work. We wondered whether we were in the right place and we called our work into question. It also affected our colleagues, our performance and our sleep. As members of Parliament, we're no different from anyone else. We sometimes have sleep issues, which affect our health. Lack of sleep can be linked to high blood pressure or diabetes, for example. We all have small hidden health issues. Experiencing stress, a pandemic and psychological distress isn't good for our health.

Queen's University professor Kathy L. Brock often said that this enabled us to regain our energy somewhat. Was the timing right or not? We discussed the matter. We'll have a chance to talk about it again a little later. I think that the timing was right.

Mr. Turnbull clearly explained the process after the first wave and the importance of preparing for the second wave.

• (1205)

I'll talk about fatigue. We just spoke about psychological distress. The professor was right on the money. However, she also talked about exhaustion caused by long working hours.

As members of Parliament, we're always meeting, always talking, and we're still being asked a lot about vaccines. I understand that we're in politics and that I also chose to get into politics.

There has never been such a great opportunity for us to work together. We shouldn't be using this opportunity to play politics. Sometimes, I find it really distasteful when a journalist's words, for example, are used in public or in the House to score points in the middle of a pandemic. Whether we like it or not, we must deal with this pandemic and we shouldn't use it to play politics.

We can politicize many other issues. Many issues are on the table. The House is continuing to sit as a result of the many support programs established during the pandemic.

I want to tell the opposition members that we looked everywhere for ideas and that there's no better consultation. For example, for the new horizons for seniors program, we worked with all the parties to ensure that seniors in every constituency in Canada could benefit from the program. The program criteria weren't established based on merit alone. They were established on a constituency-by-constituency basis, with a minimum requirement for each constituency. Several constituencies represented by opposition members benefited more from the program.

In the past, some constituencies didn't even apply for the new horizons for seniors program. These communities now have several projects. We're getting emails from members of the opposition parties thanking us for our work. This was the result of taking a step back.

With the minister's help, we consulted with all the parties so that we could invest an additional \$20 million for seniors during the pandemic. These projects are being created to break isolation, to purchase new iPads, to provide Internet training or to teach seniors how to connect through Zoom or FaceTime. These are small, basic training sessions.

I've seen some great projects. I saw that people were offering online yoga classes for seniors. One teacher was doing yoga online to get seniors moving in their rooms, when they were isolated for the past four or five months with a bed, a chair and a sink. The physical distress that these seniors experienced is the same distress that Queen's University professor Kathy L. Brock described.

Exhaustion has been experienced everywhere. Young people have never watched so many television shows or played so many video games. As part of my family values, I like my children to move around, meet with friends and socialize.

You know that we all, as members of Parliament, have an active social life. Several of my activities take place on the weekends. My children are used to following me around or doing other activities where they meet people. Now they're cooped up in their rooms playing video games. This is psychologically unhealthy, but what else can we do?

No matter how much we introduce them to painting and music and try to innovate, we're also helping to isolate them. Psychological distress often goes hand in hand with physical distress. Everything is linked.

The prorogation gave the government a chance to take a step back and set new priorities.

• (1210)

Of course, for Canadians, the fight against COVID-19 is important. However, the economic recovery is also important. Mr. Turnbull talked about this. A great deal has been done.

It takes many measures to spend \$300 billion. Is this perfect? No, nothing is perfect in this world. Nothing is perfect in a crisis where we must rush to make decisions. We're still debating the decision on the Canada recovery sickness benefit. None of the 338 members of the House of Commons anticipated that a worker returning from a trip down south would be eligible for these benefits while in quarantine. We didn't even think about travel at that point. We didn't think that the provincial governments would allow people to travel or that agencies would offer cheap trips down south, which created a difficult situation when people returned home. Everyone voted for this measure, but no one thought about this possibility, because we were making decisions quickly.

We often need to take a step back in order to move forward. Psychological and physical exhaustion can lead to mistakes. In politics, there isn't much room for error. I don't know how many questions we've received in the House about travellers returning to Canada. I don't know how many emails I've received about the fact that workers returning from trips would obtain \$1,000 in compensation for lost earnings during their quarantine. We made this decision together and we must take responsibility for it. However, the opposition took this opportunity to try to show that we were making bad decisions.

Now we're discussing a prorogation that some people say shouldn't have taken place. However, the opposition members' questions clearly show that they had already decided why we prorogued Parliament. Several opposition members said that the prorogation should have taken place at the start, before we even knew the ins and outs of the situation, before we even knew that there would be a second wave and variants, and before we even knew how the vaccine development and negotiations would proceed.

At the time, we said only that we were working with seven different vaccine suppliers and that this would give Canada the largest range of vaccines in the world. Yet we heard only that we weren't

doing anything about vaccines and that we were unable to govern because we were caught off guard by the \$1,000 sent to travellers, even though this money stemmed from a measure that everyone supported. We missed a great opportunity to show Canadians that we were working together to fight the pandemic.

Queen's University professor Kathy L. Brock spoke about the reasons for the August prorogation. She said that the prorogation gave the government a chance to step back and set new priorities for Canadians, including the fight against COVID-19, but also the economic recovery. That's where my colleague Mr. Turnbull set the stage. We needed a fresh start, because we knew that there would be a tremendous impact on our economy, and therefore on our businesses. In constituencies like mine, in rural areas, micro-businesses are the largest employers.

• (1215)

When we have a factory with 40 employees, that's wonderful. In a rural area, we don't have office towers, we don't build more than three stories, and we don't have public transportation. However, 60% of the population doesn't have affordable high-speed Internet access. This sums up how isolated we are and shows the importance of working together in a rural area during a pandemic like COVID-19. We needed to take a step back and look at the big picture and to really refocus on the priorities in order to deal with the pandemic.

Speaking of decisions and taking a step back, do you think that we've been twiddling our thumbs? No. We've never done so many consultations. We've never talked so much. We've never prepared so thoroughly for after the pandemic. We're currently in the midst of the pandemic. However, we need to talk about what will happen afterwards, about the economic recovery. This recovery will depend on our decisions. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs really has a role to play in all this. We have many other things to do besides trying to play politics and undermine the government with this type of motion. We can talk about this later.

At the start, a move to vote was made because we had had a six-hour debate. No debate will be long enough to ensure that we can keep working together without undermining the government. The prorogation study launched in December involved a dozen witnesses. Since then, the vaccines have arrived, we're in the midst of distributing the vaccines to the provinces and territories and we're seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. I believe in this, and I've been waiting for this moment for a very long time. However, nothing will go back to normal, because many procedures must change now. Life won't go back to the way that it was before.

I don't know how long it will be until I can meet with my colleagues or give them a good, heartfelt handshake. To me, a handshake is the best sign of agreement and acknowledgement possible. With a good handshake or a "high five," life is good and we move on. However, this will no longer exist. No one will dare to shake our hands in the coming years. We aren't talking about months, but years. Our way of doing things will change, and so will our closeness. Fear is here to stay. I'm very sorry to say this, but fear will linger.

We met with witnesses who started by telling us that the prorogation shouldn't have taken place and that it was a way to get out of a situation. They were right. We were getting out of a situation. We were getting out of a pandemic. However, their mind was made up for the wrong reasons. The witnesses aren't experiencing what we're going through on the ground. No one else has the opportunity to experience this apart from a member of Parliament who is getting involved in their community, speaking to their people and making calls to their constituents during the week and on the weekends.

For example, if you call someone in the Toronto Centre area or the National Capital Region, where a large portion of the population consists of public servants who are teleworking, who have never been subject to a salary penalty, who have adapted to working from home with government equipment, who haven't had to spend money and who no longer need to commute, you certainly won't see as much distress and people won't be as affected.

• (1220)

There are two main ways to cause someone distress: hit their family or hit their wallet. The pandemic has affected not only people's wallets and families, but people themselves. The situation is extremely difficult for people who have lost their jobs, for business owners who have had to close and reopen repeatedly, and for restaurant owners who have had to close their dining rooms.

In my constituency, producers have had to throw away tons of edible produce. We have a program in place to assist with produce donations to food banks. However, it wasn't possible to donate 20 tons of potatoes to a community centre. A community centre doesn't have the capacity to handle six truckloads of potatoes or to deliver the potatoes to food banks. The system wasn't designed to deal with a pandemic.

In addition, 10,000 hens had to be buried. I learned that some hens were bound for restaurants and some were bound for grocery stores. When hens are a certain size, they can't be sold at grocery stores. These hens are then bound for restaurants. Since the restaurants were closed, the hens had to be slaughtered and buried. This happened in my constituency. These decisions were extremely difficult to make. Nothing was perfect.

Furthermore, the ferries have been forgotten.

Last year, when the pandemic began, Quebec was affected by flooding. In my constituency, seven municipalities were affected by flooding. At the start of the pandemic, I was at the water's edge with my long boots, alongside my constituents. We helped people get equipment out and save animals. Since a dam was showing signs of weakness and was in danger of collapsing, army heli-

copters were brought in as backup to quickly evacuate families from their homes and take them to a community centre. We had to leave animals, horses and dogs behind. I experienced these things in my constituency.

Now we're being hit by this pandemic. Not everyone hit by this crisis last year was eligible for the programs. We try to provide the best programs possible, but nothing is perfect and we can't serve everyone. It's extremely important to step back, reflect on the situation, and provide data to decision-makers so that we can do better. In fact, that's what we did during the pandemic.

Despite all the evidence to that effect, at the December 10, January 28, February 16 and February 18 meetings, opposition members continued to say that the prorogation occurred only because of the WE Charity scandal. They had their minds made up from the start, even before the committee began its study on the reasons for the August 2020 prorogation. So why go any further? We have everything needed to prepare a report. The reasons for the prorogation have already been established. Several experts have said that the pandemic was reason enough to prorogue Parliament.

We're talking about an unprecedented health and economic crisis that has significantly affected the lives of all Canadians. It has taken the lives of thousands of people in our country. Since this is a global crisis, we'll need to help other countries in the aftermath of the pandemic. We don't want the crisis to return or to take another form.

• (1225)

In Canada and Quebec, we're lucky to have our system. This crisis showed us how fragile our system was and how such a big and strong system could be broken.

Yesterday was International Women's Day. I had a special thought for women. I decided to dedicate this day specifically to the women on the front lines who are serving Canadians and who have been working hard since the start of the pandemic. This unprecedented health and humanitarian crisis has strained the system. These women have felt the pressure of the broken system.

No matter how many times members of the opposition parties hear this, it seems that nothing will change what they've been thinking since this study began. I've realized this. Even though I'm a new committee member, I understood that, no matter what we say, their minds are made up. Their mind was made up even before the start of the committee meetings.

As a new committee member, I had to read the full documents and analyze the information to get up to speed. I can tell you that this unprecedented crisis has opened the door to possibilities. The prorogation had a purpose. However, the opposition used this opportunity to confuse Canadians with regard to the reasons for the prorogation.

Since the opposition members had preconceived notions, the template for the questions was already prepared. I had the chance to read the questions for the various witnesses who appeared. I felt very strongly that the opposition members' minds were already made up. I want to reiterate that the reasons for the prorogation were outlined in the report on this topic. Questions were often twisted around in an attempt to get answers that opposed the prerogative of prorogation.

These are basically the thoughts that drive me and that I want to share with you today.

I'll talk a bit about the report tabled in Parliament regarding the August 2020 prorogation. This document, which consists of 42 pages and includes appendices, already addresses the prorogation that took place last August. We have many other things to worry about.

I'm thinking of some of the questions that you asked certain professors about the technological processes that we're currently using and that we'll be using in the future. I've seen many great things. I'm really excited to come up with new ideas for things such as parliamentary protection and teleworking. I want to address the importance of teleworking and emphasize the difference between work-life balance and teleworking. Work-life balance is about obligations. Teleworking is about accommodation. This distinction is extremely important. I want to have the chance to discuss this matter further in the committee.

I have many ideas for you. As soon as we can put this motion behind us, move forward and prepare a report, we'll be able to roll up our sleeves and work together. This motion doesn't serve any purpose in a time of crisis.

- (1230)

I, for one, did my homework. I don't want to offend anyone. However, some of the points raised lead me to believe that certain committee members only skimmed over the report, without really reading it. The report clearly outlines the reasons for the prorogation that took place in August 2020. The report is clear and well written. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the staff who helped prepare the report and who organized all the questions asked by committee members and the responses provided to the committee since December.

I'll briefly address this report. I want to talk about the report because I think that it shows the irrelevance of the motion before us today. We're always coming back to this motion.

In the introduction to the report, the first page notes that our government changed the Standing Orders to ensure that the current government and future governments remain transparent: "Pursuant to Standing Order 32(7), this report shall set out the reasons for the recent prorogation of Parliament."

At the outset, I spoke about the report. Our government was the first to table this type of report after a prorogation.

I'll continue reading the report:

In 2015, our government committed to changing the Standing Orders to ensure that ours and future federal governments remain transparent with Canadians in all aspects of governance, including the use of prorogation. This report is intend-

ed to provide parliamentarians, and all Canadians, with greater clarity about why our government prorogued Parliament in August 2020.

This is in keeping with our commitment to Canadians.

During the 10 years of Stephen Harper's government, there were prorogations. However, the reasons for the prorogations were never explained. In fact, no Prime Minister has ever publicly explained the reasons for a prorogation. Why are we tabling a report? The goal is to keep people informed and to ensure that we remain transparent.

During previous prorogations, journalists and many other people could make their own assumptions about the reasons for the prorogation. Some people brought up the economic recovery, and other people thought that it was in preparation for a cabinet shuffle, for example. In short, everyone came up with a number of reasons for the prorogation.

It was important for us to set the record straight right after the prorogation and to clearly explain the reasons for the prorogation. That's why our government submitted a report explaining the reasons for the prorogation, period.

The prorogation was done properly. The Prime Minister decided to prorogue Parliament. He submitted the request to the Governor General and she agreed. We then recalled Parliament to set things straight and to work on the next steps in the pandemic.

In the first half of 2020, it became clear that the 2019 Speech from the Throne, when our government won the confidence of the members of the House of Commons, no longer reflected the circumstances in which we were governing. As I said, things change very quickly. In fact, certain things may happen this week that will require us to make adjustments starting next week.

- (1235)

For example, we need to make adjustments each time Health Canada approves a new vaccine, since the storage or use conditions are different from one vaccine to another. There are all kinds of logistics involved in freezing vaccines. When we talk about 500,000 doses of vaccines, we aren't just talking about 500,000 arms to vaccinate. Far from it. We need to coordinate deliveries with the provinces and territories, not to mention preparations for the deliveries. Organizations were evicted from their host community centres so that refrigerators could be set up to store thousands of doses of vaccines. All this has affected the economy, the public, the organizations and the people who will be vaccinated. In addition, each province and territory has its own vaccination system, which complicates the logistics somewhat.

All this shows that our decisions this week may need to be changed or adapted next week. Under these circumstances, clearly the priorities set out in the Speech from the Throne were already different in the wake of the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, of course.

This pandemic is not only a global health crisis, it's also a global economic crisis.

The report outlines the challenges faced by the government. The need to help Canadians was paramount, as the following quote shows:

In March alone, Canada's Gross Domestic Product contracted by 7.2 per cent and more than a million jobs were lost. In April, there was a further drop of 11.6 per cent, with 1.99 million jobs lost. Millions of Canadians now faced dire financial straits, in addition to concerns about their health and that of their loved ones.

We set up programs to try to help family caregivers, people who had lost their jobs, businesses, communities and seniors. We helped as many people as we could.

Again, the pandemic is causing these job losses. I don't blame the provinces and territories for having to impose restrictions and create systems of zones—red, yellow and green. However, once an area becomes a red zone, jobs are lost and restaurants are closed. Sugar shacks in Quebec are struggling. Some of them, in my constituency, have managed to continue their activities by offering to deliver their products. Some sugar shacks in my area have even managed to maintain their sales by reinventing themselves. However, some businesses have suffered tremendous losses.

We need to step in and do more for businesses. We must respond and act quickly to help these companies deal with the crisis.

Are these jobs lost forever? Will the labour market return to normal after the pandemic? Will the tourism and food service industries return to their former levels? We hope so.

All the provinces have implemented the tightest restrictions possible to fight the pandemic together. Yet opposition members stand in the House and hold the Canadian government responsible for job losses, even though drastic decisions are being made to fight the pandemic. We're being blamed for job losses and we're being accused of not responding quickly enough. I know that I'm in politics to receive this criticism from the opposition, and I accept it.

● (1240)

However, we now have the chance to show Canadians that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has a role to play and that it has everything it needs to make the best possible recommendations on a number of issues that we consider extremely important.

As a new committee member, I sincerely hope that we'll all pull together to continue working. I want to work together. I also want to represent francophones. Although this committee is predominantly anglophone, I want to represent francophones in order to improve the system and move forward. To do so, we must drop this motion, prepare the report and make progress on the many other issues.

In the wake of the job losses, we responded. The prorogation gave us the chance to step back and determine how we could improve the jobs and economic situation. Out of that came the pandemic economic recovery plan. A number of measures will be taken.

Our best move was to help small businesses through CFDCs and BDCs in the regions. For people who are unfamiliar with BDCs and CFDCs, I'll explain their role.

These organizations help companies through grants and support services. They help companies develop business plans, for instance. During the pandemic, the organizations have been supporting SMEs by giving them the opportunity to reinvent themselves. For example, they can help SMEs create websites. These organizations provide the funding needed for companies to keep running and to reinvent themselves. The organizations provide innovation support and help companies purchase modern equipment to increase productivity and create jobs.

In short, CFDCs and BDCs will play a crucial role in the post-pandemic economic recovery.

Our government has ensured that the relevant ministers are working together, despite the pandemic. We have also been working with BDCs and CFDCs to make more funding available to invest in communities and in creating future jobs.

Now we're no longer just talking about creating jobs, but about maintaining jobs. It's all very well and good to innovate and create new jobs. However, what matters is that we keep the jobs that we have. We mustn't lose our services either. In rural areas, closing a small corner store has the same effect as closing a Walmart in downtown Toronto. We value our post offices and all our small businesses that provide personalized service. We want our workers to look forward to opening the doors of their small businesses in the morning in order to serve the public. We want them to feel excited about coming to work.

Again, as the economy recovers, it's difficult to meet the needs of all types of businesses. We know that some businesses won't make it through the crisis and will close. Some businesses were already in a precarious position before the pandemic. This could be the result of supply chain or corporate structure issues, competing businesses moving in nearby, or a shrinking market caused by changing needs or a declining interest in a product.

● (1245)

The government will be there to help small businesses reinvent themselves. That's one of the reasons why Parliament was prorogued. We thought about how we would help small and medium-sized businesses.

We know that major food chains have been hit hard, especially when it comes to the storage of some of the less-consumed products during the pandemic. A large plant in my constituency had to close for a few weeks because the warehouses were already full. This is part of the economic crisis related to the pandemic.

We took swift and concrete action to support health care systems across Canada. On March 11, 2020, the Prime Minister announced \$500 million for the provinces and territories to support the health care systems that are so critical and to make testing available. We knew that health care services were precarious and that there was a significant need for equipment. That's why we made this decision on March 11, 2020. The purpose of all this equipment was to fight the virus. The tests and rapid tests that we sent to the provinces and territories gave us the ability to track the progress of the virus.

It's wrong to say that the government has done nothing for health care. Since the start of the pandemic, we've been fully co-operating. We've transferred all the necessary equipment to provincial and territorial health care systems to fight the pandemic.

It's also important to remember that we sent the army and the Red Cross as backup in two Canadian provinces where the health care system was broken. Two provinces, Quebec and Ontario, had alarming statistics. We had to get more involved in the system. We should be proud that our government could provide medical services through the military and its officials. They could provide support in places where the system was broken.

We've implemented a number of programs and measures. There's nothing better than a prorogation to give us time to sit down and think about how we can best deal with the crisis and support all health care systems in Canada. Our measures to help Canadians during this crisis were identified in working meetings or reflection sessions that we held every day. As members of Parliament, we were the eyes and ears of Canadians.

We've listened to all the questions asked in the House of Commons by opposition members. We've also received many emails from members. I've personally met with members from across the province and they've mostly spoken to me about seniors. I showed the same concern for everyone who spoke to me, no matter who they were or where they came from. I opened my door wide to people who came to talk to me about seniors and about how to improve the system, just as I'm used to doing and as I've been taught to do. In my area, the door was open to almost anyone who needed help. Now, as a member of Parliament, my door is always open to suggestions for how to improve the lives of seniors. I've had constructive meetings with members from all parties, including members of the Bloc Québécois. I was open to suggestions.

• (1250)

We worked hard to improve before the second wave arrived. We all knew that a second wave was coming. We knew this based on the statistics at the height of the pandemic.

In some provinces and territories, we were seeing a loss of control, weakened health care systems, a lack of available beds and staff fatigue.

I want to quote a paragraph from page 5 of the report. When I read the paragraph, I thought that it was a key paragraph to share with you. I wasn't yet a committee member at the time of this statement:

Due to this unprecedented national effort, Canadians had effectively flattened the curve by the summer months. But the battle against COVID-19 was and re-

mains far from over. On August 17, the day before prorogation, the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, Dr. Theresa Tam, noted:

Our efforts indicate that we are keeping COVID-19 spread under manageable control but the virus is still circulating in Canada and we must not let down our guard. The shape of our national epidemic curve over time, including what impact COVID-19 might have this fall, will be influenced by our collective commitment and actions to keep infection rates low.

Despite what Dr. Tam was saying, despite our situation at the time and our semblance of control, something else happened. It's funny, but it happened in August, at the same time as the prorogation. We knew that there would be some respite over the summer, because of the good weather. We knew that there would be gatherings. We knew that there would be no more activities or family parties. We knew that, as members of Parliament, we would receive fewer invitations to celebrations and festivals of all kinds in our constituencies. We knew that these would disappear. However, we didn't have a crystal ball. Then the prorogation of Parliament was announced.

[English]

Is it perfect timing?

[Translation]

In August, Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, said that we needed to be careful and to send clear messages to the public because we were between the first and second waves. Nothing was more relevant than Dr. Tam's warnings to show us that we needed to take a step back.

If we had taken that step back at the start, we wouldn't have been able to say that the curve of the first wave was flattening out. Flattening the curve of the first wave may have gotten us through the crisis, but you know very well how Canadian systems work. Our systems are very regulated, especially with respect to vaccine approval. That's a very good thing. At the time, we also knew that the solution—

• (1255)

[English]

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

I know that we are getting close to the one o'clock spot. After speaking to some of the whips and some of the other party members on this call, we recognize that there will be other committees that need to be heard today as well. I would ask that we suspend this meeting for now and come back to this issue on Thursday when we're normally slotted into the time schedule.

The Chair: We have four more minutes.

Mr. Lauzon, is it okay with you if we suspend until Thursday? If it's okay with you, then I'll just ask if we have consensus and we can just suspend.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: It's okay, as long as I start on Thursday because I have a little bit more to say.

The Chair: I promise we will keep to the list and the same speaking order.

One thing I want to mention is that Ms. Petitpas Taylor and Dr. Duncan had been booted off the system and the order changed from what you see. The order for Thursday would look like this: Monsieur Lauzon, Ms. Petitpas Taylor, Dr. Duncan and then Mr. Blaikie. That would be the speaking order for Thursday.

We will suspend for today and reconvene on Thursday. Thank you.

[The meeting was suspended at 12:57 p.m., Tuesday, March 9]

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

• (5900)

The Chair: I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 26 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Justin, how does this work? Do we still see the date as March 9, 2021, or is the date March 11, 2021?

The Clerk: It is March 11. It is still technically meeting 26, however, a continuation of the meeting from two days ago.

The Chair: Okay.

I used to have some colleagues who would joke and say it was whatever time or whatever date you last left it at, but I think it makes more sense to just say it's still meeting 26 as we only suspended the last meeting. We are picking up from where we left off.

Today's meeting, as always, is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25.

Mr. Clerk, I believe nobody is there in person today. Is that correct?

The Clerk: That's correct. No one is in the room.

The Chair: Okay.

I would just remind anybody who is in the room to keep the physical distancing that's necessary, to wear your non-medical masks when you're circulating in the room and when possible, even when seated, and to use the hand sanitizer that is provided there.

The rest of us are participating virtually, unless we have somebody sub in who would be in person.

I will be following along in the participants toolbar to see the order of hands raised, but we will pick up from where we left off last time and the order we left off.

If there are any points of order, please, as always, unmute your mike, raise the point of order to get my attention and then we'll hear your point of order. If somebody wants to speak to that point of order, they must raise their hand in the toolbar section.

Don't forget to put your interpretation on, if needed. You can choose the floor, French or English. You don't have to switch between the two, but I would suggest maybe a few seconds' pause be-

tween switching languages if you are going to switch from one to the other.

That's basically it. Make sure your mikes are on mute when you're not speaking.

We will pick up from where we left off.

Mr. Clerk, I believe we were on Monsieur Lauzon. Then we have Ms. Petitpas Taylor, followed by Dr. Duncan, and you'll have to remind me after that. I think you have the rest of the list.

The Clerk: That's right, Madam Chair. Mr. Lauzon has the floor, followed by Madame Petitpas Taylor, Dr. Duncan and Mr. Blaikie.

The Chair: All right. You can keep your hands raised or you can unraise your hands, since we have you on the speakers list in the proper order.

Sometimes when you get disconnected, which happened the last time and has happened many times before, your hand will automatically get dropped off the list, but we are trying to keep an accurate record so that we can see the difference. We're monitoring when that change happens. Of course, we're only human. It can be overlooked. Please raise a point of order if you think I have taken you out of the proper order you should be in.

Mr. Lauzon, please go ahead. You have the floor.

• (5905)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thanks, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Good morning. Thank you to everyone for being here.

Today is a momentous day. Each of our leaders and the Prime Minister commemorated the very reason that we are in Parliament and the reason that we must govern the country. They also highlighted just how strained our health care system is.

That ties in with a comment I made at the last meeting. I said that our health care system was broken and strained. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, I was deeply concerned about the challenges seniors have had to face throughout the pandemic, challenges they are still facing. The statements made by our leaders and the Prime Minister reminded us how important it was to move forward and respond. It was also important to take a step back in order to better anticipate the second wave of the pandemic.

At the last meeting, I reiterated what the university professors had told us. They said that the recovery was essential to the way forward, that it was important to start from scratch. We are all gathered today because certain members are trying to prove that the prorogation was not important. The evidence to the contrary is what our leaders and Prime Minister made very clear today: taking a step back is in our best interest so we can forge ahead smarter. Doing so benefits seniors and all Canadians. They have been hit hard by this unprecedented pandemic, which has been an exercise in learning, growing and making tough decisions.

Let us now compare Canada with other countries. In some places, health care workers had to decide which patients would be allowed to die first. Thanks to our health care system, things never got to that point in Canada, because we made sure the necessary machines and equipment were provided. Now, we are delivering vaccines.

As the Prime Minister said, to get through this, we must work together. This is no time for politicking. Yes, we all got into politics to be politicians, but we are in the midst of a health crisis—a pandemic.

Now is the time to turn the page, to prepare a report and to keep moving forward. Since the beginning, the intention has not been to examine the issue of prorogation and move forward. The goal has been to show that the government prorogued Parliament for reasons other than addressing the pandemic.

To put it mildly, I am still quite emotional after the remarks we heard today. Top of mind are all the families who have been affected and all the families who have lost loved ones—fathers, mothers and friends. We all know someone who has been affected by COVID-19. Some 20,000 Canadians have lost their lives. That is a lot of people. We owe it to them to do something. We owe it to them to set political games aside and forge ahead. That is how we will get through this.

The best thing the committee can do is turn the page, prepare a report based on all the comments it heard, and let staff get to the business of drafting a report and recommendations.

• (5910)

We can resume the discussion when we look at the recommendations. That would not only send a good message, but also allow us to move forward.

We have a list of issues we need to address in short order. When it comes to the issues that will shape a potential election campaign, no committee plays a more important role than the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I was impressed when I looked at the list of issues to be considered by the committee. I would very much like to help improve that list by adding issues that reflect today's reality, a reality that is totally different.

Barbara Messamore, from the University of the Fraser Valley, told the committee that a strong case could also be made that the unforeseen eruption of the COVID-19 crisis following the start of the 43rd Parliament provided a rationale for a new session, with a new Speech from the Throne setting out a fresh legislative program.

All of that led to the throne speech, the springboard for our decision-making going forward. However many times the opposition parties hear that, it seems to make no difference. Their minds were made up before we began discussing the motion. That was clear from the rounds of questions. The questions were subjective, implying that Parliament was prorogued for reasons that had nothing to do with the pandemic.

Today, the best thing we can do is move on. Our team must work together for Canadians, so we can make progress on the issues that matter.

The report on the 2020 prorogation of Parliament is the first of its kind. It marks the first time a government has submitted a report after proroguing Parliament. The government was under no obligation to do what it did. No other prime minister ever had to account for their decision to prorogue Parliament. We know the reasons behind past prorogations. No other prime minister committed to providing a clear and specific explanation of the reasons behind prorogation.

People can suspect plenty of things in politics. All kinds of things happen during a four-year term, and it's a different story when a minority government is in power. We know the government has a minority, but it was nevertheless elected by Canadians. The majority decided that Justin Trudeau and the Liberals would be the ones to govern Canada, like it or not. Now, we must work together to properly address people's needs further to the committee's decisions and recommendations.

• (5915)

Briefly, coming back to the report, I think it shows just how inappropriate the motion before us is. Bear in mind that our government changed the Standing Orders so that our and future governments would have an obligation to be transparent. I would like to read from the report: “Pursuant to Standing Order 32(7), this report shall set out the reasons for the recent prorogation of Parliament.”

It goes on to state the following: “In 2015, our government committed to changing the Standing Orders to ensure that ours and future federal governments remain transparent with Canadians in all aspects of governance, including the use of prorogation. This report is intended to provide parliamentarians, and all Canadians, with greater clarity about why our government prorogued Parliament in August 2020.”

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

Mr. Alain Therrien: The honourable member was speaking in French, but I was hearing the English interpreter. Could we get that fixed, please?

[*English*]

The Chair: In English...?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Yes, I was hearing the English interpreter.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. That can be distracting.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Indeed.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Is that better, Mr. Therrien? Can you hear me in French?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Yes, it's fine now.

[*English*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Do you want me to speak in English now?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: No. Seldom do I hear someone speaking in French, so please continue, if you wouldn't mind, Mr. Lauzon.

[*English*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you very much, Mr. Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Your French is excellent, by the way.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you. I am a pure laine Quebecker, after all.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for alerting us. That usually solves the problem. Just the alert is usually enough.

Thank you, Monsieur Therrien.

Carry on, Mr. Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you.

As I was saying, in 2015, we did not know a pandemic was coming. We did not know we would have to prorogue Parliament. It was the decision of a government that wanted to be transparent with Canadians and report on the reasons for prorogation after the fact.

The pandemic hit, and nothing was more warranted than a report on the reasons for prorogation. I want to reiterate that the government had to get things on the right track and set out its priorities in a new throne speech, in response to the pandemic.

The timing of the prorogation has been the subject of much debate. Was it the right time? Was it too soon or too late? Why didn't the government prorogue Parliament when the pandemic began? Some have said that the government should have prorogued Parliament at the very beginning of the pandemic, without knowing all the implications, without knowing that people would die and without knowing the fate that awaited seniors. This debate is even more timely now because of the variants, the vaccines, and the distribution of vaccines in the provinces and territories.

It would be appropriate to take a step back now as well. Let's imagine the government had prorogued Parliament at the beginning of the pandemic. A huge amount of information was lacking then. All along, our government has said that it would base decisions on science and the advice of professionals. How could scientists and health care professionals have predicted the future—the declaration of a pandemic—if Parliament had been prorogued when the crisis first began? The timing of the prorogation may not have been perfect, but it was appropriate.

In 2019, the government obtained the confidence of the members of Parliament in the House of Commons. During the second half of 2020, it became clear that the 2019 throne speech no longer represented the context in which we would govern. What caused the change? The pandemic, of course.

I repeat, the government did not have a crystal ball when it prepared its 2019 throne speech, which laid out its new policy direc-

tions. Then, suddenly, the pandemic struck, so different values and priorities had to guide us, as a government. That is a point I did not raise the last time the committee met, but I remembered it afterwards.

We responded swiftly with tangible support for health care systems across the country. On March 11, 2020, the Prime Minister announced \$500 million in funding for the provinces and territories—an important decision to support health care all over the country. Some have claimed that the government did not provide health care support to certain provinces, and yet, no government has ever done as much for health care as this one. We worked closely with public health authorities to support health care systems and get equipment to those who needed it. We provided funding, ventilators and support for long-term care facilities, not to mention sending in the military and the Red Cross to help.

We were there for the provinces and territories. That sets the stage and summarizes the gist of my remarks at our last meeting, bringing me to what I want to say to you today. I want to talk about the supports and programs we introduced to help Canadians during the crisis, because we knew the second wave was coming.

● (5920)

I've been poring through the report since Tuesday, and I'd like to read an excerpt from page 4:

Due to this unprecedented national effort, Canadians had effectively flattened the curve by the summer months. But the battle against COVID-19 was and remains far from over. On August 17, the day before prorogation, the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, Dr. Theresa Tam, noted:

Our efforts indicate that we are keeping COVID-19 spread under manageable control but the virus is still circulating in Canada and we must not let down our guard. The shape of our national epidemic curve over time, including what impact COVID-19 might have this fall, will be influenced by our collective commitment and actions to keep infection rates low.

That last paragraph is the important part. Why? Because, if Dr. Tam had known then about the variants and their ramifications, or if she had been concerned about anything other than flattening the curve, she would have said so.

Allow me to explain just how quickly the circumstances of the pandemic can change. In July, people got together more because of the warm weather. We all heard about gatherings in our ridings. There was a huge gathering of young people in my riding. People still gathered for weddings. All those events led to outbreaks that sent certain regions back into the red zone.

Nevertheless, no informed decision-making could have prevented that. No matter how much we told people to do all the right things—wash their hands, social distance and avoid gatherings outside their family bubbles—it was inevitable. On the whole, people have followed the guidelines. They have stuck it out during the pandemic. It is only a minority of people who have made it difficult to get the virus under control, given the alarming rate at which it spreads. When one person is infected, all of their contacts are at risk and they can bring the virus back to their households.

I want to take this opportunity to say that we should acknowledge the whole of our medical system. Essential workers were exposed to the virus every single day. They would come home after work and see their families, their children. Then, they would go back to work. All those doing essential work throughout the pandemic are brave people. They put themselves at risk, and some contracted the virus. The pandemic has been hard on all front-line workers, whether it be paramedics, police officers, grocery store employees or pharmacy staff, but they have never given up.

In the House this week, we talked about the supply chain. That includes not only the factory workers, but also the truckers who cross the border into the U.S., travelling all over to get Canadians the supplies they need. Supply shortages were a real possibility during the pandemic, but there was no such crisis. We never ran out of gas or staples like toilet paper. Everyone helped keep supply chains running throughout the pandemic, doing a good job of managing inputs and outputs to ensure adequate supply for Canada.

On page 5 of the report, the government talks about the importance of developing a plan and refocusing its priorities to face the second wave.

● (5925)

Furthermore, despite the success in flattening the curve in some regions of Canada, and our work to prepare for the fall, it was already clear in August that the colder months would bring new and more difficult challenges, for which we needed to prepare. As I explained, summer was ending and winter was on its way. We all know what happened.

Medical experts from across Canada made it clear that the question was not whether there would be a second wave, but how bad it would be.

That's all from the report, further supporting the fact that the government stepped back to take stock to inform its decision-making. After the first wave, people were at the end of their ropes, they were tired, emergency rooms were full, and hospitals had no empty beds. Every hospital had built makeshift areas for patients. I toured two of them when I went for COVID-19 testing. Workers had used plastic to create makeshift isolation areas for people with COVID-19 symptoms.

All the work was done in preparation for providing this care. Preparations had to be made. No one could have ever anticipated the size of the second wave or its impact on the health care system. We had to get ready. No one knew how bad it would be. It was anticipated that some parts of the country would have to return to lockdown. That meant closing borders and posting police officers where zones intersected to check whether folks could cross from one zone to the other.

My riding is mainly home to cottages and vacation properties. Whole neighbourhoods in a number of municipalities were deserted. Folks could not get to their cottages because of the lockdown. Canadians lost their jobs because of lockdowns; businesses were forced to close, including restaurants. The tourism industry was hit hard. Tourists come to my riding to discover and enjoy the majesty of nature. Municipalities rely on tourism. With travel prohibited,

tourists stopped coming to the area. It's tough to keep a tourism-based economy rolling without tourists.

We knew that more Canadians would get sick or die. That was the worst part of the whole thing. We knew the second wave would take its course and that a vaccine was not yet available.

Five and a half months into this pandemic—the greatest challenge Canadians have faced since the Second World War—the people of Canada deserved to know that the federal government had a bold and comprehensive plan. There is nothing in the world more important than being able to tell Canadians what the government can and will do to help them through whatever challenge comes next. A pandemic does not come with an instruction manual. The government strives to make the best decisions possible. It also works with the other parties to come through the crisis as a team.

I don't how it could be any clearer than that. I don't know what more justification the opposition members want. I could spend hours more talking about the reasons for the prorogation and the importance of our work.

● (5930)

Now, I will let other members take the floor to continue this important debate. Later, I will explain my position further.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

Go ahead, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

You're on mute. You'll have to start all over.

No, I still can't hear you.

This is the same problem I was having this morning. I was trying to do my sound check and even though I was unmuted, I couldn't be heard.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Chair, I had the same problem yesterday and had to reboot my computer. It updated. It took an hour and a half, and today it's now working much better. I don't know, but it could be that. That's just a thought.

The Chair: All I did was sign in and out, but you could probably....

Rather than that, let's hear from the clerk. He probably has some advice from IT. Maybe you could pull out your headphones and put them back in or something.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we're trying to figure out what that issue is because Madame Petitpas Taylor's audio was working fine when we were doing the sound check.

Madame Petitpas Taylor, is it possible that on your headset, the cord for your headset, the little button, similar to what Mr. Lauzon is showing you...? There's a little button, and sometimes the mute gets hit on that.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Can you hear me now?

The Chair: Yes, we can hear you. Thank you so much.

I take your point, too, Dr. Duncan, that a lot of on-the-record time in the House and in our committees is going to be spent saying, “Am I on mute? Can you hear me?” I guess these are the times of COVID.

Please, carry on.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: My sincere apologies about that.

First and foremost, I want to say hello to all the members and a special welcome to Scott Simms for joining us today.

Scott, we know you have a long history with PROC, and we really appreciate having you with us. I have to say to start off that I'm not as eloquent, perhaps, as Stéphane. I can't seem to talk as long, but I will certainly do my best in order to address this really important motion. I appreciate the comments that Stéphane and Ryan have made over the past while.

I have to say, as well, that I missed a few meetings because of the Board of Internal Economy, and I felt really bad about that, because I missed a part of the debate.

Today I certainly want to continue on the theme that I spoke about last time, which was about how the opinion of the opposition as to why prorogation occurred has already been made up in their minds. I really want to address that.

● (5935)

[*Translation*]

To give Mr. Therrien a break, I will switch to French. We tend to speak in English, so Mr. Therrien has to listen to the interpreted remarks. We appreciate the work the interpreters do, of course, but it can be tiring to always listen to people speaking in a language that is not your own. For that reason, I will make most of my comments in French. As an Acadian from New Brunswick, I enjoy speaking in my mother tongue.

Turning back to the motion, I want to point out how many hours we have spent debating the motion put forward by our friend and fellow member Ms. Vecchio. Since many people are probably not familiar with the motion currently being debated, I feel the need to bring everyone up to speed. We are still discussing the same motion. It bears rereading for those Canadians following our proceedings.

Ms. Vecchio's motion reads as follows:

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

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

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

with a recommendation that this committee be empowered to order her appearance from time to time;

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

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

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

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

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

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

That is the motion we have been debating for a few meetings now. The last time I had an opportunity to comment, I mentioned that we had been studying the matter of prorogation for several weeks. We heard from a number of experts and academics on the issue. On top of that, Pablo Rodriguez and public servants appeared before the committee on the reasons that led to the prorogation of Parliament.

I believe my fellow members already made this point, but if a health crisis of this magnitude is not a good enough reason to prorogue Parliament, I am at a loss to understand what is.

I also want to say the opposition had preconceived ideas about the reasons for prorogation. I read a number of comments made by opposition members last time. I have to tell you I was on duty in the House this week to take part in a debate that had been extended, and I was one of the lucky ones who got to participate in the debate that evening. Opposition members once again brought up WE Charity in relation to the reasons that led to the prorogation of Parliament. The opposition members, the Conservative members, in particular, had their minds made up about why the government prorogued Parliament, when in fact, the reasons are the opposite. In 2019, during the last election campaign, I knocked on thousands of doors, and my constituents told me what their priorities were. I often shared my ideas with friends and fellow members. The throne speech delivered in 2019 did indeed reflect the priorities of the government and those of Canadians.

As we all know, things changed completely in 2020. For the first time, we were confronted with a global public health crisis, in addition to a global economic crisis. That was the case, not just in Canada, but also around the world. The priorities of Canadians changed, and the government had to change course. Naturally, certain themes overlapped, but the government had to rethink its priorities and figure out how to better support Canadians.

● (5940)

As I said, the opposition members have already made up their minds. I'd like to quote a few people I quite admire. The first is my friend and the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock. Mr. Schmale was on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in 2015, 2016 and 2017, and he is someone I have always held in high regard. Here's what he said:

I do not think it is any secret that the Prime Minister, we all know, decided to prorogue Parliament because of his involvement in the WE Charity scandal. Following the words of the Governor General, there was absolutely nothing in the Prime Minister's address last night on prime time that could not have been announced in any normal press briefing or even here on the floor of the House of Commons. The Prime Minister, of course, as many are saying, pulled the wool over the eyes of our network executives, claiming that it was not partisan politics but an address to the nation on COVID-19. We all know, after the fact, that the address was entirely political, providing further evidence that prorogation was all about distraction.

Once again, the honourable members are telling us that all the witnesses I listed need to come before the committee, but they have already made up their minds. When I read that statement, when I hear the member say that the Prime Minister's address was entirely political and meant as a distraction, I do not agree. The Prime Minister spoke to Canadians every day during the pandemic. This is not about politics.

Constituents in my riding told me that they would tune in every morning at 11:30 to hear what the Prime Minister and our government were doing to help them. I dare say everybody probably did; I know I did. I would be working at my computer and making calls, but I also wanted to hear the daily update because it gave us hope. It wasn't about politics. When I would take my walks in the park, not far from here, people would stop me because they recognized their member of Parliament, and they would thank me for the job we were doing and the support we were providing.

It was not part of the 2019 throne speech, because we didn't know a crisis was coming, but people were truly thankful for the work we did. Was it perfect? No, absolutely not. We didn't have a manual or guidelines on how to manage the crisis. With input and suggestions from all the parties, we were able to introduce solid programs.

Accordingly, when I hear someone call the decision to prorogue Parliament entirely political, I disagree. The throne speech is not about politics. Yes, some of the themes in the 2019 and 2020 throne speeches overlapped, but the 2020 throne speech contained measures specifically tied to the pandemic.

I would also like to quote the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, who had this to say:

The Prime Minister prorogued the House to avoid scrutiny on his WE scandal. We all know this. The day after prorogation, the government announced these benefits, several of which would need legislation. Instead of spending time over the last month debating and passing these benefits, the Prime Minister shut down

Parliament. Now that the CERB has ended and many Canadians are not eligible for EI, the government is playing politics with the well-being of Canadians.

Much has been said about the prorogation of Parliament, as we have all heard, but I think we lost less than two sitting days in the House. Our government took the time to rethink its priorities and set out guidelines to support Canadians throughout the biggest health crisis of our lifetimes.

● (5945)

The last person I'd like to quote is Mr. Bezan, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman. On October 5, Mr. Bezan said this:

The only reason we had prorogation by the Prime Minister, since the throne speech is so uninspiring, is the WE scandal. It was not about resetting the agenda; it was about trying to do a cover-up and ensuring the opposition parties could not continue to litigate the government about its scandal and the almost billion dollars it was going to hand over to the WE Charity.

Once again, it's a bit much to call the throne speech uninspiring and to say that it was not about resetting the agenda. Let's look at the differences between the 2019 throne speech and the 2020 throne speech. The opposition likes to say that the 2020 throne speech was not about resetting the agenda and that it was essentially more of the same. I carefully read both speeches and compared them. Certainly, some themes overlap, including climate change. Just because we are going through a health crisis does not mean we should stop addressing the climate crisis.

In 2019, our key priorities and areas of focus revolved around the fight against climate change. When I was knocking on people's doors and making calls during the last election campaign, I was shocked by how many seniors were adamant that the government do something about climate change. Even though they had not been familiar with the issue or considered it a priority before, they told me their kids and grandkids had taught them about the importance of climate change. They felt strongly that the government needed to do the right thing and meet its targets. Climate change remained a priority in 2019. We took ambitious action to make sure we met our targets.

Another issue people cared about was greening the economy. We want to be sure we make those investments. If I'm not mistaken, the government talked about implementing a roadmap in its 2019 throne speech.

Strengthening the middle class was also a key issue for people. As a member of Parliament since 2015, I am very proud of the measures we have taken between then and now to support the middle class and Canadians in need. All of those actions have made a real difference in the lives of Canadians, whether it be introducing the Canada child benefit or lowering taxes. We can't just stop strengthening the middle class now. Those efforts have to continue.

Walking the road of reconciliation is an important focus as well. We must continue moving forward as a partner with indigenous peoples to meet our respective goals. That means working together. Indigenous peoples must show us the path to take, and we must work hand in hand to make sure we get there.

Lastly, keeping Canadians safe and healthy remains a top priority. That includes addressing gun violence. Many constituents told us how important it was that the government do something. Coming from a social work background and having worked on the front lines, I saw the devastating impact guns can have. I'm not proud to admit that New Brunswick has the highest rates of domestic violence and murder-suicide in the country. There is a long way to go to make things better, and we will keep up that work.

• (5950)

Another challenge, it seems, is consistent right across the country. Here, in Atlantic Canada, a lot of us have trouble getting a doctor. Our government made a promise to Canadians, who told us they wanted everyone to have access to a family doctor. That, too, is a priority.

It ties in with pharmacare. I know my fellow member Mr. Blaikie is in favour of a universal pharmacare plan, like many of us. That is a priority for Canadians. As health minister, I had the privilege of working on that file. We made progress and we will continue working to make sure all Canadians have access to national pharmacare.

I could, of course, read the 2019 throne speech in full. Instead of going through it page by page, I'll stick to the broad strokes to highlight the differences between the 2019 and 2020 throne speeches. I just talked about the 2019 throne speech, which was prepared prior to the pandemic. It is 2021 now, and like most of you, I have spent the past year almost exclusively in my riding. I had an opportunity to travel to Ottawa once, but here, in New Brunswick—

• (5955)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I have really appreciated all the comments coming from all of our Liberal colleagues and their sharing with us the devastating impacts that we are all aware of with COVID.

I wonder if we can get back to the actual motion at hand again. We seem to have gone very far out, and I'm wondering if we can bring it back to the actual motion.

We seem to be speaking a lot about the throne speech and going into other matters there, which is fine, but perhaps we could get back to the motion. Perhaps there are some clarifications specifically on what they don't want to see when they look at the motion and who they don't want to appear. Maybe there's some actual information on that.

Perhaps we could get back to the motion and why they want to vote against it, rather than everything else.

Thanks.

The Chair: I'll remind the member to stay on point, although I think she was talking about the issue of prorogation.

Also, to all the members, as we know this is not our first meeting with a lot of interest and lengthy debate on this motion. I'm hoping that perhaps the members can talk about maybe eventually either coming to a vote or having some kind of agreement on the motion.

We will continue to hear from the members. Hopefully, there are some proposals that are put forward at some point.

I do also—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): I'm sorry, Madam Chair.

On that same point of order, it is difficult to make proposals. Liberal members are speaking a lot and not making proposals. I've been on the speaking list for some time. It's hard to make proposals when you don't have the floor.

I would remind committee members of that.

The Chair: That is absolutely noted, Mr. Blaikie. You are on the list after Dr. Duncan today.

I will allow, obviously, Ms. Petitpas Taylor, to carry on with her remarks. Thank you for all of your contributions.

One more thing, though, there is a subcommittee meeting after the scheduled time of this meeting today at 1:15 p.m. That's the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business. I know it's important to all of our members to make sure that private members' business can continue forward. Hopefully, we can address that closer to the end time. If there is agreement, again, you can let me know at that point.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I fully recognize the issue with the subcommittee. That is really important. Because I recognize that this will be another day of filibustering, I know there is very little change in today's schedule as well as the subcommittee business for members. It is relevant for the work that needs to be done on April 14. We do have ample time, just in case we do need to reschedule that as well.

I want to keep it just as a side note in the next hour that we could perhaps look at doing that at another time. We do luckily have some time on this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, go ahead. You have the floor.

[*Translation*]

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

In response to Mr. Blaikie's comment, I would just point out that I was on the speaking list for a while and I have quite a bit to say. Patience can wear thin sometimes, but I do understand the process can be long. Ms. Duncan also has things she would like to say. We are eager to hear what everyone has to say.

I will circle back to the motion now. To be honest, I think my comments were relevant to the motion because I was talking about the preconceived opinions of the opposition members. I simply expressed my position, which is that the government had valid reasons to seek prorogation. It was useful. The issue is not whether the throne speech was inspiring or not. The issue is whether it demonstrates a rethinking of goals and priorities. I know the committee has to hear what everyone has to say, so I will try to be succinct. We certainly want to make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak.

Briefly, I am going to run through what I consider to be the highlights of the 2020 throne speech, which opened the session of Parliament after prorogation.

Although I think everything in the throne speech is important, the part that's really crucial pertains to how the government will protect Canadians during a potential second wave of the pandemic. The recollection of some may be wanting, but at the time, we were extremely concerned about the second wave. It may not have been quite the same for those of us living in Atlantic Canada, but the second wave took a great toll on many ridings and provinces. Our government wanted to be there for Canadians and for small and medium-sized businesses. We wanted to make sure businesses could remain open.

As I said, the government built its approach around themes, while keeping the focus on helping Canadians through the second wave. As a government, we wanted to make sure the programs and supports were in place to build back better. The idea was not to rebuild by replicating what existed previously; we had suitable programs, but we now know some of them had gaps. Now seems like the right time to review the programs and tailor them more effectively to people's needs, so we can really help people, especially vulnerable Canadians. Not all Canadians enjoy the same privileges. We want to make sure everyone gets their fair share and has an equal opportunity to succeed. That is one of my top priorities, and it's also one of the reasons why I got into politics.

The pandemic has laid bare fundamental inequalities in our society. Owing to those inequalities, certain groups were hit harder by the pandemic than others. I repeat, the government wanted to pay special attention to the needs of those individuals, and see to it that programs and funding were in place to remedy the inequalities.

Furthermore, I was delighted that the throne speech included supports for people experiencing homelessness. Who would have ever thought that, in a small community like Moncton, the cradle of Acadia, people would wind up living on the streets or out of tents? That wasn't the case a decade ago, but we now see a lot of people who are homeless.

The throne speech mentions support for the rapid housing initiative; a number of organizations across the country have really benefited from the program. Under the initiative, the government is investing a billion dollars in housing units, and \$500 million is already in the hands of municipalities. The other \$500 million is available to organizations that apply for funding. I am happy to say that a program in my neck of the woods was funded through the initiative. We are working very closely with stakeholders to get housing units built for this population.

The throne speech also addresses the creation of national standards for long-term care facilities, an issue my fellow member Mr. Lauzon spoke about at length. According to figures released yesterday, 22,335 Canadians have died from COVID-19. The figure is heartbreaking, because that many human lives have been lost. Aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters and parents—gone. It is a painful reality.

• (6000)

In the early days of the pandemic, I lost my mother; she was in a long-term care facility. I miss her every single day. I even keep her picture next to me. In spite of everything, I am so glad she did not have to live out the pandemic in a long-term care facility; I think not seeing her daughter for a year would have done her in.

As hard as it may, making sure the provinces and territories work together to develop national standards is imperative. Neither the provinces nor the federal government is solely responsible. We must all come together to ensure seniors receive proper care. My mother spent some 10 years in a long-term care facility, so I had plenty of opportunity to see where the failings were. If we can learn one thing from what has happened, it should be this: we must invest what it takes to ensure seniors are properly cared for.

My apologies for becoming emotional. I wasn't planning to bring that up.

We also need to make it easier for women to participate in the workforce. As we all saw, women have suffered tremendously during the pandemic. They tended to be the ones who had to stay home. While not always the case, it was often women doing double duty: working from home while looking after the kids. The statistics show that, because of the pandemic, more women than men will not return to the workforce. Addressing the need for a national child care system is paramount, and I was certainly glad to see it among the government's priorities in the 2020 throne speech.

Moreover, we must acknowledge the supports that were put in place to help individuals cope with the pandemic. I won't list them all, but the government introduced some excellent programs to support individuals and families, such as the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery sickness benefit and the Canada recovery caregiving benefit. The government also made temporary changes to the employment insurance system, provided options to defer mortgage payments, and made supports available to the provinces and territories. Although the programs may not have been perfect, we were able to make adjustments to get Canadians the help they needed. We asked them to stay home to prevent the spread of the virus, so we made sure they had access to supports.

Another issue of real concern, especially in my riding, was the capacity of organizations to help individuals. As I've mentioned a few times, my background is in social work, so I truly understand the important role not-for-profit organizations play as community service providers. When I hear opposition members call the throne speech uninspiring, I feel like asking, "How could it have been more inspiring?" We were there to help people, businesses and all those not-for-profit organizations.

In my New Brunswick riding, people are doing a tremendous job, working tirelessly. Even though they are seldom well-paid, they are really there to help people. They were there during the crisis, and they still are. I am very happy with the programs we put in place to help those organizations. A number of them in my community have really benefited from that extra funding, which meant they could keep their doors open and provide more help to their clients.

I'll give you an example of a small business here, in Moncton. It's called Inspiration Café. In partnership with the Moncton United Way, the owners opened a small café that employed people with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems. They receive on-the-job training. Folks in the community really got behind the business, going there to eat and so forth, but the café had to close because of the pandemic.

• (6005)

The employees still wanted to work; they went through something of a grieving process. In conjunction with the United Way, the business received government support but could not reopen its dining room. Employees and volunteers got together to prepare and deliver meals twice a week for seniors living at home. Seniors knew they would have at least two good meals a week thanks to Inspiration Café.

I was fortunate enough to do a bit of volunteering at the café over the holidays, since many of the volunteers were off to spend time with their families and children. I spent a few hours with volunteers and employees, cooking and delivering meals, and I saw just how grateful the seniors were.

The pandemic-related investments made by our government have made a real difference. I don't think I mentioned it, but the café currently prepares and delivers about 600 meals a week for seniors—a rather impressive accomplishment.

Alternative Residences Alternatives is another organization that received assistance. It provides housing to people dealing with mental illness. The pandemic, of course, meant that the organization had to restrict visits significantly. The funding we made available was used to create spaces where families could visit residents in accordance with physical distancing and public health rules.

When I hear members call the government's throne speech and investments uninspiring, all I have to do is think about those accomplishments to know the opposite is actually true.

In my New Brunswick riding, the Alzheimer Society was able to introduce a new program. The organization had a support centre of sorts for families living with a person with Alzheimer's, and used

the financial support it received to provide families with education on COVID-19 and the public health guidelines.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is another organization I really admire. Naturally, in-person meetings could not take place during the pandemic, but thanks to the support our government provided, the organization was able to create digital spaces where youth and their mentors could meet via Facebook and Zoom.

The Boys & Girls Club of Moncton showed tremendous innovation, doing whatever it could to help youth. The organization has a multicultural clientele, which is wonderful. It really wanted to stay connected with young people, so it organized an activity where community leaders were invited to make a meal on camera so young people could cook along with them via Facebook. I had the privilege of taking part, and there were some really fun recipes for kids. Through activities like these, the Boys & Girls Club of Moncton has been able to reach out to young people, many of whom find it hard being separated from their friends and peers during the pandemic. The feeling of isolation is a real problem, so activities like these are helping young people.

I won't be too much longer. I know the clock is ticking, and I want to make sure Dr. Duncan has an opportunity to share her views today.

Ensemble Greater Moncton is one of the organizations that really benefited from the funding our government made available. It used to provide a lot of services to people living with HIV or AIDS, but with all the medical advances in the field in recent years, the organization now does a lot of work with people impacted by drug addiction.

• (6010)

[*English*]

SIDA/AIDS Moncton, or Ensemble Moncton, was very fortunate that during the pandemic they received some additional funding.

Oftentimes, they provide harm reduction supplies to people who use drugs, but they were not able to have that frontline service because their agency was often closed because of different colourings—they were going into a red zone or orange zone—and their agency is really small. Because of funding that we've been able to provide for them, they've been able to purchase two computerized interactive harm reduction resource dispensers that are available for people with addictions and disorders.

New Brunswick is a pretty cold province and we get a lot of snow, but these machines are outside. They're centrally located in our downtown. They have all of the safe supplies that they need. The temperature is controlled, so even if they want condoms or whatever the case may be, the temperature is not going to affect the security of any of the products that are given. It's really quite something how we've come a long way. As well, because of the pandemic, they've also made sure that there are face masks and hand sanitizer available in the dispensing machine. This was and is all free of charge.

We wanted to make sure that people received the safe supplies that they needed if they were using. The pandemic should not be a barrier to that. Ensemble Moncton has offered tremendous services over the past years to the community. I was really proud to be able to go to see them as they moved forward with the installation of that program because it was just so important.

Finally, I'm going to make one other comment. I could go on and on because I have so many great agencies, as I'm sure most of you have as well. The Multicultural Association of the Greater Moncton Area, which is a settlement agency that receives a lot of people, was overwhelmed during the pandemic with a lot of newcomers who just didn't know what to do.

They were provided with additional funding. At one event that I had just before Christmas, I asked for them to share with me what difference that had made in their lives and the lives of their clients. The director of the multicultural association had just indicated to me that some people had lost their jobs because of the pandemic. Because of the waiting period for the different programs, one particular client needed medication for their diabetes. The funding that we were able to provide to them bridged them.

All that is to say that when I hear folks say that the throne speech and the work that we've done wasn't inspiring and was just the same, I have to challenge that. We are here to help Canadians. We are all here to help Canadians no matter which party we're in. When we work together we come up with better policy. We really do. When we keep politics out of it—I know we're all politicians; that's who we are—I think we can accomplish so much more when we work together.

During the pandemic right now, people don't want us pointing fingers. It's not who's doing what. They just want us to get the job done. I think if that can be our focus, Canadians are going to be well served by that. Having a minority Parliament is a time for that as well. We have to take each other's feedback and move the best policies forward.

I still have an awful lot of other comments that I could make, but I really want to make sure that my friend and colleague, Dr. Duncan, is going to have an opportunity to share her comments. I'll come back. I'm sure we'll perhaps have another round. Dr. Duncan, we missed you for a few weeks when you were away. We're really happy that you're back with us.

I really want to thank the committee for allowing me time to speak and to share a few thoughts on this issue.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

• (6015)

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, indeed, we're very happy to have you back, Dr. Duncan.

Thank you, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Go ahead, Dr. Duncan. The floor is yours.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Dear friends, Madam Chair, before I start, I really feel I have to acknowledge that today we come together to remember, pay tribute to and grieve for all those we have lost to COVID-19. We reflect on the sacrifice, the hurt and the suffering, and we offer comfort to doctors, nurses, frontline workers, survivors, families and communities. We promise to learn the lessons.

Thank you to my extraordinary colleagues, Ryan, Stéphane and Ginette, for your speeches.

Ginette, most recently, thank you for your caring. We are all so profoundly sorry for your loss.

To my dear colleagues, my apologies for my absence recently. I have missed you all.

At this time, it's nice to be able to celebrate, so to Peter and his wife, I wish a very happy 40th wedding anniversary. We all need some light, happy anniversary.

When it comes to the motion, I understand the politics of this motion. However, every single day, Canadians are becoming sick with COVID-19, they are being hospitalized and they're dying. Our focus has to be on Canadians. The COVID-19 pandemic remains a public health emergency, an economic crisis, a social crisis and a human rights crisis. There is nothing that is more important than fighting the pandemic, and we are still fighting the pandemic. We have new variants, and even if we suppress the virus in one country but it is allowed to spread to other parts of the world, the variants and perhaps with new mutations can cause new outbreaks, even in countries that seem to have the virus under control. We have all endured a year of tragedy and crisis. COVID-19 is the most challenging crisis we have faced since World War II, and it's not finished, yet we are arguing over politics.

Moreover, as countries and communities continue our fight to contain cases while rolling out vaccines, the global rollout has been far from even and fair. As of mid-February, 130 countries had not received a single dose of vaccine, and just 10 countries had administered 75% of all vaccines. We must remember that we are one human family, we are interdependent and what happens to one person can quickly affect many others. A cluster of pneumonia cases just over a year ago has translated into over 117 million infections and 2.6 million deaths. If we do not ensure vaccine equity, the virus will continue to spread, to mutate and will ultimately prolong the pandemic, our vulnerability, with devastating impacts. The reality is that we are one small planet with one human family. Disease knows no borders, and through the pandemic and beyond, we are truly in this together.

The point is that responding to COVID-19, recovering from the virus and preparing for the future must remain our focus. We all have to learn from the pandemic. We can't forget what we have all been through, and we need to prepare for the future. This includes our work at this very committee. Lessons learned and pandemic preparedness should be a focus of this committee. Each of us knows COVID-19 very personally. It has touched all our lives—doctors, nurses, frontline workers, survivors, family members and communities—and the virus has done so in ways we could not have imagined a year ago.

All of us know families who are grieving loss. We need to acknowledge their pain and be there for them. We must address the grief, loneliness and stress and provide much-needed mental health supports. We need to lift each other up and inspire hope. We need to think of everyone on the health care front line who has been at this for a year. It wasn't a wave. It was sustained and it has been gruelling and hard. I thank the tireless frontline health care workers, and in Etobicoke North, particularly William Osler Health System for their life-saving services.

● (6020)

I also thank the Rexdale Community Health Centre and its partners for their important community care, including providing health services, delivering food and providing computers and internet access.

A friend of mine who is a physician says that each patient who dies leaves a scar on the heart.

We also need to think of all those on the front line who do not have the luxury of Zooming in to work but who provide essential services, from those working in grocery stores to personal support workers, to truck drivers—everyone who worked to keep our community and country going. We owe them so much more than our collective thanks. We must tackle the glaring inequalities of age, disability, gender, income, race and more that have been laid bare by the pandemic.

In Toronto, where I'm from, in August racialized people made up 83% of reported COVID-19 cases while making up half of Toronto's population. They are more likely to live in poverty, poor housing, have precarious work and be victims of discrimination. All of these lead to worse health.

We have all been touched by the pandemic. I think of the mother who not only has to work but also help her young children learn. I think of students preparing for apprenticeships, college and university, or preparing to make their start in the world, and of what they have lost: a loss of contact with friends, a loss of activities, mental stress. One year is a long time.

I think of grandparents in long-term care, scared and alone. Long-term care facilities bore the brunt of wave one, with more than 70% of deaths occurring among those aged over 80, about twice the average of rates of other developed countries. Tragically, it happened again in wave two. I think of the several long-term care residences in our Etobicoke North community.

Deaths among seniors are not just numbers. Our seniors are people we know, people we have listened to. We have heard their life stories, learned from them, laughed with them, sung with them and danced with them. I dread going back to our long-term care, because I know those people, and I wonder who's not going to be there.

I think about the 48th Highlanders veterans at Sunnybrook Hospital for whom we danced. Eight decades ago, they stepped up for our generation and for future generations. Their motto was *Dileas Gu Brath*. It means "faithful forever".

We owe all our seniors who have helped build this country safe and dignified care. The greatest tragedy of this pandemic is the lives lost in long-term care homes.

I think of people with disabilities in congregate settings. I think of the homeless. I think of indigenous peoples. I think of the taxi drivers and the truck drivers in the community I serve, who picked up travellers in the spring at the airport only to succumb to COVID-19.

The point is that it's our families and communities that should be top of mind now: protecting their health and safety, their jobs and their livelihoods. Think of the thousands who work here in the parliamentary precinct. Think of our clerks and the teams that support this very meeting. These are our colleagues, our friends who work to maintain the people's House. What lessons do they want us to learn? What lessons do they want carried forward for the next pandemic, disaster or for next time?

What Canadians needed this past year, what they need a year into the pandemic, is to know how best to protect themselves, their families and communities. They need economic support.

I strongly believe that our focus has to be on protecting the health and safety of Canadians, protecting jobs and livelihoods and the economic recovery, and not on scoring partisan political points.

In order to protect the health and safety of Canadians we closed the borders. We directly funded the provinces and territories. We bought personal protective equipment and testing kits, and we pre-ordered vaccines.

- (6025)

The most important thing we can do to address the spread of COVID-19 is to vaccinate, test, contact trace and isolate.

Our government bought the vaccines and tests and provided contact tracers and quarantine hotels. In the spring, when the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces were needed, they went in to care for our elders, for our families.

To protect jobs and livelihoods, the government put in place strong measures to protect businesses and workers. We had to do this because the virus could only be slowed or stopped by limiting social contacts. This meant reducing economic activity. It meant shutting down workplaces and later limiting the number of people restaurants served. It meant asking people to stay home from work if they were sick or their children were sick. It simply would have been unfair to ask businesses to shut down and workers to stay home without compensating them for lost income.

The reality is that the best economic approach is to stop the spread of the disease. The next best approach is to help Canadian businesses and Canadian families weather the pandemic without losing their livelihoods and without going broke.

We must provide meaningful investment to build our way out and to ensure our economy comes back stronger than before, laying a foundation for a green economy, an innovation economy and a fair economy that supports good jobs for all Canadians.

To rebuild from job losses and strengthen our economy, we will launch a campaign to create more than a million jobs. Families should not have to choose between their health and their jobs, and our families should not have to take on the debt that their government can better shoulder.

Pandemics are not the time for partisan politics. It's time for the country to come together to protect one another and to begin to heal, but we have to acknowledge the hurt first and there are a lot of people who are hurting.

We call daily into our Etobicoke North community to hear how people are doing. Our Etobicoke North families matter. They are good people. They work hard. What makes Etobicoke North such a special place to live, work and play is that we welcome the world. We are proudly one of the most diverse communities in the country. We learn from one another, and we learn each other's beautiful cultures, languages and religions. We look after one another, and we lift each other up.

We ask how our families are doing and what is on their minds, and the answers are invariably the same: protecting their health and safety, jobs and economic livelihoods.

My friends, we have done good work together in this committee in putting in place virtual voting and coming together to produce a report on the best way to protect Canadians and democracy should an election happen during the pandemic, but there is more good work to be done, important work.

Will we clearly remain in the throes of responding to the pandemic? Our focus must absolutely be the response.

It will also be important for this committee to review the parliamentary precinct response. Was there a pandemic plan? Who was consulted in the development of any pandemic plan? How often was any plan reviewed? Once it was known that something new was circulating in late 2019, on what date was any pandemic plan first looked at? Was any plan updated in January and February? What actions were taken during January and February to protect the health and safety of all those who work on Parliament Hill?

Was there any consultation with Canada's chief public health officer in December, January or February? Was there any consultation with Canada's chief scientists? Was there a review of Parliament's response following the 2009 H1N1 pandemic? When was any plan updated following H1N1? Was a tabletop exercise ever run for Parliament following the H1N1 pandemic?

- (6030)

Did each of the major groups in Parliament know about any plan for security, pages, those who provide food and more?

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

I absolutely appreciate all of the comments that Dr. Duncan is making. I know we've all seen that in our own communities.

I would urge her to perhaps actually table these motions. We're talking about them today, but perhaps we could get back to my motion. We can talk about those potential motions in the future, because I think they're all very critical. We have not seen the Liberals table any of these suggestions already. There's nothing on the table from the government at this time. Perhaps we could get back to my motion and then potentially talk about some of these great motions she's putting forward at a later time.

Thank you.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: I thank my dear colleague, Karen, whom I have so much respect for. I am coming to a point here. There are important points to make today.

Our sole focus has to be the pandemic, not partisan politics. Were political party leaders made aware of any pandemic plans? Were political leaders ever asked to make their parties aware of any plan? It's important to review Parliament's response to see what action was taken, when action was taken and whether it was taken early enough.

One of my fears is that we will forget. Should there be an election, would a new Parliament study the pandemic response, identify lessons learned and implement change? Whatever we learn must be incorporated for next time, because there will be a next time. Pandemics are not a matter of "if", but "when". Will we do our work so that future Parliaments are better prepared?

At this point I think it's so important for all of us on this committee to recognize all those in the parliamentary precinct who have worked tirelessly to protect health and safety and to ensure a functioning Parliament.

My friends, I have spent my adult life studying pandemics. First was the 1918 influenza pandemic. Then I helped business and industry prepare for pandemics. In fact, when H1N1 happened, the previous government reached out to me and included me in those conversations.

The 1918 influenza killed upwards of 50 million people, which was more people than the Black Death of the Middle Ages and more people than in all the fighting of the First World War. The entire pandemic lasted only 18 to 24 months.

I really want to bring this point home. The 1918 flu was a traumatic event. Doctors, medical professionals and people seemed hesitant to talk about their experiences. Because they were reluctant to talk or write about the flu, future generations weren't always aware of it. Despite its shocking mortality, historians largely ignored the 1918 flu until the 1970s, when they explored the epidemiology and the frightening nature of the disease. Later, they examined the social and cultural aspects, including how the disease revealed class and ethnic tensions.

For decades, the 1918 flu was the forgotten pandemic. For almost a century it remained a medical mystery. The point is that there were lessons to learn in 1918 and a hundred years later there are lessons to learn from 2020. We have to learn the lessons, update our plans and be better prepared for next time.

Going forward, we must all be prepared. I'll repeat that: We must all be prepared. It's governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and international organizations. When we are not prepared, we face not only deadly impacts but also devastating economic consequences, new inequalities and vulnerabilities. A virus can quickly undo economic progress or impede sustainable development goals.

Just over a hundred years ago in 1918, and today in 2021, it's poverty, hunger, good health and well-being, gender equality, racialization and economic status that determines who gets sick, who gets treated and who survives. We must understand that pandemics result from the vulnerabilities we have created through our relationships with our environment, other species and each other. We must urgently change course. The recovery must respect the rights of future generations. We must increase climate action, lock-

ing in carbon neutrality by 2050. We must protect biodiversity. We must learn what we always learn following a pandemic, namely that science and public health matter—not just when we are in crisis.

Research institutions have a crucial role to play in research and policy, in reviewing pandemic response, helping to define lessons and ensuring that we are better prepared. We have to learn from each pandemic. They also need evidence-based advocacy.

• (6035)

This year, it's science and public health that will remain key to fighting COVID-19. That research matters beyond the pandemic. It is a fundamental building block of our country that requires attention and nurturing for a better future, environment and quality of life for all.

My friends, I appreciate this committee. I appreciate the work we do together, but this is not the time for partisan politics. We are in a race between the vaccines and the variants. Our sole focus should be on how we get the vaccines to as many people who want them as quickly as possible. Our families and our communities want us to be focused on protecting their health, safety, jobs and economic livelihoods.

They're tired. We are all tired. People long for compassion, generosity and kindness. What this committee should be looking at is the House of Commons' response and how we can all be better prepared for next time.

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with our committee.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (6040)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Duncan.

I know that this pandemic has really hit home for you and so many others, so we're always thinking of you.

Next we have Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I just want to recall for the committee that we're at this point as a result of two main decisions.

One was in 2015 by the now Prime Minister. There was a decision to try to address what were seen as political abuses of prorogation with the previous government, so the Prime Minister made the decision to run on a platform that the way to mitigate those abuses was to require the government to report on its reasons for prorogation.

Of course, there was no prorogation in the last Parliament, which I actually thought was too bad. I thought that a routine prorogation would have gone some way to just help remind Canadians that prorogation is not always a bad thing. It's a bad thing when it's abused politically, as it sometimes is.

However, there have been and we've heard it in testimony that there have been a lot of routine prorogations in Canadian history. The Manitoba legislature under governments of various political stripes routinely prorogues every year. There's a new Speech from the Throne annually in the Manitoba legislature.

While the content can sometimes be controversial, the fact of having a Speech from the Throne is not. There are lots of different ways to use prorogation. This was a policy developed by the Prime Minister, and that he ran on, to prevent political abuses of prorogation, and then mid-last year he decided to prorogue.

That's the second decision that got us to here, because then the government tabled an explanation, which was, as the Prime Minister wished, brought here to PROC.

We've heard arguments on both sides, and obviously there's some disagreement about some of the real motivations for the timing of the prorogation and the length of the prorogation. However, what we have heard from a number of witnesses is that this all does ultimately come back to the Prime Minister, because it's the Prime Minister who ultimately makes the decision about prorogation and how to advise the Governor General.

I've said this before on the record, and there have been some conversations off the record. I know one of the arguments that Liberals have made at length, when they're on topic here at this committee, is that the demand for documents and the number of witnesses is an unreasonable burden on government. Again, I think reasonable people can disagree about that, and I do know that some other committees are making headway in terms of getting some of these witnesses before a parliamentary committee.

I do think that Canadians want to hear more about what happened with the WE Charity, but I think, in the context of our study, and I've said this before, I would be satisfied with an hour of the Prime Minister's time, for him to come here, to honour his commitment to be held to account for the use of prorogation and to offer that explanation.

Now we've had a document tabled. We've had the government House leader here. I'm not of the view that he's provided particularly good arguments.

We hear sometimes from the Liberals on the committee as if we're judges charged with making some kind of determination. This isn't a judicial hearing. Our work here is to hold the government to account for its decisions. Just accepting a written statement at face value doesn't really do that.

We've heard a lot of testimony identifying the Prime Minister as the principle decision-maker. We know that the Prime Minister is the principle decision-maker. He's the only one with the constitutional authority to advise the Governor General to prorogue Parliament, so all roads lead back to him.

It's his policy. This was his idea for how to prevent political abuses of prorogation, and it stands to reason, in my view, that he ought to come here and talk to the committee about it. That would be the way he could set an important precedent for how this mechanism to prevent the political abuse of prorogation is meant to work.

I've said it before and I'll say it again. For an hour of the Prime Minister's time, I think the rest of this motion can go away. I would be satisfied to have the Prime Minister here to answer questions about prorogation for an hour. That's not an unreasonable burden on the government. It's not an unreasonable burden on the Prime Minister, particularly in light of the fact that it's his own policy that has brought us to this point, and I think he would do well to honour that policy and to set the right precedent.

I imagine that, were we having this conversation about the politically controversial prorogation of Stephen Harper, Liberals, if we were all here at that time, would be keen to have then prime minister Stephen Harper appear to give some reasons.

• (6045)

I can imagine that in some circumstance in the future, where prorogation has been politically abused, or where there is the perception of political abuse of the power of prorogation, some Liberals might think it appropriate for the Prime Minister, himself or herself, to appear before the committee to provide reasons and answer questions. That is being held to account, which is one of the principal functions of Parliament, for decision-making. It's a cornerstone of responsible government that ministers and decision-makers be held to account for the decisions they make.

I hear in the Liberals' comments at committee that somehow this is an intractable situation, or that they're forced to hold up the committee because a vote on this would issue in some kind of unreasonable demand on the government. An hour of the Prime Minister's time to honour his own policy is not unreasonable. That's a way to break this loggerhead. A public commitment from the Prime Minister to appear...

He has already been invited. All he has to do is say publicly that he'll accept that invitation and come here for an hour. Then we can move on to other important work, as other members, particularly government members on this committee, have said many times that we need to do. They have given some examples, even, of some of the things we might move on to. I'm prepared to do that, but I'm not prepared to do that on pain of giving up the idea that we would set the precedent that the only person who really makes the call about prorogation would not be here to speak to that and be pressed on the reasons for prorogation. I think that's part of important accountability work.

That's what's there. A public commitment from the Prime Minister to appear for an hour could resolve this loggerhead. That is what's being filibustered here. It's not the lengthy motion that's before the table. I think there are good things about that. I think there should be accountability on those issues. I'm happy that other committees have found a way to make some more progress on those things, but let's not pretend that it's an either-or scenario—that it's either all of this motion exactly as it is or this ongoing chat-fest by Liberals at the committee.

There are other options we can proceed with that would help us do more meaningful work and get value for the resources that continue to be dedicated to this committee, despite the fact that we're not getting a lot done.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay.

I was about to say something earlier, but I also didn't want to interrupt. Mr. Nater had fallen offline, and at that point I felt like I saw some of his colleagues, some Conservative members, looking around.... I just wanted to say that I was going to wait for him. I was informed.

Generally, if anything comes to a vote and members, through no fault of their own, get booted out and don't intentionally leave, then of course I will wait for their technical difficulties to be resolved before any amendment or any issue goes to a vote.

At this point, do we carry on with the speakers list, or is this a formal proposition or amendment?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: There's no amendment being suggested.

I think what we need is a public commitment from the Prime Minister to appear before the committee. The invitation has already been made. All this motion would do is reassert that invitation. I think the Liberal members of this committee could do that very effectively in an informal way without a motion of the committee, but I don't see a reason to decline a motion that has a lot of merit in terms of what we might hear and things that I'm interested to hear and that I think a lot of Canadians are interested to hear, frankly, if it means we're just going to move on and not have the Prime Minister appear for what I consider to be his own study.

I'm not prepared to move on this without that commitment from the Prime Minister. There's no amendment or motion that's going to get that for us by virtue of a resolution of the committee. That's a decision the Prime Minister continues to make, which is to forgo this invitation. That's what's causing the logjam.

In terms of a lot of the other concerns the Liberals have raised, even if we don't agree.... The crux of this Parliament is negotiation and compromise. I don't come here expecting to get everything I want or that everything is going to go exactly how I want, but I do expect for people to sit down and try to hammer out some reasonable compromises.

The Prime Minister's appearing for an hour on a study that's the direct result of his proposal on how to prevent political abuses of prorogation is an eminently reasonable proposal. I'm disappointed we haven't seen any action on that. There have been conversations at this table, and particularly around this table, that haven't yet is-

sued in that commitment on his behalf. We continue to have what I think is a structurally flawed conversation, because it rests on the idea that we either accept this motion whole hog or we move on as if there's no reason for the Prime Minister to defend his decision to prorogue Parliament. I don't accept that.

I do think there are a lot of good things in this motion. I do think there are some accountability questions about the WE Charity as yet unanswered. I do recognize some progress is being made at other committees. I'm willing to try to move on to other important work, if we can hear from the Prime Minister on an issue that is central to his constitutional powers. If we could do that, it would be great. I recognize nobody at this committee can make that decision for him today, but I don't want to continue on this conversation pretending there isn't a way out when there is. It's an hour of the Prime Minister's time, which I don't think is a lot to ask.

Let's have the conversation, but let's stop having it as if there isn't an offer on the table and as if that offer isn't reasonable. An hour of the Prime Minister's time is very reasonable for his own study, to do justice to his own proposal and to set a good precedent, a precedent that Liberals now may not feel is warranted, but I'm sure at some point in the future will feel would have been a good precedent. Let's get on with doing that good work, and then go on to something else that, hopefully, we can make some progress on.

I think that has to be the spirit of this Parliament, and we're not seeing that in this ongoing filibuster. There's no movement on the part of the government. That's the other side of this. If there's no plausible offer for how to meet somewhere in between coming from the government, I think people need to recognize that is itself a form of toxic partisanship. There are people willing to talk about solutions for how we move forward in a less partisan way, but jamming up this committee for meetings and meetings and meetings on end, because they know they're going to lose a vote on a motion, is not a non-partisan approach. Negotiating a solution is. If they don't like this offer of the Prime Minister's appearing, I think they need to start talking about some other options.

I appreciate the frustration Ms. Vecchio voiced earlier, which is "What are the other options? Put something on the table." However, here we are. The opposition has a proposal. The government has made it clear it doesn't like it, and we're at loggerheads because we can't get any kind of interesting counter-offer on the part of the government. Here we are and here we will remain until there's some movement on this.

I'm proposing something. It's not up to this committee to decide whether it's a good offer or not, but I hope that members on the committee will be taking that offer back and urging people on their side to take that seriously. At one point it seemed there were some folks on that side who were taking it seriously, and then the trail went cold.

• (6050)

We should be thinking about how we get back on that trail to allow us to do some meaningful work, which is something we have neglected to do for some time now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Do we have the correct order, Mr. Clerk? Is it Mr. Lauzon and then Mr. Simms?

The Clerk: We have Mr. Lauzon—then at one point we had Madam Petitpas Taylor but her hand has since been lowered—then we have Mr. Simms and then Mr. Turnbull.

The Chair: Okay. I felt I had seen a slightly different order earlier.

Monsieur Lauzon, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for your comments, Mr. Blaikie. May I also congratulate you for your French. It's very pleasant to hear you speak the language, because you do it extremely well.

Despite that, I cannot agree with you when you say that this debate has no place. Nor can I agree that Canadians want to see appearances by the witnesses whom the motion we are studying seeks to invite.

Since the pandemic began and since this motion has been on the table, I have consulted thousands of Canadians in my constituency and all across Canada, and I can tell you that none of them, not one, has asked for the Prime Minister—

• (6055)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thanks very much.

Madam Chair, on a point of order, I just want to perhaps suspend. After listening to Mr. Blaikie and the first couple of seconds of Mr. Lauzon, I recognize that now may be a really great time for the parties to go back and reflect on opportunities to find a workable motion so that we can do something in this committee rather than continue to filibuster.

I recognize that if we do not suspend, we'll just continue to listen to hours and hours of filibustering.

Perhaps this is a good time for the parties to reflect on what they are willing to...or what in this motion is acceptable to the government. They seem to be the ones who have the most difficulty with this.

Perhaps this is a great time to suspend. Then we can reflect and come back to this issue on the following Tuesday, March 16, after our break week.

The Chair: I'll confirm with Mr. Lauzon, just so that we do the procedural aspect of this properly and everybody understands it.

On a point of order you can't necessarily put a motion to suspend or to adjourn. Of course you have raised the issue to my attention, and I can assess whether we have consensus from the room.

Monsieur Lauzon does have the floor, so he could either move that, or if Mr. Lauzon thinks that we may have consensus and Ms. Vecchio feels that, then we could suspend for today.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I just want to continue and finish my point for today and then I will continue on Tuesday after the break week.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead. Continue your point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I will continue my comments to Mr. Blaikie.

Your proposal is not really an amendment. You want the Prime Minister to appear for an hour and you are saying that the rest of the motion is equally valid. But we actually feel that we have heard enough witnesses and that we have enough documentation to write a report. You said that we are acting in a partisan manner. You are right to talk about partisanship: regrettably, we are here because of the partisan games being played by members of the opposition.

In terms of the motion before the committee today, I strongly believe that the ability to advise the Governor General about prorogation is the prerogative of the Prime Minister. You actually said so yourself, Mr. Blaikie. That is also exactly what we were told by the officials from the Privy Council Office and by the academics who appeared before the committee. Some of those experts and scholars stated that prorogation is legitimate as long as the Prime Minister has the confidence of the House. That was the case for the prorogation in August 2020.

Everyone on this committee will recall that the vote on the Speech from the Throne was a confidence vote. They did not all vote in favour of the Speech from the Throne but the majority of members of the House did. This proves that the Prime Minister certainly had the confidence of the House. Three hundred and twenty-nine members of Parliament took part in that vote. Of that number, 177 members of Parliament voted in favour of the Speech from the Throne, thereby demonstrating their confidence in our government. A majority of members of Parliament voted in favour of this Speech from the Throne.

Does our NDP colleague not acknowledge that his party demonstrated its confidence in our government through that vote? All the members of his party voted in favour of the Speech from the Throne: the honourable members from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, Elmwood—Transcona, North Island—Powell River, Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, South Okanagan—West Kootenay, Victoria, Vancouver Kingsway, Hamilton Mountain, Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, Winnipeg Centre, Hamilton Centre, St. John's East, Algotina—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, Courtenay—Alberni, New Westminster—Burnaby, Vancouver East, Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, Windsor West, London—Fanshawe—

• (6100)

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, I think there is an interpretation issue here. Although I understand what he is saying, there must be an interpretation issue.

The Chair: There is. Maybe I should have said something, but I felt—

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I have only a few more names.

The Chair: —that even though my French is not that good, I knew what he was saying.

I also want to say that it is 1:02 p.m. right now. If we are going to allow the subcommittee to be able to have their meeting on private members' business, then I think we're going to have to cut it at this point.

I feel really bad saying that to you, Monsieur Lauzon, but either we go on for a long time and have them reschedule or we allow them time to be able to switch to the other committee.

Is that okay?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I'm okay to continue on the Tuesday after the break week.

The Chair: All right, Monsieur Lauzon.

Is everyone else okay if we suspend, then?

Seeing there is no opposition to that, we are—

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Chair, why don't we suspend until Tuesday during the break week? For example, I have an open schedule on Tuesday at 11 o'clock. Why don't we suspend until Tuesday during the break week? Hopefully, we can deal with this motion and put it to bed finally.

The Chair: That's not really my call, at this point, but I will take that suggestion and take a look at whether that is possible.

We will suspend until either our next scheduled meeting or until—or if—we can schedule one during that time.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, when would we get notification of that?

As I said, I think many people would like to get this matter dealt with. As I indicated, if the Liberals can come to an agreement on something, perhaps we can all sit down once again and work on Tuesday, rather than prolong this, so that we can get to all of those important motions that our Liberal speakers have brought forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: I don't really know, because even last break week we saw so many meetings that still took place. I don't know whether the capacity is a little less during a constituency week. I don't know the answer to that, but I can try to get that to you as soon as possible.

We will suspend for today. Thank you, everyone.

[*The meeting was suspended at 1:04 p.m., Tuesday, March 11*]

[*The meeting resumed at 11:00 a.m., Tuesday, March 23*]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. The committee is resuming meeting 26 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which was suspended on March 11, 2021.

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

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

Mr. Clerk, it doesn't look like anyone is attending in person today.

The Clerk: That's correct, Madam Chair. No one is in the room other than staff.

The Chair: I will just remind staff and anyone subbing in that, if they are in the room, they are to maintain a two-metre physical distance and wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It's highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated. You must maintain the proper hand hygiene using the provided hand sanitizer at the room entrance. As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting. I thank members in advance for their co-operation.

For those participating virtually, I'd like to outline a few rules to follow. Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. With the latest Zoom version, you may now speak the language of your choice without the need to select the corresponding language channel. You will also notice that the platform's "raise hand" feature is now in a more easily accessible location on the main toolbar, should you wish to speak or alert the chair.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is in the meeting room. Before speaking, wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled by the proceedings and verification officer. I'll remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

With regard to the speaking list, the committee's clerk and I will do our best to maintain the list. We'll be using the list given to us in the toolbar. If you want you can follow along, as well, as know who's next. If there are any technical difficulties and anyone drops off, we'll remind you of and try to keep the proper original order. You should not be losing your place in line if technical issues occur. If any people end up attending in person, we'll consolidate the two lists.

I'll just remind everyone, before we pick up from where we left off, that currently there are three motions put on notice by Mr. Therrien of the Bloc. They have been put on notice for some time now—since February 23. Around the same time, February 23, there was a notice of motion put forth by Mr. Blaikie as well.

Currently, we are still on Mrs. Vecchio's motion on the prorogation study and the witness list. When we left off last time, Mr. Lauzon had the floor.

Just before I give him the floor, one more reminder is that we do have the main estimates. We don't have the supplementary estimates, though. The main estimates are not due back until near the end of May, so we have some flexibility with that. Let me know if you wish for me to schedule a meeting on the main estimates at any point during our calendar time. This is just a reminder to the committee members that this is also coming up.

We will carry on from where we left off. Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning and welcome to everyone.

We have a number of motions before us today, including the main motion, which is about the reasons why the government prorogued Parliament in August 2020.

As I think back on my experience since I arrived on this committee, I find it unfortunate that we are in this position and that we are still sitting here debating this issue. I was hoping that, after some fruitless attempts, my opposition colleagues would decide to give up this political game over the WE Charity affair, which has already been dealt with at other committees.

Of course, I am here to stand up for all the interests of this committee and I am well aware that this political game—

[*English*]

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

I just want to read the following motion that, notwithstanding any standing order or unusual practice, the motion of Karen Vecchio concerning the committee's study of the government's reasons for the prorogation of Parliament in August of 2020 be amended, first, by deleting paragraph (b); second, by replacing paragraph (c) with the following: “renew the invitation issued to Katie Telford to appear before the committee, provided that if she does not agree within one week of the adoption of this motion to appear for at least three hours, a summons do issue for her appearance before the committee at a date and time determined by the chair, but no later than one month following the adoption of this motion”; and third,

by deleting paragraphs (d) and (b); and that the motion be deemed adopted as amended on division without further debate.

The reason I am bringing this forward is that we are willing to work on this—

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

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'll continue to speak, Chair, until you call me.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, Mrs. Vecchio. Complete your thought. I don't know that this is procedurally in order, but after this I'll take Mr. Turnbull's comment and then we'll decide.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: We have sent to the clerk, in both official languages, this motion.

I have heard Mr. Lauzon several times talking about our wanting to drop this motion. The bottom line is that we have said there are a couple of things we would like.

This motion basically drops the majority of the bottom of the motion and continues to ask for both the Prime Minister and his chief of staff, Katie Telford, and the documents.

For the remainder of the motion in question—I know that you were thinking it was unnecessary for the Kielburgers and Speakers' Spotlight—all of that is removed. We really chopped it down so that we could get to the meat and potatoes of what we want to see here in this prorogation study.

Perhaps, with all due respect for what Mr. Lauzon was saying earlier, we are here to find a balance, and we are willing to reduce our motion to keep those three items and remove everything else.

I have asked for that motion to be circulated, and the clerk should have it so that everybody can read it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, thank you.

You are essentially moving.... I recognize right away that to move a motion on a point of order, or an amendment, is typically not in order unless there is unanimous consent.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: You can demand unanimous consent.

The Chair: Since you're asking for unanimous consent, we'll see whether there is unanimous consent for you to move this amendment.

It is also not typical for the amendment to be moved by the person who moved the original motion, but we'll get to that.

Is there unanimous consent for Ms. Vecchio to even put this before the committee at this point?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: No. I'm sorry.

The Chair: At this point we don't have unanimous consent, but you may have the floor, Mrs. Vecchio, in the coming time, and at that point it would be completely appropriate for you to move it.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes, you could bring it back.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Turnbull, you had a point of order.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I think you've clarified my points of order. I was just concerned about Ms. Vecchio's introducing an amendment. Although I was very happy to hear her willingness to amend her motion, I don't think it's appropriate on a point of order.

Thanks. You have already clarified that.

The Chair: Okay.

I just wanted to hear Ms. Vecchio out before I went down the road of making comments and responding. I think we will get to that point at some point soon.

Mr. Lauzon, I'm sorry for the interruption. You have the floor.

Actually, let me let everyone know who has the floor after that as well, so that there's an idea of the speakers list. There was a speakers list the last time when we had left. It is Mr. Lauzon and then Madam Petitpas Taylor. Mr. Simms was subbing in that day. He is not here so he'll be dropped. Next is Mr. Turnbull. Then Ms. Vecchio and Dr. Duncan would have the floor. That would be the speaking order.

Mr. Lauzon, I'm sorry for the interruption.

Go ahead.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thanks, Ms. Vecchio, for your proposal.

[*Translation*]

However, we really are ready to debate as long as we need to do so.

Earlier, you talked about respect. No self-respecting government would allow a motion like that to be passed. Whether it's a majority or minority government, the Prime Minister was still elected by universal suffrage and is the people's choice. It is not true that we must pass this motion, which is purely partisan and whose purpose was already predetermined before we even discussed it and made recommendations on the proposal. It is very unfortunate.

As parliamentarians, we should be focusing on matters that Canadians really see as important. We are still in the middle of the pandemic. We know what happened. The current situation happened because of the break week. Two weeks later, the virus resurfaced and there have been more cases of concern. We are still in the second wave and we are heading towards the third. Do we not have to concentrate on something completely different today?

Our committee can make a difference, not on health or public health recommendations, but certainly on everything related to procedure. Today, I see no use for us in still being here, possibly for a long time. We are ready to face up to what is happening and we would like to focus on much more important matters, as we should.

This week, we made more than 1,240 calls to people in my constituency. Not one talked to me about prorogation, let alone that it was caused by the WE Charity affair. In fact, people were talking about what is happening today and what they need. They were concerned about the election and wondering how it would unfold, should there be one. That is about procedure. Canadians, including the Quebecers in my constituency, are focusing on the millions of doses that we have delivered to them this week. The concern is knowing how they will be administered and how we can assist our governments in administering them.

Canadians are wondering about the economic recovery that will shortly be getting under way. We can ask ourselves the same questions, in order for the economy to recover properly. This is one of the biggest crises for generations, since the wars, in fact. Canadians are not focused on the partisan games being played in Parliament. They have no idea about what we're doing, right at this moment. Our entire focus should be on moving our issues forward so that the government moves forward too.

We have made some wonderful announcements. We are trying to work for the people and their constituencies, especially on Internet access. This week, the Premier of Quebec and Prime Minister Trudeau announced that thousands more Quebec households would be connected to high-speed Internet by September 2022. This is a partnership with the province that moves things forward, and that is what people are talking to us about.

They are talking about procedures, about innovation, about working at home, about the work-life balance, and about telework. At this very moment, 40% of my constituents have no Internet access. They are not even able to listen to us right now, or to see what is happening in the House of Commons, because they have no Internet.

It is essential for my constituents to talk about important matters like the economic recovery. We have such major, hot-button issues to deal with. For example, we want to talk about climate change, about the economic recovery, about the energy transition, and about investments.

The convention that took place at the end of last week has shown us that 55% of the hardline Conservatives do not acknowledge that climate change exists. But it is the reality and we must face up to it. That is what our constituents are talking to us about. We have to move forward on issues like these. Electrifying transportation, public transit, green innovation and access to high-speed Internet are the issues of today. This is about helping all our communities, not just mine, but yours too.

Canadians would like us to be debating other issues, not trying to associate the prorogation with a nonexistent scandal over the WE Charity. The opposition is trying to make it into a scandal, but after everything that has gone on in the other committees, we have seen no impact. So we all know that the real object of prorogation was the need to reset the government's agenda.

Let us be clear: as I said earlier, this motion is a trick, an illusion. Could it simply be a way to keep the WE Charity scandal story alive?

A number of other parliamentary committees have examined the documents and the testimonies in detail and found nothing at all that could show that anything inappropriate was done. The Prime Minister drafted a report on the prorogation and explained the problems that occurred in connection with the student grants.

Instead of all this, we could be focusing on matters that really concern Canadians. We have a lot of them to study at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The committee has produced a report that I work with every day and that deals with possible future business. It's a fine work plan. Personally, I like working with work plans. But they are supposed to provide us with direction. Are we providing ourselves with good direction by doing what we are doing today? I don't think so. I don't think that we are being useful. We should move on.

However the motion is amended, I am convinced that it is unreasonable to summon the Prime Minister in this case. We have met with witnesses and they have shown us clearly that the Prime Minister had a good reason to prorogue Parliament, the pandemic. It was a good way to react to it. If a pandemic is not a good reason to prorogue Parliament, I don't know what one might be.

So there is the real problem: the opposition cannot handle the fact that, since last summer, they have spent all their time, all their energy, and all their resources trying to fabricate this nonexistent crisis. The crisis was invented to try and create conflict and to implicate a government that is trying to make the best decisions possible to help as many people as possible during a pandemic, including those who live in your constituencies. They are our constituents, our companies, our workers and our students.

Sometimes, when we work quickly, we can make mistakes.

Let us not forget that we in all parties worked together on measures and found solutions. We wanted workers coming to one constituency not to be penalized and forced to go into quarantine before being able to work. We did not want to make it necessary to isolate, house and feed them for that time. We found ways to make it happen.

In all the decisions we made, we missed the fact that travellers coming back from holiday in the South could be paid during their quarantine. We had to take a step backwards, admit it and work together to make the correction. When we move fast, when we make decisions quickly, and when we are in the middle of a crisis, we may make mistakes. That's what the Prime Minister told us.

We could see the frustration on some faces after the Prime Minister, his Chief of Staff and his ministers came before committees and all said the same thing. In theory, the Canada Emergency Student Benefit was a good program that had a place. Our intentions for it were good. Unfortunately, we failed when we were putting it into operation. Nothing is perfect. Our government was in the middle of a global pandemic.

The important point I want to emphasize is that we work with public servants. Let me take this opportunity to thank them and to

say "well done". I congratulate them for supporting the government, when such support is so difficult in times like these. Think about the technological shift that public servants are experiencing at the moment. Think of all the rules that have to quickly change and of all the decisions that we are making. Each of those decisions has an impact on the financial system. Software is not even designed to handle this pressure on the system. We are making miracles happen, thanks to the work of the public servants who are trying to represent us as best they can. We must take this opportunity to say that, while public servants may work in the shadows, they are just as important as front-line workers.

Officials and politicians have worked countless hours to make sure that all the programs we have created are available to help Canadians in difficulty. Of course, mistakes were made, but far be it from me to point fingers at anyone. It's easy not to make mistakes; you just do nothing.

When you get into politics, it is because you are looking for the big picture. My father always told me that, if I did not try, I would not learn, but if I did try, I could make mistakes. I am not perfect either. I am perhaps not as educated as a number of you, but I can tell you that, when I have work to do, I always try to do it in the interests of Canadians as much as I can, to make the best decisions I can, to get as much information as I can, so that we can keep our promises and be as fair we can. On the day after an election, I turn the page. You may support the Bloc, the Conservatives, the New Democrats or the Liberals, but if you come with a request in my constituency, I will turn myself into a public servant in order to respond to it.

That is how public servants work, they work in a nonpartisan manner. They are there for us, so that we can move forward. I use them as my example in serving the public. In addition, I am Deb Schulte's parliamentary secretary. She and I have the same approach: let's help everyone. Never have so many multiparty consultations been held as for the New Horizons program. Now we are assured of fairness through all Canadian constituencies. We are here to work for all Canadians, to work together.

A pandemic is never good. However, there is nothing better than a situation like this to show Canadians that we can and we must move forward together.

The public service has served the government from day one. It dates from Confederation, 152 years ago. In the First World War, about 100 years ago, jobs at the Post Office and in Customs were given to people who had voted for the party in power. Today, the public service is nonpartisan. We have had the same model for 100 years and we must keep it.

Whatever the elected government, whoever the current Prime Minister, everyone have been able to count on the support of a neutral, nonpartisan, professional and merit-based public service. Public servants in Canada are there to serve the public. They are there to advise the men and women who have been elected to make decisions in Cabinet and in Parliament. It may also be that the same has happened to them as it did to us, and they have made errors, because having to make decisions creates a lot of pressure.

Once again, let me remind you that our officials did the best they could in the WE Charity affair. The Prime Minister's office had no bad intentions. It just moved too fast.

The biggest machine in Canada is the government. We are lucky in having a public service that is able to move from one government to another in the blink of an eye. They are able to adapt in a few days. However, to do so, they have to adapt themselves, adapt procedures, add regulations. They have to work with new regulations, with new members of Parliament who have new ideas. Freshly elected members of Parliament arrive with their heads full of ideas, with the wind in their sails, and with the desire to make change. In addition, each time Parliament changes, the procedures and the rules of the House have to be improved.

On my first day in the House, I remember being surprised by the voting system. I could not imagine that, for the rest of my political career, everyone was going to have to stand up in turn to say “yea” or “nay”, to spend an hour on each vote, and even to do so during the night. I told myself that we should be able to improve that process.

We have recently been able to move to our first electronic votes. We know that it was the result of a tremendous amount of work done in the shadows by our public servants. We know that procedures were added over time that allow us to experience what we are experiencing today. My hat is off to our officials.

In the middle of the first wave of the pandemic, we were working like crazy. Something was bound to happen sooner or later and it happened when decisions were being made and when we were wondering whether we had responded to everyone. We tried to do so and we tripped over some grey areas. We found some exceptional cases to which we were not able to respond.

Are we going to be able save all our companies? I am not sure.

Will our economic recovery be perfect? Will people quickly regain the jobs back that they lost?

Let us not forget that we already had a labour shortage before the pandemic.

Will the economic recovery and the rehiring reveal the fact that some areas, such as culture and tourism, will be more affected, given that people have relocated to other sectors?

These are questions that we must ask ourselves during the pandemic. At the end of last fall, after hearing countless hours of testimony, after examining thousands of pages of documents and the detailed evidence in those documents, the opposition recognized that it had overplayed its hand. This was the case in all the committees, I should mention.

What we are doing here is more or less repeating the failure in other committees. As I see it, it is important today for us to follow the example of what happened in the other committees, and to move on.

However, here we still are. We are still dealing with another motion before the committee, a motion that is clearly fixated on the WE issue, which is unrelated to, and has nothing to do with, the pandemic or the prorogation. However, it masquerades as an examination of the prorogation in August 2020. What they are trying to do is so clear that it borders on the surreal. This is not the example I want to provide to our young politicians of the future.

I hope that no university political science prof will use this kind of motion as an example of doing politics. The lesson that absolutely has to be learned, as various witnesses before this committee have told us, is that all our constitutional conventions give the Prime Minister the authority to advise the Governor General on prorogation. The Prime Minister just has to go to the Governor General to ask for permission to prorogue Parliament.

Basically, you just have to respect that. Basically, you just have to get it into your head that we have a Prime Minister who was elected by universal suffrage, whether you like it or not, whether you like him or not. Our Prime Minister is still Canada's highest elected official.

The decision to go to the Governor General to ask her for permission to prorogue Parliament was his alone. As a consequence, we should not even be talking about it anymore. Now, he decided to go further. He decided to do more. He decided to tell Canadians why he made that decision, something that no Canadian Prime Minister has ever done. He decided to justify the prorogation.

Some witnesses used the prorogation to say that he acted too soon; some said that he acted too late. We could see that some witnesses did not have a clear picture of what was going on in our constituencies during the pandemic. Let us not forget to mention our seniors and what they went through in the long-term care homes. At a time like that, while the Canadian Army and the Canadian Red Cross were coming to assist in long-term care homes in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, witnesses were telling us that it was not necessary to prorogue Parliament during the pandemic.

If you are telling me that that was not a preconceived idea, I do not understand politics at all anymore.

So, for all those reasons, the Prime Minister has the full authority to declare a prorogation and to restart our government. We have also learned that the Prime Minister does not need a reason to do so. We have heard witnesses saying “this is the reason” or “this is why we should prorogue” or “these are the reasons that have been used for prorogation in the past”. No reasons are needed. Prorogation is the prerogative of the Prime Minister, as authorized by the Governor General.

Throughout this country's history, prorogation has been used to start again from scratch. It is a reset, as it were, for the government, for the business of Parliament. The time between the dissolutions and the throne speeches has varied from a few hours to a number of weeks. Witnesses have told us that it could have been done in 24 hours. Work is needed behind the scenes. Who does that work? As I told you before, our public servants do it.

When you work too quickly, you can make mistakes. Today, I can tell you that the Speech from the Throne was well prepared. There was a lot in it and I found it very interesting. The opposition points to the time that elapsed between the prorogation and the Speech from the Throne in September to claim that it is linked to the WE Charity. Almost no time was lost in the House. Let us not forget that, in the fall of 2008, the former Conservative prime minister prorogued Parliament for weeks before coming back to the House.

I find it ironic that this is happening today. Given that this Prime Minister is not Conservative, the Conservatives now support a motion like this, just to stir things up or to create a crisis that does not exist. I also find it very ironic that some of the members sitting here today were part of that government. We cannot say that other members of Parliament were involved, because some of the ones here were there at that time.

Prorogation is an inherently political action, based on political considerations. There is nothing bad, nothing inappropriate in that. When I say that public servants are involved, I mean that they focus on the announcements that will be made in the Speech from the Throne. However, before the Speech from the Throne, came the purely political prorogation, the Prime Minister's prerogative.

Prorogation is an action. Why does one prorogue, why is it political and why is it acceptable? Those are questions we were asked during the testimony. It is because the government's program is political, which is why we became involved in politics. It is so that we can live every day to its fullest, bringing about change to benefit the citizens of our country.

When we make political choices like that, it's so that we can offer those citizens the choices in a better way. My opposition colleagues must make the distinction between a political action and a partisan action. The government was elected on the basis of its political program. Once again, whether you like it or not, we have implemented a program. Those elected in Canada are sticking with that program, such as the fight against climate change. Our citizens have chosen to put their trust in this government.

The government was elected on the basis of its program, but the Speech from the Throne is a political manifesto, establishing the government's roadmap that matches the program. Consequently, the need to prorogue Parliament and to update the program is purely political and perfectly acceptable. That is the nature of prorogation. To say that prorogation took place for reasons other than the pandemic, just means that we end up here today before a dysfunctional committee.

I understand full well that Ms. Vecchio has proposed amendments to the motion with a view to improving it. We know full well that, under such conditions, there is no real justification for the

Prime Minister to be at the committee. We already know how and why the prorogation happened.

We are here today because we were obliged to prorogue Parliament and restart the government. In December 2019, the government presented a Speech from the Throne based on its political promises and the objectives it had set for itself in the goal of moving Canada forward. However, no one could have foreseen the global pandemic that occurred in March 2020.

As parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Seniors, I became involved in increasing the old age security pension by 10%. We made that commitment when we were hit by the pandemic. We did not just increase the pension by 10%, we gave seniors twice as much money in various ways. We helped seniors by providing a one-time GST tax credit. During the pandemic, we gave low-income senior couples more than \$1,500. Who could have foreseen that we were going to give seniors double the money that was intended during the first election campaign, in the space of a few days, in the blink of an eye?

My daughter reminded me of something this week. She told me that, on the same date last year, she was at a friend's house and that I called to tell her that I was coming to get her. She was not allowed to be with her friends anymore because a new rule had come into effect. My daughter did not understand why she had to leave her friends and no longer have any contact with them. No one could have foreseen that. A year later, she still cannot see her friends, except those who are in her class. Her school has major restrictions in terms of contacts. Who could have foreseen that? Because of the pandemic, my daughter could no longer see her friends. If a pandemic is not a good reason to prorogue Parliament, I don't know what it would take. We prorogued Parliament so that the government could make the right decisions.

This affects our families and it affects seniors. Seniors have suffered because of the isolation and they have suffered financially. Seniors who live in long-term care facilities have seen their neighbours die because of the pandemic. Front-line workers assisting our seniors have fallen in action trying to sustain the healthcare system. Those are all good reasons to prorogue Parliament and restart the government.

I am led to wonder whether we really are working in good faith, really working on specific ideas in the purview of committees on procedure. Once again, we have an attempt to link prorogation to the WE Charity to try to draw the media's attention to a crisis that does not exist. Everyone knows that mistakes were made with WE Charity, but it's over. Let's start the clock again and move on.

Once again, I need to thank all the public servants who have tried, through grant programs, to find the best possible ways of helping all the students whose jobs in tourism have been affected. In my constituency, a lot of young people work in tourism and agriculture during the summer. We have been badly affected at home. I have seen it in my constituency and you in yours. The entire program introduced in Parliament in December 2019 suddenly became obsolete, because we had been hit hard. All the priorities, the good intentions, the parliamentary sessions and the committee meetings are taking a different form because of the pandemic. There are so many things that we can do to improve things for people.

As a principle, we should be talking about the great projects that we had on our agenda. I am thinking of things like reviewing regulations. Even today, I dream of reviewing regulations so that I can add my two cents. I would like to have been with you from the beginning. I came to the committee late. For a few weeks, though a new, legitimate member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I was like a guest. But I can assure you that, once I am in a boat, I can row and I can work with others. I would like to have made a number of points because the preamble says that members of Parliament can make suggestions for projects to be debated at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. There have been some good ideas.

I was talking earlier about the public service. But let us not overlook the interpretation services with which we are provided. The interpreters do a remarkable job. They keep us going through our long hours of work in both official languages. We often do not take the time to thank them or appreciate their work. We have an agenda item to study the interpretation services, to look for ways of improving their situation so that we can be better served in both official languages. If you can hear me in your language, in English, it is because we have exceptional services that make it possible and that our procedures provide for.

I was one of the founders of the rural caucus in 2015. Even today, the problem continues when elections come around. This is a matter I raised in 2015 and in 2019. In remote regions, some people travel 200 kilometres to get to a polling station in order to exercise their right to vote. With today's technology, with high security and with cyber security, would it be possible for our procedures to provide for ways of improving remote voting? We might, for example, call the topic "Rural and Remote Voting" or "Voting in Rural and Remote Areas".

It would mean that the elderly would not have to depend on others else to drive them 200 km to vote and that we would be able to provide a more up-to-date service. These are matters that I would like to discuss at the committee. But I feel really useless.

So I will talk for as long as it takes, for three weeks if I have to, to point out that, for this motion, we should simply write a report, continue to work together, roll up our sleeves and move forward.

Believe me, it is not a good idea to summon the Prime Minister to a committee when everything has been said, when a report has been prepared, when we have admitted the problems with the WE Charity and also when another report was written as a result of the prorogation.

In addition, we have met with witnesses today and we are capable of understanding the issue. Really, we should be moving on.

Earlier, I talked about reviewing regulations. Just in terms of the review of the Canada Elections Act, a lot of work was done. My hat is off to you. A lot of work was done by this committee and by other committees. However, so many things are evolving so quickly because of the current situation that we have to constantly be aware of and open to changes. It is a role that our committee must take seriously so that we can play our rightful part as agents of change. The committees are the best places to produce reports along those lines.

I would also like to talk to you about an extremely important matter, which is to examine initiatives to improve the work-family balance in the House of Commons. This is a matter that we must focus on and to which I would like to suggest a refinement. In fact, not only are we talking about the work-family balance today but we have more women and more young people in politics. The young people have children and we all know the sacrifice made to be in politics when one has children. Can we do better?

Personally, I would like to establish a link between telework and the work-family balance. I would really like to discuss this issue with you and work to do a study, or to improve a study, along those lines. Nothing is more current. I feel that this matter should be moved to the top of the list. As a government, we would also be able to ensure a good transition.

No one is talking about this, but, currently, a number of public servants working remotely do not even know the difference between telework that the employer imposes, that is to say working from home because one cannot go back to the office, and choosing to balance work and family. In fact, the work-family balance allows a family to improve its quality of life when one of the two parents can work at home. It means that someone is there to greet the children when they come home from school; it means that people are no longer sitting in traffic for hours. That is possible, but only when the work done at home is equally effective.

I could talk to you about this for a very long time. I have read a lot on the matter. I have my opinions.

We absolutely have to work on the work-family balance issue, but we must also include the aspect of telework, because it is being imposed on workers. If people want to be paid, they have to work outside their offices, in other words, to telework. They are given the equipment they need to set up at home, but with no concern as to the isolation they might feel or the space they need. Some people are alone from morning to night because their socialization is done at the office. Their work is their family. They can't see their friends in the evening and, during the day, they are alone in their little apartments. We see this mostly in large centres, where public servants rent apartments closer to their offices during their first years of work. Let's put ourselves in the shoes of people living alone in small apartments for more than a year and who have set up their kitchen tables as Service Canada offices in order to work. It is extremely difficult.

These are the kinds of matters I would like to be talking about at meetings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Let's also not forget the legal structure of the Parliamentary Protective Service. I've already talked about that a little, so I will not go back over it.

Everything happens quickly today. I am thinking of the news and the allegations we can see online. Everything that happens today becomes a pressing issue. You can even include recommendations on the study on issues of sexual harassment. That is a pressing issue. We also have the issue of medical assistance in dying for the healthy. Why do we not focus on those matters, even though they may not be easy to talk about?

We have to talk about the measures that must be taken against any form of harassment. We have to talk about the legal structure of the Parliamentary Protective Service. They are matters of great consequence, but we have to brave the storm and move forward. It makes no sense to be talking about prorogation and its links to an imagined scandal involving WE Charity, given all the work we have to do at the moment.

In addition, we know that our committee has to conduct a study on redrawing constituencies. It is our responsibility to do so. We have to start sooner rather than later, because the demographics are constantly changing. For example, in my constituency, some regions are developing exponentially. Since the pandemic started, there has been an explosion of people into remote areas. Cottages have become so important. Some are converting them into houses. The real estate market varies enormously. The Canadian market is overheated everywhere right now.

By all indications, the demographics are changing rapidly in each of our constituencies. The game-changing news is that high-speed Internet is going to be accessible. Some municipalities in my constituency were not developing because they had no Internet access. The provinces and the federal government have committed to ensuring that everyone has Internet access. With the minister responsible, they have established a number of programs. The CRTC has also created a program. My province had a program and the federal level had a program. So a project jointly funded by Quebec and the feds has just been announced. Just imagine the demographic explosion that this is going to create in rural areas and in the regions.

We have the data today. The data are probably realistic. We can use the data we have today as a basis; we can work with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and assess the increase in the number of rural residents. The increase will result in some overload. In downtown Toronto, with block upon block that are 95% apartment buildings, nothing will change. We know that not a lot will change. However, we have to ask ourselves whether we need more constituencies, whether we need to increase the number of residents per constituency, and whether our constituencies need to be made bigger.

My constituency currently has 41 municipalities, spread over 5,000 km². That is a lot of ground to cover. When I go to the far end of my constituency for a dinner or an evening, I have to stay there overnight and come back the next day. You can see clearly how those things have to be thought through. The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has to take a look, in order to change and improve the way we do things.

I would now like to discuss something other than constituency boundaries. It deals with recommendations about a study on a confidence convention. This matter was raised by a member, in fact. He wants to establish a confidence convention.

Reading that piqued my curiosity. I went to check what studying a confidence convention might entail. I couldn't find anything about it. I am ready to listen to others, to take the plunge and to learn. I am curious to move forward and to find out what is possible in terms of a confidence convention.

To me, it is not common political language, and I have been working in politics since 2009. I am open to it today. However, we are going to have to work as a committee, ask questions and plan for a working session on the approach to the upcoming motions we want to implement. We have to know what work we want to do.

Earlier, the Chair said that we have to pass a budget. We have to bite the bullet and pass a budget. Even though members are not travelling, there are still expenses for the technical equipment for our guests. The committee wants to hear the witnesses' testimony. That actually seems to be the greatest expense. Even though we are not travelling and the committee has no expenses, we still have to establish a budget and set priorities. So we are going to have to make decisions along those lines.

Basically, all the plans, priorities and intentions that we had for the parliamentary session at the beginning of 2020 have disappeared and been replaced by the urgent need to assist Canadians to make it through the greatest global event since the Second World War. It is therefore quite logical that, when the first wave subsided, in the summer of 2020, the government had to take stock and decide whether it was still possible to continue with the plan that had been established in December 2019. That was done in preparation for the Speech from the Throne.

No one here can argue the fact that it was necessary to reset the government's priorities after the first wave of COVID-19.

We had to concentrate on the economic recovery, on seeking vaccines, on the importance of working well with the provinces to prepare to vaccinate Canadians, and on the preparations for the likely second and third waves. It was exactly the kind of situation where prorogation was needed and was properly used.

Some have said that it was a political decision by the Prime Minister. As I said previously, it is perfectly understandable that the reasoning should still be the subject of debate. However, the committee was able to be made aware of the government's reasoning, and that is the important point. We on the committee expect to hear the explanations so that we can accept the answers. The Prime Minister himself took the time to justify the prorogation. In addition, Mr. Rodriguez came before the committee and explained the government's position. It was absolutely unnecessary for the Prime Minister or his Chief of Staff to appear.

Let us not mince words. Some of Ms. Vecchio's amendments would mean that the Prime Minister would have to appear with his Chief of Staff. We know that is pure politics. It is absolutely unnecessary for the Prime Minister to appear. Frankly, I wonder why we are back at this stage, given everything I have just explained.

In closing, I will spend a few minutes on that issue.

[*English*]

I will end on this, but this is very important.

[*Translation*]

Honestly, why would we be asking for those witnesses to appear here given that, in the court of Conservative and opposition opinion, they are already guilty of something? We can read as much in the questions and the answers: they are guilty before ever they come here. Notions have been preconceived. We have a motion to knock somebody down who is already on the ground. At this committee, the opposition has presumed the conclusion of the matter and has done everything it can to try and make the facts fit its story. What facts is it talking about? There are no facts, because those witnesses appeared at other committees. With what result? None.

Canadians are not interested in this political game. They are concerned by the political game being played by the Conservatives and their opposition cronies. Canadians do not believe in this fake crisis they are trying to create. The scope of the motion before us is so broad, and so inappropriate for this study that, as committee members, we have no other choice but to reject it. If you want, we can talk about a counterproposal or an amendment to the motion later, but I will be speaking for my point of view as long as it is necessary to do so.

I find it interesting to be talking to you about the way in which I do politics and the decisions we made in terms of the prorogation. As I reread the motion we are discussing today, I found it interesting to see how outrageous the opposition's attempt really is.

They are not trying to do a study on prorogation; this is about the WE Charity. Prorogation is only an excuse for them to bring that matter up before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I understand my opposition colleagues' frustration. For months, they have been trying to make this an issue, at a number of committees and in the media, and they have got nowhere. Now,

they are trying one last time to use the WE Charity to embarrass the government. I understand their frustration.

During the pandemic, we helped seniors, especially the most vulnerable. To start with, we gave them a GST credit, which helped 6 million seniors in Canada. The Bloc Québécois has said publicly that we did not help seniors because the GST credit was made available to everyone, not just seniors. For us, "everyone" includes seniors. For me, all Canadian citizens have a place in the country that I am proud to defend.

Furthermore, the dates for which documents have been demanded, show that our colleagues are not interested in prorogation itself and they are actually trying to link the WE Charity to this study. When I arrived, I began to take notes, in order to trace the history of the study. Today, with a simple and concise analysis, it is easy to see the opposition's intention in introducing such a motion. These demands for witnesses and for documents are simply intended to slow down the work of the government, rather than to work in the interests of Canadians. We can see what is happening in the House in terms of medical assistance in dying. They don't want to move matters forward; they just want to hinder the work that the government is doing.

It is really funny to hear the Leader of the Opposition say that he wants the government to succeed in providing vaccines to Canadians. That is a joke. When we succeed, he's happy, and when the distribution is not going quick enough for his taste, he blames us. He would like us to move faster than the public health authorities and to be able to—

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, can we just get back to the motion?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: That is why it is important for our government to hear all the opinions it needs to move forward. Even if my colleagues say that the motion does not serve to slow down the government, nothing is going to stop me from saying what slows down a government and prevents it from working well, and this motion is directly linked to WE Charity. We need to move on. The opposition must stop playing partisan games. We must all continue to work together for the good of Canadians and our country. We need to get back to focusing on what matters to Canadians, which is reviving the economy and helping them through this global pandemic.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I give the floor to my colleagues.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

It was interesting. On the study you mentioned—I mean, there are no motions that have been put on notice on that—we did look at modernizing Parliament.

I think even Ms. Petitpas Taylor was on committee when we first looked at the issue of a family-friendly Parliament. Then that study went on, and years later we picked it back up, called it modernizing Parliament, and made some recommendations. I still don't think the work was done, because there was at that time a lot of hesitation. I feel like we've progressed beyond that point now.

Anyway, it brought back some flashbacks on different things we've studied here before.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, it is your turn.

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

Actually, yes, I was on the committee back then. Quite interestingly enough, the Province of New Brunswick right now is looking at studying a family-friendly type of legislature in New Brunswick. As Mr. Lauzon has indicated, we have an awful lot of young parliamentarians and, as such, they're wanting to look at things differently. It's good.

Before I begin, I wanted to say a special hello to Richard Cannings, the member of the NDP.

Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Cannings. I always have great memories of my first day in Ottawa. I met you and your wife in 2015 in our orientation session, and I think you and I both didn't exactly know what we were getting ourselves into. It's great to see you, and thank you for joining us. It's always great.

I have to also say, Monsieur Lauzon, thank you so much for all of your comments. I have to laugh when you say you're new to PROC and that you really want to make sure you're carrying your weight.

[*Translation*]

You are carrying your weight, no doubt about it.

[*English*]

You're continuing to work. I have to say you're certainly contributing a lot to the committee, Stéphane, and we appreciate your wisdom and your experience. Thank you so much for all that you do for us.

[*Translation*]

Before I start, I have to be honest. My comments are somewhat related to what Mr. Lauzon said earlier.

We are talking about the whole question of the relevance of prorogation. We are continuing this study that began several meetings ago. I think we can say that the opposition members have already made up their minds.

The last time I was in the House of Commons was on March 11, when Bill C-7 was introduced. That evening, I took the time to listen to all the debates in the House. Time and time again, members of the opposition, particularly the Conservatives, established links between prorogation and the WE Charity speech. I know they want to hear further witnesses at the committee, and I also think they want to reopen this debate.

I find it unfortunate that we are still debating this issue today. After all the attempts by the opposition members to make WE Charity

the subject of this study, I was hoping that they would have finally moved on, but we are still here today. It's really unfortunate, because we want to work on issues and studies that matter to parliamentarians and to Canadians, but we need to continue to pursue this issue.

Like my colleague Mr. Lauzon, this past weekend, I had the opportunity to phone my constituents on what is called an action weekend. At no time did people talk to me about prorogation or the study of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That said, what really came out of those conversations was vaccination. I could see that people were very hopeful. There was a light at the end of the tunnel as, finally, vaccination and delivery rates were gradually increasing.

[*English*]

Again, speaking about the many calls that I, my staff and volunteers have done over the past week, hearing about the issue of vaccination was really what was key and paramount to the people I spoke to. Prorogation certainly was not top of mind for people. I would again say that prorogation is not something that most Canadians think of day in and day out.

When it came to the issue of vaccination, when speaking to my constituents, again, they had hoped.... We know the big lift, as Minister Anand likes to say, is starting to occur now.

For me, I'm really excited when we're able to say to people that our original objective of having six million vaccines by the end of March is now not the case. We are actually going to have over 9.5 million vaccines in Canada by the end of next week. That's really exciting. I know that when constituents spoke to me this weekend, that's really what they were talking to me about.

They had questions about Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, and J and J. There are many opinions about that. However, what they also wanted us to focus on was making sure that Canadians had the right information about vaccines. They wanted to be reassured.

Health Canada regulators are doing a phenomenal job. When we hear that these folks are working around the clock to do the approval of vaccines, they really are. I know a lot of these people personally, and I can tell you that I see the black marks under their eyes, because they are literally working seven days a week to get the work done.

They deserve our congratulations. They are doing it because they want to keep Canadians safe. They also want to make sure that the work that needs to get done, that we are not taking shortcuts and that vaccines are being approved in Canada.

What Canadians want is for us to protect their health and safety and their families'. They recognize that we need to get vaccines in arms as quickly as possible if we want to get a handle on COVID-19.

I also think what people are concerned about as well right now... Again, I find it quite disturbing and really unfortunate that we're here debating this matter. Canadians are also really concerned about the third wave that's probably upon us right now. I shouldn't say "probably"; it is upon us.

Coming from New Brunswick, our numbers are a lot lower per capita, and I'm very pleased about that, but I'm concerned about all provinces and territories. Today alone—I was just looking at the numbers this morning—in the province of Ontario, we have 372 people right now who are in the ICU. That is the highest number since the peak of the second wave. The third wave is upon us in some areas, and it's really important to make sure that we continue to have all hands on deck to do the work that needs to be done.

Not only do we have to have vaccines in arms, but we have to continue to practise the public health guidelines. Last year, none of us knew what that was. We didn't talk about public health guidelines as much as we do now. However, we know that we have to do that. We have to have a multipronged approach to effectively gain control of this situation. I'm proud, as Canadians, that we continue to do that.

Again, in Ontario they were saying that over the past 24 hours, they've had 33 new admissions in ICU. We know that these numbers are creeping up again, so we have to work together and we have to make sure we have all hands on deck.

What Canadians want us to focus on is the issue of vaccines. They are really proud of the work that Minister Anand has been doing on this file. She's been doing a lot of heavy lifting. The job has not been easy and she continues to push those targets, because again, we want to make sure that the numbers of vaccines coming in are coming in as quickly as possible.

If I look at the province of New Brunswick, our small little province here on the east coast, population 750,000 total, and the number of vaccines coming in, that's what the people in my riding are really concerned about and really excited about. I quickly went through some of the lists of the numbers we're seeing in the province of New Brunswick. Last week, the week of March 15, we saw 9,300 vaccines come into our province. However, this next week—how exciting—we're receiving almost 25,000 vaccines.

That number continues on that trajectory, and that is without the additional 1.5 million AstraZeneca vaccines we are receiving from the U.S. We can see that the work we are doing is going to continue to ramp up and ramp up. From there, the speed that we can get vaccines into the arms of Canadians is absolutely key.

I also have to give a shout-out to Major-General Fortin, who has been doing a phenomenal job with respect to the issue of vaccine delivery across the country. We certainly recognize that is not a small feat. It's the biggest challenge, I am sure, that he's had in his career, probably, when it comes to logistics, but he's doing a great job and working collaboratively with provinces and territories to make sure that provinces get the supplies they need.

The other thing, as well, that I want to comment on was mentioned to me this week. Many Canadians aren't aware that the federal government is not only procuring the vaccines that are needed,

but also all of the equipment that is needed to make sure those vaccines get into the arms of Canadians.

When we look at all of the PPE, the needles, the swabs and all the rest of it, a lot of work has been done in that area to make sure that we not only have the vaccines but the tools. If we don't have the tools that are needed to administer the vaccines, we're not going to be ahead.

Again, Minister Anand has done a phenomenal job in that area, in making sure that people have access to the tools.

I have to also comment that not all countries were as well prepared to have those additional tools that were needed. Some countries, because they didn't have the tools, weren't able to administer the vaccine. Therefore, we can see that Minister Anand has taken a global approach to making sure that all that was needed was—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I have a point of order. I'm questioning the relevance.

Could we get back to the motion? Thanks.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Absolutely. Thank you, Ms. Vecchio.

With respect to the tools and the procurement that was needed—and, again, this would be the area of priority that Canadians want us to focus on and what is really important for them right now—these are the types of things that people were mentioning to me.

With regard to the issue of prorogation, I can't say it came up at all in my conversations last weekend or during my busy week in the riding when I had meetings with many constituents.

If I focus again on the province of New Brunswick with respect to the PPE that the federal government has been able to procure, the province of New Brunswick has received 377,488 rapid tests for our little province alone. We have procured 578,000 pairs of gloves for frontline workers; disposable gowns, 5,900; respirators, 142,000; and surgical masks of all types, over 62,000.

Canadians want us to be prepared. They want us to make sure that, with the big lift of vaccines, we have the tools that are needed to administer them. I can see that our ministers have been hard at work making sure that gets done.

The other thing as well that I heard during my phone calls this weekend—and, again, my friend and colleague, Monsieur Lauzon, mentioned it—was on the issue of seniors. We have certainly recognized—again, we have said it time and time again—that the pandemic has certainly shone the light on the many inequalities and also the many vulnerabilities that exist within our system. The issue of people in long-term care facilities has certainly been key and highlighted and is really disturbing for all Canadians.

Throughout this pandemic, our government has tried to work hard with provinces and territories to make sure they received the additional supports that were needed, because we recognize that the issue of long-term care falls in the responsibilities of the provinces and territories. However, at the end of the day, I think it's all of our responsibility to make sure that our seniors are well taken of. They worked so hard to build this country that we are privileged to live in, and we have to be sure we are there for them. We have provided additional funding, through the safe restart agreement, in order to prevent and control outbreaks of infection. We have to continue working closely with them to make sure they receive those supports.

What's the relevancy is perhaps being asked. This weekend, again, the issue of prorogation was not the issue that was coming up. These are the issues, the long conversations that people wanted to have and wanted to make sure that our government was really focused on.

We have heard too many stories...and, yes, in my province of New Brunswick as well, we have had some outbreaks in facilities. We know how difficult it has been for our seniors. It has been difficult for our family members. It has been difficult for everyone involved. We have to make sure that our seniors are better protected and that support workers receive the training they need, the protection they need and the wage increase they need. Again, there's a lot of work that needs to be done, and I'm happy that our government has been able to work with the provinces and territories. That is going to continue in the short term, but also it has to continue for the long term.

The other thing as well that was brought to mind many times last week was the issue of long-term care standards. This is not something we can take lightly. It's something that we have to continue to work on with provinces and territories to make sure we get this done right.

The approach that "Ottawa knows best" is not the approach that is needed. We have to work in close collaboration with leading experts and also with the provinces and territories. The reality in New Brunswick is probably not the reality in Etobicoke, or in Whitby perhaps, or other areas of the country. I don't know the names of all the ridings of my colleagues, so I'm trying to divide them up.

I think we have to look at what national standards are needed to make sure that everyone at least gets a level of care that is similar across the country, just like our health care system. When we look at the Canada Health Act, we have a Canada Health Act that's imposed in order to make sure people have access to similar services. Again, we want to make sure, through our long-term care standards that we are going to be putting in place, that people are going to have access to similar types of services, and that should be expected of all.

Another thing I want to mention really quickly, which I think is good news when we talk about long-term care, is that we've seen thus far with our vaccine rollout that, as of last week, 89% of people in long-term care have finally been inoculated. That's really good news. I know it certainly warmed my heart when my 99-year-old aunt, Lillian, called me to say that she had gotten her vaccine. She was pretty happy. We need to make sure that we continue and

that everyone who can be inoculated will be, but again, we have a lot of other folks we certainly have to focus on.

Another point that came out for me during the conversations this past week—and again, I don't want to take all the time, and I want to make sure that I share my time with other colleagues who have a lot of things to say—is that a lot of people were focusing on seniors who are living at home. I talked about 89% of seniors who live in long-term care facilities being inoculated, but in my province we're still at people 85 and over having appointments booked. Slowly but surely the age is going down. People in long-term care have been inoculated, but those who are living at home still have to wait for when their turn comes up on the list.

We're fortunate in New Brunswick. We have over 200 pharmacies that are providing the vaccines, so the rollout is going well.

I really have to give a shout-out to Dr. Jennifer Russell. She appeared before our committee during our study on election preparedness. Dr. Russell and her team have really done a great job of informing New Brunswickers and of keeping New Brunswickers safe. At the end of the day, Dr. Russell has the trust of New Brunswickers. Every day at two o'clock people still tune in to hear her message. That's where the decisions need to be. The decisions need to be with our public health experts and not with politicians. We need to rely on their expertise in order to move forward.

Coming back to what I was going to mention about seniors who are at home, I know I've heard from a lot of them and, I can tell you, when they got me on the phone last week they certainly wanted to talk and had a lot of thoughts to share about the handling of the pandemic. Overall, again, they were satisfied with the work that has been done, but a lot of them indicated to me that they were really lonely. This past year has been tough on them. We have these little bubbles, but many of them couldn't go out and their bubble was really limited.

They want to make sure that we continue to work hard in order, again, to get vaccines into arms but also to make sure that we do all that we can to prevent that third wave from happening, because they want life to get back to some sense of normalcy again—whatever that new normal is going to look like.

I think we all can be of the opinion that probably normal is not going to be what it was before. I think we're all going to be changing our habits, and that's not a bad thing. I think the quicker we can get to whatever that new sense of normalcy is going to be, the more beneficial it will be to all of us for our physical health and also our mental health.

When I was speaking to my seniors this weekend, prorogation was not an issue that came up. What they did talk to me about was making sure that governments provided additional services to people who were actually living at home. In the province of New Brunswick, the issue of connectivity sometimes comes up. I'm fortunate that in my riding we have high-speed Internet pretty well all over the place, but I know it's not the reality for folks across the province.

We talked a lot about some different types of investments that we've made and perhaps some financial support that we've been able to provide, as my friend and colleague Monsieur Lauzon indicated. I'm not going to go over the comments with respect to the amounts of money that have been given to individuals, but I do know that in my riding there are a lot of great community organizations that provide support to seniors and that things had to change because of the pandemic, because we couldn't have that physical contact with each other. I was really pleased a few weeks ago that we were able to make a few phone calls to folks in organizations in the area to tell them about some investments through the new horizons for seniors program, and I'm sure that probably all of us here in this committee have received some funding for different groups in our area. Sometimes they're not huge amounts of money, but it makes a huge difference to these organizations and how they can deliver services, and they can certainly stretch a dollar. This money goes far for them.

I'll give you just a bit of a snapshot of the types of investments we've been able to make and some groups that have benefited from them.

One group was the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. It wanted to provide some services to alleviate isolation for seniors who are visually impaired. Again, these are people who oftentimes would meet together in settings, and as a result of the pandemic they're no longer able to do that. This funding that we were able to provide for them is going to provide them outlets to alleviate that isolation that many seniors are going through.

We were also able to make some investments.... Again, this came up during one of my calls—prorogation didn't, but lawn bowling in my riding did, believe it or not. The Centennial Lawn Bowling Club has received some funding, and it's to increase their amount of equipment and to give people lessons and courses on lawn bowling. Spring is upon us, even in New Brunswick; it is going to start soon, and we know that physical distancing is possible when doing outside sports. They were thrilled to get some additional funding, and they'll be able to increase their participation when it comes to that program.

Another group that received funding was the Codiac Woodworkers Guild. A lot of people, like seniors, who have woodworking experience will be sharing their tricks of the trade and encouraging people to get involved, all while respecting social distancing.

I had to laugh. Last year I visited one of these groups, and many of the seniors who have now moved into apartments have donated all of their woodworking equipment to these seniors facilities and are using their own equipment to teach people. It's like a win-win for these folks because they didn't know whom to donate their equipment to. Their children in many cases didn't want the equipment, but these seniors still feel really valued. As a result, through the additional funding that we were able to provide to them, we can see that it's going to make a difference. Again, seniors want us to work on their priorities and provide them with the assistance and additional funding they need to help them during the really trying times of the pandemic.

I could go on and on, but I'm probably going to save a few examples in the event that we...wanting to share a bit of what's going on

in the riding. However, one other thing I wanted to comment on was the United Way of the greater Moncton area. I know that many of you probably have United Way agencies, and the one in Moncton does phenomenal work throughout the southeastern part of the province.

This time around, with the monies we've provided to the United Way through the new horizons for seniors program, they have also received a grant, meaning that seniors are preparing meals for seniors and delivering them at home. They've seen that, throughout the pandemic, this has been really needed because many seniors haven't been able to go to food banks or get the additional support they need. This meal delivery program has made a huge difference in their lives, and we will hopefully continue to support them and find ways to support them as well.

I mentioned a lot of these types of examples today because, first of all, they speak to the pride of my riding. I'm really proud and pleased with the work that many committed people are doing in the riding. I also mentioned them to demonstrate that at this point in time, Canadians want us to focus on what's really important to them.

Talking about the WE Charity and other things is not a priority in the minds of Canadians. I know that people have indicated that this is about the study on prorogation. However, over the past several meetings we've had at PROC, a group of people has provided us with valuable expertise on prorogation. We've had academics. We've also had the House leader, who came forward to provide us with testimony, very openly and transparently, with his bureaucrats, on the reason for prorogation.

I truly believe that at this point in time, we are at the point that we should start writing our report with respect to our recommendations.

[*Translation*]

Again, I think it is time we wrote the report on our study on prorogation. It makes no sense to ask the Prime Minister or anyone else to come back here. It is obvious that the opposition members are fixated on one thing. They are convinced that they will find a smoking gun. Yet, after hearing all the witnesses who appeared in the WE Charity study, it is clear that there is no scandal in this story. So, I think it is time to start writing our report. This way, we can continue our important work for Canadians.

Frankly, why call all these witnesses if, according to the opposition, they are all guilty of something already?

The opposition parties have already made their views on this clear and public.

As I was saying last week, when we were debating the assisted dying bill in the evening, even then, time and time again, I heard people make that comment about prorogation and WE Charity. I really don't think we have anything to gain by continuing to invite witnesses.

Madam Chair, to conclude, I have a few comments to make before I hand the floor over to my honourable colleagues.

I understand the frustration of my colleagues in the opposition. They have tried for months to make this an issue in several committees and in the media, and have gotten nowhere. Now, they are trying one last time to embarrass the government with the WE Charity issue. Again, this has nothing to do with prorogation. This request for additional witnesses and documents is nothing more than an attempt to slow down the work of the government, to bog down civil servants in paperwork and to waste their time reviewing documents rather than working on implementing the government's agenda.

Madam Chair, this concludes my comments.

[*English*]

I would also like to give a notice of motion at this point in time, if I'm able to. Is that okay, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You wouldn't be able to actually move it, but you can put it on notice.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: That would be great.

The notice is as follows:

That, pursuant to its mandate to examine issues related to Elections Canada under Standing Order 108(3)(a)(vi), the committee undertake to study the issue of hate groups registering as political entities with Elections Canada in order to be able to access the tax advantages for fundraising and the voters list;

That this study include a particular focus on any legal space, given the existing transparency requirements for political entities laid out in the Canada Elections Act and Criminal Code offences related to hate speech directed towards identifiable groups, that allows hate groups to access benefits intended for legitimate political activity with the express purpose of disseminating messages of hate;

That the committee make recommendations to the Government on how best to address this issue, recognizing the limits to free speech as defined in the Criminal Code and without

—and I stress “without”—

undermining key tools required for political engagement of legitimate political parties with Canadian voters;

That the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and

That, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the Government table a comprehensive response to this report.

That would be the motion, Madam Chair. I think it's really timely that PROC do a detailed study on this matter. We certainly recognize that this is an issue of grave concern. I think it would be very timely if this committee would be tasked to undertake this study.

For now, Madam Chair, I will cede the floor to my friend and colleague Mr. Turnbull.

Thank you so much.

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

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to Ms. Petitpas Taylor for bringing forward that motion.

Perhaps in an effort to move things along, why don't we seek unanimous consent to pass both Ms. Petitpas Taylor's motion and Ms. Vecchio's motion on division and get to work on the content of both motions. We'd pass both motions on division and move on.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Nater.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to do that?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: No.

The Chair: It was a good attempt to move us forward, Mr. Nater.

That motion is just on notice. As I mentioned before, we have the motion of Mr. Blaikie and also three motions from Monsieur Therrien.

Would you be able to email—

The Clerk: Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: Sorry, that's what I was just going to ask, if Ms. Petitpas Taylor could email me a copy of the motion she just put on notice.

That would be great. Thank you.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Will do, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Something that came to my mind when I was listening to you speaking and talking about new horizons funding, Ms. Petitpas Taylor, was that just before I logged on to this meeting, I joined virtually a group funded through new horizons. It was a group of seniors all learning to use tablets.

They were also talking about how technology has been the saviour for a lot of us through this pandemic, but it has been so difficult for them because some of them don't even know how to use that technology to their benefit. It's nice, then, to see there are groups doing work like that, training seniors so they'll have access to a whole bunch of different things—groceries, banking and all of that. It was nice to get in touch with those seniors from my riding this morning.

Mr. Turnbull, you are next.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank my honourable colleagues who came before me and made such great speeches and remarks.

Before I get started with my argument today, I would like to put another motion on notice. It's a shorter one, but no less important. The motion is as follows:

That, pursuant to its mandate to examine issues related to Elections Canada under Standing Order 108(3)(a)(vi), the committee undertake a study of the issue of the Ontario Superior Court decision on Section 91(1) of the Canada Elections Act; and consideration of any necessary legislative amendments.

My French is not great. That's why I said it in English. But I will email it to the clerk in both official languages. I'm pushing “Send” right now.

The Chair: Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I think that's a very worthwhile motion. I note that the motion is like an amendment I moved in the previous Parliament on that exact issue, which would have prevented the court challenge. Unfortunately, the committee at the time didn't adopt it, but I'm glad the government has now come around to the Conservative view on this.

Perhaps we could have unanimous consent to adopt all three motions—Ms. Vecchio's, Mr. Turnbull's and Ms. Petitpas Taylor's. It's three for the price of one. Let's get to work on these three issues and see if we can't move this committee along. I'm optimistic this time, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Good ideas can come from anywhere, Mr. Nater. They often come from you, so I won't say they can't also come from you. I'm glad to see that you're in favour.

I don't think the committee has changed its view on unanimous consent, unless you want me to formally ask—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I apologize Madam Chair. I would very much like to see all this written in French to ensure that I can follow the discussions and think intelligently about what is being proposed at the moment.

I would like to see the documents in French first of all, please.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, absolutely. You'll be circulated a copy in French shortly.

We won't be moving forward on any of this right now. It's just been put on notice, like the other motions we have from Mr. Therrien and Mr. Blaikie. We will remain on the debate of Ms. Vecchio's motion at this time.

Mr. Turnbull has the floor right now on that motion.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair. I did just send a copy in both official languages to the clerk, so that should have been received.

I appreciate Mr. Nater's attempt to “let's make a deal” the situation here, but I don't think we have unanimous consent.

I'm looking forward to delivering some prepared remarks. I've been spending a lot of time.... Continuing with the argument that I started in one of our previous meetings—I think it was actually two meetings ago—where I referenced a document by the chief statistician, it is a 134-page or 135-page report of key statistics that were gathered, or I guess collected and analyzed throughout the period from the beginning of the pandemic to around August 2020.

This information was relevant at the time of prorogation. I think it serves as a foundational document of extremely important and relevant data to inform evidence-based decision-making around resetting the government's agenda. I believe very strongly—and I'm

going to argue today—that all of the data actually points to very specific and important themes that show up in the Speech from the Throne.

To me, this again provides significant rationale as to why prorogation was necessary and why a new Speech from the Throne was a chance to reflect the needs of Canadians, and also to check in with them through an extensive consultation process, which I've spoken about before.

The argument really starts off from.... I think the key argument I want to make is that if a global pandemic is not a good reason to prorogue Parliament, then really nothing is. That I think is something that the opposition parties around the table here should be keeping in mind.

I know that the opposition doesn't seem to be satisfied with that, and I feel as if they want to fabricate a narrative that suits their political purposes. Really, you could continue to deny that this is a legitimate and good rationale for the reasons that existed for prorogation, but I think that's denying the evidence and the science behind this and the specific facts about what actually happened following from prorogation.

I say good reasons and rational arguments, because we've seen recently that the Conservative Party in particular has even denied climate change being real, at their national convention. This again continues to show a disregard for scientific evidence and research.

I think that the hypocrisy is thick here, to be honest. Harper prorogued four times in the better part of a decade when he served as prime minister. No disrespect to Stephen Harper or to the Conservative Party, or any of its members, but the party spokesperson gave reasons each time, especially in 2008 and 2009. All of the reasons given were very consistent with concerns about an economic crisis or recession at the time and wanting to check in with Canadians, key stakeholders and opposition parties.

My argument is this. The global pandemic that we've been living through over the last year and responding to as a government is at least 10 times greater than the recession in 2008 and 2009. If we are sitting around the table and honestly thinking that proroguing Parliament wasn't justified, it just seems hypocritical to me, especially when the economic crisis is so much worse. Mind you, this is a public health crisis first and foremost, but it has economic and social implications that are deep and far reaching.

We all have been living through that together, and it's been challenging for every Canadian out there, every one of us, for sure. I feel very privileged to be serving Canadians at this time, and advocating for them first and foremost. However, we're not immune to the impacts as well. We've all experienced losses in our families, local businesses, the isolation, mental health challenges. The list goes on and on.

We're all feeling this and getting through it together, and I really wish that instead of debating this motion, which seems to be about nothing more than political games, we could get down to the business that matters to Canadians. It would be really great.

My colleagues Ms. Petitpas Taylor and Mr. Lauzon painted the picture, from their perspectives, of what their constituents are asking about today. This study is not on their minds. I would even venture to say that it is almost completely irrelevant to Canadians right now. That's a bold statement, I know, because I think many opposition members are committed to pursuing it, but I am still struggling to understand why. I guess I'm really at a loss, because I have to assume it is, again, only for political purposes.

I want to reference a couple of statements that were made in the media in relation to the 2008 and 2009 prorogations of former prime minister Stephen Harper. One of them was in a 2008 CTV article. This is a direct quote:

Last Friday I asked Canadians to give us their opinion on the parliamentary situation. That feedback has been overwhelming and very clear. They want Canada's government to continue to work on the agenda they voted for—our plan to strengthen the economy.

This is, again, referring to prorogation, and it's very clear from this statement that this was a chance to work on the agenda. It was assumed not only that the agenda was not abandoned but also that prorogation was justified based on wanting to strengthen the economy and look at how the government could do that at the time.

In a Toronto Star article on the same prorogation in 2008, this statement was made: "It's the opportunity to work in the next six weeks on these measures, and I invite all the opposition parties, especially those that have a responsibility to the whole of Canada, to work with us, to inform us of their detailed position and we will be there to listen."

Again, this expresses the idea of consultation with opposition parties, responsibility to Canadians and a chance to reflect and listen. That was used as justification in 2008 by the Conservative government at the time.

One could criticize whether prorogation was necessary again a year later, in 2009, but I won't go there today. For our purposes, I want to clarify what reasons were given, which I think are very consistent with the reasons that our government has given. This is my point about hypocrisy being kind of thick at this moment in time.

In the Toronto Star, Dimitri Soudas, whom I've never met but I understand was the spokesperson for former prime minister Stephen Harper, said at the time that with the recession easing, it was "time to engage with constituents, stakeholders and businesses in order to listen to Canadians, identify priorities and to set the next stage of our agenda."

This was about resetting the agenda coming out of an economic recession that was slightly easing. One could draw a very similar parallel between the easing first wave of COVID-19, with its economic impacts, and the chance to re-evaluate and do the consultation necessary with constituents, stakeholders and businesses to reset the agenda. This is exactly the same. It's so blatantly parallel that it's hard for anybody to deny.

In a CBC News article from Ottawa, Dimitri Soudas said, "This is quite routine", referring to prorogation, "but it is also important to give Canadians an overview of where we will be taking the country over the next little while." In a CTV article, Soudas said, "There's nothing out of the ordinary about doing this", referring to prorogation. Then in Maclean's, Soudas said that a new parliamentary session was needed to set in motion "basically the next phase of the economic action plan."

All of these statements made in the media to justify prorogation in 2008 and 2009 were almost identical, only we have to remember that the government of the day, in the four times it prorogued, didn't provide any evidence or any report to the House to justify why it had prorogued. Sure, Canadians were left guessing and, sure, these reasons were given in the media, but that was acceptable at the time.

Our government introduced a change to the Standing Orders that required transparency around this process. Here we have opposition parties now trying to claim that we haven't been transparent, and they want to do an extensive study that's already been done multiple times at other committees. This is a rinse and repeat until they get what they want, which is holding up the very important work that this committee could be doing.

I want to speak directly to Ms. Vecchio's livestreamed constituents. I know she's livestreaming this on her Facebook account, but I really think this is—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, he is misleading people. I believe it's the debate that's going on in the House of Commons today that is being livestreamed.

Ryan, can you clear the record and make sure you give the correct information?

Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I know Ms. Vecchio was doing that in our last meeting, so if I was wrong, my apologies.

The Chair: The clarification I guess has been made.

Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

To round out that point, it's very hard and rich specifically for the Conservative party to be saying that our government lacks transparency around this when the pandemic presents at least 10 times the impact....

We amended the Standing Orders previously. We complied with that standing order and produced a report. We've had the government House leader come and speak to us. We've done a study. We've entertained this in terms of understanding the rationale for prorogation and still they persist in wasting this committee's time.

I do believe it's a waste of time. I'm sitting here and I'm preparing for hours and hours to speak to this motion, which I fundamentally disagree with. I will not stop arguing for it to be defeated. I will not stop, because it is a waste of our time.

We're here to serve Canadians. We're here to do work that matters to Canadians. I would like to be talking about misinformation within the elections process and what we can do about combatting misinformation. I think there are so many other things we could be doing.

The safe passage of the bill that was put forward, I think it's Bill C-19—sometimes I get the numbers mixed up, because so many things are happening. It's the bill we worked on. We did some great work in this committee, some really fantastic, non-partisan work to move us forward as a country, understanding that if an election is called.... I know we all don't want an election. We looked at what we need to do if it's called to ensure that Canadians are safe, they can exercise their democratic rights and they can vote within a safe electoral process.

That work is so impactful and important. Here we are debating this instead of moving that. We could be doing a pre-study on that bill to make sure the bill itself passes more quickly when it does come to our committee. There are so many better things we could focus our attention on right now that are more relevant to Canadians.

This is just the start of my remarks today. I have a lot more to say. I will try to be brief, but I do have a lot to say. I've been reading extensively and preparing for this conversation.

I know that, as a new member of Parliament, it's my job to speak and advocate for the things I believe in and that I think my constituents would want me to be saying and doing. I'm very conscious of that, and I take that very seriously. Like Mr. Lauzon, Ms. Petitpas Taylor and all my colleagues, we're working hard for Canadians.

I also want to point to something else that is a key piece of evidence, that if I were a witness on this committee I would introduce.

Experts say this pandemic has been approximately 10 times worse than the recession in 2008 and 2009. They are almost incomparable. When we look at the statistics, the recession in 2008 and 2009 is a blip compared with the economic impacts of this public health crisis that we're all living through and trying to manage our country through.

I want to refer to a specific article in BNN Bloomberg on April 27, 2020. The title of it is "COVID-19 to spur depression '10 times worse' than 2008". I have a whole host of other articles, but I'm just referring to that one so it's on the record. It's not just me saying this. I'm not making this stuff up. I'm reading expert opinions and advice and bringing that to the committee.

I would also add that one can't even say that we can use what we learned from 2008-09 and apply it to the current health crisis and the induced economic crisis based on our public health crisis. They're so different in attributes and characteristics. I started to say this last time, and I'm prepared to talk more about this in the future. I think there's a very big difference between a supply-side recession and a demand-side recession. Economists have done a lot of analysis to look at the differences between 2008-09 and the 2020-21 economic crisis.

I would just say maybe "to be continued", but it's not just 10 times worse. It's completely different. We can't even necessarily apply some of the learning from that past crisis to this one, because it doesn't really apply. There may be some aspects of it that do, but I think it's pretty important to point out that they're qualitatively different, and this one is much more complex and deeper.

Getting back to my original argument, I referred to the report from Statistics Canada. I've read it pretty much cover to cover numerous times. I've made notes about it. I think it's important. The reason I think it's important is that the key message in the throne speech that I found opposition parties would contest and trivialize and call a "buzz term" or a "catchphrase" is this message of "build back better", which I know some people may perceive as a buzz phrase, a catchphrase, a talking point or something.

It certainly may sound like that to you, but to me, and based on all the evidence I see from Statistics Canada, I believe this message that we need to build a sustainable, resilient, inclusive and equitable economy moving forward resonates with the majority of Canadians—and now is the time.

Just as we always say that COVID-19 is an unprecedented crisis and that we haven't seen this in 100 years, we also have an opportunity, coming out of this, to really address the deep inequities in our society and our economy and to ensure we have an economy that works for everyone, that builds pathways to social and economic inclusion and that, more than anything else—we have to make sure—protects our planet.

To me, if you believe in social justice and environmental sustainability, our Speech from the Throne really would speak to you. That message of "build back better" isn't just a buzz phrase or catchphrase. It's something that we believe in and that stakeholders across this country have been echoing. They've been echoing it because it resonates with them, not because it's a talking point or a.... I don't trivialize that. It encapsulates what people want to see in the future of this country.

What I want to do is bring it back to the statistics and the information that we have, and specifically the information that was available at the time of prorogation, which is relevant. The economic crisis and the social impacts of COVID-19 have gone through a second wave and, now, as Ms. Petitpas Taylor rightly pointed out, we're in a third wave. We're going to experience that, I guess exponentially, in that third wave.

I want to get down to making my argument. That was a bit of a preamble, but I wanted to outline the overall architecture of the argument I'm making. I really think it's important for you as members of this committee to know where I'm going with all of this. Now I'm going to provide you with evidence, research and information that I think substantiates it.

First of all, on the economic impacts in general, there's a whole bunch of categories to the economic impact in general. There was an unprecedented decline in outputs. Again, this is based on August 2020, and it's five times greater than 2008, with the worst impact on the economy in the service-based industries. Real GDP fell by 2.9% in 2009. Real GDP fell by 12% in 2020, and that was only after the first wave. Already, you can see that the impact was greater and that was only during the first wave.

I want to quote from this report by the chief statistician of Canada. I'm not sure whether this should be attributed to the person who wrote the report, because there's probably a whole team that worked on it, but I will just quote it:

The road to recovery will involve major adaptations for businesses and households, which poses challenges for an equitable and resilient recovery.

It's interesting that those phrases should be used at a fairly early point in that report, but I certainly think this is relevant to where I'm going with this argument.

Another point that I think is important to keep in mind is that historic declines in all economic activities were experienced. Those include imports, exports, business investment, household spending and real GDP at market prices. Those are five categories. Not only did real GDP fall, but all of these other economic activities also experienced historic declines.

In Q2 2020, household spending had decreased by 13%. Employment earnings fell by 9%. Our government's emergency relief measures ensured that Canadian families got direct payments through the CERB and other income supports. Those led to disposable income and household savings actually increasing eventually. They went from 8% to 28%. That was based on a reduced cost of living, and this will also ensure that people spend—

Mr. Wayne Long: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I believe the translation isn't coming through clearly. I just want to make sure that it is coming through in French.

The Chair: Is it not coming through in French to you?

Mr. Wayne Long: No, actually, my apologies, it is now.

The Chair: Are you able to hear me right now?

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes, I can. There was something wrong with my headset. I apologize. Thank you.

The Chair: No problem, Mr. Long.

Mr. Turnbull, I'm sorry about that.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

If possible, I'd like to move an amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion while I have the floor.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It's as follows:

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

I. by deleting paragraph (a),

II. by replacing paragraph (b) with the following: “(b) renew the invitations issued to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, each to appear separately before the committee for at least 90 minutes; and”

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

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

The Chair: Do you have a version of that amendment that you can email as well, so we can see it?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Yes, I can do that.

The Chair: It's a little hard.... Even with Ms. Vecchio's first attempt, it was handy to have the email version so we could understand it. Even if we go back to it, we'll know what she was talking about.

Mr. Clerk, since he has the floor and he's moving an amendment to the motion he's speaking about, can he continue to speak to this amendment or what is the committee's practice?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, that's right. He would be able to continue to speak. The debate will now be on Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

The Chair: Okay.

All right, Mr. Turnbull, would you like to explain your amendment a little bit? I think an explanation is probably needed before—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: If we could we get that amendment before we discuss....

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

I would like to receive the written version of Mr. Turnbull's amendment to see how far it modifies Mrs. Vecchio's amendment. If it changes it too much, then it may not be in order. So I would like to read the amendment in question, please. We refer to an amendment. I understand that Mr. Turnbull's amendment changes the motion, but I would just like to be sure.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're past one o'clock. Do you want to just suspend for 15 minutes while that is circulated?

You can take a look and also take a bathroom break or whatever might be needed, and we'll come back in 15 minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long: That sounds good to me.

The Chair: All right. We'll see you all back in 15 minutes.

• (1315)

(Pause)

• (1335)

The Chair: Welcome back. We were on Mr. Turnbull's amendment and everyone has received a copy of it, though I don't know if you were able to take a minute or so to skim through it.

Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm happy to give an explanation of this amendment. I think the amendment is clear and everybody has received it, but essentially it focuses on renewing invitations to the Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. This is relevant to the study, and the reason I'm asking to renew those invitations is that perhaps they couldn't come at the request of the committee last time. I think renewing the invitation would be a smart thing to do, especially given my speech, which was related to diversity and inclusion and the deep economic impacts that we've experienced as a result of COVID-19. It seems to me that having those ministers come back would be beneficial.

I will also add that the Speakers' Spotlight section of the motion concerns me, as does the section with the document requests and the request for records from WE Charity. I think these two sections of the motion overstep dramatically. Why would we be dragging folks into this conversation when there's no way they would have any information that's relevant to prorogation? I think it's a fishing expedition to ask these individuals to do this. They are not public representatives and they're not politicians. They're individual citizens.

Speakers' Spotlight is a private company, and they have no knowledge of prorogation. I don't think they even understand it. In many cases, we've seen that people outside of government don't even understand the process of prorogation and what it means. Very few people talk about it in my constituency, so I find that the topic, again, is not at the forefront of people's minds. I think we have to stop treating private citizens like they're under an investigation.

We've heard from the government House leader, who speaks on behalf of the government, and he gave really detailed testimony and an explanation—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: You look so beautiful today.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Karen.

The Chair: Karen, you were unmuted.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm sorry.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'll take the compliment. Thank you very much. It must be my hair.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, you look dashing. Carry on.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: My sentiments are really that we're amending to cut out portions of this that I think are not valid or useful for pursuing the reasons for prorogation. I think renewing the invitations to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion is particularly relevant given what we've been saying, which is that the rationale for prorogation was based on these deep inequities we're experiencing. The pandemic has hit sectors very differently. I prepared lots of data and information in my remarks to demonstrate to you just how far-reaching and how deep the impacts are in terms of inequity and whom those impacts are predominately hitting.

Youth are one of those groups, almost above any other group. Women and visible minorities are the other two major segments of our Canadian society that are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. There's a lot of robust information on that.

I'll use this as an example to illustrate my point. First of all, a quarter of families did not have savings to avoid poverty, to get

them through two months. New Canadians, lower-educated workers and diverse population groups struggled the most, but it was over a quarter of families. A third of families did not have enough savings to handle a three-month work stoppage. The financial vulnerability was pronounced in people under 35, unmarried men and women, and single mothers. Those were highlighted in the statistics of the report I was previously highlighting.

In addition to that, visible minority groups were at higher risk of work stoppage. The percentage of workers employed in accommodation and food services and arts and entertainment were disproportionately.... Minority groups were overrepresented, specifically Korean, Japanese, Southeast Asian, Filipino and Chinese people. Therefore, they had much higher risks of work stoppage. They were experiencing that very differently from the rest of the population. Poverty rates also were highest among Korean, West Asian, Arab, Chinese, Japanese, Black and Southeast Asian individuals.

There was an unequal impact on low-wage workers, far greater than in 2008-09. In the average monthly layoff rates of employees by wage decile comparison, I looked at the bottom decile, which is the bottom 10%. In 2007, the monthly layoff rate was 1.8%. In 2009, the bottom decile experienced a 2% layoff rate. In 2020, that was 13%. In other words, the lowest-wage workers were the ones who got hit the hardest with the most layoffs. Visible minorities and new Canadians were overrepresented in those groups. The impact was six to seven times greater than in the 2008-09 recession, and again, that was just after the first wave.

Also I think we need to note that unequal economic impacts reached other portions of the population: youth, less educated workers, women, recent immigrants and temporary employees. The difference between temporary and permanent is really significant. If you're a temporary employee between 25 and 50 years old, the job rates experienced by August 2020 are 20% lower compared to 2019. If you compare it year over year, there is 20% lower employment for temporary employees.

When you compare that to permanent employee job losses, year over year, you see that it was only 3% in the same age category. This 3% and 20% difference highlights just how much more frequently temporary employees were laid off as a result of the pandemic. The explanation for that is quite simple. I think we all realize this intuitively, but people with permanent jobs more frequently can do them from home. Many of the more temporary jobs out there were those that were likely on the front lines and in sectors that were the most impacted.

I want to reference youth for the moment, because I think this speaks to why the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth should be invited to come back to the committee. Youth were probably the hardest hit. It's hard to actually identify which one of these equity-seeking groups would be the hardest hit, but certainly youth have been hit extremely hard. I want to give you a few pieces of evidence for that.

Employment loss is greatest among youth, with 870,000 job losses. That's just within the first wave of the pandemic. These statistics aren't up to date because, again, we're talking about prorogation. I've only looked at data and information that would have been relevant at the time of prorogation, which would have been up to and around August. All of this data only reflects March to August 2020.

There were 870,000 job losses. There was a weaker recovery among young Canadians after the first wave. There was that period in the summer of 2020 when there was certainly a significant dip in the case numbers and there was some recovery happening. I have a lot of information about what that looked like. Full-time work among young Canadians was down by 23% and dropped even more for young women. It dropped by 30%.

In fact, young women were probably the hardest hit. Approximately 50% of young women work in retail and the food service and/or accommodation industries. Those two industries were the hardest hit. I say they are two industries because retail is separate from food service and accommodation.

Retail did start to bounce back, but obviously got hit again by the second wave and another set of public health restrictions. Youth would have felt that disproportionately, because approximately 50% of young women work in those two industries. That's pretty high. That's for young women. Why are young women disproportionately impacted? Because they more often work in retail and food service and accommodation.

Young workers entering the labour market will also take an earnings hit for up to five years. This is really an interesting statistic. Young people aren't just taking a hit during the pandemic. Their income earnings are expected to decline for up to five years or more.

First of all, the youth unemployment rate hit the historic high of 19% during the pandemic. The cumulative earnings loss estimated by Statistics Canada would equal between \$8,000 to \$15,000 over that five-year period. Basically, youth are taking an earnings loss as a result of the pandemic.

Even in our recovery period, they're still likely going to take a hit. How can we address that? I think that's a key question that prorogation would have been entertaining. What can we do about this inequity that youth are experiencing? That probably exacerbates some of the inequities they already experience.

The percentage of workers facing high risk of job transition is another really important point here. Basically, we all know that this pandemic has increased the trend of teleworking, but it's also increased the trend of digitalization which, in many respects, actually means not just teleworking but also the automation of jobs.

Whose jobs are at highest risk of being displaced by or replaced by automation? In fact, it's people whose jobs require less educa-

tion. Essentially, the less educated you are, the more likely you are to be in a job that's at high risk of being replaced by automation. This highlights another extremely important equity issue.

The other thing that's interesting to note is that, according to the statistics for teleworking, basically the lowest-wage jobs were likeliest to be replaced by automation and the highest-paid jobs were likeliest to be able to be done from home. Just think about the equity issue that creates for our recovery as a country.

These are things that the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth could definitely speak to. That's why I think those witnesses are still potentially relevant for this study—hence the amendment.

In terms of the overall economic impact, I think the reason the amendment still includes a renewed invitation to the previous minister of finance, the Honourable Bill Morneau, and the new Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland is that they would both be able to speak to the specific economic impacts of this crisis, including at the time of prorogation, which I think is all the more relevant.

This speaks to why this amendment makes sense, from my perspective, and why it is an improvement to Ms. Vecchio's original motion. I hope members of this committee will support this amendment. I will be greatly interested in hearing what other members of the committee think.

Perhaps, just before I close, I'll add a little bit more emphasis to the remarks I prepared. I think they relate to the amendment, which is on the depth of the economic impact we've seen, which is the reason for reinviting the Minister of Finance. I'm sure she's studied these impacts greatly and her team has been seized with understanding the full scope and depth of the economic scarring and how to recover from this. I think that's relevant information that would help substantiate the reason for prorogation.

We know there have been historic declines in labour market activity. There were employment losses of three million workers between February and April of 2020. Employment rose by 1.9 million jobs between April and August, so you can see very quickly that there was quite a significant recovery. That's still a net loss of 1.1 million jobs, but 1.9 million jobs did come back, essentially after the first wave, rather quickly.

Our government had worked really hard to create jobs across Canada, and we had a historic low in February of 5.6%. That number jumped to 13.7% in May, but then started to fall back down in July and August. In August it was 10.2%, so we were starting to recover. That was nowhere near, obviously, where we started, which was at 5.6%, which was great, but it was a telltale sign that what we were doing was having an impact.

As to the employment rate, which is the flip side of this, we started in February at 61.8%, so almost 62% of Canadians were employed out of those who are of the age that Statistics Canada uses. That number fell to 52.1% in April, then rose again in July to 57.3% and was at 58% in August. This is only roughly 4% below where we started in February, and in August things were starting to look better.

We can assess the recovery to date based on this time period, up to August 2020. Between February and April, 5.5 million Canadian workers had been affected negatively by the public health measures that were implemented. This wouldn't all have been job losses. Some of it was about income earned for workers who are paid hourly. However, by August the number of impacted workers had fallen to 1.8 million. Again, we were starting to recover pretty significantly if you think about those numbers. About 3.7 million workers had recovered from the losses and negative impacts they had experienced between February and April, so there's lots to consider here.

I will cede the floor now and give an opportunity to some of my colleagues on the committee to make some remarks about the amendment that I've put forward. I hope we can get somewhere in this meeting and move on with this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Mrs. Vecchio, you're next.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thanks very much.

Seeing as there are no further speakers, perhaps we can take this amendment to a vote.

The Chair: Dr. Duncan is on the list as well. She's next, after you.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Go ahead, Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Madam Chair, can you just clarify that we are discussing the amendment that my colleague has proposed?

The Chair: Yes. It's to call forward the witnesses that Mr. Turnbull has mentioned. It eliminates a couple of witnesses too: the Prime Minister, Katie Telford and those from Speakers' Spotlight.

We're on the amendment, as Mr. Turnbull has explained it in the last little while.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Okay, I just wanted to clarify. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank my colleagues for their previous speeches, and I thank Mr. Turnbull for bringing forward this amendment.

I'll begin by saying that I really appreciate our committee and the work we have been able to do together on establishing electronic voting and providing recommendations for a possible election during a pandemic. While I get the motion, the politics of the motion that was at hand, I can't fathom that there is anything more important than addressing the unprecedented global crisis we are still fighting. I will, of course, support the amendment that my colleague made.

I think it's important that we recognize we've lost more than 22,000 Canadians. They are not just numbers. They are our grand-

parents, mothers, fathers, loved ones, neighbours, colleagues, life-long friends, mentors and heroes, and they matter to so many people.

Many people have lost their jobs and businesses. Health care and frontline workers have faced great risks and challenges, and all Canadians have made sacrifices to keep others healthy and safe.

Almost two weeks ago, Canadians came together to remember, pay tribute to and grieve all those we have lost to COVID-19 during the last year. We reflected on the hurt and suffering, the sacrifice. We offered comfort to doctors, nurses, frontline workers, survivors, families and communities. COVID-19 remains an unprecedented global health crisis that has shaken the foundations of economic, political and social security.

I'll just share this with our colleagues. One analysis of premature and excess mortality estimates that over 20 million years of life have been lost. According to the World Bank, the pandemic pushed 124 million people into extreme poverty. The Economist estimates that two years of COVID-19 will cause, as my colleague Mr. Turnbull said, a downturn twice as deep as the great recession.

Yet, here we are with a partisan motion focused on scoring political points. Again, I will support the amendments that Mr. Turnbull brought forward—

The Chair: Dr. Duncan, can you put your mike a little bit higher, because it was popping.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: I'm sorry, my apologies to the interpreters.

Madam Chair, before I continue, can I ask what time we will be going to because of question period?

The Chair: You're right. It's 2:01.

It's really up to the committee. If you would like to suspend for question period and come back or suspend until Thursday's meeting, we'd have to have a consensus from the committee for that.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Should I ask that question, Madam Chair, or are you asking that question?

The Chair: I'm asking that question right now and taking a look.... I'm seeing some nodding in the negative, so just continue.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The point is that none of us will ever forget 2020. It's been a year of tears, tragedy and trials. The pandemic turned our lives upside down under lockdowns, office buildings emptied, streets quieted and schools closed, and Canadians and communities adapted.

There are so many Canadians to thank for adapting, including health workers in the William Osler Health System and the Rexdale Community Health Centre in our Etobicoke North community for their dedication and sacrifice, as well as other essential workers who kept our country running, and Canadians across the country who learned to work, learn and live in new ways. They followed science and public health and safety protocols, and they stood up to COVID-19 deniers and disinformation. They all helped save lives.

Instead of focusing on the pandemic that continues to rage with new waves of sickness and death, we have a motion before this committee that focuses on politics. Again, I will of course support my colleague Mr. Turnbull's recommendation.

Every day, Canadians are becoming sick with COVID-19 and being hospitalized, and they are dying. We are still fighting the pandemic. A few days ago, the director-general of the World Health Organization made the point that after six weeks of declining cases in January and February, we are now on track for a fourth consecutive week of increasing cases. Cases globally are increasing in most regions, and while the number of deaths is still declining, it is doing so at a slower rate. The director-general explained that these are worrying trends due to the variants, the opening up of society and inequitable vaccine rollout.

Thankfully, here in Canada, the largest immunization campaign in our country's history is well under way. According to our country's top vaccine coordinator, there should be enough COVID-19 vaccines available to give every Canadian who's eligible a first dose by the end of June.

The pandemic isn't over, and until all Canadians have access to a safe and effective vaccine, we all need to continue to follow public health advice. That means working from home if you can, keeping two metres apart from others, wearing a mask and downloading the COVID alert app.

COVID-19 is the most challenging crisis we have faced since World War II. It is not finished, and the global vaccine rollout has been far from even and fair, yet we have a motion aimed at scoring political points.

We have new variants. Even if we suppress the virus in one country but it is allowed to spread to other parts of the world, the variants can cause new outbreaks, even in countries that seem to have the virus under control. Vaccines are necessary to help the world move from locking down societies to locking down the virus.

Many low-income countries have not yet received a single dose of vaccine, and there are many examples of vaccine hoarding. If we do not ensure vaccine equity, the virus will continue to spread and to mutate and will ultimately prolong the pandemic and our vulnerability with devastating impacts.

Canada has agreed to top up its funding for vaccine rollouts in lower-income countries, pledging \$75 million more for the COVAX international vaccine-sharing program. As our wealthy countries step up their commitments, the new pledge brings Canada's total contribution to \$940 million.

We must remember that we are one human family. We are interdependent. What happens to one person can quickly affect many

others. You only have to remember that our cluster of pneumonia cases just over a year ago has translated into almost 123 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 2.8 million deaths. That's a real increase since our last meeting.

As of March 19, over 390 million vaccine doses had been administered worldwide. While the world needs to unite to produce and distribute sufficient vaccines for all, which means at least doubling manufacturing capacity around the world, this committee is arguing about partisan politics. We have to keep fighting COVID-19 and rolling out the vaccine to as many Canadians who want it, as quickly as possible. We have to stay focused on what matters most to Canadians: their health and safety, jobs, livelihoods and the economic recovery.

Each of us here knows COVID-19 very personally. We have to think about the children and what the pandemic has meant to them. Imagine being five and COVID-19 having taken up 20% of your life, with having to stare at a screen to learn, not seeing your friends, playing in the schoolyard or attending birthday parties. Imagine being 15 and COVID-19 having taken up about 7% of your life, with lost connections to lifelong friends, lost activities and lessons, mental stress and uncertainty about the future. We have asked so much of children and young people. Life and health are precious. People of all ages are valuable.

I think of seniors. Everyone will remember Captain Tom Moore. As he approached his 100th birthday he decided to try to raise 1,000 pounds for the United Kingdom's National Health Service by completing 100 laps of his garden. He ended up raising more than 30 million pounds and received a knighthood for his service. Captain Tom, Sir Tom, became a symbol of hope for millions around the world. He demonstrated that although older people are among the most at risk from COVID-19, they make incredible contributions to our society.

Closer to home, in our Etobicoke North community our seniors make a real difference in brighter times, volunteering at hospitals, teaching language and culture, tending community gardens and looking after the next generation. We also have wonderful seniors' clubs in Etobicoke North. Many of them meet daily. They talk, play bingo and cards, and they eat and pray together. They are there for one another. They support each other. They deliver food to one another when they are sick or grieving.

The clubs are lifelines, but it's COVID-19 right now. These are hard times, and our clubs cannot meet. Seniors have lost their connections, friendships and their lifelines. COVID-19 not only changed seniors' daily routines but also the care and support they receive and how they are perceived.

My heart breaks for those in long-term care. During the first wave of COVID-19, 70% of the deaths were of those over age 80, or about twice the rates of other developed countries. It tragically happened again in wave two. The greatest tragedy of this pandemic is the lives lost in long-term care homes. We have to root out a dangerous narrative that older people are frail, vulnerable and dispensable. This is absolutely wrong. Seniors helped build the country that we have inherited, and they deserve to be safe, to live with dignity and respect, and to receive the care and support they need.

Although long-term care falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction, our government will take any action it can to support seniors, while working alongside the provinces and territories. Our government will work with Parliament on Criminal Code amendments to explicitly penalize those who neglect seniors under their care, putting them in danger.

Our government will also work with the provinces and territories to set new national standards for long-term care so that seniors get the best support possible, and we will take additional action to help people stay in their homes longer.

COVID-19 also hammered home that we need to address poverty, inequality, hunger and violence against women. I know that both of my colleagues Mr. Turnbull and Ms. Petitpas Taylor have spoken eloquently about both issues in the past.

However, instead of staying focused on Canadians and their needs, we have a political motion. Responding to COVID-19—recovering from the virus, learning lessons and preparing for the future—should be our focus. It should remain our focus.

We have all been touched by the pandemic, and we have to learn from the crisis. We can't forget what we've all been through. We need to prepare for the future, and this includes through our work at this very committee. This committee should focus on lessons learned and pandemic preparedness.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, I hate interrupting and I normally don't do this and I apologize to Dr. Duncan, but I do feel it's important to remind her and all committee members about the rules of relevance.

While I take no issue with any of the comments she's making regarding the health and safety of Canadians, we are really talking about an amendment dealing with prorogation. I would appreciate it if we could continue this discussion but focus on the main issue of the amendment.

The Chair: I know there have been a lot of points of order as to relevance. I don't know how Ms. Duncan feels about the amendment, but if she is of the opinion that the study should be brought to an end and we shouldn't be bringing witnesses forward, then I think her comments might be relevant.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: My point is, Madam Chair, that we are speaking to the amendment. That's all I'm trying to get at here. I have no issue whatsoever with Dr. Duncan speaking as long as it's relevant to the amendment, which is, of course, central to prorogation. If we could focus our remarks on that, then I think this discussion would be much better served.

The Chair: Okay.

Perhaps Dr. Duncan can inform us as to how her remarks are relevant to this study coming to an end or continuing with the witnesses being called forward in the amendment.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Madam Chair, can I just have clarification—and I apologize that I do not know the rules—as to whether we break for question period or if this continues?

The Chair: It's up to the committee whether we break for question period or suspend at any point or adjourn. I am, however, required to suspend in the case of votes. That's the only time I would have to suspend the committee. The rest would be up to the committee.

So far, since we haven't had the consent of the committee, we're moving forward with our meeting of March 9.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Okay. Thank you.

I think this is really relevant. We are speaking about an amendment to the motion that the Conservatives brought forward.

I obviously support the amendment, but I think we also have to address the original motion. We should be focused on the crisis that's ahead of us rather than on politics, because there will be a next time. Pandemics are not a matter of if—

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

When we are doing an amendment, it's specifically about the amendment. We can go back to the original motion once we have voted on this.

We should keep it really tight to the fact that they want to invite the WE brothers and all of those others and just dismiss the Prime Minister from coming. Could we keep it focused on these new people they would like instead...?

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm not going to assume who is supporting or not supporting, but however you find it relevant to that amendment, Ms. Vecchio is correct. We are on the amendment. We're on the amendment to the original motion.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you. I find it very strange and somewhat disturbing....

I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I really would like to continue and I will make this relevant.

I support what my colleague Mr. Turnbull has brought forward, but this committee cannot forget what this country is facing and that pandemics are not a matter of if but when. My greatest fear is that we will forget.

Can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes, we can hear you.

I know we've made you lose track of the thought you were on, so you can take a minute.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Could I have a minute? I have indeed lost track of where I was. I'm not used to being interrupted. I'm also very careful about not interrupting my colleagues.

Dear colleagues, I'm really asking that we think about what is most relevant to Canadians at this time. We have to learn the lessons. We have to be prepared for next time. I'll support the amendment. I'll support the motion, but we cannot forget what we've all been through. If there were ever to be an election, would a new Parliament study the pandemic response? Would they identify lessons learned and implement change so that we are better prepared for next time?

I really would like to share a few of the lessons. This is something we can be asking colleagues. We have to understand what is known and not known. When dealing with a new disease, it's important to acknowledge that not everything is known at the beginning. With new science and data, information will likely change. There will likely need to be adjustments in guidelines, policies and recommendations.

Look at what was known last January versus what is known today. There are a lot of differences—the role of aerosols, the role of indoor versus outdoor spaces, the role of masks. Scientific knowledge evolves over time. Decision-makers have to be open, flexible and willing to change course. Decision-makers must stay humble in the face of a new virus. We have to understand that misinformation is common when there's a new disease. When people are scared, it's easy for false ideas to spread. I'm going to tie this right back into the amendment.

If we look back at the start of the AIDS pandemic, people thought HIV could spread just by being close to someone infected. Many believed only members of the LGBTQ community could get the disease. To be clear, we know that both of these ideas are absolutely false. As the world fought COVID-19, we saw a dangerous proliferation of harmful falsehoods and lies. Conspiracy theories infected the Internet. Hatred went viral, stigmatizing and vilifying people and groups. What we really needed was science, solidarity and trust in institutions.

We have to stop blaming others. COVID-19 was traced back to Wuhan, China. We have heard the disease called by egregious names. As a result, we have seen an increase in discrimination and violence against Asian people. Data from Statistics Canada in July 2020 suggested that Canadians with Asian backgrounds were more likely to report noticing increased racial or ethnic harassment during the pandemic. The largest increase was seen among people of Chinese, Korean and South Asian descent.

A separate report prepared by the Chinese Canadian National Council in September 2020 found that Canadians had reported more anti-Asian racist incidents per capita than the United States since the start of the pandemic. Just last week, eight people were killed by a white gunman at several massage parlours in Atlanta, Georgia. Six of the victims were Asian-American women. The shooting sparked outrage around the world, putting a spotlight on the rise of anti-Asian racism fuelled by COVID-19 pandemic.

Our colleagues from across our parties have also spoken publicly about the discrimination they themselves have faced.

Yesterday, once again, we were all able to come together as Canadian members of Parliament and pass a motion to condemn the rise of anti-Asian racism and racist attacks in North America and to express our unanimous horror at the shootings in Georgia.

Again, it would be very relevant, with the amendments that Mr. Turnbull has put on the table, to have our colleagues back.

I think, Madam Chair, with that, I will cede the floor to my extraordinary colleagues. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Duncan.

Monsieur Lauzon, you are next on the speakers list, and then Madam [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Dr. Duncan, thank you very much for your remarks. They were very interesting.

[*Translation*]

I want to come back to the amendment proposed by my colleague Mr. Turnbull.

At the outset, I made it clear that I did not think it is relevant to invite the Prime Minister to appear before the committee once again. The other amendments also seek to renew this invitation.

Mr. Turnbull has suggested some very good alternatives. Paragraph (a) talks about not asking the Prime Minister to appear before the committee. We remember very well why we concluded that it was not necessary to have the Prime Minister at the committee, especially since Mr. Pablo Rodriguez came to give evidence on behalf of the government.

What is important to recognize in paragraph (a) is that we did make some concessions. Indeed, our original objective was to defeat the motion and to move forward. Mr. Turnbull has gone a long way in replacing paragraph (b). He renewed the invitations to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth for 90 minutes. Anyway, you already know the answers.

Out of respect, I will vote in favour of Mr. Turnbull's amendment, but you already know my opinion: I do not think it is necessary to invite them. However, in order to present my vision and the ideas that we can put forward to advance committee proceedings, I am prepared to make this concession, which for me is the biggest one I am prepared to make.

I'm ready to defend my arguments in direct relation to Mrs. Vecchio's motion.

We've made some changes to paragraph (c), but Mr. Turnbull still retains the essence of the paragraph, which is to renew the invitations to Mr. Bill Morneau, Mr. Craig Kielburger, and his brother, Mr. Marc Kielburger, to appear for 90 minutes. I think that brings us full circle to a series of testimonies that will allow us to conclude this study.

I hope that you'll accept Mr. Turnbull's amendment, because it will allow us to move on.

We've come a long way with this motion. We must remember where we're coming from to understand Mr. Turnbull's amendment. I was a latecomer to the committee, but on December 10, 2020, you were already talking about this motion.

On December 10, even before the whole process was set in motion, the reason for prorogation was already clear to some. I was WE Charity that was at issue. Despite the many nuances brought by several witnesses, people wouldn't budge about the reason for prorogation: it was still connected to WE Charity. Yet, more than 100 days have passed since December 10.

We have evolved since then. Many witnesses have come to different committees. We have to take into account that it is not only our committee that is moving forward. There are also other parliamentary committees, which have asked the same questions to the same people. We need to talk to each other. We need to look at what is being done elsewhere in order to move forward.

If we want to have a good economic recovery to fight this pandemic, we have to go ahead, to go for it, to bring innovative ideas and to be very imaginative. In the private sector, I've been on boards of directors, and I can tell you that there's not a lot of duplication and waste of time. If we ran a private company the way we run the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, we'd be in bankruptcy as we speak. There is no need for the CEO of a company to come into the hot seat for purely political purposes.

Today, we must take the opportunity to say that we have prorogued Parliament for very specific reasons. My colleague Mr. Turnbull has presented an alternative that already goes too far, but shows that we can move forward with teamwork.

I am convinced that we will all win if we include in the report everything that has been said and done so far.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for the work you did before I arrived. I thank all those who took the time to write the report line by line. It allowed me to get on board at the same time as you to be in the same place. I am convinced that my reading has allowed me to be as informed as committee members who have been there from the beginning.

The proposed amendment makes the motion more viable, more humane and more achievable. I sincerely believe that it will allow us to collectively demonstrate to other committees and to our organization that we are capable of reaching a consensus and putting politics aside for a while. I am really eager to see the work of the committee move forward and to contribute to the progress of other issues.

I would remind you that the process started about 105 days ago and that a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then. I could talk about the nuances brought by several witnesses, but the fact remains that when we started the process on December 10, some witnesses already had preconceived ideas about what the committee should recommend. So I want to show that progress has been made since December 10.

I know that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is independent. However, we still have to look at other committees to determine exactly how we move forward in this committee.

I am not saying that we are dependent on the Standing Committee on Finance or the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. What I'm saying is that listening to evidence and questions from other committees allows us to add to our report today by showing that we have met with the array of witnesses on the list. We could also add the questions and answers from Mr. Rodriguez, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion of Youth.

Today, this amendment by Mr. Ryan Turnbull prompts us to make a concrete decision on the nuance between what happened at the start on December 10 and what is happening today. It is no small thing to dedicate over 100 days to a study in government. Decisions taken on the spot in the private sector would not have taken more than 100 days. Of course, we are not in the private sector; we are in government.

I remember that when I entered politics in 2009, I thought there were two speeds: slow and standstill. Coming from a private company, I had difficulty getting used to the pace of politics, which included a lot of discussion. I realized that, in politics, mistakes are made when you go too fast.

This is more or less in line with what I said at the beginning. I was saying that we have indeed recognized that mistakes had been made, and by everyone. I also include myself, because I am one of the first culprits. I am usually the one who uses the expression

[*English*]

"I'm here to raise the flag."

[*Translation*]

I missed out on a few opportunities to speak.

[*English*]

I didn't see the flag arrive.

[*Translation*]

I really missed the boat when we put in place bills that would have allowed a worker returning from the South to receive \$1,000 for his quarantine. We managed to correct this situation. It's important to take a step back.

I want to highlight the testimony of Dr. Kathy Brock, who is a professor at the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University, on prorogation. It won't matter if we call the Prime Minister in to say that the reasons for prorogation in August were, first, to start over and to focus on the government's priorities after a situation had changed, and second, to take into account that the government was exhausted and under enormous pressure in 2020.

Although the opposition members were getting answers to all their questions, they were presenting complex problems that were the same as those experienced in our constituencies. Every day, we had meetings to try to find solutions. I have never seen so much accessibility to the organization and the administration to try to find solutions together. The reason for prorogation will make absolutely no difference today, 100 days after we started the study. The amendment proposed by Mr. Turnbull is THEREFORE extremely valid.

The Queen's University professor said that starting over is one thing. Today, the government and the public service were able to catch their breath. We've been able to take a breather and to start afresh. It is hard to be politicians during a pandemic; the population used us as punching bags. For a human being, it is not easy to take blows. In the ridings, many seniors are grouped together in the same place, in large residential centres or in long-term care facilities. These people are our builders, our grandparents, our friends, our acquaintances, our friends' fathers or mothers. We needed to take a step back. People should have thanked us for proroguing and for starting over with a vote of confidence and a Speech from the Throne, for thinking of the people. That's the way to look at it.

I understand the political game behind all this. The openness that Mr. Turnbull has shown in proposing an amendment to the motion means that we are once again demonstrating that we have the opportunity to move forward and to address the other issues that we would like to address. As I was explaining, prorogation made it possible for the government to take a step back, to set priorities for Canadians in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to set priorities for the economic recovery. I talked about the seniors who suffered greatly because of COVID-19, the schools and the parents who were stuck at home with their children, but I am thinking especially of our merchants and our small businesses. The more rural your environment was, the more isolated you were and the more you were affected.

Again, we cannot save every business and every small business, but we have done everything we can, and we are doing it again today by announcing the extension of the assistance available to businesses. This can greatly help businesses in my riding and in my colleagues' ridings. During the prorogation, we reflected on this. Today, we need to put things into perspective and adopt Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Now there are two possibilities. The first is that we can vote in favour of the amendment, which would allow us to move forward and demonstrate that we are working as a team. The second is that we can vote against the amendment, which would allow us to open the debate and propose even more robust changes. As a member of Parliament, I am prepared to debate for as long as it takes. If we have to debate until an election is called, we will do so. We will not

tolerate this situation. I am prepared to roll up my sleeves, to work hard, to prepare accordingly and to debate for as long as it takes.

It is important to understand how important December 10 was. The witnesses appeared before several committees, and the government heard all the answers. We heard a whole range of evidence in this study. In addition, Mr. Pablo Rodriguez testified on behalf of the government.

Now we absolutely must move on to another issue.

I talked to you about prorogation, but I want to quote Ms. Barbara Messamore from the University of the Fraser Valley, who came and talked to us about prorogation on December 10. Things have changed a lot since then. Here's what she said:

[...] there is also a strong case that can be made that the unforeseen eruption of the COVID-19 crisis since the start of the 43rd Parliament provides a rationale for a new session, with a new Speech from the Throne setting out a fresh legislative program. For this reason, I think prorogation was entirely justifiable.

Today, we are being criticized for not having prorogued Parliament earlier. Let's think about everything that has happened since then. We have done a lot to adapt and to help the population. I am thinking of all the bills we have passed. Today, the distribution of vaccines alone could justify a prorogation so that we can step back and prepare for a good recovery, but we have already done that. There was no right or wrong time to prorogue Parliament. The Prime Minister did it during the pandemic, and Ms. Barbara Messamore told us that it was totally justified to do so.

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, at every meeting since December 10, opposition members have been saying that the only reason Parliament was prorogued was because of the WE Charity case. Despite everything that has been said at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, the Standing Committee on Finance and everywhere else, they are unable to admit that they are wrong.

Our citizens are not talking about a scandal surrounding WE Charity or the reasons behind the prorogation. My colleagues have talked about that in their speeches. Mr. Turnbull clearly stated that his constituents had never questioned him about the reasons behind prorogation and WE Charity. That is not what our citizens are talking about. Mr. Turnbull has tabled an amendment that I would not even have tabled myself, but I am prepared to support it and say that it is very valid. It shows goodwill on his part.

Now, no matter how many times the opposition parties have heard it, I do not mind repeating it: nothing is going to change their opinion, because they are trying to fabricate a scandal surrounding WE Charity through the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. As good parliamentarians, we will never accept that. They had a preconceived idea from the start. I do not understand the relevance of summoning the Prime Minister, political staff and dedicated citizens who have tried to help people when opposition members have already formed their opinion on this. It is unfair. It is not right to summon these people with the ultimate aim of trapping them in a political war.

I do not mind recalling the reasons for prorogation. They were set out in the report on the subject. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the tabling of a document of some 40 pages, including annexes, which talks about the prorogation that took place in August 2020.

If you haven't read the Prime Minister's report, I invite you to do so. It's about forty pages long and well explained. The Prime Minister did not have to justify himself, but he took the time to come and testify before he was even asked. His testimony is simple. He explained line by line the reason for prorogation. He wanted to give decision makers, civil servants and senior officials some time to let the dust settle a bit. This way, they could be better, come up with better solutions and avoid mistakes.

We make mistakes when we go too fast. This happens with our staff, but also with our colleagues. It is often just one irrelevant word in a sentence that could be corrected, but is already considered a mistake. It's a fine line. Imagine being a big decision maker and having to quickly implement policies that affect millions of Canadians, that go directly into their pockets.

My father always told me to be careful in life. He said that if you want to hurt someone, you go for their family or their money. But the pandemic has affected both. It's affected taxpayers' pockets, our seniors' grocery baskets, budgets spent on expensive deliveries, the businesses of workers who could no longer get to work. Indirectly, it's affected families who were isolated, families who suffered loss or illness.

A personal friend of mine—a young man in his forties—has contracted COVID-19 and has not yet recovered. Week after week, he is tired and he struggles. Months after getting sick, he has not fully recovered. This virus has left its mark. This friend is an elementary school principal under pressure to manage staff and students and to control everything. For instance, if a child has a bit of a runny nose, he must call the parents. He has to manage all this while being personally affected by COVID-19 and struggling to get through his work weeks without feeling the fatigue caused by COVID-19. Imagine how much this can affect families.

This is real, this is what is happening on the ground. We absolutely must be able to come up with a motion that will be accepted by everyone.

We will have to leave soon for votes in the House. However, I don't know what the procedure is.

[*English*]

Madam Chair, about the vote, I don't want to go too fast. I didn't read anything, but what about the vote?

Can you tell me if we have a vote at three o'clock?

The Chair: Yes, we have a vote at three o'clock.

If you want, you have the floor until three, but at that point we'll have to suspend this meeting for the vote.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: You'll cut me off for the vote.

The Chair: Yes, I will.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Don't be shy. I don't want to miss the vote.

The Chair: No, I won't let you miss the vote. There's a reminder as well.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you very much.

I was just scared about the vote. I'm sorry about that. I was thinking that I don't want to be responsible for all of you missing the vote.

[*Translation*]

I just want to go back to the report. In my view, it clearly demonstrates the motion's irrelevance. Mr. Turnbull has decided to make concessions and to propose, I would say, a good compromise.

Regarding the amendment to the motion put forward by my colleague, if my party had proposed it to me, I would have taken time to reflect before tabling it, because I've already said that we should simply scrap the motion and move on. However, I understand. I understand that it's like a negotiation between the unions and the employer's side. It has to be give and take, and we are entering into important discussions. I think that our current discussion is extremely important, and it is necessary to reach a consensus.

I know that there are several motions on the table. For the sake of clarity, I print out the email of the person who is moving the motion. So I have the original motion, I have this motion with the proposed amendments, and I compare it with what Mrs. Vecchio has tabled. I also compare it with the other motions tabled by colleagues and I compare the amendment to Mr. Turnbull's motion. I did the same exercise for all the motions. This work method helps to get better oriented during negotiations.

However, I can tell you that I have seen the progress anyway.

[*English*]

We can see the progress from all the motions we have on the table right now. I think Ryan Turnbull's motion is the best one for now. I think we should all work together and go ahead with this motion.

[*Translation*]

In spite of all the evidence heard, which I was able to read afterwards because I was absent for a good part of it, people continue to say "since December 10." This preconception is the trigger for today's meeting. Today, almost 100 days later, nothing will change.

If we were to ask the witnesses to come back, they would say that, despite what happened, despite the waves of COVID-19, the vaccines and everything that happened in the different provinces with the colour codes, we asked for a prorogation because of the WE Charity case. It seems to me that nothing will change, no matter how many times members of the official opposition and other parties hear it.

I think the openness that we are showing today, through the motion that Mr. Turnbull has tabled, shows a willingness to reach a consensus. If we start asking to meet with the Prime Minister, I'm telling you that I will vote against it for sure. We are ready to receive the Deputy Prime Minister and other ministers, also, who will come to support us.

In 2015, that made a difference as well. Our government committed to changing regulations so that federal governments—not just ours, but future ones—regardless of who is in power, would be transparent to Canadians in all aspects of governance, including the use of prorogation.

This was done when there was no obligation. It was the result of the cumulative prorogations that have taken place over the years.

From what I have read in the reports, no justification was given for the 2008 prorogation or the others. People had no choice but to endure the prorogation. The timing of the prorogation was chosen, and no one asked any questions about it. The issue was not referred to committees.

Today we are subject to transparency, given the promise we made on this subject in 2015. We committed to producing a report. This report is intended to provide parliamentarians and all Canadians with greater clarity on why the government prorogued Parliament in August 2020. The report serves as evidence. Indeed, the Prime Minister explains to us in writing the reasons for prorogation.

How is it any different for the Prime Minister to appear before the committee, report in hand, to tell us why he prorogued Parliament? If that doesn't work for you, what does? From the beginning, people have been trying to show that prorogation is related to WE Charity. We are lucky that our citizens are not concerned with prorogation. I spoke to hundreds of people last weekend and not one of them mentioned it to me. We are lucky that they are not telling us about it. The opposition is lucky that citizens are not talking about prorogation. People care about the right things, like vaccines, the pandemic, jobs and economic recovery. It would not be right for people to tell us that they are worried about the rationale for prorogation. If that had been the case, I would have had important questions to ask them. But that is not going to happen, because the prorogation has had no impact on them.

We spend long hours in committee, but people do not necessarily follow our work. Indeed, the ratings are extremely low. If people were to watch our work, they would probably say that we're being childish. Can the government move forward? Can we put forward Mr. Turnbull's amendment? It's up to us. It's not up to the people, because they won't vote on Mr. Turnbull's amendment or Mrs. Vecchio's motion. They will not listen to you. You won't get a good sound bite for your ridings.

Nothing moves our government forward, except to say that it was politics—it still is. We have been pounding the nail for over 100 days. Today, witnesses have appeared before a committee, but not necessarily ours. Can we move on? That is more or less what Mr. Turnbull's amendment implies.

[*English*]

I think you want to interrupt me.

The Chair: Are you wrapping up, Mr. Lauzon?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes.

[*Translation*]

I will be brief.

To conclude, I will say the following. I am a new member of Parliament and I may not be as involved as some of you who have been in Parliament for a long time, but I think I know enough. Can we please move on? Can we at least adopt Mr. Turnbull's amendment to the motion?

I thank you all for listening to me.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

As I said, since there's a vote taking place now, I'm sure everyone needs time to log on to the other system, and sometimes there can be problems with that. Therefore, I think it's an appropriate time for us to now suspend the meeting. We'll see all of you back on Thursday.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Chair, I don't think there's consent to suspend the meeting indefinitely. I would be more than happy to return immediately following the vote. I think the will of the committee would be to do the same.

The Chair: We are already suspended.

[*The meeting was suspended at 3:05 p.m., Tuesday, March 23*]

[*The meeting resumed at 11:02 a.m., Thursday, March 25*]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. The committee is resuming meeting number 26 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This is the meeting that started on March 9 and was suspended on March 23.

Today's meeting is taking place in hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. Therefore, members can attend in person or online. I don't believe we have any members in the room today. Is that correct, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk: That's correct, Madam Chair. There are no members in the room.

The Chair: Seeing that some subs are coming into this meeting from time to time today, there could end up being people in the room, but I'll remind them when they are there. Other than that, I guess there are no personal hygiene reminders if you are sitting in your own office all by yourself. I just want to remind everyone participating virtually to pick the language of their choice at the bottom, English or French.

We have a speaking order from last time and I'll remind you what that is. We had Mr. Lauzon and then we have Madam Normandin, but as she's not here today, her name will be struck from the list. I also see that Ms. Petitpas Taylor is not here today, so her name will be struck from the list as well. Then we have Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Long, Dr. Duncan and then Mr. Turnbull again. We'll figure that out at that point.

We'll carry on from where we left off. Some new motions were put on notice last time. Now we have a notice from Mr. Blaikie, three from Mr. Therrien, one from Mr. Turnbull and one from Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

We are currently on the amendment to Ms. Vecchio's motion. The amendment was put forth by Mr. Turnbull, and we are speaking to that at this time.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My apologies to my colleagues for this interruption. Hopefully, it'll be a short one.

I want to bring forward an issue that came up at the conclusion of the meeting last Tuesday, Madam Chair, when you suspended the meeting until today.

Madam Chair, I think you were in error when you did that, only because Mr. Nater had filed an interjection virtually, when you were about to suspend, saying that he did not want to suspend until today. He wanted to continue with the meeting. As I'm sure you're aware, Madam Chair, as are the clerk and other procedural experts, you require a majority of members to agree with any suspension or adjournment.

I think this is a bit of a potential problem. I want to give some context, and perhaps a bit of a historical perspective to why I'm bringing this forward at this time. I've been around for a while, as many of you know, and the filibuster that's ongoing now is similar to one that I experienced, ironically in PROC again, over 10 years ago. Actually, it was back in 2008.

During that time, the Conservatives, my party, were in government, but in a minority situation, similar to what we have today. There was a motion on the floor that we as a government did not want to see come to a vote, because the opposition members outnumbered us on committee, as is the case today, so I engaged in a filibuster. The only difference, I suppose, from what I was doing back then and what currently is happening is that I did not play a tag team, as some of my Liberal colleagues are doing now. I spoke continuously, and I was speaking into my ninth hour when finally, the meeting came to an abrupt halt.

It came to a halt because of disorder in the committee. That disorder was a result of [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] that I had been [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the opposition members were getting more and more frustrated, and they eventually turned their anger from me and pointed it toward the chair.

Many of the comments before the chair, who at that time was a very nice gentleman by the name of Gary Goodyear, were very

pointed, as I say, very disparaging, and at times highly personal. At the very end, Mr. Goodyear had had enough and he adjourned the meeting. He had good cause to do so, because there was disorder in the committee, and it was his right because of the disorder to adjourn without seeking consent from the committee.

Unfortunately, there was a consequence to Mr. Goodyear's action. At the next meeting, the opposition members called a vote of confidence in the chair. He was found to have lacked the confidence from committee members and was removed as chair.

I want to make it perfectly clear, Madam Chair, I'm not suggesting that there is a lack of confidence in your abilities in this committee. I'm not suggesting that whatsoever. This is not a veiled threat. People who know me well know I certainly don't act that way.

My concern is that you unilaterally suspended the meeting on Tuesday until today without seeking consent or agreement from the committee. In fact, Mr. Nater had filed his intervention saying he did not want to suspend until today. He wanted the meeting to continue following the votes, but you made a unilateral decision to go ahead and suspend anyway, which I believe is in contravention to the procedures and practices of this House.

On pages 1098 and 1099, should you care to look it up, you will find that the procedures are quite clear that, for an adjournment, as an example, the chair must seek a majority of consent or receive a majority of consent and agreement from committee members. It does not require unanimous consent, but it does require a majority of consent, which you did not have, Madam Chair.

I raise that because this could be the start of a very long day and a very long meeting. Tempers might start to fray a bit if we go several hours during this filibuster.

Madam Chair, I want to have a commitment, or at least an acknowledgement from you, and some clarity as to how you are planning to proceed. If you plan to either suspend or adjourn, will you seek the agreement and the majority consent of members of this committee?

I think that is your obligation, Madam Chair. I point that out because I don't know how and when this meeting will finally come to a conclusion. The way it's going, I'm fairly confident in saying that I do not see any quick end to this filibuster that's ongoing.

I want to make sure that while this committee has been very respectful in the past and actually has been getting along fairly well even in the midst of a prolonged filibuster, we don't end up in a situation as we did back in 2008.

With that, Madam Chair, I will turn it back to you, but I am asking, both on my behalf and that of my colleagues, for some clarity and a commitment, if possible, from you that should there be any suspension and/or adjournment, you will not do so without first seeking the consent of committee members.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

I appreciate your experience and your comments. I especially appreciate your experience on this committee. I know that you have probably been through much more than what many of us have been through on this committee so far, so thank you for letting me know about that.

As for Tuesday's meeting on the 23rd, the bells were ringing at the time. I don't need consent when the bells are ringing. I also don't have my virtual gavel. I was hoping to maybe have that sound effect. I don't, but maybe I can get a gavel.

I do respect your comments and your feedback on that. There will be bells ringing today at one point as well. There are scheduled votes, so if those votes are going forward—I believe at around five—we would be suspending at that point, with or without consent for suspending at that point for the votes when the bells ring.

As to whether you all want to come back or not after the vote, we can seek the majority opinion at that time before I suspend, but we will suspend for the votes. We won't go through the bells at that time. We can seek what the consensus opinion is at that time, or we could take a vote at that point. Is that okay with you, Mr. Lukiwski?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's fine. I obviously realize that it is a requirement to suspend when the bells are ringing, unless, of course, there's unanimous consent from the committee not to suspend due to a vote, but my point was that Mr. Nater was on the record as saying he did not want to suspend indefinitely or suspend until today's meeting. He wanted to resume the meeting following the vote yet [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] I think you will check that the bells, frankly, were not ringing at the time. Our vote apps were going on, saying that the bells were about to ring, but they hadn't actually started at the time.

You are quite correct in the fact that you have the ability to suspend when a vote is imminent, which you did. I'm pointing out that Mr. Nater wanted to continue the meeting, and yet you did not oblige with either a call for opinion or any kind of a vote on whether to suspend or to continue with the meeting.

That's what I'm trying to get at here: some clarity on this issue. If we are interrupted by votes if this meeting is still going at the time the votes are called and there's an indication from members that they want to resume the meeting, will you respect that opinion and not suspend arbitrarily or unilaterally?

The Chair: Yes. That's exactly what I have said.

As for the 23rd, I had already suspended. Perhaps it did not seem clear to the members, so I apologize for that, but I had already suspended before Mr. Nater's intervention.

Since you have brought it up at the beginning of the meeting, I understand your wishes and perhaps probably Mr. Nater and many other people on the committee.... Therefore, you have my commitment that although we will suspend for the votes today, I will ask for the will of the committee sometime before that point if we do go past to that point. Who knows what will happen until then? I will ask well ahead, before the bells ring, as to whether you want to come back after the completion of the votes. You have my commitment on that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

We will carry on with Mr. Lauzon.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order. I'm sorry. I just wanted to continue.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: As you know, with the filibuster that will be going on, will we be assured that we will have the resources for both this afternoon and this evening? Sometimes that has been a concern as well. I just wanted to ensure that we do have the resources, it being 11 o'clock now, and to be able to make sure that with the votes at 5:15 p.m. or 5:30 p.m., we do have those resources at least until that time, and then preferably after.

The Chair: The clerk has informed me that the resources are generally lined up because there is some expectation that this meeting might go a little longer than the regularly scheduled one o'clock time.

As for the other committees taking place at 3:30, there was no clarification for all of that, even at the last meeting on the 23rd. Generally the whips are supposed to decide. You know the spiel I usually read at the beginning of most meetings. It's up to the whips of all the different parties to agree as to how the House resources are going to get allocated. Only so many committee meetings can take place at one time. I know you're aware of this, Ms. Vecchio, because I know your whip relays information to you and at times you've reached out to me. Hopefully, I will hear.

Usually a decision to cancel a particular meeting is made by the whips and therefore there would be enough House resources for us to be able to proceed. No decision was made. It left me in a difficult position as well. Hopefully, the whips of all the different parties can decide whether they want to cancel a different committee meeting this time, well before our time to adjourn or before we would have that one hour time for clean-up in between the meeting.

I'll let you know if I hear. I'm really at their disposal. It's not a decision I can make. The clerk may have some comments that can also help clarify the position we're usually in.

The Clerk: Madam Chair and Ms. Vecchio, I don't have anything to add to what the chair said. My understanding is that resources are available for PROC to continue, if that is what the committee chooses to do.

The Chair: All right. We will carry on with Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Lukiwski, for sharing all your years of experience on this committee.

[*Translation*]

I can assure you that we would not be frustrated or angry. We just want to make sensible comments on the motion and the amendments that are being proposed, especially the one by my colleague Mr. Turnbull.

We also know the political games, Mr. Lukiwski, and we are not prepared to accept such a motion quickly. This is something we do have in common. It is very unfortunate that we are caught up in these partisan games with all the opposition members.

With respect to the motion before us today, it is the Prime Minister's prerogative to advise the Governor General on prorogation. That is exactly what the Privy Council Office officials and the academics said before the committee. So there is no debate. In fact, some of them argued that prorogation is legitimate when the Prime Minister has the confidence of the House, which was the case with the August 2020 prorogation.

Members of the committee will recall that there was indeed a vote of confidence in the House when the Speech from the Throne was voted on. Not all members of this committee voted in favour of the Speech from the Throne, but a majority of the members of Parliament did. That proves that the Prime Minister did have the confidence of the House.

Earlier, Mr. Lukiwski, you demonstrated the importance of a majority vote. Well, that's what happened during the Speech from the Throne. Indeed, of the 329 members of Parliament who took part in that vote, 177 voted in favour of the Speech from the Throne, thereby expressing their confidence in our government. The majority of parliamentarians voted in favour of it. Does my NDP colleague not recognize that his party voted and expressed confidence in our government?

So there are a lot of political games, but the opposition is talking about filibustering, as we have seen in the House. Again, committees were able to continue their work after prorogation. I believe that the committees have studied the particular issue of WE Charity. In fact, I believe the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics is still studying it today.

Putting aside these two arguments from the opposition, it is therefore clear that parts of the motion are motivated—

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Lauzon.

Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Chair, in the interest of making sure that the record accurately reflects what's going on in Parliament right now, it might help the committee to know that the WE Charity issue was recently discussed at the finance committee. It was examined there in the summer, but it's recently come up again. It is another forum where WE has been looked at.

I didn't mean to interrupt my colleague, but I think this goes to his point that the government continues to show an openness to looking at these issues when the opposition raises them. We are all seeing committees examine—

The Chair: This doesn't really seem like a point of order necessarily, but—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'll leave it there, Madam Chair.

The Chair:—what we've done in the past is used a protocol that if the person speaking at the moment is okay with your intervention, you could make a short intervention. It doesn't give you the floor necessarily, but it allows you to make an intervention. However, this doesn't seem to be a proper point of order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'll leave it there. As I said, I just wanted the record to accurately reflect where things currently stand in terms of the committees examining issues that my colleague raised.

I'll turn it back to you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I thank my colleague for those important points. I should say that instead of two arguments, there are three.

[*Translation*]

So, setting aside my colleague's arguments and clarifications, especially since we are again studying this issue in two committees, to which I would add the Standing Committee on Finance, which I had neglected to mention, the first major argument for the motion is the naming of the Deputy Prime Minister as a witness, even though she is not involved in any way with WE Charity or with prorogation. In good faith, my colleague Mr. Turnbull mentioned that the Deputy Prime Minister might appear before the committee. So we are now a long way from a motion that calls for all of the Prime Minister's staff, the Prime Minister himself and other outside members, who no longer have any connection to Parliament, to come forward.

As we all know, from hearing the Prime Minister on several occasions in committee, prorogation remains his prerogative. The Clerk of the Privy Council, Ian Shugart, also named in the motion, will soon be on sick leave to take care of his health, following his recent diagnosis. We wish him a speedy recovery. I am sure that all members of this committee will agree that the clerk's health must come before partisan games.

I recently explained how things are changing rapidly. The motion tabled at the time is no longer relevant today. The same can be said of all the witnesses who have testified, of those who have appeared before the other committees, whether it be the Standing Committee on Finance, as my colleague mentioned, the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics or the Standing Committee on Health. As for the honourable Bill Morneau, he is no longer an elected representative in the House.

As we all know, the Prime Minister has come forward. Mr. Lukiwski was talking about experience; in old-timers' experience, prime ministers do not usually appear before a committee. The Prime Minister made an exception over the summer so that he could speak officially and as a courtesy to the opposition parties. Not to mention the Prime Minister's chief of staff who also appeared before a House of Commons committee over the summer.

However, as we are all seeing today, there is very little in the way of good faith debate from the official opposition. It seems that the motion's only intent is to give the opposition parties another opportunity to blame everything on the Prime Minister and see what happens next. That is understandable, because we stood together during the pandemic, we got a historic unanimous vote on the decisions that were made during the pandemic—

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Chair, on a point of order, Mr. Lauzon has accused the opposition of lack of faith, but I think you should remind him that we are currently debating a Liberal motion. The Liberal filibuster at the moment is on a Liberal motion.

Why not bring it to a vote and we can get back to the original Conservative motion?

The Chair: That's a good reminder for all of us. Maybe Mr. Lauzon will explain.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes, we're debating an amendment to the motion. We're still talking about the same motion, but we're talking maybe about a solution on this motion.

As long as I have something to say, I will say it.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Privy Council, Mr. Shugart, was also named in the motion, but he will no longer be with us shortly. It is important to avoid having him appear on this motion after his diagnosis. That is part of the original motion. So we're talking about the Clerk, Mr. Bill Morneau and the Prime Minister. When you interrupted me, I was talking about the Prime Minister's chief of staff.

What is the purpose of all these ill-advised attempts? I want to choose my words carefully, but prorogation must be justifiable. In any case, the rationale has been repeated many times in the public sphere, and the motion was tabled following changes made by this government in order to be transparent about the reasons for proroguing Parliament. That is what I was explaining to you.

Historically, members of all parties have voted unanimously on all decisions made for Canadians during this pandemic. We have had to make extremely difficult choices to provide assistance. Obviously, this is also related to a budgetary issue. We made decisions that had an impact on the economic crisis, which we are experiencing at the same time as the health crisis. As parliamentarians, we have made decisions together to help Canadians, and we have opened the door to the possibility of listening to each other and working together.

Of course, in a political context, it is annoying for opposition members to tell the public that things are fine and that members agree with all the positions taken. It can be annoying to say that Liberals have accepted the arguments they have raised and responded positively to their requests. In every debate in the House since the pandemic began, we have considered every situation, because a situation experienced in one riding could occur in our own. We must serve all Canadians to the best of our ability to get through this pandemic, regardless of their riding.

This is something that the previous government did very little of. We cannot judge the Harper government, known for its serial prorogations that were not necessarily warranted, as this was a prerogative of the incumbent Prime Minister. The current government has made changes to allow for more open and transparent governance. It has already been said that the opposition parties, some of whose members are here today, had taken their position on the reasons for the prorogation that took place in August 2020 long before the committee met to consider it. These are questions that were asked in the House and in the committee; these are media readings and attempts at publicity. These were questions that were directly related to prorogation, for which opposition members had already determined the reason.

With that, what is the purpose of the study? At some point, I'll have to stop saying that I'm a new member, as I'm starting to become part of the family, but I can tell you that I consider myself fairly new and that I'm coming from the outside into a committee that I'm keen to move forward.

The question I am asking myself today is the following. What is the purpose of this study?

If you have already made up your mind and nothing can change it, then why pretend to undertake a study?

To do so is to use a motion in a study simply to play partisan politics.

I went to the trouble of looking up the definition of the word "study." It means dedicating time and attention to acquiring knowledge about a subject. This takes me back to my 21 years as a teacher. Whenever we wanted to send a positive message to learners so they could improve or gain new knowledge, that was the question we asked ourselves.

This was the question we asked ourselves every morning as teachers when we prepared our lessons. We asked ourselves what skills and knowledge we wanted to teach. We were passionate about it.

I would have liked to feel that same passion today and see that we have the opportunity to intervene to become better.

However, I was disappointed as soon as the political games started when the motion was tabled in the committee. The motion had probably already been prepared and was in line with the questions that had been raised during the discussions.

Why not just make a statement that the reasons for proroguing Parliament were clear and that they were x , y and z ?

It would be sufficient to state in the report that, in your opinion, prorogation concerned WE Charity for x , y and z reasons, because a witness said that the prorogation should have taken place before or after, or that it took place too quickly or too late, or that the prerogative did not apply and was reserved for WE Charity. [*Technical difficulty*]

It would be enough to state in the report that this is the reason for prorogation. In any case, from what I can sense from the beginning, nothing is going to change.

I come back to being passionate about progressing on an issue or acquiring knowledge. It always reminds me that in my twenty years as a teacher, my greatest satisfaction was not my paycheck at the end of the week, but rather the results and...

[*English*]

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

The Chair: Is it about the noise?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It's not only the noise, but I can hear both French and English equally. That buzz is really bad too. That's [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

The Chair: It seems that it's more when you're speaking, but I did start hearing it before. I don't know if it's happening for every speaker.

Mr. Lauzon, can you say a couple of words?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes, I can say a couple of words if you want.

Can you hear better, Karen? Is the sound better now?

The Chair: No.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, Ms. Vecchio's audio and perhaps her Internet may be a problem. We're going to try to figure out if it's related to her device or a more generalized problem.

Could you hold on for just a minute?

The Chair: Okay.

Even your sound, Justin, seemed a little bit off. I could hear you and I can hear Mr. Lauzon, but there is something off. It's not as bad as what I'm hearing from Ms. Vecchio, but overall....

The Clerk: We will look into it on our end.

• (1135) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1135) _____
Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thanks, everyone.

[*Translation*]

I was telling you that when I got up in the morning to go and teach, it was always with the aim of gaining knowledge and sharing it with as many people as possible. Money is not what motivates people to become teachers. It's the result that counts. We're all in it to obtain results and to get things done.

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, I have a point of order. I'm really sorry about this, but I am getting both French and English at the same volume.

The Chair: Let's suspend for two minutes so that it's a bit cleaner.

The Clerk: We'll check on it.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are suspended.

• (1140) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you.

I hope that the technical difficulties have been resolved.

I was comparing my experience in teaching, where one dedicates time and attention to gaining knowledge on a particular subject, to our work in committee. Let's say this motion passes today—I'm talking about the original motion, not Mr. Turnbull's amendment—the witnesses who were named appear before the committee, we wrap up our study and we want to move on. What would happen next? I was thinking about that last night.

If the committee were to call the Prime Minister to explain the reasons for prorogation, which we already know because they have been revealed in a statement, he would be repeating what he has already said and what we have already heard elsewhere. Minister Rodrigue has already made a statement before this committee, but the opposition members seem to want to ignore that and do as they please. Will they interpret the final decision differently? That is the question I have been asking myself. Why not just get on with it?

Last night, I wondered how I could possibly interpret what I experienced in this study. It is as if opposition members signed up for a course and refused to listen to the teacher or any other guest speaker. Why would they bother to read anything or take any tests if they clung to deep-seated beliefs, which they have already mentioned and which have already been widely written about? Nothing could change the opinion they already had.

If a student in my class told me that he was only there because his father forced him to be and threatened to kick him out, I would know right away that his intentions were not good and that he would have difficulty moving forward. This is exactly what happened in this case. In 2010, in response to the economic crisis at the time, the Conservative government House leader said:

Prorogation plays an important role in the effective functioning of our parliamentary and democratic systems. When circumstances change, as has been the case with the serious economic situation we have encountered, it is perfectly normal that the government would want to pause to take stock and to consult Canadians.

Compare that statement in 2010 with the statement made by the current Prime Minister following the prorogation that took place because of the pandemic. At the time, the economic crisis was cited as a justification. Today, however, there is a double crisis. Not only is there an economic crisis, but there is also a health crisis. The prorogation was therefore doubly justified, according to the Conservative government House leader at the time. We could add him to the list of witnesses, so that he can come and explain to us the importance of prorogation in a difficult economic situation, but we have already heard from Mr. Pablo Rodriguez, the current government House leader, on this subject.

The House leader of the time might have added that, in addition to the current economic crisis, we also have the health crisis. Consequently, if it was true at the time, why wouldn't it be true today?

However, we know the idea is preconceived. We know you already want the report to say the prorogation was due to the WE Charity scandal. Write it! Nothing will change today, apart from the fact that we're playing a political game here. It's completely natural for a government to want to pause, take stock of the situation and consult Canadians. I entirely agree with the House leader of the time and our current leader that proroguing Parliament gave us the time we needed. Government business had to stop, and we had to stop sitting in order to take a step back so we could move forward more effectively.

With that in mind, the government used the available time to take a close look at our agenda, plan the next steps in our economic recovery and adjust more effectively to the health crisis. The results of that effort are apparent today in the more than 4 million doses of vaccine that have been distributed and the way we're working hand in hand with the provinces and territories.

I know it troubles the Conservatives to see that people are satisfied with the results, but they're our collective results, those of the House of Commons. We're providing Canadians with the care they need. I could explain at length why proroguing was justified in every instance. However, we have a much bigger and more consequential economic and public health crisis that requires a single government response. No government in the history of Canada has faced this kind of crisis. Canadian citizens are at least entitled to that much.

In the midst of this economic and public health crisis, the government must take time both to plan the next steps needed to protect the health and safety of all Canadians and to conduct broad-based consultations on economic recovery measures that should be taken.

I'd like pause here for a moment to address a point that's of the utmost importance at this time. With respect to the economic recovery, although the government must manage the economic and public health crisis, it nevertheless needs to look to the future and consider how it plans to restart the economy. We've been extremely troubled by the situation of our seniors and Canadians with poor Internet service. What have we done? Canada has invested \$1.7 billion to ensure that Canadians are connected. We've introduced programs in partnership with the provinces. We've put in place programs to assist indigenous communities. We've introduced programs together with the CRTC.

We've just announced a partnership in Quebec. Last Monday, the Quebec premier and the Prime Minister of Canada appeared together to announce the rollout of an Internet project to connect all Quebecers by September 2022. We know that's what we need in rural areas. Quebec has expansive rural areas. I believe you're now familiar with my riding, which is very large. I could even have two or three riding offices, but, for budgetary reasons, I limit myself to two, one at each end.

My home is situated roughly in the middle of my riding. I'm not far from Ottawa, an hour and a quarter away. So I can have offices anywhere, but it also forces me to travel a lot. It's hard for me to stay in touch with my community because 40% of my constituents don't have Internet access.

I therefore have to allow for that fact in every communications strategy, whether it be for elections or simply to contact my fellow citizens. The fact of the matter is that our local newspaper is more popular in my riding than the Internet. We have no subways, buses, public transit or fast lanes, and virtually no bike trails. Since we have to stick to the shoulders of the main roads and highways, it's very dangerous to ride from one town to the next. There are 41 municipalities over an area of 5,000 square kilometers.

It's important for us to discuss the economic recovery, which, in my case, will be based on the small businesses and micro-businesses that have been forced to close as a result of the pandemic. However, I can tell you that it's also extremely important to have Internet connectivity. Our government is working hard on that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] even though we're facing an economic crisis.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Lauzon, did the interpreters say that your sound cut out?

Just pause for a moment, please. I was actually very interested in listening about your riding. It was bringing a lot of thoughts to my mind.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I just want to end on this. I'm very interested in my riding, so I want to conclude on that.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, can the interpreters hear Mr. Lauzon?

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Chair, they're telling me they can hear him now. It may have been just a momentary hiccup.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I will stay in French, as I don't want to disturb the system.

The Chair: You had a great flow going there. I love hearing your French.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: As you know, I can speak passionately about the economic recovery and the measures we've introduced in my riding. And since I'm the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Seniors, I'm a fan of seniors and have extensive relations with them.

I'd like to let my colleagues speak. I think they'd like to speak to this topic too.

Having said that, I'd like to add something before I yield the floor. I still have a lot to say.

[*English*]

I will raise my hand again to come back.

[*Translation*]

Let the report be written, and let the opposition members say what they want about prorogation; in any case, the die is cast.

So the appearance of witnesses would make no difference or alter the situation in any way. All the testimony and, more particularly, the drift of the questions that have been asked point directly to a predetermined solution. I noticed that as I read them.

This confirms that you've already made up your minds without even considering all the factors. In addition, yes, under the amendment to Mr. Turnbull's motion, many witnesses may still appear. In fact, we could continue discussing that.

I yield the floor to my colleagues.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, you are next.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to my colleague Mr. Lauzon for his remarks and specifically for his work on seniors and the incredible work he does for his constituents. It's clear to me that he has unending passion for advocating for his constituents, and that's great to see.

I hope I do as good a job as he does.

This amendment I put forward does attempt to appease the opposition. I know that it doesn't necessarily include all the witnesses and the documents and things that were a part of this fishing expedition, or the continued fishing expedition that's already been done several times in other committees. I don't think it needs to go on ad infinitum.

I would hope that people recognize we're willing to move in that direction and have some more witnesses come to the committee. I think they're witnesses who make sense, given the argument I've made over and over again, and I have mountains of evidence to substantiate my argument that the throne speech reflected the data and the consultation process that was undertaken during the prorogation.

I think I have made that very clear in past meetings, but I will continue. I have a lot more to say today.

Before I pass the mike to my wonderful friend Wayne Long, who is here, who is someone else whom I greatly admire and respect, I want to say that the witnesses who are included in the amendment focus on understanding the deep economic and social impacts of COVID-19. I've argued that the throne speech's main message of building a more inclusive and equitable, sustainable, resilient economy and society in Canada reflects the data and evidence.

I think my amendment also attempts to call witnesses who can speak to that as well. I think it's very consistent with what I've been arguing, and I am anxious to hear what my colleague Mr. Long has to say about this. I know he is equally as passionate as Mr. Lauzon, so I'll hand it over to Mr. Long.

The Chair: Just as a reminder, because some people had to log on and off when we were having difficulties, I want to let you know my speakers list.

We have Mr. Turnbull, who just finished. Then we have Mr. Long, Dr. Duncan and then Mr. Blaikie. What is reflected on your toolbar might not be the proper order because it's out of order.

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

I believe my hand was up before Mr. Blaikie's. My understanding is that my name was on the list from the previous meeting, so I just made a short remark. My understanding was that my hand was up at the beginning of this meeting, and I distinctly remember raising it right after my colleague, Dr. Duncan, so I would like—

The Chair: You were already on the list, Mr. Turnbull, so I don't know how we're to...

Mr. Clerk, can someone raise their hand twice if they're already on the list? Do I add them back on?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, there is no firm rule with respect to that.

Mr. Turnbull is correct. He was on the list from the previous meeting and his turn hadn't come up yet by the end of the meeting two days ago. Then when this new meeting started today, he also immediately put his hand up, with several other members.

Part of the problem might be my fault. I wasn't sure if you were simply putting your hand up again to guarantee a spot today, or if you wanted a second slot, essentially.

You had your hand up from the previous time, you gave up the floor and then when the meeting started again today, you also put your hand up. That's my understanding. I may have led the chair to the wrong conclusion on that. I apologize.

The Chair: Okay.

We have Mr. Long, Dr. Duncan, Mr. Blaikie, Mr. Turnbull [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

The Clerk: Mr. Turnbull just gave up the floor. What I have here is Mr. Long next, with Dr. Duncan after that. Mr. Turnbull will then go again and then Mr. Blaikie.

The Chair: Okay. I got it.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: On that point of order, Madam Chair, I'm trying to understand the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] raising one's hand to get on the list in that case.

Perhaps a demonstration might serve to make my point. If I do this—

The Chair: I'm sorry, your screens are moving all over the place. Is this just happening to me?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm lowering and raising my hand and now wondering if I have four spots on the speaking list. If I continue, I'm wondering if I'm reserving future spots on the speaking list.

From my understanding, usually when you have a speaking list, once you have a spot on the list, you can't reserve another spot until you've spoken. It seems like an odd practice, and I'm concerned about the nature of how that might unfold.

If Mr. Turnbull has more to say now, I'd encourage him to say what he has to say now. If he wants to get back on the list, I'd encourage him to put up his hand after he's had his turn to speak, or I think this could get rather ridiculous pretty quickly.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie, I agree. Once the person is done speaking, then they can obviously raise their hand after that if they want to go again after the next speaker. I think it would be more appropriate to go to Mr. Long, Dr. Duncan, Mr. Blaikie and then Mr. Turnbull.

Dr. Duncan, you can go ahead and lower your hand in the list since we already have you. You'll be going after Mr. Long.

Stéphane, is your hand up from before? If it is, then Mr. Turnbull's turn would come right after Mr. Blaikie's.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I will lower my hand right now.

The Chair: Perfect. That's my understanding.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Will Ryan Turnbull be going before me?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I raise my hand to be the last one after that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Is that okay with the clerk?

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Yes, Mr. Lauzon. That's the order I have as well.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: All right. That's good.

[*English*]

The Chair: Everyone can go ahead and drop their hands in the toolbar. That way there's no more confusion there. We have Mr. Long, Dr. Duncan, Mr. Blaikie, Mr. Turnbull and then we have Mr. Lauzon.

After people are done speaking, they can raise their hand again, and they would go down to the bottom of the list.

Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I know my colleague Mr. Turnbull is always so gracious. I'm not sure that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] hasn't ceded the floor, because I think he wanted to be generous to his colleague. I don't want him now to have to wait a very long time. I think it's only fair and equitable, since there was this confusion, that we ask Mr. Turnbull if he wants to speak now.

The Chair: You're right. We should hear from Mr. Turnbull. I guess even Mr. Blaikie said that unless Mr. Turnbull has more remarks to make at this time....

We can hear from you, Mr. Turnbull, as to whether you'd like to continue.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, my intention was to give the floor to Mr. Long, my colleague. I didn't realize that, by your having a list of speakers from a previous meeting, I wasn't able to raise my hand in another meeting. I didn't do that on purpose. I just figured that made sense, given that we were starting a new meeting.

To Mr. Blaikie's point, if he wants to go before me, that's fine. I'm not going to argue this point much further. I will turn the floor over to Mr. Long, and I will await my turn after Mr. Blaikie.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Just to clarify, at the top of every meeting I will remind everyone who's on the speakers list that if we are in a situation like today, where we suspended, the meeting essentially continues on from where we left off in the last one. It doesn't start a new speakers list. It would just carry on.

For carrying on, we won't have people raise their hands twice or be on that list twice until they're struck off that list, and then they can go back on the list once they're struck off.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: On that point, Madam Chair, I'm indifferent as to where I am in the speaking order. I just don't want to adopt a poor practice for establishing a speakers list.

It's important to note that we're in the same meeting, which is why we start off with the continued speakers list. The meeting never ended; it was suspended.

If the committee would like to adopt a practice whereby we wipe clean the speakers list at the beginning of any iteration of the same meeting, I'm fine with that, too. That might have allowed me to get on the speakers list sooner, in fact, because then we could have had a race to see who could click the button faster. If the committee wants to proceed in that fashion, that's not a problem for me either.

I'm not hung up on the order. What I'm hung up on is that everybody should have a clear understanding of how a speakers list works and that we follow it, so that we don't get into some odd practices around jockeying on the speakers list.

If it's really important to Mr. Turnbull to go ahead of me in the order, perhaps he could elaborate for the committee why that's important. I'd be happy to have him on the list ahead of me, because I don't think anything hinges on the order except the potential misunderstanding of how speakers lists work and what the practice going forward is going to be.

The Chair: I think Mr. Turnbull has made it clear that he doesn't really have a preference. It was just an understanding issue, and we've all helped to clarify that.

We will carry on with the regular practice of continuing when a meeting is suspended. We would just continue with the speakers list from the previous meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, I'll let you know who I have on the speakers list. If you don't see or find your name on the speakers list but you would like to speak, then use the "raise hand" function in the toolbar. I'll add you to the bottom of the speakers list. If you wish to speak again afterwards, when you're done speaking, raise your hand again and you'll be added to the bottom of the speakers list.

Mr. Long, go ahead. The floor is yours.

Mr. Wayne Long: Madam Chair, thank you very much. I almost lost my train of thought for the last five minutes. I was a little worried, but I kept my concentration. Again, Madam Chair, thank you for giving me the floor.

I certainly want to acknowledge MP Turnbull and MP Lauzon for their really interesting speeches. I learned a lot from listening. I think as parliamentarians it's important that we remember the old adage that we measure twice and cut once. I think this is one of those times when we can all learn by listening to our colleagues, being open to different thoughts and different ideas, and continuing to evolve as politicians.

I certainly have evolved over the last six years. I remember starting in 2015. Obviously, looking back now, I was a naive, green rookie member who thought he knew a lot. I thought I knew how committees worked, how Parliament worked, how Ottawa worked and so on and so forth. Boy, oh, boy, I did not know a lot. Have I ever learned.

We can all step back and reflect a little bit on why we were elected. Why are we here? What's important to Canadians? What do we need to do to work together across the aisle, to make government work, to make Parliament work? How do we better serve Canadians?

To be perfectly honest, I have a lot to say today. I have a lot of thoughts. Last night I watched the movie *Inception*. I don't know if anybody has seen *Inception* with Leonardo DiCaprio. There was one layer that went to the next layer that went to the next layer and then down to the next layer. Then they had to work their way back up. I think there were a lot of parallels to what's happening now.

Certainly, I respect very much the amendment, if you will, to the motion that my colleague MP Turnbull has brought forward. I cer-

tainly acknowledge the motion that MP Vecchio has put forth. If you'll bear with me here, I think it's important to go back and just take a few minutes to really understand where we're at and why we're there. Certainly, again, my friend and colleague MP Turnbull talked about a fishing expedition—let's see what we can find, the proroguing, WE, the Kielburger brothers and all these things. Let me give a very quick example, and I'll get back to the amendment.

I had the distinct pleasure yesterday of calling organizations in my beautiful riding of Saint John—Rothesay and giving them great news about the new horizons for seniors program. This is just as an example. Whether it was the Hope centre or Loch Lomond Villa or the Rothesay Elementary School, it didn't matter what the organization was that I called. One organization is doing a greenhouse to bring seniors together. Another one, the Saint John regional library, did a new horizons for seniors program that allowed seniors to come in to write a book together about their experiences.

The point of bringing up the new horizons for seniors program and the great calls I made to these organizations is that they didn't care about us in committee trying to debate prorogation and WE. They were sincerely appreciative that our government was working with them to deliver funding for them and programs for them. That's what good government is.

It's about our coming up with programs that can help people and change people's lives. Whether it's new horizons for seniors or—and I'll bring this back to the motion—obviously for the pandemic we're going through, coming up with wonderful programs such as the wage subsidy, CERB, the expanded EI, sick leave or the caregiver benefit, that's what Canadians want us to do. They want us to deliver programs for them. That's why they elected us.

I did a quick poll yesterday. I'll be honest. It was for 10 people, maybe 9. I asked them what they were concerned about, what they wanted me to do, how they wanted me to be an advocate for them and what they wanted me to bring forward for them to the government in Ottawa. Again, it was to represent them and what they care about and what they need. It's not about sitting in a committee trying to talk about proroguing. Again, Canadians have moved on, and I feel we should move on too.

I know that there are a lot of Canadians watching this today, listening in and wondering what we're talking about. I go back to the *Inception* movie, where one layer goes to the next, goes to the next and then to the next. Certainly, MP Turnbull has brought forth an amendment for the record and for everybody. The amendment is to MP Vecchio's motion.

If you'll indulge me, I think it's important that we revisit what MP Vecchio's motion was.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, we're supposed to be doing the subamendment, so maybe we could speak about the subamendment. I've been listening to an hour and a bit of just talk, so I'd love to talk about the subamendment. Then we can go back to the main motion, which you can continue to filibuster.

Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: On a point of order, Chair. It's actually an amendment, not a subamendment. I want to make that clear for the committee.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you.

The Chair: The amendment will have an effect on the full motion. To the point that you want to speak to the effect that it would have if it passes or fails, I guess you could stick to that.

Mr. Wayne Long: My point, and I appreciate MP Vecchio's—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I'm looking for a point of clarification. I think part of this may stem from the fact that I wasn't here for most of the meeting yesterday.

My understanding, and I may be wrong, is that Ms. Vecchio moved an amendment and then Mr. Turnbull moved to amend the amendment. Is that...?

The Chair: No. Actually, I understand where that's coming from, though. Ms. Vecchio did, on a point of order, attempt to inform us or... I don't know if she was trying to move the amendment, but she did put notice of an amendment she would like, of a motion, actually, of an amendment to her own motion, but that wasn't in order because she didn't have the floor to move it.

The appropriately moved amendment that's before us right now is Mr. Turnbull's amendment to Ms. Vecchio's original motion. Ms. Vecchio doesn't have any amendments that we're speaking to right now. She may at some point wish to move an amendment later on.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Is there anybody else? Are there any more points of clarification before we give the floor back to Mr. Long? I don't want to interrupt him every 30—

Hon. Peter Kent: Madam Chair, it was my understanding that Ms. Vecchio was presenting a unanimous consent motion, which didn't exist...

The Chair: That's correct. We did not have unanimous consent. On a point of order, she would only be able to do such a thing if she had unanimous consent. There was not unanimous consent for her to move it at that point, on a point of order. Later on, like I said, if Ms. Vecchio chooses to do so when she has the floor, she would be able to do that again.

Is there anyone else on that? We've clarified it, I think, to the point where we have gotten to complete clarity now, so thank you, Mr. Kent, for adding that and reminding me that it was seeking unanimous consent.

Mr. Long, I'll give the floor back to you.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will say that I think it's important... Obviously the amendment is relevant to the motion and so on and so forth. Right now, for clarity, we are talking about Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

That being said, it's important to understand, as Canadians—because I know Canadians are watching this—what Ms. Vecchio's motion was, which Mr. Turnbull suggested the amendment to, so that we're clear on that.

If everybody can sit back and indulge me, I want to revisit Ms. Vecchio's motion. I think I'm certainly allowed to do that because of the amendment to the motion. I think they go hand in hand, for what it's worth. I'm going to read this out:

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

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

That's (a). That's the Prime Minister of Canada.

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

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

Madam Chair, I think I also bring a unique perspective to this. I've been lucky enough to substitute in on ethics too, where the Kielburger brothers have testified again.

What screams at me, Madam Chair, is that the opposition is not getting the answers that they want. It's not the answers that Canadians want. It's not the answers that Canadians care about, that's for sure. They're not getting the answers that they want.

I'm going to have a lot to say about the Kielburger brothers and their testimony also at ethics, but I'm going to continue here.

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

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

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

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

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

Now, Madam Chair, this is what the opposition is expecting this committee to move forward with. How much more can possibly be pulled out of the Kielburgers or Perelmuters that hasn't already been flushed out and talked about?

I saw the motion by MP Vecchio. Obviously, we have the amendment. This is what we're talking about now. MP Turnbull, I know, gave a lot of thought to this. He's a great MP. I called him a rookie MP, but he's not a rookie anymore. His dedication, his preparedness and the way he articulates his points are really to be commended. They really are. We are lucky as parliamentarians to have somebody like MP Turnbull join us. He certainly adds to all of us.

He put forth an amendment:

I. by deleting paragraph (a),

II. by replacing paragraph (b) with the following: "(b) renew the invitations issued to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, each to appear separately before the committee for at least 90 minutes; and"

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

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

It looks reasonable. This is his amendment but, no, it's not good enough. It's frustrating to me, I'll be honest, when I know that each and every one of us on this committee and each and every one of us in Parliament, in the House, is elected to serve our constituents. Sure, we have differences in ideologies; that's what it is. I have a certain belief. Conservatives have certain ideologies, as do NDP or Green Party or Bloc members or independents, and what have you.

I believe government can do good things. Government is there to undertake initiatives and support people who need help. Good government can bring forth transformational programs, such as the Canada child benefit, which is an incredible program.

There is also the old age pension, the GIS and the Canada housing benefit, which my province unfortunately hasn't picked up yet. It's another bone of contention I have. Hopefully my province will pick it up.

Why are we here? We're elected to serve our constituents, and I'm passionate about that. This motion isn't serving our constituents. There's no one on this committee from any party whose phone is ringing off the hook about prorogation and the reasons we prorogued. We've talked about that before. Some members say, "They prorogued to avoid this, and they did that", forgetting what the Harper government did with respect to proroguing. I'm disappointed, and I'm a part of it too. I'm disappointed that we can't move on, we can't move forward and we can't work together on things that Canadians care about.

What has my phone been ringing about in my constituency office today? It is Bill C-24, the Supreme Court ruling and reaffirming of the federal right to move forward with a price on pollution. We certainly saw Conservative premiers across the country resist and challenge this, and I was certainly thrilled that my premier, Premier Higgs, pulled out of the lawsuit. It was probably a year ago. He basically said that he was not going to go down a road that wastes his time. That's what my constituents care about.

I don't want to take up too much of the committee's time today, but last night I gave the amendment a lot of thought. I gave a lot of thought to the meeting too. I knew I would be talking. I'm certainly never at a loss for words, but I wanted to try to articulate what I really feel with respect to MP Turnbull's proposed amendment to MP Vecchio's motion.

I have a number of thoughts that I thought would be relevant and that needed to be shared with my colleagues on this committee and with Canadians with respect to my support for Mr. Turnbull's amendment. I know he has given it a lot of thought. I'm jealous because he's eating his lunch right now and I'm not. I don't know if that's popcorn he has there, but hopefully he is enjoying his lunch.

First of all, I want colleagues to think of the precedents they are setting with some of the stunts they've been pulling with regard to the calling of witnesses and requesting documents. I won't read it again so don't worry, but when I read through MP Vecchio's motion, I can't believe the depth of the people and documents they want. There's no end to it. There is no end to this, and again, I implore the opposition to see that Canadians have moved on. Canadians have made judgments.

It's time to move on. It's time to move forward.

When you're in opposition, you're always looking for new and creative ways to try to hold government to account. That's what Her Majesty's loyal opposition is supposed to do. That works on both sides.

I wasn't around before 2015, obviously. I was very busy running a hockey team, for those of you who don't know. MP Blaikie knows. It was the Saint John Sea Dogs, which is certainly one of the most successful major junior organizations in the country. Yes, MP Lauzon, they're more successful than the Gatineau Olympiques. I take that back. Maybe they're not quite as successful as the Olympiques. We've only been in the league for a very limited number of years.

I know the opposition's job is to hold us to account. I applaud you. I give you credit. You have held us to account. That's how Parliament is supposed to work. The NDP, the Bloc, the Conservative Party and the Green Party are there to hold us to account. You did a good job doing it.

You did your job and you held us to account. You beat us up here, you did this, you did that and now you're going to move on. You're going to now be seized with governing and helping to govern. You do that, Madam Chair, by working together across the aisle and being bipartisan. You work on legislation and policies to better Canadians' lives. That's why we're here.

For those watching at home, from time to time we all use parliamentary procedure or all the tools in the tool box to challenge the government of the day. Just be transparent. We did it too in opposition. It's how Parliament works. It's acceptable and it's something that has been done since the advent of the Westminster parliamentary model. However, as with everything in our line of work, Madam Chair, there are boundaries.

What has been true, at least until 2020, is that prime ministers only testify before committees in rare and exceptional circumstances. In a sign of openness, transparency and to answer pertinent [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] appeared before FINA back in August of 2020. Before that time, a PM only spoke in committee in a handful of circumstances.

I find concerning that this debate we are now having in regard to inviting the Prime Minister to this committee, and everybody else—anyone who ever drove by the House of Commons it seems at times.... Frankly, if the members opposite really did want the Prime Minister here to speak about prorogation, there would at least be a small amount of relevance to that request.

Not long ago, we heard from the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons that there was some relevance to his appearance. It made sense to hear from him in regard to the prorogation study. Mr. Rodriguez provided the government's reasoning and decision on behalf of the Prime Minister and cabinet, as well as all other matters that come before this committee in regard to government policy. We heard from the relevant minister as part of the testimony on this subject.

How many other times has the Prime Minister appeared before this committee to testify on a matter that falls into the wheelhouse of House operations or matters pertaining to the Privy Council Office?

The answer is easy. He hasn't.

Let's lay it on the table for each other here today, Madam Chair. Opposition colleagues want to call the Prime Minister here today to talk about WE Charity matters. We all know that is what they're trying to get at, and we all know why they are making it in this prorogation study. Relevance is an issue.

They have tried this at several other committees, tried to tangentially connect WE to all facets of government operations in the COVID-19 response. Obviously I'm tuned in, Madam Chair. I was asked to sit in on the ethics committee a few times, and it was great to be back at the ethics committee. I sat on the ethics committee in

the previous Parliament with people like Joël Lightbound and Nathaniel Erskine-Smith. Blaine Calkins, I believe, was the chair.

I was surprised to see an opposition member in the chair of ethics. I was not aware it worked that way, but I sat on ethics and saw the Perelmuters with respect to Speakers' Spotlight and heard testimony in ethics that really made me sad about how their lives had been literally shattered and their organization shattered, all in the pursuit of trying to find an answer—not the truth, not an answer that satisfied—an answer the opposition wanted, and they wouldn't stop. There were threats against these people and their staff. For what? What was the end here?

I saw with respect to ethics, literally.... I'll be blunt: the committee, I thought, was almost turned into a circus. The finance committee had heard from the Kielburger brothers for four hours. This meeting was remarkable inasmuch as, for all the hype and accusations that were made by the opposition, at the end of the day, all the questions put forth were answered, and documents were requested, which they agreed to provide to the committee.

The Kielburgers were at the committee for hours. Ask yourself this; ask all of us this: What new did we learn, really? For the opposition now, Madam Chair, and the prorogation, let's kind of wrap in the WE; let's throw this altogether. Let's cast this net. Let's cast this net out as far as we can throw it, and let's see what we can reel in.

I'll be blunt. What surprises me is that there is nothing new, but yet we're still looking for answers to questions. Last week there was really still nothing, yet now we're still going to put a motion out there that we want to get them back to testify again. We want to compel them to come before us, Madam Chair. We want documents, and we want this, and we want that.

I sometimes try to put myself out there, Madam Chair, just objectively. I step away. I'm a very proud Liberal, of course. I love the programs and policies that we stand for in the government that we give Canadians. Sometimes I try to step back. I'm going to be objective. I'm not going to put my Liberal hat on. For the life of me, I can't see why the opposition continues down this road. I know I can't ask for a raising of hands here, but there are no phones ringing in any office about prorogation.

I see Mr. Calkins has joined us. I just talked about Mr. Calkins as chair of ethics. I look up, and lo and behold, there he is. He has actually joined the committee. I don't know if that was some magical little thing I did to compel him to come on, but there he is with his hunting trophies behind him.

I hope things are all well Blaine. It's good to see you. You did a good job as chair of ethics when I was there. I learned a lot. You were fair. You were balanced. We had some fun. We did a lot of great work too. It is good to see you, even though you're in another part of the country. We're probably a four-hour time change. I'm not even sure about that, to be honest.

I believe it's time to move forward. Mr. Turnbull's amendment is doing that. It's saying that if you want to hear a little bit more, and if you want to flush out a little more information from here or there, okay, we'll give you that, even though we probably....I know Mr. Lauzon actually talked about this too, with respect to Mr. Turnbull's amendment. When I first read it, I was surprised that Mr. Turnbull was.... We're meeting halfway here.

That might be the wrong analogy in the political world, but we're meeting here. We're moving forth with something that you should take. You should vote on this. You should support it. We can move on and get on to things. It seems very reasonable to me.

In fact, when I first read it I was like, "Oh my. Oh my. This, even more than I thought, Mr. Turnbull may want", but it's a reasonable amendment. Yet, here we are.

I'm disappointed that the prorogation....That was talked out, and debated in committee very well on both sides. The opposition members have a job to do, and they put forth their thoughts, and why they wanted to go this way. We certainly were quick to remind them about Prime Minister Harper, and how he prorogued to avoid a vote. I guess that was irrelevant then. We debated that through. There were points on both sides.

It's the WE thing. Let's get that WE thing back, because we haven't yet got the answers we want.

Yes, we've talked about it in ethics and finance, and we're trying to get it in every little nook and cranny we can, but we still haven't got what we want. Not what Canadians wanted, or what's relevant to Canadians, we haven't got what we wanted, pardon the pun on WE.

Colleagues on the other side will try to say that this isn't the case with WE, yet all one has to do is look at the witnesses they are calling and it becomes very obvious. The Prime Minister, let's get the Prime Minister in here; let's get Katie Telford, Minister Chagger. All appeared before the finance committee, and in the case of Minister Chagger and Ms. Telford, provided over two hours worth of testimony. The Prime Minister took questions for an hour and a half. I watched Ms. Telford's testimony, how much more open and transparent could somebody be? You asked, she answered, but no, that wasn't good enough, we want more.

Throughout questioning time and time again, theories advanced by opposition colleagues were discounted and thoroughly shut down. Mr. Poilievre tried a gotcha moment on the PM; it fell flat. Mr. Cooper tried with Ms. Telford; he fell flatter. Why is that? Because there was and is nothing there. This ridiculous theory that the Prime Minister and his family were personally invested in the decision to marshal a federal program to the WE Charity is absurd, and has been particularly disproved.

I remember, and I think I alluded to this the last time I spoke, that the opposition obviously wants to get that gotcha moment, they want that clip, that five o'clock news story, and there's nothing there. How long has this been going on? Again, I'm lucky to have my office in a mall—Market Square—and I told you this last time, colleagues, if I walked out that door today and asked the first 100 people who walked by me on a scale of one to 10 where they would prioritize this committee, the Conservative Party trying to compel the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister about prorogation and WE, I'm telling you it would be a zero. They've moved on, they're concerned about getting vaccines in their arms, where we're doing an amazing job. They're concerned about benefits, whether the wage subsidy is going to be extended, whether the recovery benefit, the sickness benefit are going to be there for them.

I'm proud, too, as a government. We're shifting now—you can see it—from support to recovery, and we're focused on doing the right things to make industries recover, help Canadians recover so we can move forward past this. Yet what are we doing? We're sitting here. The Conservative Party, the opposition party, wants us to get all these witnesses back in to talk about proroguing.

Time and time again, from finance committee to ethics to government operations, multiple attempts were made to try to keep the WE matter alive in the eyes of Canadians and media. However, no one was buying what the Conservatives and their opposition allies were selling.

Frankly, Madam Chair, Canadians know better. They saw this cheap political stunt for what it was and promptly moved on. They wanted a government that is serious and focused on them. If people are watching, we should be focused on you, what you're concerned about, what you need to get through the week, the month, the next six months.

Yet, here we are. Here we all are. I'm just a sub. I'm happy to sub, but I'm just a sub-in here, probably a pinch-hitter, doing my best. Here we are staring down what is the last-ditch effort of a desperate opposition trying to keep the non-story alive.

Look, you want a little free advice? I have some thoughts.

I don't believe that it's helping you. I don't believe that there's a massive movement of public opinion behind you. I don't believe that it benefits you. You can say, "Well, it's Wayne Long in Saint John—Rothesay. Of course, it's benefiting us. Of course, it's going to help our Conservative Party. It's going to make Canadians want to vote for us, if and when there's an election in the next...". Well, we certainly know there's going to be one in the next...what, three years or two and a half years, whatever it is?

However, my advice to you, my colleagues on the other side, would be to move on. Spend your time focused on coming up with policies and a vision for Canada, something that Canadians can look at and say, "You know, I like that vision. I like what they're offering." That's what makes politics fun and that's how politics should work. It's not this....

Let me be abundantly clear, Madam Chair. This motion before us today is nothing but a cheap political stunt aimed at breaking the last remaining boundaries of the decorum we have left. The Conservatives and other opposition parties have taken the cue of some other politicians and are willing to completely disconnect from reality and say whatever is necessary to achieve their goal of attaining power. Frankly, I believe it is completely unacceptable. It's unbecoming of this place.

I'm proud of the work I do, proud of the work that we all do. However, I think we need to reflect, to really step back.... I don't want to see a show of hands, but I think that Mr. Turnbull's amendment should be supported. Think about it. It's reasonable. I know MP Turnbull put a lot of work into that amendment—a lot of work and a lot of time. It's just one man's opinion, but I think it should be supported.

As it's been said over and over again, let's.... I know MP Duncan talked about this when she spoke the other day, and she spoke quite passionately to it: We are in the midst of an international pandemic, and we are seized with, and should all be seized with, running this country and being there for Canadians. It's not too late, even for a guy like me, to learn this.

If I've ever seen value in a strong government, it's now. I am so thankful that we have been able to answer the bell to be there for Canadians. I think we've all been changed by it. We've all been challenged by it. It has certainly made me a different person. I'm more thankful, more reflective and more appreciative. I now understand the incredible challenges that we all face as parliamentarians and as government in being there for our constituents and our citizens.

I'll never forget—and I know I echoed this before—coming home over a year ago now, which is crazy, and not knowing what to expect, not knowing what was in front of us. I walked into a mall that was basically shut down. I had to call security to get into my constituency office. I remember the calls I got from Canadians who worried about where they were going to get support to buy groceries for their kids and to pay their rents. They had the legs cut out from underneath them, and we were there.

We're seized with a pandemic, and Canadians want us to act aggressively yet responsibly. Do we see light at the end of the tunnel with respect to it? Yes, there is light. I believe in my heart that

we're in a race now against variants and with respect to the vaccine, but there are better days ahead. There are brighter days ahead for all of us. That's what we should be concerned about.

By August 2020, with restrictions loosened and some normalcy returning to the country, we took stock and realized that the road map that had been set out was not even close. Therefore, a reset was needed to ensure that the whole country was ready and prepared for the impending second wave and the economic recovery.

For us, we needed to prorogue. We needed to step back, assess and reboot. Prorogation is a parliamentary tool, at the disposal of the government of the day, to wipe the slate clean and refocus the governmental agenda. No one, not even my colleagues on the other side, can argue that the previous throne speech was no longer relevant. A new plan was needed. We had to come forth with a new plan. However, colleagues would rather see the ghost of the WE Charity around every corner and are doing everything possible to tie these two issues together.

Madam Chair, do you mind if I get a drink of water?

I'm not sure where my opposition colleagues are looking to go with this motion by having these witnesses come before us and provide the same testimony they have already given elsewhere, which can be read into the record here, other than to put on a political show. We've heard from these people. How much more do we expect? Perelmuters, Kielburgers, Katie Telford—what more do you want them to say?

It's not what they've said—well, I guess technically it is what they've said—it's the fact that it's not what the opposition wants to hear. That's what this is really about, isn't it? They're not getting the answers they want, so they want to continue on. They want to see if they can find something else.

The truth is the opposition have already made up their mind on the issue of the prorogation and the WE Charity matter. They've repeatedly been presented with evidence to the contrary of their theories on the matter, and yet they continue to look for ways to make the narrative true. Madam Chair, this is one man musing.

Unless the opposition party polling is telling them that Canadians want more on WE—and indeed if that's what they're getting from their polling, I'd suggest they talk to their pollsters or ask their pollsters who they are actually polling. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] I don't see it. I'm not saying that, Chair, to be a smart guy or to say "ha ha ha". I don't see it, and Canadians don't see it.

This committee shouldn't be used as the opposition's kangaroo court. That's not what this is for. This committee should be seized with much more important matters, Madam Chair. This committee does not exist to serve narrow political interests. This is not a court of law. We are not Crown prosecutors. The public does not believe that Her Majesty's loyal opposition is looking at this issue for the public good.

Canadians realize that the point of this motion is to advance the political interests of the Conservative Party and the other opposition parties. I know everybody's keenly interested here. I can tell by looking at the screens. I can tell people are extremely interested, especially my colleague MP Drouin, who's listening with bated breath to everything I say.

This will be the third time I've asked this question to the committee. Ask yourself this: Has anybody's phone rung over the last week with respect to prorogation or WE? Be honest with yourselves. Obviously you don't have to show your hand.

Why should witnesses have to come before us at all if the opposition has already determined the outcome of the testimony?

The testimony we've heard before this committee in regard to this study has been clear. Public servants, politicians and constitutional experts alike are all in agreement that the power to prorogue Parliament rests solely with the Prime Minister. It's an inherently political decision. There is nothing wrong with that, because governments are elected based on their political leanings. Their agendas themselves are political in nature. It makes complete sense, then, that resetting the government agenda would be a political decision.

I apologize for being loose with the date and time, but I remember when Stephen Harper prorogued. I was travelling with the Sea Dogs at that point. I know I referenced this before. I remember watching *The National* or CTV News that night. I don't know if MP Kent was actually reading the news at that point. He might have been. Nonetheless, I remember watching and looking at Prime Minister Harper. People were really upset that he did it to avoid a confidence vote. That wasn't the case. It was just a reset. Times have changed. But yet here we are.

The opposition party wants this investigated more and more. Let's get the Kielburgers in. Let's get everybody else in. Let's throw the kitchen sink in there too. Let's stir the pot all around. Let's get a big brew going here and see what we can find.

I mean, the previous Conservative government prorogued for weeks. They cited extraordinary times due to the 2008 economic crisis. In many ways, late 2020 was much worse than the situation the Conservatives faced in 2008. The government was faced with both an international pandemic of mass proportions and sizable economic issues. This was not the time to produce a governing blueprint overnight. The government took its time to consult and ensure that the right approach was taken on behalf of all Canadians. That's what good, responsible government should do.

We needed to step back. We needed to reassess. We needed to take account of everything that was happening around us. The well-being of Canadians has always been the number one priority of this government and always will be throughout its time in office, and

especially during this unprecedented pandemic. I will tell you that all of us are privileged to have the support of our constituents. All of us are privileged to be members of Parliament. I will certainly look back at this time, as a member of Parliament, not with fondness but with pride at the response our government gave at one of the country's darkest, most challenging times.

I mean, think about the fact that we were literally writing and turning pages before the ink was dry. The odd Conservative critic in my riding would be, "Oh, these programs are poorly thought out." Poorly thought out—are you kidding me? We were rolling out these programs within weeks, not years.

I'll look back with a lot of pride. We don't need political stunts rights now. It is very clear that there is no need whatsoever for the witnesses requested to appear.

The Prime Minister, Ms. Telford and Minister Chagger all have testimony on file. They have already testified. It's already in the record. Our clerk could easily make the request to FINA for that testimony.

Frankly, I'm not even sure why Minister Freeland is on the list or what she has to do with the prorogation debate. Can someone tell me that? While the minister plays a key and central role to the management of government, she is not the prime minister and would not have played a role in deciding to exercise prorogation.

I read MP Vecchio's motion and while reading it I thought, "Oh my lord, it would compel this, we want this, we want that, we want him, we want her..." To what end?

Mr. Turnbull's amendment is extremely reasonable and well-thought-out.

What Canadians need going forward is for parliamentarians to focus on the task at hand. The economic recovery that we have before us is going to be the most important since the Second World War. Canadians do not have time for narrow and cheap political games. We need to shift to recovery. We were there for support and now we need to shift to recovery. That's where our focus should be.

Colleagues have said time and time again that they are willing to join the team Canada approach to rebuilding our economy post-pandemic. Here we are ready to extend a hand and ask them to join us to work together toward that end.

I want to finish up with an appeal to whoever is watching this. Let's work together. Let's call a spade a spade. Testimonies have occurred in other committees. Tough questions have been asked. Difficult questions have been asked. I respect that. I respect that people needed to come before certain committees to testify. I totally respected that, supported it, in fact. They testified and it's on the record. Transcripts can be given to this committee.

I will close with this. I thank the committee for the work we do. I know you are all good MPs. I have an abundance of respect for all of you. I know you care deeply about your ridings, Canadians, the country. I know we stood together on many things and many votes, especially with respect to supporting Canadians.

I know we did the right things when we had to. We put partisanship aside. This is my appeal to you. I ask you sincerely to support the amendment to the motion. Please support the amendment. We meet you more than halfway.

Madam Chair, thank you for letting me say a few words. I respect you very much. You do a great job, Ruby, a fantastic job as chair of this committee. I know it's not easy. I thank you for what you're doing. Certainly on behalf of my riding of Saint John—Rothesay, I thank you. I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Long. Your speeches are always very captivating.

Thank you for those compliments.

Now I know why you're so well dressed all the time. You have a constituency office in a mall. I know that would not be good for me, though. That's for sure. I would be far too distracted.

We're moving to Dr. Duncan next.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Chair, I'm pleased to speak to the amendment that has been brought forward today by my excellent colleague, Mr. Turnbull. I would like to thank him for his always thoughtful work and his thoughtful proposition.

It's nice to see Ms. Normandin this morning and Mr. Calkins as well.

I would like to thank my colleagues, Monsieur Lauzon and Mr. Long, for their speeches this morning. I really appreciate hearing about Monsieur Lauzon's teaching and Mr. Long's life in hockey with the Sea Dogs.

I think we should absolutely be inviting to the committee our Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, as well as the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth. I think it's important that this amendment has been put forward. After all, we are a government that believes in ministers being accountable, effective and transparent, raising the bar on openness and answering the questions of members of Parliament at committees.

While I will speak very directly to the motion, I will once again make the point that there is nothing more important than addressing the global crisis that we are still fighting. That is what this committee should be focused on. While this is about politics, I would just like to share with my colleagues that 1.2 million people developed COVID in the last three days globally, and over 23,000 people died. Now there have been over 124 million cases worldwide and 2.7 million deaths—so many lives, a tsunami of suffering.

Here in Canada, 22,000 Canadians have died. They were grandparents, parents, loved ones and neighbours, and they mattered to so many more people. My heart goes out to all those who have lost family, friends and loved ones. I honour all our health workers for their dedication and sacrifice and all our other essential workers who have kept society running. They put the interests of their neighbours, communities and country ahead of their own every day. Beyond saying thank you for their heroic efforts during COVID-19, let's each of us do our part to slow the spread of the virus. That means working from home if you can, keeping two metres apart from others, wearing a mask and downloading the COVID alert app.

The point is, COVID-19 remains an unprecedented global health crisis that has shaken the foundations of economic, political and social security, and it should be the focus of this committee.

However, with respect to the amendment before us, let me explain why I think we should reinstate our Deputy Prime Minister. She is extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary, and not only led our COVID-19 response through the spring and the summer, but also now serves as Minister of Finance. I would just like to recognize that the Deputy Prime Minister is the first woman in Canadian history to be sworn in as finance minister. This is a milestone 153 years in the making, and we should celebrate this.

From the beginning of COVID-19, our government understood that the pandemic turned our lives upside down, with office buildings emptied, streets quieted and schools closed. Canadians and communities had to adapt, and our government had to find the balance between health and the economy. In some public debate, the response to the pandemic was framed as a choice between health and the economy, but that's a false choice. They always go together. Health and the economy go hand in hand.

We promised to be there for Canadians through the pandemic to our recovery. Our government had a number of overarching goals to protect the health and safety of Canadians, to provide the necessary economic supports to allow Canadians to isolate at home, to try to slow the spread of the virus and to protect jobs and livelihood.

In order to protect the health and safety of Canadians, we closed the borders. We directly funded the provinces and territories: \$19 billion for the safe restart agreement. We bought personal protective equipment, testing kits—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, Madam Chair, with all due respect to Dr. Duncan, I really respect all of the great information, because COVID is important to all Canadians, absolutely, but we have heard much of this evidence that has been provided—or these notes—before. I am intervening, because one hour ago when I intervened already....

Could we get back on topic to the actual amendment that was put forward by Ryan Turnbull? If we could get back to that, that would be wonderful and brilliant.

Thank you.

The Chair: I believe Dr. Duncan is speaking to why Ms. Freeland should be invited to committee, so I'll let her carry on.

I feel that she was interrupted a lot on Tuesday, so we should let her make her remarks.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and I'll thank Ms. Vecchio, who is a dear colleague, as well.

I really am here to represent my constituents of Etobicoke North. I stand here debating the motion at hand, which is to invite several ministers to appear in front of this committee. I am here to support this motion and explain why I think it's important that we extend the invitation to them.

As I was saying, we bought personal protective equipment, testing kits, and we pre-ordered vaccines.

The most important thing we can do to address the spread of COVID-19 is to vaccinate, test, contact trace and isolate. I want to make it clear, our government bought the vaccine doses, tests, provided contact tracers and quarantine hotels.

Here in Canada the largest immunization campaign in our country's history is well under way. According to our country's top vaccine coordinator, there should be enough COVID-19 vaccines available to give every Canadian who is eligible a first dose by the end of June. With this vaccine rollout, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

In the spring, when the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces were needed, they went in to care for our elders. We know that our long-term care facilities really bore the brunt of wave one in Canada, and tragically it happened again in wave two.

I think of several long-term care residents in our Etobicoke North community. Deaths among seniors are not just numbers. Our seniors are people we know, people we have listened to. We have heard their life stories, learned from them, laughed with them, sang with them and danced with them. We owe all of our seniors who have helped build this country safe and dignified care. The greatest tragedy of this pandemic is the lives lost in long-term care homes.

I took every opportunity to stand up for our seniors and particularly those in long-term care.

I think it's relevant to bring this up, because if we have the Deputy Prime Minister, we can hear about the action that is planned. Although long-term care falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction, our government will take any action it can to support seniors while working alongside provinces and territories.

Our government will work with Parliament on Criminal Code amendments to explicitly penalize those who neglect seniors under their care, putting them in danger.

Our government will work with the provinces and territories to set new national standards for long-term care so that seniors get the best possible support, and we'll take additional action to help people stay in their homes longer.

These important actions were outlined in the throne speech that was delivered after prorogation and after tremendous consultation. I think it would be very important to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister on where we are on implementation. Our seniors are an integral part of our communities and we must do everything possible to protect them.

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

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. John Nater: Perhaps on the Simms protocol to Ms. Duncan, if I may, having—

The Chair: I guess we'll have to ask Ms. Duncan if you may.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: I would like to continue to have the opportunity to speak. Everyone has been given their turn. I am speaking in support of this motion. I am bringing the concerns of my constituents to this committee, and I am supporting the motion to bring

in our Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth. I would like to be able to make these arguments why I think they should be here.

Mr. John Nater: That's exactly what my Simms question was going to be focused on. If I could just ask you a quick question, Dr. Duncan, and if you could respond, if you're willing.... Again, this predicates working together. If that's not an option, that's fine.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you to my dear colleague.

I really appreciate our committee. I think we work well together.

I really would like the opportunity to speak for my constituents today and to speak in support of this motion.

The Chair: I guess not, Mr. Nater.

Go ahead, Dr. Duncan.

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

We must value our seniors. We must value their wisdom, knowledge and talents, and address the challenges they face in society.

To protect jobs and livelihoods, our government put in place strong measures to protect businesses and workers. We had to do this because the virus could only be slowed or stopped by limiting social contacts. This meant reducing economic activity. It meant shutting down workplaces and later limiting the number of people restaurants serve. It meant asking people to stay home from work if they were sick or their children were sick. It simply would have been unfair to ask businesses to shut down and workers to stay home without compensating them for lost income.

Within one week of shutting down the country last March, our government announced a stimulus package, which included \$27 billion in emergency aid for workers and businesses and \$55 billion in tax deferrals. We injected billions of dollars into businesses to help with their cash flow and to keep workers on the payroll, while bolstering federal benefits and support programs for people who had lost their jobs.

This money really matters to our communities. Those funds helped Canadians pay for rent and groceries, and they helped businesses continue to pay their employees and their bills.

Our government created CERB, which helped more than eight million workers. We call our Etobicoke North community daily to hear how our families are doing, what additional help they need. We hear right across the board that CERB was a lifeline, which allowed people to pay for rent, groceries and transportation.

Our government put in place the Canada emergency wage subsidy, which supported three million Canadian workers to stay on the payroll.

Our local businesses are at the heart of our communities. They are our friends and neighbours. We can support them by ordering takeout from the restaurant down the street, shopping at the store around the corner or ordering online. These economic programs we have put in place are good reasons to hear directly from the Deputy Prime Minister.

Our government also understood that parents were worried about the costs of raising our children. That's why we invested in families. For the year 2021, we increased the Canada child benefit to a maximum of \$6,765 per child under six years of age and \$5,708 per child age six to 17. Later on, we invested \$625 million in emergency federal support to ensure that safe, sufficient and affordable child care was available.

Our government understood that additional support was needed for local food banks and organizations. Without that support, COVID-19 would have had additional impacts on vulnerable communities. We know that many Canadians rely on food banks and local food organizations to feed their families and find support in hard times.

In our Etobicoke North community, I would like to thank the Salvation Army, the International Muslim Organization of Toronto and Mount Olive Church for the work they do to provide healthy and nutritious food to our families.

Our government understood that young Canadians were facing unprecedented challenges, so we doubled the Canada student service grant and created the Canada emergency student benefit. We wanted to ensure that students had the help they needed to continue their studies.

My own research area was pandemics and helping governments, industry, businesses and organizations prepare for a possible pandemic. In Etobicoke North, parents and teachers told me their concerns about their children heading back to school. As a former educator, I understood and that's why I pushed so hard for our government to invest \$2 billion in the safe return to class fund in support of provinces and territories.

Our government was committed to protecting students and staff from the challenges of COVID-19. Learning is different this year. The school year has been difficult for many Canadians, including teachers, students and parents. Let me just say thank you to our educators for teaching during difficult times and inspiring the next generation.

Let me also acknowledge our children and young people. One year is a long time in their lives. One year for a five-year-old is 20% of their life, and for a 15-year-old is 7% of their life. We have asked so much of children.

Our students work so hard. Let's remember that all children are born curious. They innately discover, explore and ask questions and it's the job of all of us to inspire them, to encourage them, to reach for the stars and to make sure that every child has a place to shine. All these programs are good reasons we should hear from the Deputy Prime Minister.

I also fought very hard for a \$1-billion investment in a national medical and research strategy to address COVID-19, because sci-

ence and public health are key to fighting COVID-19, research for vaccines and treatment, support for clinical trials and expanded testing and modelling, but research matters beyond the pandemic. Research is a fundamental building block of our country that requires attention, nurture and support for a better future, environment and quality of life for all.

Hearing about investments in science and research would be another good reason to hear from our Deputy Prime Minister. The Deputy Prime Minister understood that the best economic approach was to stop the spread of COVID-19, and until that was possible through a vaccine, the next best approach is to help Canadians, businesses and our families weather the pandemic without losing their livelihoods and without going broke.

Vaccine equity would be another good reason to hear from our Deputy Prime Minister. Vaccines are necessary to help the world move from locking down societies to locking down the virus. More transmission means more variants. The more variants that emerge, the more likely it is that they will evade vaccines. As long as the virus continues to circulate, people will continue to die, trade and travel will continue to be disrupted and the economic recovery will be further delayed.

The global vaccination campaign represents the greatest moral test of our times. The many low-income countries [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. I know Canada has agreed to top up its funding for vaccine rollouts in lower-income countries, pledging \$75 million more to the COVAX international vaccine-sharing program. That new pledge brings Canada's total contribution to \$940 million. It would be good to get the Deputy Prime Minister's thoughts on how the world needs to unite to produce and distribute sufficient vaccines for all, which means at least doubling manufacturing capacity around the world. This really matters.

The inequitable distribution of vaccines is a moral outrage. It makes no sense for stopping the spread of the disease and it's economically self-defeating.

Only together can we end this pandemic and recover. Only together can we revive our economies. We know that our eventual recovery will be faster and more complete in direct proportion to how much we limit the economic damage caused by the coronavirus. According to the World Bank, the pandemic pushed 124 million people into extreme poverty in 2020. The Economist estimates that two years of COVID-19 will create a downturn twice as deep as the Great Recession.

Hearing about the economic recovery would be another important reason to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister. We entered this crisis with significant fiscal firepower. When COVID-19 hit, Canada had the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. I'd like [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] what investments will help our economy come back stronger than before. How are we going to lay a foundation for a green economy, an innovation economy and a fair economy that supports good jobs for all Canadians? We want to emerge from the pandemic healthier, wealthier and greener.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Once again, I apologize. I don't normally like making interventions when one of my colleagues is speaking. Similar to the intervention I made yesterday, I'm a little confused. I wonder if you could help me out here.

I still don't see the relevance. Even though Dr. Duncan's comments may be worthy in another light, I don't see the relevance to the amendments that we should be discussing. As you know, Madam Chair, the rules of relevance come into play when anyone is speaking, particularly during a filibuster. If we can keep on topic and keep focused, then I have no difficulty whatsoever listening for many hours. It's a little disheartening to hear members continue to speak off topic when they should be speaking to the amendment brought forward by Mr. Turnbull.

The Chair: I was trying to follow along to see the relevance of it. The way I see it, we're on a study of prorogation. Dr. Duncan is speaking to the reason that the government had to prorogue and what information these ministers could bring to light as to why we prorogued and why this amendment could maybe bring those issues to light.

I'll give it to Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and of course—

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

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: For my thanking...?

Mr. John Nater: It's not on that. It's on the question at hand.

We are debating the amendment. The change in the amendment from the main motion is that the Minister of Finance is invited in both the main motion and in the amendment. The amendment basically just takes away the capacity for Parliament to compel the Minister of Finance's testimony. I think the debate we're having right now is on that aspect of it. It's why the Liberals are proposing to take away that aspect of the power of Parliament to compel the testimony from certain people—not whether to hear from the Minister of Finance or not. That's baked into the original motion.

We are on the amendment, which the Liberals have introduced and which would take away the power of Parliament to compel the testimony. It's a very constrained amendment. I did not write the amendment—the Liberals did—so I would hope that they would speak to their amendment rather than trying to speak to the main motion. If they want to speak to the main motion, I'm ready to vote right now on the amendment and we can get to the main motion.

The Chair: Maybe we can, but we have allowed Mr. Long, Mr. Lauzon and all of them to speak to what impact this amendment would have.

Dr. Duncan, go ahead.

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

Of course, I'd like to thank my colleagues. Mr. Lukiwski and I go back a long time and I appreciate his comments, and of course Mr. Nater. I've never been interrupted, I can tell you, for saying “Madam Chair” before.

I really would like to continue. I'm absolutely focused on the amendment and why we should be bringing in our Deputy Prime Minister and our Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

Another reason I would really like to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister is that we want to emerge from the pandemic healthier, wealthier and greener. For now our focus remains on fighting the pandemic, and we have to do everything in our power to keep Canadians healthy, safe and solvent.

Another reason I would like to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister is for any thoughts she has about lessons learned. Let me be clear. There will be ample time for a review of our response in the future, but what have we learned to date? What are her thoughts about preparedness? I really believe we must all be prepared—governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and international organizations—because when we are not prepared, we face not only deadly impacts but also devastating economic consequences and new inequalities and vulnerabilities. A virus can quickly undo any economic progress.

I would also like to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister on the other global crisis we face, and that's climate change. This year we have literally been facing two global crises. We are in a climate emergency. The global response is inadequate and we must urgently change course.

I think there are lessons to be learned from COVID-19. The world came together. Countries listened to the science. Governments put in place detailed plans to protect the health and safety of their people and there was an understanding that we really are all in this together, with international partners coming together to guarantee COVID-19 vaccine access—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair...?

The Chair: Is this a point of order?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes, it is.

I recognize you have given a lot of leeway so everybody can talk. Because you were granting all this, you mentioned Mr. Lauzon and Mr. Long speaking and sharing these impacts, but we have gone so far off the amendment. We could start talking about what flowers we're going to plant tomorrow or what we're going to be doing during our break weeks.

I'm very concerned. Let's get back to the motion. The pandemic is a concern, absolutely, but we're talking about things this PROC committee does not talk about. These are things that would be in the health committee. These are things that would be in the foreign affairs committee. Procedure and House affairs, on this specific committee, when we're looking at it, if we could get back to the mandate and the discussion that we're having. It's becoming out of line, I believe.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, Ms. Vecchio, but the reasons for prorogation will be many, and they will fall outside of just the procedural.

Dr. Duncan can explain that.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, of course, to Ms. Vecchio. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think one of the reasons, and we certainly saw it in the throne speech, was the importance of climate change. The science is clear. To limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C, we have to cut global emissions by 45% by 2030. We are nine years away and governments are nowhere close to the level of ambition needed. I think we all have to work together for an equitable, carbon-neutral and nature-positive future, and we certainly saw that reflected in the throne speech after the consultations following prorogation.

The last reason I would like to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister is that I will have important questions from my community about what is on their minds. From our daily calls, they have made it abundantly clear that it is their health and safety, jobs, livelihoods, and the economic recovery. My priority is always serving the people of Etobicoke North and our very special community. We are a caring, resilient and strong community. We stand up for one another, and through good and hard times, I'm always here to serve them and to be their champion.

I want them to know that we will get through this challenging time together. I would also like to hear from the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, because human rights must be central to the COVID-19 response and recovery.

The pandemic has deeply impacted seniors, persons with disabilities, women and girls, indigenous people and racialized people. We have to understand that systemic racism is real, unconscious bias is real, and they are happening in Canada. Globally, the pandemic has unleashed a tsunami of hate, scapegoating, scaremongering and xenophobia. Just last week, we saw in the United States that eight people were killed by a gunman at several massage parlours in Atlanta, Georgia. Six of the victims were Asian-American women. Those shootings have sparked outrage around the world, putting a spotlight on the rise of anti-Asian racism fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was really struck by what we heard from our colleagues across our parties. They spoke out about the discrimination they have faced. We must stand in solidarity with all those who face racism and an assault on their human rights. I'm glad that our Parliament came together to pass a motion to condemn the rise of anti-Asian racism and racist attacks in North America, and to express our unanimous horror at the shootings in Georgia.

Very briefly, we've seen data from Statistics Canada that suggested that Canadians with Asian backgrounds were more likely to report noticing increased racial or ethnic harassment during the pandemic [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] among people of Chinese, Korean and South Asian descent. There's been a more recent report, this one from the Chinese Canadian National Council, that found that Canadians reported more anti-Asian racist incidents per capita than the United States since the start of the pandemic. Advancing inclusion and belonging for people is critical to guaranteeing [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Because the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth is tasked with helping to build a country where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed and with championing the full breadth of Canada's vibrant diversity and advancing greater inclusion, I think this could not be a more important time to hear from her.

We need to work together to build a fairer future for us all. We must fight racism and prejudice and promote respect, compassion and equality.

Madam Chair, I'd like to thank you and all honourable colleagues. I am here to represent the constituents of Etobicoke North. I'm here to debate the motion at hand, which is to invite our ministers to appear in front of this committee. I support this motion.

I wanted to explain why it was important that we extend this invitation and highlight the unique opportunity we have to raise the real issues of Canadians, the ones that we're hearing in our communities, as well as hearing about the good work that the government has done.

With that, I have been speaking at length. I feel it only fair to give my colleagues their time.

Once again, thank you to Mr. Turnbull for bringing forth this important motion. Thank you for trying to find a path forward. I'll look forward to contributing more today.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Duncan.

We're lucky to have you as a colleague. You've been such an invaluable person to have on the team, and the lead when it comes to the pandemic. Thank you for all your hard work on that.

Mr. Blaikie, please go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I suppose the question before us is whether Mr. Turnbull's amendment is going to be adequate to the task of finding a way we can proceed.

I just want to recall why it is that we're here in terms of the study of prorogation. As I've said before, you have to go back past this latest prorogation to understand why we're here. You have to go back to the prorogation of Stephen Harper under his tenure. There were two of them, I believe, that were controversial, although for different reasons.

I think an important question is raised about the political abuse of prorogation, what exactly that means, how it's done and how we can try to prevent abuses of prorogation in the future.

The Prime Minister's proposal on how to do that was to have the government table reasons for its prorogation and to have those forwarded to PROC, presumably for study, so here we are.

I think I've also been clear elsewhere on the record, but just in case I haven't, let me say that I don't think it's an adequate policy. I think that the best way to prevent political abuses of prorogation—which is by no means foolproof, but nevertheless better than what we have—would be to mandate a vote in the House of Commons prior to a prorogation. Then these debates that we've had about the advisability of the latest prorogation would happen in advance of it. A deliberative body would make the decision rather than leaving the decision to one person acting alone, so there's that.

We're doing this study because of the Prime Minister's own initiative in proposing a solution for the political abuses of prorogation in the aftermath of the controversial Harper prorogation. Then, of course, the Prime Minister didn't prorogue Parliament at all in the four years of the majority government. I think, if he did, we could have established a pretty routine mechanism for dealing with this and perhaps set some good precedents for how the Prime Minister's own policy would work in a less controversial and less heated scenario. These kinds of intense political disagreements typically make for bad policy and bad procedure. It's why it's better to lay those things out clearly beforehand.

We've heard a lot of different things. I think it's interesting that the debate has brought out the virtue of long debate, something that I hope members will remember for majority Parliaments when they might have the votes they need in order to summarily end debate, as we've seen in Parliaments of the past.

I think it's interesting. We've heard just today Mr. Long saying that the main motion is ridiculous because it invites the Deputy Prime Minister, and she has nothing to do with it. It's the decision of the Prime Minister alone, so why would we invite her?

Then we just heard a long argument by Ms. Duncan about why it makes a lot of sense to have the Deputy Prime Minister here. It's a salutary feature of the motion that it calls for the Deputy Prime Minister. Maybe those arguments were rehearsed on the last day, I don't know.

That disagreement on the Liberal bench between the advisability of inviting the Deputy Prime Minister or not was new information to me. Had the debate ended early, we wouldn't have been graced with that insight into the diversity of opinion on the Liberal bench. I take that as an interesting development in today's meeting.

What I want to say is that we've heard a lot of different kinds of arguments from our Liberal colleagues about the nature of this motion and what we're here to do. They're very quick to say that it's political. I would say that I have, on a number of occasions at this committee and elsewhere, offered the view that, "Look, if this is just political, if this is really about digging into the details of the latest prorogation then, yes, I do think that the WE Charity scandal had a lot to do with the latest prorogation". I don't think it was innocent.

Having been one of the New Democrats who negotiated the Canadian emergency student benefit, the government was quite reticent to offer a benefit at all to students. Members will know that it was ultimately offered at a reduced rate.

One of the justifications the government gave for paying students less income support than everybody else, despite the fact that they needed to eat and they needed to have a roof over their heads like everybody else, was that they had a fantastic program for student employment during the summer that went above and beyond the Canada summer jobs program. That became the WE Charity scandal. This meant, because the program didn't move forward, students had a reduced rate of income support during the summer and beyond, without having the job program that was supposed to help them make up that difference.

When we talk about whether the opposition is just focusing on issues that don't have a human impact versus the kinds of substantial things that Liberals say they want to be talking about, I would argue that the WE Charity scandal did have a very substantive impact on students. It meant they had a lot less income support than other Canadians. It was and continues to be the position of the NDP that this was wrong, but even more so because a scandal on the government benches, and a pretty massive mishandling of a program, issued in that aspect of the promise and the income support program for students not being delivered at all.

I think it's pretty clear that the issues of WE Charity, whether you agree or disagree about the ultimate motive, are germane to the issue of prorogation. It is really hard to pretend that this isn't the case. Reasonable people can disagree about what was preponderant in terms of the reasons. Yes, we're going through a global pandemic. Yes, that also matters.

However, we've heard testimony about the various lengths of prorogation that could have been obtained. We've heard some arguments about why certain people on the government side think we needed a longer period, although I note that they are preparing a budget, or at least that's what they tell us.

They haven't prorogued Parliament, in order to prepare the budget, because they need to consult with people. Most governments can walk and chew gum. Nobody has made it obvious to me that a prorogation was necessary in order to consult for a Speech from the Throne. I think that's pretty silly. Actually, budgets are a more difficult enterprise to prepare in many cases than throne speeches, yet Parliament sits even as government consults and prepares budget documents.

As Mr. Long pointed out earlier, the theme of much of the testimony was that all roads lead back to the Prime Minister on this. It's the Prime Minister's own policy that caused us to be here studying this issue in the first place. It is the Prime Minister's decision ultimately, as Mr. Long emphasized for us today, to decide whether or not to prorogue. It's a decision that he is within his constitutional authority to make—nobody is contesting that—but there is a job here. It's not the job of a judge. It's okay for members to have opinions about what may or may not be the case. It's not simply the job of a prosecutor, although it's more like that. Our job is to provide some political accountability for decision-makers.

Everybody has been very clear, including Mr. Long earlier today, that the only real decision-maker here is the Prime Minister. We're evaluating a decision that he made. He had the right to make it. We're doing that under the guise of a policy that he developed in order to prevent political abuses of prorogation. Either it's all political all the way down...in which case I think, yes, the WE Charity scandal does have something to do with it. Let's hear it out.

The other path is to see this as an exercise in establishing a precedent for how these studies should unfold, recognizing that there will likely always be some measure of disagreement about the nature of a prorogation if it's contentious. This one is. Some prorogations haven't been. In those cases, it will matter less. You might find cross-party agreement that it's not worth having the Prime Minister testify at a committee. Certainly, in the cases where it's contentious, it is worth it. I think that is part of what the Prime Minister envisioned. He knew that the Harper prorogations were contentious. He thought that needed to be addressed. I think it's wholly appropriate that he come here for an hour to defend his decisions. He sent his government House leader. They wrote some things out.

Look, we have question period every day. We don't just say, "Oh, well, the Prime Minister already made a statement about that. You shouldn't ask him questions about it anymore." We do that because there is a role for holding our elected members of the government to account for the decisions they make. We've heard clearly that this was the decision of the Prime Minister.

We're here because of a policy of the Prime Minister. We're setting precedent. It's fine for the Liberals on the committee to believe that there were good reasons for this prorogation. That's fine, but that doesn't mean that we should set a bad precedent.

There will be times in the future when Liberal members will feel that a prime minister has abused the power of prorogation. What we're deciding here, as far as I'm concerned, is how we're going to proceed not only in this case but in future cases. Barring having a mechanism whereby the House of Commons actually gets to pronounce on the issue before there's a prorogation—in other words, barring having a system where the House of Commons votes on whether or not it's appropriate to prorogue—the least we could do under this second-best measure is to set the precedent that the Prime Minister comes and defends his decision to the committee.

After we've had the benefit of hearing from experts and civil society and have some preliminary arguments from government members, I think the committee is now ready to test the Prime Minister on those reasons. I understand he's confident about his reasons. Maybe I have that wrong. Any member of the governing party can correct me on that, but I understand that he's pretty confident that he had good reasons, so fine—let him come. He's confident about other things he has to defend in question period every day. Nobody says, "Don't ask the question because you already have an idea that you won't like the answer." I don't see why that should be different in this case.

I've proposed a way out of this, which is to dispense with all of the calls for documents, and all of the other witness requests, for one hour of the Prime Minister's time at this committee in order to set a good precedent for how the procedure and House affairs committee—not just for this prorogation but for all prorogation studies

to come—can handle these issues. There will come a day when members of this committee who seem to think it doesn't make sense for the Prime Minister to come now will think that it's perfectly appropriate for a prime minister to come and defend their decision of prorogation.

I'm not prepared to yield on this. I'm not prepared to support this amendment, and I'm not prepared to turn on the main motion until I hear from the Prime Minister [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to defend what was his decision.

We've heard that very clearly. We've heard it from witnesses, and now we've heard it from Liberals on this very committee. It was his decision. He has his reasons. There are clearly disputes about what the reasons were. Yes, we're going to ask him questions about the WE Charity scandal, and if he can survive the hour, which I suspect he will, things will go on and we'll turn to other issues, but I think it's a terrible precedent to allow this committee to close off this study without having heard from the one person who actually makes the call. I'm not prepared to endorse such a terrible precedent.

That's as simple as it is. If Liberals want to move on, then I encourage the members of this committee to go to their leader and impress upon him the benefit that would accrue from his coming and spending one hour to defend a decision he made—and they agree he has good reasons he can share for having made it—and the opposition will do its job of holding him to account and testing those reasons in the ways that we can, and then we can close off the study and move on.

To pretend that this is some kind of bottomless political pandemic...not bottomless political pandemic. Excuse me. The word is on the mind. To pretend that this is some political thing all the way down and that there isn't a reasonable solution on the table, I think that point presses the boundaries of honesty, Madam Chair, because there is a very simple way out of this. It's to have the Prime Minister announce publicly that he's going to come here for an hour and for us to spend the hour with him and move onto something else. It's that simple.

I don't see why a man who proposed this very study as the way to prevent the kinds of abuses of prorogation that I would say we saw under Stephen Harper... I can't for the life of me understand why he's not willing to come and spend an hour with us now on that, not only to show that he had a meaningful idea about how to prevent the political abuse of prorogation—because the government just tabling a pretty fluffy report without actually sending the decision-maker to answer for it doesn't meet the threshold of political accountability that I would like to see—but also for future instances.

I don't think people would have accepted in the days of Harper that he would have just tabled a fluffy report and been done with it and not appeared. I think that if this mechanism is to have teeth and be a meaningful response to those abuses, then the Prime Minister should show his face here. If he's not willing to do that, I think that's too bad.

I would hope then that Canadians who are listening would understand why it is so important that the House of Commons have a vote before prorogation, because if a prime minister really does have plan that's not contentious in terms of the time it would take away from Parliament and has good reasons to restart a session, then no prime minister should fear going to the House of Commons with a reasonable argument.

We saw during the pandemic the budget that's supposed to be coming in April now is long delayed. It was delayed in the early stages, although we've been calling for a budget for some time now. Initially, that delay was endorsed by the parties of the House, and even the main estimates, which are legally required to be tabled by a certain date, were pushed back because the House was quite reasonable.

In the future, prime ministers who have a reasonable prorogation request could trust that the House would grant it. Where it's contentious, I don't think one person should be making the call. That's why Canadians elect many people to make decisions, not one person to make decisions.

To me, this is not about all of those politics, although they are there, and if the Prime Minister comes, I will ask him questions about the WE Charity scandal, because I do think it's germane to prorogation and we heard that in the testimony. However, for me, this is really about the procedure and House affairs committee of the House of Commons of Canada setting a precedent, under a new mechanism by this very Prime Minister, in order to prevent political abuses of prorogation. I want a good precedent and I'm not willing to walk away from that.

I just want to remind my Liberal colleagues of that, because that doesn't come through in their remarks. They're casting a very wide net about the opposition parties this and the opposition parties that. That's not my position. My position is how we proceed with this mechanism and make it as meaningful as possible, understanding that it is already by its nature an inferior solution to actually granting more power to Canadians' elected representatives over the issue of prorogation.

I thank you very much for listening to that point again. I've said my piece and I will happily cede the floor to the next speaker.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie. You're always very persuasive. Maybe that has moved the dial a bit. Only time will tell, especially if we get to a vote.

Next we have Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the chance to address the committee.

I will note that my Internet seems to be cutting in and out a bit. I don't know if I'm coming through okay.

The Chair: You're okay.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay. Let me know if you can't hear me.

I appreciate Mr. Blaikie's comments, as always. I think you're right; he is somewhat persuasive, although I have to note that despite our both having a love for philosophy and some other things, I disagreed with Mr. Blaikie when he spoke about the pandemic. He used a phrase that bothered me. I must point this out.

Mr. Blaikie, you said the pandemic also matters. I know within the context of what you're saying, you were saying that to mean that it also matters, given all the other things. For us on this side, we're seized with supporting Canadians through this pandemic every step of the way. To us it's not something that also matters; it is what matters most right now for Canadians.

I think Mr. Long especially pointed this out, but so did Dr. Duncan. I think every one of the Liberal members on this committee has pointed out to what degree Canadians feel this particular study is relevant to them at the moment.

We've also done this study. We've had witnesses come before this committee. They've given some pretty substantive testimony, I think. We heard from the government House leader. I think we've done justice to a process. I know you don't agree with me because you want an hour with the Prime Minister. I get that. We've had a report tabled. The Prime Minister has already testified. You've indicated that you want to ask him questions about WE Charity. You've already done that, though, so what is it?

I think Mr. Long's points were quite compelling as well. We've been there, done that. I feel that because you didn't get what you want you want to rinse and repeat and try to dig up something else. It's not there.

There's a good rationale. I've spent many hours digging into information and making a substantive argument that shows how the reasons given for prorogation are completely rational and well-founded. You've never once addressed that. You seem to want to get the witnesses you want because you know that's your best chance at having a—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I want one witness, just the one.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm sorry, Madam Chair, is that a point of order?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: It is a point of clarification. I'm confused about the timeline. You've said that the Prime Minister has already testified to the WE Charity scandal. I want him here to testify to prorogation.

Can you confirm that the Prime Minister's testimony on the WE Charity scandal happened prior to the prorogation, or am I mistaken about that? I don't see how we could have asked him questions about the prorogation in the testimony that occurred prior to his decision to prorogue Parliament or any public knowledge of an intent to prorogue. Could you point to where the Prime Minister was asked a question at committee about prorogation?

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

The Chair: Mr. Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I think this is leading to a debate at this stage. Mr. Turnbull clearly stated his position. If anyone tries to justify it, the result will be a debate.

I invite my colleagues to abide by the rules and to raise their hands if they wish to speak. I'd like to present arguments regarding what Mr. Turnbull is moving. I have my hand up, and I'm the next speaker on the list.

As I see it, if I correctly understand how the committee meeting is being conducted, we're starting the period of questions and answers, but I may be mistaken.

[*English*]

On the same point of order, could we have a break?

The Chair: Are you asking for a five-minute suspension to go to the bathroom?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes, five or 10 minutes to make sure everyone has time to go to the bathroom and be ready for the next couple of hours.

The Chair: Let's suspend for 15 minutes and come right back and Mr. Turnbull will have the floor.

• (1440) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1455)

The Chair: We are back.

For the benefit of members who are joining in, we did discuss earlier today the speakers list. Since the meeting on Tuesday, March 23 was suspended and not adjourned, we're carrying forward with the same speakers list. If your name is on the list and you're not present at the time your name comes up, you will be removed from the list and you will have to raise your hand again if you return.

Right now on the speakers list there is Mr. Turnbull, who has the floor. After that we have Monsieur Lauzon, then Madam Normandin and then Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Mr. Blaikie, did you put your hand up again?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. After Ms. Petitpas Taylor, you will be back on the list.

That is the list right now: Turnbull, Lauzon, Normandin, Petitpas Taylor, Blaikie.

We will carry on with you, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, just before we start again, I want to clarify something. Before we broke, Mr. Blaikie sort of jumped in and asked me a question, and I just wondered whether that was customary when a member has the floor. My understanding was that would be the case only if I gave my permission to use the Simms protocol, and it is not necessarily customary to ask questions of members who have the floor.

I just want to check on the rules, because I noticed Mr. Blaikie did that. I thought it was actually a pretty good question to be

asked, for sure, but I didn't really give my consent to have my time interrupted. I just want to clarify if that was contravening the rules.

The Chair: If you haven't given your consent, then it is contravening the rules. A member cannot interrupt and ask questions of the person who has the floor. However, I'll just say that in my position as chair, when there are points of order, points of clarification, or relevancy orders being made, I sometimes have to give them a minute and hear them out in order to see what the member is saying. That sometimes is enough time for the member to put that question out there. Of course, though, you do not by any means have to respond.

That was, I guess, not a point of order. That was not in order. I hope that resolves that and gives you some clarification.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: On that point, Madam Chair, upon reflection, I think I realized that was not in fact a good point of order, so apologies to Mr. Turnbull for the interruption. I'll leave it to him as to whether or not he cares to answer the question.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie. That's nice of you to recognize.

Carry on, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I appreciate that as well, Madam Chair.

Mr. Blaikie, it's much appreciated. Thank you.

I want to make a few remarks in the hopes that we can move past this. I know, as I just mentioned, that Mr. Blaikie said the pandemic also matters. I know maybe he didn't mean it the way I took it, but I certainly think the pandemic is of central importance and we need to remain focused on that. I think that's what we have heard from members.

I also know that we've done some great work in this committee on a possible pandemic election, and that has resulted in, or at least contributed to, a bill that's before Parliament. That's really important as well.

I also want to reference a recent CBC article and raise this issue for the committee for consideration. It's really the issue of election integrity. To me, it's not just managing an election, but ensuring that—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Point of order.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Turnbull.

Yes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: We have an amendment. Now he's talking about a different bill. I really think it's important that we get back to the motion. I recognize that we're giving lots of people leniency on this, but now we're talking about Bill C-19, and we're talking about the election. Perhaps we could get back to the prorogation. Even if it has an impact on your community, Bill C-19 does not currently have an impact. It has nothing to do with prorogation.

Thank you.

The Chair: I apologize. I myself didn't hear that last sentence, so I can't really make a clear ruling on that.

I will remind the member to stay on the point of the amendment.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To Ms. Vecchio's point, in a pandemic context, it's really important for us to be considering misinformation that's out there. This is an important topic that this committee should be studying. I put a motion on notice at our last meeting. I believe we should move on [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: May we request a recorded vote, please.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

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

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, as I was saying, the recent Ontario Superior Court decision struck down amendments that were made to the Canada Elections Act. This is deeply concerning for me, because there's quite a bit of misinformation that seems to be circulating. I've seen quite a lot of attention on this issue. We need to start looking at this, within an elections process, if deliberately false statements are being put out by parties within an election process. I know Mr. Blaikie was reported in the media recently as being in support of this study. I had put a motion on notice. This would be a better use of our time. I digress and I'll move back to speaking to the amendment.

I have lots to say about the amendment that I've put forward, providing rationale and justification for that amendment.

First off, from the last two meetings, I've been making a real effort to articulate an argument that substantiates the reasons for proration. You'll probably remember, for those of you who were at those meetings, that I've been saying very clearly that a global pandemic is a good reason for proroguing Parliament. If not, then what is? When I look back at prorogations in the past, it's very clear that there were lesser reasons cited. There were recessions that were blips compared to what we're experiencing today.

With that said, I want to further my argument. We've heard from multiple opposition parties numerous times that they think the throne speech lacked substance and basically didn't include anything new. I beg to differ on that front. Actually, I should state it more strongly. I emphatically disagree with that statement. The throne speech was constructed based on evidence, research and data that was provided by the chief statistician of Canada, and a very robust consultation process that was undertaken by the government.

The Chair: There's an issue with your sound. There's a lot of static and I don't know how that would be for the interpreters. I think you were mentioning at the beginning that you had a connection problem. I wonder if we can get some assistance from the technical team to check out Mr. Turnbull's connectivity.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It seems to be particularly bad right now. It's jumping in and out and I'm not sure why, because it was fine yesterday and the day before that. I'm not sure what's going on.

The Clerk: Madam Chair and Mr. Turnbull, we'll look into it and see if there's anything on our end that we can do. We might need to

get an IT ambassador to reach out to you directly and try to address the problem. Just stand by, please.

The Chair: Okay. The static I've heard is not good for the interpreters.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Chair, the sound was bad at my end as well.

• (1505) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1510)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thanks very much. I have a point of order. Under Bosc and Gagnon, according to our procedures, after somebody has moved a motion to adjourn debate, he has conceded the floor. I know we have a speakers list. I believe it should go to the next speaker.

During the small break when Mr. Turnbull was having some issues, I just referred to page 607 of Bosc and Gagnon. As is noted in there, he has removed himself from the speakers list. He can put himself back on there, but he had moved a motion that ended his time.

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, thank you for that point of order.

I will call upon our wonderful clerk to help us out here. I've just opened up our procedure book, but I'm sure the clerk can help us out quickly.

I'll review it as well so it doesn't happen again if we do find that it was not according to the rules of procedure.

Mr. Clerk, could you help us out there?

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Chair. The passage that Ms. Vecchio read would be consistent with my understanding of the procedure. Generally when a member makes a motion after an intervention, when they get to the point of making that motion and a decision is made on it, that has the effect of ceding the floor to the next person on the list.

The Chair: Okay. So be it. We need to follow the rules of procedure.

Mr. Turnbull, that means we are now giving the floor to Mr. Lauzon.

[*Translation*]

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

I'm pleased to resume the floor on the amendment of my colleague Mr. Turnbull, who will have an opportunity to address the topic again.

First, I want to thank Mr. Turnbull. I would also like to thank Ms. Duncan and Mr. Long for their inspirational speeches. They are passionate, they speak from the heart, and they are very determined. We're inevitably inspired when we have the good fortune to hear from these experienced individuals.

After the amendment was introduced, we had time to examine the reasons for excluding the Prime Minister's testimony and including that of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. After analyzing the remarks of all the members and more closely considering the amendment introduced by Mr. Turnbull...

[*English*]

Something has happened. I have an issue.

[*Translation*]

Can you hear me?

Then I'll continue. As I was saying, I took a look at the report the government tabled on the reasons leading to Mr. Turnbull's amendment. I'm going to support the amendment because it's a good compromise, even though I would personally have liked to forge ahead and abandon the idea of hearing witnesses other than those we've heard to date, including Mr. Rodriguez.

That being said, the report that Mr. Rodriguez tabled in the House of Commons really paints a picture of the situation facing our government and country during the pandemic. The report also made me reflect on the cooperation we've observed among members, regardless of party. We've felt that we're here for Canadians despite the pandemic. Mr. Turnbull's amendment makes me wonder how far we could go by having the Deputy Prime Minister testify before the committee.

The words Mr. Turnbull uses in his amendment are entirely legitimate. My colleague Mr. Long has used terms relating more to the collective bargaining process. I don't want to use those terms because we aren't operating in a reciprocity context. I would say instead that this is a good compromise.

This good compromise, under which we would delete the first paragraph and invite the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth to appear before the committee for at least 90 minutes, is an extremely valid one. We've already made considerable progress toward asking all the questions to which we already know the answers.

I've also thought about the role of cooperation in a minority government context.

I'm a newcomer to federal politics, and I haven't experienced this in municipal politics. I've served two terms, but I've never had to work with the opposition when my party was in power. I experienced it in 2015, when the government came to power. Now I know what it means to work with the opposition.

We've done some good things. I was much impressed to see that a government could be functional even as a minority government. We've definitely shown how we can serve Canadians.

Again with respect to Mr. Turnbull's amendment, the Deputy Prime Minister could show us how the work was done before, during and after the prorogation.

I feel I have to support Mr. Turnbull's motion so I can say that open-mindedness still has a place on this committee. That's given me food for thought.

What I really find disappointing is to see that a party has decided that politics and scoring political points take precedence over the common good. That's what bothers me.

We've done a lot of work together. We're proud we're still here. We aren't yet talking about the pandemic in the past tense, but rather in the present. We don't want to abandon all the work we've done together. Some people say our government hasn't acted in good faith. However, we've made good decisions, and we'll have to make more. It's disappointing to see that people are trying to turn this into a political football.

The Deputy Prime Minister could confirm for the committee that we don't need to hear testimony from the Prime Minister. She could also confirm that we've offered emergency support to more than 8 million Canadians through the Canada emergency response benefit. That's not nothing. We've helped people who have lost their jobs by providing the Canada emergency rent subsidy. I still have to process certain cases in my riding even today. I have to intervene and call people back.

People are still trying to play politics over a motion.

Mr. Turnbull's amendment should be debated. Mr. Blaikie clearly indicated in his remarks that he's opposed to the amendment to the motion. What I want to do is continue arguing as long as possible so I can show all the members, including Mr. Blaikie, that we should forget about inviting the Prime Minister. We already have all the evidence we need to prove that achieved nothing on the outside.

We're trying to make a connection between the Prime Minister's appearance and the prorogation and between the Prime Minister's appearance and the WE Charity. I encourage my colleagues to reread the questions in the report. It states that, from the outset, they made a connection between the WE Charity and the questions we put to witnesses. So there's nothing new. They're saying that the Prime Minister must say it, but I would remind you that at no time did the Conservative Prime Minister of the time, Mr. Harper, have to testify before the committees with regard to the prorogation. A prime minister is usually not invited to appear before committee. However, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau did just that.

The work we've done together has helped support millions of Canadians. We've helped people stay in business and cope better with the circumstances of this economic and health crisis that we've discussed at such great length. We've also help people get back on their feet and put food on the table. We put in place old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. You know the latter is my baby and how important it was for me to make the right decisions.

With respect to Mr. Turnbull's amendment, the Deputy Prime Minister could come and talk to the committee about Canadians living in residential long-term care centres, seniors living in private residences and those living at home and who were isolated because they didn't even dare go to the grocery store or drugstore.

We put financial assistance in place for Canadians living with disabilities and advanced one-time non-taxable payments of \$600. That also affects a large percentage of seniors who, as they age, suffer from disabilities that prevent them from readily fitting into society and performing everyday tasks. So we've assisted them. Canadians, particularly those living with disabilities, remember that the Conservatives tried to block that support. Imagine that! They tried to block support for persons with disabilities.

The Deputy Prime Minister could come and tell you that the government has invested in support for Canada's food banks and about what we've achieved. We don't need to see the Prime Minister because the Deputy Prime Minister is also the Minister of Finance. So it's important that she come and provide answers to all your questions on pandemic-related needs, measures that we have taken and why we prorogued Parliament.

We've also invested in food banks and assisted community partners in meeting housing needs and the safety-related needs of the homeless. We've also introduced a support measure to house 500 persons. At the very moment we were making major decisions, the provinces did the same. Some imposed curfews, which proved to be a problem for homeless individuals. So we had to act quickly. The Deputy Prime Minister could come and tell you about that and explain the homelessness situation to you.

We also supported more than 500 women's shelters and centres for sexual assault victims during the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of female sexual assault victims has increased during that time for all the reasons we are well aware of.

No one is in a better position to testify before the committee than the Deputy Prime Minister, who is a woman and is highly sensitive to the cause of women, to finance and the pandemic. It's not the Prime Minister's role to meet and speak with us since we have all the necessary staff and answers to the questions we've put to the right witnesses. In addition, Mr. Turnbull's amendment affords us an opportunity to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister in committee.

I also haven't told you about our cooperation with our first nations, Métis and Inuit partners. We've invested \$2.2 billion to find community solutions and immediately meet the public health needs of indigenous persons. There's little discussion of the socioeconomic phenomenon caused by the pandemic in indigenous communities, but it's extremely important that we discuss it today.

The Deputy Prime Minister also could have come and told you about the students who had to face a very different labour market last year. Many students in my riding found themselves without a job because tourism is a large part of my riding's economy. We also have a lot of jobs in the restaurant and hotel industries, outfitting and access to watersports. All those students wound up unemployed.

The Deputy Prime Minister could also come and talk, as Mr. Turnbull's amendment proposes, about how we introduced the Canada emergency student benefit, which provided financial support to more than 700,000 students. A little later, I'll tell you about the WE Charity's approach to students. You'll understand what I'm

getting at. I'm going to make the connection with Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

What the Deputy Prime Minister could come and tell you is that we've enabled small, medium and large Canadian businesses in all sectors to stay afloat. We introduced a business credit program and measures designed to support local jobs and the economies of all Canadian regions through all six regional development agencies in Canada. Our officials have worked hard from the start to adjust to the programs we're trying to develop to assist the public.

Dr. Duncan has addressed the health issue. No one on this committee is in a better position to discuss health. She's been criticized for not speaking directly to the amendment, but I'm pleased to take the floor to thank her for her efforts. She has made me think, once again, about how important today's debate is. We can ask Dr. Duncan all the questions we want to put to the Deputy Prime Minister about what we've done to improve the health of Canadians as a result of this prorogation. So her speech directly concerned the amendment. I tip my hat to her.

Despite some setbacks, such as those I mentioned a few moments ago, we've managed to do these things and to offer these programs because we've worked together. "Together" is an important word. We've put Canadians first.

Now we're witnessing a dangerous trend toward casting the interests of Canadians aside and focusing solely on political gains. We see what's happening in the committees. No one's trying to advance files; some just want committees to suspend their meetings until a later date, while others extend their sitting times, sometimes until early morning, if necessary. It's gotten that bad. It's a dangerous game.

I'm prepared to do my job just as I've done it, but I'll defend Mr. Turnbull's amendment tooth and nail. Mr. Blaikie said in his speech that he was completely opposed to the idea of inviting the Deputy Prime Minister and that he absolutely wanted to summon the Prime Minister, but I'll keep working as long as necessary to have Mr. Turnbull's amendment accepted.

The motion we're debating today is a clear example of that. The amendment that Mr. Turnbull has introduced is nevertheless a compromise, and that's evidence of an open mind. Mr. Blaikie has clearly shown us he doesn't have an open mind, and he's unfortunately not the only one. The same is true of the Conservatives. You need only look at what happened in the House: the Conservatives used every possible tactic to delay and block adoption of extremely important bills.

I don't want to join the debate on medical assistance in dying. We could discuss that for a very long time. I want to stick to Mr. Turnbull's amendment. Today let's conduct an appropriate examination of the bill on the fall economic statement. What does that bill actually contain?

We're going to talk briefly about figures because they're really important. Under this amendment, since she's also the Minister of Finance, the Deputy Prime Minister could come and explain to us how funding of up to \$505.7 million [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], including funding to prevent the spread of COVID-19, outbreaks and deaths. These are decisions that have been made.

She could come and justify the prorogation and talk about emergency support for low-income families who are entitled to the Canada child benefit. Mr. Turnbull also discussed the importance of the child benefit. The amount of the benefit could range up to \$1,200 for each child under the age of six in 2021. These families aren't just thanking the Liberals; they're thanking all members of Parliament for granting Canadians \$1,200 per child to support them during the pandemic.

The Deputy Prime Minister could also come and discuss the elimination of interest on repayment of the federal portion of Canada student and apprentice loans for 2021-2022. That measure lightens the financial burden of 1.4 million young Canadians. Those young people are my children and your children, children who need support in order to pay for their studies, who need summer jobs. I have one daughter at university and another studying at a community college. They're at the age where education is expensive. My three daughters, of whom I am extremely proud, have received a good education. However, that education is costing me a lot of money. So I can tell you that student assistance is very much appreciated.

Incidentally, a single scholarship made it possible for one of my daughters to study in Europe, acquire incredible life experience and come home with an invaluable addition to her education. That's what subsidies are for, and that's the result of the decisions we make. Thanks to certain political decisions, my daughter had an opportunity to visit a number of countries.

The Europeans invest in high-speed trains and accessible and affordable public transit. We have quite a way to go in that respect, and we must follow their example. We absolutely have to put subsidy programs in place. We have to help young students develop here and elsewhere by providing grants so they can study as long as possible. As one teacher said, young people who study today will be supporting us tomorrow. They're our future and we must continue supporting them.

The WE Charity had, and still has, an objective, which is to help young people do volunteer work, get paid and save money to go back to school in September, all in order to assist parents like me. I have three daughters, two of whom are still in school.

It's important that every one of the decisions we make for young students is made in the greater interest of students and parents as a whole. We often see grandparents providing assistance. In so doing, they skip a generation. We see grandparents assisting their grandchildren because education costs include rent, books, Internet regis-

trations, subscriptions, cell phone service, computers and tablets; in short, the equipment that young people need at university. Those costs are exorbitant, particularly for parents who have more than one child. They are already exorbitant for a single child; imagine when there are three.

The Deputy Prime Minister could explain all that to us because we're talking about money. She could even tell us about funding, which could reach \$262 million, to support COVID-19-related tests, medical research, countermeasures and vaccine funding and development. We're standing in the midst of it all.

Parliament was prorogued in order to improve the situation. If the Deputy Prime Minister could come and testify pursuant to Mr. Turnbull's amendment, she would tell us how important funding is. She would also tell us about the decisions and measures made respecting transfers to the provinces to assist them with medical supplies and long-term care facilities. She could even include all the measures that apply to borders and travellers, as well as the extensive management of quarantine sites. The opposition parties enjoyed telling us that the process of booking appointments was long and complicated. However, we reinvent the wheel every week we make a decision.

Every time the integrity of the system was attacked, I felt uncomfortable for our public servants, and I found that unfortunate because they were affected by those comments. As you know, my riding is in the Outaouais region, where a lot of public servants live. It's largely rural, but some of my colleagues, Mr. Fergus and Mr. MacKinnon in particular, have many public servants in their constituencies. We're fortunate to cross paths with those public servants, and, when we do, they confront us and ask us whether we're aware of the work they have to do when we make a decision in the House of Commons or propose a program we would like to see adapted within a week. Can you just imagine the pressure these people are under?

For example, Ms. Freeland is the best person to tell us about and make us understand the delays caused at the Department of Revenue and those associated with a measure that we've introduced and that involves our officials. The Deputy Prime Minister is in the best position to discuss that with us because she has attended pandemic-related briefings every day. She could come and tell us about the budgets the various measures entail. She's aware of what goes on and regularly answers virtually all questions raised in the House. She's an exceptional woman who would be entirely capable of doing the upcoming work.

I initially wanted to abandon Mr. Turnbull's amendment. Having read, listened and spoken about it, however, I would now accept it. I would have good questions to put to the Deputy Prime Minister concerning the prorogation.

As a result of Mr. Turnbull's amendment, I would give the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance an opportunity to come and testify before the committee.

She could also tell us about the funding that could amount to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to support access to virtual care, including mental health care. I'm thinking, for example, of the substance abuse support program. I've discussed it at length since I'm particularly concerned by it.

Without wanting to repeat myself, the most vulnerable people are seniors in long-term care facilities. They suffer from isolation, often finding themselves in a small room with a sink, a bed and a chair.

The best person to tell you about that, particularly about the care of women, is the Deputy Prime Minister. There is no one better than a woman to understand and discuss the situation of women, including problems of family violence, isolation, mental health and declining independence. Women are more affected than men. I'm very sensitive to that.

I'm pleased to have a feminist Prime Minister, but I'd be even more pleased if the Deputy Prime Minister came and testified on the situation of women...

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: On a point of order, I don't believe there's any translation. Maybe I'm the only one listening, but I'm just letting you know there has been no translation.

The Chair: Okay. Can we have a pause, Monsieur Lauzon?

The Clerk: We'll have a check on that, Madam Chair.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Do I hit a button or something? Did I do something wrong?

The Chair: No, I don't think you've done anything wrong. I think maybe sometimes the channel just gets disconnected.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: If I speak French, can you hear interpretation now?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, we can hear it.

Sorry, Mr. Lauzon. Please carry on.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I will just rewind two sentences because they're very important.

[*Translation*]

I'm proud to have a feminist Prime Minister. I agree with all his remarks concerning women and equity. However, I feel the Deputy Prime Minister is the person in the best position to come and speak to us about the situation of women during the pandemic.

The amendment that Mr. Turnbull has proposed would be an opportunity for her to come and speak to us. I think it would also be highly appropriate for her to tell us about the \$133 million earmarked for mental health services, substance abuse support and other programs.

She could also discuss authorization of the planned increase in extraordinary borrowings.

To date, however, the Conservatives have prevented the bills from being put to a vote.

Since we're considering inviting the Deputy Prime Minister, I'm going to quote her. In her letter to Mr. O'Toole, she wrote the following:

Partisanship is part of our democratic system. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, however, we have witnessed a rare unanimity in Canada's Parliament with respect to the emergency measures designed to support Canadians in need. As I am sure you will agree, that is how it should be.

I have decided to quote the remarks that the Deputy Prime Minister made in her letter to Mr. O'Toole because she could come and explain them to us if we allowed her to come and testify in committee. Then we could close the loop and move on to something else.

I couldn't agree more with the Deputy Prime Minister's words and impressions. They are absolutely valid, highly relevant and topical considering the amendment Mr. Turnbull has moved. My objective today is to underscore the importance of the Deputy Prime Minister's testimony in connection with Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

I know this political game is sometimes difficult for the opposition. The purpose of Mr. Turnbull's proposal is to amend a purely political motion that doesn't hold water. It's unprecedented.

We had an opportunity to reach a compromise until Mr. Blaikie said he didn't agree on the amendment.

[*English*]

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: In all fairness, I appreciate this, but we've been filibustering now for six days. Daniel's comment came just an hour ago, so perhaps you could explain to me why we filibustered for the first five days then. Let's just get back on track. I really love the relevance, and I just really would like to one day get to a vote on this, perhaps before I'm 95.

The Chair: I hope we do get to a vote on this before you're 95, Mrs. Vecchio.

Mr. Lauzon, go ahead.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thanks for your comment, Madam Vecchio.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): I have a point of order also, if I may, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Lamoureux. Welcome to the committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you.

I understand that the committee is reviewing a couple of motions in which I have a real keen interest, and I'm hoping to be able to address them sometime today if not this evening. I just wanted to make sure, by raising my hand now, that I would be put on the list. I don't know how you're proceeding with the list—

The Chair: Yes, you're on.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Turnbull's up there, too. Mrs. Vecchio is on there. I want to make sure I'm doing it properly. Could you just provide clarification as to how one gets onto the list, so that we can contribute to this debate?

My apologies to Mr. Lauzon, who's a man I'm a big fan of in terms of interrupting.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: On a related point of clarification, Madam Chair, I'm just wondering if there are enough hours left in the day for an intervention by Mr. Lamoureux. Perhaps you could provide some clarification for the committee on that as well.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: On the same point, Madam Speaker, I can tell my friend and colleague from Elmwood—Transcona that I'm told that you're adjourning, unfortunately, sometime around 10. I hope to get a good portion of my comments in before we adjourn anyway. I'll do my best.

The Chair: We have yet to have that discussion as to whether we'll be adjourning or not. I'm assuming there'll be plenty of time to hear from you, Mr. Lamoureux, but that is just an assumption. We'll see how the committee feels, at least before the vote for today. Then we'll take it from there.

I'm glad you did bring up the list because you wouldn't want to go hours and then not have your name on the list. The list that you see before you right now is not the entire list. The list is actually longer than what you see. We're on Mr. Lauzon, then we have Madame Normandin, Ms. Petitpas Taylor and Mr. Blaikie. I believe after that we have Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Vecchio, you intentionally had your hand up, right? It wasn't from the points of order earlier, was it?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes.

The Chair: It's Mrs. Vecchio, then Mr. Turnbull and then, Mr. Lamoureux, it would be you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: To that end, Madam Chair, if by chance I'm not able to stay in the room, is it okay that I don't lose my place in the list and that I would be able to come back? Do I have to stay on inside the room currently?

The Chair: It would be fine as long as you're here when your name comes up on the list.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I promise.

The Chair: That's how we've been operating. If you're not here when your name is called on the list, then you would lose your spot.

Hon. Peter Kent: I have a point of order, Chair.

You disallowed Christine for not being here.

The Chair: We had moved past her name on the list. She was supposed to be earlier in the day and she wasn't here at the time, so then when she came in she put her name on the list. If Mr. Lamoureux is not here when his speaking spot comes up, he will be removed from the list. He would have to come back to the meeting, actually put his hand up and get back on the list.

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

Could I just get clarification on this? We can have members come in and out and as long as they're in their spot it doesn't matter—their name can stay on the list. They can go out for an hour and come back. Are we doing substitutions? This seems like we could probably have every single person that we want just sign up on a list. I could put all 120 Conservative members on a list and as long as they show up on video at that time....

I'm just trying to get a little bit of a tighter and clearer perspective on what we're actually doing in this committee. That would be wonderful.

The Chair: We definitely do not have a hundred and something people on the list. I just read out the list and it's all members who have been here and dedicated to this speech. Even Madame Normandin has been dedicated over several meetings to come in. Mr. Lamoureux has, in the past, also substituted a few times in this meeting and has raised his hand, but always lost his spot because he had to move on to something else in the day.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I have a point of order on that, then.

We've had a number of different people also on our side. Does that mean that if they choose to come in and then leave...? Marilyn Gladu, for instance, had subbed for me for my five minutes earlier today. She could have been back on the list and then in the five hours that she would have had to wait, she could just get back on. Are we having a committee of the normal membership or are we expanding it to almost a committee of the whole and people just show up?

I'm just trying to find this out because I believe we're expanding this. There's a lot of room and opportunity to continue to fool around and play political games—as we've been seeing all day—on who's coming in and out and how many times people put their name on the list. I'm really concerned about that because there is a very good door here to be opened where people can play these political games, just as we've seen, with raising their hand and being on the list all day.

Could you just share that with me? I think we should have clarification as well as some limitations on this. Saying that one person is dedicated more than the other is very subjective, so I'd hope that we'd come up with a little bit more of a plan than that.

The Chair: I just stated my plan, Mrs. Vecchio. So far, I haven't seen any kind of abuse of that sort where hundreds of people are signed up on the list. If somebody has substituted in or even if a colleague comes in and wishes to speak at a committee meeting, the procedure has generally allowed for that.

Mrs. Vecchio, definitely if Ms. Gladu had her name on the list, her speaking slot is up and she's present to speak, then by all means I would be calling on Ms. Gladu or you or whoever you have subbing in. You had Mr. Calkins sub in earlier. Any of your subs are free to speak.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I have a different point of order, if I may.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Beauchesne's sixth edition is fairly clear about imputing motives. The member inferred that others, possibly even me, are in this to play games. I want to indicate very clearly to members of this committee that I don't see this as a game at all. I believe the coronavirus is a very serious issue in Canada. I have some very tangible ideas and thoughts on what PROC should be doing. I would like to expand on those a great deal, and I don't necessarily want members of the committee to read in my motivations, or imply any sort of motive, that I am going to play games, because I take this issue very seriously.

I can assure committee members that I am not alone. My understanding, based on your ruling on the previous point of order, Madam Chair, just so that I have it straight, is that the committee is open to hearing from members of the entire House, but they have to show up at the committee and indicate this. To answer Ms. Vecchio's question, she can't just submit a list—at least I don't think she can, based on my knowledge.

The Chair: No.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Chair, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but if any member of the House wants to speak, all they have to do is to show up and put up their hand. They will be put onto a list and will stay on that list. When their name is called and it's their turn to speak, as long as they're here they will be recognized. If they are not, then, as I understand it, you'll drop them from the list and then go on to the next person. That's my understanding. I hope I got it right.

In regard to the point of order, with regard to imputing my motives, it was just an expression from my point of view, because I do not want members to believe that I would be playing games on this very serious matter.

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

The Chair: Yes, Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I recognize that Mr. Lamoureux is a very dedicated member of Parliament. We see him 24 hours a day, if there's an opportunity for him to be there 24 hours a day. We know that about him. However, I find it very reckless for us to indicate.... As I indicated, you said that we've seen Ms. Normandin and other individuals. Perhaps the clerk could share with me what the ruling on that would be. There has to be some sort of precedent.

I know that we are now in a very different time, when we have people coming in virtually, but earlier today Mr. Turnbull put his name on the list so that he could be back on it for a second time because of the last meeting. He wanted to be back on the list. We saw that happen. I am greatly concerned because I know that we are dedicated to this.

To the note on political games, this is just what we have seen. I've seen some of these people continue to talk. I've heard Mr. Lauzon say, "We want the minister here" and "We don't want the minister" within four hours. Obviously he had a good night's rest on that.

I don't mean to be sarcastic, but I believe we are going into an area where things are becoming really loosey-goosey. This is the procedure and House affairs committee. We are the grandfather committee. Basically, precedent is set here. If we're seeing loosey-goosey rules, that is what we're going to see in all of our standing committees, so I think there needs to be something done.

Perhaps the clerk can share with us how this would work. If we have people exiting and entering the meeting all the time, we could be in this filibuster.... As Mr. Lauzon indicated the other day, he will speak till the election. We could be in this until then, but we want to get work done, so I'm very concerned.

Madam Chair, if we can get a ruling, if we can get something, we should, because this is very loosey-goosey. You're opening this up to multiple interpretations, and to be honest, we know what can happen from there. Let's just set this—

The Chair: Yes, absolutely. I respect wanting clarity and I understand that you want this to be over. I'm sure a lot of members feel similarly.

As for precedent at this committee, I can tell you that I sat through a filibuster, led by the Conservative members in the previous Parliament, that went on longer than this—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, on a point of order, although that's wonderful, I'm just asking if you could perhaps give us a ruling. It's great that you're giving us your subjective view, but I would like a ruling on what we're going to do moving forward.

The Chair: I'm making my ruling.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's great.

The Chair: You asked for a precedent, and precedent is by how a committee has behaved in the past. This committee has allowed non-permanent members of the committee to sub in during meetings and speak. This not just my opinion; I'm sharing with you the precedents that I saw in the last Parliament.

Non-regular members—and I don't have to say which party they belonged to since you know from the last Parliament—came in. They would routinely come in for some meetings and all of the regular members would leave. That precedent was set, and they were always allowed to speak at committee. There was never an objection of this sort raised, namely, that they were not allowed to be on a list and not allowed to speak.

Yes, Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Perhaps I could give some clarification, though. What I'm referring to is people coming into a meeting, exiting a meeting and coming back into the meeting just because their name is called at that time. I'm concerned about that, because as we're looking at this I recognize that we're all members and associate members of these types of committees, and so we all have the opportunity to speak. I do not question that. What I question is people coming in and out of meetings, and by no means am I indicating Mr. Lamoureux has done this. I know he hasn't, as a matter of fact, so I will protect him there. I just want to be very cautious on this, because I think that if we're allowing people to come in and out.... As you said, Christine was not allowed to speak because she wasn't there when her name was called, but her name was on the list. She would have been able to speak.

The in and out policy is a little—

The Chair: Christine is on the list currently. She is somebody who subs in regularly. She wasn't here at the time her spot was up. There's nothing I could have done about that. She wasn't here at that point when her name was up on the list. She's back on the list, because she came back. She had her name put back on the list and she is going to be called upon.

I'll remind you of who the members are in the speaking order, and I think you're going to find that all of these members, or a majority of them, are permanent members. The list is mostly of the permanent members. We have Monsieur Lauzon, Madame Normandin, Ms. Petitpas Taylor and Mr. Blaikie, who is a regular member. All these members so far are regular members. We have Ms. Vecchio after that, and then Mr. Turnbull, and then at the very end Mr. Lamoureux.

I don't see any kind of abuse at this point. The list is not hundreds of members long, with members from Parliament lining up. It's all mostly regular members at this point, with the exception of one.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Right now that's wonderful, but I would just ask something there. I'm looking at Mr. Regan, who would probably know lots about this kind of stuff. But there were seven members, and I'm just wondering because of the substitutions. We've always had the protocol of substitutions and that's great, but I just want a little bit more clarity here, because right now I'm looking at eight members, in fact, from the Liberal Party who are currently on this part. If everybody can have their name on the list, then it's just now becoming a committee of the whole if this is what we're going to do. I'm wondering what's the need for substitutions if we're just going to be loosey-goosey. That's why I prefer some sort of rules and protocol. Thank you.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Chair, if I may, to get a little more background. Prior to 2015, I sat on PROC for a number of years. Maybe I can bring a bit of a different light to this or different experience from when I was in opposition. The member was asking about how important this committee is. In fact, she's right. Often other committees will look at what's taking place in PROC. PROC is held in fairly high esteem. That's why in the eyes of many, including to a certain degree me, there's a certain level of disappointment in what the official opposition is doing in PROC. They have the right to do that. There's no doubt about that. As they have the right to do what they're doing, members of all caucuses have the right to participate.

Even in the era between 2010 and 2015 when I sat in opposition, we would often have filibusters in PROC too. One of the great filibusterers was David Christopherson. Members here will reflect on David Christopherson. We would often get members or people who wanted to participate who are not members.

In fact, Madam Chair, one only needs to look at the former leader of the Green Party, and other parties that didn't get recognition or independence. I can recall having members come to speak on bills and other issues. All were very important to him or her. They felt they needed to be able to contribute. They didn't have to be a member of PROC.

I have nothing but the deepest respect for members of PROC, and the fine work you do. I had the opportunity to take a look at some of the things coming up. I, for one, am hoping to be able to contribute to a very important piece of legislation dealing with the coronavirus, Bill C-19 on elections. When I was in opposition back then, we had to deal with legislation such as that.

Anyway, I'm getting a little off track. I just wanted to assure my friend that what I have heard and witnessed taking place at PROC today is no different from in the past, and I could cite endless examples. I would encourage members to continue to allow others members to be able to say what they believe is so important on this issue. Take a look at the broader issue: What's being debated in the chamber causes a great deal of concern today. I hope to address that a little later, but not now.

This is just to assure my friend that things in PROC, from what I can tell, are going perfectly naturally, the way they should be going, and no games are being played. This is serious. I hope negotiations are taking place in the background so that we can get on to do some of the fine work that has to be done at this committee.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I have a point of order on that, a clarification perhaps.

As I said with precedents, right now I'm looking at all of the different members. Anybody who has joined can then put their name on the list, regardless of whether they are substitutes.

Could we get clarification on that?

Those are the types of things. I'm just recognizing that we're setting precedents.

Are we able to put anyone on the list as they come through, or is a substitution being done here?

Perhaps the clerk can share on that with me.

Can the list only have perhaps the seven members of the Liberal Party on the committee?

How does that work?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Chair, while you are conferring with the clerk, I can provide the member across the way with the following. Traditionally, in the past, as I tried to explain, in the PROC and other committees, we have had the current or permanent membership— which ironically is ultimately determined by the PROC committee itself—there all of the time leading the discussions. Unless it's in camera, and in that case it's even somewhat questionable, you can still have members participate.

I have seen, as I say, members from the Green Party, and other affiliations participate. I think your explanation, from what I heard, Madam Chair, was right on. I fully support what you're saying on who is able to speak and when they can speak, the fact that who can speak is unlimited. This is all something that's happened for many years. I would applaud what you're doing, as the chair. I know at times it can be fairly challenging.

At the end of the day, I think we are moving in the direction that it has happened in the past. As I indicated, I think we should allow Mr. Lauzon to continue. He has been waiting very patiently through these points of orders.

Madam Chair, I would encourage you to continue doing exactly what you're doing.

The Chair: Other members are allowed to come and speak at committee; however, they would not be allowed to vote if were not officially substituted in. Even if we were to draw parallels to the House, I would say that members are free to come in and out of the House and speak, whether it's in question period or afterwards. If their name is on the list, they come in and they have a speaking slot, regardless of whether or not they stayed in the House chamber the whole time.

That's just to draw that parallel. That's not how committees function, but we take a lot of parallels from the chamber itself as well.

In terms of the substitutions and members sitting in, Justin, would you want to clarify whether they can speak or not?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, in a public meeting, it is common practice that non-members, even members who haven't been formally substituted in, can participate in the meeting if the committee is fine with allowing the member to intervene and have an opportunity to speak. It is different in an in camera meeting, where the committee's approval is required to allow a non-member to sit in on an in camera meeting. On that point, on the issue of non-members, that was the point.

I know there was also a member asking about the substitutions. Just for the committee's information, I currently have a substitution for Mr. Gerretsen, who isn't here, and that is Mr. Drouin, who is formally subbed in for him.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin is also replacing Mr. Therrien.

[*English*]

There are other members obviously present who are non-members, and they are not formally subbed in. They are participating here in the public meeting or sitting in listening to the committee proceedings.

The Chair: Okay.

Was Mr. Regan not substituted?

Oh, Mr. Drouin is here, okay.

The Clerk: Mr. Regan is participating. However, he is being substituted for Mr. Lauzon, as Mr. Lauzon is still currently in the meeting. Mr. Lauzon would be the member we are counting for purposes of quorum, and so on. Until such time as Mr. Lauzon leaves, if he does leave, Mr. Regan would be here in a capacity as a non-member just sitting in on the meeting. Should Mr. Lauzon absent himself, or leave, then I do have official notification from the Liberal whip that Mr. Regan would be the formal substitute for Mr. Lauzon.

The Chair: How about Mr. Morrissey?

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Madam Chair, on a point of order, I believe I'm substituting. I was advised I was replacing Mr. Gerretsen.

The Clerk: I do have notifications of substitution for Mr. Drouin and Mr. Morrissey to replace Mr. Gerretsen. I believe there was an issue of one or the other possibly not being able to stay the entire time. I see that both are still here. I have notification that both are here.

Obviously, Mr. Drouin came into the meeting first as the substitute for Mr. Gerretsen. He will still be considered the official substitute. For any purposes of quorum or voting, Mr. Drouin will be the official substitute for Mr. Gerretsen, until such time as Mr. Drouin leaves and then it would be Mr. Morrissey.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: At this point, I have to leave. Geoff Regan will be my substitute. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon, therefore, you are ceding the floor.

Ms. Normandin, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Since we're discussing the amendment, I'll tell you why I find it appealing and why I like it so much.

Without going on too long, I'll also explain why I nevertheless intend to vote against it.

I find the amendment appealing because one of the arguments we've consistently heard since the debate began is that it will take a lot of time for many individuals to testify before the committee, that we should use that time to do something else, such as combating the pandemic, that Canadians aren't interested in the prorogation and that we therefore shouldn't dwell on it. However, nine hours of committee meetings have already been scheduled for the amendment. We feel that nine hours is ultimately not too long, that it's reasonable and that we can use that time to hear witnesses.

What's even more interesting, even though it's an open secret, is that many committee members would be inclined to have only six hours of testimony if certain persons, notably the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Ms. Telford, came and testified.

Even if we could say at the outset that the use of time is a compelling argument, we can see, in spite of it all, that there's an obstruction here, that we've spent six meetings discussing the matter and that Mr. Lauzon has said he's prepared to continue discussing it for weeks. If the time argument is served up once again, the amendment that Mr. Turnbull has just introduced demolishes that claim.

We may therefore conclude that the mission we now seem to have set for ourselves isn't to use time efficiently but rather to ensure that Mr. Trudeau and Ms. Telford do not testify before the committee on the specific issue of the prorogation.

It was said that they had already testified before the Standing Committee on Finance. However, I would point out that they did so before the prorogation and that they therefore could not provide testimony respecting an event that had not yet occurred.

Seeing that the most important thing for members of the party in power is not to have Mr. Trudeau and Ms. Telford testify on the prorogation issue raises questions in my mind. We've discussed at length the fact that prorogation is solely the prerogative of the prime minister. Far be it from me to compare the Prime Minister to the Good Lord, but, as the proverb goes, "Better to speak to God than to his saints." So if we want to know what the Prime Minister had in mind, I think we should speak to him.

The reason we should invite Ms. Telford is that we can expect, if not hope, that she has previously discussed the prorogation issue with the Prime Minister in her capacity as his chief of staff. If we heard testimony from both, we could then determine whether their versions are consistent and thus clarify the prorogation issue, on which they have not yet testified.

As previously suggested, but not introduced as an amendment by other members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, they could both testify for six hours, which is less than the nine hours proposed in the amendment we're discussing. The time argument therefore does not hold water.

For my part, I would like to hear from the person who made the decision to prorogue Parliament. That's why I will vote against the amendment currently on the table.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin. That was succinct.

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

I've been waiting for hours to express my point of view.

First, I'd like to apologize for missing the first two hours this morning. I was attending a meeting of the Board of Internal Economy. I'd like to thank my colleague Wayne Long for replacing me. He may not officially be a permanent member of our committee, but he has recently almost become one. We like him very much, and we enjoy his speeches.

I'd also like to thank Ms. Normandin for being with us again. We always enjoy her company and her remarks as well.

Once again, I also want to thank all my colleagues who have already spoken today for their truly informed comments. Thanks as well to Mr. Regan and Mr. Lamoureux for being here, and I apologize if I have forgotten anyone.

Today we are debating Mr. Turnbull's amendment. I've previously spoken on this subject on several occasions, and no one will be surprised by my comments. To date, we have heard from many witnesses, experts and Mr. Rodriguez, who appeared with his own staff. Mr. Rodriguez provided good answers to our questions. Now I think we can start drafting the report.

That being said, Mr. Turnbull, a friend and colleague for whom I have an enormous amount of esteem, is a thoughtful individual. He seems to want to play the role of mediator. He has introduced an amendment on which he has clearly done a great deal of work to assist us in coming to an agreement.

I have to be honest. I still think we could begin drafting the report, but I also think it might be a good compromise to hear a few more witnesses.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the necessity of a prorogation that the alliance of opposition parties had long predetermined. I stated in my previous comments that the opposition parties had already formed an idea. Again yesterday, we heard in the House of Commons that it had been prorogued as a result of the WE Charity scandal.

I absolutely do not agree. However, I want to comment once again on Mr. Turnbull's amendment, since it's really a [*Inaudible—Editor*] on this study on the prorogation with facts rather than accusations. I genuinely think that what Mr. Turnbull wants to do is explain facts not make accusations.

As we all know, the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament in order to take the necessary time, and I emphasize the word "necessary," to take stock of Canada's situation, determine the priority sectors and plan the future. Obviously, the absolute priority has always been to protect the health and safety of all Canadians. Looking back, who would have thought, a year ago, that we would find ourselves in this situation?

I'm sure that many of us have yogurt in refrigerators in Ottawa from a year ago. The reality is that many of us never returned to Ottawa. Who would have imagined that at the onset of the pandemic? In the whip's office, when we talked about adjourning because of increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases, never in the world could I have imagined we would be in this situation a year later. However, I'm certain that, if you go to Ottawa right now, you'll definitely see yogurts in fridges with expiry dates...

[*English*]

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

On a point of clarification, Ms. Petitpas Taylor was saying who could have known or who could have prepared. Didn't the Auditor General's report actually lay the blame on Health Canada, including when she was minister? Would she not have had some advance knowledge of that, because she was responsible for that portfolio? Just curious.

The Chair: Once again, that's not a point of order.

Carry on, Ms. Petitpas Taylor; that's still an interesting point.

[*Translation*]

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

I'll continue with my thoughts about my colleague Mr. Turnbull's amendment.

Technical difficulty end of the pandemic and when Canadians would be ready to enter the economic restart phase, we wanted to do something to ensure that all Canadians would actually be ready.

On the prorogation issue, it's clear that the government really wanted to assess the situation and also make sure that we could consult people. I know that the Minister of Finance, Ms. Freeland, as well as Minister Fortier and the caucus in general, did indeed consult people to make sure that everyone could understand the government's priorities.

The Speech from the Throne clearly describes avenues that could boost the economic recovery and where the federal government sees an opportunity to help industries prosper. Here again, my understanding is that if Minister Freeland were to give evidence before the committee, she could explain the ideas put forward in the throne speech.

As we do battle on behalf of all Canadians and defend everyone's capacity to succeed, we also need to focus on the future and on a better way to build our programs. It's what the throne speech describes as the third of the government's foundations in its approach.

We find the following in the throne speech:

Around the world, advanced economies are realizing that things should not go back to business as usual. COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerabilities in our societies.

The Government will create a resiliency agenda for the middle class and people working hard to join it.

This will include addressing the gaps in our social systems, investing in health care, and creating jobs.

I think that all members here today also want to invest in health care and creating jobs.

It will also include fighting climate change, and maintaining a commitment to fiscal sustainability and economic growth as the foundation of a strong and vibrant society.

I'd like to take a few moments to say that we've finally been able to bridge the gaps and identify those in our systems. We want to ensure that our existing programs are strengthened, because we want to support the most vulnerable people in our communities.

My colleague, Stéphane Lauzon, often talks about seniors. One of the greatest tragedies of this pandemic is the lives lost in long-

term care homes. Seniors deserve to be respected, safe and live in dignity.

I know that in my region—the small province of New Brunswick—there may not have been the major outbreaks that occurred in other regions, but some care homes were affected. It's truly heartbreaking. We want to make sure that we can protect our seniors.

One of my nephews is in the Canadian Armed Forces. Many of his colleagues were sent to care for our seniors. These people, who went to war in Afghanistan, were genuinely traumatized by what they saw in the care homes. When my brawny nephew spoke to me about it, he had tears in his eyes. These were truly difficult situations. The report written by the armed forces clearly describes the situation our seniors are facing. It's important for us to be there for them.

Although long-term care is a provincial and territorial jurisdiction, the federal government will do everything it can to support seniors, working alongside the provinces and territories.

Once again, I want to point out that it's wrong to believe that the federal government has all the answers. We need to work closely with the provinces and territories so that national standards can be complied with. To accomplish this, the provinces need to be at the table with us, because we all have a role to play in protecting the help health and safety of seniors.

The government will work with Parliament on Criminal Code amendments to explicitly penalize those who neglect seniors under their care, putting them in danger.

Prior to being elected as a politician, I was a social worker with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for several years.

I must say that it was always very difficult to investigate instances of violence against seniors. We often had to investigate members of the immediate family when most of the time, the abusers were the caregivers. Generally speaking, seniors did not even want to talk about what had happened to them, because they were afraid and felt intimidated. It's essential for us to do everything in our power to protect these people, who are often very vulnerable.

The government will also work with the provinces and territories to set new, national standards for long-term care so that seniors get the best support possible.

Once again, we are definitely not saying that Ottawa has all the answers. I'm sure, however, that the application of consistent standards in all the provinces and territories is the least we can do to ensure that seniors receive proper care. I'm pleased that our government is working towards this.

If Minister Freeland were to come and give evidence before the committee, she could speak to us about it. It's not only a matter of developing standards, but also explaining the possible investments, and the thinking that went into the new throne speech. She could also answer any additional questions my colleagues might have.

We also need to take further action to help people stay at home longer. Of course, not all seniors live in long-term care homes, but it's obvious that they experienced truly difficult circumstances throughout the pandemic, particularly in terms of isolation.

I'll give you an example of one measure that was introduced in New Brunswick. In 2018, we set up a pilot project called the "Healthy Seniors Pilot Project". It required an investment of \$75 million.

We funded several programs that would enable seniors to continue to live at home for as long as possible. They often did not want to move into long-term care homes, but they did need additional assistance.

One of the programs that we funded was called "Nursing Homes Without Walls". Seniors often needed help to take their medicine, do their grocery shopping and other similar tasks. This kind of program contributed enormously to improving the lives of our seniors, even during the pandemic.

I think that we're capable of continuing to support our seniors in difficult times.

The federal government will also look into measures for personal support workers, who provide an essential service by helping the most vulnerable people in our communities. Canada must better value their work and their contributions to our society.

To be perfectly clear, 90 to 95% of them are women. These women work in care homes, grocery stores, and provide homecare and other services.

We need to help protect these workers so that they receive equitable pay. The whole issue of pay equity has to be addressed. Clearly, responsibility for this is not wholly the federal government's, but it needs to work with the provinces and territories.

Once again, I believe that Ms. Freeland might be helpful by explaining to us the plan that was developed for further discussion of these issues.

COVID-19 has also disproportionately affected Canadians with disabilities, and highlighted long-standing challenges for members of this community. The government will bring forward a disability inclusion plan, which will have a new Canadian disability benefit modelled on the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, a robust employment strategy for Canadians with disabilities, and a better process to determine eligibility for government disability programs and benefits.

Ms. Freeland would probably be able to give us more information about these funding programs and explain the process that led to their being announced in the throne speech.

Over the past six months, it has become clearer than ever that Canadians need a resilient health care system. All my colleagues are requesting additional funding for services, and thus far, I feel confident in saying that the government has contributed greatly to helping Canadians during this pandemic.

The federal government invested in vaccines and paid for all of the required equipment. Under the Safe Restart Agreement, considerable investment went to the provinces and territories, much of which was invested in health systems.

The government will make sure that everyone, including people in rural and remote regions, has access to a family doctor or a primary care team. COVID-19 has also shown that our system needs to be more flexible and capable of reaching out to people at home. The government will continue to increase its capacity to provide virtual health care.

Many of my colleagues probably live in large regions. In the province of New Brunswick, there are many rural regions. It's often difficult to get to doctor's appointments. And the issue of virtual care has come to the fore during the pandemic. Many professionals would also like these services to continue. This requires investment. I presume that the Deputy Prime Minister could also talk to us about this if she were to testify before the committee.

The government will also continue to address the opioid epidemic tearing through communities, which is an ongoing and worsening public health crisis. We are experiencing a global health crisis because of COVID-19, but we mustn't forget that there are other crises in Canada. The opioid crisis is clearly a tragedy. Every day, Canadians are dying. We still have a great deal of work to do. While we need to address the pandemic, we mustn't forget the opioid crisis and the climate crisis.

So there needs to be ongoing investment in this area, particularly under the Canadian drugs and substances strategy. We've made serious investments thus far, and need to continue. The Deputy Prime Minister could speak to us about investments and priorities with respect to the opioid crisis. It's something I feel strongly about.

Of course, the 2020 Speech from the Throne is not the same as the 2019 speech, but there are similarities between the two because in 2019, there were emergencies that are still ongoing today. Moreover, the issue of priorities came up because of the pandemic.

When I was minister of health, I had the opportunity to meet many health workers and people who were using substances. They told us that prevention and treatment were required. They were very happy that the Liberal government had reintroduced the idea of harm reduction. The Conservative government didn't want to touch the subject, although it was a priority for us.

We need to meet people on their own ground and make sure they have the required tools. Health workers were very pleased with our work, of course, but much remains to be done.

I'll stop there for the time being on this subject. I'll return to it if I have any further comments to make.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

Mr. Blaikie, you're next.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: No, I'm not done. I just wanted to take a bit of a sip.

I'm sorry.

The Chair: I'm so sorry. I thought you were saying you'll leave it there for now.

It seemed a bit odd, but yes, okay.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I was going to park the topic of opioid therapy because I didn't want to be seen as being off topic. My apologies. I know there are a lot points of order today about that, so I'm trying to stay on point.

I hope that I had not ceded the floor, because that was not my wish, at all.

The Chair: No. Things are not like that.

Go ahead. Sorry, it was my mistake.

[*Translation*]

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

There is another topic I would like to get back to. In the 2019 and 2020 throne speeches, there was talk of a national universal drug insurance program. The purpose was to ensure that all Canadians had access to drugs. For me, Ginette Petitpas Taylor, member for the riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, it's a priority. It's also a priority for our government.

Through a rare-disease strategy to help Canadian families save money on high-cost drugs, we want to continue to develop a national plan to ensure that all Canadians have access to a national pharmacare plan. I was happy to see that it was in the 2019 throne speech as well as the 2020 throne speech. Ms. Freeland could talk about this if we were to invite her to join us.

As for establishing a national system designed to keep drug prices low, this would be part of developing a national pharmacare plan. To develop a national plan, close collaboration with the provinces and territories will be required. We need to set it in motion soon if we want to actually get it done. As far as I'm concerned, it's an absolute priority.

In addition to sound health infrastructures, Canadians need strong, safe communities to call home. That's why the government has banned assault-style firearms. The government will also continue implementing firearms policy commitments, including by giving municipalities the ability to further restrict or ban handguns, and strengthening measures to control the flow of illegal guns into Canada.

Women's safety must be the foundation on which all progress is built. The government will accelerate investments in shelters and transition housing, and continue to advance with a national action plan on gender-based violence. We have all seen the recently published statistics. Over the past year, the rates of spousal and family violence have risen enormously.

As I have already mentioned to the committee members, I was a social worker at the RCMP before entering politics. Many of my clients were women victims of spousal violence and sexual abuse. Every year in Moncton, I had to write a death notice for at least one if not two women who had been a victim of spousal violence. Going to meet family members to tell them that their relative had been stabbed or shot was very difficult. When I hear that our statistics are still increasing during the pandemic, I tell myself that we have to do better. We have to protect women and doing so requires the necessary investments.

I'm happy about the investments made over the past year. The number of cases has been increasing. The pandemic is not a cause, but it's nevertheless clear that more women have been victims of violence. The sexual assault rate has also increased. As a government, we have to continue to ensure that shelters, transition housing and second-stage housing receive the funding they need. I know that I'm speaking on behalf of all my colleagues. We all want to do whatever we can to protect women and put an end to a really serious situation^x.

In Canada, one woman dies every six days because of spousal violence. That's one woman every six days, and the numbers are still rising. We can and must do better.

I know that Ms. Vecchio has been a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. The pandemic has made it clear that women and children are more vulnerable. If Minister Freeland were to meet with us, we could ask some questions and emphasize the importance of ensuring that the investments are made. We need to invest more.

To continue to build communities...

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't know if you've heard this, because we've been in here all day today. The House has granted an emergency debate on that issue. I just thought I would mention it because you were speaking so passionately about it, and there have been several deaths, and many in Quebec recently. There has been an emergency debate granted on that issue.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I was not aware. I was listening to the speeches, so thank you for sharing that.

The Chair: We've been in here all day.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: If I wasn't here, I would want to speak to this matter because it is an important matter, and I know that it affects all of us. We are all impacted by intimate partner violence. We all know someone. Even if we don't think we know someone, we know someone. I've learned that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, I was sorry to hear about another death in Quebec only a few days ago. News like that is heartbreaking.

To keep building strong communities, over the next two years the government will also invest in all types of infrastructure, including public transit, energy efficient retrofits, clean energy, rural broadband, and affordable housing, particularly for indigenous peoples and northern communities.

Once again, if Minister Freeland were here with us, she could clarify some of the ideas put forward in the throne speech and the reasons for these investments.

Can't we recognize once again that this pandemic has shown clearly who the most vulnerable people are?

In the last six months, many more people have worked from home, done classes from the kitchen table, shopped online, and accessed government services remotely. So it has become more important than ever that all Canadians have access to the Internet.

We have all had the experience of working from home and occasionally having technical problems. We need to make the investments required for all Canadians to have access to Internet services. They are no longer a luxury, and have become a necessity.

The government will accelerate the connectivity timelines and ambitions of the Universal Broadband Fund to ensure that all Canadians, no matter where they live, have access to high-speed Internet.

Where I live, in Moncton, we receive really good services from my small province of New Brunswick. I always say that we can thank Frank McKenna, the former premier of the province, because he understood what the future would bring, and the required investments were made for us in the province. It's very good.

I'm going to continue to explain to you why I support my colleague Mr. Turnbull's amendment. To further help our communities, the government will work with partners to support regional routes for airlines. It is essential that Canadians have access to reliable and affordable regional air services. It is an issue of equity, of jobs, and of economic development. The government will work to support this.

So we can see that many changes are happening in the regions. We want the economy to restart, and investments are definitely going to be made in the regions.

No one should be without a place to stay during a pandemic or a Canadian winter. In October 2020, the government invested more than \$1 billion for people experiencing homelessness. Last fall, Minister Hussen invested this amount to create rapid housing. I believe that those who will get a home have just learned that their applications were approved. To be sure, there were many more applications than the number of homes available, because they came

from several regions across Canada. However, people are obtaining more and more assistance and funds have been invested.

I know that in Moncton, the homeless situation has been much more visible in recent years. Once again, the pandemic has highlighted these truly vulnerable people. That's why I'm happy that the minister made these investments.

That is another area on which Minister Freeland could provide us with further details. She could also explain to us what led to these investments, and how they came to be announced in the throne speech.

In 2017, the government announced that it would reduce chronic homelessness by 50 percent. It has already helped more than a million people get a safe and affordable place to call home. Given the progress that has been made, and our commitment to do more, the government is now focused on entirely eliminating chronic homelessness in Canada.

At the same time, the government will also make substantial investments in housing for Canadians.

I'm really looking forward to tomorrow, because a special announcement will be made in my region. A group there has been doing incredible work and handling the initiative to create rapid housing. Together, we're going to make an announcement tomorrow about something that will provide considerable assistance to my community.

The government will add to the historic National Housing Strategy announced in 2017 by increasing investments to rapid housing in the short term, and partnering with not-for-profits and co-ops in the mid- to long-term. For the middle class, the government will also move forward with enhancements to the First-Time Home Buyer Incentive, including in Canada's largest cities, so families can afford to buy their first home. Once more, I think that Minister Freeland could come and speak to us about this.

As a result of the pandemic, people from big cities in Ontario and even Western Canada have been choosing to move to our province or one of the other beautiful Atlantic provinces where housing is more affordable. That's a good thing, but it has been driving up the cost of housing here. That's why I'm very pleased that our government is helping people to purchase their first home. Housing is something everyone deserves, and it's also a key driver of the economy. Construction projects create jobs, and having a home is critical so people can contribute to their communities.

Just as everyone deserves a home, everyone deserves to be able to put nutritious food on the table. Everyone should have food in the refrigerator. The pandemic has made that harder for Canadians. Canada will continue to work with partners—including directly with first nations, Inuit, and Métis nation partners—to address food insecurity in Canada. The government will also strengthen local food supply chains here in Canada. Here again, I think that Minister Freeland could probably tell us more about it.

The foreign workers who produce, harvest, and process our food—from people picking fruit to packing seafood—have done an outstanding job getting good food to Canadians. They deserve the government's full support and protection. The government will ensure that those in Canada's supply managed sectors receive full and fair compensation for recent trade agreements. Farmers keep our families fed, and we will continue to help them succeed and grow.

This pandemic has revealed gaps in health, housing, and food supply. And it has also maintained the inequalities Canadians face in the workforce. We have an opportunity to not only support Canadians, but also grow their potential.

Working with the provinces and territories, the government will make the largest investment in Canadian history in training for workers. This will include supporting Canadians as they build new skills in growing sectors, helping workers receive education and accreditation, and strengthening workers' futures, by connecting them to employers and good jobs, in order to grow and strengthen the middle class.

From researchers developing vaccines, to entrepreneurs building online stores, this pandemic has reminded us of the power of the knowledge economy, and how vital it is for our future. Canadians are leading, and they should have state-of-the-art government services. The government will make generational investments in updating outdated IT systems to modernize the way that government serves Canadians, from the elderly to the young, from people looking for work to those living with a disability.

The government will also work to introduce free, automatic tax filing for simple returns to ensure citizens receive the benefits they need. Government must remain agile, and ready for what lies ahead.

I would like to end with a few comments about combating climate change. As I was saying earlier, a number of priorities have been changed compared to the 2019 and 2020 priorities. However, climate change is a priority for this generation, and we need to move ahead.

Climate action will be a cornerstone of our plan to support and create a million jobs across the country. This is where the world is going. Global consumers and investors are demanding and rewarding climate action. Canadians have the determination and ingenuity to rise to this challenge and global market opportunity. We can create good jobs today and a globally competitive economy not just next year, but in 2030, 2040, and beyond.

Canadians also know climate change threatens their health, their way of life, and their planet. They want climate action now, and that is what the government will continue to deliver. I know that

some people are still wondering about the climate crisis. We Liberals know that it really is a priority for Canadians.

The government will immediately bring forward a plan to exceed Canada's 2030 climate goal. It will also legislate Canada's goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 and will reach this goal.

As part of its plan, the government will create thousands of jobs retrofitting buildings, cutting energy costs for Canadian families and businesses. We're going to invest in reducing the impact of climate-related disasters like floods and wildfires to make communities safer and more resilient.

The 2020 throne speech made it clear that climate change issues are a real priority. Once again, if Ms. Freeland were to appear, she could give us her point of view on the inclusion of climate change issues in the throne speech.

We also want to assist Canadians by helping to deliver more transit and active transit options, and making zero-emission vehicles more affordable while investing in more charging stations across the country. Zero-emission vehicles are somewhat more expensive and we want to make them more affordable for Canadians. Based on the various programs that have been established, it's clear that we are well on our way.

A good example of adapting to a carbon-neutral future is the zero-emission battery. Canada has the nickel and copper resources needed for these clean technologies. This, combined with Canadian expertise, is Canada's competitive edge.

To top it off, the government will launch a new fund to attract investments in making zero-emission products and cut the corporate tax rate in half for these companies to create jobs and make Canada a world leader in clean technology. The government will ensure Canada is the most competitive country in the world for clean technology companies.

In the throne speech, several priorities were clearly tied to the pandemic. What we really want to do is build a better world and a better society. When we talk about building back better, we want to be sure that we can make the investments needed to build a better and more prosperous society for everyone.

Additionally, the government wants to transform our economy and communities by moving forward with the Clean Power Fund, and projects like the Atlantic Loop that will connect surplus clean power to regions transitioning away from coal. The Atlantic Loop project is really galvanizing us, and it is a priority for our region.

The government will support investments in renewable energy and next-generation clean energy and technology solutions. Canada cannot reach net zero without the know-how of the energy sector, and the innovative ideas of all Canadians, including people in places like British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

By creating good-paying and long-lasting jobs, we want to support manufacturing, natural resource, and energy sectors as they work to transform to meet a net zero future.

We want to recognize farmers, foresters, and ranchers as key partners in the fight against climate change by supporting their efforts to reduce emissions and build resilience.

The government will continue its policy of putting a price on pollution, while putting that money back in the pockets of Canadians. We cannot be free to pollute. I think that the court was very clear on this matter in its decision today. This pandemic has reminded Canadians of the importance of nature. The government will work with municipalities.

[*English*]

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

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Madam Chair, I see that we're getting to five o'clock. The bells will be ringing at 5:15.

I would like to suggest—and “suggest”, because I don't want anyone to go off there—that we suspend and then [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] I know that Kirsty has been on this call all day, and also Ryan and a variety of us. Perhaps you could give us a 15-minute break before bells and then we would return 15 minutes after the votes this evening, March 25. We would return right after the votes, 15 minutes later, and get back to this conversation.

The Chair: Would there be consensus to do that?

Ms. Petitpas Taylor, since you have the floor, were you wrapping up, or if you have a large portion—

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I have about 30 seconds left, but if you want me to go on, I can certainly elaborate on other comments. I'll finish my time, if that would be okay with everyone and then I will cede the floor.

The Chair: That would be great. It would be a cleaner break for us.

Is everyone in agreement to suspend when Ms. Petitpas Taylor is done until 15 minutes after the votes tonight?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, can I clarify who else is on your speakers list and the order? It's just so I know who's next.

The Chair: Yes. It's Mr. Blaikie, then Ms. Vecchio....

Ms. Vecchio, you had your hand up, but then at one point you put it down. I still have you on my written list.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm on there, but you said that once you're on the list to take your hand down, so I took mine down.

The Chair: I have Mr. Blaikie, Ms. Vecchio, Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Lamoureux.

I'm sorry, Ms. Petitpas Taylor, for the interruption. We'll continue.

Once you're done, I will formally suspend until 15 minutes after the votes.

[*Translation*]

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

And I would like to thank my colleagues too.

To wrap up then, the government will work with municipalities as part of a new commitment to expand urban parks, so that everyone has access to green space. This will be done over a period of five years, and will protect a quarter of Canada's land and a quarter of Canada's oceans, using nature-based solutions to fight climate change, including the planting of two billion trees.

The government will ban harmful single-use plastics next year and ensure more plastic is recycled. And the government will also modernize Canada's Environmental Protection Act.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Vecchio, you're not on mute. Not a problem.... I don't know if you want to hear comments on climate change.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Perhaps not.

[*Translation*]

When the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration was closed by a previous government, Canada lost an important tool to manage its waters.

The government will create a new Canada water agency to keep our water safe, clean, and well managed. The government will also identify opportunities to build more modern water and irrigation infrastructure.

The federal government actioned this plan in the fall economic statement.

I will now give the floor to my colleagues for their comments. As I mentioned earlier, I think that we could move on to drafting the motion before us. However, Mr. Turnbull has suggested a compromise. I am in any event ready to support this motion.

On that note, I yield the floor.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Petitpas Taylor.

According to the consensus that we have found, we'll return after the votes. I don't know exactly what time that will be, but it will be approximately 15 minutes afterward. I'll wait for everyone to log on. Once I see that all members are here, we will proceed.

For now, we are suspended.

• (1705) _____ (Pause) _____

• (2030)

The Chair: We are back in session and we are still on meeting number 26.

We are on the amendment put forward by Mr. Turnbull to Ms. Vecchio's motion. We have a speakers list for the benefit of the new members who are here. I'll let you know who I have on the list so far. Members, for those of you who were here before, just a reminder in case you have forgotten—we had a long voting session—we ended with Ms. Petitpas Taylor. Next we have Mr. Blaikie, Ms. Vecchio, Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Lamoureux. That is all who I have on the list thus far. I'm sure there will be others who are looking forward to speaking to the amendment or the main motion, depending on how things go.

We'll start off with Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good evening to my colleagues on the committee. Welcome back to the meeting. It's so great we just can't seem to bring ourselves to end it.

I know there are a number of people on the committee now who weren't here earlier in the day, so I might just briefly summarize some of the points that I made earlier and then come to what I hope will be a novel contribution to the debate.

Obviously there have been a lot of arguments made in a meeting this long; that will happen. Some of them have even been made more than once. There's a tendency on the government side to kind of cast everything in a particular light and say that this is all just about politics and that it's really about trying to score points.

What I've been trying to say is that I've taken the Prime Minister, I think, at his word in terms of wanting to have a policy that would help curb the political abuse of prorogation. What we heard in testimony from experts all along is that, at the end of the day, the buck stops with the Prime Minister. It's the Prime Minister who is the principal decision-maker with respect to prorogation.

I think it stands to reason that, if we're going to honour this proposal that was made by the Prime Minister in the 2015 election coming out of some serious abuses of prorogation, in my opinion, certainly by the Harper government, in order to give this thing teeth and to make it useful in future instances, even for members who may feel that there was no political abuse of prorogation—there's obviously a difference of opinion about that—it would be useful to set the precedent that a prime minister would appear in order to defend a prorogation decision. Otherwise, I don't think we've really

done enough to try to curb potential abuses of prorogation for political purposes.

Members who were here earlier, not just today but on other calendar days, will know that I really think we ought to have vote in the House of Commons in order to authorize a prorogation, which would be a departure from our historical practice, but I think a good one.

Then we heard a lot of arguments today about how wonderful it would be to have the Deputy Prime Minister come to committee. I'm trying to understand the hair that's being split there. I mean, if it's that we don't want to trouble important people in government, certainly the Deputy Prime Minister is an important person whose time is also valuable, and it's odd that there would be such enthusiasm on the government bench to have her come here, because she's not the ultimate decision-maker. I mean, she's called in the original motion along with many other people, and, as I say, I think there are answers to be had on the WE Charity scandal, and I think it's right for parliamentarians to be pursuing those answers.

I know that they are being vigorously pursued with some more success in other parliamentary venues these days, and I think that's a good thing. Here's a shout-out to my colleague Charlie Angus who is doing some of that work at the ethics committee, for example.

Really, if we want it to not be about that, then it has to be about prorogation, which is what it should be about. Then it's about PROC setting a good precedent for how these studies unfold in the future in order to make this a successful mechanism to try to curb political abuses of prorogation.

I think it stands to reason, then, that the decision-maker would come here. I think it's an odd argument to say that we should have the Deputy Prime Minister be the person to come. We've already had the government House leader.

It seems to me it's not unlike departmental estimates. We have ministers come to committee for departmental estimates, because they're the ultimate decision-makers for their department. We don't call the Minister of Finance to speak for decisions that are made in the department of the environment, even though she's an influential person and obviously her opinion will matter around the cabinet table and elsewhere. We don't call the government House leader to explain decisions that are made in the natural resources department. On the principle of responsible government, we call the person who is responsible for the decision.

We've heard loud and clear from a number of experts that it is the Prime Minister's decision. We can have different opinions about his motives. We can have a difference of opinion about how it unfolded, but if the idea of this mechanism of the government tabling a report and defending its decision.... Then we've heard in many cases—I don't want to characterize it pejoratively because I don't want politics to get in the way of the point—some people who might have offered an answer for why the government did what it did. At some point they just said, “Well, you know, I can't really answer that because ultimately it's up to the Prime Minister, and nobody knows the Prime Minister's mind.”

The Prime Minister knows the Prime Minister's mind. That's why it makes sense to have him here. I'm not saying that answers haven't been given, but I really do think it makes sense to have the Prime Minister come here. In terms of precedent, I don't think having the Prime Minister here for this study opens the floodgates to have him appear willy-nilly all the time at different committees on different issues. This is a particular kind of issue where the Prime Minister is really the sole decision-maker. I think it makes sense, again, to have him be the person to come here. I don't think a proxy really is sufficient.

What I've said is that if this is going to be a political exercise...and I don't think Canadians listening at home should make any mistake; the fact that we have gone through so many meetings with Liberal members speaking in order to avoid the motion that's on the table coming to a vote is itself a political act. It itself is the result of political interests. Nobody should kid themselves about that. We have people trying to do politics on all sides.

If we want to get out of the quagmire of the politics of it, I propose that we focus on prorogation. We get a commitment from the main decision-maker to come to this committee for one hour. If we do that, we can wrap up the prorogation study. I'd be satisfied, anyway. I'd be happy to work with whichever other members on the committee would at that point be satisfied that we had done our job. The rest of what's in this motion can go away. We can write our report on the prorogation study, having heard from the principal decision-maker, having had an opportunity to test his answers with him here, and having set a good precedent for the future. Even members who now don't feel there's been a political abuse of prorogation may feel, in a future instance, that there is one. They may find that they're grateful this committee established a good precedent and that the Prime Minister established a good precedent.

I just want to offer that up. When we do other things, like the parliamentary estimates, we want the decision-maker there. We've heard very clearly that the Prime Minister is the decision-maker here. I don't think inviting the Deputy Prime Minister as a proxy for that on a prorogation study makes sense. I think if we're not going to be able to get the Prime Minister, then we need to continue to ask people about the things that we think were behind the prorogation decision, including things having to do with the WE Charity.

That's why I'd be prepared to support this motion in the absence of a commitment by the Prime Minister to come to this committee, for one hour, to explain his reasons for prorogation directly to the committee. It's the Prime Minister's insistence on refusing to come to committee for one hour that is at the root of this prolonged debate here at the procedure and House affairs committee. I think it's

a pretty simple solution. It would free up the time of many people—people in government and people in Parliament—if the Prime Minister would make that commitment. Then we could move on, draft our report and get to some of the other important issues that I think PROC should also be looking at.

Mr. Lamoureux has indicated that he has some ideas about what those things ought to be. That's fine. I'd be happy to have that conversation, not in the context of a motion about who's going to appear in order for us to be able to wrap up our prorogation study but to have it afterward as a committee. A number of study motions have been put forward. It's appropriate to have that conversation at that time. Tonight we're trying to figure out how we move forward and get to a place where we can wrap up this particular study on prorogation. I'm very much of the view that we should hear from the one and only decision-maker on that file before we do.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thanks very much.

Daniel, thank you very much for providing that information on the way you see it as well.

Just as a reminder, because there are so many new faces at the committee tonight, I had put forward on Tuesday a request for a unanimous consent motion where we basically were looking at the actual motion I had put forward over a month ago. This is now day six of this filibuster. Today we have been here since 11 a.m. To anyone—perhaps my husband, who's viewing tonight—who is bored, I put forward a motion where it's really focusing on the Prime Minister. This seems to be the biggest concern.

Of course, government members of the committee would not support that. I believe at this time we've already heard from many members of government that they will continue to speak on this, so at this time I would ask for adjournment.

The Chair: You're asking for a vote?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Yes, please.

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

The Clerk: Madam Chair, the question is on the motion that the committee do now adjourn.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I want to confirm that it's about adjourning the meeting.

The Chair: Yes, it's about adjourning the meeting.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: Poor Kevin. I think he was looking forward to speaking, but I'm sure you'll all hear him in the House.

The meeting is adjourned.

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