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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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•(1655)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison): If I can have the members come to the table so we can get started. We don't have a lot of time so what I thought we'd do is make sure we have the opportunity for the witnesses to provide their testimony and then maybe get in one quick round of questions, because we're going to have bells in about 20 minutes. So if I could get all the members to the table that would be great.

Pursuant to standing order 108(2), we'll continue our study on the situation in Ukraine.

I want to thank our witnesses for being flexible today, as we rescheduled a couple of things and had you come together. You're waiting now. As I mentioned before, we'd like to get your testimony on the record, and maybe one quick round of questions of five minutes for each party, and then we can get going.

I want to first welcome our witnesses, Lada Roslycky, who's a foreign adviser with the Public Commission for the Investigation and Prevention of Human Rights Abuses in Ukraine.

Welcome, Lada, very nice to have you here today.

And Daniel Bilak, who's the managing partner of the Kiev office of the CMS Cameron LLC. I understand, sir, the group was able to meet with you when they were in Ukraine.

Mr. Daniel Bilak (Managing Partner, Kyiv Office, CMS Cameron McKenna LLC): Yes, that's correct.

The Chair: Excellent.

So why don't we start with you, Lada, if you'd like to go with your testimony first, and then we'll move to Daniel.

Thanks.

Dr. Lada Roslycky (Foreign Adviser, Public Commission for the Investigation and Prevention of Human Rights Abuses in Ukraine): Sure.

I would like to quickly just mention that this morning we had a live feed with the First National television channel in Ukraine discussing the human rights abuses and the military situation. It will be online and it's in English. For those of you who are interested, I can pass the link on to you later.

The most important aspect that I add to this brief that I've provided you is a witness account of the people who have been tortured, abducted in Crimea. An eyewitness accounts says that, "The former minister of forestry in Crimea spoke to us this morning about the

manner in which he had been abducted by men in green, backed by the Russian military. They were held for 11 days, beaten, tortured with electric shock therapy. They were interrogated daily. They weren't fed for a number of days."

The main question the interrogators were asking them was, who is funding the Euromaidan in Kiev? That was the main question, who is funding them. And where are the weapons? Where is Ukraine storing its weapons?

Now I would like to make a little note about the situation on Crimean refugees.

On March 20, the Verkhovna Rada had a meeting expecting about 300,000 refugees to be fleeing Crimea. This is a very disturbing issue not only for Ukraine's internal situation, but also for states such as Canada. Canada already has one young gentleman present in Ottawa who is facing basically becoming a stateless person. He is a Ukrainian from Crimea. The Russians are forcing everybody to adopt Russian citizenship. All of the bank accounts have been frozen. Credit cards aren't used. This gentleman from Ukraine is here, and he doesn't have money, he doesn't have anything. There is more than one, but I know of this person personally. Property has been hijacked. So businesses, everything, have just been taken over.

I will now start from the beginning of my points.

It's important to realize that what we're seeing happening in Ukraine right now is not an accident and it's not a reaction to anything. It is a long-term plan that has been started since 1994, when the Russian Black Sea Fleet was being divided. It was the Soviet fleet being divided into the Russian and Ukrainian fleets.

The man behind this current scene, who requires special attention, is a man named Victor Medvedchuk. He leads a program called the Referendum Project or the Ukrainian Choice. This is a Russian Kremlin-organized plan.

A little bit more on Medvedchuk. He is something called the *kum* of Vladimir Putin. A *kum* is a very serious formal relationship in Ukrainian culture where one is a godparent to the other's children. Victor Medvedchuk was a former adviser to Leonid Kuchma, the second president of Ukraine, and Leonid Kuchma's current son-in-law is Victor Pinchuk, who is a major oligarch on board.

Moving on, because we have very little time, it's important to note that the current acting Prime Minister, Yatseniuk, declared in the White House that legislation will be adopted in regard to giving effect to Medvedchuk's plan on local referendum. Local referendum is forbidden by Ukrainian constitutional law.

Yesterday—I think it was this morning here in Canada—the information came that Yatseniuk has announced that, next to the presidential elections that will be taking place in May, there will also be mayoral elections taking place. This is very significant due to the fact that these mayoral elections will be taking place in the areas currently under direct military threat from the Russian Federation, that is, Lugansk, Dnepropetrovsk, and Donetsk. Odessa may be on the list. I can't confirm it at this moment, but I could do so later.

Yatseniuk's position has to be clarified in this regard. The current interim government must be treated as such. It is infiltrated with at least three powerful individuals with direct connections to the Medvedchuk Referendum Project. It is necessary to identify those people. Also keep in mind that the Communists have a very strong role in Ukrainian politics, particularly as it relates to post-Soviet political-criminal relations. The Communist Party voted 100% for the current interim government. That should sound alarm bells.

• (1700)

The role of Yulia Tymoshenko is a critical one. She is acting as a private person; however, she is still an unindicted co-conspirator in the United States. She received the monopoly of gas from Putin back in the nineties. When Ukraine separated from the Russian Federation, it did not have a gas debt. Through my research, I spoke with many people in Ukraine, government officials, who claimed that she didn't even.... Part of the gas debt that was used to make the Russian Black Sea Fleet stay on Crimean territory is actually debt that she created together with Pavlo Lazarenko.

The apparent latency of the government as it pertains to the military defence of Ukraine is causing turmoil and massive distrust inside Ukraine. Attention should be paid to the recent switches of ministers of defence in Ukraine. It started with a man called Salamatin. I believe it was in 2013. He was a Russian citizen who actually didn't have a right to be a Ukrainian minister of defence. After that, during the revolution, Yanukovich appointed another man, who remained in power basically until Crimea had been taken over.

The clearing of Maidan is potentially taking place right now. It is important to remember that 83% of the people on Maidan did not belong to or support any political party. They are now being cleared under the misnomers of fascists and neo-Nazis.

Yesterday a leader of the Right Sector, Muzychko, was killed. The question is this. The Ministry of Internal Affairs presents it as him having shot himself in custody. MPs from the opposition, but particularly Oles Doniy, who's been to Ottawa and has spoken to the government earlier, actually bring out the story that he had been hunted down and killed. Importantly, in this regard, Muzychko actually did go on YouTube and left a film saying that the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine was after him and was going to kill him.

A fund to support Ukrainian military forces in Crimea has been established by retired Admiral Volodymyr Bezkorovainiy. This fund is worthy of attention. Whereas the national guard fund and the Ukrainian military are also asking for money publicly, this fund of Bezkorovainiy's is actually interesting, because it's directly aimed at helping the Ukrainian military who have been thrown out of Crimea.

They've lived there. They have their families, their children, and their schools there. And now they're wanted men under threat.

Another issue is the question of lustration. Lustration is starting much in the same way that it did with Saakashvili, the former president of Georgia, with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the police.

How am I doing with time?

• (1705)

The Chair: You have a couple of minutes.

Dr. Lada Roslycky: So they have started to clear and make major changes inside of the police system.

However, the name Yehor Sobolev requires attention. It could be that he is a good guy or a bad guy. Nonetheless, lustration is one of the main demands of the people in Maidan. They don't want to have people connected to the Party of Regions, the post-Soviet political-criminal nexus, or the Communist Party in government.

The role being played by the oligarch and president of the European Council for Jewish Communities, Ihor Kolomoyskiy, governor of the new Dnipropetrovsk, must be considered. His role has been to take his private money to fuel the military, and simultaneously he's an owner of a bank called PrivatBank. While he was taking his private money to fuel the Ukrainian military, his bank was the first one to start dispensing rubles in the Crimean peninsula. Right now the banks are starting to have a very difficult time to operate because they have to switch to Russian laws. PrivatBank is not having problems, but they were the first to use the ruble.

Russian-backed ethnic cleansing is taking place in Crimea, as mentioned earlier. Catholic priests have been abducted+ and beaten. Politicians and anybody who has anything to do with supporting democracy are being persecuted. Ukrainian parents have actually been put under duress because elementary schools have been attacked by men in green and the kids have been basically put under pressure to influence the behaviour of their parents. That's just one example.

The self-appointed prime minister of Crimea, Sergey Aksionov, is directly related to an organized criminal ring, called the Salem. Salem is backed by Semion Mogilevich. Mogilevich is, I think, the second or third most wanted criminal in the world on an FBI list. He is linked to Gazprom and the underground arms trade, particularly through Transnistria, which is a potential hot spot at this point, with direct links to Yanukovich. Firtash, the oligarch who was arrested in Austria, has links to funding him.

The legality of Yanukovich's presidency is a potential trump card up Putin's sleeve. Ukraine does not have an impeachment process. When one carefully reads Putin's speech, Putin says that there are three ways that you can get rid of the Ukrainian president and none of those have been done. He named impeachment. There is no impeachment process, so technically people are still waiting for Yanukovich to come back. He is still the only recognized president that Putin continually refers to.

Jumping a little bit, in 2012 the SBU, the Ukrainian Intelligence Service, was infiltrated up to 75% by Russian intelligence. When dealing with Nalyvaichenko, the current head of the SBU, this factor should be considered. He did do significant work under the Orange government to get rid of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, to try to get the Russian military off the ground, but he failed. The same percentages hold for the Ministry of Defence top guns.

Media warfare is rampant in Ukraine. Canada can actually do something by really supporting a nationwide public broadcasting station, which will also include Crimea and eastern parts of Ukraine. Those people have no access to any information.

I made a very long story short.

Thank you.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thank you for your testimony.

We're going to turn it over to Daniel, now. Sir, the floor is yours for 10 minutes.

Mr. Daniel Bilak: Thank you very much. I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me. My background is that for the last 23 years I've lived and worked in Kiev. I'm currently a managing partner of an international law firm but I spent 10 years as an advisor to the Ukrainian government, twice as chief of staff to the Minister of Justice of Ukraine and I was an advisor to Prime Minister Tymoshenko in public administration reform and President Yushchenko on governance reform. But please don't blame me. I really did try.

So, it's a great honour for me to be here today and I came from Kiev to testify before the committee because I wanted to get a few things across to you. I'm currently advising the governor of Donetsk Oblast Serhiy Taruta on reforms in that very difficult situation. That will be the basis of my presentation to you this afternoon.

Edmund Burke, the English philosopher, said that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. The turmoil in Ukraine in the context now in its fourth month will not be resolved without robust resolution on the part of its key western partners, Canada, the European Union, and the United States.

The protests on the Maidan spawned the birth of an authentic Ukrainian civil society. But they have also unleashed pent-up frustrations with the systemic cronyism and corruption of Ukraine's political class, characterized by a distrust of all of the country's governing institutions. The country is paying a huge price for what the Minister of Economy of Ukraine has dubbed as massive state racketeering during the Yanukovich years. The Prime Minister of Ukraine says the country has witnessed the theft of almost \$15 billion from the state treasury. Moreover, Ukrainians across the country are demanding a greater say in how they are governed, through the decentralization of powers from the state.

Institutional change on this scale would be a challenge under the most ideal circumstances; however, it must be now carried out in the face of an external threat to the very existence of the country. Against the backdrop of a currency in free fall and the imminent collapse of a bankrupted economy, with 220,000 Russian troops on

war footing ringing its land border, Ukraine now faces the very real prospect of being torn asunder.

Amid the start of the reforms by the Ukrainian government, the signing of part of the association agreement with the European Union last week and the apparently successful negotiations with the IMF, it appears that Ukraine will obtain the financial backup it needs to get on its feet. The main challenge now is to secure Ukraine's eastern and southern regions from imminent Russian annexation.

The task will not be easy, but it is not impossible. While Ukrainians for the most part see themselves as Europeans, there is no consensus in the country now on how to move forward. What divides Ukrainians is not language—there was a poll last year and it showed that it was 134th on the list of issues—but the socio-economic impact of the Soviet legacy in the east and west of the country. Western and central Ukrainians are nationally conscious, agrarian, commercial, and constitute the heart of Ukraine's middle class. These independent-minded and self-reliant people see themselves in Europe. Their brethren in eastern and southern Ukraine remain mired in a Soviet-era mind and heavy industry warp and identify more provincially with their regions.

The one-company towns and industrial cities that emerged after the Second World War brought Soviet-style serfdom to the region that has endured to this day. Soviet-era propaganda about the Great Patriotic War, American imperialism, and western Ukrainian fascist bourgeois nationalism have been cynically propagated by the political and economic elites of the region. As they enriched themselves through the cheap acquisition of industrial assets, they shackled the minds and pockets of 20 million workers, pensioners, teachers, doctors, and other public workers and voters. As a result, the people of eastern and southern Ukraine were kept fossilized in the sterile mythologies of the Soviet past through total control of the media and blatant anti-western and anti-Ukrainian propaganda. Worse, they have been kept impoverished through the suppression of wages to avoid the cost of modernizing decrepit industrial plant.

Since, at its core, the Maidan was the manifestation of an ongoing process of de-Sovietization of Ukrainian society, it is no wonder that the eastern regions of Ukraine did not wholeheartedly support this movement. While the youth is drawn to the Maidan's narrative of self-reliance, freedom, respect, justice, and European future, their parents and especially their grandparents see instead potential chaos, uncertainty, and instability, reawakening the traumas of the last century.

President Putin is brilliantly exploiting these phobias to try to repeat his success in Crimea in order to tear away Ukraine's eastern and southern oblasts. Today, even though the violent protests of the past few weeks have been contained, the level of discontent remains high and separatist rhetoric is rising in intensity. People in eastern Ukraine are angry, confused, resentful, and scared. They feel cheated, robbed, and abandoned by their native son, Yanukovich and the discredited Party of the Regions. Russia's propaganda undermining the legitimacy of Ukraine's new leadership and seductive rhetoric of higher salaries and pensions is channelling all of that negative energy against the new government in Kiev.

This is, therefore, an ideological battle, the focal point of which is the eastern oblast of Donetsk, Ukraine's industrial and coal-mining heartland. Representing over 10% of Ukraine's population and 30% of its industrial exports, it is here that the fate of the territorial integrity of Ukraine will be determined. President Putin's strategy at this stage seems to be to try, just as in Crimea, to take eastern Ukraine without an invasion, but by sowing chaos and fomenting dissent designed to perpetuate a sham referendum. Donetsk Oblast's new governor, Serhiy Taruta, understands that only by improving the livelihoods of the people living in the oblast, by addressing their deep-rooted social and economic grievances and helping them see their future in a united European-oriented Ukraine, can the people of the east and south of the country be kept in the fold.

To try to keep the east from fracturing and to calm the concerns of the people, the Donetsk administration has embarked on an ambitious six-month crisis management plan of action, a copy of which I have provided to the secretary. It involves the fight against poverty, improving the business environment, a local government reform and an action plan, targeted measures to alleviate key social problems in the region, fostering unity by twinning Donetsk with western Ukrainian regions, and ensuring free and fair presidential elections. Because of its outsized political and economic influence, Donetsk will influence the fates of the other eastern and southern oblasts.

This is not a confrontation between Ukraine and Russia, but between Russia and the West. It is a conflict about values, principles, and the right of people to freely determine their own destiny without external coercion. It is in the West's collective interests to embrace Ukraine's choice to pursue a democratically confident and economically stable Ukraine firmly integrated into Europe. Indeed, the ultimate prize for the West is not even a stable Ukraine, but a democratic Russia. A peaceful, prosperous European Ukraine destroys Putin's residual imperial ambitions and provides Russia with an opportunity to eventually transform into a democratic, responsible, and peaceful partner.

I am proud to say that Canada has not been a bystander in this drama. Our government and parliament have been robust and unwavering in their support of the Ukrainian people from the beginning of the Maidan. However, much remains to be done to rebuild Ukraine. Canada has invested millions of dollars of taxpayers' money over the years assisting the country. Our programs are well-placed to help mediate the healing process in Ukraine, especially the eastern portion, and to construct institutions necessary to create a modern Ukrainian society founded on the values we cherish, the rule of law and democratic governance.

I'd be very happy to answer any of your questions.

Thank you very much for your attention.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, can I get unanimous consent to go to half past five?

All right.

I'm going to ask each party to ask one question and to try to keep it to two to three minutes so that we can move back to the House for votes at half past five.

Mr. Dewar, go ahead.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): I'll get right to it. Both of our guests, thank you so much. I really appreciate your testimony.

I have questions for both of you, first on aid, concerning how we get it to the right people. Can either of you give us a brief summation now? How does it fit in with the IMF funding? Is there something that Canada can do to help direct it in the right place?

On human rights, this is very layered and complicated, but it's a question about ensuring that we are supporting, if you will.... It is up to the Ukrainian people, obviously, to decide their future, but we also want to make sure that we're not making things worse. How do we ensure that there are going to be free and fair elections in support of the aspirations of those in the Maidan who, as you said, do not support any of the political options?

Further to that, should we, as we have asked the government to do, provide pre-election observers as soon as possible to make sure that there is an understanding of what's happening on the ground with the upcoming elections?

I'll stop there.

• (1720)

Dr. Lada Roslycky: I would defer the IMF question to Mr. Bilak.

Mr. Daniel Bilak: I think it's a mistake to try to link our aid to the IMF package. The IMF package is a stabilization fund; it goes to the budget. It's used by the government to pay pensions, wage arrears, Gazprom arrears—although I don't know whether we're going to pay those or not, or maybe set them off—but we have a fairly robust aid program in Ukraine. I think the most important part right now is to work together with other donor agencies to make sure that it's coordinated effectively.

Donor coordination, from my 10 years in government, is one of life's great oxymorons. I think that now, with this government, there's much more of a demand-driven process. Hopefully, it will be much easier to target it.

I know that in Donetsk, for example, we have listed the categories in which we really do need assistance, especially humanitarian and economic assistance, because of the very dire socio-economic conditions in which those people live. We're working towards trying to get targeted funding and shovel-ready programs in place to show people that there's hope for the future.

Mr. Paul Dewar: In hot pursuit of that, are you going to provide that information—as you have in your brief—to us as a committee?

Mr. Daniel Bilak: I have a list of five points that I didn't mention, because I was waiting for questions and didn't want to run over. I also had a meeting today at Foreign Affairs at which we discussed that issue as well.

Mr. Paul Dewar: If you can provide it for us to do our report, it's

Mr. Daniel Bilak: It's in the materials I submitted.

The Chair: We're going to go over to Mr. Anderson very quickly.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): I want to thank you for being here.

I want to thank the chairman, actually, for insisting that we come to hear your testimony. Because of what is happening in the House, it was difficult, but I'm very glad we've heard it.

You are working with the mayor of Donetsk. Is his life in danger? Is your life in danger? Is that an issue that you're concerned about? We've seen some other people pay the price, and I'm wondering whether you can give us your perspective on this.

Second, let me ask about media management. What opportunity is there for you to manage your message?

Third, I'd like you to talk, if you can, a little bit about the Russian economy and the slowdown there, and how the currency or the investment that has left Russia might impact the overall threat of annexation and those kinds of things.

I'll leave you with that. Maybe, if we have time, I'll have one more.

Mr. Daniel Bilak: I'll also give Lada a chance to respond, I think.

The situation in Ukraine is very tense, whether you're in Kiev or in Donetsk. Donetsk gets a little hotter on the weekends.

One of the first things the governor did was deal with the security situation. We basically had no government for a week in Ukraine. In that period of time, thousands of people were able to cross the borders. They emptied the prisons in western Russia to have them come and create havoc in the cities of eastern Ukraine. Those people have gone home; they have been escorted. Many of the local people who are troublemakers are now in prison. On the last two weekends, we've had very vocal and aggressive demonstrations in Donetsk, but they've been peaceful.

So people are getting the message. I think that the security situation, God willing, is coming under control.

Governor Taruta's brother owns a construction company. They dug a trench at the border to prevent not just buses; they made it big enough to fill with tanks as well. We're using self-help remedies to protect the eastern border, if we could.

I believe your second question involved media. We have a very good team that we've put together. We're very proud of this team. The people are very switched on, in terms of the communications strategy. We've been very focused in what we've been telling international interlocutors and partners we've been dealing with.

One of the key points of our anti-corruption strategy is to have a free and open media. The governor has met with the media. He's made the local regional television networks and stations available. The best way to counter the Russian lies and propaganda is to tell the truth.

Your third question involved...?

• (1725)

Mr. David Anderson: It had to do with the Russian economy.

Mr. Daniel Bilak: I'm not a specialist on the Russian economy, but any time you lose \$70 billion in a quarter, it's not a good thing.

The Chair: Do you have a quick response to that?

Dr. Lada Roslycky: Concerning the economy, this morning we heard mention that the U.S. statement on oil has had a significant impact on the Russian economy. It's very fragile at this moment.

May I answer the question I was supposed to?

The Chair: You may very quickly, sure.

Dr. Lada Roslycky: As far as elections in Ukraine are concerned, I really wonder how you can have elections in Ukraine in May.

When it comes to monitors, have election observers train them. I have worked on many of these election monitorings in the post-Soviet states. Excuse me, but they're bozos. They come in and they don't know what they're doing. They don't speak the language; they don't know the law; they come and they make a show. So train them. That's my advice.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll finish up with Mr. Garneau.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Of course, the success and the future of Ukraine will depend on putting in place a government that eventually will be elected, going beyond just seeing the president elected.

One hears occasionally—and I'm not sure where it comes from, but since you both have extensive experience of Ukraine, I'd like your opinions—about there being some radical... I think you used the term “fascist” or “neo-Nazi” anti-Semitic elements that may be in the current interim government. To what extent is this Russian propaganda to try to stir things up? To what extent is there any truth to it? I'd be interested in your opinions.

Dr. Lada Roslycky: Interestingly, again I refer to the communication we had this morning with Ukraine. Percentages were given for how many far-right activists there are in Austria, France, the U.K. I believe, and Canada. They're in every country, and they're marginal.

As it pertains to people on Maidan who are actually revolutionaries, I think you have to be a radical when you live in a politically criminal authoritarian regime. Be very careful to follow the statements of this Ihor Kolomoyskiy; his is a very important position. The president of the Jewish council is saying that this is not true.

Last week Israeli officials—rabbis—came to this television program called *Shuster* acknowledging that these were lies. It's significant. If Israel comes and says this, then what is Russia up to?

Mr. Marc Garneau: Who is propagating it? Is it Russia?

Dr. Lada Roslycky: Russia is.

Mr. Daniel Bilak: Yes, it's essentially.... This is the same propaganda that has been there since Soviet times.

I would just direct the committee's attention to today's *National Post* and to an open letter of Ukrainian Jews to Russian Federation president Vladimir Putin. I think it will explain everything, answer all of the questions you have raised. It really is a Who's Who of the Jewish community in Ukraine.

In terms of the right-wing extremists, etc., there's a lot of speculation about what rights.... Svoboda actually shows the strength of allowing people to decide: they elected them. They were radical; they actually exceeded whatever expectations they had in western Ukraine. They were very anti-Yanukovych, and that resonated with Russian-speaking people in the country. They were horrible at running Lviv, they were horrible at running Ternopil, and they're now running at 2%, so it's unlikely that they're going to be in the next parliament.

Everybody is talking about this shadowy Right Sector. They have never made an anti-Semitic statement. The only issue people have with them is that they don't want NATO or the EU. The head of Right Sector has met with the Israeli ambassador to Ukraine. They have said not only that they are opposed to anti-Semitism but that they will actively seek to root it out. They've done a great job on PR. If there is a people that the government—which has done an abysmal job on communications, by the way....

In fact, if there's one area in which I would heavily criticize them, it's that they have not been very robust in countering this machine.

We have to give it to Putin; he's been planning this a long, long time. But essentially, it seeps; it's the big lie, the Joseph Goebbels school of information: the bigger the lie and the more often you repeat it, the more people will start to believe it.

But please read today's *National Post*.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you.

Lada, for one final comment before we wrap up.

Dr. Lada Roslycky: Pay attention to Syria from a geopolitical perspective. The first Russian visit to Israel was, I think, just last year or the year before. It was since its independence. Syria is a flashpoint. The Russian Black Sea Fleet has a port there in the Tatus Strait.

So it's Syria.

The Chair: Thank you.

To our witnesses, thank you very much. I appreciate your flexibility. We wanted to get your testimony, and we've been able to do that. Thank you.

This meeting is adjourned.

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