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# Standing Committee on Finance

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Chair: The Honourable Wayne Easter





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• (1600)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.)):** I will officially call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 44 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance.

Pursuant to a request from four members of the committee, we are meeting to discuss the logistics of the committee testimony of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau; the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford; Craig Kielburger; Marc Kielburger; Michelle Douglas, former WE board chair; and the CFO of WE, Victor Li, including but not limited to the panels they will appear on and the length of their respective testimony. That's the purpose of today's meeting.

I think members have all received the contribution agreement that the Clerk of the Privy Council agreed to provide. We have put notices out for the meeting for tomorrow and for the meeting with the Prime Minister and for a separate panel for the chief of staff on Thursday, but that is, as you know, subject to change.

Do I see your hand up, Peter Fragiskatos?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** You do, Mr. Chair. I apologize if you weren't finished yet, but I do have a motion to put forward.

**The Chair:** Okay. I'll take your motion, but because we are in video conference, make sure you wave. I have a very small screen here.

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos. What's your motion?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you very much.

Since we are meeting to discuss the logistics of witnesses and future meetings, the motion does relate to that.

It is as follows: "That the chair be empowered to schedule meetings with the witnesses listed in the request for today's meeting as the chair deems appropriate, as per the availability of witnesses."

**The Chair:** I only got about seven words of that down, Mr. Fragiskatos. Can you read it more slowly? Then I have Mr. Poilievre next.

Read it more slowly. Then present your reasoning, and then we'll go to Mr. Poilievre.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I'm happy to go more slowly.

It is as follows: "That the chair be empowered to schedule meetings with the witnesses listed in the request for today's meeting, as the chair deems appropriate, as per the availability of witnesses."

As to the reasoning, Mr. Chair, I think it's self-explanatory. This allows for the best approach in terms of organizing future meetings. Leaving it in your hands and the hands of those who help organize meetings on the clerk's side, I think, would be quite useful.

Thanks a lot.

**The Chair:** Okay. The motion's on the floor.

We have Mr. Poilievre, and if there is anybody else, just put your hand up.

Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

• (1605)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC):** Just to be clear, Mr. Chair, I hate to ruin your momentary flattery, but Mr. Fragiskatos' motion does not empower you to do anything. If you look at the wording, you see it has "subject to the availability of the witnesses". Effectively, it empowers them to decide when they come and for how long.

We've never done that before. It's completely unprecedented for us to just say, "Hey, a witness can come whenever he wants and for however long he wants." This motion would be unprecedented in my 16 years in Parliament.

Now, we can haggle over it all we want, but here's the bottom line: the Kielburgers are coming for four hours. They may come tomorrow for four hours or the Liberals on the committee might choose to talk us through the night, but the opposition has a majority and we are going to compel sufficient testimony to get the answers. If Liberals want to talk out the clock, as they've done in other committees, in order for the witnesses to appear for only an hour or an hour and a half or something like that tomorrow, that's fine. We'll just invite them back again, and maybe a third time, so that we get a cumulative period to cover the questions that need answering.

Right now the Kielburgers are offering to come. I think originally it was for an hour. Now it's for an hour and a half. Once we've had a couple of opening statements, we will burn through that in no time. This is a massive undertaking. We need to ask a lot of questions. There's no chance that we're going to allow an appearance of an hour and a half for two witnesses who are so quintessential to the discussion.

I understand that they now want to include a third witness in those proceedings. That would then burn up a tremendous amount of time in opening statements alone. That's obviously not acceptable to the official opposition. I won't speak for the other two opposition parties, but I suspect it's not acceptable to them either. We do need to have the Kielburgers for at least four hours tomorrow. If the government wants to finagle a procedural trick to prevent that from happening, then we'll have to invite the Kielburgers back for more testimony later on.

**The Chair:** I take it that you're speaking against that motion.

Who's next on the speaking list? Is there anyone?

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I actually had some technical problems, so could you read the motion that Mr. Fragiskatos has presented before I make my comments?

**The Chair:** I'll ask Mr. Fragiskatos to read it again. My notes are just so-so.

Mr. Fragiskatos, read the motion again, please.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Sure. I'm happy to.

It is as follows: "That the chair be empowered to schedule meetings with the witnesses listed in the request for today's meeting as the chair deems appropriate, as per the availability of witnesses."

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do think that takes away from your power rather than adding to it.

I think there are a lot of questions people have. There's no doubt that as information has trickled out about this controversy, more questions have come to light, and I certainly think we require more time to ask the questions, both of folks involved with WE and also of government officials.

I'm thinking about at least a dozen different subject areas, things that can't be covered in an hour of a half. There is absolutely no doubt of that, so I think it's up to this committee to step forward and provide the leadership, and up to the majority of the committee to make the decision about how much time we require with witnesses to ask them the appropriate questions and to get the information that Canadians are looking for.

My final point is this. We saw with the SNC-Lavalin scandal that the ethics committee was shut down. At the time, it was a majority Parliament. There was a Liberal majority on the committee, and the members basically refused to have hearings and refused to allow testimony that people had been willing to bring forward, so Canadians didn't get all the information they required. In a democracy, it's important that we know anything good the government is doing and anything bad the government is doing. There's a democratic right to transparency.

We now have a minority Parliament and a minority in this committee. No one party can decide how we are to proceed. I prefer to see a consensus around it, but I think we're best served, Mr. Chair, if the committee provides the direction, and the chair then is able, once we've provided that direction, to work things out. There are

still a lot of logistical things. There are still a lot of organizational things that we give to you, Mr. Chair, for you to work out.

We need to put in place what the broad guidelines are and what the answers are that we're seeking on behalf of the committee and on behalf of Canadians. In that respect, then, I will be voting against Mr. Fragiskatos' motion.

• (1610)

**The Chair:** We do have a motion on the floor.

Did I see your hand up, Mr. Fraser? Please go ahead.

**Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to those who have intervened on the motion so far.

I don't think there's a huge problem with the time at which the Kielburgers testify. Four hours seems a bit excessive to me. We haven't had any witnesses who have gone anywhere near that long.

Maybe what I would suggest will be a friendly amendment, Mr. Fragiskatos and others. I don't know if this will cause you to support it or not. I'm happy to have this discussion.

If the issue is around "as per the availability of the witnesses", perhaps I would propose that it say "that the chair be empowered to schedule meetings with the witnesses listed in the request for today's meeting as the chair deems appropriate", as opposed to "as per the availability of the witnesses". I forget the exact language Mr. Fragiskatos used.

This is not a big or important issue to me in terms of the availability of the witnesses. Four hours seems unprecedented in terms of what this committee has dealt with before, but if we want to negotiate a bit more time, staying within the reasonable bounds of what the committee has done before, I'd be quite happy to entertain that discussion.

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, is that amendment in order?

On the amendment, perhaps you could give me the exact words again, Mr. Fraser. We'll see if there's any further discussion on the amendment. We'll vote on the amendment and then go back to the original motion to see if we can come to a consensus on witnesses.

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** I'm not sure if a vote is required on the amendment if the original mover is okay with it. In any event, the proposed—

**The Chair:** Let's ask Mr. Fragiskatos.

Are you okay with the proposed language? Is it a friendly amendment, Peter?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** It is a friendly amendment, yes.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Look, if the issue is not the availability, I'm happy to have that chat, but the proposed language I have here is "That the chair be empowered to schedule meetings with the witnesses listed in the request for today's meeting as the chair deems appropriate." The motivation for the change was to try to address Mr. Poilievre's concern about yielding power with regard to the witnesses' availability. In this case, we'll squarely empower the chair, who will figure out what is appropriate.

On the issue of the time for witnesses, if we want to extend it a bit, that's fine. It does seem over the top to have four hours, but we'll have this conversation.

**The Chair:** I see Mr. Poilievre.

Go ahead. The floor is yours.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Again, with respect, Mr. Chair, you had originally scheduled the Kielburgers for an hour. That's obviously unacceptable.

The committee is the master of its own domain. The chair serves the committee. If the committee believes it needs four hours, then the committee needs four hours. It's as simple as that. To have the witnesses effectively dictate through the chair how much time they're prepared to testify is not how we do business. If committee members are unhappy with how scheduling and timing of witnesses works, they have the power to vote accordingly, and I implore the committee to do that here.

• (1615)

**The Chair:** I'm going to go to the question on this motion, Madam Clerk.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Caroline Bosc):** Do we want to do a recorded vote, then, for this one?

**The Chair:** Yes, we'll have to do a recorded vote. I don't think there's any other way unless....

**The Clerk:** We're voting without any kind of amendment. We're just voting on the motion as worded by Mr. Fraser, just to be clear.

**The Chair:** We're voting on the motion with new wording by Mr. Fraser, with the friendly amendment. Yes.

**The Clerk:** Perfect. That's just to be clear for the record.

Let's go to the vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** The motion is lost.

Go ahead. The floor is yours, Mr. Poilievre.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I have a motion. I move that Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger appear for no less than four hours on Tuesday, July 28.

**The Chair:** Just as a suggestion, do we need to go to motions, or can we try to achieve consensus? I guess the motion is on the floor, so we'll go with the motion. The motion moved by Pierre is that the Kielburgers appear for four hours.

Is that on their own, Pierre, just the Kielburgers and not Victor Li?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** That's right.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Thank you, Pierre and Mr. Chair.

As I said before, I'm not really too fussy about this. From a logistical point of view, I believe there are other witnesses from WE Charity. Are they intended to be part of the same panel? What does this do to the anticipated schedule of existing witnesses or others who have been proposed?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** This motion seeks to have the Kielburgers alone for four hours, and then, as for the other witnesses, the committee clerk and the chair can work to fit them in.

The good news is that tomorrow we will have lots of time. The meeting starts at noon, and there's nothing after that, so we can just extend the length of the meeting to include other witnesses' testimony.

**The Chair:** For members' information, what went out in the notice was that from 12:00 to 1:00, we would have, as an individual, Michelle Douglas, former chair of the board of directors of WE, and from the Canadian Federation of Students, Nicole Brayannis, deputy chairman. That's the first hour.

In the notice, from 1:00 to 2:30, for an hour and a half, it was Craig and Marc Kielburger and Victor Li—

**The Clerk:** If I can just clarify, Mr. Chair, the Federation of Students has now declined. They will no longer be participating, just to clarify.

**The Chair:** Okay, that's good.

Mr. Poilievre's motion would move that from 1:00 to 5:00 Ottawa time. Is that correct, Pierre?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** That's right.

**The Chair:** Then we'll have to deal with Victor Li some other way.

Okay. That's what is on the floor.

Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Sure, and look, I don't even know that we're going to end up needing a vote on this. I hope we will be able to achieve some kind of consensus.

For what it's worth, Mr. Poilievre, my concern is really around scheduling as much as anything else. We have some things going on tomorrow in Nova Scotia, including the return of HMCS *Fred-erickton*. One of my neighbours lost a child during the helicopter incident, and then there are some additional personal and professional things scheduled for the afternoon.

There is no attempt to be tricky. I want to assure you that I'm not trying to pull some stunt. I just want to make sure that we have the ability to be there.

Is there going to be any requirement, Mr. Chair, of the other witnesses from WE—not from CFS—who are going to be there? Are they Ottawa-based? I guess it's a teleconference, so it won't matter much. Is this something, from just a logistical point of view, you think is going to be easy to sort out from the committee's perspective?

• (1620)

**The Chair:** I don't know. The clerk would have more information on that. She's been in discussions with the Kielburgers. They initially requested to appear for an hour.

Madam Clerk, I don't know if you can add anything to that.

**The Clerk:** When I spoke with them today to see if they had more availability, they were available for only one and a half hours. If the committee chooses to say four, I will send that request their way and we'll see whether or not they can meet that. I won't know until I check with them.

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask Mr. Poilievre why he feels we should add three more hours to the presentation on top of the one hour that was previously planned.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** The answer is that we have a lot of questions.

This is an extraordinary circumstance. We have an organization that has given over \$300,000 in benefits to the Prime Minister's family and \$41,000 in free travel to the finance minister's family. It has given jobs to members of the finance minister's family, and in exchange—

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Is it going to take four hours to ask that?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** —it has had extraordinary benefits from the public treasury. It got extraordinary access to Parliament Hill on one of the most coveted days of the year to have that access. It saw its contributions from the government rise tenfold under the government and it received a half-billion-dollar contribution agreement, a very unusual contribution agreement, so it's an organization that is facing many questions. We think it's appropriate to have all those questions answered.

**The Chair:** I see that Ms. Dzerowicz has her hand up.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** I think Mr. Fragiskatos was before me, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Oh, I didn't see him.

We'll go with you first anyway, Ms. Dzerowicz, and then Mr. Fragiskatos.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Thank you.

If the Kielburgers are available tomorrow for four hours, I think that's fine, but if they're not available, do we just take them for an hour and a half tomorrow? Then do we have to find another time for them, and would it be this week or when they are next available? How does that work?

**The Chair:** I guess it would be a matter of discussion between the clerk and the Kielburgers to see how much time they could be available for tomorrow. We'd have to make up the difference at another time. They would know that the committee has the power of

subpoena, if we need to go that far. We would hope that we don't have to.

I think it would be a matter of discussion, Julie, between the clerk and the Kielburgers.

Mr. Fragiskatos is next.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

This is on that point. I worry that we'll end up going in circles here. I think you've heard already that there isn't great opposition to the idea that the Kielburgers would come and testify beyond the time that was originally set out, but we don't know their availability. We can debate all day about whether four hours is appropriate. I personally, like Mr. Fraser, don't have a problem with it. Again, I haven't heard any opposition from the Liberal side. My Liberal colleagues seem to be for that, but I have a tough time seeing how we'll get anywhere without knowing their schedule.

Perhaps a way forward here is to allow tomorrow's meeting, set for an hour and a half, to continue as scheduled. Then we can see, either in the meantime or at tomorrow's meeting, whether the Kielburgers can stay for four hours, or what to do if that's not possible. Otherwise, we will just end up wasting our time here.

**The Chair:** Could I perhaps suggest that the clerk see what their availability is tomorrow? If we could at least get a minimum of two hours tomorrow and then another two hours later this week, would that be acceptable to Mr. Poilievre's proposal?

Then there's the time for Victor Li, the chief financial officer. What are we talking about for Mr. Li? That would be a separate panel on another day, likely.

• (1625)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** That would have to be another day.

Listen, I don't know what the Kielburgers would have in their schedule that would be more important right now. Perhaps they're very busy, but it is extraordinary to me that they'd have something more important than testifying before a parliamentary committee that is looking into a scandal that has gripped the nation regarding a \$500-million now-cancelled contribution agreement for which two ministers, including the Prime Minister, have admitted a conflict of interest. I think something of that enormity would merit their time. I don't know. If they have some other engagement they had planned, perhaps they could reschedule it for the Parliament of Canada.

As for four hours, I remember Jody Wilson-Raybould testified for, I think, more than four hours, and was grilled by Liberal members who had no problem keeping her before committee that length of time. It's strange that they are now concerned about such a time frame for the Kielburger brothers.

I don't want to have to do a subpoena, but I will if necessary. We do have that power. They're going to have to testify for four hours at least. They might as well get it done tomorrow.

**The Chair:** Okay. I think that's well known.

Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Yes, I don't think we're at a subpoena stage yet either.

For something that there doesn't seem to be big disagreement on, we seem to be talking in circles. May I propose that you invite them for four hours tomorrow, and that if, for whatever reason, they're not available, we split it up into two hours tomorrow and two hours on Wednesday, as an alternative? Make the pitch for four hours tomorrow. If that works, great.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Excellent. I can live with that.

**The Chair:** Okay. Then we're agreed on that.

Mr. Julian, did you have your hand up, or were you just moving around?

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I did have my hand up, Mr. Chair, but I think Mr. Fraser voiced what I was thinking. If we have a consensus, then that's the consensus of the committee, and we move on.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's great.

The clerk will ask the Kielburgers if they can appear for four hours tomorrow, and, if they can't, for two hours tomorrow and two the next day.

On Victor Li, what are you proposing there? We'll take him off the list for tomorrow, and then is there another proposal?

I guess I'm turning to you, Mr. Poilievre.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I don't think it's appropriate for him to be on the same panel as the Kielburgers. I would suggest that perhaps we look at this for the end of the week, or perhaps next week. We do need at this point, unless something changes, to have him appear. I think it would be important to have him for at least a couple of hours.

**The Chair:** Okay. The clerk and I will try to schedule that in for this week for Mr. Li.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Mr. Chairman, I just want to point out that the clerk has notified us that the Canadian Federation of Students has withdrawn. Does that leave a slot open in that area? Is that time frame enough?

**The Chair:** We had Michelle Douglas and then the Canadian Federation of Students for an hour. Mr. Poilievre is requesting that Mr. Li be here longer than that, I believe.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** That's right.

**The Chair:** Then it would likely have to be another day.

Okay? Are we okay on that? Okay.

Where are we now?

• (1630)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** All right. I think we have an understanding on Messrs. Kielburger and Mr. Li.

We're moving now to—

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Sorry, Mr. Chair; I did have my hand up.

**The Chair:** Oh, sorry.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I have another motion.

**The Chair:** Sorry, Pierre; I did miss Mr. Fragiskatos before.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I see.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Peter.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** To Mr. McLeod's point, we have a slot open that would allow for significant time with Mr. Li. Why is it that Mr. Poilievre doesn't want to entertain that? It's not as though Mr. Li would be coming for 10 or 15 minutes. It would be significant time with the witness, not during the time with Craig and Marc Kielburger.

I have never been opposed to this committee looking at issues around WE Charity. I think the matters that have arisen in the past few weeks do merit examination, but the more we call for more and more meetings, the more we are away from our constituents. It means we are away, as MPs, from dealing with the central issue of the day, which is COVID-19 and the economic response on the part of the federal government.

Why we would continue to schedule more meetings when we have an opportunity tomorrow to put in a witness and ask questions of that witness and be effective in our role is really beyond me. I'm surprised, because I think you've heard Liberal members throughout make it clear that we are willing to entertain the ideas of the opposition, and when we've put forward reasonable questions and ideas, they've time and time again been cast aside.

There's an opening tomorrow. I think Mr. Li can be fit into that opening, with all due respect to Mr. Poilievre.

**The Chair:** I'll take Mr. Cooper on this point and then go back to Mr. Poilievre.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Very simply, in response to Mr. Fragiskatos, there is insufficient time. Mr. Li is a key player. He is the CFO of a number of WE-controlled organizations. It's imperative that we have sufficient time to ask him questions. We have the Kielburgers, hopefully tomorrow for four hours, and I anticipate that there will be issues arising from their testimony that will be relevant in the case of Mr. Li.

I really don't understand why this is difficult. I think the manner in which we're proceeding to have him on another day so that we can have a full examination of him and sufficient time to ask him questions is important. Again, he is a key player.

**The Chair:** I'll go back to Mr. Fragiskatos. Then we'll try to move ahead, I believe.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Mr. Chair, we pretend, or some of us pretend, that finance is the only committee looking at this matter. It is also being examined by the ethics committee. I know that the government operations committee will also begin looking at this in short order. If the opposition is looking to bring witnesses forward, and if they're upset about what we on the Liberal side have suggested in terms of possible times when witnesses could speak, I remind my colleagues very respectfully that other committees are examining these issues and can call whichever witnesses they want.

Again, I'm not opposed to our continuing to spend some time here looking at issues around WE. Obviously, we're going to be doing that this week. However, it makes no sense not to invite Mr. Li tomorrow for an hour in place of the students who have pulled out.

**The Chair:** Mr. Julian is next.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fragiskatos mentioned the ethics committee. We know that the ethics committee has been filibustered now for the last few days. They've been unable to move forward. Liberals on the committee are blocking the committee's work, which is really unfortunate. We saw the same thing in SNC-Lavalin. In a minority Parliament, all parties do have to work together. I think we've done that by having the four-hour request to the Kielburgers; that's important. I think Mr. Li will probably have a lot of substantive questions coming his way. It would seem to me most appropriate to have the Kielburgers tomorrow and then have Mr. Li subsequently.

As this information comes out—there have been so many contradictions that it's hard to keep up—I think that the measured in-depth questioning tomorrow will help form the questions that we may want to ask eventually of Mr. Li.

• (1635)

**The Chair:** I will take it that there is agreement that we hear from Mr. Li separately for two hours on Wednesday. I do think it's probably important to have the WE Charity testimony completed before we hear from the Prime Minister. We know that the Prime Minister is appearing on Thursday.

All right. That's—

**The Clerk:** Can I just interject?

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Li's lawyer did contact the committee and stated that he was only available on Tuesday at the time indicated that the committee scheduled him for. I will let him know, but I just want the committee to be aware that if he is unable to make it on Wednesday, that's what was communicated to me in that letter by the lawyer. That's just so you're aware.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that, Caroline.

Mr. Poilievre—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** I'd like to comment, as well, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We'll go to Mr. Poilievre and then Mr. Ste-Marie.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and Madam Clerk.

I think if Mr. Li cannot attend on Wednesday, then we can just bump him to the next week and continue the hearings at that time or at a future date for the allotted period of time. I don't know if Peter Julian or a member of the Bloc has views on the exact timing that Mr. Li would appear, but if he doesn't want to do Wednesday, then we'll just bring him in another time.

**The Chair:** We will go to Mr. Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** First of all, I agree with what Mr. Poilievre just said.

Second, I just want to remind everyone that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics is meeting on Wednesday, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., and on Thursday, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

I don't think the Standing Committee on Finance should meet at the same time as the ethics committee. That's directed at you, Mr. Chair, and the clerk.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Would you give me those times again, Gabriel?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Yes. The finance committee is meeting on Wednesday, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., and on Thursday, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll have to work around those times.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** With regard to the Prime Minister, didn't they already put out a statement to indicate that he's coming in from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday and she's from 4:15 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.? That's already happening. There's already a public statement. As much as I think everybody's trying to coordinate, that's been scheduled.

That's it. I just wanted to point that out. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Coming back to the clerk for a minute, with regard to Mr. Li, did his lawyer say that the only time he was available was tomorrow between 1 p.m. and 2:30 p.m., the time we had him listed for?

**The Clerk:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Okay. I guess we'll have to see where discussions—

**The Clerk:** In the meantime, I have already reached out to the Kielburgers, extending the invitation for four hours tomorrow. I stated that if that doesn't work, we would do two and two. I'm waiting to hear back from them at the moment.

I'll communicate with Mr. Li as soon as you like about whichever proposal you prefer.



**The Chair:** I know other committees are meeting, but I think it would be best to have the WE Charity folks' appearances completed so that all the information is out there for any questions that people might have for the Prime Minister, but we'll see where that goes.

Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

• (1640)

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Look, this a bit of a tangential point, but nevertheless an important one to me. I don't want to be small about these things, so I'll apologize in advance if it doesn't seem as significant as some of the matters at hand.

Just in response to Mr. Ste-Marie's point about moving the committee times, on a personal and constituency level, one of the things I've really tried to do is to plan in advance to have certain meeting slots that have become routine for this committee so that I can do the simple things we all do, such as meeting with constituents, tending to the work that they would have us do, and, personally, just with a young family, trying to pair up my own schedule with that of my wife, who has her own career as well.

If we can avoid, to the extent possible, changing with limited notice the time that our committee meets, I would greatly appreciate it. There's a reason that we typically have a waiting period before notices will take effect and can be moved at the committee, even for this kind of a meeting that is outside of the ordinary course. Just as a favour—although if we must move things in this instance, I'll understand—I would beg of the committee that we try not to make a habit of last-minute changes to the ordinary meeting times.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that point. The point has been made.

I guess at the moment, then, we will leave it up to the clerk to see what kind of responses we get back.

Go ahead, Mr. McLeod.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Mr. Chair, I have another question for clarity. We had scheduled two presentations for 12 until one o'clock, for the one-hour period.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** One of the presenters has withdrawn. Are we cutting that time frame in half for the remaining presenter, or can we move that presenter to present at the same time as Mr. Li on Wednesday?

**The Chair:** I see a bit of difficulty with that, Mr. McLeod. Michelle Douglas is the former chair of the board of directors with the WE Charity, and Mr. Li is chief financial officer. If it's possible to bring the two of them together for two hours, that's fine with me.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** No.

**The Chair:** I see perhaps some differences of opinion. Sometimes that's good to have on the floor of the committee.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** My point was that I'm trying to avoid the marathon day.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** There was a slot with two presenters. Now we have one presenter with the same time frame. Should we shorten the time frame, then?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** No.

**The Chair:** We could do that, but what I find, from the chair's perspective, is that a second presenter would be five minutes more in terms of the presentation. It really does take about 50 to 55 minutes to give all members, at least eight members and sometimes 10, the opportunity to raise questions, so I think a session shorter than an hour is just not doable.

We'll leave it to see where negotiations can go for Wednesday. I know it creates a complication with another committee, but we'll see.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** It's important to try to convince the Kielburgers to come for four hours tomorrow. That would simplify things.

Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Listen, we don't want to be unreasonable with the witnesses. I think I speak for my official opposition colleagues in saying that if Mr. Li prefers to come next week, then we would welcome that. If moving him from Tuesday to Wednesday is hard for him to juggle, given that he's a CFO and he has lots of obligations, then out of respect for him, I would be willing to accept his coming sometime next week. We do, as the opposition, offer that olive branch. I don't know if there are others who would want to chime in on that point, but we want to offer that.

**The Chair:** Okay. The clerk has that information. I think it's preferable to meet as soon as we can, but okay.

Where does that leave us, now? You were suggesting some other witnesses, I believe, Mr. Poilievre.

• (1645)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Yes.

**The Chair:** We have the Prime Minister and his chief of staff, who are in the original motion. We have Michelle Douglas, who is in the original request. Where are we at?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I have another motion that I will—

**The Clerk:** Sorry, Mr. Poilievre—

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

**The Clerk:** Sorry, but before we get going, I just want to mention that the ethics committee has not yet scheduled its meeting for Thursday. It will adjust to make sure we're not meeting at the same time as it is, just for members who've had concerns about that.

I also just want clarification. Technically the motion regarding Mr. Li wasn't officially moved. We discussed it, but I would like to include something in the minutes. Is there general...?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I'll move something on that.

Just to simplify it, to avoid having you go back and forth and back and forth, why don't we just say the following: "That the committee invites Victor Li to appear between August 3 and August 7, inclusive, for no less than two hours?"

**The Chair:** Could we have agreement on that, rather than necessarily going to a recorded vote? Could we say, in case he might want to make himself available on Wednesday, that we want to open that up between now and August 7 or whatever your final date was?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Chair, I think we should just make it for next week. There's so much going on, so many moving parts. I think we just do it next week.

**The Chair:** Let's wrap it up. I see Mr. Julian's head shaking as well.

Is there, then, general agreement on that? Is there any opposition?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** That's where we're at. That will give you some direction, Madam Clerk.

**The Clerk:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are there any other witnesses, Mr. Poilievre or Mr. Julian?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Yes. Next I have a motion as well that the committee.... Originally we had limited our preliminary examination to just four meetings. Of course, we all now agree that this would be insufficient. The Prime Minister himself has asked to testify in a meeting that would be in addition to the four already being held.

I would suggest, then, that we extend our study. I propose the following motion: "That the Standing Committee on Finance continue to hold hearings until the list of witnesses committee members submit is exhausted, and that the subcommittee convene to discuss scheduling of meetings for witnesses to attend."

This basically says that members of the committee are invited to bring forward a list, as is the normal practice, and that we'll convene a subcommittee early next week in order to schedule the proper timing.

It might be wise to have a bit of a breather so that members can absorb the testimony they're going to receive this week. There's also a commitment from the Clerk of the Privy Council to release additional documents. Committee members might want to read those documents before deciding what hearings to hold.

The purpose of this motion is simply to keep the study alive and to open the door for committee members to submit their witnesses through the clerk so that she can begin working to schedule them, and the subcommittee can convene informally, as it always does, in order to set up those hearings.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** I'm going to go to Mr. Fraser and then Mr. Julian, but I want to come back to Mr. Li for a moment. If he offers to come this week, can we accept him?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I think my motion on that has been adopted already.

**The Chair:** Well, it wasn't a motion, but it was an agreement.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** We're going backwards now.

**The Chair:** I know we are, but if he's completely tied up next week and offers to come this week, is that doable? Do I have the authority to say yes?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I don't think so. I think we have too much going on this week. Out of respect to Mr. Li, who said he's very busy this week, we should just leave it.

**The Chair:** All right. Then that's an issue behind us.

I'll go to Mr. Fraser, Mr. Julian, and Mr. Fragiskatos on Mr. Poilievre's last proposal.

• (1650)

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** There's a lot to take in here. I can even tell by some of Mr. Poilievre's Conservative colleagues laughing along as he's making these points that there may be—

Now they're shaking their heads that I've said that. We should do our best to be reasonable human beings here. If somebody can get through the testimony now, that's fine. I find it ironic that on the one hand there's opposition to limiting some meetings while on the other we are extending others. There seems to be a bit of a conflict.

The other piece that's grating away on me right now is that I think it's patently ludicrous to have an absolutely unlimited meeting length. I've been here only five years, Mr. Chair. You've been here probably as long as I've been walking. I don't think you would ever have seen a committee meeting that has dragged on indefinitely, with as many witnesses as anybody wanted.

I by no means am trying to close things down prematurely. I supported the study of this meeting. I supported the idea of the Prime Minister testifying. I supported a full document production. I want to continue to be transparent. At a certain point in time, I think we need to give our heads a shake and realize that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose potentially the greatest threat our species has faced in my lifetime, with the exception of, perhaps, climate change. I don't want to waste months and months, or even weeks and weeks beyond what is actually necessary to figure out what we need to figure out, when we can be turning our minds to how we are going to best support Canadians not only to get through the continuing public health emergency but also to get back to work, grow the economy and improve the quality of life for the people who live in our communities.

I know there is some interest in the story at hand. I think we should continue to have testimony from witnesses who have something important and unique to say. The idea that we will forever have as many witnesses as anybody who is attending this meeting should like is a bit over the top, to my mind. I hope colleagues will not break along partisan lines on this one. Actually, just ask yourself whether it's reasonable to have an unlimited number of witnesses. I think the answer is clearly no.

**The Chair:** We will go to Mr. Julian, Mr. Fragiskatos and then Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There's nothing here that talks about an unlimited list of witnesses. In fact, what this motion speaks to is having the subcommittee—which is, as you know, Mr. Chair, fundamental to scheduling witnesses—meet and define who the witnesses are, what the timing is, etc.

The reality is that three weeks ago I brought forward the motion for documents, on July 7. We have had stunning revelations over the last three weeks, so we do have an important job to get to the bottom of this and to get answers.

Mr. Poilievre and I disagree on a whole lot of things, but the idea that we would end basically tomorrow, which was the original scheduling that we decided on as a committee, would be doing a disservice to the Canadian public. There are tons more questions that have arisen in the last three weeks. What Mr. Poilievre is proposing is extending the study under the agreement, if you like, or under the structure set up by the subcommittee. That's the way it should go. I'm not sure why Mr. Fraser is objecting so vehemently. It's certainly not an open book. It is the subcommittee getting together and structuring witnesses.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Then of course, Mr. Chair, we have the documents, which we should be getting by August 8, hopefully. We have some of those documents. Others will be coming forward. That will give the subcommittee the opportunity to decide how we move forward.

I'm a member of the finance committee. I'm very disturbed by some of the revelations we've had around this scandal over the last few weeks, but I'm also working on behalf of my constituents and the pandemic, and also pushing hard, as the NDP has, on improving the government programs that were brought forward. I think there's a long list of policies and programs that the NDP and Jagmeet Singh, as our leader, have been able to force the government to accept, and we can do more than one thing at a time.

There is no doubt that we can't end the study tomorrow, which is basically what the motion we adopted on July 7 does, so we do need to extend it. There are tons of unanswered questions. Let's extend it under the structure put in place by the subcommittee, on which all parties are represented. We'll come to a consensus at the subcommittee. As Mr. Fraser knows, that decision will come back to the committee for the committee to ratify it.

It's not a blank cheque; it's quite the opposite. It's a very structured way of moving forward to get answers to the questions that have not been answered over the last three weeks. Of course, over the last three weeks, we have had tons more additional questions as this scandal has unfolded. Canadians need those answers as well. That's our job as responsible members of the finance committee.

• (1655)

**The Chair:** Okay.

Normally, Mr. Poilievre and Mr. Julian, we do set some kind of deadline on when we should be done, which I think is appropriate as well. A very open-ended motion could see us roll on for eternity.

We will go to Mr. Fragiskatos, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Fraser and then Ms. Koutrakis.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To return to the point I made earlier, this is not the only committee that's examining this matter. The ethics committee is looking at it. The government operations committee is looking at it.

Let me tell you that when I came in to the office this morning, the first thing I did was answer a message from a new business owner who wanted to know what supports, if any, would be available from the federal government for new entrepreneurs. This individual is working very hard. They came up with a business plan and wanted to put a business in place. They didn't foresee a pandemic. They went to the bank, which is not being helpful. I'm working with the government and the relevant departments to assist this constituent, but the more we turn a committee like this one into the WE Charity committee, the more it takes away from our ability as MPs to do the work that's expected of us by constituents.

I wonder if Mr. Poilievre and the Conservative members on the committee would be opposed to looking at COVID-19 issues, and the government's economic response, in future meetings. I would hope that this would be the case. It should be the aim of the finance committee.

This is not to say that issues relating to WE Charity are not important to examine. We have, after all, devoted five meetings now to the issue, and Mr. Poilievre wants to keep going, feeling it's not enough. I understand his position, and I also, I suppose, appreciate that's it good to take “a breather”. I think that's the term he used. He also said that the committee is doing “too much” work this week. I'm sure he's very sincere when he wants us to space this out for the well-being of all of us, or it could be that other issues and considerations are on his mind.

Be that as it may, Mr. Chair, I have to tell you that when a word like “exhausted” is used in a motion, as is the case with Mr. Poilievre's motion, that's the problem here. I mean, there are many problems with what he has proposed, but when the word “exhausted” is used, I get the sense that this will now turn into the WE Charity committee and that we as a committee will not be able to examine the economic realities facing the country at this time.

We have heard from many witnesses at this committee. The clerk has done a wonderful job, so I'm worried about giving her more work, but I'd love to know the number of witnesses we've heard from. There were witnesses who shed a great deal of light on what happened. There were members of the public service, in particular Ms. Kovacevic, who came a few days ago and gave a compelling account and helped us understand more about this issue, but there have been witnesses who, with all due respect to them, at times did not shed a great deal of light, were not terribly helpful, and in fact focused on issues completely unrelated to WE Charity. I will not name witnesses here, but we saw how that went. It was unhelpful to the goals of this committee and this particular study.

If we could take out the wording that's it until the witness list is "exhausted", that would be most helpful, because I do not want to see this committee, the finance committee.... With all due respect to all MPs, there are those who have made the point—I think, Mr. Chair, you've made this point to me in the past—that the finance committee is among the most important committees, if not the most important, on Parliament Hill. We have an enormous responsibility facing us at this time. We ought to live up to that responsibility on behalf of Canadian workers, businesses and their families.

This is not to say, of course, that ethical matters are not important. Of course they are imperative. That is why we have devoted these meetings to this subject. That is why the ethics committee is devoting meetings to this subject. That is why the government operations committee is devoting meetings to this subject. I really fail to see what we will get out of having meetings ad nauseam, over and over, until the witness list is "exhausted", of course only to the satisfaction of Mr. Poilievre.

I have one more point. We have to keep in mind that at the end of the day, while this issue is important, we can't be distracted from all those issues that I mentioned before.

• (1700)

I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair. Thanks very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have Mr. Cooper, Mr. Fraser, and Ms. Koutrakis, and I do see Elizabeth May's hand up as well. I believe we can let you in on this, Elizabeth.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me just say, with the greatest of respect to my friends Mr. Fraser and Mr. Fragiskatos, who downplay the seriousness of what we are looking at, that Canadians care about ethics and integrity in government. Let's also be clear that this particular program falls within the legislative authority that Parliament has vested in the finance minister, so it is perfectly appropriate that this committee hold hearings to get answers in this matter.

With respect to the motion that has been put forward by Mr. Poilievre, it is not open-ended. It is a way to proceed that will allow the committee to call the appropriate witnesses at the appropriate times to get the answers that Canadians deserve.

When the initial motion was passed, it provided for four meetings. Every passing day there have been new revelations. Which witnesses might need to be called, how much time and how many more meetings are required have yet to be determined until we hear further evidence. Let us follow the facts. Let us follow the evidence. That is what this motion simply provides for.

I find it interesting that the Liberals on this committee are so keen on rushing witnesses through all in a week. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that in order for this committee to properly do its job, to absorb the testimony of key witnesses, to be able to formulate questions, to be able to identify inconsistencies, to identify issues arising from testimony, it's simply not feasible or practical to do that in back-to-back-to-back hearings.

This motion would allow our committee to take sufficient time to do our job. I know that's something the Liberal members on this committee are not particularly excited about. Let's face it: the allegations that have come out, by the day, have become more and more serious. We're talking about a contribution of \$1 billion that was tagged to an organization that socially, politically and financially benefited the Prime Minister and his family and the finance minister and his family. We're talking about multiple breaches of the Conflict of Interest Act.

I know that they'd like to overwhelm this committee. They'd like to overwhelm the media. They'd like to overwhelm Canadians, effectively, to cover up what has in fact gone on.

I was there during the SNC-Lavalin scandal. I sat on the justice committee. I was there when Liberal MPs, using their majority, shut down the committee, shut down the ability of the committee to hear from witnesses who were prepared to appear. They walked out the back door, afraid to take questions, afraid to face the media because they knew what they were doing was wrong.

Well, the good news this time is that they don't have a majority. They don't have the ability to shut down this committee's ability to call witnesses, as they did during SNC-Lavalin.

I say this to my friends on the Liberal side: If you really are interested in getting answers, if you really are interested in allowing our committee to do its work and to call the appropriate witnesses, then let's provide sufficient flexibility to do just that, to call the appropriate witnesses based upon the evidence. Let us follow the evidence. Let us have sufficient time to do it well.

Thank you.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** On the list, I have Mr. Fraser, Ms. Koutrakis, Ms. May and Mr. Fragiskatos.

I would just throw one thing in, Mr. Cooper. You did talk about appropriate witnesses. I don't think that's a problem, but at the moment, for the original list, we've exhausted the Liberal list, we've exhausted the NDP list and we've exhausted the Conservative list.

I would remind people that August 7 is the deadline for submissions for pre-budget consultations. We usually have 300 to 550 submissions, and then we have to be prepared to have that stuff researched and to do hearings on that in the fall, as well as on the restart and recovery from COVID. My concern is that we have appropriate witnesses and some kind of deadline we can work with.

We will go to Mr. Fraser, Ms. Koutrakis, and Ms. May.

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

Look, though I'm enjoying this discussion, I know that Mr. Julian suggested that perhaps the ordinary way these things are dealt with is by virtue of the subcommittee. I can't help but feel that it might have been an appropriate forum for much of today's discussion.

Frankly, Mr. Julian, I agreed with almost everything you said in your speech. Doing this the normal way, with the subcommittee getting the witnesses and establishing how to proceed, is not the portion of the motion I objected to. Where I think we have a point of disagreement—and I don't know if you'll come around to seeing things my way or not—is in the portion of the motion that discusses each of the parties bringing forward their witnesses and the committee hearing them until every list is “exhausted”. To my mind, that is in fact an indefinite period of time that would allow one party or another, if it so chose, to put in 200 witnesses whose testimony might have limited probative value. If the subcommittee wished to get together and discuss a path forward, that would be a very healthy discussion. If the motion included language demanding that the committee hear from every single witness that every member of this committee could put forward, I think we would create an environment that would be ripe for abuse, frankly.

Mr. Cooper, I take your comments with great respect. I always find you to be articulate. There is no effort to demean the importance of the issue that is currently before this committee. My experience on this committee, since this Parliament has begun, has been extremely valuable to me. I've been very fortunate to have front-row tickets, in some ways, to the economic emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are three sources of information that have been as valuable as anything for me to get new ideas that I could use to help influence the government's approach to various policies: conversations with stakeholders, including in my own community; conversations with MPs from different parts of the country and different parties; and the finance committee. It was really an incredible experience for me to learn about things like the need to invest in the mental health of those who serve on juries in serious trials. It was really valuable to me to learn about the role of the Great Lakes Commission, which I knew very little about before the testimony. It was very informative for me to hear, at a granular level of detail, what investments in a green recovery might be able to offer in terms of the future growth of Canada's employment numbers and environmental and economic health. I could probably list about 200 different examples of testimony that I found valuable and was able to have conversations with colleagues about.

There is a global pandemic on the go. It will require our continued attention and a world-class response if we are going to best serve the interests of Canadians. I do not view that position to be mutually exclusive to the idea that the current study before the finance committee is also important. Both things can be true at once. My only point is that I don't want this scheduling issue to turn into a forum to have as many witnesses as one party may like for potentially political opportunism rather than the substantive probing that I think has taken place to date and that I agree should have taken place to date. That's why I supported most of the motions that have come before this committee, with perhaps the exception of one motion when my power went out. I lost connection immediately before a vote on an issue that I would have supported.

My only hope is that we can get together, be reasonable human beings and, as in virtually every other project, exercise or initiative that I've ever been a part of, try to figure out how long this should properly take and try to figure out where the real information

should come from so that we can focus on the issues at hand rather than background noise, which will just confuse the issue for perhaps the purpose of keeping it in the newspapers, when there's actually an emergency that we need to respond to. I would pray that the committee members, whom I've enjoyed my time with, would share my desire to advise the government on what policies it can implement as part of the effort to build back our economy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I promise you, Michael, I'm not trying to be tricky. I want to have a solid inquiry through this committee. I think it's been valuable to date. What I do want to avoid is turning it into an exercise that is something other than a probative exercise, which would detract from our ability to advance policies to keep roofs over heads and food on the table.

• (1710)

**The Chair:** Okay.

I have added names to my list, and I see another hand up. I have Ms. Koutrakis, Ms. May, Mr. Fragiskatos, Mr. Ste-Marie and Mr. Poilievre. Hopefully we can end the discussion there.

Go ahead, Ms. Koutrakis.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to repeat many comments that I've heard here from all my colleagues on this committee, no matter the party.

We all agree that this is a very important issue. We need to ask the important questions. Canadians expect us to ask the important questions and to get the answers that they deserve to hear, but this is the finance committee. As far as I know, we have heard testimony in the past. Monies have not been spent. We are in the steepest economic decline in history, and hopefully, a robust recovery is around the corner.

As important as WE is, I think our economy and how Canadians are doing are far more important at this time. We have to focus on the pandemic. We don't know what's around the corner. We know, as we have heard from senior health officials not only in Canada but worldwide, that a second wave will come upon us.

As part of the very important work that we do as the finance committee, we have the pre-budget consultation meetings coming up. As everyone knows, this is my first mandate as a member of Parliament. I'm very honoured to be a member of this all-important committee on finance. I have learned a lot from everything that I've been exposed to, from my colleagues in my own party and my colleagues across the way.

I can't imagine how we should be spending all of our time and effort on this very important issue. Again, I echo many of the comments. This is an important issue. I'm very happy that the Prime Minister and his chief of staff will be before us this week to answer questions for us. However, I don't want us to focus on just the one issue, which is the WE Charity, at this time.

I've started to schedule very important meetings with my constituents. I've started to hit the terrain, with my mask and with my team. It is so lovely to visit them and to hear how important all of the government programs that we've rolled out up until today have been.

I have to tell you that I monitor my emails very carefully. In my own riding I have not received one email saying that this is the most important issue of the day. What I have heard from my constituents is how happy they are to see me reach out to them. They are happy about how my team is helping them during this difficult time. They are happy to see that I'm going to visit them and start to learn more about them and their needs.

Nothing would make me happier, and I think I can speak for my colleagues in the Liberal Party. We're looking for answers as well, but can we take a balanced approach? Can we take a step back and identify what the most important issue is right now? Where should we be focusing most of our efforts? Is it really only WE? Should we perhaps be doing more meetings to see whether we are in the right place? Are we doing the right things to help our small businesses, to help the mothers who need to report back to work? Do we have the affordable child care that women need? I happen to be in a province, in Quebec, where we do have affordable child care in place. We should be talking about those issues.

I'm not saying, again, that we should not be asking the all-important questions where WE Charity is concerned. I'm very much looking forward to listening to WE Charity and its testimony. I just want to make sure that we don't forget about all the other issues that are very, very important. We should not diminish our role as the finance committee. Let's, please, be reasonable. Let's all be reasonable and make sure that we're taking a well-balanced approach.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** We will go to Ms. May, then Mr. Fragiskatos, then Mr. Ste-Marie.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, colleagues.

As I've been listening to all of this, I've been thinking that looking for evidence around the WE Charity scandal did get us the evidence of GlobalMedic and Rahul Singh. Of course, I'm not a member of this committee and I can't vote, but please be mindful of his evidence. The summer is going by. He had hundreds of people who were ready to participate in the program when it was going to be run by WE. Now it's run by nobody. I think we as parliamentarians have an obligation to keep our eye on the ball to make sure young people get the opportunities they're still entitled to. I am very impressed with a lot of the evidence we've heard while looking into the WE Charity issue, but I don't want us to forget the people who are caught in the crosshairs of a big, juicy scandal, and that includes a lot of young people and NGOs like GlobalMedic.

As for your motion, Mr. Pierre Poilievre, I'm not going to be able to vote on this, but when the word "exhaustion" is used, I just encourage all colleagues to remember that at some point, the public appetite for this issue will be exhausted. Keep an eye on that, be-

cause they're going to get very frustrated if they see parliamentarians more interested in scandal than in helping them.

This is a big issue, and it needs to be thoroughly and properly investigated. I would not want to appear to say that this is not a subject of importance. The fact that the Prime Minister is testifying before this committee underscores that we all understand the gravity of the situation. Major ethical breaches occurred, but just be mindful of where the public sense of what we do as parliamentarians shifts from "Good for them for getting to the truth" to "What the heck is wrong with them? Don't they see we're in a pandemic?"

It's advice you probably don't want.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. May.

Now we have Mr. Fragiskatos, Mr. Ste-Marie and then Mr. Poilievre.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Mr. Chair, here is another case in which I find myself agreeing, as I so often do, with much of what Ms. May said—not everything, but there's a great deal there, a great deal of substance, as always, from our colleague.

Mr. Chair, I received an email from a constituent just a few days ago. It relates back to the points I was making earlier about the importance of staying focused on the main thing. Obviously, WE Charity is quite critical. We're not denying that at all. I'm not opposed to extending our study beyond the original mandate—the original mandate being four meetings, of course—but the main thing facing this country, the main thing facing our constituents right now, is COVID-19.

Here's the email from the constituent. I won't read the whole thing, but I'll read the part that stood out the most and that moved me the most, as follows:

My rent is average for London rent prices, and even still once I pay rent I have nothing left to spend on my other bills. This means I have to rely on the food bank. What can you do to lower my rent to an affordable amount? I need to stay where I am to maintain my health. My doctor would gladly confirm this.

I get emails like this on a very regular basis these days, as I'm sure we all do. This one particularly stood out. It's heartbreaking. Of course, I want to help this man in every way I can. I don't have that ability. There are many things I can do, but I cannot create a new reality for him, much as I would like to. What we as a committee and what we as parliamentarians can do is be serious about the work at hand. We've heard at this committee very effective, very important and very meaningful testimony at previous meetings. I expect that once we get to budget deliberations, we'll hear even more about COVID-19 and its impact on the country, what it's doing to the country, how the federal government is responding and how else it could respond.

The issue I have, which I think Mr. Fraser brought up and Ms. Koutrakis brought up, and now Ms. May has eloquently brought up, relates to the wording of the motion. That's the issue here. We're not trying to get away from further probing the issues relating to WE and the challenges they raise for the government. Important questions still need to be answered, but will we even get to those pre-budget deliberations if we go down the path that Mr. Poilievre and his Conservative colleagues are suggesting? "Exhaustive" carries very.... Well, its meaning is very clear. There are clear consequences to endorsing this motion, ones that would set us back as a committee.

I also find it rather peculiar, Mr. Chair, that Mr. Poilievre has put this motion forward. If he is concerned that this committee is not engaged in an exhaustive study of the WE Charity issue, then frankly he's wrong. We are going to hear this week from the Prime Minister of Canada on this subject. The Prime Minister of this country is coming to testify at committee and answer questions.

This is unprecedented, as I'm sure Mr. Poilievre knows. In fact, I know he knows that, because on November 6, 2013, he had a chance to vote in favour of Stephen Harper coming to what was the access to information and privacy committee to examine matters relating to the Mike Duffy scandal. Mr. Poilievre voted against that motion.

That said, I won't exhaust the point—not to use that word over and over, although I'm using it now in a different way—but on November 6, 2013, there was a vote in Parliament on a motion that said the following:

That the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be instructed to examine the conduct of the Prime Minister's Office regarding the repayment of Senator Mike Duffy's expenses; that...Prime Minister [Harper] be ordered to appear under oath as a witness before the Committee for a period of 3 hours, before December 10, 2013; and that the proceedings be televised.

Mr. Poilievre voted against that motion in Parliament. He voted against it. A number of other current Conservative colleagues who are now sitting in the House also voted against that motion. I know that was 2013, but it's still relevant, because contrary to that approach, this committee, with this Prime Minister, will see something that is very, very different: We have a Prime Minister coming to the committee to answer questions, so if Mr. Poilievre is looking for an exhaustive approach to this issue, we're seeing it play out. We are looking into this matter in great detail.

I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair, but I think we have to be serious about what matters here and the task at hand. We have to stay focused on COVID-19.

• (1720)

We cannot push aside matters of ethics. Canadians will have questions, and we ought to look at those issues and make sure there are not unanswered questions, but when we have this committee, the ethics committee and the government operations committee all looking at all those issues, I end with the point that I began with, which is that the emails that I see in my constituency office are the reason I'm a member of Parliament: to help individuals who are going through those sorts of challenges.

WE is an important issue. We should devote more time to it than the original four meetings. We are doing that, and I'm not opposed

to looking at this in greater detail, but let's not forget the main thing right now. The main thing is the main thing, and that's COVID-19.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1725)

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Ste-Marie and then Mr. Poilievre.

Did I see your hand up, Mr. Fraser?

That should end our list. I don't want to use the word "exhaust".

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Ste-Marie.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to respond to what Mr. Fraser and his fellow members Mr. Fragiskatos and Ms. Koutrakis said. Obviously, the committee's priority is to focus on the government's financial and economic response to the pandemic, which is hurting not just people's health, but also our economic health overall.

I would also point out that, in the last election, the people elected the Liberals to form a minority government. In the current context, the government has introduced economic programs of unprecedented proportions, the likes of which we've never seen. Although it was necessary, this whole issue is tremendously important. It's imperative that the public's trust in government not be broken.

As lawmakers and elected officials, we've already handed over way too much power to the government. In dealing with bills on an urgent basis, we no longer subject them to committee scrutiny as we did before. Had we done so, we may have learned that the Liberal Party of Canada would be able to take advantage of the wage subsidy, support it does not need, in my view. That affects the level of trust I have in the government, and my constituents have expressed the same concerns.

Now, we have a situation where the administration of a major program, one worth nearly a billion dollars, was apparently given to an organization whose ties to the government raise serious ethical questions. We never should have had to probe a scandal like this, a situation involving hugely problematic ties to the government, but we do. Why must we do it, and above all, why must we do it right? Because the people's trust in government depends on it. Never have we seen such massive spending, by a minority government, no less, without lawmakers having the ability to fulfill their roles and ensure the government's actions are scrutinized.

That is why we must examine the situation properly, in my view. Conducting a balanced examination demands that we take the time necessary to get to the truth. Frankly, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the government have left us no choice. This isn't what we wanted.

I enjoy working together to improve measures so they are better tailored to people's needs. We trusted the government, and this is what happened, so let's get to the bottom of this. Taking an in-depth look at what happened is not tantamount to brushing aside what matters most, because this is vital to maintain the public's trust in government. I hope my fellow committee members will agree.

That's what I wanted to say.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Poilievre, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with Mr. Ste-Marie.

I'd like to point out two things.

First, the Liberals are saying they want to discuss other issues related to COVID-19, and yet, not a single Liberal member of the committee has suggested holding additional meetings this summer to discuss COVID-19. If they were so concerned about having the finance committee discuss COVID-19 matters, they should have suggested witnesses, but they didn't. That shows this is merely a diversion.

[*English*]

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Mr. Chairman, I have two voices, one in English and one in French.

**The Chair:** Okay. Are you on "French" there when you're speaking French, Mr. Poilievre?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I don't know. I have interpretation. Is that what I press? I'm not sure.

• (1730)

**The Chair:** Whatever you're speaking, if you're speaking English, make sure you're on the "English" button. If you're speaking French, make sure you're on "French".

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I see. All right.

**The Chair:** Okay.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** My apologies. Pardon me.

First of all, what I just said is that the Liberals are claiming they want to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic, but they haven't put forward a single motion to that effect. What they are actually suggesting is that the committee do nothing for the rest of the summer. The assertion that they want the Standing Committee on Finance to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic is merely an excuse to avoid being held to account for the scandal involving We Charity.

Second of all, as parliamentarians, we gave the government sweeping spending power, which is almost unprecedented, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is that very power that the Liberals used to grant a contribution agreement valued at more than \$500 million to an organization that paid the Prime Minister's

family and footed the bill for the Minister of Finance to take a vacation. It is therefore up to us, as parliamentarians, to answer for the government's spending under the power granted by Parliament in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third, and finally, the committee members seem to take issue with the word "exhausted". I would remind the committee that, as soon as the majority decides there is no longer any reason to discuss the matter or continue the study, that majority can vote to put an end to it, as always. Consequently, should the time come when the witnesses no longer have anything relevant to say, the committee can simply choose to conclude the study. My motion doesn't prevent that in the slightest. It simply gives committee members an opportunity to submit their witnesses and to hear from everyone, nothing more.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Sorry about that, folks.

I have Mr. Fraser on my list, and that should wrap it up. We'll see where we can go.

Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Thank you once again, Mr. Chair.

First, in response to Mr. Poilievre's commentary, should others wish this committee to sit and study things related to the economic recovery, I would be more than pleased to do so. I think he'll appreciate, given his experience in his role as a member of Parliament sitting on numerous committees, that it is atypical for standing committees to sit when the House is adjourned for the summer months. He can rest assured that as a local representative and the finance minister's parliamentary secretary, I have continued my work on this issue, literally on a daily basis, through this summer.

It doesn't take place exclusively before this committee. Should the rest of the committee wish to supplement the work that I do and that the government is doing over the course of the summer, I think it would be an honest value added. I think that taking different voices from different perspectives would help inform this process.

Mr. Ste-Marie, thank you. As always, I find your submissions valuable and interesting. I don't disagree with you. It's important that there be public trust between the government and its citizens. The only point I have an objection to, which I think Ms. May very professionally outlined, was the fact that it is unusual to have a motion suggesting that there be no limit to a list of witnesses that the committee must exhaust.

Madam Clerk, perhaps we could bring this discussion to a head. If you could repeat the motion that's actually on the floor, I'd like to propose an amendment. It will be interesting to me to see whether committee members will dig in and insist that in fact this committee must exhaust every single witness that any member of any party proposes, in contravention of the ordinary practices of the committee.

Madam Clerk, could I invite you to read the motion on the floor so I can fine-tune the amendment as we go?



• (1735)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

**The Clerk:** Do you want that in English?

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Yes, please.

**The Clerk:** It reads, “That the finance committee continue to hold hearings until the list of witnesses committee members submit is exhausted, and that the subcommittee convene to discuss scheduling of meetings for witnesses to attend.”

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** That's excellent. I wish I had this in writing in front of me. It would make the exercise perhaps easier, but—

**The Clerk:** Do you want me to repeat it?

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** If you could, I would. I'm struggling because the pen I've picked up has also run out of ink, if I can be frank. Give me a moment and I'll have you read it again.

Please go ahead.

**The Clerk:** I'll go even more slowly.

It reads, “That the finance committee continue to hold hearings until the list of witnesses committee members submit is exhausted, and that the subcommittee convene to discuss scheduling of meetings for witnesses to attend.”

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Perhaps I will move an amendment to the motion on the floor such that the amended motion would read: “That the finance committee continue to hold hearings and that the subcommittee convene...”, and just finish the motion as it was there.

The effective change is only to delete the middle portion, which insists that all witnesses from every party be exhausted before this study concludes, which, I believe, is in accordance with the point that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has made; although, regrettably, in this instance, she's not a voting member of this committee.

**The Chair:** Okay. Is it seen as a friendly amendment, Mr. Poilievre, and we will meet as a subcommittee on, say, Friday?

Go ahead.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I didn't actually hear the motion as now proposed as amended in its totality. If there's a way that the clerk could read that, then I could make sense of what's being proposed.

**The Chair:** We'll ask the clerk to read the original motion and then either Mr. Fraser or Madam Clerk to read the amendment.

Go ahead, Madam Clerk.

**The Clerk:** Would it be preferable maybe for me to read the motion as amended if it were to be adopted?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** That would be helpful. Yes, please.

**The Clerk:** If it were to be adopted, the motion would read, “That the finance committee continue to hold hearings, and that the subcommittee convene to discuss scheduling of meetings for witnesses to attend.”

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Okay.

**The Chair:** If it were to carry, Mr. Poilievre, I'd suggest that we have that subcommittee meeting on Friday so as to give the clerk enough time to start inviting witnesses for next week.

We have as witnesses now the Kielburger brothers for four hours, Mr. Li next week, and the PM and chief of staff on Thursday. Then we could prepare the list on Friday to give time to have the witnesses invited.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Okay. I think we'll just have a debate on the amendment and let members jump in. I'll be curious to hear what the other opposition members think of it.

**The Chair:** All right.

We're on the amendment, folks. Mr. Julian is first, and then it's Mr. Fragiskatos.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** I think, Mr. Chair, that the amendment goes in the same sense as the original motion. It extends committee hearings and gives the ability to the steering committee to do the scheduling and to map out how things are going to look in the coming weeks. That is always subject to committee approval, so I don't actually see a huge difference at all. I think it's the same substance.

The concern here is moving beyond the original study. Three weeks ago, we set up a study. A lot has happened since then. A lot of revelations have come out, as Mr. Cooper mentioned. What this does is allow the steering committee to bring a plan back to the main committee and for the main committee to adopt it. I'm, quite frankly, fine either way, and if we can get a consensus around the amendment, then that's good moving forward as well. If you recall, Mr. Chair, the original motion that the NDP brought forward and the original motion that Mr. Poilievre brought forward both were adopted with the support of members from all four parties on the committee, and that kind of collaboration is important.

• (1740)

**The Chair:** Okay. We will go now to Mr. Fragiskatos. Do you want in as well, Mr. Ste-Marie? I didn't see your hand there. Do you want in? No? Okay.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Mr. Chair, I have no problem with what Mr. Fraser has suggested to the committee. It certainly will give a bit more work to the subcommittee. I can say that because I sit on the subcommittee, Mr. Chair. Mr. Julian's there, and Mr. Poilievre's there.

Your suggestion about a Friday meeting is a good one. It gets us past this original problem with the word “exhaustive”. I legitimately believe that would have stood in the way of the committee's carrying out important work on matters relating to COVID-19. This motion allows for further analysis of the WE Charity issue, but in a way that is not prohibitive of the committee's wider mandate, which is to examine economic matters relating to cabinet.

I'm very much in favour of what's been proposed.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Ms. Koutrakis is next.

**Ms. Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm in favour of this proposal as well. I think it's an efficient way to work this through and get to what my colleague Mr. Poilievre recommended in his motion. I think it's an efficient way. It meets the objective.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. McLeod.

I was going to ask if we have consensus here to go ahead with the proposed amendment. We can vote on it if—

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I think if we can just make it a friendly amendment I'm fine with that.

**The Chair:** Okay. Mr. McLeod, did you want to speak?

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** Yes, Mr. Chair. I think Pierre just cancelled my reason to speak—

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Michael McLeod:** —but I wanted to make a couple of points.

First of all, I think some of this discussion that happened today maybe should have been handled by the subcommittee. Maybe we could have had a bit more organized strategy going forward.

I was wanting to suggest and I planned to suggest that we remove the “exhaustive list of witnesses” from the motion. We have the Prime Minister coming in front of the committee. We have the government operations committee studying this, and the ethics committee is also doing it.

Many people have said this, but we are in the middle of a pandemic. Having unlimited meetings, just going on and on for the sake of going on and on, I think, is going to become repetitive. If there's more information people want to bring to the surface or try to bring clarity on, I think that's fine. In the meantime, I'm still very concerned that we don't have a program in place for supporting young people. That, for me, is very important. I'm hoping that is something we'll be able to focus on too.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Do I see any disagreement? Mr. Poilievre has seen this as a friendly amendment. We don't need to vote on it if everybody's in favour of what Mr. Fraser and Mr. Poilievre together have proposed.

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Okay. I see agreement on that.

We will call a subcommittee meeting, if it can be arranged, for Friday, to give time to the clerk to get her work done as well.

Is that it?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I have another motion, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Just before we move to your motion, go ahead, Madam Clerk..

**The Clerk:** Before we move on, I just want to make sure we have agreement, then, on Monsieur Poilievre's motion as amended, without a recorded vote.

**The Chair:** Yes. We are all agreed.

Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

• (1745)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Okay. This motion should be less controversial.

It reads, “That all witnesses who have appeared and will appear release all written communications (texts, emails, messenger service app and any other means of communication) that they have had since March 1, 2020, with Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger and anyone else with the WE Charity or any organization of which Craig and/or Marc Kielburger hold ownership, management or directorship positions.”

**The Chair:** Okay. You're going to have to read it another time.

One of the difficulties with virtual meetings is that we don't have the writing in front of us.

Read it fairly slowly, if you could, Mr. Poilievre.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Sure.

I'll just tell my staff to email this motion to the clerk so that the clerk will have it in writing.

It reads as follows: “That all witnesses who have appeared and will appear release all written communications (texts, emails, messenger service app and any other means of communication) that they have had since March 1, 2020, with Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger and anyone else with the WE Charity or any organization of which Craig and/or Marc Kielburger hold ownership, management or directorship positions.”

**The Chair:** Okay. It's up for discussion. Do I see any hands?

I see Mr. Fraser, Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Julian and then Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Cooper, was your hand up too? Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Fraser.

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of concerns, and there are a couple of pieces of information that I think I'm going to want. Again, not having these things in writing in advance does make it challenging to deal with them on the fly.

First, before I got into politics, I was in litigation. I think Mr. Morantz is a fellow lawyer, and Mr. Cooper is as well. I practised out west, mostly. I probably would have bumped into Mr. Cooper had I stayed a little longer and both of us had never chosen this profession.

One thing I always found immensely frustrating was when there would be an exercise to essentially conduct a fishing expedition rather than have a targeted and reasonable approach to get information that was likely to add value to the matters at hand. I can't assess on a moment's notice which of the two approaches this motion constitutes. I wouldn't mind having time to conduct that analytical exercise on my own.

Madam Clerk, I'm wondering if you could point to the language that was used in the earlier motion for the production of documents so that it's not simply a duplicative effort to get at more information for the sake of simply having the exercise drag on. If there's more information that needs to come out with respect to the matters at hand, then I don't have a problem having that information form part of this committee's assessment and analysis. However, I do want to avoid what appears to be a continued effort to just throw more at the wall, over and over and over, in an exhaustive way—not to double down on that word yet again.

If you do have access, Madam Clerk, I'd be curious to see the previously adopted document production motion that we supported and that was passed by this committee.

**The Clerk:** Yes. I have it front of me. I can read it out. It was adopted on July 7.

It says, "That the committee order that any contracts concluded with WE Charity and Me to We, all briefing notes, memos and emails from senior officials, including the contribution agreement between the government and the organization, prepared for or sent to any minister regarding the design and creation of the Canada student service grant, as well as any written correspondence and records of other correspondence with WE Charity and Me to We from March 2020 be provided to the committee no later than August 8, 2020".

• (1750)

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Just so that I can contrast the two, as I'm somebody who's always learned better with paper in front of me, one thing I'm trying to discern is the difference between the new motion....

Pierre, maybe you can answer this, unless the clerk has the language right there. Are we dealing with things like just private communications, or is this stuff that touches on the Canada student service grant? It seems a bit odd.

There's another concern that I have. Although I wasn't present for this particular testimony, I believe we had a journalist appear before the committee as well. I have some questions around that in its own right, but I'd be curious to know whether you'd be looking for things from journalistic sources and the like. I think there might be more difficulty here than meets the eye at first blush.

I'm wondering whether the clerk or Pierre would care to shed a bit of light on that. That's something that I'd need to sort out before I could have an informed vote on this particular motion, which strikes me as a bit much, but I'm willing to listen.

**The Chair:** I'll go back to Mr. Poilievre on that question, and then go to Ms. Dzerowicz.

Do you want to answer that question, Mr. Poilievre? What's it related to in terms of individual privacy concerns as well?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** It's related to the origin of the entire Canada student service grant. That's really one of the essential mysteries of this entire saga—where did this strange and exotic program come from, given that we already have a Canada summer jobs program that could very easily have funded the creation of additional positions for students at charities and non-profits across the

country? What on God's green earth would have compelled the government to completely duplicate that existing program and then farm it out to a third party that just happened to have paid the Prime Minister's family 300 grand and happened to have taken the finance minister on a \$41,000 vacation?

The government continues to imply, without saying it, that it was the public service that came up with this idea. They imply it by saying that the final recommendation came from the public service. I have no doubt that the government is going to be able to produce some document somewhere that shows that after weeks and weeks of insisting by political staffers and ministers, somebody in the bureaucracy was forced to put their name on a so-called "recommendation" to create this strange program and direct it to this particular embattled organization. We need to know how this all came about and what conversations led to its genesis.

The reason I'm not circumscribing the kinds of communications to mention the Canada student service grant is that we've seen how Jesuitical the government can be. For example, we had the Minister of Diversity come before this committee and say that she did not discuss the Canada student service grant with WE at any point ever. We all left thinking that she had not been in contact with the group. Well, we learned a day or two later in a news report that she had spoken with the group and that she spoke with Mr. Kielburger directly, but they didn't talk about something that at that time was called the "Canada student service grant". The words "Canada student service grant" were not used in that particular order, and therefore she thought, cleverly, that she could say she had never discussed that issue with them.

This grant experienced a very slow development of its branding, over many weeks. It is entirely possible that there will be all kinds of communications that led to its creation that don't mention the grant itself. It would not be appropriate simply to limit the committee's request to communications in which the program entitled "Canada student service grant" would be mentioned. Rather, it should be limited by time. I'm not interested in seeing every text message that Craig Kielburger has had with every minister going back a decade. At this critical period during which this program went from unthinkable to imagined to supported to named to funded to retroactively granted, that chronology needs to become known. That's why I put forward this motion to make it known.

Mr. Fraser is concerned that journalistic communications might get caught up in this. I would be prepared to say, "...that all government witnesses, including exempt staff". That would deal with his concern. It would just be a friendly amendment, right after the word "all" and before the word "witnesses", saying "that all government witnesses, including exempt staff, who have appeared or will appear release all written communications (texts...)", and so on and so forth.

• (1755)

**The Chair:** Okay.

I have Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Julian, and Mr. Fragiskatos.

I have to ask the clerk a question.

Where it says, “all witnesses who have appeared or will appear before the committee—

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Yes. It should read “or will”.

**The Chair:** “Or will” means it’s retroactive. I’ll have to ask the clerk for advice on this.

Is that motion in order in terms of going retroactively?

I’ll give the clerk a little time to think about it, because witnesses have appeared in good faith, and now we’re going to retroactively go back and say, “Look, you have to provide all your correspondence.” That might, to my mind, get into privacy issues.

Ms. Dzerowicz is next, and then Mr. Julian.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to say that the motion that we are currently functioning under, the original finance motion, says that as part of our study on COVID-19, we will hold hearings in July 2020, for no less than four meetings, for a duration of three hours each, to examine how much the government spent in awarding the \$912 million, sole-source contract to WE Charity and how the outsourcing of the Canada student service grant to WE Charity proceeded as far as it did, and that the committee will produce a report of its findings to be tabled in the House of Commons.:

Then there was a list of witnesses.

That was our mandate, but now it’s starting to feel, with this additional motion—I’m like Mr. Fraser, and I need to see it in front of me to really absorb it—as though it’s an investigation into the Kielburgers or an investigation into the WE foundation. I feel as though we’re now starting to get away from what we were mandated to do, which is to examine how much money we spent on this, whether there was financial mismanagement, and how we reached this decision. In other words, was there any funny business in how we actually reached this decision?

There is a ton of data coming our way, and I want to thank the clerk so much for reading that slowly and very accurately. Thank you for that.

I’d also like to remind everybody that every single witness from whom we have asked for additional information has indicated absolutely that they would forward the information, so I’m starting to feel a little bit uncomfortable about what exactly we are asking for at this point.

I also want to respond to Mr. Poilievre’s statement that we are implying that there was no involvement by the Prime Minister or by any of the ministers in directing our civil servants to actually select WE.

What I’d like to put on the record is that it’s actually our public service that has clearly articulated that it was they who actually suggested and put forward WE Charity as the recommendation and the selection to deliver the CSSG program, based on the limited amount of time they had to come up with a group to be able to deliver it. We had that confirmed by our Clerk of the Privy Council, Ian Shugart. We have also had that confirmed by Gina Wilson, our senior associate deputy minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth, and it was stated by our senior assistant deputy minister of the skills

and employment branch, Rachel Wernick. There is zero evidence of anything to the contrary that we have heard so far, any evidence that any minister, any prime minister, or anybody within our cabinet might have directed any public servant to actually select only WE Charity as the charity to deliver the Canada student service grant.

Quite honestly, Mr. Chair, I am not understanding the value of this additional information. Maybe I do not have an issue. Maybe I need to look at the statement of what is being proposed, but it just feels as though we’re starting to move into something more personal, away from what our original intention was before this committee in terms of investigating the financial spending on this contribution agreement as well as how the decision to select WE Charity to deliver the Canada student service grant actually transpired.

Those are my comments for the moment, Mr. Chair.

• (1800)

**The Chair:** Okay.

I’m adding Mr. Morantz to the list, so it will be Mr. Julian, Mr. Fragiskatos and Mr. Morantz.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think I agree with the principle of the motion. The principle is basically extending the motion that we adopted on July 7.

On July 7 we specifically referred to memos, emails and briefing notes from WE Charity and ME to WE. Subsequent to that, the revelations over the last three weeks really should allow us to refine how we’re approaching this. First, we found out that the WE submission occurred the very same day that the Prime Minister announced the program. It is unlikely that we’ll find briefing notes around this when what essentially happened was a simultaneous announcement of a program and a submission to run the program.

Second, we found out that it was not a contract signed with WE but rather with the WE Charity Foundation. The liability issues, of course, that we’ve been hearing about over the last few days are substantial because of the fact that it was signed with a different entity. Of course, the issue of Canada summer jobs continues to be relevant. There was a cutback in the number of positions offered at the time of a pandemic, when we really needed to see the number of student positions expanded. Many businesses and many organizations suffered, here in my neck of the woods in New Westminster—Burnaby and right across the country.

I think the intent is a very good one, but I think there need to be a number of changes. I understand having text and emails and messages, because we’re finding out that it happened simultaneously. It’s unlikely to be the memos, emails and briefing notes that we talked about originally. I believe the complexity of the number of organizations around WE and for-profit businesses means that we need to certainly talk about organizations or for-profit businesses that are connected with the WE family. As we’ve heard, there are about a dozen different entities. These weren’t covered in the original motion that I brought forward for July 7.

I think there's a good intent here. I'm not convinced that we're going to be able to come to a consensus for this meeting, but we do have many opportunities now that we've expanded the study. The steering committee is meeting on Friday. I think there's an opportunity to refine and put forward a motion like this that actually gets us to the heart of many of the questions that have come up since the original request for documents was made three weeks ago. The ground is different now. We've found out many things that we didn't know on July 7. Expanding it beyond just the ME to WE and the WE Charity is important, including the for-profit businesses connected with the family.

Second, there's ensuring that we have text messages that might well go beyond the standard process. There's clearly not a standard process here at all. Bureaucrats weren't even aware of the details, and you had a submission coming the same day as the Prime Minister making his announcement.

I think there's something we can work on. Perhaps committee members want to refine it now, but I also think we have an opportunity in the next few days to come back to this issue, refine it, and adopt the motion that I think folks would be prepared to support. I would be offering some amendments today, but I'm not sure it's necessary to adopt it today. It could be something that we adopt over the next few days.

• (1805)

**The Chair:** Mr. Poilievre is next.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I think both Mr. Fraser and Mr. Julian raised some good points. This was a very complicated motion to write, precisely because of the octopus-like nature of the WE organization. All of the numbered companies, the foundations and the related entities that are part of it made it very complicated to write a motion that would capture everything we were looking for.

I would invite Mr. Julian, and anyone else who wants to, to work with me over the next day. Perhaps at the end of the testimony from the Kielburgers tomorrow, when they leave the stage, we could revisit the motion and have an opportunity to put forward something with wording that's fine-tuned to the liking of committee members.

That will save us the time of thrashing it out right now. We could just put it aside and deal with it tomorrow.

**The Chair:** If you could withdraw the motion, then, and bring it forward at a later date, I was going to suggest....

I mean, I don't want to rule it out of order—at least, not as yet—but I do think that the implications of the way the motion is currently worded are very broad. It may get into some privacy issues. It may put a chill on witnesses wanting to come before committee if we retroactively ask them to provide any of the correspondence, etc. I'd like to see it in writing, and maybe run it by the law clerk, for that matter, to make sure we're on fair ground, if I can put it that way.

Are you pulling it back, Mr. Poilievre, and we'll think about it and bring it forward with maybe a little more clarity to it? Is that what I'm hearing?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Yes, that's fine.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** I have another motion, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We are beyond our two hours, but I don't think we automatically adjourn. Go ahead.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** It is with regard to the Prime Minister's appearance, and that of Ms. Telford.

Before I begin my motion, can I seek clarification that Mr. Trudeau and Madam Telford have agreed to appear separately? Is that the status right now?

**The Chair:** That is the status right now. On Thursday the Prime Minister will appear from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m., and Ms. Telford will appear from 4:15 p.m. to 5:15 p.m.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Okay.

I will put forward the following motion:

That the Prime Minister appear for no less than three hours alone as a witness, on his own panel; that Katie Telford appear for no less than two hours, alone as a witness, on her own panel; and that the two appear separately.

The rationale is that this is a large and complicated file. This is a case in which the Prime Minister and his family are personally implicated. Unlike previous controversies, like the ones Mr. Fraser mentioned about other governments and other prime ministers, this was a case of the Prime Minister's family personally benefiting from \$300,000 of highly unusual payments. Then the Prime Minister decided to attempt to direct a massive half-billion-dollar program to the same organization that had paid his family. If the Prime Minister comes and gives a lengthy opening remark, there won't be much time left for intervention.

Now, I will point out that if the Prime Minister does not provide us with more than an hour right now, there is a strong likelihood that the House of Commons would pass a motion in September to recall him, in which case he would have to testify in person again, perhaps at the ethics committee, depending on what the House says. A majority of opposition members do have that authority and will likely exercise it. In the pragmatic interests of the Prime Minister, I would suggest he simply come now and give comprehensive and complete testimony. Rather than trying to get in and get out and run out the back door before anyone catches him, he maybe would be better suited to just come and give a full testimony now and then avoid having to do it over. Do it once and do it right.

• (1810)

**The Chair:** The motion is on the floor.

Did I see your hand, Mr. Fraser?

**Mr. Sean Fraser:** Yes. Thanks, Chair.

With respect, a bit of cognitive dissonance has gone on with respect to the treatment of various different witnesses and the willingness to accommodate their schedules. I only mean to suggest that it's unique for a Prime Minister to be willing to come and testify at all. I know there was some concern raised that either the Kielburgers or Mr. Li may or may not have other things on the go with respect to being present for testimony at a parliamentary committee.

I can tell you from personal experience over the past few months that the Prime Minister is working specifically to help rebuild the Canadian economy right now. If we want to invite him for whatever period, that's up to the will of the committee, of course. I would be quite pleased that he's making himself available at all, quite frankly, in deep contrast to the practice of Prime Minister Harper when he was given the opportunity.

Of course, this is up to the will of the committee, but my strong preference is to invite the Prime Minister, as we have. He has now accepted it. I'm quite satisfied with the fact that he's made himself available, which is quite unique for parliamentary committees, to say the least.

**The Chair:** Okay. Is there anybody else?

I have to ask the clerk a question. It's one of the difficulties of not having the clerk beside me.

Madam Clerk, I've had some emails saying that we need the unanimous consent of the committee to continue. I would ask you for some advice there.

**The Clerk:** You can always adjourn a meeting, Mr. Chair. That's at your discretion. If you choose to continue, then typically, if

there's no objection, it's implied consent, so it's kind of up to the committee to decide.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** I object.

**The Chair:** A number of people are objecting to the meeting continuing, so I will adjourn the....

Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, maybe I misheard the clerk, but I thought she said that you could attempt to adjourn the meeting unless someone objected, and I would object to your doing so.

**The Chair:** Which way is it, Madam Clerk? Is it that if I adjourn the meeting and there's an objection, it can't be adjourned, or if I continue the meeting and there's an objection...?

We have you on the spot, Madam Clerk, rather than me.

**The Clerk:** We would continue unless there was an objection. If Ms. Dzerowicz objected, then we would adjourn.

**The Chair:** Okay.

The meeting is adjourned.

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