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Chair: Mr. David Sweet



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC)): Good morning, colleagues.

I'm live here at 035-B but still don't have a gavel, so you'll have to consider my voice as gavelling our meeting in.

We'll continue with the debate at hand on the motion that was before us when we adjourned the other day. I have an electronic list and a live list of speakers.

Mr. Angus is joining me here in this room, and I see that hands are up, so, Mr. Barrett, you go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thanks very much, Chair.

We find ourselves back here meeting on my motion of two weeks ago.

Can you hear me, Chair?

The Chair: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Barrett. Sorry, we just didn't have audio in the room, and now we do.

Mr. Michael Barrett: We're almost 14 hours into this debate, and we've heard from members around the table again and again. This morning, there were new documents released by the WE organization, and I unfortunately didn't have time to review them. I had announced yesterday that I would be speaking at 9:15 this morning, and at 9:15 those documents were released. I haven't had an opportunity to review them, as I was engaged at that time, though I did receive questions on them during that press conference.

Interestingly, though I haven't made it all the way through them, one of the points that's been highlighted in these documents is that the WE organization identifies Ms. Margaret Trudeau as having spoken at 28 events and being paid for attending 27 events. This contradicts a previous release of theirs in July when they stated that Ms. Margaret Trudeau had been paid for 28 events. This adds more urgency for us to see the documents that were previously ordered by this committee and that we're looking to order again today. The challenge that we've had as a committee, and as parliamentarians who have seen multiple committees initiate hearings on this—including the government operations, official languages and finance committees, as well as our committee—is that we've received multiple answers that differ in the facts that have been provided.

Today's release from the WE organization highlights that again. The information that's requested in these documents would expose the named individuals to no risk or breach of their privacy, and is

imperative. Parliamentarians have undertaken inquiries to determine if there is.... We've now been told that half a million dollars in fees were paid to members of the Trudeau family, versus being told initially that no were fees were paid to members of the Trudeau family. That initial contradiction was a very important one. Then that organization received a half a billion dollar contribution agreement to administer, for the government...and it would have benefited to the tune of tens of millions of dollars as an organization for doing so. The proposal they presented to the government was created by them, and we've heard that it's only this organization, the WE organization, that could administer it. Well, they wrote it: of course they were the only ones who could administer it.

The proposal to cabinet included pictures of these very people whom we've named in our motion today. What does the relationship between the Prime Minister's family members and the WE organization, which was paying them huge sums of money, have to do with the awarding of this contribution agreement? Well, it's important that we get all of the details, the full details. We need to verify the information that's been presented. Was there a conflict of interest? Was there pressure? Was there interference? These are the questions that we need to answer. After nearly 13 hours of filibustering at this committee by the Liberal members, it's important to note that the need for the information hasn't changed. In fact, the release of documents this morning by the WE organization only adds to the need for clarity, the need for verification of the sums, the dates and the figures that have been offered to us to this point.

It's true that we're in the midst of a global pandemic and that the lives and the livelihood of Canadians can be impacted and truly improved by the actions that members of Parliament take, but when we have parliamentary committees.... It's not just the finance committee that's dealing with a question of privilege or the illegal redaction of documents, and it's not just this committee, which previously ordered these documents to committee and was stopped a day short by Parliament's being prorogued.

• (1110)

We're also seeing at other parliamentary committees government members filibustering and blocking and preventing members from doing their work, even on COVID-related matters. It's imperative that we get this information so that we can make a determination on the scope of further work that this committee needs to do. It was at the first meeting of this committee that this motion was raised, and we're in our fourth meeting, nearly 14 hours in, and members of the Liberal Party are unwilling to vote on the motion. I would invite members, all members, to consider that we have an opportunity to put forward business that can address the needs and concerns of Canadians, while concurrently reviewing the information as it relates to the WE scandal. We can do that starting this morning.

Mr. Chair, I would ask you if you could poll the committee to see if there is consensus for us to take a vote.

I see Liberal members shaking their heads already, so the filibuster will continue, Mr. Chair, but I think that with the new documents we've seen this morning, it's very clear that we as members have to review these documents.

Chair, I, along with members of the official opposition, remain ready to vote before we crest the 14th hour of this filibuster.

• (1115)

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

Colleagues, you can't see Mr. Angus on the screen because he is live with me here, but I just want to give you what I have, which is kind of a hybrid list here. Right now I have Ms. Shanahan, Mr. Warkentin, Mr. Dong, Mr. Angus, Mr. Sorbara, Madam Gaudreau, Mr. Fergus, and Ms. Lattanzio. That's the order in which the hands came up on screen or, here, live.

We'll now go to Madame Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you as always for clarifying the speakers list for us; that's very helpful.

I do want to revisit some of the points that were raised at our last meeting concerning the redaction process, the privacy process, and the importance of respecting the privacy of individuals. I would also like to address the documents that were just released this morning, which my colleague Mr. Barrett just spoke to.

I would like to read this out for the benefit of the committee members and for anyone who is watching here. Bear with me because age dictates that the glasses come on and the glasses come off.

The letter that was released this morning by the government House leader and was addressed to the other House leaders—Mr. Deltell, Mr. Therrien, and Mr. Julian—reads as follows:

Dear Colleagues,

When Parliament was recalled last month, our government presented a strong plan to support Canadians during this global pandemic. Our main focus has been, and continues to be, how to best help and protect Canadians through these moments. The last few months demonstrated what Parliament can achieve for Canadians when Parliamentarians work together. In that spirit, I was glad to see

that we received your unanimous support for our plan to help Canadians who lost their jobs due to COVID-19.

We recognize the financial impact of doing what needs to be done, all while knowing that doing less would end up costing more. That is why I agree that a Special House of Commons Committee, dedicated to studying COVID-19 related investments, should be established. Adopting the reasonable motion I shared with you previously will achieve this. This Special Committee will help ensure that other Standing Committees can do their work and focus on the issue that truly matters: COVID-19. For your convenience, I am also attaching our proposal to this letter.

Unfortunately, the motion for a Special Committee put forward by the Leader of the Official Opposition would not accomplish this. Rather than focusing on how the government and Parliament can work together to best support Canadians, Mr. O'Toole put forward a blatantly partisan proposal. Its main objective is to paralyze the government at a time when the entire Government of Canada is focused on keeping Canadians safe and healthy. This proposal, were it to pass, would raise serious questions about whether the House of Commons continues to have confidence in this government.

Similarly, Opposition MPs have claimed that their privileges were breached by the hard-working and non-partisan public service, following certain redactions they made to the more than 5,000 pages provided to the House of Commons Finance Committee in August. In fact, so much information was provided that the Conservative Party launched a website to ask for the public's help to review the exhaustive amount of information. So as to move forward, Liberal Members have offered to have these public servants appear at committee and explain the reasons behind the redactions that were made. Thus far, you have refused this reasonable step, choosing to forego due process.

• (1120)

As explained by the Clerk of the Privy Council and Deputy Ministers in their letters to the committee, redactions were made to protect Cabinet Confidence, following the exact directive of the motion adopted at committee. Though these letters were provided to committee members, Opposition Members seem intent on ignoring them, and so I am sharing another copy of the letters with you. They also redacted items that were completely irrelevant to the Canada Student Service Grant program, as it was not information requested by the committee. Finally, the public service respected their statutory obligations throughout this process. However, rather than permitting public servants to explain this, you have already decided that they are in contempt of the committee for not providing information that the committee never requested. That is why our motion will also give a forum for the public service to further explain the reasons for their redactions. If, after hearing from public servants and the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons, the committee remains unsatisfied, the government has made clear it is open to working with the committee to address its concerns.

Furthermore, the House of Commons Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics Committee is debating whether to force private citizens to provide personal financial information to the committee. I believe that the House of Commons would be severely abusing its authority in doing so. No Canadian should have to fear that Parliamentarians may arbitrarily force them to divulge their personal financial information, even more so when they did nothing wrong.

As a demonstration of transparency, the Prime Minister has asked that I proactively share exhaustive information with you about events organized through Speakers' Spotlight, for which the Prime Minister was a guest speaker. Speakers' Spotlight has confirmed the accuracy of the events and fees listed. You will also find this information accompanying this letter. I can also confirm to you, as previously disclosed, the only payment to Ms. Grégoire Trudeau regarding WE Charity and any of its affiliates was the February 2012 event for \$1,500. However, we will continue to strongly oppose attempts by committees or the House of Commons to target extended family members of Parliamentarians who are not involved in political life.

Finally, in regards to the numerous forthcoming motions for the production of documents at different committees, the government will do all that it can to provide the information requested by Parliamentarians. In normal times, calling for the vast production of documents across multiple departments places a significant strain on public servants who must physically go to the office to conduct such searches. Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I fear that such sweeping document production motions with extremely tight timelines put forward by Conservative MPs are intentionally designed to be impossible to complete. In the midst of rising cases of COVID-19 in the National Capital Region, the government will not put at risk the health and safety of hundreds, if not thousands, of hard-working public servants. We want them to remain focused on delivering supports for Canadians, as should all Parliamentarians.

I sincerely hope we will continue to be able to work together constructively for Canadians. We believe we have put forward an extremely reasonable proposal that will permit Parliamentarians to be focused on the issue that should be occupying most, if not all of our attention: the health and safety of Canadians during this global pandemic.

• (1125)

It's signed, "Sincerely, Hon. Pablo Rodriguez...Leader of the Government in the House of Commons".

The appendix to this document also includes a list of speaking events that the Prime Minister spoke at when he was not the Prime Minister but, first, a private citizen, and then a member of Parliament, such as events at the University of British Columbia and the Toronto District School Board. I'm naming just a few of them to give a flavour of the types of organizations that, yes, wanted to have a keynote speaker of the reputation of Justin Trudeau at their event.

I challenge my Conservative colleagues to continue in this vein of implying that these charitable organizations, non-profit organizations and esteemed institutions were somehow seeking to influence someone whom they thought might be in a position to help them. We're looking at groups such as the Nova Scotia Nature Trust, the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers, the Ontario Hospital Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association and Carleton University. Moreover, there were groups such as the London Convention Centre, Reading for the Love of It—that's a wonderful title for a group—Eventful Times, Blessed Events, the London Interfaith Counselling Centre, the Municipal Finance Officers' Association, York University, and we have a number of universities on the list. We can continue. Furthermore, there was the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, Charity of Hope, the Regional Municipality of Halton, Humber College, the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, Kincardine District Secondary School, Queen's University, Literacy for Life, the Grace Foundation, and I could go on.

I do find it very forthcoming on the part of our Prime Minister and our government House leader to have put forward this information—again, in the interest of all transparency.

I want to return now to the points that were brought up at our last meeting regarding the redaction process, why it is so important that this be done by non-partisan, professional civil servants and the principles they serve in doing so—

• (1130)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Sorry, I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Excuse me, Madame Shanahan. We have a point of order by Mr. Angus.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: The issue of the redaction of documents has nothing to do with our committee. If the member wants to speak to the finance committee, she can go to the finance committee. We're talking about a different set of documents. Maybe the member is getting confused, but I think it's not good for the public record to have these kinds of gross errors. We're talking about the Speakers' Spotlight documents, and we should stay focused on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Continue, Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair. I appreciate the comments by my experienced colleague, but he did raise at our last meeting the issue of the 5,000 documents and the redaction process. We did speak about them then and I want to return to that, because it is a principle where we need to have this balance between transparency but also for protection. I take my learned colleague's good point, and maybe we'll return to it at another time.

I cede the floor. Thank you, Chair.

I do need to table the documents. Do I email them to the clerk?

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead and email them to the clerk. That would be great.

I want to review the speakers list again.

Madame Lattanzio, you were on as the last speaker, just after Mr. Fergus, and I see that your name has now been removed. Did you remove your name or did you wish to stay on the list?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to stay on.

I would like to point out that I've been logged off at least two times during this meeting. I want the clerk to be made aware of the situation. I'm trying my darndest to stay on, but I shall raise my hand again.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay. That's why we have a manual list as well as an electronic one. We'll continue trying to learn how to navigate through this as we do these hybrid meetings.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope you can hear me.

The Chair: Yes, we can hear you fine.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Very good.

We do know that the Prime Minister does not want these documents to be released. Everything the Prime Minister has done since there was any indication these documents could be released has been to stop the documents from coming forward and to shut down the investigation into what is now known as the "WE scandal".

We know these documents had been approved by this committee. They had been called for by this committee, and just hours before they were due to be brought forward to this committee, the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament, ending not only the session of Parliament but also the investigation and the release of these documents, basically setting all things the committee had done aside and cancelling them until such time as committees would be reconstituted. Of course, at the time he said it was not to kill the investigation and that it was in fact to do some other things. It was to reset the parliamentary calendar.

We have since learned that the Prime Minister had no new ideas. Every piece of legislation he had intended to move forward with before the prorogation he has continued with, so there is no argument that it was anything other than to stop the investigation into himself and his involvement with the WE organization and the awarding of the money. Of course, these documents could prove that, but the Prime Minister did the unprecedented thing of shutting down Parliament so that he could end the investigation and the release of these documents.

Subsequently the Liberal Party has been engaged in an unprecedented filibuster at this committee to ensure that these documents are not called for again. We are now into the 14th or 15th hour of debate on whether or not these documents should be brought forward. Obviously, the committee made the decision in the past that these should come forward, and the Liberals are now trying to have a do-over in a situation where, if they got their way, these documents would never see the light of day.

It is interesting that when the Prime Minister was not yet the Prime Minister but was promising to change the way things work in Ottawa, he said his government would be open by default, that in any and every situation it would provide openness, transparency and accountability to ensure that Canadians would see and render their judgment on what the government was doing, but this government has turned into the most secretive and dismissive government of all time. It is interesting that Liberal MPs suggest that opposition MPs are playing politics simply by demanding what the Prime Minister promised before he was the Prime Minister.

It is unconscionable that Liberal MPs continue to dismiss opposition MPs. We are in a minority Parliament. More Canadians voted for opposition MPs than for Liberal MPs, and the Liberal MPs think they can demand that opposition MPs follow their lead and help limit access to these documents. However, what they seem to forget is that I speak not only for myself, and my colleagues speak not only for themselves, but also that we speak on behalf of our constituents.

A majority of Canadians sent opposition MPs to this Parliament to hold this government to account because they had questions about this government. They didn't trust this government. They wanted accountability and a measure of assurance that when Canadians needed to see what was happening behind the curtain, they would have access to that through their members of Parliament, and these Liberal MPs continue to dismiss opposition MPs as if they were simply a nuisance that should be done away with and ignored.

For my colleagues on the Liberal side, it is not only we who have a responsibility to hold this government to account; you do too.

Through the chair to my Liberal colleagues, you are not members of cabinet. You are not the Prime Minister. You have a responsibility to hold your government to account in the same way that we have a responsibility to hold this government to account.

The Prime Minister before he became the Prime Minister said that committees would be independent. As a matter of fact, he went the extra mile to say that parliamentary secretaries would never sit on parliamentary committees, to ensure that the government would dictate to committees what they would and would not do.

● (1135)

The Prime Minister broke that promise. He now allows parliamentary secretaries from the Liberal Party to sit on parliamentary committees. He's already broken that promise, but with the suggestion by Ms. Shanahan today, he has gone a measure further by giving instruction directly from the Liberal House leader to this committee as to how we should conduct our business.

That is a significant distance from the way committees should be operating, which is independent of the government and of Parliament. We are masters of our own destiny. That is the entire foundation by which we can operate to ensure accountability and transparency for Canadians. Today the Liberal Party has gone a significant distance further in eroding accountability and transparency by having the House leader of the Liberal Party of Canada dictating to the ethics committee what we should and should not be doing, having the Prime Minister clearly giving instruction to the Liberal members on this committee as to what they should and should not be doing.

This is unprecedented. There have been suggestions through the years that government MPs were getting direction from their government and from their prime minister's office, but never have I seen a member of the government at a committee, especially an opposition-led accountability committee like the ethics committee, show up with a letter from the Liberal House leader instructing the committee as to how they should engage in their activities. This is unprecedented. I am dumbfounded by this. It's just unbelievable.

They are now telling us, assuring us, that nothing went wrong. The entire Liberal argument is that the Prime Minister promises that having corrected what he originally said, he's now telling the truth—you know, he maybe wasn't telling the truth to begin with, but now he's telling the truth, so just trust the Prime Minister. Well, we can't do that. We've learned that enough times.

The Prime Minister's story always changes. The moment he gets caught, it's always somebody else's fault. We can't take the Prime Minister's word on any of this. The Prime Minister hasn't been transparent. He hasn't been honest. He hasn't been truthful on this and many other things.

Then they say, well, if you can't trust the Prime Minister, trust the WE organization: They have new documents that are different from the last documents; this time it's honest. This time it's true. I wonder if the Liberal members recall that when this whole thing started, the WE organization said they didn't pay, that they'd never paid. We had the chair of the WE organization saying that they'd never paid anybody to speak. Well, all of a sudden she found out that she didn't even know what was going on at the WE organization. She didn't know what deals were being developed behind her back. Still, the Liberal members say to trust the WE organization, whatever that is now—this organization that is now scrambling out of our country because, in the light of day, all of a sudden they don't want to operate in Canada anymore.

I don't think we can trust the WE organization. I don't think we can trust the Prime Minister. I don't think we can trust the Liberal House leader to give instruction to this committee so that we can actually find out what happened. It is left to us, as honourable members representing Canadians, to bring into the light of day what has gone on behind closed doors.

I will quote the words of the guy who is now the Prime Minister. He is clearly a different person from who he was when he was trying to be the Prime Minister. I do think we should be “open by default”. When there's an argument as to whether or not we should have documents, I think we as members of Parliament can be trusted both to protect the privacy of Canadians and to ensure that we do the due diligence that we are sent here to do. If my Liberal colleagues believe that they don't have a job to do in holding their government to account, that they have no responsibility to hold Justin Trudeau to account and have no job to do here, well, they could give up their paycheque or resign their seats and see what Canadians have to say. I think Canadians would send people in their place who would hold this government to account.

Maybe even some Liberal members would do the job of holding their government to account. I've seen that in the past, when even Liberal members, even government members, would hold the government to account.

• (1140)

However, there's been such an erosion, to the extent that we now have members of Parliament who sit on this committee showing up with letters from their Liberal House leader giving instruction as to what we should and should not have access to. That is unprecedented. That is undemocratic. That is not transparent. It's a fundamental failing in our democracy if that's where we are today.

I would suggest that Liberals need to look at themselves in the mirror and find out who sent them to this place and why. Is it just to protect the Prime Minister, or is it to do the good work of protecting the interests of Canadians? I would suggest that the members, upon reflection, would recognize that they have a responsibility to protect the interests of their constituents.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, colleagues. I am just reviewing the list here.

I have right now a different list, again, than I have electronically. I have Mr. Dong, Mr. Angus, Mr. Sorbara, Madam Gaudreau, Mr.

Fergus, and Madam Lattanzio, and then I also have Mr. Kusmierczyk, who I guess is going to be subbing in.

Do you intend to speak first, Mr. Sorbara?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: I have to exit now. I just want to wish everybody a good afternoon. I have to bring my daughter and wife down to SickKids. My daughter is having her appendix removed later on today. I will be with my family today, but I want to wish everyone a wonderful Monday.

I hope in the spirit of collaboration that the committee continues to work for the good of all Canadians and residents we represent. I want to wish you a good rest of the day.

I apologize. It's unfortunate that I can't be here with you folks as we continue this discussion that is very important for Canadians. I wish everyone a great afternoon. I hope not to see everyone this evening once I sign back on. Let's hope, but nonetheless, if need be, I hope to be able to do so later on today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that time.

• (1145)

The Chair: I wish all the best for your daughter, and I'm certain I speak for everybody here on this committee. There is no need to apologize. You need to look after your family.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Do I have the pronunciation right, Mr. Kusmierczyk?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Yes. Excellent, Chair.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk. I have you on the list now as the final speaker, after Ms. Lattanzio. That list may grow. These things do happen.

Mr. Dong, you're next.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I lowered my hand. I will speak at a later opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go to Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am thinking of Mr. Sorbara, who is an excellent member of Parliament, and I have a lot of respect for him and his family—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Gaudreau, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I would like to see my colleague Mr. Angus when he speaks to us. Unfortunately, we don't have the video right now.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Angus is here live, so I don't know if we can get a video feed for him. Let me work on that. I'm certain that's what your concern was.

[*Translation*]

My French is not good, Madam.

[*English*]

but I think that's what I got.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We're going to see if we can get Mr. Angus on the screen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angus, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

I've lost count of how many hours we've been on this filibuster, and I'm very frustrated because we have work to do on this committee, and it's work that is specific to ethics. I am very concerned when I get a letter from the Liberal House leader's office telling our committee what we will and won't do. I think this is very unfortunate.

My focus in being here and pushing for this investigation was to find out about political interference and political connections that made the decision to award that enormous amount of money to the WE group, money that the Prime Minister had said would be close to a billion dollars for university students, but not a dime of that money ever went out the door. The university students never got the funds that they needed, so we have an obligation here to find out how those decisions were made.

I find it deeply offensive that the Liberals continue to throw the Public Service of Canada under the bus, blaming them for the redacted documents, saying it was their idea to go forward with this, when the evidence that we've gathered in a very short period of time shows differently. We have only had, I think, two full committee meetings at the ethics committee on the WE scandal, and we need to get to these issues. We need to get to the questions about whether or not the lobbying that was done through WE with their hired government outreach people was legal or illegal lobbying,

and whether or not they were using connections because of their close contacts with senior ministers to get meetings that did not meet the test and standards of transparency of the Lobbying Act. That's what we need to be looking at. I am insisting that we will get there.

I appreciate Madam Shanahan talking about the redacted documents, but the redacted documents that were given to finance that we had a chance to look at deeply contradict the position taken by Madam Chagger, who made a claim that this was brought to her by the public service, that the public service thought up the idea, that she had never had any conversations about this proposal. We know now that the April 17 meeting with Ms. Chagger and Craig Kielburger was a key moment. We need to get clear answers on that, so this work has to get done.

There have been suggestions that the Liberals will work with us on a committee, and I'm hoping they will, but if we have a special pandemic committee that is run my Liberals and they try to shut down our work or try to swamp us, I still reserve the right, as a member of this ethics committee, to continue this investigation that we started, because we have obligations to the Canadian people. If I could be assured that the Liberals will work with us on a credible committee that will actually get answers, I'd be more than willing to transfer some of this work from ethics over to them, but if they're not willing to do that, then I will retain my right as a parliamentarian to continue the work that we've done here.

As for the standoff that we've come to, I think one of the unfortunate things is that there's a lot of machismo in politics. I think the more women we get in politics, the better it will be, but I do find that even with more women in politics, we still end up with a lot of machismo and showdowns that we need to find a solution to. I'm trying to find a solution here.

This morning documents were released, I think because of the pressure from our committee. We know that the WE group has released a number of documents regarding speaker fees and other issues, and we need to look at those documents. At the last minute, the Prime Minister's Office has released documents regarding his speaking fees and Sophie Grégoire's speaking fees, so there is movement on these documents.

The sticking point is that the Liberals say they don't want family members to be involved, and that's the mother and brother. I understand that. I think that whenever we ask for these things, we are crossing a Rubicon in terms of precedent, and it can be very damaging if we establish that precedent. I think these documents are worth looking at because the family was paid by the WE group, but I don't think this is the hill to die on. Whether or not Margaret Trudeau is paid for 27 or 28 appearances does not change the fact, and the fact is that we now know the WE group paid Margaret Trudeau and Sacha Trudeau to participate in events, after the public was told they weren't paid.

● (1150)

What we do know is that whether this was for 27 or 28 events, those are facts. They aren't as relevant to our committee work as getting to the issues of lobbying, of getting access to ministers. That's what I think we need to focus on.

The government has stepped forward and the WE group has stepped forward with some of the documents. We should be able to verify the documents on Madam Grégoire and Mr. Trudeau. To that end, in trying to bring forward a solution here, I would offer a friendly amendment to the Conservative motion. It is that we set aside for the moment the issue of payments to Margaret and Sacha Trudeau.

We can say that we will accept that and we will put that to the side. We will ask for the verification of the speakers documents regarding payments to Mr. Trudeau and Sophie Grégoire Trudeau. If we get agreement on that, then we can move forward with the witness list that we have for this WE study and with what I think is the key issue, particularly for me: the issue of the lobbying that went on in the awarding of this contract.

I would like to bring forward a friendly amendment to my friendly colleagues of all stripes. It is as follows: "That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), an order of committee do issue to Speakers' Spotlight for a copy of all records pertaining to speaking appearances arranged since October 14, 2008, for Justin Trudeau and Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, and that they be provided to the Standing Committee on Access to Information."

If the Liberals want to verify that the Prime Minister's payments are correct, they should be going along with this amendment.

I appeal to my Conservative colleagues. We do need to get this committee rolling and we have some serious issues about this investigation. I am less concerned about Margaret Trudeau being paid 27 or 28 times. This is an attempt to break the logjam, and I'm looking to my colleagues to move forward on this.

The Chair: Mr. Angus has moved an amendment to the motion.

Mr. Angus, do you have that in writing?

Mr. Charlie Angus: It's written as well as I have ever written. The nuns always said my penmanship was a disgrace, so I will leave it to our very intelligent clerk to see if she can make sense of it.

The Chair: Just for clarification for the members on the committee, is it substantially the same, other than removing the family members that are—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Colleagues, now we are moving to a debate on the amendment to the motion.

Just give me a moment, colleagues, as we sort out the wording of the amendment.

• (1155)

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, can I ask for it to be read in full once we get the wording finalized?

The Chair: Yes. That's what I'm trying to do to make sure that we have complete clarity.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I think to keep it simple I would just drop the names of Margaret Trudeau and Alexandre Trudeau and leave the rest of it intact.

The Chair: Okay.

Basically, colleagues, the amendment to the motion simply removes Margaret Trudeau and Sacha Trudeau. The rest of it remains the same. We're going to be debating that amendment now.

Mr. Angus, have you completed your time?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes.

The Chair: Now we'll go on to Madame Gaudreau.

Madame Gaudreau, it's your opportunity to debate. We're on the debate of the amendment to the motion.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I will still take the time to make my statement, since there were elements on which I totally agree with my colleagues. This means...

Is there a problem, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: We're working on some translation here, Madam Gaudreau.

You can continue.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Am I speaking slowly enough?

[English]

The Chair: Everybody on the screen has the interpretation. We're just trying to get it here in the room.

[Translation]

You may begin, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: The previous comments referred to the continuum of work that we must do as parliamentarians. I've been thinking about that. There were some very conscientious interventions, and there was talk about the need to move away from partisanship. Beyond all that, I realize that during the summer, a committee looked at the allocation of nearly \$1 billion to shed some light on this. It is not \$202. Having been on the Standing Committee on Finance as well as the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, I can tell you that we have moved forward and we have taken a big step.

The reason I am talking to you about this is that our work has been interrupted for several hours to discuss a request. Perhaps you had fun combing through all this, but I didn't expect us to stop so abruptly at the first experience. However, in my opinion, we cannot deconstruct what was actually a very good start. We were going to find the missing elements. So I don't understand why we are putting so much energy into this. The door is even open for a subamendment. I heard my government colleagues ask how far the definition of family and extended family goes. Whether or not we agree to include our loved ones, there are some things that need to be clarified.

At the moment, we have a motion before us. In any event, whether Mr. Barrett's motion passes or not, I have heard you all agree with the idea of a special committee that would allow us to do our work on all issues, whether it be lobbying, conflict of interest or privacy. I don't have to list them all, you know them all. However, we do have a duty to complete what we were doing up until August 13.

I therefore invite you, no matter how it happens, to stop stretching out the debate and to do your work with dignity, conscientiously. One way or another, I believe we all want to finish what we have just started. In fact, the Standing Committee on Finance has the same problems.

A lot of things were raised, and although there were a lot of very relevant stories and comments, this leads me to believe that if we could pass this amendment, we could continue our work and get to the bottom of what happened. In any case, I repeat, I think we all agree that we should continue to work on our files and finalize everything, while respecting everyone's personal opinion.

With respect to the amendment, I believe Ms. Shanahan asked a question about its scope. When I began my role as a member of Parliament, I understood that my spouse would also come under scrutiny in the event of a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.

• (1200)

I think we could talk for hours. We are likely to reach a consensus, because we have rules to follow, especially when we are at a high level. For my part, I lack elements to make a judgment. We can discuss the details later, and I think that should be done in a special committee.

Dear colleagues, I really want to talk to you, but I am a person who works conscientiously and who thinks about her fellow citizens every day. Since this summer, there has been a lot of pressure. I am asked if we can do everything at the same time. The answer is yes, but we spend hours going around in circles.

So I'm calling on you. I am in favour of the amendment, and I would like the next speakers to speak specifically on the amendment so that we can proceed to the vote, because I am sure that you, like me, have another beautiful and great day's work to do.

[*English*]

The Chair: Just to be clear, Madame Gaudreau, we are now on the amendment. It's not obvious to me as the chair if you are speaking for the amendment. Are you in support of the amendment? Yes.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

I want to review the speakers list once more. It's okay, Madam Shanahan; I'm on it.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, you were after Madam Lattanzio and your name dropped off again. Did you move down the list purposely, or did you want to remain on the list where you were? Did you somehow get cut off by your electronic connection?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I thought we were going to be renewing the list after the amendment was put forward. I just wanted to lower my hand and then re-raise it again. I'm fine with wherever you place me on that list.

• (1205)

The Chair: All right. I will put you back right after Madame Lattanzio, because that's where you were. There's no need to renew it. We just move into different debate in that regard.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: It will be Mr. Fergus, Madam Lattanzio, Mr. Kusmierczyk, Madam Shanahan, Monsieur Gourde and then Mr. Dong.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I really do appreciate your once again ably chairing our meetings.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to speak in favour of this amendment. Mr. Angus' proposal has a lot of merit for several reasons. While I still don't like the idea of MPs investigating other MPs, at least Mr. Angus' amendment limits it to those who are subject to the Conflict of Interest Act. I congratulate him because he has found an elegant way to calm things down and let our committee move on to much more important matters.

If anything unites Mr. Angus, Ms. Gaudreau and myself, and other members of the committee, I am sure it is the desire to address the committee's priority, which was established long before this situation. It is to conduct a study on facial recognition to ensure that Canada will have legislation or regulations to address this issue. This is a high priority for me. We don't have a lot of time left to find that framework, and it's important that we think about it. Mr. Angus may be acting a little against his will, but I still think it's the right thing to do. I congratulate him for finding this solution.

I think the Prime Minister and Ms. Grégoire Trudeau, through Mr. Rodriguez, have shown that they had nothing to hide. They revealed all their commitments as speakers long before Mr. Trudeau became prime minister or party leader. I think this shows his good faith.

Add to that the fact that the Prime Minister testified for several hours before the Standing Committee on Finance and his chief of staff did the same. In addition, although it is natural, all of the relevant officials from our non-partisan public service testified before the Standing Committee on Finance.

If I may, I'd like to share something important with Canadians. In my view, Mr. Warkentin has made unfair accusations against the Prime Minister. Mr. Warkentin has presented himself as someone who always does the right thing and always takes the necessary steps to ensure transparency. However, in the past few weeks, I have had the opportunity to review the minutes of this committee.

When Mr. Warkentin was a member of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, in May 2013, opposition MPs raised an issue concerning former prime minister Harper. Mr. Warkentin said something several times, and I can quote him:

• (1210)

[*English*]

He said, “You do know, Mr. Chair, that the Ethics Commissioner is currently reviewing the circumstances and the submission that has been brought forward. (...) We also know that the Prime Minister has answered questions with regard to this and said that he knew nothing of it.”

Later he went on to say, “We know that there is clarity that needs to be brought forward. We would look to the Liberals...it's an interesting and very partisan motion that he's brought forward.”

[*Translation*]

Mr. Warkentin therefore seems to use certain rhetorical tools whenever he feels like it, but when MPs from other political parties use the same reasoning, it is a little less legitimate in his eyes.

Having said that, we are here to talk about Mr. Angus' amendment. Again, I congratulate him for finding this very elegant way to make these changes so that we can move on. I hope people will do that.

[*English*]

We can make sure that these spurious allegations will be put to rest and we can finally put our efforts towards issues that are most important for Canadians, such as the facial recognition policies and other measures we identified at the beginning of this Parliament for the ethics committee.

There is just one element on which I wouldn't mind seeking clarification from Mr. Angus, my honourable colleague. I don't know what the proper procedure is to do this. I don't know if I should ask this question through you. I know it's not usually our habit to have a back-and-forth, but I was wondering if perhaps we or the chair can ask if the clerk could just read back exactly the full amendment. I think there's one part of it on which I would love to get clarification, but maybe it's just better that I ask the clerk to read the motion in full so that I could have a clear understanding.

Also, Mr. Chair, with your agreement, I would like to make a comment at the very end, after she reads the motion. Would that be all right?

The Chair: That is fine, Mr. Fergus. We will read the amendment now. The clerk is prepared to send it out electronically very shortly as well.

Madam Clerk, please go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Charlie Angus moved that the motion be amended by removing “Margaret Trudeau” and “Alexandre Trudeau”.

• (1215)

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, would this be possible? When Mr. Angus first started reading it, he read out a full motion. Now we have the removal of two different names, which is great. I'm wondering if the clerk can read what the motion would look like if it were passed.

The Chair: Okay.

The Clerk: The motion, should the amendment pass, would read as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Orders 108(1)(a), an order of the Committee do issue to Speaker's Spotlight for a copy of all records pertaining to speaking appearances arranged since October 14, 2008, for Justin Trudeau and Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, including, in respect of each speaking appearance, an indication of the fee provided, any expenses that were reimbursed and the name of the company, organization, person or entity booking it—which had been originally ordered to be produced on July 22, 2020, by the Standing Committee on Access to Information—

Mr. Greg Fergus: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but Madam Clerk's microphone stopped after “July 22”, and you are on mute, sir.

The Chair: You can't hear me at all?

Mr. Greg Fergus: Is anyone else having this problem?

The Chair: I can certainly hear myself in my earpiece, Mr. Fergus, so there might be a problem with your reception.

Mr. Greg Fergus: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, I'm not hearing you at all.

Oh, here we go.

The Chair: Do you have it okay?

All right, then, the clerk will begin once more.

Mr. Greg Fergus: I apologize.

The Clerk: Would you like the full thing again, or just from July 22, 2020?

The Chair: Are you good with having the clerk continue from July 22?

Mr. Greg Fergus: Sure.

The Clerk: Okay.

...which had been originally ordered to be produced on July 22, 2020, by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, provided that these documents shall be provided to the Clerk of the Committee within 24 hours of the adoption of this motion; and that the documents be reviewed in camera.

Mr. Greg Fergus: That is actually the key part that I would like to address, and that's why I was interested in Mr. Angus's original motion, but since it became a removal of issues, the only issue I would have, Mr. Chair, is a practical one. Given the state of WE Charity and its current operations in Canada, I'm wondering if we could extend that to “no longer than one week”, which would give them the opportunity to get that information.

I don't know what their state of play is, and I would hate for Canadians to feel that any skulduggery was going on. I just want to give them enough time, for practical reasons, to get that information to us.

The Chair: At the moment, it's 48 hours. Is that correct?

The Clerk: It's 24 hours.

The Chair: We could deal with that as a subamendment, and then we could debate the time. Then we'd debate the amendment and then the motion.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, would you like me to propose a subamendment?

The Chair: It's actually an amendment to the motion, not a subamendment. It's an amendment to the original motion. Because the original motion has "24 hours", you would go ahead with an amendment in that regard.

Mr. Han Dong: On a point of order, Chair—

The Chair: We're going to suspend for a second.

Mr. Han Dong: —I just want to clarify whether that was a subamendment or an amendment to the main motion.

The Chair: We're going to make sure that we are squeaky clean on procedure and practices. We'll get back to you.

We're going to suspend for two or three minutes.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, could we say five minutes?

• (1220)

Mr. Greg Fergus: We could do a nature break.

The Chair: Sure. We'll suspend for five minutes. We'll see if we can squeeze in both.

• (1220)

(Pause)

• (1225)

The Chair: All right, colleagues, we are ready to reconvene now.

Mr. Fergus, there is a fine detail on the number of amendments, subamendments and motions that can be on the floor at any given time, and we had to sort that out specifically.

For the benefit of all colleagues, it is probably good to review it right now. We can manage one motion on the floor at any given time. Then we can manage one amendment at a time and one subamendment at a time.

Mr. Fergus, the subtlety of your motion is that you are not amending Mr. Angus's amendment. In other words, it wouldn't be a subamendment. It is actually an additional amendment to the original motion with regard to the time, so we would have to dispose of the amendment first before we could entertain another amendment.

Mr. Greg Fergus: That's fair enough, Mr. Chair. I will withdraw the complication, the wrinkle. Whatever you want to call it, I will withdraw it at this time.

The Chair: Yes, that's—

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order—

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: On that point, given the fact that we have requested a turnaround time on documents that is relatively short, would it not just come back to the clerk, who would say there have been difficulties and report to committee that we are having a slowdown in getting those documents in the period described? Do we need to anticipate that now, or if this motion passes, can we leave it to the clerk to send a message for the documents, and if there is a problem, it comes back to our committee?

The Chair: Mr. Angus, the only problem, I think, is that if I were the organization, I would be concerned about the fact that I wouldn't be in compliance with an order coming from—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay.

The Chair: It's not so much us, but the fact that it would be on the public record that they didn't comply—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Right. That's fair enough.

The Chair: —so I think we need to investigate that afterwards.

Mr. Fergus, have you conceded the floor, then?

Mr. Greg Fergus: I have conceded the floor.

The Chair: Okay. Now we'll move on to Madam Lattanzio.

Madam Lattanzio, have you unmuted yourself?

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: I have.

The Chair: There we go. Now we can hear you.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Subsequent to the amendment of MP Angus, I'm going to make some very brief comments. They are as follows.

As I mentioned last week, being a new member of this committee, I think it was incumbent on me to get as much information and ask as many questions as possible to be able to understand the essence of the motion that MP Barrett put before us.

I think we've debated this and we've obtained information and, I would say, not all the information and not all the answers to the questions that were put before members of this committee. I think the interventions made by my colleagues last week perhaps led to Mr. Angus's amendment this morning, and I think what that shows is an understanding of wanting to work collaboratively on this committee to be able to do our work and to fulfill the mandate we have, both collectively and individually.

I commend my colleague for having put forward the amendment and considering the removal of Margaret Trudeau and Alexandre Trudeau. You will recall also that last week we referred to various passages of information and various documents that were made available to this committee, and I believe that everything that had been put forward, as well as our interventions, may have led us to reconsider and to put the amendment that we have before us.

As a new member of this committee, I'm hopeful that we will be able to continue discussions and continue the exchange of information, which we owe to ourselves and to the mandate of this committee, so that we can continue our work and fulfill our respective obligations on this committee. I welcome the amendment. I think I've made it very clear that I will be in favour of this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Lattanzio.

I should review the speakers list once more.

So far, we have Mr. Kusmierczyk, Madam Shanahan, Monsieur Gourde and Mr. Dong. Members can look at this electronically too, and see that it also matches up with my electronic list.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, welcome.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First I want to say that I feel privileged to be joining this committee for the first time. I very much respect the important work this committee and its members have been engaged in during this Parliament.

I also welcome this amendment that my colleague has brought forward, and I will be supporting it. It represents an approach that I firmly believe my colleagues on this side of the aisle support. It is one that I believe characterizes our work to date—that is, seeking common ground, being open to dialogue, fostering collaboration and working together in a responsible fashion.

Looking back, I think we see those characteristics in, for example, the over 5,000 pages of documentation that we've submitted to committee, with the Prime Minister and the chief of staff appearing in front of committee to answer questions for hours, along with numerous officials. Canadians want to see that. Canadians want to see us working together.

At the same time, I believe we also have a responsibility to stand up to what is a bad motion. I think we have a responsibility as committee members to stand up and signal when we feel that the committee is veering towards the shoals. The original motion put forward by my Conservative colleague was a bad motion. It almost felt as if a fever had set in, in subsequent conversations. It represented overreach. It was concerning, I think, to many Canadians that unelected family members could be the subject of arbitrary probing of their finances and personal information by this committee.

That's why, again, I welcome Mr. Angus's motion. I think that's why Mr. Angus's motion is very much welcome. It is reasonable, it is responsible, and it brings the work of this committee off the rocks and focuses on the real work that Canadians expect us to do together. I think we are ready to have those tough discussions. We're prepared to answer those challenging questions. I strongly believe that Mr. Angus's amendment is reasonable and responsible. For that reason, I will be supporting it.

Thank you.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Now we will go to Madam Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

I think that the exercise we're going through is positive. This amendment is a step in the right direction. Mr. Angus took into consideration all the interventions we made in the last few meetings on the problem of the net, which was very broad. I am thinking in particular of statements made by my colleague Mr. Housefather, who gave a very good description of the difference between close family members, that is, a spouse and dependent children, and relatives, which include brothers and sisters, cousins, and so on. This demonstrates the quality of our discussion.

I am pleased that the principles of confidentiality and the Conflict of Interest Act are mentioned and considered. We are in the process of looking at the situation of a person who holds public office. It could be a minister or a member of the government, of course, but it could also be a person who has an important position in one of our public institutions. Indeed, Canadians have a right to know whether spouses and dependent children may be included in an investigation of a person who has placed himself or herself in a conflict of interest. We now know that this is the case. I return to the importance of the commissioner being able to examine all the facts before him and to obtain the necessary documents.

I will also support the amendment because it is a step in the right direction. It is a good thing that we have excluded Mr. Trudeau's brother and mother from this search for documents. I still have some questions in that regard, but I will save them for the debate on the motion itself. For the time being, I am in favour of the amendment that Mr. Angus has presented to us today in good faith. We appreciate all the experience he brings to the committee.

• (1240)

That sums up one of the main concerns I had about the motion, and that concern has been allayed. Nevertheless, as I said, I still have some reservations, but I think this amendment is a step in the right direction.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Shanahan.

We'll now go to Monsieur Gourde.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can you hear me well?

The Chair: Yes, the sound is excellent.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: As Ms. Shanahan just said, it's a step, but it's a step in another direction. Is it in the right or the wrong direction? History will tell us.

There is something I find unfortunate about this debate on the amendment to the motion. It is rare that I take the time to speak philosophically. We are changing the essence of the motion and why we want to go in one direction rather than another. It was really important to include the brother and mother of our Prime Minister in the motion.

We took the time this summer to work on the whole famous story of the WE Charity when the ethics committee had the right to work and before everything was stopped. We were beginning to get somewhere and to understand some things. Some people, through our committee, had revealed some interesting things.

The advantage of having witnesses come to committee is that when we ask them questions, they answer us. They are not necessarily redacted documents. If you take the trouble to ask the right questions, you get very interesting answers that can shed some light on what happened with the student program and the WE Charity.

I will open a parenthesis here. In all the measures that were put in place last spring to help Canadians, this program was misunderstood and difficult to understand. That's why we asked questions of some of the witnesses who appeared before this committee last summer. We wanted to know where this initiative came from. The students were already protected. Those who had already worked were entitled to the CERB. We know that in Canada, there were many—

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: Did you have a point of order, Mr. Fergus?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, you are on mute.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: I will continue while he is adjusting the sound.

[*English*]

The Chair: My mike is live.

Mr. Fergus, did you have a point of order?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: I'm trying to recognize Mr. Fergus right now for a point of order. Can you hear me, Madam Shanahan?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Madam Clerk, are we to take it for granted that—

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fergus, on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to apologize to Mr. Gourde. I do not dispute the substance of what he is saying. I just want to point out that there was a phone call to allow our assistants to listen to the testimony, but unfortunately the call was cut off. I don't know if it's a technical problem, but unfortunately the line used by our assistants to listen to the testimony was down. Can this be fixed before Mr. Gourde continues?

• (1245)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus. We'll suspend for a minute and check into that.

• (1245)

(Pause)

• (1255)

The Chair: All right, colleagues, I've canvassed the room, and we'll adjourn until next Monday.

Mr. Han Dong: Sorry, Chair; did any members show that they were not ready to vote for the amendment?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Han Dong: Oh, okay. I didn't see any. That's why I asked.

The Chair: Okay, colleagues, the meeting is adjourned.

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