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Chair: Mr. Chris Warkentin



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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC)): I'm going to call this meeting to order. This is the 25th meeting of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Today I'd like to remind colleagues that the meeting is webcast and will be made available on the House of Commons website.

This meeting is being called pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), that a committee meeting be held today to consider the request submitted to the clerk by four members of the committee to discuss the motion to request further documentation and testimony in relation to the study concerning questions of conflict of interest and lobbying in relation to the pandemic spending.

Standing Order 106(4) effectively just calls the meeting. We will, I'm certain, entertain motions with regard to the specifics if members determine that they would like to move that motion. I think that's how we'll proceed. Today is the date on which we had intended to have a business meeting anyway, so I'm certain that there are other matters of business that we'll entertain. I do already have a speaking list that has started to develop.

We'll begin by turning to Mr. Angus, and we also have Mr. Barrett. I see that Madam Shanahan's hand is raised as well. We'll entertain members as we get through all of the business that we can in the next couple of hours.

Mr. Angus, we'll turn to you.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

This morning I wanted to speak to two questions of privilege. I won't be too long, but I think it's important for the committee to consider them.

The first is that last week, when the Kielburger brothers came for their testimony, at the same moment that they launched their testimony they launched an attack website on me, referring to something like 101 lies I've apparently said. I don't lose much sleep over that. I feel like it was very juvenile. I feel like they were trying to stone me in the public square with popcorn.

What concerns me—and I put this to the committee because the issue of our work is serious—is the fact that we had to go a full week where they were actually undermining.... Their lawyers were claiming that parliamentarians shouldn't even be able to draw witness testimony. I've not been aware of attack websites on members

of Parliament before. I think it is very concerning. Personally, I've been around a long time. I've got pretty tough shoulders, but I think it could certainly intimidate new MPs, and other groups may consider it.

As part of this first issue of privilege, at the same time that this attack website was launched on me, a Twitter doxing campaign was launched against my daughter. Her photograph was posted online. Her place of work was posted online. People began to target her employer about my daughter. I actually tried to engage with some of them, because they weren't bots. They were real people. I was trying to say, "Why are you making stuff up?" I realized that it was a deliberate disinformation campaign to intimidate me through my daughter over the fact that when she was 13 years old, she volunteered for a Free the Children event. I don't know that my daughter's 13-year-old behaviour in trying to save the world has anything to do with committee.

I'm not sure what I'm going to do with this. I want the committee to be aware of it because I think it is a pattern of intimidation when people draw our families in, when they try to intimidate us through harassing our family with photos of them and where they work and with other information. I think it is very concerning, and if it happens to me, it could easily happen to any of you. I wanted to put that out there. I'm not sure where I'm going to go with this, if anywhere. Again, I'd have to talk with my daughter, because it's about her personal space that was deliberately invaded because I was asking questions about the Kielburger operation.

I want to go now to my second question of privilege, which I think is definitely within the purview of this committee.

One of the problems we've had with the Kielburger WE study and pandemic spending is that we don't know, after eight months—and I challenge any of my colleagues to tell me if they actually know—how the WE organization works. We don't know anything about their financial structure. We don't know their real estate. We don't know how the donor issues work. We've been trying to get answers. It's about the due diligence that we have to do in order to finalize our report.

I'm pretty close to being ready to finalize this report, but one of those questions was to have Mr. Victor Li testify. We had to issue a legal summons against Mr. Victor Li. Mr. Victor Li said he couldn't come, and he asked us to go the extra mile to write him with the questions and he would answer those questions. Mr. Victor Li has opted not to answer a number of questions.

I think my privilege and the privilege of this committee have been undermined by the trust that we gave Mr. Victor Li, because these are key questions. I'm going to run through just a few of them, and I'm going to ask my colleagues—

• (1105)

The Chair: Mr. Angus, I apologize for interrupting. Apparently we are experiencing technical difficulties right now. We're being asked to suspend.

I apologize. We'll hopefully be back up and running as soon as they've got us on ParIVU.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1105)

(Pause)

• (1105)

The Chair: Colleagues, we will call this meeting back to order.

I apologize, Mr. Angus. We'll turn it back to you.

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

I want to raise an issue of privilege relating to our work and our ability to get answers on the issue of the WE Charity scandal. I won't take too much time, but I think it's very concerning, because part of the role that we had to do in terms of finalizing this study was that....

After eight months, none of us around this committee actually has any real sense of how the Kielburger operation works. We know of WE Charity. We know that there's a multitude of side companies, but we don't really have a sense.... So when questions were being raised.... We cannot say we've actually done the due diligence. This was why we agreed to have Mr. Victor Li testify. We attempted for a number of months to have Mr. Victor Li. We issued a legal summons for Mr. Victor Li. He said he was feeling sick. I think we were all very reasonable and did something that I've never heard of being done before—offering to let him answer questions in writing.

What concerns me, and the reason I'm bringing it forward, is that a number of questions that were asked were not answered. I can only see that the decision not to answer key questions was deliberate. I would suggest that this is an infringement on the work of our committee.

I will not go through all of them, but some of them are key, as follows: What compensation, financial or otherwise, have you received from any of the related corporate companies or real estate? What other WE-related or Kielburger-related, entities are you involved with in any capacity, as a director, CFO or otherwise? We have been informed that some staff at Free the Children/WE Charity were paid through ME to WE, the for-profit arm. How many employees were paid through the for-profit wing while working for the

charity? Do the founders have signing authority at WE Charity and/or any other WE organizations? How many organizations, corporations, charities, etc., are in the global WE family? Please list them and where they are registered.

He refused to answer that.

How many of these companies' organizations are owned partially or entirely by WE founders Craig and Mark Kielburger or Roxanne Joyal?

He refused to answer that.

Does WE Charity, ME to WE, or any subsidiary organization do any business with companies owned by the founders or their family members? This includes from rent on property and purchase of goods and services.

He refused to answer that.

What financial systems do you use to track and account for any donations coming into the Kielburger-related organization? How far do these records go?

He refused to answer that. We're dealing with a charity, and we're asking questions about donor tracking.

What systems and structures do you have in place to ensure the designated funding is actually spent in the appropriate places?

He did not answer that.

Please provide a list of all schools, along with the country, address, location and what donor funds went into its construction.

He did not answer that. That should have been one of the easiest questions to answer, because we were told about all the good work they're doing with children. This was an opportunity for them to explain exactly where the donor funds have gone and what they built.

Please indicate any schools that WE built for any other foundations.

We know that they've been involved. What have they done?

How many hospitals has WE Charity/Free the Children built in the past 25 years? Please provide a list of all hospitals, along with the country, address, location and what donor funds went into its construction.

He did not answer that.

How many villages were adopted in the last 25 years?

He did not answer that.

We asked about the property they owned.

The reason these questions are important is that we were told last week, time and time again, by the Kielburger brothers about the incredible good work they've done on behalf of children around the world. This was an opportunity for them to clear the record, particularly in light of the very concerning allegations raised by Bloomberg, by *The Fifth Estate* and by other journalists.

Mr. Chair, I feel that my rights as a member have been impeded by the fact that Mr. Victor Li was given a legal summons, we agreed to let him answer in writing, and he has not answered key questions about the financial structure and operations of this organization.

I would like to turn it over to the committee. I think this a serious issue. I think it is a prima facie case of contempt. The question is, do we give him a period of time to answer those questions? What should we do?

I think this is not just about me. This is about the work of our committee.

• (1110)

The Chair: With regard to the discussion on the question before the committee, I'll turn to members who have indicated that their hands are raised.

Madam Shanahan, we'll turn to you first.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair, for giving me the opportunity to extend to Mr. Angus just how appalled I am that his daughter has experienced this attack on her. I think we've had this discussion before in this committee about how attacks on family members of parliamentarians are odious. In this light, particularly if it seeks to intimidate or to shut down a parliamentary member, this cannot be allowed to go unchecked. I just wonder if the member will seek whatever security and legal means that he needs.

We can explore our options. I think of, especially in social media, the attacks that have proliferated in the last few years on members of Parliament, and by extension on family members. I think we agree that an attack on a family member is essentially an attack on the member of Parliament, too, and therefore a question of privilege. I would like to see that we explore our options.

I do want to address the motion before us, as well, Chair. Unfortunately, the motion that we are here to discuss today, to me, is nothing but a fishing expedition by the opposition. [*Inaudible-Editor*] testimony on this issue, where I think we have shown, on the Liberal side, that we have been very collaborative in bringing forward—

• (1115)

The Chair: Madame Shanahan, I don't want to interrupt. I'm reluctant to, but I will interrupt. I just want to verify that right now we are discussing the matter of privilege that Mr. Angus brought forward with regard to the Li documents. Nobody has actually moved a motion with regard to the Standing Order 104(6) request for the meeting. I'm certain that will happen in due course, but I think it would be helpful for members if we debated these in order.

I'd like to get the sense of where the committee is with regard to the question of privilege that was brought forward first by Mr. Angus.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Understood. On the second question of privilege regarding Victor Li, again I think this is where we have shown our collaboration, and certainly our agreement that we can have our discussions about which witnesses we want to see in front of this committee, but once a witness is summoned, that is the wish of the committee.

Chair, you have shown great flexibility in accommodating witnesses. I agree with Mr. Angus that this is something we need to pursue. Because we know there are health issues involved, perhaps a letter from the chair giving Mr. Li an opportunity to respond, again, to the questions that were asked, because that is what has been found deficient, would be a way forward. Thank you.

Then I do want to speak again.

The Chair: Right. Yes, we'll note that you were on the speaking list early as well with regard to the other issues.

We'll turn to Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Colleagues, again, we're debating the issue of the question of privilege with regard to the Li documents.

Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Very simply, I would just say I think Charlie raises a really important point, and not only with respect to his daughter. It is just unconscionable, the people online who are highlighting the work of his daughter, suggesting there is some sort of conflict of interest there. All of the allegations and the work online around Charlie's daughter is just so unconscionable and should be condemned by all of us.

On the second piece, though, in relation to privilege as it relates to Victor Li, I do think, just as a matter of our dotting the i's and crossing the t's, Chair, you should write a letter to Victor Li and his counsel, and set a specific timeline for these answers to be provided. Once that timeline has elapsed, whatever answers haven't been provided....

If no answers have been provided, it makes your job a little easier, but with those that have been provided, we can reconvene a meeting to specifically consider them and this question of privilege. We can determine whether the answers are sufficient or are still lacking and have shown contempt in some way. I would suggest five days from the date that your letter is sent, a short timeline. I think we do want to make sure that we are affording as much.... We want to act as reasonably as we can when we're undertaking something as serious, potentially, as referring the matter for contempt, which is where this would ultimately lead.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll turn to Mr. Sorbara.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Good morning, everyone.

With respect to the points Charlie raised this morning, on the first one, I want to address Deputy Angus formally. I saw the tweets that were directed at your daughter and stuff, and I am vehemently and completely appalled—in the strongest language without using foul language—that this would happen to anyone's daughter. I have two daughters. I plan to continue being an MP for as long as the voters give me that privilege and that confidence. My daughters are growing up—the older one will soon be 10 years old, so they're a few years younger than Charlie's daughters—and they will have experiences with volunteer work and with employment. I would absolutely be disgusted if some organization—I am not saying that it was an organization, but in this circumstance it was an organization—or individuals potentially coordinated to attack me, and with that, attack my daughters. I don't know what can be done. I would love to get clarification from the clerk on that in terms of what we can or can't do. That would be great.

On the second question of privilege, which is in reference to the documents requested, in reading the rules and procedures with regard to parliamentary committees formed by the House of Commons and the elected individuals, my understand is that we have certain responsibilities but we also have certain powers to obtain documents when we are doing a study. I'm with my colleague, Nathaniel. We have asked these questions. We have asked for these documents. They do need to be provided. I think that is imperative. A committee cannot undertake a study without receiving the information it needs to finish that study. I am of the mind that a further five days or whatever pertinent period be provided so that a response can be made before the next steps are decided by the committee. The committee is the master of its own direction and domain, so I share Charlie and Nathaniel's view on this.

Thank you.

● (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fortin, we'll turn to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I'll address the two points raised by our colleague, Mr. Angus.

Obviously, I can only agree with him. It's unacceptable that our families are being threatened or intimidated in this manner. Unfortunately, I don't think that the committee can do much about it. However, I'm sure that the police could handle a complaint on this matter. I'll always stand with the member in this type of fight. It's unacceptable that the families of parliamentarians are being intimidated or threatened. This covers the first point.

I also agree with the second point made by my colleague. I took the time to look at Mr. Li's responses as well. I may not have looked at them as carefully as he did, but I did notice some major shortcomings. When a person doesn't answer the committee's ques-

tions, it's as if they didn't show up to speak when called upon to do so. That's how to address the situation, Mr. Chair.

I suggest that you write to Mr. Li. You must inform him that the committee considers his silence a contempt of Parliament and that we're giving him one last chance to respond. You must repeat the questions that he hasn't answered and give him five days to respond. You must inform him that, if he doesn't respond to each question within five days, the committee will report back to the House and the House will decide how to proceed. In my view, his silence is clearly the equivalent of not showing up when he should have done so. I would agree that strong action should be taken with regard to Mr. Li and that it shouldn't just be an invitation to find out whether he wants to provide further responses. I humbly suggest this way of dealing with the second point.

The Bloc Québécois recommends that the due diligence report be prepared, because we think that it's important. I don't want to argue about this right now, because we can do so later. This goes along with what Mr. Angus wants with respect to Mr. Li's evidence. We must get to the bottom of this matter. We're talking about \$43 million for WE Charity to manage almost \$1 billion. We have a right to know where the government was putting our money.

That said, I also just want to remind you that I hope that we'll have time to consider the motion that brought us here this morning, pursuant to section 106(4). As we discuss the motion, I'll expand on the arguments concerning this matter.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1125)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

I want to thank all of my colleagues for their solidarity. I actually find it really hard to even raise this issue because I like to think that I live in a world where I can defend myself and be myself. It's a tough world in politics. I don't mind the brickbats, but to even have to mention that my family has been dragged into it is something I have not wanted to do. However, I think it's important that we're aware of it. I recognize that my colleagues from all parties carry themselves with dignity on these issues and would not support these kinds of side attacks, but they are something that we need to consider.

I don't think I will take it to the House as an issue of privilege, but I want people to be aware of it because I think we have to start seeing the kinds of pressures that are being put on us at times for issues that we raise.

I appreciate my colleagues also on the second point. I have to say I'm just getting rather frustrated with this sense of entitlement that we've seen from an organization that seems to think we're picking on it. It's about getting answers. We just need to get answers. We need to finish this report. We need to do due diligence. This is our work. This is our right as parliamentarians. Questions about the finances of an organization are absolutely fair questions to ask, and I think we've gone out of our way to do this in a fair way.

To Mr. Erskine-Smith's point, I think it is really important that we dot the i's and cross the t's. This committee has certain powers, but it has to exercise those powers within a context of making sure that we follow the rules that are given to us as parliamentarians. I'm very frustrated that I didn't get answers and that we've gone out of our way. I think the next step is to say that five days is more than enough, and we want those answers. If we're not getting those answers, then I will refer it to the House. We need to move on with this report. We don't have time to play games when it's about the work and the right of parliamentarians to get answers.

I would support my colleagues who say let's do this right; let's ask him one more time; let's say five days and if not, then we'll refer this to the House. I'm more than willing to accept the suggestions made by my colleagues.

Thank you.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Carrie, I think you're the last person who has indicated a desire to intervene on this.

Go ahead.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and colleagues.

I want to thank you, Mr. Angus. I think any action by witnesses that could be perceived as intimidation of a committee member is extremely serious, and the fact that they involved or the consequences involved your daughter... I think all of us see how that would affect us personally and how we do our jobs here at committee, so I think this is extremely serious. For you to bring it up so we can address it is very important, and thank you for that.

On the second point, with respect to Mr. Li, I agree with Charlie about trying to figure out how this charity works in relation to its for-profit arm. I know that during my questioning, I was deliberately trying to get answers about the separation of WE Charity from the for-profit arm. There seemed to consistently be a deliberate attempt to move things back to the charity. For example, when I talked about their sponsors of the WE Day event, which is a for-profit event, they kept on saying our donors are extremely generous. But it's so confusing. I think some of their donors don't even realize—or I should say “contributors”, because it wasn't a donation to a charity. They certainly weren't donating to WE to build schools and help kids in Kenya. This was a promotion and public relations event, and some of their sponsors were giving money and they may have actually thought that they were giving to a charity when it was a for-profit event.

I think we do have to dig a little deeper to find out how these organizations work. It's extremely important for us as far as moving

this report forward, so that everyone can understand that there is a distinct difference between a charity event and a for-profit event and where the money goes.

The Chair: Okay. I think I have seen a consensus, and if committee members are amenable to it, we will write the letter and give Mr. Li until Friday to answer the questions. However, we will require the assistance of committee members.

Those committee members who have submitted questions who don't believe they have been answered, we will need you to indicate to us that those questions need to be answered so we can include those in the letter. We want to be very specific about the questions that we do not believe have been answered. Mr. Angus has given his list. That may not be an exhaustive list.

Members, if you could get those questions that have not been answered to the clerk by the end of today, then the letter can be produced and we can get that sent off.

I think that's settled.

Mr. Angus, with regard to your daughter, I believe that in the intimidation of members, especially when it involves a family member, it would be seen by this chair as an issue of privilege. Certainly if you desire at some point to bring that forward—obviously, you have the backing of every committee member who has spoken thus far—this chair, of course, would pursue that, not only on behalf of the committee but as a father as well.

Next, we're going to go to the speaking order.

I have Mr. Barrett, Ms. Shanahan, and then Mr. Fortin has indicated he would like to move the motion. I'm not sure if we would like to do this in reverse order—if it would be helpful.

Madame Shanahan, we'll turn to you, but it seemed like you were looking to debate the motion that Mr. Fortin is about to move. I think that maybe it would be more productive if we had the motion moved by Mr. Fortin, and then we could begin the debate on that.

● (1130)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I agree, Chair. You can move me to after Mr. Fortin and Mr. Barrett. Thank you.

The Chair: Sure thing.

We'll move to Mr. Fortin, and if he wants to move the motion that this meeting was called in regard to, then we can begin the debate.

Monsieur Fortin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Chair, I won't mindlessly read the motion again. We've all read it. It speaks for itself, in my view.

Basically, we've been investigating the WE Charity scandal since last summer. I understand that Parliament was prorogued, with the associated consequences. However, the fact remains that, for several months, we've been trying to shed light on a government agreement to pay \$43 million to a charity so that about \$900 million could be distributed to volunteers. In my opinion, it was already a bit odd to want to pay volunteers, but oh well.

As we know, there was a series of investigations into this initiative. Mr. Trudeau and the Kielburger brothers appeared and gave evidence several times before the Standing Committee on Finance. A number of witnesses have been heard from. The bottom line is the following: on what basis did our government enter into this agreement?

For both ethical and financial reasons, if I want to invest in an RRSP or any other type of pension, I won't do business with the first peddler that comes along. I want to know where my money is going: to a bank, a fund, a trust? At the very least, I want to do my due diligence in proportion to the amount invested and the situation.

If I go to a bank to invest a \$2,000 RRSP, you'll agree that the due diligence will be fairly straightforward. If I'm comfortable with the bank representative, I'll sign the documents and I'll be satisfied. I'll have done my job, and I'll have acted diligently.

If I'm the Prime Minister of Canada and I give \$43 million to an organization, I must do even greater due diligence. I think that, in a case such as the one before us, an audit should have been conducted. From the start, we've heard that this case is somewhat odd, because there was no competitive bidding, an existing process. The ethics specialists who have spoken so far have said that, if you don't have a competitive bidding process, which involves a routine audit, you must do even greater due diligence before you give a contract to someone.

I want to know what the Prime Minister did. He didn't proceed with a competitive bidding process. We understand the reason. He explained that it was because of the pandemic and that things were urgent. We may or may not agree with his reason. However, I want to know what audit he conducted if he didn't proceed with a competitive bidding process. Last August, at a Standing Committee on Finance meeting, Mr. Shugart, the Clerk of the Privy Council, was asked about this. He responded that due diligence had been done.

I included the text of the relevant comments in the letter. Mr. Shugart's response to my comment is quite clear. I said: "Obviously, we'd like the contribution agreement as well, but it was the report containing the due diligence that was carried out that Ms. Gaudreau was asking for. I'm not sure whether the witness understood that." He responded: "Chair, I understood perfectly, and I undertook to provide both." It was the due diligence report and the contribution agreement.

We obtained the contribution agreement, but we never obtained the due diligence report. To this day, we still don't know what au-

dit the federal government conducted before giving the \$43 million, or rather our \$43 million, to this company. By asking questions and conducting investigations, we learned that, contrary to what cabinet members believed, the money wasn't invested in WE Charity. WE Charity is a well-known entity. The money was placed in a new shell company created specifically for this investment. When I asked the Kielburger brothers about this, they told me that it was normal to create a new shell company. Their counsel reportedly told them what they should do to protect WE Charity's assets.

What's this about? Our government didn't invest \$43, but 43 million of our dollars in an empty shell with no financial history. In my opinion, this was done without any due diligence. I'm concerned.

I hear that the audit report exists. I want to read it, but no one is sending it to us. I find this questionable. We need this audit report to shed light on the audit conducted. Obviously, there's the underlying issue of conflict of interest, but I don't want to go on all day about it. However, in terms of the due diligence report, I think that we must know what made the government in power feel comfortable making such a significant investment.

● (1135)

With respect to the witnesses, I think that Mr. Barrett wanted to comment on this matter. I agree with him completely. During a question period last week, Mr. Poilievre referred to some form of communication on LinkedIn in which Mr. Kielburger thanked Mr. Chin for his help. At the same time, Mr. Kielburger told us that he had sent many of these types of messages to thank people whom he didn't need to thank. Between you and me, I find this questionable. The explanation doesn't make sense. If I were Mr. Kielburger's counsel, we would have had a proper discussion, because I don't find his version very credible.

I think that we need to hear from these people as well to get to the bottom of the matter. I can come back to this if necessary. However, I think that I've said what I needed to say regarding this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Mrs. Shanahan first on the speaking list.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Chair, I would like to go after Mr. Barrett, given that it's his motion. As well, I'd like to hear what he has to say. You can put me afterwards.

Thank you.

The Chair: We are debating Mr. Fortin's motion, but if Mr. Barrett would like to jump in, we'll allow Mr. Barrett to do that now.

Mr. Barrett.

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

I appreciate the comments by Mr. Fortin.

The due diligence that was done in the preparation of presenting this proposal to cabinet is really key, and certainly with the revelations we've heard in recent weeks and months here at this committee with respect to allegations of donor fraud and double matching and the like, what the Prime Minister and the finance minister and members of cabinet knew and when they knew, it is key to understanding if... I think this would go a long way to answering the question and reassuring Canadians that proper processes were followed.

It's unusual that the ask was made for this report, and the response was that they would provide that, and then it wasn't provided. I think, when you look further at some of the questions we asked of Mr. Li, and the answers that would hopefully clarify some of the structure and how the WE organization is arranged, we're still left with a ton of questions. Those answers haven't been forthcoming to this point from the partner organization. Were they asked originally by PCO, by the government, by a minister or by the public service before they embarked on a half-billion dollar arrangement with this organization? Or were they prepared to ask an unknown to administer a half-billion dollars of taxpayers' money and hope that everything would be okay? Meanwhile, we had a host of other organizations from the charitable sector that weren't asked to participate in the CSSG, but that have since expressed that not only do they think they would have been able to do it, but that they were well-equipped or that Canadians would have been best served by their having administered it.

I think the question we have in front of us is absolutely germane, and the government has had many months to prepare this report, and we expect that it likely is. Mr. Fortin has mentioned that perhaps it already exists. If that's the case, it should be quite straightforward for the committee to be furnished with this information.

I think an invitation for those witnesses to appear... We can have a panel of two witnesses and break them up that way. It doesn't need to be a large production. We're going to ask questions that, again, are germane to the study. We have this inconsistency with respect to the testimony that has been offered by senior members of the political offices, members and ministers and the Prime Minister who have testified, and the testimony from the Kielburgers.

We want to hear directly from these senior staff, get the answers and put this to bed. I think that's the biggest takeaway we had from the testimony from the Kielburgers last week, so let's hear that testimony as well. I think, should they make themselves available relatively soon, by the end of next week we would have the due diligence report, we would have this requested witness testimony, and then we could start.

● (1140)

Hopefully, we'll have the answers from Mr. Li that the committee is going to put to him through a letter from the chair. By the end of next week, we could be giving instructions to the analysts with respect to preparing our report. That's where we need to get to.

The committee has a number of other things pending, so let's get to wrapping this up, answering those unanswered questions, receiving the documents that were promised but have not been received, and getting the final set of questions from Mr. Li, which I appreciate speaks to the previous question raised by Mr. Angus.

I think once we have that information set—those three items—then we'll be in a good position to finally, many months after we first embarked on this journey, give instructions to the analysts and report this to the House.

Thanks, Chair.

● (1145)

The Chair: Madam Shanahan, we'll turn to you.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad that I'm able to speak at this point, because in the course of the discussion to date in this meeting, we can see the difference between substantive testimony—testimony that is helpful to this committee's work—and what amounts to a fishing expedition. On the substantive testimony, that is why I am certainly in agreement.

I know, in discussing this with my colleagues, that we take this work very seriously. We can have differences about what witnesses we want to hear from and when we want to hear from them and so on, but once this committee makes a decision, we are very supportive on this side in going after the testimony that is critical to producing what will ultimately be our report and our recommendations on this pandemic study.

It seems that with the motion before us the only issue in asking for Mr. Chin has to do with this one-line response through LinkedIn that was in response to an unsolicited invite to be a contact with Mr. Kielburger. I seem to remember this coming out last summer in the document dump—I don't like that word, because documents should be treated carefully. When that number was asked for—and I know they were gone through very carefully—that seems to be the only thing that came out from that production of documents. In fact, there was a press conference about this LinkedIn communication—I guess that's good for LinkedIn's business—but it really didn't seem to go anywhere. That's from last summer.

As far as the due diligence report goes, we all know that Mr. Shugart is undergoing cancer treatments right now.

First of all, let me just say something about the characterization in the motion of “the Liberal Government's Privy Council”. I take great exception to that smear on the good non-partisan work of public servants in the Privy Council, including that of Mr. Shugart. We know by his reputation and by his experience that he has been an exemplar of non-partisan professional service to Canada. I take great exception to that.

The Privy Council works on behalf of all Canadians in executing the work of the government that Canadians have elected. Therefore, when Mr. Shugart gives us his word that he will produce a document, I think we should take him at that word. Knowing that he's in a health situation right now and that he's undergoing treatment, I think this committee can show the same kind of flexibility that we have shown to other witnesses. Indeed, where I will agree with my colleagues is that we have much more important work to do than to continue taking up valuable committee time calling witnesses on a fishing expedition in pursuing this study.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll turn to Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, and thank you to my colleague for this motion.

I'm certainly interested in it if there's a due diligence report. I don't have a problem looking at it. The issue of due diligence is something that has been important from the get-go.

As for Mr. Shugart, he is off. He is, I believe, taking medical treatments, and I don't think it's fair to ask him to come back. Mr. Shugart did testify last summer. He testified for a good period of time. I was at those hearings. If we asked him now, I don't believe Mr. Shugart would give us anything different than what he gave us then. I don't believe there is anyone else at Privy Council who has stepped in to replace him who would be helpful, because it was under Mr. Shugart's watch. If there's an issue of a due diligence report, I'd say let's just add it to the list.

I hope we can get these things settled, my friends, because we know the Liberals are going to be bringing out Bill C-11, which will upend all our other work. That's going to be coming soon. We also have to finish the Pornhub study. There are a lot of people watching that. We have agreed to the facial recognition study, which I think we need to get to.

I'm really adamant that we have to get this WE report to Parliament. We've been on this for a long time. If there are other documents that could add to it, I think it's time that we actually moved on it. As much as I appreciate Monsieur Fortin's intervention, I don't see that this is an emergency issue that suddenly came up out of nowhere, because it's testimony from eight or nine months ago. If there's a report, I'll take it, but I'm not interested in having Mr. Shugart come at this time.

• (1150)

The Chair: Mr. Erskine-Smith, you are a visitor at our committee today. You're not subbed in, but I'll welcome your intervention at this point. We'll extend that courtesy to you.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thanks very much. I'll be brief.

I agree with everything that my colleague, Brenda, has said. I agree with Charlie as well. In the interest of fairness, the one item that came up in relation to the LinkedIn correspondence that I took from the correspondence back in August was the only correspondence between Mr. Chin and the Kielburgers.

I don't think my colleagues on the Liberal side will support this motion, but in the interest of fairness, if you write to Mr. Chin, and have him confirm that that was the only correspondence....It would

be odd for us to invite him before this committee if that was in fact the only correspondence. If it's not—if he comes back and says no, “I corresponded this way and that way”—then the committee may want to reconsider the question. Based on what we know today, if that was, in fact, the only correspondence, to be confirmed by you, potentially, Mr. Chair, it would be....Brenda is putting it politely, calling it a fishing expedition. There would be no merit whatsoever. That's all I have to say on that, but that would be my one suggestion, a possible consensus, and a way forward.

The Chair: Mr. Dong, we'll turn to you.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): This is my first chance to intervene on what I'm hearing so far. First of all, to Mr. Angus' point, I agree with writing and requesting documents, and having a response in five days.

I am concerned when family members are brought into the extension of our work. It's not a good thing for democracy. We should be able to speak and ask questions freely at committee, and not have to think about consequences and what might happen to our family members. He has my support.

I agree with Mr. Erskine-Smith's point. Let's write to individuals of interest. I don't think these are new revelations. I agree with Mr. Barrett's point that it's been happening for months and months, and I feel like we're just going in circles.

If we hear something, we want to study more or bring more people in. If we don't hear something, we think they're not telling the full story. I feel like we've been going in circles. Let's write the letter, request the information we need, and move on to finalize the report. That's where I stand right now.

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan, we'll turn to you.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: We have heard from all the parties now, so I move that we vote on the motion before us.

The Chair: We don't have anybody else on the speaking list at this point.

Mr. Fortin has indicated that he would like to speak.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to add that we're aware of Mr. Shugart's health. If you read the motion, you'll see that the request is for Mr. Shugart or someone else who can represent him to come and table the report.

That said, if someone wants to move an amendment to ensure that we receive the report without the testimony, I would agree to it. However, I think that we must make sure that we receive the report to obtain a clear picture of what took place when the contract or approval was given to WE Charity.

• (1155)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: In response to Mr. Fortin's comments, I would move an amendment to his motion. For brevity, because I know everyone's going to need to update the copy in front of them—

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: On a point of order, Mr. Chair. I did request the vote. I moved that we go to the vote.

The Chair: As you know, Mrs. Shanahan, as long as somebody's on the speaking list there is no way for a member to force a vote. You do know that from previous experience, and you're now a seasoned parliamentarian, having involved yourself in extended debates.

Mr. Barrett, we'll turn back to you.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, I would strike the reference calling for testimony or an appearance by a representative from PCO, obviously, with Mr. Shugart away from the office. We're, of course, wishing him good health and good results, and when he's ready, a return to his duties.

That being said, to receive the report and not require someone to come and present it to us.... Of course, should the committee have questions about it, there can be a discussion following receipt of the report about whether anyone needs to testify.

The motion sponsor, Mr. Fortin, suggested that he would be amenable to this, and so that's the amendment I'd like to propose.

The Chair: Monsieur Fortin.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: I accept Mr. Barrett's proposed amendment. I agree with him.

[English]

The Chair: Very good.

We have Madame Lattanzio on the speakers list, and then Mr. Sorbara.

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

Can we have the motion amended and sent to us in both official languages so that we can see the latest amendment before we vote on it?

Also, am I to understand that if we receive the report, committee members will be satisfied with just the reception? Or are we going to be then having questions, and depending on the questions of the members, envisage having to subpoena more people to come to the committee and ask more questions?

I want to have direction from both Mr. Barrett and Monsieur Fortin on where this amendment will go. At the same time, I'd also like to receive the amendment in both official languages.

Thank you.

The Chair: The debate now is on the amendment.

We'll suspend for a few moments. As soon as it's been circulated, I'll call the meeting back to order.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1200)

The Chair: I'll go back to Madame Lattanzio. You now have the text in front of you. Were you done with your intervention, or do you have additional comments you'd like to make?

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

I just wanted to have clarification from either Mr. Barrett or Mr. Fortin. Once we get this report, if the committee still wishes to vote for this amendment, will that satisfy the committee members? Or are we then to again engage in further...if we have any other questions, and subpoena other witnesses? Am I to understand that once we get the report, that will be it, and the committee members will be satisfied?

I need to have that answer, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Sorbara, we'll turn to you.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks for everybody's work on this and getting to a point where we need to get to in order to move on to Bill C-11 and, actually, to be very blunt, to move back to the Pornhub/MindGeek study we are doing that is receiving a lot of attention from concerned Canadians. I think it behooves us to, as quickly as possible and as prudently as possible, get back to those very urgent matters for my constituents and for yours as well.

On this motion that's been put forward this morning, I would like to move a subamendment. I'm going to ask the clerk that the following be struck and that the following be inserted.

In terms of the material, I would like to see struck the following:

and in light of revelations stemming from Craig and Mark Kielburger's testimony of March 15, 2021, the Committee do call for Ben Chin, Rick Theis, and Amitpal Singh to appear before the Committee at a date and time determined by the Chair but no later than one week following the adoption of this motion.

In place of that, I would like to have the following inserted: "and that the clerk write to Mr. Ben Chin and ask him to provide in writing that the only communication he had with the Kielburgers was the already public LinkedIn communication, and the clerk write to Mr. Shugart to determine when the document he agreed to provide to the committee will be forthcoming."

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sorbara.

We'll get that in writing and distribute it to committee members.

I just want clarification. Were you seeking to have the clerk write, or the chair?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: The chair, with all due respect.

The Chair: That's very good. I assumed that's what we were talking about.

We will suspend the meeting now and do the same thing over again.

Mr. Sorbara, if you could get that text to the clerk, that would be very helpful, and then we can debate the subamendment.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I was just about to send a text over to the clerk. I don't think my name was included on the last distribution list. It might have been just a simple error because I was away for the first part of the meeting. Could she just make sure that she includes my email address?

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Fergus. We'll make sure that gets added.

We will suspend, and when it's distributed, we will call the meeting back to order.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fortin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Chair, I would like my address added to the distribution list as well. I didn't receive the most recent email.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will do that as well.

The meeting is suspended, colleagues.

• (1205) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1215)

The Chair: I'm calling the meeting back to order.

We'll now debate on the subamendment.

We'll go to Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The first thing about the subamendment is this. Writing to Mr. Shugart to determine when the document he agreed to provide would be forthcoming.... I don't necessarily see that as relevant. We do want that document, period. I think we should just be asking for it.

The second thing is about having Mr. Chin in the original ask. There were three individuals who were asked to come and testify in front of the committee. I would say, Mr. Chair, that there's more than one way to correspond. There may be that one LinkedIn communication that was available, but there are text messages; there are phone calls. I think it's very important that we also hear from the people surrounding Mr. Chin and those people in power who may have had influence in this case. The subamendment here, I don't think really in the spirit of what was originally written, would provide the committee with what we would need to have.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

My concern is that I find that the wording of this is presupposing an outcome already, in that it says that "the only communication he

had with the Kielburgers was the already public LinkedIn communication". We don't know if that was the only communication, so I think it's problematic.

I also agree with my colleague that the clerk's writing to Mr. Shugart to determine.... Mr. Shugart is off, so we don't want to be writing to Mr. Shugart. We want that document.

What we haven't discussed is the motion to have Mr. Ben Chin—Ben Chin we've talked about—or Rick Theis or Mr. Singh appear. I'm not sure why we're asking them at this point, but it is in the motion. If we're going to ask them, I would like to have reason to ask them. If my Liberal colleagues want to exclude them, I'd like to have reason to exclude them. We haven't actually discussed those other two.

Mr. Ben Chin appears to us because of the testimony from last week with Mr. Craig Kielburger. I have read many times the 5,000 pages of documents. I think there's a pretty clear pattern of how this deal developed. What struck me about the LinkedIn message and the response that we heard in the testimony is that I didn't find Mr. Kielburger's testimony credible. There may be other reasons that he contacted Mr. Ben Chin to sort of give him the big thumbs-up that they'd been awarded the contract. It might have been a case of his trying to procure further favours in the Prime Minister's Office further down the road, but I didn't think Craig Kielburger's response was credible, which is why Mr. Chin's name has been brought forward.

We haven't had a discussion on Mr. Rick Theis and whether he needs to appear.

Mr. Singh is in the documents—I think in reference to the April 20 meeting with Sofia Marquez—but I don't know what he offers to change what we already have in the documents.

I have a problem with the subamendment because it precludes the possibility that Mr. Chin may have had other conversations; that's problematic. It asks Mr. Shugart, who is not in a position to turn over those documents...and we need those documents. I'm still not sure where we're standing with Mr. Theis and Mr. Singh.

• (1220)

The Chair: Mr. Fortin, we'll turn to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: I raised my hand to speak about the previous motion. Time is flying.

With regard to the amendment, I understand our colleague's suggestion. However, his proposal significantly alters the text of the main motion. This isn't just a matter of obtaining the document or asking the witness to provide it. The proposal is to select only one of the three names put forward. He is also being asked to confirm that he hasn't had any discussions other than this one. That's a leading question.

This seems a little too simplistic to achieve the objective of the main motion. I would find it difficult to agree with this proposal regarding the subamendment.

[English]

The Chair: The recorded vote is on the subamendment of Mr. Sorbara.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 5; yeas 5)

The Chair: I will vote against the subamendment to allow for debate to continue.

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

The Chair: Is there any debate with regard to the amendment on the motion?

Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

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

I apologize for having missed a good part of the debate. I have a couple of points to make about the amendment to the motion.

Based on what I'm reading here, the scope of the amendment certainly isn't broad enough. The only thing that came up after the Kielburger brothers' appearance concerns this LinkedIn message. Some people doubted that the correspondence between them and Mr. Chin was in fact limited to this communication that someone in their office sent proactively, according to their testimony. I want to be very clear about this.

However, no one has raised the issue regarding Mr. Theis and Mr. Singh. It seems almost contrived to me, because, honestly, their names were brought up in passing. I understand the importance of obtaining the document that will be provided by the Clerk of the Privy Council Office. That's fine. We should receive it with this due diligence report. I think that we can easily address the issue of the communication with Mr. Chin by simply writing him a letter. We know that there are very significant consequences for not telling the truth.

I believe that we're just trying to extend the debate unnecessarily. It would be good to do so if there were nothing else to discuss. However, we know that we must look at some very important matters. For example, we must finish the study on Pornhub and MindGeek. Also, I thought that we would finally be starting the debate on facial recognition. In my opinion, this is so important, especially for people with brown skin, like me. We know that these types of monitoring software are very inaccurate. We must pay attention to them. We've been waiting for over 13 months to start this debate.

We were coming to the end of the process and getting ready to roll up our sleeves to start preparing the WE Charity report and doing the necessary work. I think that we need to take action.

I have a great deal of respect for Mr. Angus, who said that we should provide reasons for not wanting staff and political assistants to appear before the committee.

• (1225)

I want to be very specific, clear and unambiguous about this. If we receive a letter from Mr. Chin, we don't need to hear from

Mr. Theis and Mr. Singh. We know that the Prime Minister and Ms. Telford, his chief of staff, have already spoken to us about this matter.

In addition, no new issues related to political assistants or political staff have been raised, other than this LinkedIn message. That's why I think that we can resolve this issue quickly by writing to Mr. Chin and asking him to clarify the situation. This will ensure that we don't waste the committee's time.

Mr. Chair, I know that you can ensure that this letter includes a broad definition and that nothing is left out. I think that this is a better solution to the problem. If this issue doesn't get resolved or if other issues arise, we can make different decisions. However, I don't want the committee to waste its time on an issue that could be resolved by a simple and straightforward letter that you can write, Mr. Chair. In my opinion, this is very important.

The proposed solution should resolve the issue. I hope that it will meet the requirements of the opposition members, who are seeking the clarifications needed for our WE Charity report. This will give us the opportunity to quickly move on to other issues that require our attention. The clock is ticking and we need to get on with these issues.

I would like to hear what my colleagues on the other side have to say about this matter. I hope that my proposal will meet their needs.

• (1230)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sorbara.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Chair, my colleague, Parliamentary Secretary Fergus actually stated what I was going to say in reference to MP Angus' earlier comments about landing on a spot that we can move forward from to tackle Bill C-11, which I know is important to many colleagues, and to finish up the MindGeek/Pornhub study we're doing.

The Chair: We'll turn to Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks very much, Chair.

I'm sensitive to the questions about what we're going to be doing next as a committee. As I previously stated, I think that the items dealt with in this motion can be resolved inside of a week. We dedicated the equivalent of 20 meetings to not doing anything except live through a filibuster. With respect, then, given the amount of time the committee has not been doing other things, it's not reasonable to say that the opposition is looking to rag the puck. These are germane questions.

The issue of the message with Mr. Chin reignites the questions that were raised about the origins of the Canada student service grant.

Mr. Theis and Mr. Singh were both revealed in the document release from last summer to have had contact. Mr. Theis was sent a message by Mr. Craig Kielburger with information about a suite of options with respect to programs that they could choose from. That was last May. The same is true of communication between Mr. Singh and the WE organization. Now we have the question about Mr. Chin and the WE organization.

We're not, then, starting the study over again; we're looking to resolve these questions. That can be done in one day. It could be done Friday of this week. We could have that response from PCO. It was offered many months ago, so I expect that it is prepared.

There have been some unexpected changes, particularly with respect to Mr. Shugart's legitimate absence from his role. Give them a couple of days to get that together. The document would have been created last spring, if it was created, so they could furnish the committee with it. The same is true of Mr. Lee's fulsome responses, following the letter that the committee has instructed the chair to write.

Concerning the question about Bill C-11, the committee hasn't received Bill C-11 from the House. Once that happens, there will be some urgency there, but there are other matters that the committee has expressed an interest in dealing with, and we can do so. As I said before, we could be moving ahead with those as early as next week, should we resolve this matter this week.

Ms. Lattanzio asked whether there would be a commitment that there would be no further questions. Well, sometimes the work we do causes more questions to be asked, but my intention is that we wrap this up, and I think that we can wrap it up with hearing from these witnesses and getting the information we're requesting. Then we can provide instructions to the analysts. I think that's very reasonable.

As to the clarification that can be provided by these individuals to the committee in answer to the questions, yes, sure we could write a letter. If we're doing this in the interest of saving time, however, and are writing letters to three different individuals, and then they write back to us, and on and on, we're not going to have this wrapped up in short order. We'll be dealing with it in June. That is not an outcome I would prefer, and I expect, based on the comments of my colleagues opposite, it's not the outcome that they prefer.

The most expeditious way for us to dispose of this study on pandemic spending and potential conflicts of interest is to just call the witnesses, as we normally do. We made an exception to this practice by writing letters with respect to an individual who is on medical leave. Now I think we should return to business as normal: we call the witnesses. That is why those witnesses specifically are being referred to.

- (1235)

We're not looking to have people reappear, we're not asking for the Prime Minister to come to this committee, and we're not asking for his chief of staff. We're looking for three very specific people based on correspondence and communication, and the evidence of that communication contradicts what we heard previously or evidence in other committees. The multiple communications between

Mr. Singh and the WE organization, the communications between Mr. Theis and one of the founders of the WE organization, and the question with respect to Mr. Chin, if he's appearing and has no other information to offer, would be a pretty quick panel for us to dispose of.

We can do that and in the interest of time we can vote on this now. We can give our instructions to the chair and we will be off to the races and hopefully concluding this work, reporting it to the House and moving on to the many other important subjects this committee has decided it would undertake.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lattanzio, you are next, and then Mr. Angus.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Mr. Chair, I'm eager to hear from my colleague Mr. Angus. I'd like to come back right after him as we're discussing how to best time manage this issue. I will let him go before me.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, we'll turn to you.

Again, we are debating the amendment.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I think we need to move forward because we have a lot of work to do, and I can see we're starting to get locked down. I don't want to return.

On the issue of writing letters to the three men, I agree with my colleague Mr. Barrett. It does start to set a dangerous precedent that we are writing letters to people instead of having them testify. That will be used as a precedent in the future.

My suggestion as a compromise would be that we call Ben Chin because he was named in the testimony last week. Rick Theis and Amitpal Singh are in the documents. From what I heard there was nothing new from the Kielburger testimony that makes me think we're going to learn something else. I think that we need to clear up this LinkedIn message. The answer to Mr. Kielburger struck me as odd; it may be very straightforward. I imagine it probably is.

I would suggest as an amendment to the amendment that the committee call Ben Chin and we leave out Rick Theis and Amitpal Singh. Therefore we're just responding to the testimony we heard and we're getting clarification. We could have that done by Friday, as Mr. Barrett says. We could get our instructions and we could start to move on. The issue of the Pornhub study is vitally important. I urge my colleagues to read all the letters and presentations that are being sent to us. This is not just in Canada; people around the world are watching. It is incumbent upon us to finish this. To Mr. Fergus who has been my biggest supporter in trying to get this facial recognition technology study done, I have put in my witness; I hope other people do. I am ready to move on that at any time.

I would amend the amendment so we call Ben Chin.

- (1240)

The Chair: Now we're onto a new subamendment. Again we'll ask Mr. Angus to work with the clerk to get that in writing and be distributed to members. We will suspend until that's circulated to members.

• (1240) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1245)

The Chair: We will resume.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

Before I address the proposed subamendment, I want to say something that may be relevant. I believe that Mr. Poilievre, your colleague from the official opposition, raised the issue over the summer, in the Standing Committee on Finance, regarding the LinkedIn message sent by Mr. Kielburger's employee to Ben Chin. Nothing came of the matter. It didn't lead to anything. This isn't a new fact, since it was revealed six months ago. I may lack imagination, but I don't see the point of addressing this issue. There's nothing new, apart from the fact that Mr. Kielburger simply brought up Ben Chin's name.

My colleague Mr. Barrett said that we would just need to set aside one day and spend two hours on this. I've heard this a number of times, but again, there's nothing new. This issue came up six months ago. At that time, everyone thought that it wasn't relevant. We can resolve this issue with a letter. I don't want the committee to waste time, given the issues that we must address and the studies that we must finish. Already, when it comes time to write our WE Charity report, the consensus-building process will put all our skills to the test. The sooner we can begin this, the better.

It seems pointless to listen to two hours of testimony regarding a question that can almost be answered yes or no. I'm exaggerating a bit, I admit. I imagine that several members will want to ask questions, but in the end, the question will remain the same. We'll ask the witness if he corresponded with the Kielburgers in any way other than this LinkedIn message. We'll probably find new ways to ask that question, but it will remain the same. That's why I hope that I can convince my colleagues to resolve this quickly.

Just because we have the power to summon people to talk about irrelevant matters doesn't mean that we should do so. With Pornhub, MindGeek and WE Charity, we have repeatedly sent letters seeking clarifications. We could just use this method once again. There's nothing new about this approach either. It would be the most effective way to proceed.

• (1250)

I hope that my colleagues will support my point of view and that we can then move on to more urgent issues.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

I'm speaking to the subamendment. I really do appreciate the effort by Mr. Angus to help this committee complete this work, so that we can get to other work.

In the same way that Mr. Fergus said that the only mention of Mr. Chin was by Mr. Kielburger referring to a LinkedIn message, I

think that by the nature of that involvement—especially after seven months and all of us going through reams of documents with a fine-tooth comb on this issue—if there is an outstanding question, it can be dispensed with very quickly with a letter of request from yourself. That's just as we ask witnesses to do all the time—to provide us with written documentation.

I do agree with Mr. Angus that we can then move on to the material that we have received just recently with regard to MindGeek. It is very disturbing and I think that we owe it to Canadians to get back to that work.

On this issue of the WE study, we can dispense with it very quickly. That was the effort we made in the subamendment we had earlier, which was to request the answer to the committee's questions and move on.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Chair, for recognizing me.

There are a couple of things. One is Mr. Chin's name and the LinkedIn exchange brought up by Mr. Poilievre in the Kielburgers' meeting. This isn't on you. I remember an article going back to last summer in which Mr. Poilievre mentioned this. He subbed in at the last meeting, and he brought this up. Now we are locked in this debate on whether or not to have Mr. Chin come to the committee to testify. I agree that we need to get a confirmation directly from Mr. Chin. I think writing a letter is a good, efficient method and quite effective as well, because that's sort of the final piece that got thrown in from the last meeting, but that information is not new. If it wasn't included in the previous work plan, given that it was old information, I have a tough time understanding the significance of having him come in. That's my first point.

The second point is that I heard about the precedent setting. In my time on this committee, there has been a lot of precedent setting. First we talked about whether or not the Prime Minister's family members should be involved. In the end, their documents were called for and reviewed and there wasn't any substantial new information that we found from that action. I spoke at length against that, because I don't think family members should be brought in. When we run, it's a personal decision. We put ourselves under the microscope of the public in terms of accountability and transparency. That I understand. To me, it's a matter of principle whether or not family members of MPs should be subject to unveiling their own personal privacy and story. We heard earlier about a lot of support, including from me, for Mr. Angus. We have to defend the final line to protect our family members, so that's precedent setting.

Now, on staff, I don't believe there is a tradition of calling on political staff or on the staff of an MP's office just because a name was brought up by an opposition member on the committee questioning something that happened or that was reported on six or seven months ago. I just don't think that is a good thing. I remember that there was a question to Ms. Telford when she showed up at FINA, and she specifically said she was there on behalf of all staff. I think the question was put to Ms. Telford, and she spoke on behalf of staff members, and I think that's enough.

When it comes to this particular question about Mr. Chin's involvement with the WE Charity entity, I think the response we've heard is that clearly he has no involvement with WE Charity. We just need to confirm that, and a formal letter is more than enough to do that.

Again, I feel as though we're going in circles, and now we're deadlocked in this argument triggered by a question that came from Mr. Poilievre in the last meeting, and with some old information. I just don't think that we should waste any more time on calling another witness in. I was under the impression the work plan was to move on to finalize the report.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you.

I think we have exhausted the speaking list here now, so let's go to a vote on the subamendment.

(Subamendment negatived: nays 9; yeas 1 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The subamendment has been defeated, so we'll move to debate on the amendment.

Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

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

Obviously, I'll be voting against the main motion, and for several reasons. It seeks to create a controversy where none exists, simply because someone brought up the name of a witness who appeared last week. Six months ago, this person brought up the same name in the same context, and it was considered a non-issue. I'm sure that the same thing will happen this time.

People want to play—

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: I am recognizing Mr. Fortin on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: With all due respect to our colleague, Mr. Fergus, I think that he's arguing about the wrong issue. You submitted to the committee the amendment to remove the second-last paragraph of the motion, so that Mr. Shugart wouldn't need to testify. Now Mr. Fergus is telling us why he'll be voting against the main motion. I think that his comments are out of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will ask Mr. Fergus to remain on the debate we're currently undertaking, but we'll extend some latitude.

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

The reason I am caught short is that I am still having trouble receiving documents directly. Madam Clerk is well aware of this, as we have corresponded via text message about it. I don't know why, but they don't reach my inbox. If you can give me a few minutes, I will look for the information in my personal inbox, where I can receive documents from the clerk.

So it may be my fault that I do not have the right text in front of me. If you give me a few minutes, I will look for the right text so I can make a proper case. That said, the gist of my argument remains the same.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll turn to you, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: For Mr. Fergus's benefit, the amendment removes the second of three paragraphs, so it omits calling a representative from PCO to speak to the due diligence report. That is the change. There is no addition to the main motion.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I thank my colleagues Mr. Fortin and Mr. Barrett.

I'd like to ask a question about this. Did the invitation to appear before the committee always include personal assistants?

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Chair, it is not about—

• (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair: Pardon me, colleagues.

Let's not get into a debate here. I will allow Monsieur Fortin to answer, and then I would like to get to the vote.

Monsieur Fortin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: I was just saying that this is not the issue. The amendment is to remove a paragraph asking Mr. Shugart or another member of the Privy Council to appear. It is removed, period.

We have not yet discussed the rest of the motion.

Mr. Greg Fergus: In that case, Mr. Chair, I humbly maintain that my speech is entirely relevant, because the effect of this amendment is to still allow...

Our vote is going to have consequences, and I was just explaining why I feel the amendment is inadequate.

I believe my points are quite relevant, and if I may, I would like to continue.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, there has been some insistence by your colleagues to move things along today. We will turn back to you, but we're looking forward to voting on this expeditiously.

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

I hope you will give me the opportunity to make sure that this can be resolved quickly and in the most effective way possible so that the committee can be efficient in its efforts.

I feel the solution is simple. We can request a report from the Privy Council Office, and that is important. We don't need anyone to appear to talk about that report, as the amendment suggests. That is a good thing.

A witch hunt with respect to the rest is not necessary. We can deal with this, Mr. Chair, by giving you the authority to write a letter to Mr. Chin, in which you find the right words to get to the bottom of the matter and ask him to provide us with all communications he has had with WE Charity about the student grant program. By doing that, we can be very efficient and get to the things that are germane to our writing up our work. In addition, that should satisfy the interests of all committee members.

I move this assuming that my colleagues around the table are acting in good faith. I sincerely believe that they are.

If I may, I would like to introduce a subamendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think you could, Mr. Fergus, if you'd like to move your subamendment now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I am attempting to open the email in my personal inbox, as I was unable to receive it in my House of Commons email account.

I move to amend the motion where it says:

• (1310)

[*English*]

“adoption of this motion”....

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Chair, this is out of order. We are considering Mr. Barrett's amendment, and Mr. Fergus already told us that he supports it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Fortin, did you have a point of order?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is out of order. With all due respect, I do not believe we can move a new amendment to the motion. We are currently discussing Mr. Barrett's proposed amendment to remove the second paragraph. Mr. Fergus has already indicated that he is in favour of it. So I do not understand why he is proposing an amendment on something else. We are not there yet.

Can we move on? It is now 1:10 p.m. I know that people have made a habit of filibustering on this committee since last fall, but I confess I do not have a lot of patience for that kind of childish behaviour. Afterwards, if Mr. Fergus wishes to make another amendment, he can do so. One thing is clear, however: he has told us that he supports the amendment before us. So I want us to vote on it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Fortin. I'm going to hear the subamendment, and then I'm going to rule as to whether or not it's in order.

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I feel that Mr. Fortin's comments were not at all parliamentary. I have a great deal of respect for him—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus. We're just trying to get the subamendment.

Could you give us the text of the subamendment so that can be distributed to the members?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I certainly will, Mr. Chair.

However, we must do things properly. When a member uses disrespectful language, it does not help the situation. We are all members of Parliament and are all presumed to be honourable. We must always make sure that we treat our colleagues accordingly. I would like to say to Mr. Fortin—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

I'll just jump in here. I do agree with you that it is necessary for us to respect one another, including our time. I would like to circulate the text of your subamendment to the members—

Mr. Han Dong: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Dong has a point of order.

Mr. Han Dong: On a point of order, Chair, Mr. Fergus was being told he was acting like a child by another colleague from the opposition party and I think he has the right to respond to that, and I think you interrupted him twice.

The Chair: Mr. Dong, that's not a point of order, but I appreciate the reminder to all members to keep the conversation courteous. Thank you.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, out of courtesy to the members, would you read into the record the text of the subamendment that you're proposing so that it could be distributed to the members and so we can be courteous of members' time?

Mr. Greg Fergus: I certainly will, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

I would appreciate it if Mr. Fortin would kindly withdraw his comments so that we can continue to treat each other with respect. It is important. I know we can be passionate, but we should not use any bad language toward other members.

• (1315)

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Mr. Chair, may I respond to Mr. Fergus?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: I just wanted to note that I accused Mr. Fergus of absolutely nothing. Rather, I was critical of his behaviour. He has been talking about nothing for a long time in an effort to run out the clock. To me, that is childishness. I confessed my lack of patience for this kind of behaviour.

I have too much respect for Mr. Fergus to believe that he knows so little about the rules. I believe he knows very well what he is doing and I must admit that it exasperates me, Mr. Chair. I hardly see how I can apologize for it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. We'll consider the matter closed.

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, that is far from an apology.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: You are right, Mr. Fergus: it is not an apology. I have no intention of apologizing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Fortin, if you'd like to interject one last time, I would then like to move the business of the committee forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: I am ready to proceed to the vote, Mr. Chair.

I do not know where you stand, but I have nothing else to say. I will not apologize and I do not see why I should. I said I have no patience for childishness, period.

If Mr. Fergus feels the shoe fits, let him wear it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Fortin. Thanks for the clarification.

Colleagues, it would be helpful if we could debate the matter that's before our committee in terms of the amendment and the subamendment being proposed by Mr. Fergus.

I would now ask Mr. Fergus to read into the record the text that he is proposing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, I really want to honour your request, but once again, I feel that what Mr. Fortin said is really inexcusable.

I do not understand why he is insisting on it. An experienced man like him—

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I think what we're seeing here is childish behaviour, because we have serious issues to deal with. A colleague has been asked to withdraw his remark and he's withdrawn it. We've been asking Mr. Fergus to come up with the language of the subamendment. He either has it or he doesn't. To continue to try to pick a fight with Mr. Fortin is to me not credible. We have wasted a lot of time here. We've been told time and time again by the Liberals that they want to get down to work, so let's get down to work.

Does he have wording of a motion that actually may be in order? It may not be in order, and that's what I want to know. Does he actually have language for the motion? Can he get to that, please?

The Chair: Yes. I've asked Mr. Fergus to do that several times.

Mr. Fergus, we're anticipating the—

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, to be fair, are you telling me that there was a withdrawal of the comment? I did not hear that.

The Chair: That was my understanding. That was how I heard the conversation, Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Greg Fergus: I certainly didn't hear that, sir.

The Chair: That's how I heard it, Mr. Fergus.

We'll turn to you for the subamendment.

Mr. Greg Fergus: So for the record, there was a withdrawal of the comment—

The Chair: That's how I understood the translation. That's what I heard.

Mr. Greg Fergus: And that's the way you are reading it, sir.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Barrett on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Chair, you ruled that the matter was closed. The member opposite is required to speak to the motion at hand. On a question of relevance, the amendment is being debated unless there is a motion being put forward that will then be ruled on by the chair as to whether or not it is in order. If we're not discussing those things, and the point of order has been ruled closed by the chair, then any other comments would be out of order.

The Chair: I appreciate that.

Mr. Fergus, you can understand there is a desire by the committee to move forward to a vote. If you'd like to propose a subamendment, I would encourage you to do it now. Otherwise we can proceed—

• (1320)

Mr. Greg Fergus: I will do so.

Mr. Han Dong: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong: I've been listening to this exchange back and forth—

The Chair: Mr. Dong, I just want to make sure this is a point of order, not a point of debate.

Mr. Han Dong: It is a point of order, Chair. You made a ruling. In your interpretation the comment was withdrawn but none of us actually heard Monsieur Fortin say to withdraw.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Then challenge the chair.

The Chair: Pardon me, colleagues. I'm going to call this meeting back to order. I did not state that Mr. Fortin's language was unparliamentary. I did not rule that. I did not call him to withdraw the comment.

Mr. Fergus was offended. He can take that up with Mr. Fortin, but I would suggest that happen in a private conversation and not at this committee. I did not demand anybody to withdraw a comment. Mr. Fergus requested a withdrawal. It wasn't forthcoming to his satisfaction. That is between him and Mr. Fortin. That's a private conversation that probably should happen, but quite frankly, this chair has not ruled Monsieur Fortin's language unparliamentary and therefore there is nothing that is required to be withdrawn.

Mr. Han Dong: That's contradictory to what Mr. Barrett said.

Wow.

The Chair: Mr. Dong, we're not going to continue with regard to a debate. I am the chair. I have not ruled that unparliamentary language was used, and therefore let's move on to the text of the subamendment.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Sorry, I just want to get this on the record, because it is a very difficult job to be chair, and I think that what you're being subjected to is not fair. I think these are delaying tactics. I want to say that I have confidence in the chair.

If the Liberals.... Mr. Dong doesn't have confidence in the chair. He has a mechanism. Rather than saying, "wow", he can challenge the chair. If Mr. Fergus wants to continue this fight, he can challenge the chair.

You ruled that this was finished, and as chair you represent all of us, and so I accept your ruling. I think it's a wise ruling. I think you're trying to get to the heart of the matter so we can get back on track.

I would say to my Liberal colleagues, either challenge the chair or let's move on and actually hear if Mr. Fergus does have an amendment that is in order. That's what I'm interested in hearing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Colleagues, I think it would be helpful for us to move on.

Mr. Fergus, if you have the text of the subamendment, that will allow us to suspend the meeting so that that can be circulated to the members and then we can vote on it.

Mr. Greg Fergus: We'll see, Mr. Chair, if you find this subamendment to be in order. It is to amend the motion. After the words, "adoption of this motion" replace that with, "that the chair write to Mr. Ben Chin and ask him to provide in writing to confirm any communications he had with the Kielburgers or WE Charity in regard to the CSSG".

The Chair: Can you explain to the committee members how that's [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] subamendment that was proposed, the one by Mr. Dong, specifically?

Mr. Greg Fergus: It is substantively different in that, Mr. Chair, we are moving away.... We are allowing for the clerk, or a representative of the clerk, to bring forward the report, which we would have, as well as making sure that we are trying to move...that the communications are just larger than the LinkedIn aspect of it. I put it out that it is the "any communication" with regard to the CSSG that makes it different. I'm also requesting that written testimony be submitted to this committee and to all members who sit on this committee. It doesn't presuppose the outcome, which was suggested in the previous subamendment.

For those reasons, sir, I think it's substantively different.

The Chair: I respectfully disagree. I believe that it's substantively the same as the previous one that was already voted on. Let us now move to the vote on the amendment. We can have a recorded vote on that.

• (1325)

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Greg Fergus: I'm not certain if it's a point of order or an actual motion, Mr. Chair, but very respectfully I disagree.

The Chair: Are you challenging the chair?

Mr. Greg Fergus: I would like to challenge the chair.

The Chair: The question is whether the chair's ruling is sustained. We'll now move to a recorded vote on that.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 5; nays 5)

The Chair: Colleagues, let's move to the amended motion. Let's move to a recorded vote on that. I will move to Madam Clerk with a vote on the amendment.

Mr. Greg Fergus: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, I see Mr. Fortin's hand is up.

The Chair: Mr. Fortin, were you on the speaking list?

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: No, it was a mistake.

[English]

The Chair: We'll move to the vote on that, Madam Clerk.

Mr. Han Dong: I understand the amendment is to take away the part for Mr. Shugart to attend. For that I vote yes.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

Mr. Charlie Angus: That's excellent. Could we just read what we just voted on?

The Chair: Let's actually suspend. It has been circulated already. We'll allow members to look through that again. It is Mr. Barrett's amendment. So it's the motion as amended.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I'm ready to vote on the main issue; we don't need to hear the amendment.

The Chair: Very good.

We have three people on the speaking list.

We go to Mr. Fergus to begin.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Not that I'm shy to take the microphone but it was actually Madam Shanahan who was before me, sir.

The Chair: My list has you first.

Mrs. Shanahan, we'll turn to you.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This committee has been trying to get to a better place on this motion. I welcome the fact that we are not asking Mr. Shugart to appear. We respect the fact that he has made a commitment to this committee to provide a report, and we know he will certainly do so in a reasonable time.

It's the other part of this motion that is most concerning. As someone who doesn't tend to get involved in the day-to-day fracas of partisan debate, it has been quite something to watch the Conservatives operating over the past few months, especially how they've been trying to shift the conversation in the political arena. We have certainly seen that in the media, but even the media has gotten tired of this story with all its permutations and variations.

In fact, when I'm watching the news, and when I'm speaking to my constituents, the constituents who are calling my office, the news they want to talk about, the information they want to have, pertains to when they're going to get their vaccine. They want to know, when we are going to see a return to some kind of post-pandemic normal and what our next steps are in relaunching the economy.

Apparently, WE is still on the mind of Mr. Barrett, and we had Mr. Poilievre last week making his appearance here at this committee. That's what they want to talk about. That is what Conservatives want to talk about. They just want to bring up an old story, something that has been gone over many times.

There was a time when the Conservatives were addressing the vaccine issue. Indeed, that is the role of opposition, and we certainly respect that. These were the main topics that were being brought

up in question period back in January and February. Then all of a sudden, it stopped. We saw Mr. Poilievre doing his little videos on Twitter. It's funny that the subject of concern would change so dramatically.

When WE Charity was all he wanted to talk about, that's all we saw. Yet, that disappeared in December, January and February, as if...Indeed, that's what many of us felt, that the WE Charity issue had been put to bed, and amply so. From the point of view of the finance committee and this committee, we still had some tail end testimony to take care of. We certainly thought that's where we were going, to deal with the issue before us regarding the pandemic spending, and if there were issues of lobbying and so on.

No, that disappeared. It looked like the Conservatives had moved on to something else. They thought that would be...The fact that there were job losses...There was a pandemic going on, there were definitely job losses. Those job losses were most keenly felt among women in the service sector. It's something that, certainly, our side takes very seriously. We want to be addressing those issues.

However, there was some torquing going on, and a fear campaign that somehow vaccines weren't coming, people were out of jobs, and we were all going to hell in a handbasket.

• (1330)

Lo and behold, vaccines arrived, Chair. They are arriving on a daily basis. Every day we're seeing more and more vaccines arriving and I know—

• (1335)

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order.

There's a question of relevance. We aren't the health committee. I don't know why we're descending into this sideshow on vaccines. If the Liberals are going to spend another 40 hours filibustering, perhaps they could just tell us in advance.

On issues of relevance, vaccines have nothing to do with the discussion at hand.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Shanahan, while I have given significant leeway today, I would ask that you move to the amended motion that we're currently debating. I will start to be a little bit more restrictive in terms of where and how far I will allow committee members to venture.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, I'm sorry that members on this committee feel that vaccines are not an issue of importance because—

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order

I'm not sure that the need to be snide on an issue as serious as a pandemic is very becoming on someone on the government side. I never said vaccines weren't important.

If they are going to make these personal attacks, I think we're going to be looking at a long filibuster. I think they should stick to their point.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

I do appreciate that. That isn't a point of order, but I think, Mrs. Shanahan, we all will take note of the conversation that happened earlier between Mr. Fergus and Monsieur Fortin that sometimes language can be unhelpful.

Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Indeed, and I withdraw any remark I made that would have disparaged the good intentions of anyone on this committee, but indeed, it is what this study is about. This study is about the pandemic spending. It is about the different programs and measures that the government put together very quickly in a period of crisis to address the many sectors that were affected by the pandemic and certainly the measures that were taken to control the pandemic, which of course was the economic lockdown. That is indeed in the very title of the motion that is before us here. It's a meeting requested by four members of the committee to discuss their request for further documents and testimony in relation to the study concerning questions of conflict of interest and lobbying in relation to pandemic spending. That's in the Standing Order 106(4) motion that we are discussing here today.

I would like to continue with the remarks that I want to make regarding the pandemic spending, the measures that were taken and the fact that it was all hands on deck for the staff, public servants and parliamentarians of all stripes. If you recall, it seems like eons ago, but we were all hands on deck consulting with each other and trying to put those measures in place. Who would have thought at that time that we would be here today where we actually are delivering vaccines and vaccines are getting into arms?

That's why I could understand that the Conservative Party would talk about the importance of jobs and vaccines. This was very important. They completely dropped the WE study. I'd like to reassure the Conservative members that the latest job numbers look great, that the vaccine deliveries are continuing, not only as scheduled but better than scheduled. The numbers recently released by Statistics Canada reveal that Canadians recovered more than 259,000 jobs in February alone. The national unemployment rate fell to 8.2%. This is the lowest level since March 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These figures blew past expectations of a gain of 75,000 jobs and an unemployment rate of 9.2%.

This government's plan to help Canadians and Canadian businesses is working, and the numbers show it, despite what Mr. Poilievre and others in his party want to make us believe.

My colleagues don't need to take it from me. Let me share two quotes while we're on this subject.

The International Monetary Fund said last week about Canada's economy:

Public health policies and spending were instrumental in containing the initial spread of the virus.

● (1340)

The Chair: Ms. Shanahan, I did say that I was going to limit the latitude in terms of this debate. I've said that it needs to be attributed to the amended motion. I'd ask you to bring it back to the amended motion.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Well, Mr. Chair, the amended motion is calling for the appearance of an employee to speak to their in-

volvement in putting together a measure, a government program, to address one of the economic side effects and some of the fallout from COVID, so I think it's germane to speak about how, already, that good work has been furthering the Canadian economy and we are seeing the results.

The Chair: Madame Shanahan, I am not looking to debate whether or not you were into territory that was no longer relevant. I had ruled that it was no longer relevant, so I'd like you to move to the debate with regard to the motion that has been amended, which is currently before the committee.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, the time of this committee is very precious. Earlier today, we offered subamendments that would address the very issues that the opposition has put forward in this motion. They want to hear about Mr. Chin's involvement regarding the LinkedIn email that Mr. Kielburger mentioned. We certainly agree that it's appropriate to have some communication. That can be expedited by a simple letter from the chair.

I am concerned that the opposition is using committees for their fishing expedition. Luckily for us the Conservatives are not in government because, as we witnessed this weekend at the convention that was held, the denial of climate change.... There's a debate that any committee could be having.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order.

I certainly agree that the issue of climate change is a debate, but it's not a debate for this committee. This is the privacy and ethics committee, so, again, we're seeing a filibuster. We need to get this, so that we can get on to other issues, like the Pornhub study. This is a question of relevance.

The Chair: I have warned Mrs. Shanahan several times.

Mrs. Shanahan, we're going to move on to the next speaker.

We'll turn to you, Mr. Sorbara.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Thank you, Chair.

My question is very simple. It's more of a request.

I have received several emails from the clerk today in terms of where we are in today's debate. I am requesting that we please be sent the version of the motion that we are dealing with at this moment in time. I have received a number of emails with lots of lines scratched out, wording changes and so forth. I would like to make sure, for my own safety in terms of understanding where we are at the point of the debate, where the motion is.

I am humbly requesting you, Chair, through to the clerk to have that motion sent now to everyone. I want to make sure I am debating and speaking to the right thing. There have been a lot of amendments and subamendments moved. I just want to make sure I'm on track.

I thank you for that.

The Chair: To make it easy, it's the second paragraph that has been removed and all else remains the same, but we will get that distributed.

Mr. Fergus.

• (1345)

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

Chair, I respectfully ask you to inform this committee where the rule is that you can move on and deny me my right to speak. I take it that you can ask me to continue on the motion. I was attempting to do so. I do not believe that you can just cut me off.

The Chair: Yes. Thanks, Mrs. Shanahan.

It is a requirement and a rule that the chair is to maintain order. I had asked you several times to move to relevance. It was causing disorder that you weren't; therefore, I cut you off.

Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I am sorry, Mr. Chair. I'm looking for the motion that Mr. Sorbara requested be sent to us.

You want my comments to be directly relevant to the motion before us, and I understand that very well. So it is important to have the latest version of the motion so that we are all on the same page.

I would not like to say anything that you believe is not relevant to the debate on the motion. I want to make sure I follow your instructions to the letter. I will attempt to read the last email I received in my personal inbox.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, can you confirm that you've have received it? It has been circulated to all members.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I just received it, at 1:47 p.m., in my inbox. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Madam Clerk.

Once again, I did not receive it at my House of Commons email address. I need to resolve this with the IT group, but that is not relevant to our discussion.

So, Mr. Chair, I would ask you to confirm that the motion in question is indeed the following:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the Committee requests to receive from the Liberal Government's Privy Council the due diligence report concerning the assignment of the Canada Student Service Grant;

That the document be translated beforehand and that it be submitted to the Clerk of the Committee in both official languages, not later than (5) five days after the adoption of this motion and...

It goes on, but as I understand it, Mr. Chair, the amendment is to remove the next few lines and replace them with the following:

And that, in light of revelations stemming from Craig and Mark Kielburger's testimony of March 15, 2021, the Committee do call for Ben Chin, Rick Theis and Amitpal Singh to appear before the Committee at a date and time determined by the Chair, but no later than one week following the adoption of this motion.

I believe that is precisely the motion we are debating. If you can confirm that for me by nodding your head, Mr. Chair, I will continue my comments.

[*English*]

The Chair: You are correct. It is the email that was circulated most recently, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to add to my comments that a review of the items in this motion reveals several things that leave much to be desired.

When they appeared last Monday, Craig and Marc Kielburger mentioned that, in mid-summer 2020, they had sent a message to Ben Chin through LinkedIn. They testified under oath, I believe. They said it was the only message sent to Mr. Chin and that it was not directly from Mr. Kielburger, but from one of his assistants, his executive assistant, I would imagine. As I recall the testimony, the Kielburgers said that this individual sent the message because it was a LinkedIn request and Mr. Chin simply responded with a short, polite sentence, as people often do in those cases.

If you recall, I had mentioned that I do not have a LinkedIn account myself. That was in response to a comment from an opposition member who said that the testimony regarding the message in question was not credible. He said it was unrealistic that people do not have LinkedIn accounts and that the conversation could not have been as simple as that. If you refer to the transcript of that meeting, you will see that I explained that I found it credible, and indeed quite understandable, that things happened according to the testimony.

Several things concern me about the motion put forward. It asks for information from the "Liberal Government's" Privy Council. I may be a little picky about the wording, but it should be noted that it is the Privy Council "of the Government of Canada". The Privy Council Office is not a political entity. As you know, we have a professional public service that works for all governments, regardless of political affiliation. Public servants are there to look after the common good of Canadians. That is why I find this motion to be unnecessarily partisan and, by the same token, unduly damaging to the reputation of our public service.

• (1350)

Mr. Chair, you were in the previous government, the Harper government. You have a lot of political experience. I imagine that you see, as I do, that our public servants have done a remarkable, outstanding, non-partisan job to ensure the well-being of Canadians. So you can understand why I find it disturbing that the motion refers to the "Liberal government's" Privy Council, when it is the Privy Council Office of the Government of Canada, whatever that government may be.

I'm pleased, because at least the part of the motion that called for Mr. Shugart to appear before this committee, regardless of his personal circumstances, has been replaced. In fact, I would like to take this opportunity to wish him a speedy recovery, as Mr. Barrett did as well. The man has a long history in our Canadian public service. He has been involved since his youth and has served successive governments well, regardless of their political stripes. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to—

• (1355)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus. I'll just remind you to move into the relevance. That portion of the text has been removed, so I'd ask that you move to the motion as amended.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: All right.

We will now wait for the report to come in. This is a good amendment to the motion.

Now we need to turn to the rest of the motion. Some will say that it is a kind of witch hunt. We want to call certain people to the committee just because some witnesses mentioned their names in passing. For example, actually, last Monday, the Kielburger brothers mentioned Mr. Chin, Mr. Theis and Mr. Singh, and now we want those three people to appear before the committee.

Mr. Chair, in the Harper era, your colleagues worked very hard to prevent political staff from appearing before this committee. I believe that happened during the meetings of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. An argument was made—

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: We do have to leave to go to question period, so are we going to wrap this meeting up and then we'll reconvene on Friday?

The Chair: It's left to committee members to determine what it would look like. Mr. Fergus was reminding me of the time I was in government, and so I'm very familiar with what a filibuster looks like. This is looking very reminiscent of past times, so it doesn't appear that we will get to a vote.

I'll ask committee members: Is there an appetite to move to a vote today? I'm seeing several people saying yes, and the three members on the speaking list saying no.

I'm getting a sense by the question that there's an appetite to adjourn this committee meeting and return to this debate on Friday. Is that sense I'm getting correct?

• (1400)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes.

The Chair: I think so. We will move to adjourn, then.

The meeting is adjourned.

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