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Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Monday, September 28, 2020

Chair: Ms. Ruby Sahota



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1530)

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Justin Vaive): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

I must inform members that the clerk of the committee can receive motions only for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive other types of motions and cannot entertain points of order or participate in debate.

We will now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

I am now ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Clerk, I would really love to entertain debate with you, but I understand that's not possible, given what you just said, so I move that Ms. Sahota be chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Gerretsen that Ruby Sahota be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

There are no further motions. Is it agreed?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Ruby Sahota duly elected chair of the committee.

I invite Ruby Sahota to take the virtual chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaive.

It is a pleasure to be back on this committee, and it is nice to see all of the very familiar faces and some new members as well. Welcome to PROC.

It's nice to have you, Ms. Vecchio. Tom, it's nice to see you as well.

Mr. Doherty, you have subbed in before as well. It's nice to have you back. It seems as though many of the other members are permanent members from the last Parliament.

Oh, actually, Mr. Finnigan, you are a new member and you have been subbing in as well. It's nice to have you back.

Ms. Blaney, Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Alghabra, Mr. Gerretsen, and Dr. Duncan, it's a pleasure to have all of you.

Mr. Therrien and Mr. Tucker, it's nice to have you as well.

I don't think I've forgotten anybody at this point.

We should carry on with the election of the vice-chairs at this time. After that we'll get into routine motions.

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition.

I'm now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): I think I have my hand raised.

The Clerk: Go ahead, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I would like to put forward the name of Todd Doherty for first vice-chair, representing the CPC.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Ms. Vecchio that Todd Doherty be elected as first vice-chair of the committee. Are there any other motions?

The Chair: Congratulations, Todd.

The Clerk: I'll just put the question on the motion proposed by Ms. Vecchio.

It has been moved by Ms. Vecchio that Todd Doherty be elected as first vice-chair of the committee. Are all in agreement?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Welcome, Mr. Doherty.

• (1535)

The Chair: Congratulations.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Thanks. It's an honour.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

I am now ready to receive motions for the second vice-chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Clerk, or Madam Chair, I nominate Mr. Therrien for second vice-chair.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Mr. Gerretsen has moved that Alain Therrien be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: Welcome, Mr. Therrien.

[English]

We have elected the chair and vice-chairs of the committee.

The Chair: Congratulations, Mr. Therrien. It's nice to have you aboard again.

Let us get into the routine motions. Before we get into any other discussion, it is a priority that we set those in place.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Chair, I'd like to move that we adopt the routine motions, and I'll read them one by one if that's okay.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: On analyst services, I move:

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, should we vote on these one by one or just see if there is any opposition to any of the routine motions?

The Clerk: The committee could proceed in whichever way it so pleases. It can choose to go through all of them and adopt them in a block. The committee can also choose to go through them one at a time, with a vote after each one.

The Chair: How would the committee like to proceed? Would you like to proceed in blocks or one at a time?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Chair, can I suggest that we see if there are any routine motions that anybody would like to separate out, and then first vote on everything else in one block? Then, if there are separations, we could deal with those on their own.

The Chair: Okay. I guess what's being asked is if there are any objections to any of the routine motions.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): I have a few questions, Madam Chair. However we move through it, I'm fine to do that. I just have a couple of logistical questions and one proposition, which members already know about, but I thought we could have a discussion about it. I will leave it in your hands as to what to do next. I did raise my hand, so I'm not sure what the process is.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Hopefully, I'm doing this right. I will un-raise my hand as soon as I am done.

First of all, I just wanted to put forward a discussion about the second and subsequent rounds. Right now, we have the Conservative Party for five minutes, the Liberal Party for five minutes, the Conservative Party a second time for five minutes, the Liberal Party for a second five minutes, and then the Bloc and the NDP for 2.5 minutes.

I wanted to recommend that the NDP and the Bloc be moved between the two rounds for the Conservatives and the Liberals, so it would be Conservative Party for five minutes, Liberal Party for five

minutes, Bloc two and a half, NDP two and a half, and then it would return to the Conservatives and the Liberals for five minutes each. That is one proposition that I would like to propose. I feel that often we don't get any chances to have that second round, and I think that's a bit of unfairness that I would like to address.

The other questions I have are just simple ones. Right underneath the second round, we talk about the clerk being authorized to distribute documents to the members only when documents are in both official languages, and of course I think that is absolutely correct. I am just wondering how that will be done in the hybrid model and just what the methods are for doing that.

The last question I have is around the clerk's responsibility to make sure there are necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and subcommittees. I'm just wondering, if it's the hybrid model, how soon the committee members are required to let the clerk know so that the clerk can do that. I want to make sure that we're very respectful of their time if we're there in person. Of course there would be a meal provided, and I don't expect that to happen if I am participating virtually, but I want to make sure that we respect the clerk's time in these unprecedented circumstances.

Thank you.

• (1540)

The Chair: I think we have a couple of other issues.

We'll hear from Mr. Doherty and then Monsieur Therrien.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Chair and colleagues, in other committees we've been on, it has been the chair's prerogative in terms of questioning of witnesses and the length of time they have been given for statements. If we feel that six minutes or eight minutes is enough, rather than 10 minutes, are we still going with the same assumption that it will be the prerogative of the chair and the committee, as per the study we're doing, that the length of time allotted to witnesses can be adjusted as we see fit? That then will give additional time for speaking and questions from members.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Chair, may I make a point of order? I'm sorry to interrupt.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Just in terms of making sure that we're running through this properly, maybe you would want to consult with the clerk. Mr. Turnbull moved a motion, and I think we're still back on that analyst services motion he moved. I thought we were just discussing how to go through this at first, but now it seems we're starting to home in on some of the issues. Should we deal with the analyst services motion that's on the floor before we continue debating other items?

The Chair: I'm not sure if Mr. Therrien has debate on the issue or just a suggestion as to which part. So far, everyone seems to be in favour of all of the routine motions, other than the questioning section, on which there's some debate or maybe motions to be put forward. On the working meals, I think there was just some clarification. Other than that, nothing has been raised so far.

I want to see if Monsieur Therrien has any other issues with any of the sections. Otherwise, perhaps we could pass all non-contentious sections together and then come back to those two.

Go ahead, Monsieur Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I'm not sure whether now is the right time to do this or whether we'll be discussing it more formally later, but I wanted to piggyback on what Ms. Blaney was saying about the second round.

[*English*]

The Chair: Perfect. We are going to come back to that. That seems to be a section we won't pass until there's been some discussion or some motions on it. We'll come back to that one.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Great. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: On working meals, it states that the clerk be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals. Did you just want a time frame to be put in place, Ms. Blaney?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I just wanted clarity. I know that we are to let the clerk know if we'll be participating in person. I'm just wondering if there's a clear timeline around that, just to be respectful.

The Clerk: Madam Chair and Ms. Blaney, for the working meals, generally for the hybrid meetings I would be proceeding the way I would when the entire committee is meeting in person in the committee room. I would be ordering meals for the members of the committee. It might take a little while to figure out how many are actually participating in person versus virtually. Any heads-up that I get that one of you will be participating in person obviously would be of benefit. However, I will be ordering a certain amount of food to permit everybody who is here in person to have a meal.

I must say—and I'll take the opportunity while I have the floor—that obviously because of the special COVID arrangements, the nature of the catered meals we usually get will be different. No longer will there be shared platters of food that people can pick from to assemble a plate. There will be enough individualized plates for any of the members who do show up in person.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: My thoughts on this are that the amazing clerks and all the analysts and staff who do so well by us every day are going to always respond to us accordingly, and I respect that. I'm just wondering if it's something we should discuss and if it actually should be in the routine motions that you have to tell the clerk, because it is also a bit of a waste of money if we have the clerk getting food for everybody and three people show up.

I'm wondering if, as the mother committee, we should seriously consider this new format and give direction so that there's less of a lack of clarity for the amazing people who work for the committee.

• (1545)

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Vecchio, do you have something on a different section, or is it debate on a particular section?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It will be after routine proceedings. It's all okay.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Clerk, are we able to pass or move all motions with the exception of the questioning motion and the meals, and then discuss those other motions afterwards?

The Clerk: Yes, Madam Chair, you can proceed that way if you want. You can group them all together into one block, except for the two that the committee would like to discuss further.

The Chair: Is it okay with the committee if we proceed that way? That way we've dealt with the majority of issues.

I see that it's okay.

Mr. Clerk, would you mind calling the question?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Turnbull might want to amend his motion.

The Chair: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, can I ask for clarification here on the two sections? Is one on the opening remarks and questioning of witnesses and the other one on travel, accommodation and living expenses, or am I getting that wrong?

The Chair: No. It's on working meals.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Oh, right. I'm sorry. I missed that.

Shall I read all of them into the record? Is that necessary, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes, Mr. Turnbull, you could proceed that way so that everybody would have maximum clarity and if that would be of benefit for the other members.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's unless you want to save time. Then I don't need to read them.

The Chair: It's a lot of reading, I think. Would any of the members request that Mr. Turnbull read into the record all of the sections being moved?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

All right, Mr. Turnbull—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: If you need a break, Ryan, I'm happy to help out.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: No, I think I can read a couple of paragraphs, but thanks.

On the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business, I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(1), the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business be composed of one (1) member from each recognized party and a Chair from the Government party; and that Ginette Petitpas-Taylor be appointed Chair of the subcommittee.

The Chair: Well, it was a good thing you were reading that out, because I believe you'll need a substitute for that name.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, she's still on the committee. Mr. Finnigan's just filling in.

The Chair: Oh, Mr. Finnigan is filling in today. Okay. Thank you for clarifying that for me.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): That's right. Don't give me more work.

The Chair: Okay, we don't have to substitute anything. Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's okay. I'll continue on, then.

On the subcommittee on agenda and procedure, I move:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five (5) members; the Chair, one member from each party; and that the subcommittee work in the spirit of collaboration.

I also move, on meeting without a quorum, that the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four (4) members are present, including one (1) member of the opposition and one (1) member of the government, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after fifteen (15) minutes, regardless of members present.

I also move, on documents—

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, do you have an issue with that motion?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: The concern I have is that in the last one we had in this Parliament, we actually had four members. We had two members of the opposition and two members of the government, not one member of the government and one member of the opposition. I just want to make sure. The original had just one, but then we modified it, and all committees followed suit. I wanted to point that out.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Chair, I thought the same—that it was two members from the opposition and two members of the government.

• (1550)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm okay with changing that.

The Chair: Okay. Would you like that to be amended, then?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It looks as though they do, and I personally don't have a problem with it.

The Chair: Is anyone opposed to that motion being amended? Okay.

Ryan, could you—

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Chair, I can read it out. Just for clarity, it would be:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence printed when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four (4) members are present, including two (2) members of the opposition and two (2) members of the government, but when travelling outside the parliamentary precinct, that the meeting begin after fifteen (15) minutes, regardless of members present.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I consider that to be friendly.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Shall I move on?

The Chair: Yes, we're moving on to document distribution.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I move:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the committee only when the documents are available in both official languages and that witnesses be advised accordingly.

On travel, accommodation and living expenses for witnesses, I move:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two (2) representatives per organization; provided that, in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

On access to in camera meetings, I move:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to have one staff member at an in camera meeting and that one additional person from each House officer's office be allowed to be present.

On transcripts of in camera meetings, I move:

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee or by their staff.

On notice of motion, I move:

That a forty-eight (48) hours notice, interpreted as two (2) nights, shall be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that (1) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday; that (2) the motion be distributed to members in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said notice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour; and that (3) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day and that when the committee is travelling on official business, no substantive motions may be moved.

The Chair: Okay, are we in favour of the motions moved by Mr. Turnbull?

(Motions agreed to)

The Chair: The motions are carried.

Okay, we'll move back to the two sections. Let's move back to the first one. It's on the time for opening remarks and the questioning of witnesses.

I believe we have Mr. Therrien and then Ms. Vecchio on the speakers list.

Go ahead, Mr. Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: We're on Ms. Blaney's motion regarding the second round, right?

[*English*]

The Chair: That's correct.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Very good.

I understand what she's trying to do, that is, ensure the Bloc Québécois and NDP don't miss out on their speaking time in the second round, which tends to happen because we often don't make it to the end of the second round.

Naturally, I agree with moving the Bloc Québécois and the NDP farther up the list for the second round, to make sure we both get an opportunity to speak. That said, I believe the Standing Committee on Health found a way to guarantee it gets all the way through the second round. I wonder whether it wouldn't be a good idea to just tighten up the second round so that the NDP and the Bloc Québécois are each guaranteed a turn to speak. That's an option. I know other committees have done it.

Basically, I agree with Ms. Blaney, but this is something I wondered about.

[*English*]

The Chair: I guess that's a question for me. I would love to guarantee that the Bloc and the NDP would get their time to speak in the second round, but I know that Ms. Blaney—

• (1555)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Madam Chair, the translation on the English channel is in French.

The Chair: Oh, okay. There is a translation issue.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we'll look into it to see what the issue is. If you could just suspend for a couple of minutes, we'll try to figure out what the problem is.

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): I think it's fine now. I don't hear the translators anymore.

The Chair: Yes, it has stopped.

The Clerk: Okay. We can proceed.

The Chair: I would love to guarantee that the NDP and the Bloc get their time in the second round each and every time we have witnesses, but there's an issue, and we've seen it happen. For the most part, when we had extended, longer open meetings, I was able to do that and I obviously want to be able to do that always, but when we have the regular three-hour time slot for a committee meeting, it's a little bit more challenging to be able to always guarantee it, unless we extend the time for our meeting that day, because technical difficulties can arise. Things can happen.

I understand why Ms. Blaney has raised this issue—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: In that case, we support Ms. Blaney's suggestion to change the order of speakers in the second round—if possible, obviously—to better the Bloc Québécois's and the NDP's

chances of being able to speak a second time to address each witness.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Vecchio is next.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm okay. Just pass it to Mr. Tom Lukiwski.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Thank you.

Quickly, colleagues, just as way of background, I'm back on PROC. I was previously on PROC for nine years when I was parliamentary secretary to the government House leader when the Conservatives were in power, but for the past five years I have been the chairman of government operations and estimates. I put that in context by saying that during my tenure as chair, we had the same questions come up on a fairly frequent basis. On many occasions the Bloc and the NDP were prevented from asking questions simply because we ran out of time.

What I did—and it was a unilateral and very arbitrary decision that I made—was that on many occasions, I reduced the amount of time in the first and second rounds, which would allow the Bloc and the NDP to ask questions. As an example, if we had one hour of witnesses and the two witnesses presenting were giving 10-minute opening addresses, that would leave 40 minutes for Q and A. I would arbitrarily reduce the first round to five minutes and the second to four minutes, and that would leave two minutes each for the Bloc and the NDP at the end. That worked out very well, but I must say it was not guaranteed. It was just the approach that I took to try to ensure fairness so that my Bloc and NDP colleagues would have ample opportunity to ask questions.

From time to time, there was something else I did in order to allow more time for questions. If we had a government representative, whether a minister or a public service officer who was giving opening comments, I would ask concurrence from the committee members that we would not have those opening statements given verbally but that those opening statements would be delivered. I would ask the committee to allow them to be appended to the minutes of the meeting as if read. That allowed even more time for questions.

My point, Madam Chair, is that at the discretion of the chair, there are many options available if in fact your overriding desire is to allow both the Bloc and the NDP to have questions. I fully support that. That is how I operated when I was a chair.

Monsieur Therrien and Madame Blaney, I'm not sure if there's any way, unless we have unanimous consent, to guarantee those speaking slots. A bit of a leap of faith is required in this committee and in other committees. If both Bloc and NDP members trust the discretion of the chair to do everything in his or her power to ensure that the third and fourth parties in the House have an opportunity to ask questions, that may be the best we can get to.

I would certainly support you, Madam Chair, if in fact you used your discretionary powers to try to ensure that the NDP and the Bloc are not overlooked and are not prevented from asking questions.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski. I really appreciate the experience you bring to this committee. I got to sit across from you in some meetings of PROC when you subbed in two parliaments ago.

Thank you for that suggestion. I think it is great. Of course I do wish to allow proper chances for questioning by all parties. I like your idea of being able to shorten the times. We have had to do that in the past when, on some rounds, I asked for consent from the members to either shorten the opening remarks or to shorten some of the other parties' time that was allocated so that there would be enough time at the end to allow for questions from the Bloc and from the NDP.

There are a couple more suggestions, and then maybe we can get to a solution on this issue.

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really like what I just heard, to be completely honest. If you look at the total number of minutes that are in here for questions, there are 49 minutes. With a 10-minute introductory statement, that is just under an hour, at 59 minutes.

I would definitely support shortening the opening statements. My personal opinion is that if you can't get your point across in six minutes, I don't know how much more you're going to be able to get across in an additional four minutes. To be honest, I'm skeptical about moving the time slots around. I'm not 100% certain that this is the best way to go about doing it. I really do think that if we can limit and even reduce the amount of time for the opening statements to, let's say, six minutes, it would be a much better way to go about it.

I'm interested in hearing what others have to say, but as it stands right now, I really like the idea of shortening the opening statements by the witnesses.

The Chair: What would you do with that extra time? Would you be tacking it on somewhere, or do you think it would guarantee our getting to the end?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's in an attempt to guarantee getting to the end. That's why I would do it that way. I mean, right now it's at 59 minutes, so you literally have no opportunity to be off by even a little bit.

There's another thing I would really encourage you to do as the chair, Madam Chair, and I know you were really good about it in the last committee. I'll give credit where credit is due. I liked what Marilyn Gladu did as chair when I subbed in once. She was chair a number of years ago on the status of women committee, and she was really good. As soon as it got to the 10-minute mark, she would say, "Okay, you're done. Thank you." Then she'd go to the next person.

You might think you're being rude, but the truth is that if you treat every single witness in exactly the same way, then you can rely on that fact and you can say, "Sorry. I treat everybody like this. It's not unique. I'm not doing it for a Conservative or Liberal witness", or something like that.

If we can get to a place where that happens—

The Chair: I'm rude to everyone.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, never.

I think it can be done. You're so diplomatic that I'm sure you'll come across as being a nice guy.

I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: I don't know about that, but yes, I could try that. Yes, we could reduce the time there.

Would people be in favour of those two scenarios that Ms. Blaney has presented? I don't know if anyone has jumped in support of any of those scenarios yet; nor has anyone jumped in support of reducing the time given to the witnesses.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I was just going to show support for the suggestion made by Mr. Gerretsen. I thought it was a really good suggestion, potentially, to shorten the opening statements. I do think that empowering and giving flexibility and discretion to our chair, whom I completely trust to ensure that everyone gets equal time, is good.

I think Mr. Lukiwski's suggestions were really good as well. I do like giving the chair the ability to potentially shorten and distribute the time fairly to ensure that everybody gets a chance to ask questions.

I really don't think there's any way to guarantee that people don't get cut off or that everyone gets equal time. I think there's a large degree of uncertainty about how many interruptions or how many different side discussions will ensue.

Those are my thoughts. Thanks.

• (1605)

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I'll go back to what I said before. This will be a rare circumstance, in that I'm agreeing with my colleague Mr. Gerretsen, so mark it down in the calendar.

What I said earlier on—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm going to go into the House and stand on a point of order so everybody knows this, Todd.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Todd Doherty: I knew you would. You'd probably tweet it out too.

Listen, again, we need to put faith in one another that we are moving forward in a collaborative fashion. It's the chair's prerogative. We may have witnesses who are repetitive. If there is any way that we can give more opportunity for us to question those witnesses, I think that's the best way of doing it.

The other thing is getting their statements in advance so that we have an opportunity to review them, rather than having them just table-dropping them when they show up. That helps. It gives us, as committee members, the opportunity to fully prepare so that when they are before us, we can literally say, "Listen, we've read your opening statements. We have questions. Let's get right into it." Then our colleagues from the Bloc and NDP can get a fair shake.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Lukiwski and then Monsieur Therrien are next.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Just to quickly underscore what I was saying earlier, the whole objective, I believe, Madam Chair, is to ensure fairness for all members representing all parties. What I would do, for example, if it looked as though we certainly couldn't get through the entire second round, nor would we get to the third round, is cut it off after both the Conservatives and the Liberals talked. In other words, I wouldn't give the Conservatives an extra question and then say, "We're out of time." I would try to do everything in my power to ensure we had equal amounts of time for every party, whenever possible.

There will be times, as you well know, Madam Chair, that you may want to have 15 minutes at the end of a meeting for committee business. That will mean we have to truncate the time we have for questions. It's again a discretionary thing that I think we should empower you with, but it's a bit of a leap of faith. I agree with that, but I think that if you have the ability to circumvent and to cut down on the amount of time each round takes to ensure that all questions are asked whenever possible, probably that's the best approach we could take.

Obviously I would hope that the Bloc and the NDP parties would agree to that idea. That approach would be taken to benefit them primarily, more so than the Liberals or the Conservatives.

The Chair: I appreciate that feedback. I'll absolutely make note of that.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I want to thank everybody for this discussion. I think it's always important to have these conversations. I definitely have noticed, in the committees in which I've participated, that more often than not the Bloc and the New Democrats do not get a second chance. That is a concern that I will continue to bring up after this discussion so that we don't forget it.

I really appreciate how Mr. Lukiwski as an independent chair made a decision. I also understand the process that a chair works under. I have definitely worked in that role in previous work experiences.

The thing that I will bring forward is that if we don't have a change in this or we don't actually have some sort of process, it will continue to be left to the discretion of every single chair. Of course, being PROC, we are the mother committee. I think it's important

for us to look at how we're going to guide other committees. I want to challenge that a little bit and say we may want to look at that process.

I will continue to think that the NDP and the Bloc should have that spot in the middle. We don't often get to the second round for the Conservatives and the Liberals anyway. Even there, I'm not in any way delusional that we're going to get an opportunity to ask a second time.

Hopefully, with what I see from this discussion, we will actually implement something and not just have a discussion and leave it completely. Hopefully, we'll have a vote and move on.

• (1610)

The Chair: All right. I think we can probably get to a vote very soon.

Let's just hear from the last two speakers, and then we will vote.

Go ahead, Monsieur Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Thank you very much.

Because of technical difficulties, I had trouble hearing the interpretation of Ms. Blaney's comments. That's fairly typical of what's been happening since the pandemic began. Unfortunately, despite everyone's best efforts, technical difficulties arise from time to time, which simply underscores how important this discussion is. Technical difficulties like the one I just had mean that I don't always get my allotted speaking time. Technical problems cause delays, and consequently, the Bloc Québécois and NDP members get left out of the questioning.

I have confidence in the chair. I think she's extremely competent, but I don't understand why we can't just see to it that we get all the way through the second round. That would make everyone's job easier, including hers.

If we cut the time given to witnesses from 10 minutes to six minutes, we would seldom run over time and everyone would almost be guaranteed a turn to speak. I think everyone around the table is in favour of ensuring all sides have an opportunity to speak, as intended.

I'm not impugning the chair's motives, just the opposite. All I'm trying to do is lighten the burden on her, so she doesn't find herself in an awkward position where she can't respect our wishes. That's not what I want for her. She doesn't deserve that.

[*English*]

The Chair: I appreciate that. What remains is Ms. Blaney's point, also, about actually setting something in place permanently so that other committees could follow it. If it weren't to be permanent, we could make the change, as proposed, about cutting the witnesses' statements down to six minutes.

Of course, if it seems as though we will be crammed for time, in the second round we can reduce everyone's time to four minutes so that we could be assured, guaranteed, of getting the NDP and the Bloc questions in at that point. That could always be done. I have done that in the past as well. I've just carved time off from the other parties that have more time so that we get to the Bloc and the NDP. That could be done.

Go ahead, Mr. Tochor.

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): I just want to lend my support to the idea that we can do things better in the future. We can't keep doing the same things that were done and expect different results. In this committee, if we took some of the best parts of Ms. Blaney's and Tom's proposals, I'd look forward to seeing what that would do for the management of time. Especially at the end of committee meetings, we never seem to have time for committee business. If we can shorten that up a bit, we should be able to get more things done.

Those are my comments on this issue.

The Chair: Okay.

We were talking about getting to a vote. What does this look like now? Are we going to put a whole bunch of ideas together and make those changes in this section?

Ms. Blaney, would you like to go with one of the scenarios you've put forward and vote on that, or make some amendments to that scenario?

• (1615)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I would love to move a simple change to have the Bloc and the New Democrats in the second round with their 2.5 minutes between the two rounds of Liberal and Conservative questions. I will leave Mark to make any other motions that he may want to based on his own ideas.

The Chair: Okay. Since that has been moved, should we vote on that first before any other motions are entertained? Are there any friendly amendments to make to this, or should we just vote?

Seeing as there are no hands raised, we'll vote on that change.

Go ahead, Monsieur Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Sorry, I'm not trying to be a killjoy here, but I'm still having major issues with the interpretation of Ms. Blaney's comments. I think something's wrong with her headset. She put one on, but the interpreter couldn't make anything out. On top of that, the volume dropped and I could no longer hear anything, not even what she was saying in English. I missed everything she said.

[*English*]

The Chair: Maybe we could have the clerk look into that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I'll just wrap up by saying that I'd like to vote in favour of the motion, but it needs to be amended first to reflect the discussion we've just had. A lot's been said, so I'd like to

have the motion reread to make sure we've all got it straight and we're on the same page.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I've gotten word here in the room that there does seem to be an audio problem with Ms. Blaney's mike.

I don't know, Ms. Blaney, if you could try to unplug and plug it back into your computer to see if that might address the issue. The interpreters were also having some difficulty understanding you.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, you're on mute.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I've unplugged it and plugged it back in. Is that better?

The Clerk: Can you speak for just a couple more seconds? We'll see, with the interpreters, if they're getting better sound quality. One moment, please.

Ms. Blaney, can you just say a few more words to see if the interpreters can understand a bit better?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Absolutely. I'm sorry. I came in and did the sound check, and it was fine then. I'm not sure what happened. I have unplugged it and plugged it in.

The Clerk: They're giving me a thumbs-up now, so hopefully, that might be better.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Therrien should also be getting better sound quality.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Perfect. Thank you for letting me know.

The Chair: Okay. I will clarify a little bit how we're proceeding. I'll clarify the motion that's being moved by Ms. Blaney. I don't think there are any amendments to this motion at this time. We'll see whether or not it passes and then changes can be entertained if it does not.

Right now, Monsieur Therrien, Ms. Blaney's motion essentially takes in that second round those 2.5 minutes of the Bloc's questioning and the 2.5 minutes of the NDP's questioning and puts them in the middle of the Conservative/Liberal five minutes. You would have Conservative, Liberal, Bloc, NDP, and then Conservative, Liberal again. You're just moving them up two spots.

That's the motion being moved right now. We're going to have a vote on that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's her scenario number one. Is that correct?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Chair, is that scenario one or two? That's what I want to ask as well.

The Chair: Madam Blaney, is that scenario one or two?

I don't have the scenarios in front of me right now.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I believe it is—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That is scenario one.

The Chair: That is scenario one. Okay.

Mr. Clerk, could you help us with the vote? Is everyone in favour of scenario one? All in favour?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, I think we need a recorded vote.

The Chair: Okay.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: Okay, so the questioning order has been changed for the second round to place the Bloc and the NDP in the middle, after the Conservatives' and the Liberals' questions.

As for the other issue that came up, the 10 minutes for opening statements, would anyone like to move that change?

• (1620)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I would like to put forward a motion, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'd like to put forward the motion that in the second round we swap the second Conservative and Liberal spot so that it would go New Democratic Party 2.5, Liberals five minutes, Conservatives five minutes.

The Chair: I'm sorry; could you repeat yourself, please?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: In scenario one, which we've now amended—

The Chair: Adopted.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: —it goes Conservative five, Liberal five, Bloc 2.5, New Democrat 2.5, Conservative five and Liberal five. I'm saying that the last two be swapped so that it goes Liberal five and Conservative five.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: You lose.

The Chair: Okay. I see what you're saying.

Go ahead, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm just wondering, Mark, if you could give me a little background. What is the benefit to any opposition party supporting that? Is it just a case of more questions for the Liberals? I just want to get a little more feedback on that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I don't understand.... Well, I mean, I think you'll make your decision as to whether or not you want to support it. I'm not presupposing that you won't, but I think it's important that in order to be as fair as possible, we do it this way.

The reality is that there's one extra member on the Liberal side. If we're talking about fairness, we don't even end up with all of our people getting to ask questions, whereas we're seeing it otherwise on the other side, where people are getting more time than the composition of members, if you were to factor that in.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Ruby, can I take the floor? Are you answering from the list? I'm just wondering how you're going to do this.

The Chair: Maybe we could take a 30-second pause. I'm going to confer with the clerk on a couple of things before we move forward.

Okay. Procedurally, there may be some issues with Mr. Gerretsen's motion at this point, because scenario one, which the committee voted on and adopted, gives the order for questioning in that second round.

The clerk can jump in as well and help explain whether there's an issue with understanding what we just passed.

The Clerk: Yes.

As I mentioned to the chair, Ms. Blaney moved a motion on the rounds of questions that specifically set out how that would proceed. The committee adopted that through a majority, which essentially brings it to an end. It was the decision of the committee to proceed on that basis for the rounds of questions. It seems there are now some suggestions from other members to attempt to further amend that. If that is the will of the committee, the committee first needs to undo the decision they just made.

• (1625)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Madam Chair—

The Clerk: Just to finish, Mr. Gerretsen, had the motion from Ms. Blaney been defeated, then there would be no problem moving a further suggestion or a different variation.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, Madam Chair, that's not my interpretation of it. You can go back and check the blues. Ms. Blaney said to take two and move them into another location in the speaking order. I did not interpret her motion to be saying.... It may have affected the two spots afterwards, but she didn't touch those two spots. She just moved the last two and bumped them forward by two. I did not interpret that to mean that we were done talking about that particular issue.

The Chair: Justin, could that be an interpretation? I could foresee that.

Mr. Lukiwski, we'll have you speak next.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Now, Madam Chair, or do you want to go to the clerk first?

The Chair: We'll go to the clerk first, please.

The Clerk: I apologize, Madam Chair. My sense from Ms. Blaney was that she was moving a motion to adopt the routine motion as she set it out, and then the committee voted on it. If I have made a mistake, I apologize, but that was the understanding I had.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: If that's the case, then why are we even discussing the time at the beginning? That's part of the routine motion. If what the clerk is saying is correct, Madam Chair, then we've just adopted the entire thing.

I was under the impression it was an amendment to the motion, which was to move two of the items in there. If what you're saying is correct, Mr. Clerk—and I'm really not trying to enter into a debate with you—then we're done with this routine motion and there is no sense continuing to talk about it.

The Chair: My understanding was that the witness portion in the first round hadn't been touched. My understanding is similar to your understanding, Mr. Gerretsen, and that's why I was saying that we could move on to the issue of the witness statements, which is also within this motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay. I can always come back to this later on, because we can always change our stuff later on, if necessary, through a motion.

Then I will withdraw that motion, Madam Chair, and I would propose that we change the opening statements from 10 minutes to six minutes.

The Chair: I don't think we've resolved the can of worms we just opened up.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I withdrew the motion.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Yes, he withdrew his motion, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I withdrew that motion and put forward the other one that you were getting at.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Clerk, just to clarify, would it be okay to move a change to the opening statement time at this point?

The Clerk: Yes, you can go ahead.

I apologize. I was confused by Ms. Blaney's motion, so it can be treated as an amendment. That section has been dealt with, and now you're on to a different part of that same motion. Again, I apologize to the committee for the confusion.

The Chair: Okay. That's the can of worms I was talking about, because I wasn't sure whether we had clarified if it was just for that particular part.

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'll put forward a motion, Madam Chair, that we change the opening statements from 10 minutes to six minutes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Lukiwski, do you want to speak to this section of the motion?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Just briefly, it's more of a question to Mark than anything.

Mark, do you think that six minutes is correct, or would five give even more latitude in case we start the meeting late, which happens quite frequently virtually? I have no issue with six minutes. I think I would prefer five, just to build in a bit of a buffer, but it's your motion. I would support either one.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I appreciate that suggestion, and it's probably better, because if you tell people five and then it goes over by a few minutes.... I think you're absolutely right, so I'll accept that friendly amendment.

• (1630)

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I would accept that as well, and I would request that all witnesses prepare and present to the committee, in advance, their opening remarks, written.

The Chair: Do you want that language to be inserted into the motion?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Yes, please.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It doesn't have to be an amendment to the amendment. I'm happy to just insert it as well, such that all witnesses be requested to provide their opening statements, in writing, within 72 hours, so they can be translated.

The Chair: Go ahead, Justin.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I would just like to let the members of the committee know that in the past we've encouraged witnesses to provide their opening statements ahead of time so that they can be distributed. Frequently, issues arose over having opening statements translated in enough time to be able to distribute them to the committee. Part of it is in relation to the invitation to witnesses. Frequently, invitations to witnesses are proffered in a very short timeline, sometimes even less than 72 hours, so certain kinds of deadlines for the submission of opening statements are not always possible.

There can be language in the routine motions that perhaps suggests best efforts, but we have had those issues in the past and then what has happened is that the witness has not been able to provide their opening statement to the committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: In light of that, Madam Chair, why don't we just say "whenever possible", and then what I said? It would be "whenever possible, witnesses provide opening statements in writing no later than 72 hours before the meeting begins".

The Chair: I think that would be wise, rather than locking ourselves in, because we have had challenges. The clerk is right that in some of the studies, we sometimes have to swap days or things change at the last minute, and it becomes difficult.

Does everybody have clarity as to what we are voting on? It's the motion on the opening statements and the questioning of witnesses. Witnesses will be given five minutes for their opening statements, and at the discretion of the chair during questioning of witnesses, there will be allocated...and the rest of that remains the same.

We're also going to insert...Justin, where would you insert it? I think at the end of "statement" is where you should insert that where possible, witnesses should provide their opening statement remarks in writing to the committee 72 hours in advance, and then the remainder would stay the same.

Go ahead, Mr. Therrien.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: If witnesses don't provide their opening statements 72 hours ahead of time, should we not hear from them? Is it an obligation or a recommendation?

[English]

The Chair: No, it's just where possible, when witnesses can. We're more strongly encouraging it this time. Even though it has always been encouraged, we're just formalizing it and putting it into the routine motions.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I just want to be 100% clear about what we're voting on, just because there was a little confusion on that last one. Could we have it read out before we vote, please, just so we're all 100% clear?

The Chair: Justin, would you mind reading it out?

The Clerk: This would be essentially the amendment that Mr. Gerretsen is proposing: "That witnesses be given five (5) minutes for their opening statements; that whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statements 72 hours in advance; that, at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six (6) minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows", and then we have the list of the rounds of questions.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, I believe Mark's motion was for opening statements of five minutes, not 10. The six-minute, five-minute, and 2.5-minute rounds after that are fine, but the whole purpose of Mark's motion was to cut down the opening statements from 10 minutes to five minutes.

• (1635)

The Clerk: That's right. It's five minutes. I apologize.

The Chair: He misspoke. Sorry.

Mr. Pat Finnigan: Madam Chair, I believe we lost Mark. Apparently the Internet cut on him, and he's trying to reboot.

The Chair: Okay. Since it is his motion, we'll just pause for a moment.

Go ahead, Dr. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Could we have clarification? I want to thank Mr. Lukiwski for clarifying the opening statement. Can we just have clarification once again on the timing for each of the rounds, please?

The Chair: The witness would be given five minutes. The remainder will stay the same. The Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, and the New Democratic Party would each have six minutes in the first round. The only thing being changed is the opening statement, which is being brought down to five minutes, and then there's also going to be language inserted to encourage the witness to provide a written statement wherever possible.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Could you clarify the second round as well, just to make sure we're all clear?

The Chair: The second round is five minutes for the Conservatives, five minutes for the Liberals, 2.5 minutes for the Bloc Québécois and 2.5 minutes for the NDP. Then the Conservatives have five minutes and the Liberals five minutes.

Is that everyone's understanding?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Yes, Mr. Turnbull?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Just from the top again, please, because it was a little choppy, and I want to make sure that I know what I'm voting on. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Okay. From the beginning of the motion to its end, for all relevant numbers, we're replacing the first 10-minute opening statement with five minutes for an opening statement. Then there will be a round of six-minute questions, which will go to the Conservatives, Liberals, the Bloc, and then the NDP, at six minutes each. Then we go into the second round, with the Conservatives at five minutes; the Liberals, five minutes; the Bloc Québécois, 2.5 minutes; the NDP, 2.5 minutes; the Conservatives, five minutes; and the Liberals, five minutes.

Is that everyone's understanding as well? Okay. That's clear.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Chair, I was disconnected. I'm sorry. I had to reboot. The Internet wasn't working on my Surface tablet here. Did we vote on the amendment?

The Chair: No, of course not. We did notice your absence.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Doherty was probably the first to notice, right?

The Chair: I can't remember who it was, but he was very worried as well.

We've paused and we're just clarifying it. What we're voting on right now will be your motion of changing the opening statement to five minutes and then inserting the language of requiring or encouraging the witnesses to present a written statement 72 hours in advance. Then, after that, the first round of allocated questioning slots will be six minutes each: Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois and NDP. That is the order of that first round. That's basically all your motion would affect.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Put it to a vote, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay. We'll have a recorded vote.

The Clerk: This is on the amendment by Mr. Gerretsen.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: All right.

Go ahead, Ms. Vecchio.

• (1640)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you. Have we finished going through routine proceedings?

The Chair: No. We have working meals still to go back to. Then we'll be done.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's fantastic. I just wanted to find out about that agenda piece. We're on working meals. Got it.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, we've now adopted Mr. Gerretsen's amendment. Ms. Blaney's amendment was adopted before that.

Now, the formality of putting the whole question on the motion as amended is needed.

The Chair: Okay.

The Clerk: This question is on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we can move on to working meals, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: My point was basically that now that we're moving into a hybrid model, I think it would be respectful for members to alert the clerk, within the appropriate time, that they would be physically present so that the clerk is not put in a position of having to order more meals than required. I think that would be a good savings of money, which is always important to New Democrats regardless of what the Conservatives might say—I had to bug you, Todd, come on—and I think it's respectful of the process.

I just wanted to bring that out, because we could again do this thing where every committee sort of does what it wants and we could see the clerk not knowing and having to order for everyone. I think it would be respectful if there were a timeline so that you would have to let the clerk know if you would be participating. I would love to hear people's thoughts on that and, as well, I would love to hear from the clerk if there is a ideal timeline for that process.

The Chair: I think the question of whether there is a particular timeline needed for ordering the meals is really for Justin. Today we're not working over the lunch hour, but in the past we weren't ordering meals either. When we were doing the virtual committees, we had stopped ordering meals during that time, I believe.

Is that correct, Justin?

The Clerk: Madam Chair, yes, we haven't ordered any meals during any of the virtual meetings. The last time we had catered meals was in early March.

The Chair: So what would be the plan at this point, going forward? For the support staff who are there and if it's over the lunch hour, would you be ordering a working meal for everybody, regardless of whether any members are present or not, or how would that work?

The Clerk: I could let the committee know a little bit more about the timelines associated with ordering the food. Generally the House catering require 48 hours' notice before providing a catered committee meal. That would generally be what we're looking for.

In the past, when the committee all met together in person, we tended to have a standing order to feed approximately 12 members of the committee. There were also a few extra meals for staff so they could also eat. We tend to order the food several weeks ahead of time. It's a standing order for every committee meeting we have over the lunch hour.

In this case, I would essentially need to know a full two days before the meeting whether you would be appearing in person or virtually, which may create an imposition on your own scheduling for your own time. If the committee is interested in putting into the routine motion a set timeline, it would be at least 48 hours before the meeting that I would need to know.

• (1645)

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Blaney, would you like to put the time in place?

I think there are some hands up. We can hear from the other members.

Essentially the clerk wouldn't be required to order the food and you could just get your own food if you did happen to show up in person. That's essentially what would be the effect of this.

Mr. Gerretsen is next, and then Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I was just going to say, Madam Chair, what you've just concluded there, which is that I imagine what would be delivered would be the same stuff that is prepared and packaged up individually that we get out of the second-floor room that's next to the opposition lobby.

I think if we want to authorize the clerk to get a few meals, as required, for the support staff. If that's the regular custom, then we should do that, but in terms of members, for people here in person, our meetings are in West Block so we have access to that same room that everybody who on House duty is going to have, so why wouldn't we just bring our own meal if we are in person? I would rather take that approach than to have to try to remember, with everything else going on, whether or not I have to tell the clerk 48 hours in advance about my presence or absence.

That would be my preference, but if we insist on having to tell the clerk, then I would suggest that the default be “no” and that you have to tell him that yes, you are going to be there so that we don't end up having a number of meals that are there because somebody forgot to say they weren't going to be there.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I would just add for the committee's information that occasionally when there is leftover food from the catered meals, the support staff can have access to that. The catered meals, in terms of what the committee is authorized to cover, are for the members' benefit, for the members' use.

I would further suggest that the suggestion Mr. Gerretsen put forward can also be used as a bit of an informal arrangement for the committee so as not to create an issue with the scheduling by requiring people to figure out 48 hours ahead of time whether or not they will be at the meeting in person.

The Chair: So you're essentially saying that we could do this informally and have this rule without changing the routine motion.

We have Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Doherty and then Mr. Therrien.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's what I was going to suggest. I was going to ask why this had to be embedded in the routine motions. Couldn't it be a common courtesy and an informal practice that we agree to, which I think would make perfect sense, that we let people know? If we know we are going to be physically present, we would confirm that we would be there. That way, the clerk could order the amount of food that's appropriate.

If it has to be embedded, I guess it could be just like the 72 hours' notice for written opening statements being submitted. It could be wherever possible or whenever possible.

Those are two options. One, can we just have an informal agreement among us? If it has to be embedded, can we just put the caveat of “whenever possible” in front of it?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Speaking as somebody who doesn't really partake of our meals at the House—as long as there's coffee and water, I'm good—I think it's on us as adults to inform our whip's office working with our team and let them know whether we're going to be there or not.

The really important stuff is the coffee and water, so I'm good with whatever is done.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Therrien.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: In this day and age of COVID-19, when people are losing their jobs and struggling in every which way, I think we should forget about working meals and let everyone fend for themselves. As the pandemic rages on and we hold virtual meetings, we should lead by example. We should be sending a message that we feel very fortunate to have jobs and that we can buy our own meals.

[*English*]

The Chair: Absolutely. I believe this motion only gives the clerk authorization. It gives him the discretion. The ball is really in his court as to whether he is ordering anything or nothing. We've ordered nothing for the last several months that we've been sitting as a committee virtually, so it's not that it “must” be done or anything like that.

Would anyone like to move a formal motion or an amendment to this motion at this point, or do you want to just leave it as is?

Yes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a quick question before that, Madam Chair.

Is what we're doing here with this going to be a precedent for all committees? If it is, then I think it's important. If that's the case, then, I would agree.... I mean, I would agree regardless with what Mr. Therrien just said, but I think it's even more important that we put it in a motion rather than just have an understanding so that we can be sending this message down to the other committees through a precedent.

The Chair: It's just a message. They still have to move their own routine motions and pass them within each committee, so [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: You're muted, Ruby.

The Chair: It could serve as an idea for them, or an inspiration, but it doesn't mean they have to do what we have done.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm happy to move what Mr. Therrien has proposed—unless he wants to move it—to the effect that until such time as the House returns to its normal practices, we discontinue the lunch-purchasing practice. Hopefully, other committees will pick up on that and do the same thing.

What he said is absolutely correct, and I agree 100%.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: If I may, this is exactly why I brought this forward. Without clarity, the clerk may feel obligated. As well, it's hybrid, so the clerks won't know how many people will show up. With a lack of clarity it becomes a huge void.

We are the mother committee, so I think our guidance is helpful. Of course, exactly as the chair said, it does not necessarily mean that all the other committees will follow us, but a lack of clarity is often just an area for confusion.

I would be happy to support a motion if Mr. Therrien put it forward.

The Chair: Would someone like to formally put this motion forward?

Justin has a comment.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I just wanted to make the point that your point about the discretion that I have as a clerk is true; it's discretionary. The habit of ordering standing catered lunches for PROC was one that came about because there was an interest in doing that when the entire committee was in the same room together. This type of routine motion in the past has also been used occasionally when the committee is meeting in person and sitting late into the evening on a vote marathon, for example, and there is the need to bring food in for the members so they don't have to suspend while they're doing their work. They can continue doing their work and still permit me, after I've been directed to do so, to order in some pizzas or something to allow the committee to continue doing its work.

The motion as it is can be that way. Informally, the arrangement can be changed so that I would only ever order food in when I am directed to do so by the chair, for example. You can also, if you want, change the wording of this motion to explicitly say that—that I would essentially order food in only when I'm explicitly directed to do so by the committee, or by the chair.

The Chair: I like that idea, because I'm sensing from the clerk that he doesn't like how we're boxing him in. This motion really just allows him the ability to do it. It doesn't mean he has to do it every meeting. I think the suggestion that was just made about adding language saying that—

• (1655)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: But it's not sending the message, and I think that's important.

Was Mr. Therrien about to move a motion before the clerk started talking? I think he was.

The Chair: I don't think so. I think we were just asking him to move one.

Go ahead, Mr. Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I just didn't have time to respond. I could move a motion, but I haven't put anything together yet.

Basically, our position is that, during the pandemic, with Parliament operating under a hybrid model, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs should suspend catered meals for members who are on site, in the House. If people are hungry, they can ask their assistants to fetch them something to eat and pay for it themselves. That's all.

I move that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs suspend meal service for those participating in committee meetings in person, for the duration of the pandemic.

[*English*]

The Chair: Not that I'm there to eat any of these meals right now, and I'm likely going to be mostly virtual, but there could be a situation that would require us all to be there in person for some meetings, and I feel the wording of that motion was very absolute.

There might not be a place on the Hill to purchase any food. The cafeteria hours may be changed and we may need to authorize the clerk to order, in that circumstance. I feel it's just too rigid. Perhaps a wording that....

At the end of the day, it's up to you. If you've moved it, then I'll obviously have a vote on that, but I just wanted to make that comment so everyone is sure about what they end up voting on before they do.

Go ahead, Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I think we're getting so lost in the weeds right now that we're not focusing on some really important things. I recognize that we all know that we're out on the job and, just as Mr. Therrien said, it's really important. I think we should just use our common sense hats and until things are over, we just don't order meals. It's that simple. It doesn't have to be a formal motion. It just has to be common sense, that's all.

I recognize that Mark wants to send this as a message down to the rest of the committees. We shouldn't have to tell the other members of Parliament to use common sense; it should just be a good practice as we're going through this pandemic.

The Chair: I agree. That would probably be my preference, but we could still send a message. We could still do it, with less harsh language. I think we can do what the clerk suggested earlier: Unless the committee or the chair requests the clerk to do so, we don't have meals until that time. Something like that would be a bit less rigid.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Let's just move on, Madam Chair, if we can.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I apologize for belabouring it again. As of right now, if the motion that's in the list isn't adopted, I have no authority to order any meal at all, which I think would be the effect that the committee is looking for. The option could essentially be to simply not adopt this motion and I wouldn't be authorized to order any food—you'd all be left to your own devices to bring a meal or to prepare and bring food with you when you do come to committee, if that's what you needed—as opposed to moving a separate motion indicating that no food will be provided during the pandemic.

The Chair: Yes, that is a very good point.

We have Mr. Turnbull, and then Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I just have another suggestion. What if we were to take this clause and add to the end of it, “for members who have confirmed their presence”? That way the clerk would be authorized to do so, but only for members who have confirmed their presence.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, so you are going to remove the wording “committee and its subcommittees”, and you're going to add on—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: No, it would read the same, but it would say “for the committee and its subcommittee members who have confirmed their presence”, or it could say “confirmed their physical presence” if you want to be clear, because virtual presence now counts, so maybe we would say “physical presence”.

• (1700)

The Chair: Okay, let's call the question.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We're through the routine motions.

Sorry, guys, I know that it may have taken a little longer than you expected, but I have seen where it has taken weeks as well, so it's not too bad, not the worst-case scenario.

There are different studies I think the committee would be interested in looking at. I could walk you through some of the studies that we have suggested as a committee.

Yes, go ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I would like to move a motion, please.

The Chair: Yes, Mrs. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

Mr. Gerretsen, hopefully I will do it in less than six minutes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: We amended that to five minutes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I move:

That, in anticipation of the committee receiving an Order of reference, pursuant to Standing Order 32(7), no later than the 20th sitting day of the present Session, the committee shall consider the document outlining the government's reasons for the latest prorogation and, in preparation for that study,

(a) invite the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons each to appear separately before the committee for at least three hours, provided that in respect of each of them who does not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to accept this invitation for the length of time prescribed, the Chair shall be instructed to report to the House forthwith a recommendation that this committee be empowered to order his or her appearance from time to time;

(b) an order of the committee do issue for all memoranda, e-mails, documents, notes or other records from the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office, since June 25, 2020, concerning options, plans and preparations for the prorogation of Parliament, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within ten days of the adoption of this motion;

(c) an order of the committee do issue for a record of all communications between the government and any of WE Charity (or its affiliated organizations), Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger, Speakers' Spotlight, Rob Silver or MCAP since June 25, 2020, in respect of the prorogation of Parliament, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within ten days of the adoption of this motion;

(d) an order of the committee do issue to WE Charity (including its affiliated organizations), Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger and Speakers' Spotlight for all memoranda, e-mails, documents, notes or other records, since June 25, 2020, concerning the prorogation of Parliament, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within ten days of the adoption of this motion;

(e) an order of the committee do issue for the unredacted version of all documents produced by the government in response to the July 7, 2020, order of the Standing Committee on Finance, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within 24 hours of the adoption of this motion;

(f) an order of the committee do issue to each member of the Cabinet, including the Prime Minister, and to the Honourable Bill Morneau requiring that they prepare and make a return to the clerk of the committee, within 10 days of the adoption of this motion, (i) indicating the date and summary of every communication they, a member of their ministerial exempt staff, or a volunteer in their ministerial office had between March 1 and April 22, 2020, with Marc Kielburger, Craig Kielburger, WE Charity (or its affiliated organizations), or any employee, agent or representative of any of them, and (ii) providing all records of the communications referred to in subparagraph (i);

(g) an order of the committee do issue to require the government to prepare and make a return to the clerk of the committee, within 10 days of the adoption of this motion, indicating (i) what criteria were used by public servants to determine that only WE Charity could deliver the Canada Student Service Grant, (ii) which individuals were responsible for designing the parameters of the Canada Student Service Grant, (iii) who was present at any meeting where the parameters of the Canada Student Service Grant were discussed, and (iv) whether the Canada Student Service Grant was approved through the ordinary Treasury Board submission process and, if not, what the variations were;

(h) an order of the committee do issue to WE Charity (including its affiliated organizations), Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger to prepare and make a return to the clerk of the committee, within 10 days of the adoption of this motion, indicating every corporation, trust, charity, association, entity or individual (including, for greater certainty, those affiliated with WE Charity) which WE Charity and WE Charity Foundation shared, or intended to share, data concerning the Canada Student Service Grant;

(i) an order of the committee do issue to Craig Kielburger, Marc Kielburger, Fred Kielburger, Theresa Kielburger, Dalal Al-Waheidi, Scott Baker and Victor Li to prepare and make a return to the clerk of the committee, within 10 days of the adoption of this motion, indicating the name of every corporation, trust, charity, association or entity in which each of them is, or has been at any time since January 1, 2015, a member, director or officer, together with (i) the name of the jurisdiction in which it is incorporated, (ii) the office in it held by the person completing the return, including the date the office was assumed and, if relevant, vacated, (iii) the relationship it has to any other organization named in the return, and (iv) the name of any subsidiary it owns or controls;

(j) an order of the committee do issue to WE Charity (including its affiliated organizations) and NATIONAL Public Relations for any contract between those organizations pertaining to the delivery of the Canada Student Service Grant, together with all memoranda, e-mails, documents, notes or other records related to the negotiation, implementation and termination of that contract, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within three weeks of the adoption of this motion;

(k) an order of the committee do issue to Speakers' Spotlight for a copy of all records pertaining to speaking appearances arranged, since October 14, 2008, for Justin Trudeau, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, Margaret Trudeau and Alexandre Trudeau—including, in respect of each speaking appearance, an indication of the fee provided, any expenses that were reimbursed and the name of the company, organization, person or entity booking it—which had been originally ordered to be produced on July 22, 2020, by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within 24 hours of the adoption of this motion;

(l) an order of the committee do issue for all memoranda, e-mails, documents, notes or other records, including Cabinet papers, in the care, custody or control of the government or of the Honourable Bill Morneau, related to program design for the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance and the subsequent contracts entered into with MCAP for the delivery of that program, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within three weeks of the adoption of this motion;

(m) an order of the committee do issue for all memoranda, e-mails, documents, notes or other records, including Cabinet papers, in the care, custody or control of the government or of the Honourable Bill Morneau, related to Rob Silver's lobbying or other representations on behalf of MCAP and amendments to the Income Tax Act pertaining to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, provided that these documents shall be provided to the clerk of the committee within three weeks of the adoption of this motion;

(n) an order of the committee do issue to each member of the Cabinet, including the Prime Minister, and to the Honourable Bill Morneau requiring that they prepare and make a return to the clerk of the committee, within 10 days of the adoption of this motion, (i) indicating the date and summary of every communication they, a member of their ministerial exempt staff, or a volunteer in their ministerial office had since January 1, 2020, with Rob Silver, and (ii) providing all records of the communications referred to in subparagraph (i); and

(o) all documents and returns provided to the clerk of the committee under this Order shall be published on the committee's website as soon as practical upon receipt.

• (1705)

Madam Chair, we have taken the opportunity and we have sent this to all of the other members' whips. That will be in both official languages. These are the things that were outstanding after the proration and things that we are just calling back on so that we can look at, as I indicated, the proration study that must come after and some of the Standing Orders that have been changed back in 2017–18 by this government. We're just starting to ask for these documents to prepare ourselves for when we're going to have this discussion.

Thank you. I'll pass the floor on.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm going to take back what I said about the meals. I think we're going to need the meals, because we're going to be here for a while.

• (1710)

The Chair: That was long. I got an email simultaneously in the middle of some of what was just said. Because a lot was said there, I wanted to know, Mrs. Vecchio, if you could help me better understand how this motion or this study request is within the PROC mandate. Clarify that for me a little, if you could.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Among the things we're looking at is that one of the Standing Orders that were changed, of course, back in the 42nd Parliament, was the fact of prorogation. I think, like many Canadians, that when this government prorogued Parliament, just last month, as everybody was coming into the fold of everything that was happening with the scandal, we recognized that the government kind of just stopped on a certain date. We also know that there are certain documents that were going to be sent in and that were expected one day after, including some of the people who were supposed to be coming to either the ethics committee or to the finance committee.

We recognize that, through this prorogation and what ended up happening by worrying more about the skin in the game of the Prime Minister, we forgot about Canadians and forgot about the fact that there are so many things going on, like the fact that we're trying to pull through legislation on Bill C-2 and Bill C-4. We want to look at this to see why there was prorogation at a time when it was so imperative to make sure that we're actually helping Canadians during this pandemic. That is one of the things I'm looking at. At the procedure and House affairs committee, our job is to make sure that all things are kept accountable, putting this all on the floor, as the grandfather of the committees for the House of Commons. That is why I think it is our duty to make sure that...what this prorogation did and the impact on all of the committee work that was done.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vecchio.

We do have a speakers list started on this request.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I was going to propose that we undertake a different study, something on virtual voting, but I think I'll take myself off the speakers list for now and I'll let my other colleagues go forward.

I still don't see how this is relevant for PROC. Given Mrs. Vecchio's comments, I would really just ask for clarification. This seems relevant to other committees, perhaps, but certainly not to this one, in my view.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Do you want me to answer that question now or after?

The Chair: Just a moment.

I, too, was going to go through a list of things we could be thinking about as this committee starts, but this is what has been put forth. I don't know if we'll get around to.... I'll try to better understand the procedure on notice requirement for this at this point, but we can definitely discuss it. We do have time until 5:30 and seeing as there is a list growing, I'll just get to that.

Mrs. Vecchio, do you want to respond to that, or do you want to take a few...? I have a feeling there are going to be a couple of questions.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I fully understand where you're coming from, Mr. Turnbull, but part of the job of the procedure and House affairs committee is to be that governing body of all of the other committees, looking to see what's going forward.

Part of our job is also, under the Standing Orders, to look at the reason for prorogation. We should be expecting the government to have that response within 20 sitting days of the session's beginning, so we're already into this. All we're asking for are the documents that support the reason for prorogation and that is the request we have made today.

Thanks.

The Chair: Okay, that's perfect.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: This is with all due respect to Mrs. Vecchio's recent comments.

You're assuming that prorogation is about the WE issue. That's an assumption you're making in order to justify the rest of it. I think it's quite ironic that here we are, talking about what's important to Canadians, and somehow this is the issue that's top of mind, when Ontario recorded today the highest number of new COVID infections reported in a single day since this outbreak started being monitored. Somehow the opposition, at least the official opposition at this point, thinks that this is top of mind for Canadians.

You know, I understand and respect the role of the opposition. I know what they want to do here. I would probably be doing the same thing, if I were in their position, in terms of trying to get answers to what they see as very important questions. However, along the lines of what Mr. Turnbull said, I can't understand how this particular motion falls before this committee. Yes, a number of committees effectively came to a close when the prorogation started. Those committees can re-request that information again very easily. It doesn't have to go through this committee. It certainly doesn't have to come back to this committee.

More importantly, as a matter of procedure, I understand that the motion was distributed to us just as it was being read out by Mrs. Vecchio. I got the email notification at the same time. Well done; it was extremely well planned. The problem here is that you're springing this on a committee.

You were also reading it really fast, Mrs. Vecchio. I mean, I was trying to listen to what you were saying as you were reading it. I recognize the fact that you have provided it to us, but there is such an incredibly huge amount of detail in here that I, for one, cannot vote on this now without at least having had the opportunity to go through it.

I wish I could be spending my time on other things, such as talking about what Canadians really want right now. What they want is security. They want to be alleviated of anxiety. They want to understand and to know that their government and their Parliament are here for them to take care of them right now. In my humble opinion, this is not top of mind for them. Yes, there are questions that the opposition deserves to get answers to, and in due course that can happen.

Madam Chair, I need more time to look at this. I am certainly not in a position to vote on this right now, when we have literally 14 minutes before this meeting is scheduled to come to an end. There is a ton of information here. I was going to ask Mrs. Vecchio if she could read it to us again, but much more slowly so that we could hear it with some clarity.

You can put me on the list to speak again later, if necessary, because I need more time before I can vote on this. Certainly, number one, I would like to read it thoroughly, understand it all thoroughly and caucus with my colleagues properly to discuss it with them to see if we want to have an amendment on one part or another. I know that Mrs. Vecchio has been around Parliament for a while. She understands the rules and has been involved in a lot of committees. Certainly, although this is committee business and she is entirely entitled to do so, you don't spring a motion like this on a committee just on the fly like this and expect everybody to vote on it—unless, of course, you've preplanned this, and it was planned very well with the way the email went out.

In any event, I'll put my hand up again if I feel the need to speak to it more. I'd be curious and interested to hear what other people have to say.

I'll leave it at that for now, Madam Chair.

• (1715)

The Chair: We have Mr. Doherty and then Mr. Tucker.

Mr. Todd Doherty: The reason is right at the top of this motion: “That, in anticipation of the committee receiving an Order of reference, pursuant to Standing Order 32(7), no later than the 20th sitting day of the present Session, the committee shall consider the document outlining the government’s reasons for the latest prorogation and, in preparation for that study”.

We talked about being efficient in this committee, and requesting the information in advance would help. I will challenge my friend Mr. Gerretsen on the fact that he hasn't had the time to review this

motion in advance. We have just passed three motions without the opportunity to really review.

Again I go back to Standing Order 32(7), which states:

Not later than 20 sitting days after the beginning of the second or subsequent session of the Parliament, a minister of the Crown shall lay upon the table a document outlining the reasons for the latest prorogation. This document shall be deemed referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs immediately after it is presented in the House.

I would also mention that there is no consent to adjourn at 5:30. Nobody agreed to that at the outset. Yes, there are votes that will be taking place later on in the evening, but I—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Point of order.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Chair, I move that the—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Point of order.

• (1720)

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Gerretsen, right after Mr. Doherty is done, I'll hear your point of order.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Right. I—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: A point of order takes precedence over a speakers list.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I have the floor, but I would move that the call be put to the committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Point of order.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Clerk, just on Mr. Doherty's point, can you confirm whether the room with the translators is available beyond 5:30 p.m.?

The Clerk: I am trying to determine that right now. I don't have an answer yet for the availability of the room or the technical staff at this point, but as soon as I do have information, I'll provide it to the chair.

The Chair: I was trying to go through this motion myself, just to give you an idea of where my head is at right now. I went over it on the side with the clerk as well. The first paragraph may seem to be in order, but to look through the rest of it, I would need a little bit of time to go through it all and then make a ruling on it. I would personally like to take it under advisement and do my best to come back at the next meeting with a ruling on this. I am not sure when the next meeting is scheduled for at this point, but I will do my best to come back at the next meeting. I will take it under advisement at this time.

Mr. Tochor.

Mr. Corey Tochor: I'll keep my comments relatively short here because I know that others will want to explore this motion a little bit more.

I would just encourage the clerk to check not just how much longer, but how far into the evening we are able to keep the room and get translation services, because I do believe this is something we should be discussing. We've been prorogued for six weeks. We're online; everyone is being safe, and we can discuss this motion. I believe it would pass, given that debate.

Those are the comments I have right now.

The Chair: Mrs. Vecchio, is your hand up from before? I think it might be up from before.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: It is. Once again, I recognize that Mr. Gerretsen had asked this, and I do know that it was brought forward by Mr. Doherty. It's basically on Standing Order 32(7) and the fact that due to prorogation there has to be something outlining the reasons. I think we're making a simple request to the government as to why it prorogued. There may be a little bit of skepticism, of course, but it is our job to investigate. We're parliamentarians, and our job in committee is to investigate.

I am concerned about how long we may end up delaying this. I believe it's all in order, but of course it will be up to the clerk to decide on what he may or may not see there. I'll just pass that forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: In response to that, that is what I was saying, that it seems as though the first part, which is the prorogation part you're mentioning, looks fine, but there is so much more in this motion at this time. That is why I would prefer to take it under advisement right now and come back with a decision on that and give the clerk and his team—and myself—some time to look through it thoroughly.

We have Ms. Blaney and then Monsieur Therrien.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

The Chair: Was there a point of order there?

Mr. Todd Doherty: There was a point of order, Madam Chair. To my colleagues Ms. Blaney and Mr. Therrien, I'm sorry. I will be short on this.

If the committee is prepared to vote on this.... The majority of the committee is prepared to vote on this. The only side that we've heard so far that is against it is the Liberal side, but—

The Chair: Is this a point of order or part of the debate?

Mr. Todd Doherty: No, this is a point of order. We should put the call to the committee.

The Chair: I think that might be debate at this point in time, since there are hands up right now to speak.

Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much.

I just want to reflect on what Mr. Gerretsen said about the highest numbers we've seen there. That is a concern, but I also want to remind everyone here that the CERB is ending and a lot of Canadians are wondering what they're going to do and how they're going to pay their bills. Unfortunately, the government did make a decision to move forward to prorogation, which really meant that the day we were set to sit in the House.... I was hoping, personally, to see legislation come forward about what was going to happen next so that we could have an appropriate debate, get those things moved through the House and move forward to support Canadians. That was my concern. What I've heard from my constituents, sadly, is that there is a lot of deeply held concern and frustration that this method of moving forward by the government, really silencing Par-

liament, was based on the scandal, and I think it is important that we uncover that.

I am a newer member to this committee. I do know that our job is to look at the procedural process of how decisions are made. I feel this is something we should be looking at. We should be making sure that, in a time of a pandemic, it wasn't the government's choice to make this decision based on a political decision-making process.

One of the things I would like to be studying as well in this place, in this committee, is what an election would look like, potentially, during a pandemic. How do we make a national plan to look across Canada? There are a lot of things I would love to get on with doing, but unfortunately we had a government that silenced all of our abilities to make those actions happen. I'm really in a position of feeling a deep element of concern, wanting to make sure that we are all moving together to look after the needs of Canadians and not silencing the voice of those folks who put us here simply because the Prime Minister and ministers were in a situation that perhaps they should not have been in.

I guess my question for you.... I understand that Mr. Therrien wants to speak, and I think it is absolutely important that all the parties speak. If we are not going to vote on this today, I want to know that there is a commitment from the chair to find out when the next date will be, so that we can be back in this committee very quickly to deal with this very important issue.

Thank you.

● (1725)

The Chair: Absolutely, Ms. Blaney, I will find that out. There is a commitment to carry on. I am by no means saying that this study won't be our first study. I'm just saying that there was a lot to absorb and I just want to see.... The first part of it does seem to me to be in order and proper. There is just so much of work that we usually do after we say that we're going to do a certain study and that we're going to call these witnesses. I think all of that is merged into this one motion. I just feel I need to take my time to actually read through it all before making any call on that. That's all. Of course, I will get back to you very soon on it and we'll figure out when we can have the next meeting. Hopefully that will be very soon.

Mr. Therrien.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: I believe I have two minutes left. Is that right?

[*English*]

The Chair: You definitely have two minutes left, and by the sound of it you could have more.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Very good. Thank you.

When the Liberal government shut down Parliament through prorogation, the volcano was about to erupt because of the WE scandal. The Minister of Finance had resigned. We all know the story; I don't need to rehash it yet again. Prorogation brought the work of the four committees studying the scandal to a halt, leaving many questions unanswered.

Many, myself included, thought ending the studies served the Prime Minister quite nicely. A stretch though it may be, let's give the Liberals the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps they decided to prorogue Parliament because they had good ideas and planned to put forward solutions to the problems caused by the pandemic. We waited anxiously for the throne speech, only to realize there was nothing in it that would justify the decision to prorogue. It's fair to say that the Prime Minister's address to the nation was just as hollow.

That's why we need to get to the bottom of the matter. The motion put forward by the Conservative Party gives us the opportunity to find out what Quebecers and Canadians want to know. Did the WE affair drive a government in trouble to prorogue Parliament in an attempt to run away and avoid giving the real answers? How could I possibly object to such a motion?

● (1730)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for your views, Mr. Therrien.

We have Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Gerretsen, Mr. Alghabra and Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm still struggling to understand Mrs. Vecchio's motion because it was so long and she read it so quickly. Mrs. Vecchio must have practised reading that quickly, because I couldn't comprehend it as it was lightning-fast.

I would appreciate an opportunity to sit down and actually read it through and really understand it. There seem to be all kinds of things in there and I'm not sure how they are related to prorogation. From my perspective, the prorogation seemed to be very clear. The mandate our government had from the people and the context had shifted dramatically, and prorogation seemed to be an opportunity to reset. I think that was a very clear message.

I'm not sure how this is getting linked to a whole bunch of other documents and questions that you have, but I certainly feel that's implied in the way this motion has been crafted. I would like to pick that apart, ask questions about it and have the opportunity to debate it, just to make sure we are fully clear before we vote on anything.

The Chair: Seeing that it's 5:32, would the committee be okay with giving me a little bit of time to take this motion under advisement and come back with a decision at the next meeting?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: No.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Why can't we deal with this tonight? We can take a break for the votes. The motion is on the floor, and this is what we have to address first.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Chair, it's not your prerogative to decide how a committee deals with a motion. It's the committee's prerogative—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: She was asking for your advice.

The Chair: I was asking if you'd be okay with my seeing if the whole motion, as is, would be in order under the mandate of this committee. I do see how large parts of it are, so I'm leaning that way; I definitely am. I just want to be able to read the whole thing and have advice from the clerk on that as well, and you would have my commitment to get back to you on this at the next meeting.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Why can't we suspend for the votes and come back after the votes?

The Chair: Perhaps if you consider... So we can just suspend, rather than adjourn and then come back at another meeting date, which could be tomorrow or the next day.

Mr. Todd Doherty: We can come back this evening.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Maybe the clerk can clarify this. The chair can suspend the meeting at any time. Is that not correct?

Mr. Todd Doherty: While a motion is on the floor...?

The Chair: Justin, could you comment on that?

The Clerk: The committee would suspend with the consent of the committee or the committee's suggestion that it suspend.

There are Standing Orders. There is a standing order related to what happens when the bells are ringing to call members to a vote, which is essentially akin to an automatic suspension for the time it takes for you to be called to the chamber, or in this case virtually as well, to vote. Once the voting is done, you come back to the meeting and the meeting resumes.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I am just going to say that I understand.

Ryan, I do speak quickly—that's just what I do. I am happy to go more slowly if you want me to and I can do clause-by-clause if you want to go through it and discuss it until the bells start to ring. I don't know if there will be much time, but if you want to go through it clause by clause, I'd be happy to work with you.

● (1735)

Mr. Todd Doherty: We have an hour before the bells. Why can't we try to come to some form of resolution right now? A majority of the committee is in support of this.

The Chair: Justin, we have the room until what time?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, is there a speakers list? I'm just checking.

The Chair: Yes, there is a speakers list.

Justin, until what time do we have the room, so I can plan accordingly?

The Clerk: I'm still checking on that. We can continue to go for the time being, but I'm trying to get a precise indication just how long the committee can go. I'm trying to get that information and as soon as I have something definitive, I'll let you know.

The Chair: Okay, so at this point we could go until 6, seeing as the bells are going to be going off at 6. Then, I don't know whether we have the room again. I know there were some suggestions made to come back tonight. That is why I am saying that if you leave this in my court, I could take a look at this and we could come back at the very next opportunity where we could have a room available.

Yes, Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Chair, I believe the bells are at 6:30.

The Chair: Oh, the bells are at 6:30. Okay, the vote is at 7.

If we have the room until 6:30, I guess we could go until 6:30 today if it is available—the clerk is looking into that—or up until the point the room is available or the bells ring, whichever comes first. We could carry on with the speakers list if I don't have consent at this point. Okay?

Mr. Alghabra, I believe you are next.

Mr. Turnbull, you had already spoken just before, right?

Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to welcome all of the new members to the committee and thank Mrs. Vecchio for her first motion.

It really reveals a lot of care for Canadians. I know the first thing they're going to think when they read this motion, if they read it, is that this committee really cares about our—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Personal attacks are not needed, thank you.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: —well-being, and advances the interests of Canadians.

However, we are in a political world and political environment and I understand that some members want to turn it political. I actually liked her summary. I wish the motion were reduced to her summary where she said that we just want to study the cause of prorogation. I think if the motion were worded that way, I could see how it would fit within the scope of this committee and how it would fall on the shoulders of this committee to study it, and I actually wouldn't have a problem with it.

The way the details are written in this committee...and I have no doubt that many other committees will also be pursuing the line of looking into WE and the decisions behind WE. I'm sure there will be other committees doing this. I just really don't understand how we can be asked to vote on a motion that is clearly way outside the scope of this committee, especially when I know there are other committees that will be doing this study. I feel this motion has gone way beyond what is expected of us as members of PROC.

I would like to encourage Mrs. Vecchio to perhaps reword it to the way she explained it, in noting that she wants to study the prorogation. I think that's fine. That sounds reasonable and within the mandate of PROC, and perhaps she could remove all of the other

paragraphs after that because they really create an unfortunate line of inquiry outside the scope of this committee.

I ask my colleagues as well to be responsible and thoughtful about what this committee is going to be studying and the work that is before us. The question of prorogation, I think, is legitimate and I think it's fair for our opposition to ask about it, but I fail to understand how all of the other aspects mentioned within the motion fall within the scope of this committee.

● (1740)

The Chair: Next we have Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I would ask that you afford my colleague Ms. Vecchio, and maybe any other colleagues, the same that you would afford your same Liberal colleagues. Mr. Alghabra came at one of our colleagues, Ms. Vecchio, with a “backhanded slap”, so to speak. That's what we call it in our neck of the woods here.

Listen, this is relevant to our committee. Standing Order 32(7) says that we are going to get the report tabled within 20 days of the House being back. This will allow us to be as prepared as possible. There are no hidden monsters in here. We have been absolutely forthright and clear in what our requests are. It is exactly what my colleague Ms. Blaney has mentioned and as Mr. Therrien has mentioned. Canadians want to know why, right in the heart and the depth of a global pandemic, this government, when they needed it the most, a week away from the emergency relief benefits coming to a halt, abandoned them. Why did this government abandon Canadians? They deserve to know that.

We're going to get the report here at PROC. It's going to be tabled for the PROC committee. It behooves us to be prepared for that and to do our own due diligence. The motion that is before you today... You know, it's no wonder the Liberals are squirming on this committee and are dithering and delaying, wanting to have an opportunity to review, but again, I will bring you back to the motions that we all came together and supported earlier today that we never had a chance to really review in advance.

To Mr. Turnbull's comment, if we have the opportunity to have my colleague Ms. Vecchio reread it at maybe at a slower pace, maybe that will help Mr. Turnbull comprehend it a little bit better.

Nothing in here—it's very forthright—should come as a surprise. Canadians want to know: Was the prorogation for six weeks an honest operational recharge or reset, or was it really just to run away from the WE scandal? I can see my colleagues nodding their heads in the affirmative and shaking their heads in the negative, but it behooves all of us here on this committee to be able to try to do that work. I've always said that, whatever committee we're on, whether it's fisheries or transport, at one point we have to come together as a group to be able to do this work. Sometimes it exposes wounds and scars from within on whichever side, but we have to be able to have the fortitude to be able to do that. Again, you have the opposition obviously in 100% agreement as we move forward. Then you have the government, of course, trying to protect their backsides.

Madam Chair, I would just ask for some leadership from you. We have over an hour here. I think we should be able to get to a vote on this. That would send a real message to Canadians that yet another Liberal-run committee is not blocking any study in terms of prorogation or the WE scandal. That's really what people want to see. If this was really a recharge or reset, then let's see if it was and actually be able to move forward and do some work. There should be nothing in here that the Liberals should be afraid of, or the government should be afraid of, if they're telling the truth.

I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you. Those are good points, Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Gerretsen.

• (1745)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't even know where to begin with that. Listen, at the end of the day, what this comes down to for me, the most offensive part of all of this for me, is the fact that this is being sprung on us literally on the fly. Based on the comments from Mr. Doherty, who keeps saying that all the opposition is in favour of it, clearly all the opposition shared this, or had the opportunity to look at it, prior to this meeting.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Not true; just from the comments—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Excuse me. I think I have the floor.

Obviously, based on what he said, they have conspired in advance to do this. If I'm to take Mr. Doherty at his word when he says that everything was done in good faith and so on and so forth, well, if it was really done in good faith, why wouldn't you have given it to us in advance of the meeting as well, as you clearly did, based on your comments? I don't think we're asking for too much.

For Mr. Doherty to somehow compare this to the three motions we did in routine proceedings is absolutely ludicrous. We're talking about whether or not we're going to change the amount of time somebody gets to speak versus an entire motion that has all these different parts to it that we're somehow supposed to be able to absorb and understand just based on one reading. I mean, at the end of the day, what it will come down to is whether or not the Conservatives genuinely want to work on this committee with the government or whether this is just an opportunity to try to dig up some dirt. I know they are looking for this silver bullet that they seem to think exists deep within all these documents that they're trying to pull. A number of Conservatives have been on a government side before. No member of this committee, certainly, knows if that silver bullet they're looking for exists, but we do know that the best way to get information is to be as collaborative as possible with all members on the committee.

My sense is that the best thing to do, moving forward, is for us to allow this discussion to happen off-line. I want to discuss this motion with my caucus, just like the Conservatives had the opportunity to discuss it with themselves, and possibly the NDP and the Bloc. Based on Mr. Doherty's comments, maybe they had the opportunity to do so, and I would like to discuss this with my colleagues as well.

For me, this is not about not being able to vote on this. One way or the other, we can vote on this. My only problem is with voting on it right now, because I feel that I and other Liberal colleagues have been completely slighted by the manner in which this was sprung on us. You're asking me to vote on something that I don't fully understand. You talk about what's in the best interest of Canadians. Well, I'm certainly not representing Canadians that well when I am being asked to vote on something that I haven't had the opportunity to really even understand or to thoroughly discuss with my colleagues before we do that. This is notwithstanding the fact that we're now learning that, from what the chair was saying, she doesn't even know if this motion's in order.

Nevertheless, there's still a desire to vote immediately on this, and I just don't think it's something we need to do right now. We can do it at the next meeting that comes up. Whenever we have our next meeting, we can pick it up from there. If you're going to make me take a position on this, at least give me the opportunity to thoroughly read it and understand it and have a discussion with my colleagues on it.

Madam Chair, I would really like to take Ms. Vecchio up on her offer. Could she read this motion to us again, very slowly this time, so that we can really absorb every word of it to the best of our ability?

• (1750)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Not that I'm opposed to Ms. Vecchio's reading it again, but I believe you have a speakers list. I believe I'm on the speakers list.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I would rather speak before Ms. Vecchio.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Lukiwski. We are going to carry on with the speakers list, and at the end of the speakers list we could have that motion read out, especially before any vote, if one does occur today.

I also want to let you know, just in the middle here, about some logistical or housekeeping questions that were put forth by some of the members earlier about how long we can go. As I mentioned, we do have until 6:30, at this point, until the bells ring. The room is available. The clerk has arranged for staff to rotate and for new support staff to come in, so if you would like to pick up after the vote, we could also do so—that is up to the committee—until such time as you would like to vote on this motion or you would like to call a vote on adjournment for the day. Someone can move to adjourn for the day as well, and we can pick up...

Like I said, I need time. I can't rule whether it's in order. It does seem initially, like I said, especially the first part, to be in order, but I do need time to read it in order to know that for myself. I would need until next meeting at least. I just want reiterate that you do have my commitment that we would start off with this piece of business right off the top, if we do at some point adjourn.

We will carry on with the speakers list—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I still have the floor, right? A point of order was raised while I was speaking. I still have the floor.

The Chair: Right. I'm sorry. Carry on, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Then we will have Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Alghabra and Mr....

Somebody has not put their hand down. My list is a little out of order, I think. Who was next on the speakers list after Mr. Gerretsen?

As well, just as a reminder, please, I wasn't at the top because we really got right into it today. I did want to make sure we got into the routine motions and had those passed today.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, I don't want to interrupt Mark, and I'm not trying to throw you off, but I'm just curious to know where I am on the speakers list.

The Chair: That's what I'm trying to figure out before we move on. I don't see....

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I had my hand raised some time ago, Madam Chair. I just don't know whether or not you actually have me on the list.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mine was taken down at some point too. I had to re-raise it. I don't know how that happened.

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski, did you raise your hand icon in the participants bar?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes. I believe it's still raised. I never took it down.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, my accounting of the speaking list would suggest that Mr. Lukiwski is after Mr. Gerretsen.

The Chair: Okay. His name is not showing up on my list.

I'll try to figure out what happened with that and how to make sure it doesn't occur that someone's hand is removed.

Mr. Gerretsen, carry on.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

I just want to get back to what Ms. Blaney said about the fact there are a lot of Canadians out there who are worried and looking for help. They absolutely are. I don't understand how this particular motion before us is going to help Canadians with their needs right now.

If there is a big secret out there that the Conservatives and all opposition parties are trying to get to the bottom of, I respect that. I respect their role in the opposition and encourage them to do that to the best of their ability in a way that's fair, by making sure that members of all parties have an opportunity to participate, especially in motions that are brought before committee, which is not what is happening here because we just haven't had that opportunity.

Most important, when we get back to Canadians and the help they're looking for right now, what we should really be doing if that's what we care about most is getting back into the House and debating Bill C-4, which was just tabled, rather than the other stalling tactics the Conservatives are pulling in the House right

now. It cannot but make one wonder what objective people really have. What is the most important thing for people?

The reality is that what we're seeing right now is that the Conservatives don't care about anything but WE, and I get it. They're going after what they see as some scandal that's going to make things incredibly bad for the government. I get it, but listen, what every-day Canadians care about right now is being taken care of. They care about knowing that their government is here for them and that Parliament actually working for them.

I don't understand why the Conservatives are so hell-bent on this. It seems this is the only thing that ever matters to them, when the reality of the situation is such that for once, why can't they just drop their whole charade of hating on the Prime Minister and making everything a personal attack, and just start to discuss policy. Why don't they come forward and say, "Hey, we don't like this; why don't we do this instead?", or really advocate for a policy.

You saw it, Madam Chair, in the last session of Parliament. Every time the Conservatives got an opportunity to move an opposition motion, the motion would just be about how the Prime Minister was such a horrible human being and that we needed to look into this and that, instead of actually doing something for Canadians like bringing forward some kind of a piece of policy that would better Canadians' lives.

What we're seeing right now is just more typical Conservative stuff where they just bring forward these motions because they may hope to God they can win an election by making somebody else look bad rather than having their own ideas. For me, it's so incredibly frustrating because when it comes right back to it, we talk about the people who are affected by this pandemic. I can't remember who it was—Mr. Doherty or Mrs. Vecchio—who said a little while ago that Canadians want to know what we're doing for them. Yes, they certainly do, but I have news for you that top of mind for them is not WE.

Do they want to know the truth and make sure that nothing nefarious happened? Absolutely, and they have a right to know that, and you have a right to bring that forward on their behalf, but that's not what's most important to them right now. What's most important right now is knowing that they're going to be taken care of throughout this pandemic, knowing that their government and Parliament are there for them, and knowing that their opposition parties are there to make sure that whatever legislation is brought forward by the government is the best it can possibly be.

I'll hand it to the NDP because at least they did that. At least they were looking for ways to make Canadians' lives better throughout this whole pandemic, and the fact is that they've now decided that they're going to vote in favour of the Speech from the Throne. At least they are coming to the table with a desire to make lives better, rather than a desire to kill one particular political career.

• (1755)

I'll leave it at that for now, Madam Chair.

I'm interested to hear what others have to say about this, but I'm extremely disappointed as a parliamentarian, as a member of Parliament, that I was not afforded an opportunity to have a good solid look at this particular motion, to understand it and digest it and make sure I knew what I was voting on, and to discuss it with my colleagues.

Instead it's an intentional attempt to blindside me, and that is what I find to be the absolutely most offensive part of what has been put forward to us by the Conservatives.

At the end of the day, as I said, if the Conservatives want to see a vote on this, they will get their vote on it, but I cannot see that being right now or today or after our votes, because I don't think we have been treated fairly in this process in how this has been brought forward. I am demanding the opportunity as a parliamentarian to do my due diligence, to look at this motion properly and then decide how to vote on it after I have an opportunity to caucus with my colleagues on it.

I'll leave it at that for now and then raise my hand again if I feel the need to discuss this further.

• (1800)

The Chair: Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'm not 100% sure of this, but I believe I may be one of the only members of this committee who was in Parliament during the prorogation under the Conservative government of Stephen Harper. In response to what Mark was saying, I can assure all committee members that there was a lot of study on the reasons why the Conservative government at the time prorogued Parliament. At the time, this committee, PROC called many witnesses forward to talk about prorogation, the need for prorogation, the reasons behind prorogation. To those who suggest this is really a worthless exercise, I would point out it is not.

I would also point out that, quite frankly, in effect, even though Karen's motion went on and had several subsets to it, if you really drill down to its essence, it is really just a request for witnesses and documents to be produced to study the reasons behind the government's proroguing of Parliament. That's all it's saying.

Mark, I can appreciate that you and others may be saying that you want some time to study this. Mark, you would know, and Omar would know as well as I do, that in the last 45 minutes we have been debating this, members of the PMO and probably the House leader's staff and the whip's staff have been poring over this motion closely. They have been studying it. They have an opinion. They will be giving you advice as to which motion you could perhaps support.

I'm sorry, Mark, but you're on mute. Thanks for trying—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I didn't want to interrupt you. I just want to say it's my vote, not theirs.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's understood, Mark, but your staff is examining this as we speak.

Procedurally, of course, Karen had every right in the world to introduce a motion during committee business, so this wasn't sprung on anyone. This is something that is quite correct procedurally.

If you're talking about something being sprung on people, I guess I could make the political argument that prorogation itself was sprung on us. We didn't know that the Prime Minister was going to prorogue and shut down Parliament and committees.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Neither did I.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: No. It kind of cuts both ways. However, I think the key element here, Mark, that you may not be grasping or admitting is that both committees and the House can work at the same time independently.

Your argument is that why in the world would the Conservatives spring this on us when we're discussing things like Bill C-2 and Bill C-4 and getting aid to Canadians, which, quite frankly, I support. Even though we believe the government is going to have to account for its spending measures, I don't think anyone is denying the fact that millions of Canadians need support financially right now.

The House is dealing with that right now. We're having a vote in about half an hour on those two motions right now. The House can do its work. We're not circumventing any of the work of the House and parliamentarians. All we're doing is saying that now that committees have been restructured, let's start meeting to discuss things like prorogation and some of the other elements of other committees that had met.

How about the China-Canada special committee? That was struck down. Do you not believe that's an important committee? I certainly do. I would like to see that back up and running, and I think most Canadians would as well.

That's my only point, Mark. You keep saying that it's offensive because we've sprung this on you without notice. Well, perhaps it was without notice, but it certainly wasn't unwarranted. There is plenty of history and precedence about studies about prorogation. Governments in the past have prorogued on many occasions, and committees have studied the reasons for that. That's all that Karen's motion is speaking to. Let's call witnesses and produce documents to ask the government the very simple question: Why? Why did you prorogue? What did you believe were the underlying and motivating factors to prorogue, which shut down Parliament for five weeks? That's as simple as it gets.

You may want to study the wording of Karen's motion, but that in essence is what it's saying. Give us the ability to call witnesses and produce documents and let's study it. That's it. In a nutshell, that's it.

I don't know how much time you actually need. For example, I know we're probably going to be voting for an hour. This is online voting, and the last couple of nights when we've had practice sessions it has usually taken about an hour to run through the roll. You'll have ample opportunity to go over the motion—line by line and clause by clause—that Karen brought forward, so I don't think there is really any excuse to say that we need to delay. I believe that probably by the time we get back after the 6:30 vote has concluded you will have had, I would hope, the opportunity to read through the motion and perhaps speak to whether or not you want to vote on the motion at that time.

That's all I have to say, Madam Chair. Thank you.

● (1805)

The Chair: Thank you.

The last two speakers have both brought up very good points.

Does everyone see the same speakers list that I am currently seeing? I'm seeing Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Alghabra, Mr. Doherty and Ms. Vecchio. Is that what you're seeing on your screen? I just want to make sure that I'm not having some issues, because a few hands were removed prior to that.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Ruby, it's Ms. Blaney. I am on the list. I'm not sure where.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Ruby, I see the same list you're referring to, but I don't know how it's set up in terms of precedence of turns, because I know that I put my hand up after Omar spoke and somehow he is on the list prior to me. Those are the questions I'm asking. That's all.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I've had my name on there for a while.

The Clerk: Madam Chair, I've been keeping a list. I have Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Doherty, Ms. Vecchio and Mr. Alghabra.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I put my hand up again too.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Ms. Blaney was on there as well.

The Clerk: That's right: Ms. Blaney and then Mr. Gerretsen.

The Chair: The only person who is not on your list, Justin, is Mr. Alghabra. Otherwise you have Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Doherty, Ms. Vecchio, Ms. Blaney and Mr. Gerretsen, correct?

The Clerk: Just prior to Ms. Blaney I do have Mr. Alghabra.

The Chair: Okay. That's the only thing that's weird. The list goes according to the time you put your hand up. Every now and then we have issues where someone has forgotten to take their hand down. That could mess up the order here and there. I'll try to look at that a little more carefully to make sure that after a person speaks we have them put their hand back down.

Next we have Mr. Turnbull, but I won't be entertaining any hand-waving moving forward, just because we have so many speakers. It's difficult to do that when there are so many who are interested in speaking. This way, it will be a bit more systematic, so just raise your hand in the toolbar.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair. That's more than fair, as always.

Forgive me, folks, but I'm a relatively new member. I'm struck by this motion and am struggling to interpret it. In my mind, the role of the procedure and House affairs committee is to study the rules and practices of the House, its committees and questions of privilege, etc. How is this related?

I understand your referencing of Standing Order 32(7) at the beginning of your motion, which I think is what was referenced numerous times by Mr. Doherty and Ms. Vecchio, and which I believe already implies that the tabling of documents explaining reasons for prorogation has to be done in the House and then referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Why do we need a motion at all when that's already a rule in the Standing Orders?

That process is going to happen, whereas this, based on Ms. Vecchio's reading, which was very fast—and I confess that I didn't fully comprehend all of it, and I would like her to reread it, if possible.... I just find that it really assumes the reason.

If the intention is what Mr. Lukiwski said it was, if the intention is pure, in that you just want to understand the reasons for prorogation, then why assume the reasons in terms of specific documentation? I caught one aspect of this that was related to the commercial rent assistance. What does that have to do with prorogation? I have absolutely...it makes no.... It certainly implies that some kind of connection might be there in terms of the motion, but it seems like a bit of a fishing expedition for reasons that I don't particularly understand.

I would really need to debate each point in each clause and go through it very carefully, because right now, based on my limited understanding.... I confess that I'm basically saying that I don't completely understand why this is necessary when certainly it's already a standing order to table documents to explain prorogation. Why is there a motion needed when we know that within 20 days that's already going to happen and PROC is going to have the chance to review it as a committee?

Mr. Lukiwski, this is for you and then Ms. Vecchio. These are questions that I'd love to hear your perspective on.

● (1810)

The Chair: Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I want to just touch on the comments about fairness that our colleague Mr. Gerretsen mentioned. I hope he was as energetic and that we saw the same fevered pitch when the government chose to prorogue for five or six weeks. Where was the fairness to the Canadians who were in the heart of this pandemic and were struggling? Where's the fairness to the small business owners in my riding who are still struggling to be recognized for any type of emergency benefit, or to the single parent, or to the person who's out of work? Where's the fairness there?

Where was the fairness in allowing the 338 members of Parliament to be able to work together collaboratively as team Canada or to represent their ridings and their electors when the government chose to suspend for six weeks? Where was the fairness there? Where were Mr. Gerretsen's arguments at that point?

I'm not discounting what you all have gone through in terms of this past six months or seven months of this pandemic, but I can tell you how it has been in my riding, which has been deeply, deeply hit by this pandemic in terms of job losses and people just losing everything.

Canadians do want to know why it was done. Where was the fairness there?

Where was the fairness? Why did we have to prorogue for six weeks to get a throne speech like we got, right? When things seemed to be going sideways for the government, who chose to do that? Who chose to hit reset?

Again, Mr. Gerretsen, in his small cubicle he's in, in the phone booth there, seemed to be having a hard time containing himself. Mr. Alghabra chose to take a shot at our colleague Ms. Vecchio. If you want to bring fairness in....

He talked about how every time the opposition gets up they want to talk about, point fingers and slander our Prime Minister. We're not the ones who actually made him do any of the ethical lapses that he's done—or his ministers. It's him, himself, or his ministers who are doing it on their own. We didn't put him in that position. They put themselves in that position. Canadians want to know why, in the heart of and right in the middle of a global pandemic, our government chose to actually remove the voices they elected, the people they elected to be their voices.

We have an opportunity right now to try to bring this forward. As my colleague Mr. Lukiwski said so eloquently, all we're asking for is a study. As 32(7) says—and Mr. Turnbull mentioned it and we quoted it a number of times—the report is coming. We want to study it, but we want to be prepared. We want to bring to the table people who were around the table and made these decisions. We want to see the unredacted reasons or reports as to why they were doing it.

Listen, Liberal-run committees have shut this down at every step of the way. Your comments and your reactions to this today are no different from what we've come to expect. Was there collusion from the opposition side? No, there wasn't. It just shows that they're all doing the same thing, that they're all hearing from their constituents and all have the same concerns that we're hearing. Canadians want to know why this was done.

There was no fairness when that vote on prorogation came down. It was heavy-handed and it was done. Just as we've seen time and again under this government's mandate, it's heavy-handed. They like to stand up and talk about fairness and what have you, but really, it's the grassroots and the people within our communities who are suffering.

Where's the fairness in the fact that my softwood lumber guys, my forest producers, still don't have a softwood lumber agreement? For Ms. Blaney and I, our regions have been hard hit by the downturn in the forest industry because of the uncertainty faced by this government and brought forward by this government's policy. Whether it's oil and gas or natural resources, we're hit hard. Where's the fairness there?

• (1815)

Mr. Gerretsen, when you talk about fairness, I have a real hard time sitting here and listening to you get up on your soapbox and talk about that and every time the Conservatives or the opposition want to stand up and point fingers at the Prime Minister and his policies. Well, that's our job.

Our job is to also work collaboratively across the way. I think this motion that is put forward doesn't expose anything other than what it's asking for. Let's get the documents and let's get the people before us who were at the heart of the decision to prorogue Parliament for six weeks and why they did it. I would challenge our committee members to really look around and look within. That's our job here. It's to do better for Canadians.

I think Ms. Vecchio, while she read it fast.... I had an opportunity to read it as she was reading it.... I understand it. I didn't get a chance to see it beforehand. It's no different than the motions we had regarding the Standing Orders or how we were going to move forward in terms of committee witnesses and the rounds of questioning.

Mr. Gerretsen, you can talk fairness all you want, but respect and fairness are given and should be earned. It's a two-way street. Whatever you're doing—if you're tweeting about it right now or you're sitting in there and sending messages to PMO about what you should do—I think we should actually move forward on this and vote. Let's get studying it and send a message to Canadians that another Liberal-led committee isn't going to block this opportunity for Canadians to find out what really happened.

I will cede the floor.

The Chair: We have Ms. Vecchio and then Mr. Alghabra.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much. I'm going to start with some simple things.

Specifically for Mr. Alghabra and Mr. Gerretsen, when you talk about Conservatives only wanting to talk about WE, prior to the prorogation I was the chair of status of women, where we worked our butts off to do an excellent study. We talked about violence against women. We talked about shelters. We talked about the sheconomy. We talked about all of these different things.

One day before that letter was finalized, prorogation took place, so to all of those members who came here and worked really hard so that we could be the voices of women across Canada, do not think this is about WE, because I—and don't question my integrity—will always fight for Canadians.

You may think that this is all about WE, but I'm going to remind you that on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food they were talking about support for poultry and egg farmers. That's not WE.

On Canada-China relations, well, we know we have a problem there, and I know an emergency debate was asked for, because there are groups that are studying the genocide that is occurring in China.

We talked about the Canadian trading relations. That was one of the studies that was going on.

On the HUMA committee, which I sat on, off and on—and I know why—we were working very hard on the things we were studying there. We talked about housing. We talked about poverty. We talked about food banks. We talked about all of this great work. That all came to an end when prorogation occurred.

The study on systematic racism in policing in Canada was started at the public safety committee, but unfortunately what happened was that the prorogation took all of these studies and just quashed them, so all the work, all of the work that was done in committees... You can talk about WE and say that's all we talk about, but I challenge you, because I can tell you, at the end of the day, do I care about WE? No, but do I care about an ethical government that I can sit there and be supportive of on great legislation and support if you bring it forward? Absolutely.

To go on to the fairness, if Mark ever wants to go there, I introduced Bill C-4 to you this morning and Bill C-2. We'll be voting on that at 3 a.m. on Wednesday morning, two legislative pieces as we're coming back to the House of Commons. We're talking 48 hours and you're concerned about getting a piece of paper on that. Sorry, that one won't go there.

I think we have to understand that prorogation stopped all the incredible work that was being done. There was a lot of non-partisan work being done so that Canadians could put food on their tables, so that poultry farmers could make sure they're getting their money after these NAFTA negotiations and CETA, and all of those great things, but you guys can turn a blind eye and not look at the big picture and then say that Conservatives are only focused on WE.

While Conservatives, the NDP, the Bloc and Liberals were all sitting on these committees doing good work, the leadership at the PMO decided to close down Parliament. We are asking for documents to support why the prorogation occurred, and I don't think that is uncalled for, especially when we know that the standing order has that there.

I'm going to finish off with a simple quote, and I'm sure we all know who said this because you all are standing behind him when you're supporting the Liberal government:

Mr. Speaker, I hope that future prime ministers will answer questions from all members, not just from party leaders. I hope that future prime ministers will not make excessive use of omnibus bills and will not resort to prorogation to avoid problematic situations.

As Todd talked about and as everybody has said—and I think Rachel talked about this—we came back to a throne speech that we thought was going to knock us on our butts, because we thought the government was actually going to do something.

All you did was close the door and reopen it. Nothing has changed in six weeks. All of these programs that you're talking about are current on my householder that I produced four weeks ago. It is four weeks old, so don't say to me that we're coming to

something new. All of these programs are old. The shelter stuff is stuff that we were talking about. There is not anything new.

Prorogation happened and we want to know why. Canadians have the right to know why. For me, I don't care about WE. What I care about is that there are beds and shelters and all of those things for our good Canadians, but as a government and as the House of Commons, we can do it all. We can pass Bill C-2 and Bill C-4 in the next 48 hours. We can have somebody studying agriculture. We can have somebody studying what is happening over in China. We can do it because there are 338 members of Parliament who are here to do our jobs.

I really hope that as we are going forward you will just step back and ask why prorogation happened, and if it wasn't for WE, prove us wrong. It's simple.

Thank you.

• (1820)

The Chair: Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me take a moment to say I regret that Mr. Doherty has taken my comments as a personal attack—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: The apology is accepted. I took it as well, but I—

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I'm not apologizing. I'm sorry—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Oh. Okay. I'm sorry. I assumed you would be, because I thought it was really rude, but oh well—

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I'm not apologizing—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, who has the floor, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Mr. Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I'm sorry. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm really not apologizing, but let me just say that I take it very seriously not to personally attack any of my colleagues. It is incredibly important that we can debate vigorously and have an argument, a healthy argument, about things we care about and about things we believe Canadians care about. We can disagree. We can point that out, but not to record it or treat it as a personal attack.

There is obviously a line between criticism and disagreement and personal attacks. We all know what that line is. I mean, Mr. Doherty just spent his entire intervention saying how Liberals don't care about small business—don't care, don't care, don't care. I don't take that as a personal attack. I take that as a matter of political disagreement and political debate. Yes, I disagree with him, but I don't take that as a personal attack.

My observation about this motion is not a personal attack against Ms. Vecchio. It's really important to avoid labelling disagreements in this committee in that way, because it's certainly not going to end up creating a positive and a welcoming environment for vigorous debate yet remaining respectful.

I want to make it very clear. I want to encourage my colleagues to maintain respect but allow for vigorous debate. I have a great amount of respect for all my colleagues here on this committee.

I especially want to acknowledge Mr. Lukiwski. I served with him in my previous life when I was a member of the opposition. He has always shown me and all of our colleagues a lot of respect and class—and also, I know, all others. I'm not saying that the others on this committee don't do the same, but I'm naming him because of his intervention. I actually wish he would agree with me on the fact that, sure, this committee can study prorogation, and that is not the point of debate here. That is not the disagreement here.

Can somebody explain this to me? For example, I'm just going to pick this point:

(g) an order of the committee do issue to require the government to prepare and make a return to the clerk of the committee, within 10 days of the adoption of this motion, indicating (i) what criteria were used by public servants to determine that only WE Charity could deliver the Canada Student Service Grant, (ii) which individuals were responsible for designing the parameters of the Canada Student Service Grant, (iii) who was present at any meeting where the parameters of the Canada Student Service Grant were discussed, and (iv) whether the Canada Student Service Grant was approved through the ordinary Treasury Board submission process and, if not, what the variations were;

How is that relevant whatsoever to prorogation and the decisions behind prorogation? If we agree to study prorogation and the reasons behind prorogation, and if we find reasons that take us down one path or another, I'm sure the committee will choose to call on certain witnesses based on the evidence that is presented before the committee. This motion doesn't wait for evidence, doesn't wait for testimony and doesn't wait for a report from government. It already says, "Call this. Do that. Call Rob Silver."

I wish that the presenter of this motion had used simple language saying, "Let's study and let's encourage our committee to do a study on the reasons behind prorogation and invite witnesses who are relevant to that decision." I think that anyone, even members of the Liberal Party—and perhaps some of us may not be comfortable in studying this—would have a hard time opposing it, because it is within the mandate of this committee.

I can see the role of the opposition as wanting to call for a study on why prorogation was done. Whether this Speech from the Throne does offer anything different or whether it doesn't offer anything different, it's all a matter of debate, and I'm happy to invite other experts and witnesses to tell us all of that.

• (1825)

I'm sure you don't want me to list these clause by clause, but I can go through this clause by clause, and it's very difficult for any reasonable observer to understand how this is relevant. If we do a study and we discover that it was relevant because one witness or another said "WE" or said something else or whatever, then we can study that further.

Most of what you are asking for in this motion, Ms. Vecchio, is going to be studied by other committees that are mandated to do the studies. I think that's fair. Let them study on their own or decide on their own studies as they wish, but in my opinion—and I am looking forward to hearing not only the chair's opinion but also the clerk's opinion—most of the elements of this motion are explicitly outside the scope of this committee.

Again, perhaps members of the Conservative Party would like to reconsider rewording their motion, but I think the way it is right now, with the complex and multi-dimensional nature of this motion, it requires not only time to study but, I feel, a thoughtful opinion on whether this is within the scope of our committee or outside the scope of our committee.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1830)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, everyone.

I think the bells will start to ring fairly soon. I want to start by saying that as one of the party whips I will need to go and organize that.

For me, there are a couple of things. First, I think about all the students across Canada who didn't get the support they well deserve. That's a big frustration for me and is something that I think needs to be explained.

I also agree that I would love to have Ms. Vecchio read it out a little more slowly so we can go through it, because I think one of the key things I heard in there were some significant commitments to timelines. I would think that somehow the timelines coincide with the obligation for our committee to follow through with the study, so I'm interested in that as well in terms of how those timelines go together.

I hope we get to a vote very soon. That is all I have to add.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

In response to the comment about fairness, when I was talking about fairness, I wasn't talking about the Prime Minister not treating Mr. Doherty fairly and vice versa. I was talking about fairness to mean—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: The bells are going. I just need to bring that forward.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Sure.

Madam Chair, I think you need to deal with that.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want us to get somewhere. I want us to have a result and, actually, I want us to do a study and to get into a study as soon as possible. As I've said, this is a very complex motion just because of all of the various parts. It starts off very simply, but then gets very complex. I would like some time to just look at it—until the next meeting. I need to look at Standing Order 108 to see whether all parts are within the mandate, and then, I feel, we should get to a vote on it.

I think the most productive and most efficient thing to do at this time to allow us to get to that point is to have that brief opportunity to review it so that we're not going nowhere. I think the best thing to do right now, and what I'm going to do, is to adjourn today's

meeting, and we'll meet very quickly right back up and pick up from where we left off. That will give me enough time to review everything and make a ruling on the motion. Then we can vote. Okay?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Chair, a clarification, please?

The Chair: We are adjourning.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm just asking, Madam Chair, if you're adjourning, if you have any sense of when we might reconvene.

The Chair: Yes. I am going to try to put a notice out for the first available opportunity that we can have a meeting this week.

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