



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 006

Friday, July 17, 2020

Chair: Ms. Rachael Harder



Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC)): I will call this meeting to order, and I will ask for the room to be cleared of any media presence. Mr. Barrett, your hand has been noted; I will come to you momentarily.

Welcome to meeting number six of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. The committee is meeting today because a request was received from four members of the committee pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), to discuss their request to undertake a study to review the safeguards in place to prevent conflicts of interest in federal government expenditure policies.

Today's meeting is taking place in person, and the proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are aware, the cameras will always show the person speaking, rather than the entire room as a whole. Please also note that sometimes there is a delay in your speaker being turned off. Should the meeting be suspended, just be aware of this.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules that are special, given the times we're in.

Occupational health and safety have requested that we limit our movement in the room and that we wear a mask unless we are seated, at which time the mask can be removed. Floor markings indicate the path of travel, which you will note goes counterclockwise around the room; please honour that. Individuals should respect physical distancing and remain two metres from one another, particularly when without a mask. Seats and microphones have been placed in a manner that respects physical distancing; therefore, we ask that you remain in the location that has been assigned to you throughout this meeting, please. If you leave the meeting and someone is expected to take your seat, we ask that you use a cleaning wipe, which is provided here in the room, and that you wipe the armrests, the table, the microphone, the earpiece and the surfaces around you. The same applies if you are taking someone else's seat; please proceed with cleaning before doing so.

To minimize health risks, you will note that limited personnel have been permitted to attend today. Staff have received a phone number where they can listen to these proceedings in real time, so we trust they're joining us from afar. With regard to washrooms, the washrooms on this floor have been opened 30 minutes preceding this meeting and will remain open until 30 minutes after this meeting. You will note that no paper documents have been distributed here today. All documents have been kept online, and you can ac-

cess them there. Should you require a copy of a document, please advise the clerk of your need by immediately emailing the committee at ethi@parl.gc.ca. Hopefully you've all come prepared.

Mr. Fergus, do you have an immediate question to that?

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Yes, I have two things. Thank you very much for *les consigne*. I sit very close to the door; if I were to remove myself, do I have to do it counterclockwise and come around, or can I just come straight to my chair?

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, why do you have to start with such difficult questions?

Mr. Greg Fergus: It's a fair question. Also, if I were to go get a coffee or a bagged lunch, should I be walking around all my colleagues, or should I just come straight to my chair?

• (1105)

The Chair: I would ask that you honour the floor markings. We would ask that you go and take your food and then continue in a counterclockwise direction back to your seat. Thank you.

Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you. I don't want to be difficult, and certainly when I was told to follow the forms when I was in school, I was in the nuns' office continually for not doing that. As a practical, I am at the farthest end; it seems I would contact the fewest people if I went this way. If I went that way, I would go past every single person in the room. I would just suggest that it would be less contact at our end of the table if we went clockwise, which [*Inaudible—Editor*] my whole life.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, I take your point. I would ask this: If you note that there are other people at the food table who may come in your direction and you would cross paths, I would ask you to honour the footsteps that are on the floor.

Are there any other questions with regard to the guidelines I have gone through here? Okay. Awesome.

Moving forward, then, as stated, we are here pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). The letter that was received by the clerk and then given to me as chair has a motion within it, which reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the Committee review the safeguards which are in place to avoid and prevent conflicts of interest in federal government procurement, contracting, granting, contribution and other expenditure policies; and that, to provide a case study for this review, 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—provided that these records shall be provided to the Clerk of Committee within one week of the adoption of this Order.

I will now open the floor for discussion with regard to the motion that has been put forward to this committee.

I will start with Mr. Barrett.

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

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Madam Chair, I'd like to be put on the speakers list, please.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you to the committee staff for arranging the meeting. This is the first time the committee has had to adopt, in the new reality of COVID-19, footsteps on the floor and all the social distancing, etc. Thank you to the clerk, analyst, translators, staff et al.

With regard to the reason for the letter that was sent to the committee to trigger Standing Order 106(4), it was effectively for one purpose. That was to get answers for Canadians on Justin Trudeau's \$900-million scandal. This has triggered an investigation by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. This is the—

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): On a point of order, Chair, could the member just repeat that? Did he say "scam"? Is that not unparliamentary language?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Nope, the word "scam" is the member's word and not mine. I used the word "scandal".

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: "Scandal", okay.

Well, I'd still like to understand whether or not that's parliamentary language at this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Shanahan. That is noted.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, do you want the clerk and you to make a ruling on whether this \$900-million scandal is in fact a scandal? Do we want the chair to rule on that?

The Chair: I believe what's being requested is that language be watched carefully.

We will allow you to continue forward with your statement, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: In light of the revelations we've heard, and following on two scandals that saw Prime Minister Justin Trudeau twice found guilty of breaking the law—the Conflict of Interest Act, with respect to his trip to Billionaire Island and with his involvement in the SNC-Lavalin scandal—it's imperative that this committee exercise its function to ensure that Canadians can have confidence in their public institutions and can have confidence in the Prime Minister's Office and in the occupant of that office, and, when there is reason to call into question that confidence, that the full force of sunlight is effected so that we can have transparency. We heard from Prime Minister Trudeau once that sunlight is the

best disinfectant, and this motion is an effort to achieve that effect, to disinfect.

So let's put some sunlight on this. Openness and transparency were proclaimed to be hallmarks or commitments of this government, and we're looking to see that. It's worth noting that in the "Trudeau II Report", Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner Mr. Mario Dion said there were nine witnesses who were not able to testify because doing so would reveal a confidence of the Queen's Privy Council.

Now that is a problem, because we were told that all cabinet confidences would be waived during that investigation, and that was not the case. It's documented, and so we had nine witnesses who wanted to aid in that transparency that an independent officer of Parliament was looking to bring to the issue, and doing that was not possible.

I think, given the reality we're faced with, that we have a shifting narrative, it's important that we pin down all the facts as soon as possible so that we can assure Canadians that Parliament is exercising its function as a check against the executive branch of government. The records that are asked for in this motion speak directly to this issue, which has been dominating the front page of newspapers and which has been the top story on the newscasts across our country for weeks. We have this \$912-million program that was awarded without competition. I'm aware—and I am sure that I'll hear from members of the Liberal Party—that it wasn't a sole-source contract, but we heard yesterday from civil servants that this was not a tendered contract. There was no tendering process. There was no RFP. The contention was that we wanted to get it done fast, so we did it.

Okay, but why was this organization selected?

There are a few distinctions about this organization that are a matter of public record and that need to be considered. One of those considerations is that members of Justin Trudeau's family, including his mother Margaret and his brother Alexandre, together benefited in the amount of more than \$300,000 in dealings with this organization, with WE Charity.

We know that the Prime Minister's wife is a spokesperson for this organization. We know that Justin Trudeau is regularly involved with this organization as well. We know that Ms. Grégoire Trudeau did one time receive a speaking fee from this organization as well, prior to Justin Trudeau taking office as Prime Minister.

• (1110)

That's a lot of money. That's not an insignificant amount of money when we're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars and about nearly \$11,000 per engagement for Ms. Margaret Trudeau. That's significant. Then for this company to be awarded this arrangement, this contract, without competition....

If we want to decide on common language other than calling it “sole source”, if that’s an impediment to us getting facts and transparency, I’m happy to engage in that conversation. But it is what it is. We heard yesterday that no competition was engaged on this.

We also know that for July 2, 2017, in one of many sole-sourced arrangements with WE Charity, there was a more than \$1-million contract between the Government of Canada and WE Charity that saw Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his mother, Margaret, on the lawn of Parliament Hill. Documents related to whether or not Ms. Margaret Trudeau was paid her approximately \$11,000 speaking fee for that effort have not been released by the PMO and have not been forthcoming from WE Charity. That’s a problem. It’s a problem when taxpayer dollars are going out of their hand and then into the hand of the mother of a public office holder, the head of our government. Any reasonable person would see that it’s inappropriate.

This organization, WE Charity, has declined to pay speaking fees to other people with exceptional reputations and perspective in the field that Ms. Margaret Trudeau is also known to be an expert in, or well known for, in the field of mental health. That’s commendable; I think it’s tremendous that she speaks on that issue. I think talking about those issues is so important today. In the context of COVID-19, I think we’ve all heard, and some of us may have experienced in our communities and in our families, that with regard to mental health, there will be real challenges for folks who’ve been isolated as a result of this. So it’s very important. But why pay her and not somebody else? Is it appropriate for her to be paid with taxpayer dollars, as the mother of the Prime Minister, \$11,000 for 90 minutes’ work? These questions that have been raised are incredibly important.

The answers we received yesterday at the finance committee are very interesting. The mandate of that committee is different. I know there are motions that will come forward from other members today. I think it’s important that we not lose sight of this committee’s mandate. This is the ethics committee. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is again investigating the Prime Minister of Canada, a prime minister who has twice been found guilty of breaking that law. We also have the Minister of Finance, Bill Morneau, who now has an investigation being conducted by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner as well, having already once been found guilty of breaking that law. The work of this committee is tremendously important.

I recognized that this would cause discomfort to my colleagues on the other side of the room, as it’s the leader of their party, members of the cabinet and the same party that they sit in who are the subject of these questions. I genuinely believe that the sooner we get all the answers, the sooner we can put this matter to rest. Nothing would give me more satisfaction than being able to reassure Canadians that the rule of law is being followed, that we have an open and transparent government and that there is no more to see here. For now, there is more to see, and that’s why it’s important that we get a look at these documents.

I look forward to hearing other comments from members of the committee, Madam Chair. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to move this motion.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: I will continue moving down my speakers list.

I have Mrs. Shanahan next.

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

I’m glad to hear the member say that he’s open to our discussing the definition of contribution agreement and talking about mandate.

I’d like to cede my time to Madame Brière, if possible.

• (1120)

The Chair: I would have to go down the speakers list. Mrs. Shanahan, if you are done, I will move to Mr. Angus, and then I will come to Ms. Brière.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay, I will continue, then.

Indeed, I would like to bring to the committee’s attention our mandate and the fact that our mandate is actually a review mandate of the work of the Commissioner of Lobbying, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, and the Privacy Commissioner. Given that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is now charged with this work, we are not an investigative body. Indeed, we are a review body. We are here to make sure that the commissioner is able to do his or her work. That is our role.

I’d like to just read out the mandate, actually—I find that this is always very helpful—and to do a review of the mandates of the other committees that we know have motions before them on this issue.

The Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics reviews, among other matters, the effectiveness, management and operations as well as the operational and expenditure plans relating to four Officers of Parliament: the Information Commissioner; the Privacy Commissioner; the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner; and the Commissioner of Lobbying. It also reviews their reports, although in the case of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the reports concerned relate to the Commissioner’s responsibilities under the Parliament of Canada Act regarding public office holders and reports tabled pursuant to the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act. In cooperation with other standing committees, the Committee also reviews any bill, federal regulation or Standing Order which impacts upon its main areas of responsibility: access to information, privacy and the ethical standards of public office holders. It may also propose initiatives in these areas and promote, monitor and assess such initiatives.

So we are not an investigative body. In fact, that was a discussion that we had in our first meeting here, when we set our rules and procedures.

I’m going to switch to French here.

[*Translation*]

I recall that we had a very detailed conversation about the fact that this committee is responsible for studying highly sensitive matters that pertain directly to people’s confidentiality and privacy. It was determined that we would not discuss individuals or specific people.

The fact that we have a public life, as members of Parliament—or commissioners—is one thing. But it is quite another matter when it concerns a spouse, mother, brother, sister or any other person with whom we are related and who, in some instances, are just ill-fated to be so related. As I have eight brothers and sisters, I can tell you I have experience of this. We can't begin to conduct investigations into all of our families. It is not the role of this committee to tarnish people's reputations.

There is a reason why former Prime Minister Harper enacted the Conflict of Interest Act and appointed a commissioner. This made it possible to study situations considered worrying by MPs in strict confidentiality. The process has my complete confidence. There may be some here who do not trust the commissioner's office or the commissioner himself, but that is another matter. As for me, I am convinced that he has everything required to conduct the investigation as he sees fit.

The issue is mainly about our mandate, and that is what we should focus on. As MPs, we are responsible for dealing with matters that the House of Commons entrusts to us. We need to make sure that commissioners have the tools required. These commissioners, who are non-partisan and independent, are appointed for specific periods.

- (1125)

They are there to do very important work on behalf of Canadians.

I agree with my colleague opposite. We can ask questions to determine whether certain actions of an MP or a member of that MP's family, or even other relations, are appropriate. We are speaking about two things here. The immediate members of an MP's family include the wife or husband and their children, but as I was just saying, there are also other relations.

Is this reasonable? Is this really what we want to do? Have we truly got to that point? Are we going to conduct a public investigation into everyone when other tools are available?

I spoke about the Ethics Commissioner. And we also know that the Standing Committee on Finance held a meeting yesterday to discuss the contribution agreement.

[English]

I know it's a bit technical, but the fact is that there is a difference, for the public, between what is a contribution agreement, what is a transfer payment and what is a procurement contract.

A procurement contract is used to obtain goods or services. It is an agreement between a federal government contracting authority and an outside party to purchase goods, provide a service or lease real property. Most often, the outside party is chosen through a competitive selection process... A transfer (payment) arrangement is used to transfer monies...from the federal government to individuals, organizations or other levels of government...to further government policy and the department's objectives.

Under a contribution agreement [a type of transfer payment], the government sets the high-level funding parameters, including the [program and policy] objectives, desired outcomes, eligible expenditures, and performance measurement.... However...the government does not direct or dictate how the recipient will carry out their project.

Those are the definitions. That is indeed the work of the finance committee. I daresay that we don't comment on other committees,

but from the time I was participating in the government operations committee, I know that this could also be part of their mandate, to judge whether to conduct a study as to whether the department's work was carried out with all due processes and whether this was the appropriate method to use.

It is not uncommon, as we heard yesterday at the finance committee—

Mr. Michael Barrett: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm diligently taking notes from my colleague, and I'm wondering if she could restate her outlining of the committee mandate. I may have missed this, but the last line says that the committee can also study any legislation or regulation or purpose, initiatives that relate to "access to information, privacy and the ethical standards of public office holders."

I'm not sure if I missed that. If she could restate it, I'll just correct my notes.

[Translation]

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

[English]

The Chair: Hold on here one moment.

Is it a point of order?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Yes. It's hard for the interpreters to do their job properly when people speak too fast. It would be better if we could speak more slowly.

Thank you.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sorry.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. That is noted.

Mrs. Shanahan, do you wish to respond to Mr. Barrett's request?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay. It is as follows:

In cooperation with other standing committees, the Committee also reviews any bill, federal regulation or Standing Order which impacts upon its main areas of responsibility: access to information, privacy and the ethical standards of public office holders. It may also propose initiatives in these areas and promote, monitor and assess such initiatives.

I did read that out. My understanding is that this is if we are reviewing a bill—for example, we have a statutory requirement to review the Conflict of Interest Act, so we may be reviewing that—a federal regulation that comes forward, an initiative, or federal privacy or ethical standards. The initiative could be a general study as to whether we have the tools or whether there is a gap in place. I think that is what we are discussing here.

For my part, I think the mandate is very clear that we are here to examine whether the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has the tools he needs to proceed.

• (1130)

The Chair: Sorry, Mrs. Shanahan, but I'm going to stop you here.

The members at this table need to honour the other members at this table who have the mike, please. Thank you.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I appreciate that, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, I guess it's that we're being told by the government what our committee is allowed to study, when the mandate clearly allows us the initiative to deal with issues of conflict of interest. That is a long-standing tradition. I guess I find it a little offensive that I'm being told by the government what we're allowed to study, when it's within the mandate.

If the government is just going to rag the puck for three hours and not allow us to vote, why don't they just tell us they're going to talk this out? Then we can go on our phones or do other things. Rather than interfere with our work by telling us, as the government, that we are not allowed to study what is within the purview of the conflict of interest and ethics codes....

I find that personally offensive. I would rather she tell us clearly: Is she going to talk out the clock so that we can't get to a vote? That would be a lot clearer.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, I'm sorry, but I don't believe that's a point of order. Thank you.

Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you.

Indeed, I am very dismayed at a comment of that nature. As a member of Parliament, as a parliamentarian, the mandate that the House of Commons has given to the standing committees is of utmost importance to me. It's something that I think we need to remind ourselves of periodically. We are a creature of the House. Yes, we have wide powers to determine our own procedures and how we are going to conduct our business. We did so in our first meeting, when it concerned the conditions of going in camera. That meeting, I thought, really showed the common interest that we had here as members. We were sensitive to the fact that names can be brought up, personal names of people who have nothing to do with running for office or being here, and that we would not be dragging personal names—

The Chair: One moment.

Mr. Gourde, you have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

What we have here is a lot of figure skating. Honestly! Even the Prime Minister said in the House that every committee is entitled to determine how it wishes to conduct its work. I have been here for almost 15 years now and have never heard that we were straight-jacketed in any way. It is up to the committee to decide what it wishes to do. Since when does our mandate prevent us from studying a particular subject or place restrictions on our work? This is the first I've heard about it.

With all due respect, Mrs. Shanahan, I can't really see where you're headed with this. You're just skating around the issue.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mrs. Shanahan.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I don't believe this is the first time you've heard this. In past meetings of this committee—some members were here before me—a Conservative MP's activities were investigated. I will not mention his name because I'm not in the habit of doing so.

[*English*]

It was actually Mr. Angus who said that just because this person—if I need to say their name, I will, but I really would rather not—drags his political enemies before our committee and drags their dirty laundry out—

Mr. Charlie Angus: A point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I find it bizarre that I am being quoted when I don't know whom I had been speaking about. If she's willing to name me, then she should just tell the story, it seems. Otherwise, it's bizarre that I'm being dragged into it.

• (1135)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay. It's Dean Del Mastro.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Oh, well, Dean Del Mastro; then that's fair.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Charlie Angus: Continue.

The Chair: Are you raising a point of order, or do you wish to be added to the speakers list?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I don't think that these repeated interruptions are moving the committee's debates forward.

My colleague will make her comments and then Mr. Angus will be entitled to make his. I can't for the life of me see how it is useful to continually interrupt our colleague and deputy chair to ask her questions or presume what she is going to say.

I would ask you, Madam Chair, to be less tolerant of these interruptions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKinnon.

Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: I'll just continue on that quote, to refresh the memory of my honourable colleague:

[J]ust because Del Mastro “drags his political enemies before our committee and drags their dirty laundry out,” doesn't mean the opposition should try to do the same.

“I guess my concern is that Mr. Del Mastro has turned our committee into a kangaroo court, where due process has been blown out time and time again,” Angus said.

“So even though I have real questions about Mr. Del Mastro's activities, I believe he's eligible for due process.”

When we're getting into the salacious details of different activities, I think we lose sight of the fact that, as another member said, “That knife cuts both ways. You can't have it one way when it's your turn and you can't have it another way when it's someone else's turn”. I believe that was Mr. Andrews at the time.

It's indeed the kind of thing that I do not want to see happen in this committee. This committee has a mandate that was given to it by the House.

[Translation]

This has certainly occurred before, and it is referred to in chapter 20 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*

[English]

It's also in our Standing Orders, and each committee has those mandates, with reason, because otherwise there would be redundancy, and I don't think we have the time and the resources, nor the desire to see that kind of redundancy between committees.

I think that's really the gist of what I wanted to say here, to remind ourselves as to what our mandate is. It is an important mandate, but we also need to respect the fact that there will be incidents that happen out there, outside this committee, that, yes, bear investigation and should be talked about, and they're publicly aired and so on, but within this committee we need to be respectful of how we speak about people and how we do that here in this committee.

I thank you, Chair, for being patient with me.

The Chair: We'll move down the speakers list to Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank my honourable colleague for mentioning me.

That was a good, timely reminder of past incidents, so I will just say two things: It is definitely within the purview of our committee to investigate ethical breaches within public office holders, but to my colleague's statement, it is also a very important obligation within our committee that we handle these matters in a manner that is respectful and that is not dragging other people in. When Mr. Andrews, a former Liberal, was going after Dean Del Mastro, I thought, every single day that he was here, that we had to have a proper process, and that is very important because we are not a kangaroo court here.

On the issue of the Trudeau family being involved, we have to be careful, because Madam Sophie Grégoire Trudeau has done a lot of really very impressive things. I have no interest in bringing her in any way into this story. Margaret Trudeau has inspired many people with her incredible work as a public spokesperson. I think it is a

very terrible situation that we are even having to discuss Margaret Trudeau.

Why this issue matters is that it is about WE and the relationship to the Trudeau government. I was very surprised to learn that WE began to hire members of the Trudeau family after Justin Trudeau became Prime Minister, and then we learned that other key people, for example, Jully Black, an incredible public figure, was not paid and Theo Fleury wasn't paid. It raises the question of whether or not there was an attempt to buy political influence. That, to me, is the issue before us.

If the Liberals are concerned about how we have documents on members of the Trudeau family, I share that concern. I don't know that we are here to go after Justin's brother, who is a filmmaker. If he is a spokesperson for WE and he got paid by them, he probably thought they were paying him because of his incredible skills as a filmmaker. That may be why he signed up. Our issue is whether or not there was an attempt to buy the influence of the government, because the financial interests of the Trudeau family and WE have become very convoluted and very connected. That's what we need to clarify.

We know that the Conflict of Interest Commissioner has launched this investigation because of those convoluted ties. As well as those convoluted ties, we learn more and more about Bill Morneau's ties with WE, so that is of interest. I have no interest in what Bill Morneau's children do at WE and whether they are paid or whatever. It is the issue of recusal and the issue of buying influence that are the focus we have to deal with. That is separate from the finance committee and it is separate from government operations. It is about the obligations of public office holders. It is about the obligations that we established when our committee first began to review the Conflict of Interest Act and when we are called upon to review it, and it is the same with the Lobbying Act. It is to make sure that it applies to everyone in a manner that is fair. That is the role of our committee.

When we had the first finding of guilt for the Prime Minister, we would have expected that measures would be put in place in the Prime Minister's Office to protect the Prime Minister and prevent conflict of interest from happening a second time. That didn't happen. The SNC-Lavalin case was very shocking because it cost the Prime Minister his chief of staff, Gerry Butts, and it cost the Clerk of the Privy Council, something that has never happened before. The Clerk of the Privy Council is someone we all look to as the independent, non-partisan voice of the civil service, advising the Prime Minister to make sure he follows the rules, and that didn't happen.

When we end up in a situation in the middle of a pandemic, in which \$900 million is awarded to a group that has deep ties to the Trudeau family, the obvious question is why that did not raise flags in the Prime Minister's Office. Again, I will not support in any way bringing Trudeau family members before our committee, because that's not the issue, but we need to hear from Katie Telford, chief of staff, about why it is that there were no checks and balances. This is not difficult stuff to figure out about the obligation to recuse. Why did Bill Morneau not recuse himself? Not only does his family have direct financial ties; Bill Morneau has been very involved with WE as well.

• (1140)

Then we learned from finance—again, finance is a separate committee—that there was a proposal circulating before the Prime Minister made his announcement that set the stage for WE getting this contract, and that the proposal was within the Prime Minister's Office, apparently with PCO, and it was in the Department of Finance with Bill Morneau. Again, we go back to not just the refusal to recuse but to whether or not WE was given the inside track on a massive program that was supposed to be doled out in a pandemic to help university students. If that was the case, then that was severe interference in the workings of government. Major questions have to be asked.

We as a committee are looking at that. Our obligation as the ethics committee is to make sure we have the appropriate checks and balances, as my colleague says. Obviously, the appropriate checks and balances were not in place because this scandal should never have happened. It should never have happened in a pandemic, during extreme economic uncertainty, that a decision would be made to award money so easily to people who are so connected to the Prime Minister's family, where there were clear financial interests going back and forth.

That is an embarrassment to all of us. I think it is also an insult to the work that all of us did across party lines when we were asked at the beginning of the pandemic to reach out to every organization in our region to identify placements where we could hire young people through Canada summer jobs. So much work was done. Across party lines, we stepped up. The civil service stepped up. We identified them. In my region, we would have had hundreds of placements. We had all the medical students in northern Ontario. We were identifying placements for them. We were identifying farm organizations that wanted to hire the agriculture students coming home. We had law firms calling us because of what they were being told, with Liberal MPs saying it was going to come through Canada summer jobs. All of that got sidelined. Suddenly this proposal came through, this proposal that was announced by the Prime Minister just after WE began circulating their proposal, which was, I admit, different, but it was very similar in terms of what it was to be.

Our focus here is not what happened in terms of the other contracts. Our interest here is whether or not political influence was attempted to be bought through the hiring of people close to the Prime Minister and whether the Prime Minister's and finance minister's refusal to recuse themselves put them in a conflict of interest and put a decision at risk that has now been a huge embarrassment. I say this across party lines, that in the middle of a pandemic I've been very proud of the work we've done. I've been proud of being able to stand up for government programs that we'd worked on and helped change and improve. Whether it was small business or whether it was CERB, the emergency \$2,000 a month, I could say to people in my riding that across party lines we were working together.

I cannot justify this \$900-million deal that may not even be legal, paying students well below minimum wage. The more we learned about it, the more we learned that WE did not have the capacity to do it. I cannot stand idly by as a committee member when questions are being raised about the financial links with the family. If the Liberals want to put forward a motion about how we discuss this, so

that we are not bringing in the Trudeau family and embarrassing them for the work they do on the sidelines....

The Prime Minister should have known that, because of those financial links, this would put him in a conflict. This is the Prime Minister's responsibility. I would like to see the Liberals say to us, "Okay, here's a deal. We will bring the Prime Minister to this committee and he will speak as to why he didn't think it was a problem that his family was being paid and that he was awarding this out."

It's the Prime Minister's responsibility that I'm interested in. It's Bill Morneau's responsibility that I'm interested in. It's Katie Telford, as chief of staff, who should have been looking after our Prime Minister and putting some kind of big ethical mitts around him so that he didn't keep putting his finger in the conflict of interest socket. That's what I'm interested in. I'm not interested in our committee being used to go after the individual members of the Trudeau family. I agree that we can put in limits on how that's done, and we can talk about that, but I would like the Liberals to tell us that they are going to have the Prime Minister sit here and explain why he put his family in that position.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Madame Brière.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Madam Chair, I would like to thank you for having me here today to discuss this important matter.

I find it surprising to see the opposition reiterating its confidence in the Ethics Commissioner, while not allowing him to complete his work or his investigation.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): I just have a point of information. Can you just tell us who is next, after Madame Brière?

The Chair: Mr. Fergus is next.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Okay. Can you put me on after Mr. Fergus?

The Chair: I will put you on the list.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: In other words, although the members of the opposition tell us that they have confidence in us and in the commissioner, they would like to take over our roles. Would it not be more appropriate to wait for the commissioner's report before drawing overly hasty conclusions?

The commissioner has all the powers he needs to request any documents he may deem relevant and to hear all witnesses who might be able to help him reach a decision.

According to the meeting notice, we are here to decide whether we should conduct a study to examine existing measures that could prevent conflicts of interest in federal government expenditure policies.

Madam Chair, I'm sure that you would agree that while it is a laudable and even important mandate, it is very broad.

I would also like to remind my colleagues of the mandate of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

Standing Order 108 in Chapter XIII of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons provides clarification on this matter. Thus Standing Order 108(3)(h) states that the mandate of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics shall include, among other matters:

- (i) the review of and report on the effectiveness, management and operation, together with the operational and expenditure plans relating to the Information Commissioner;
- (ii) the review of and report on the effectiveness, management and operation, together with the operational and expenditure plans relating to the Privacy Commissioner;
- (iii) the review of and report on the effectiveness, management and operation, together with the operational and expenditure plans relating to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner;
- (iv) the review of and report on the effectiveness, management and operation, together with the operational and expenditure plans relating to the Commissioner of Lobbying;
- (v) the review of and report on reports of the Privacy Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, the Commissioner of Lobbying and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner with respect to his or her responsibilities under the Parliament of Canada Act relating to public office holders and on reports tabled pursuant to the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act, which shall be severally deemed permanently referred to the Committee immediately after they are laid upon the Table;
- (vi) in cooperation with other committees, the review of and report on any federal legislation, regulation or Standing Order which impacts upon the access to information or privacy of Canadians or the ethical standards of public office holders;
- (vii) the proposing, promoting, monitoring and assessing of initiatives which relate to access to information and privacy across all sectors of Canadian society and to ethical standards relating to public office holders.

If I may paraphrase, the question from—

● (1150)

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, I have a point of order. I'm not sure if I have the same document as the member. Mine, right after that, says, "and any other matter which the House shall, from time to time, refer to the standing committee." I would also like to note that in the document provided by the House, "ethical standards of public office holders" is highlighted in point (vi) above. I'm not sure if we're reading from the same document, because that last line was missed.

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, could you say that more slowly? For translation you were speaking very fast. Can you just repeat it, please?

Mr. Michael Barrett: May I, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Again, I apologize. I didn't want to take up too much of Ms. Brière's time. I wanted to ensure we were read-

ing from the same document, which is in front of me: Standing Order 108. I'm on page 125. On the point that she concluded on, it finishes in bold relating to public office holders and then says, "and any other matter which the House shall, from time to time, refer to the standing committee." As well, in the point previous, I noted that, in point (vi), "ethical standards of public office holders" was highlighted as an item, as part of the committee's mandate.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Continue.

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: The question being asked by four members of this committee is as follows: what safeguards are currently in place to prevent conflicts of interest when the government commits public funds?

As I mentioned earlier, it is certainly an interesting mandate, but a very broad one. I have been wondering, given its importance, about whether the members of the three opposition parties here before us citing names and facts want us to examine the ethical guidelines established by our government and other previous governments, or rather trying to conduct a public trial against individuals. By focusing on specific events and dates, are they simply begging the question?

The opposition members seem to want to conduct an investigation. I would like to remind them, however, that the Ethics Commissioner is specifically mandated to conduct investigations. The commissioner also has the required expertise and is in a position to protect the confidentiality of information received. This committee has frequently discussed the importance of protecting the privacy of citizens. What the opposition wants to do is put the private lives of individuals on display rather than trust a parliamentary official to maintain the confidentiality of information received.

I am sure that my colleagues around the table will understand what I mean when I say that politics is above all a family decision. I would not be sitting here today without the support of my husband and my three grown boys. I have been in politics for them and thanks to them. However, I would not want them to end up in the spotlight because of me, simply as a result of the fact that they were willing to join me in this adventure.

When I see members of the opposition targeting members of an MP's family, I have serious doubts about this kind of partisan gamesmanship, and have very little interest in it. If we begin to target those close to our adversaries, where is it going to stop? Is this really the kind of slippery slope we want to embark on?

I would like to remind my Conservative colleagues of the words spoken by one of their former leaders in the House:

● (1155)

[English]

"The tyranny of the opposition majority has turned its attention to the men and women who make up our political staff," said Hill.

“Men and women who did not sign up to be tried by a committee—to be humiliated and intimidated by members of Parliament.”

[*Translation*]

I would accordingly like to ask the following question: do they believe that our sisters, our mothers, our children, our cousins and our brothers-in-law signed on to appear before these parliamentary committees?

I would like to reassure them by pointing out that, unlike their former colleague, I do not believe members of the opposition are tyrannical. I would nevertheless remind them that at one point, they wanted to prevent political staff from appearing, and yet are now demanding that our families be tried by a committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: That's not true.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: In a previous life not so long ago, I worked as a family mediation notary. I worked with several parties to reach a compromise. I am prepared to do this again and to work with several parties, even though I am now talking about political parties, to find a motion we can work with.

But if the opposition parties are trying to score political points by focusing on a single event, for which the Prime Minister has apologized, and are attempting to involve the family of an elected member, then I can tell you right now, Madam Chair, that I will oppose it.

Are we blameless? Of course not. That is why the Prime Minister apologized sincerely. And yet, the opposition parties have also made mistakes in the past. If the opposition parties want to play that game, of looking at government expenditures, we could also examine the guidelines established by the government to prevent a party from paying partisan offices out of House of Commons funds, or from taking advantage of the fact that the opposition would like to call upon Mr. Ian Schubert to ask why he had reservations about Mr. Bruce Carson when he was working for the Conservatives, not to mention the ties between then Prime Minister Harper's cabinet and the Senate expenses scandal.

Yes, we could start pointing at our adversaries, but I sincerely believe that this is not the best way to structure the committee's work. We can try to raise awareness among Canadians rather than create a political spectacle. People often say that politicians are crooked or thieves. If we take advantage of every trifling opportunity to generate a political extravaganza, we are confirming that they are right. What we have here is an excellent chance to demonstrate to Canadians that there are guidelines in place and that we can always do better.

You may not be aware of this, Madam Chair, because we are still just getting to know one another, but I also taught at the University of Sherbrooke, the best university in the world in Canada's most beautiful city.

● (1200)

I taught at the Université du troisième âge in a program for people aged 50 and over who wanted to continue their education with a view to lifelong learning. The program's goals are to facilitate the

acquisition of knowledge, combat isolation among seniors, promote the integration of seniors into cultural and social settings, encourage exchanges, support seniors in their desire for personal growth and provide society with a new wave of dynamic and responsible citizens. I also gave professional training to share my passion for the work of notaries and to train the next generation. All this is indicative of my strong belief in education, in the transmission of knowledge and in the acquisition of best practices. What we have here is an opportunity to do precisely that.

I just mentioned that before I joined you all here, I was a notary and still am. I love this profession. It is based essentially on ethics and probity. Whenever I affixed my seal, it meant a credential that could be trusted. As a notary, my role was not to represent one or other of the parties, but rather both. I know that elected members from other provinces may be bemused by my profession because our legal systems are different. However, in Quebec, notaries are recognized as public officials precisely because of their probity and ethics.

To provide a context for my comments today, and to help members of the committee better understand my line of argument, it is important to briefly explain the underpinnings of my moral code and professional ethics. As I have already mentioned, before being elected in the beautiful riding of Sherbrooke, I worked as a notary who specialized in human rights and mediation. This work required rigour and integrity. There is no bias; we are there for everyone, for all parties, to ensure that everyone gets a hearing, and that each party can express their point of view with the end result an agreement that is satisfactory to everyone. As you can see, questions of ethics have always been at the core of my professional work.

To further stress how these ethical questions ought to be expressed, I am going to speak to you about my second professional challenge. I was fortunate to have been a lecturer at the University of Sherbrooke for almost 25 years. I would like to mention in passing that I want to congratulate the university for having received the international STARS certification at the platinum level. The university is now one of the 10-best teaching institutions in the world in the field of sustainable development.

When I was a lecturer, I could make effective use of concrete examples from my professional work in my teaching. In the examples I used, and in the questions asked by students, ethical issues came up frequently. As you might expect, notaries must ensure that clients have no power over them and that there are no ethical conflicts in managing clients who have competing interests. As for the common good, another concrete example is the importance of ethical and moral issues when dealing with a tutorship, a curatorship or a power of attorney

So that this illustration can provide a better context for the ethical issues we have to deal with today, I would like to discuss them with you. When a tutor or curator is appointed, it is important to ensure that the appointee is completely independent and will always make decisions that are in the best interests of the person being represented, without ever placing themselves in a conflict of interest or a perceived conflict of interest situation.

To any members of the opposition who would want to depict us—and especially me—as wanting to prevent an investigation into an ethical pseudo-scandal, I offer as a pledge of my probity my 28 years as a notary and a teacher of the profession. Not once since I was elected have I ever failed in my rectitude and I continue to strive to ensure that the government spends public funds effectively.

• (1205)

As Montesquieu famously said: "Power should be a check to power". The checks and balances mechanism requires that we, who exercise legislative power, can control the action of executive power.

I am therefore here in my capacity as someone who can control government action, a role that I have admittedly exercised to a lesser degree because of the pandemic, during which the government, through our amazing public service, has demonstrated that it is capable of rapidly and effectively coming up with funds to help Canadian families. It succeeded in doing so, and I believe this will help us get through the crisis better. We have supported our fellow citizens when others among us demanded we abandon them.

The independent officers of Parliament play an essential role in ensuring federal transparency and accountability and in effectively running the institutions upon which Canadians depend. That is why, in the previous term of office, we strengthened the Access to Information Act, precisely because we believe in open and transparent government.

I would like to remind the committee that in 2015 we published the document entitled "Open and Accountable Government", which sets out:

core principles regarding the roles and responsibilities of Ministers in Canada's system of responsible parliamentary government. This includes the central tenet of ministerial responsibility, both individual and collective, as well as Ministers' relations with the Prime Minister and Cabinet, their portfolios and Parliament. It outlines standards of conduct expected of Ministers as well as addressing a range of administrative, procedural and institutional matters. It also provides guidance to ministerial exempt staff and useful information for public servants and Canadians on Canada's system of government. Finally, on the critical issue of ethical conduct, Ministers are expected to be thoroughly familiar with the Conflict of Interest Act.

A passage from the foreword is also very edifying. I would like to quote it, Madam Chair.

To be worthy of Canadians' trust, we must always act with integrity. This is not merely a matter of adopting the right rules, or of ensuring technical compliance with those rules. As Ministers, you and your staff must uphold the highest standards of honesty and impartiality, and both the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny. This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.

I may be here before you as the MP for Sherbrooke, but I have also had the opportunity to serve Canadians as the parliamentary

secretary to the Hon. Mélanie Joly, the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages. That being the case, I am well aware that ministers and parliamentary secretaries must act honestly and comply with the highest ethical standards if they are to maintain and enhance public trust in the integrity and impartiality of the government.

As public office holders, ministers and parliamentary secretaries are subject to the requirements of part one of "Annex A Ethical and Political Activity Guidelines for Public Office Holders", and to using best practices for ministers and parliamentary secretaries in fundraising and dealing with the lobbyists described in Annex B. They are also required to discharge their official duties and conduct their personal affairs in a manner that will stand up to the most rigorous public scrutiny. This too is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law.

I fully comply with these standards established by our government, and I am sure that this is also the case for all MPs on our side of the house. Once again, I would like to draw attention to an important fact. I am prepared to undergo a rigorous public examination, but I do not believe that our families ought to be subjected to such rigorous public scrutiny.

• (1210)

I would also like to comment on requests for interventions by political staff and public servants. I would like to do so by paraphrasing some principles from works by Dr. Kenneth Kernaghan.

Politics and policy are distinct from administration; thus politicians make strategic decisions and public officials carry them out.

These officials do not publicly state their personal opinions about government policies or administration.

Public officials give frank and objective advice to their political masters privately and confidentially; in return, the executive branch protects the anonymity of these officials by publicly shouldering accountability for ministerial decisions.

Once again, it is up to the ministers to account to Parliament for their actions, as my colleague minister Chagger did yesterday.

I acknowledge that it may be helpful for officials to assist ministers in the more technical aspects of responses. However, they ought not to be subjected—and their families even less so—to a public inquisition, as the opposition parties would like.

As I mentioned earlier, rather than use this committee as a court of inquisition, we should be using it as an educational platform.

I would like, Madam Chair, to explain what I believe our committee should be taking into consideration.

Ethical issues should indeed remain central to the concerns of parliamentarians. The bond of trust between the population and its elected representatives is vital. It is thanks to institutions like the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying, and this committee, in addition to the rigorous work carried out by the various political parties and this government, that this bond of trust will be not only maintained, but renewed.

The 21st century has presented us with an unprecedented wave of cynicism, which has no doubt opened the door to all kinds of extremist policies, propaganda, and populism, all of which have a lasting impact on the political landscape, and they are all policies that for the most part—and this is truly unfortunate—appeal to the emotional and even impulsive side of voters' psyches. Needless to say, urgent action is needed when, in a democracy that prides itself as being healthy, dynamic, open, inclusive and sustainable, part of the population can be swayed by fear-inducing messages and political negativity.

If Plato has taught us anything, it is that searching for truth must be central in our decision-making and that rational thinking needs to be exercised in good faith, pragmatically and, especially, in accordance with a reality-based dialectic. It is therefore essential for Canadian political parties to avoid sinking into dogmatism or the rhetoric of fear.

We need to give Canadians credit for their intelligence and to ensure that we address public policy issues rationally. Doing so would strengthen ethics in the political collective action of this chamber, and make it more enduring and more universal.

We also need to give consideration to Canada's specific characteristics. We have always been able to protect Canadians from the political extremism found in other countries by giving politicians of various political stripes a way to offer Canada balanced options that avoid diverting legislative and parliamentary instruments for strict partisan purposes.

Madam Chair, I hope that this balance, in which Canada takes so much pride, can be preserved, and that the various members of this committee will remember their role as parliamentarians. A descent into petty partisanship would be a disservice not only to this Parliament, but also, more broadly, to the political class and Canadians.

• (1215)

When questions of ethics are raised, it is essential to refocus on the main concept that binds us together, which is a democracy. The word "democracy", which is derived from the Greek words "*demo*", which means "people", and "*cratos*", which means "power", has undergone many changes in definition throughout history. The Greeks saw democracy as an equal opportunity to obtain a government position through a lottery. Today, it is generally agreed that democracy means a multitude of freedoms in addition to free, equitable and frequent elections, as explained by Robert Dahl. Added to these two visions of democracy are the ideas propounded by many thinkers, which make important contributions to democratic theory.

Alexis de Tocqueville was one such thinker. In 1831, he decided to study American democracy in order to document it and highlight its leanings. This leads to the next question, which is about Alexis de Tocqueville's definition of democracy and the sociological and political consequences of thereof? For Alexis de Tocqueville, several factors come into play in any definition of democracy.

One concept that is central and essential to the idea of democracy is the rule of law. The rule of law is a concept which ensures that citizens with executive power cannot place themselves above the law. Generally speaking, the rule of law describes a nation in which no one is above the law. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, this

form of equality among citizens with respect to government action and the application of law means much more than mere equality before the courts. It leads to a change in the mindset of citizens, with members of society believing and feeling that they are all equal. Even though inequalities unfortunately continue to exist, the population retains this feeling of equality.

According to Alexis de Tocqueville several other characteristics define democracy. He begins by pointing out that the process leading to democracy is ineluctable because it is natural among humans to want uniform living conditions and equal rights for everyone. This can only lead to democracy and the rule of law. Equal rights, on the other hand, means that everyone can improve their conditions. Everyone can thus aspire to social mobility. He argues that this process is unavoidable. Because this theory of democracy and equality leads to social climbing, material property lies at the core of the democratic vision. Personal comfort and the desire for personal enrichment lead to an individualism that may cause citizens to leave the public sphere for a more private sphere. This isolation is a threat to democracy, which can only exist if the population participates in politics and in public political life.

To prevent this isolation, Alexis de Tocqueville requires the establishment of many civil associations that allow citizens to become involved, put pressure on the government, and assemble to discuss ideas and issues. For these associations—and, ultimately, our democracy—to subsist, it is nevertheless important to retain people's trust in their institutions. The work of this committee is therefore crucial. I am pleased to be part of a government that ensures the preservation of individual freedoms so that they can become vehicles for democratization.

I would like to conclude with a few words about the substance of the accusation. It is important to recall that, contrary to what members of the opposition are claiming, no contract was awarded to the WE organization; it was rather a contribution agreement.

• (1220)

This distinction may appear to be a matter of semantics, but the administrative distinction is extremely important, as are the underlying implications.

It should also not be forgotten that, contrary to what some members of the opposition are saying, the WE organization was not chosen by the Prime Minister, but rather recommended by the public service, more specifically by Ms. Rachel Wernick, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister in the Skills and Employment Branch. The department and Ms. Wernick decided that only the WE organization could provide the student grant services within the assigned deadlines and that it would have been impossible to do so internally within this timeline.

Our government has the utmost confidence in our public service. We are pleased to be able to say that the Canadian public service is the best in the world. As a former lecturer at the University of Sherbrooke, I am disappointed to see that the student grant program is running behind schedule. Many citizens in my riding are students who have serious financial needs. These needs are exacerbated by the current crisis and I am disappointed to see that this money will not make its way into the hands of the students as quickly as anticipated.

I would ask all members of this committee to shift their focus and remember why this measure was implemented and what our priority should be to help Canadians and the most vulnerable among us get through the crisis.

I would therefore ask that all members of the committee remain within the terms of our mandate. The Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics must continue to fulfil its mandate and remain an institution in which partisanship does not become more important than the issues being dealt with.

Some pressure groups accuse politicians of putting on a show in committee, and of behaving as if they were in a recording studio, where you can record your opinion into the minutes without really debating anything or making any progress. Let's show the people who have this very cynical vision of our work that, on the contrary, we always work on behalf of the public, and that in spite of our partisan divisions, we can act as parliamentarians to ensure that our work always strives for the common good.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Moving down my speakers list, I have Mr. Fergus next.

[Translation]

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

I would like to begin by thanking my colleague from the Sherbrooke riding for her presentation to the committee. I found her comments relevant and accurate, with perhaps one exception. While it is true that the University of Sherbrooke is certainly among the best in Canada, I believe that the University of Quebec in Outaouais is at the top of the list. I take pride in being the MP to represent this university in the House of Commons.

Ms. Brière raised some very important points. She reminded us of the importance of our work here, and the responsibilities of this committee. It is up to each and every one of us to ensure that we have a sound and lasting system that can review ethics-related issues and function not only during this Parliament, but future parliaments too.

Madam Chair, I have only been sitting on this committee since the beginning of this Parliament, but would like to congratulate you on the manner in which you have been chairing this committee in such a balanced and sensible manner. You have demonstrated a great deal of flexibility by allowing people to express their points of view, but also made sure that we do not descend into partisan-

ship. This is particularly important when dealing with ethical questions. I applaud your efforts.

I recall that from the very outset we discussed the rules that we would be following around this table. One of our earliest meetings was held on February 19, 2020. The pandemic had not yet been officially declared and we were able to meet in committee more closely with the participation of a much larger number of assistants and in the presence of members of the general public who were interested in attending our public meetings. I found that once we had developed the committee procedures, we made good decisions. One such decision had to do with how we would treat the private information of individuals when dealing with matters of ethics. There was a constructive discussion between members of the opposition and the government. Indeed, I should not be making this distinction because in my view, you have always tried to encourage people to act as MPs, as parliamentarians, rather than people who represent the narrow interests of their particular political party.

These discussions included one between Mr. Angus and myself about how to treat the private information of individuals. I would like to quote this discussion in the language of Shakespeare, because the documents I have here are in that language.

• (1225)

[English]

We were having a debate, Madam Chair, about how we deal with material and witness selection for individuals.

I guess we should start with what Mr. Angus said, after you gave him the floor. We were talking about what to do when the committee...and I'll quote. You said:

Any time the committee puts a motion in place—any motion—the committee does have the ability to overrule that motion with unanimous consent. This would be the standing motion for most cases, but should there be a case where we feel that there's an exception or the committee feels that there's an exception then, through unanimous consent, that could be overruled.

Then you turned the microphone to Mr. Angus, who said he was “very supportive” of this; however...and I will quote:

...I think we need to be specific. I'm trying to think of the language, because anything that happens in this committee could embarrass someone because we deal with ethics and breaches, etc. If we have to have discussions that affect the private information of individuals in extraordinary circumstances or that are not germane to our study... Sometimes we will get information on a person and will want to talk about whether or not a witness is appropriate, and we have to talk about that amongst ourselves. However, we can't use in camera to avoid discussing certain people who may have to come. I just want to get clearer language on how that would be used so that we're very clear on it.

I just wanted to make sure I quoted that correctly. That's an excellent point, and I think it's particularly relevant to what we're doing here today in terms of what we're trying to get at here.

My colleague Ms. Shanahan had talked about a number of ways we want to get that. How do we discuss? We shouldn't discuss people in public, and she expressed that this wouldn't be on for her.

Mr. Angus said:

Certainly when we discuss witnesses, we do that in camera because we have to set priorities and we don't want that information to be misused or misinterpreted, but we do discuss people here. That's part of what we do with ethics. Issues are brought forward. We name people we think should be brought. That's sometimes done in public.

Then he said:

I think the issue is being able to say, "I think we should go in camera" if we're going to discuss something of a personal nature that should not be germane to the committee. How can we just define that a little more clearly so that we're not abusing that, but we're saying that if we're going to go in camera on something it's because there is specific personal information that should be brought to committee but should not be in the realm of the public?

Then, Mr. Angus, if you remember correctly, we had a great little back and forth on this issue.

• (1230)

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, since I continue to be the subject of this discussion, do I get to at least respond when I'm being asked things in particular? I think it's a good discussion, so I would like to carry on.

Mr. Greg Fergus: I would like to just set the context.

Mr. Charlie Angus: If he wants to go back and forth, because I think it's a great discussion, I would love to carry on with him.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate that.

He asked me if I could get some clearer language. I said I would like to do that, and we tried to figure out how we should do this. I said, "I will make one suggestion. I feel that everyone is in favour of the amendment you are proposing". I was speaking to Mr. Angus. I said, "Would it be possible to set it aside for the moment and work on it", so we could take some time to try to get the language right.

Then let me get right down to the crux of the issue. It's that we decided to carve out a little exception. We said that we needed to trust each other, that we were going to bring forward information and use that information correctly, and that we were going to make sure we didn't abuse these situations. We tried to make a bit of an amendment. I suggested, Madam Chair, that we would want to make sure that when we do go in camera that we would do so—and we added the proviso to our standing order—to "protect the privacy of any individual". We had that debate and eventually we adopted that.

I think this is relevant, Madam Chair, because when we take a look at the motion before us that is being brought forward

[*Translation*]

it fits precisely within the framework and responsibilities of our standing committee. I would like to quote it—as submitted by Mr. Barrett:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the Committee review the safeguards which are in place to avoid and prevent conflicts of interest in federal government procurement, contracting, granting, contribution and other expenditure policies; and that, to provide a case study for this review, an Order of the

Committee do issue to Speakers' Spotlight (the company that made the bookings for the speeches by members of the Trudeau family) 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—provided that these records shall be provided to the Clerk of Committee within one week of the adoption of this Order.

I agree with that. It's excellent. Not only that, but please note the use of the words "a case study".

Madam Chair, I am not a lawyer, but I did have the pleasure of studying some Latin. The following well-known principle: *Quando aliquid prohibetur ex directo, prohibetur et per obliquum*, means, "What cannot be done directly cannot be done indirectly". So what we are in the process of doing is skirting the parameters of our responsibilities here at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

The evidence was in Mr. Barrett's comments. I will quote you the passage in English.

• (1235)

[*English*]

He said, let's get a look at these documents. We're going to call it a case study.

[*Translation*]

We can't do that. It is *ultra vires*. It's not within our mandate. One must not indirectly do that which we are prohibited from doing directly.

In her presentation, my colleague Mrs. Brière rightly said that we need to trust our institutions and our parliamentary officials, whose mandate is to examine these types of questions.

What needs to be avoided is the disclosure of the private information of persons related to politicians.

Madam Chair, I am prepared to do so for myself and even for my wife. It is clear and it is among our responsibilities. That is the reason why we all, as members of Parliament—

[*English*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: On a point of order, I just want to understand who is on the speakers list.

The Chair: I have Mr. Green and then Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Not Mr. Scarpaleggia...?

The Chair: Mr. Angus, you are on there, according to the order.

Yes, Mr. Scarpaleggia is on there, then Mr. Barrett and then Mr. Angus.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Am I on that list as well?

The Chair: We have Madame Gaudreau and then Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Greg Fergus: I was just saying, on a very important point, that we had all taken the required steps to complete our documents, make our statement and give it, not to another politician or to an officer of the government of the day, but to an officer of Parliament. This is very important because it proves and guarantees that we are giving it to an impartial third party for evaluation. This third party, along with his or her team, then evaluates the information supplied to ensure that we are declaring all of our property and obligations. We need to ensure that the decisions we make are not tied in any way to an eventual interest in the outcome.

If there are instances in which parliamentarians have made decisions that were inconsistent with the legislative framework established by all of us as a Parliament, then it is the responsibility of the Ethics Commissioner to investigate, find all the information needed to reach a conclusion and reveal this information to Parliament. This is what has happened on several occasions.

Before concluding, I would like to point out that this kind of information is not something we would be giving to a person who represents a party or the current government. I repeat, this information is supplied to an impartial person. What we are doing today is bypassing the Commissioner's responsibilities. We're saying that we are going to gather the information and evaluate it ourselves.

I get it; it's war. Fair enough. We can decide to play that game. Today, the majority will determine whether we are going to do so. You may consider yourself part of the majority, but one day, you will be in the minority. Do you really want to politicize this kind of information?

It's not just information about us, but also about those close to us. It begins with brothers and sisters. And after that perhaps cousins and why not a neighbour. Where will it end? Who will guarantee that the information is relevant and that we are not engaging in a witch hunt? It's a good question. It's very important.

I am looking at everyone around the table and I can see that they have all completed the required documents. I see that almost everyone has submitted them. In fact, they have been published. We can now see who has which obligations, and what spouse works for which corporation.

● (1240)

I note that the information from one person who moved one of the four motions under review has not been published.

Do we want to make political capital with that? I don't think it's a good idea, Mr. Barrett

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: It's accountability, Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

Mr. Greg Fergus: In that case, you should perhaps speak with one of your colleagues.

The issue, Mr. Barrett, is that we don't want to play that game. It's not altogether fair. It's not altogether right.

We need to take the time to give it to the commissioner. We need to trust the commissioner and his staff, who will ensure that all these documents are duly completed.

If the commissioner has any questions, we will answer them. At one point, all this information will become public. Allowing ourselves, the MPs, to conduct this evaluation may lead us to play hardball.

● (1245)

[English]

We will not make what should be a very noble calling and profession, a necessary one, one that will be attractive to people to come out to participate.... Let's be really careful. Let's do the right thing. This is why Mr. Angus and I had this discussion. I shouldn't say Mr. Angus and I had the discussion. We all had this discussion back in February when we were setting out the ground rules for this committee. It was an important discussion. It was one that we set out in the absence of any particular political gain, and now we want to do indirectly what we said we wouldn't do directly. I think that's a problem that we really must try to avoid.

I call upon all of you. I plead among all of you. I'm no more special than the rest of you on this one. I'm a bit of a political parliamentary nerd. I used to subscribe to Hansard when I was 14. Who does that?

A voice: I did.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Can we declare who actually would have done that? I want to know whom I'm dealing with here.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Greg Fergus: I love this place. I think it's a great place, not because I'm here but because of what it represents.

Democracy is fragile. Take a look at the 5,000 years of reliable human history, oral and written history, that we can turn to. Take a look at the opportunities, as Madame Brière pointed out, in a *demos kratos*. Take a look at governance by the people, in its most extreme form. We're talking about the Greek city state, where you had to be.... Well, you certainly weren't my colour. You had to be male. You had to be over a certain age, and you had to be a free person—not a slave—to participate in the affairs of the city state.

If we take that as an example of democracy—which we would find repugnant to ourselves today, when we have universal suffrage and participation—from then until what we have today, if we add up all the years that we've had this form of government by the people, for the people, we're looking at somewhere between 1,200 and 1,500 years. It's certainly not a continuous history. It happens. It occurs. It falls off and disappears. It picks up again in some form, continues for a while and then it falls off again.

We have a great responsibility to tend to this very resilient yet very delicate system that we have here. We have to avoid the temptation that we are sometimes faced with to try to seek very short-term advantage or interest and rather to think of the longer term. I think we're at one of these points. Where do we stop? We're going to seek out the information of the mother of a politician, the brother of a politician. Where does it stop?

One of the motions says that we should be seeking out information from every single member of the government—every single cabinet member—to see what we get from that. It's called a fishing trip. We're going out to see what we can find.

We shouldn't do that. We have an Ethics Commissioner. We have the office and counsellors who are there to provide us with information and counsel, who we could call up at any time to see if our affairs or activities are in order. It's to our benefit to have that, but to arrogate that responsibility to ourselves is an error and one that we have seen....

I think it was a former Conservative House leader, whom my colleague quoted, who said that the men and women who work in this area—that could mean our staff or people we know or whom we are related to—did not sign up to be tried by a committee, to be humiliated and intimidated by members of Parliament. Implicit in that is exactly what I was saying: to be using this kind of information to seek short-term political gain. People didn't sign up for that. We shouldn't give in to the temptation to do that.

• (1250)

We should, however, ensure that the Ethics Commissioner has access to the information that, in this case, he needs. We should, perhaps, invite the commissioner here to make sure that he has access to that information. We could ask how we could play a role in helping him discharge his duties. That would be an appropriate role for this committee. That's a role that falls right into the specific mandate of our committee.

When we take a look at the general mandate towards standing committees, it's a general mandate that, and I quote—I'm not the first one to do it here—from chapter 20 of the 2009 second edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. Referring to standing committees, it says:

They are empowered to study and report to the House on all matters relating to the mandate, management, organization and operation of the departments assigned to them. More specifically, they can review: the statute law relating to the departments assigned to them; the program and policy objectives of those departments, and the effectiveness of their implementation thereof; the immediate, medium and long-term expenditure plans of those departments and the effectiveness of the implementation thereof; and an analysis of the relative success of those departments in meeting their objectives.

That's all related to the departments. It goes on to say that:

In addition to this general mandate, other matters are routinely referred by the House to its standing committees: bills, estimates, Order-in-Council appointments, documents tabled in the House pursuant to statute, and specific matters which the House wishes to have studied. In each case, the House chooses the most appropriate committee on the basis of its mandate.

Further on, it talks of specific mandates, moving away from the general mandates. On the specific mandate of this committee, it says:

The Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics reviews, among other matters, the effectiveness, management and operation together with the operational and expenditure plans relating to three Officers of Parliament: the Information Commissioner, the Privacy Commissioner and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

—which is germane to our discussion today—

It also reviews their reports, although in the case of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the reports concerned relate to his or her responsibilities under the Parliament of Canada Act regarding public office holders and reports tabled pursuant to the Lobbyists Registration Act. In cooperation with other standing committees, the Committee also reviews any bill, federal regulation or Standing Order which impacts upon its main areas of responsibility: access to information, privacy and the ethical standards of public office holders. It may also propose initiatives in these areas and promote, monitor and assess such initiatives.

This is the thin branch that some of my colleagues are trying to hang on.

• (1255)

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

For the committee's reference, can we find out what version the member is reading from?

Mr. Greg Fergus: It's the second edition, 2009.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I feel like that's not the most current version.

Mr. Greg Fergus: I believe it is. I believe that's the version that was provided to all members of Parliament.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, I'll address my comments to you. My understanding is that the reference was to fewer than the current number of total officers whose work this committee reviews. If we're reading it into the record, I'm not sure that it is the correct text.

Could you clarify, or through you, could the member clarify this?

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, if I may....

Mr. Greg Fergus: I would like to apologize to my honourable colleagues. It would seem, Madam Chair, that there is a consolidated version of October 2019.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I just want to make sure, Madam Chair, that our bedtime reading is non-fiction and not fiction.

Mr. Greg Fergus: It's not that it's fiction; it was perhaps out of date, so my apologies to the honourable member.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, you can continue, but if I may, I was following along in my own copy here. The statement you mentioned talked about three officers of Parliament. It's been updated to four officers. The Commissioner of Lobbying, of course, has been added to the mandate of this committee.

Mr. Greg Fergus: This is where I was incorrect.

Madam Chair, let me read off this part to see if there's a distinction in that thin branch that I think our members were trying to hang on to.

If you and the members would indulge me for a second, please.... My apologies for this.

This makes the point that it's really important, when we hand members of Parliament the Standing Orders after the election, that we provide them with the most recent Standing Orders.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Greg Fergus: I'll speak to the chair of the House about this.

The point I was trying to make was with regard to.... I'm looking at the access to information. There's a spacing problem in the print-out here, so I'll say this in French, which seems not to have this problem. Here we go:

[*Translation*]

(v) the review of and report on reports of the Privacy Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, the Commissioner of Lobbying and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner with respect to his or her responsibilities under the Parliament of Canada Act relating to public office holders and on reports tabled pursuant to the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act, which shall be severally deemed permanently referred to the Committee immediately after they are laid upon the Table;

(vi) in cooperation with other committees, the review of and report on any federal legislation, regulation or Standing Order which impacts upon the access to information or privacy of Canadians or the ethical standards of public office holders;

(vii) the proposing, promoting, monitoring and assessing of initiatives which relate to access to information and privacy across all sectors of Canadian society and to ethical standards relating to public office holders;

and any other matter which the House shall from time to time refer to the standing committee.

When we say that we want a case study without parameters that is focused on particular individuals, we are indirectly, as I have said before, doing what we are not allowed to do directly.

• (1300)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Madam Chair, as someone with many years of experience filibustering—I've been called out by the chair many times—if one is going to filibuster and rag the puck until two o'clock, which is their right, they have to be introducing new material. If they're just repeating what the other members have read into the record, they're actually just trying to walk the clock down. I would ask my colleague to....

I mean, I love the stuff about ancient Athens. He can talk about Sparta if he wants, or he can talk about other things, as long as he brings relevance. To refer to the same things that Mrs. Shanahan has already spoken about is dilatory.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Fergus, please continue.

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

I take it from the absence of a statement.... I really do feel, actually, that I'm not trying to repeat material suggested by other members but trying to point out that what is happening here

[*Translation*]

it's that, as I mentioned in French, we are indirectly doing what we cannot do directly.

We are bypassing the rules of the House of Commons.

We should simply allow the Ethics Commissioner to do his work. We need to avoid giving in to the temptation of conducting a witch hunt and trying to find information about individuals who may be linked in some way—which remains to be seen—with us in connection with our work. Let's let the commissioner conduct his investigation. It could prevent an undesirable situation. We should avoid simply looking for potentially prejudicial information and instead have a clear and precise objective.

If there are gaps in the act that governs the work of the Ethics Commissioner, then it is up to us to examine and assess them, do a proper study of them and fill these gaps. That is not what will happen here with this so-called case study. We are using an exception to justify a project and that's not a good idea.

I have confidence in the collective wisdom around this table. We can avoid this situation and avoid damaging our democratic institutions. We must always support these institutions. The people who succeed us—we are all only here temporarily—will see that it is worth the effort to run for office to serve in the House of Commons for the furtherance and continuity of our democracy. I would be concerned if we were to act in any other way.

That concludes my comments, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for your patience.

• (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, thank you very much for your comments.

I have Mr. Green next on the speakers list.

Mr. Green, you are permitted to speak; however, because you are not a regular member of this committee, nor have you been substituted in, if the committee objects, then unfortunately I cannot give you the floor.

At the will of the committee, you can go.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I would like to point out that from the very outset, when the committees began to meet in person, everyone followed the health rules. There is one particular rule that was established.

So if you tell me that the rule is still being observed, I will do otherwise. I would like to ask the following question: are we following the health rules established in the agreement reached by the committee?

[English]

The Chair: Is that about the health rules? Is that what you're saying?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I am referring to the number of MPs in attendance. There was to be a member from the Bloc Québécois and a member from the NDP. If you are telling me that it's all right this way, I will proceed accordingly for the future meetings.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

It is the member's parliamentary privilege to be at this meeting, so accommodation is being made for him to be here.

Mr. Green.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That was not what had been agreed upon at the outset. Nor is it what the committees meeting in person are doing.

[English]

The Chair: Again, it is his parliamentary privilege, and it is the responsibility of this House and for me as chair to respect his parliamentary privilege. He has every right to be here—

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Don't the health rules take precedence over privileges?

[English]

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd also like to thank the staff for setting us up in such a way that I feel very comfortable with my two-metre distance from my colleagues, as well as with the directions on the floor and all the protocols, notwithstanding coughs.

I would also like to extend, through you, my gratitude to this committee for having the courtesy to allow me to speak as the deputy critic for ethics. It's been very illuminating to be here today. We have heard a lot from the government's side, certainly anything

from, as was referenced earlier, stories in Greek and Latin to biographical stories. It's good to get to know everybody in that way.

I do feel that this is a very critically important issue for Canada and for this committee in particular.

Notwithstanding the loquacious nature of my colleagues, I just want to draw attention to the narrowing of the scope that I feel is happening here. There have been some very good procedures and standing orders that have been read into the public record. Certainly, for the viewers who might not know that, and even for me as a new MP who may not have read every single aspect of the mandate of this committee, it's been very important.

Madam Chair, I'd also like to acknowledge the work of my friend along the way who pointed out some of the omissions in the mandate of this committee, which I think are also important to fulfill the public record.

We've heard a lot about the appropriateness and the extension of conflict of interest regarding the political involvement, potentially, of family members here in this committee. I would agree with my colleague Charlie; I have no interest, nor do I think it's appropriate to necessarily bring spouses and family members before this committee that way, because, quite frankly, they haven't signed up to be cross-examined at committee. However, each one of us has. I think there is a responsibility for the Prime Minister and for senior members of both his staff and, of course, some of the ministries to be present here.

I do want to remind members of this committee, from my early learnings, that under the Conflict of Interest Act, it is very clear. Despite the very liberal definitions of "conflict of interest", I thought it would be important for this committee to add the following contribution. Family members or relatives are included seven times in the Conflict of Interest Act.

The following are the members of a public office holder's family for the purposes of this Act:

- (a) his or her spouse or common-law partner, and
- (b) his or her dependent children and the dependent children of his or her spouse or common-law partner.

Again, I have no interest in bringing any of those people before the committee.

"Relatives" are defined as follows:

- (3) Persons who are related to a public officer holder by birth, marriage, common-law partnership, adoption or affinity are the public officer holder's relatives for the purposes of this Act unless the Commissioner determines [otherwise].

I'll go further to where it states, later on in part 1, "Conflict of Interest Rules", that:

For the purposes of this Act, a public officer holder is in a conflict of interest when he or she exercises an official power, duty or function that provides an opportunity to further his or her private interests or those of his or her relatives or friends [or neighbours] or to improperly further another person's private interests.

I think that's a very germane and important point.

We also look at influence under section 9: “No public office holder shall use his or her position as a public office holder to seek to—”

• (1310)

The Chair: Mr. Green, just one moment, please.

Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

On a point of order, I'm just wondering if the member can.... I might have misheard. Did he say that the definition of family...? Would what is germane be determined by the commissioner?

Mr. Matthew Green: This is as it's related to the act.

So, for the purpose of this committee, what I would suggest is that one of the classic—speaking of Latin—rhetorical fallacies is the modal scope fallacy, where you narrow the terms to such a place where you can't help but further your side. I'm looking to define these terms in a way that doesn't mislead the public. In the public, we've heard “witch hunt”; we've heard “circus” or “show”. What I'm concerned about is that if there's a show to be had, it's one of contortion wherein we're not actually sticking to the act.

Again, for people tuning in, as this is broadcast live, I want to make sure they have a clear understanding of what influence looks like under section 9. It says:

No public office holder shall use his or her position as a public office holder to seek to influence a decision of another person so as to further the public office holder's private interests or those of the public office holder's relatives [as defined by the act] or friends or to improperly further another person's private interests.

The influence, I think, is an important consideration, given that these are not conversations of backbenchers, of regular members of Parliament, but of cabinet and of the highest echelons of power and privilege in this country.

There is another thing I want to draw our attention to. As new MPs—and I see some of my other colleagues who are new—we went through the whole process of the conflict of interest, the reporting processes where you had to declare. It was a very fulsome discussion, and one thing they taught us was on gifts.

I get very caught up in what I will call “political weasel words”. I'm not saying that in a pejorative way, but that's a term that's generally accepted for slipping and sliding around definitions: around what a contract is, or a contribution agreement, or what an honorarium is. I think we can generally agree on the fact—

• (1315)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, “weasel words”, is that parliamentary language?

Mr. Matthew Green: There's a whole book on it, actually.

The Chair: I don't believe the term was used in reference to an individual. It was used in reference to words, so I'm going to allow it.

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm very careful so as not to overstay my very early welcome here on this committee, and I do appreciate the

sensitivities around it, as I did the most illuminating lectures on the segments of the mandate of this committee, as well as the act.

I do want to draw attention to what is determined to be a material gift, which I recall to be very clear. You can correct me if I'm wrong, Madam Chair, but I believe the materiality of that was \$200. When we talk about honorariums, when we talk about conflict of interest, when we talk about the act's definition of relatives, when we look at section 4 and section 9, and then when we get into what compliance looks like as it relates to gifts, I think there is plenty for this committee.

Hopefully, if I'm given an opportunity in the future to be here in an official way, I do believe those are of public interest and well within the mandate of this committee, notwithstanding the modal scope fallacy that has been presented by what I'll call liberal—small L, so as not to be confused—definitions of the terms that have been put forward.

That being said, I did want to take my time, as I've been here listening so closely, to ask this committee to consider, when we are presenting aspects of the act, aspects of the mandate, that we do it in a full way that doesn't omit material definitions that have already been put before the House and are included in the Standing Orders.

Those are my comments, and I do appreciate your indulgence for allowing me to say the same.

Thank you.

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I just want a clarification, because he mentioned the gift under the Conflict of Interest Act being \$200. He mentioned “honorarium”. Is he suggesting that anyone in the Prime Minister's family was paid more than \$200 for their work with WE?

Mr. Matthew Green: Well, what I'm suggesting is that these are all—

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Green, I actually have to allow the questioner just to throw it out there. Thank you.

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

Mr. Greg Fergus: I do, and it's about relevance. The restrictions on honorariums refer to members of Parliament and public office holders only.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Mrs. Shanahan, you have the floor.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Can you clarify the speaking order again, Madam Chair?

The Chair: I certainly can, absolutely.

Next up, after Madame Shanahan, we have Mr. Scarpaleggia. Then we have Mr. Barrett, Mr. Angus, Madame Gaudreau and Mr. Kurek.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay, very good.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: A point of order, Madam Chair.

I gave up my spot. Some people are speaking for the second or third time. I wanted to check that the speaking order was okay.

[English]

The Chair: Madame Gaudreau, I have done my best to keep good track of everybody's hands as they have gone up, and I have had the capable help of the clerk. Thank you very much for raising that point of order. I'm pretty sure we have it handled.

Mrs. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

I know that this is the second time I've spoken and I want to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.

[English]

What I wanted to bring up was the part of our mandate that concerns.... We have a statutory review that is due. It was very interesting to look at the last statutory review that was done in 2014, I believe, and to look at some of the elements that were introduced there as recommendations, both in the majority report and in the minority report.

I think it goes to the point I was making earlier about the very important work of this committee to ensure that indeed.... I think we have two separate things we're talking about here: the act itself, with all the clauses and provisions therein, and then the fact that it is the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner who is charged with fulfilling the act or executing it—someone else may have better words than I do for that. The commissioner is to carry out the intentions, the will of Parliament, in making sure that the act is respected, bearing in mind that any finding by the commissioner is indeed a violation, and he or she is then able to.... I believe it's \$500; I may be incorrect. This is why I'm looking forward to the time when we are going to do a study of the act itself, because I think there's some—

• (1320)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: On a point of order, Madam Chair.

Unfortunately, I can't hear what is being said. In passing, you are doing a very good job. I know that it's difficult.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, excuse me, Ms. Gaudreau.

I believe that things are now working properly for the interpreter.

[English]

I just wanted to put into the record, actually, some of the very interesting recommendations from, again, someone whom I have huge respect for on this committee and who is, I believe, the *doyen* or dean of this committee, and that is Mr. Angus. He can correct me if it wasn't him who was present on the statutory review.

The 10 recommendations put forward, I think, give us much pause for thought. I believe a couple of recommendations have been adopted. They include adding public office holders such as the Governor of the Bank of Canada. That is very important.

This is the first recommendation:

Give the Commissioner the power to administer financial penalties and other penalties for breaches of the Act where an examination results in the finding of contravention, including but not limited to:

- a) Suspension for a specified period
- b) Suspension of Member's right to vote for a specified period
- c) Require reimbursement of the value of the gift, hospitality or benefit received
- d) Impose a fine not exceeding \$5,000.

That's really coming to the heart of what we're trying to do here. We're trying to dissuade members of Parliament from contravening the act.

Recommendation two states:

Enshrine Ministerial accountability guidelines into the Act: Amend section 16 of the Act to include Annex B entitled: "Fundraising and Dealing with Lobbyists: Best Practices for Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries", as follows:

- a) Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries should not seek to have departmental stakeholders included on fundraising or campaign teams or on the boards of electoral district associations.
- b) Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries should ensure that government facilities and equipment, including ministerial or departmental letterhead, are not used for or in connection with fundraising activities.
- c) Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries and their staff should not discuss departmental business at any fundraising event, and should refer any person who wishes to discuss departmental business to make an appointment with the Minister's office or department as appropriate.
- d) Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries should ensure that fundraising communications issued on their behalf do not suggest any connection between fundraising and official government business.

Recommendation three in the minority report is very interesting:

Allow members of the public to bring complaints, not just MPs.

Recommendation four states:

Extend the definition of "Ministerial staff" to include all work including contract and volunteer work.

Recommendation five states:

Expand the definition of Public Office Holder to include all Governor in Council appointees, including the Governor of the Bank of Canada.

I believe that has been done.

Some of these recommendations, Madam Chair, came from well-known organizations like Democracy Watch and experts in the field. I think it was a very comprehensive study, although clearly one that was quite controversial, because there are two minority reports. It just gives us an idea or a flavour of the kinds of discussions we can look forward to having.

Recommendation six states:

Empower the Commissioner to continue investigations that have been referred to the RCMP.

Recommendation seven states:

Reduce the value of a gift that requires disclosure from \$200 to \$100.

Recommendation eight states:

Maintain automatic divestment rules for reporting public office holders with significant decision-making power or access to privileged information, including, but not limited to, Ministers, Ministers of State, Parliamentary Secretaries, Chiefs of Staff, Deputy Ministers, Ministerial staff and employees of Ministers' offices. Maintain automatic divestment for appointees to agencies and bodies with broad mandates. All other appointees should be subject to a case-by-case divestment of controlled assets.

Recommendation nine states:

Define and toughen post-employment and secondary employment rules for MPs and Senators.

Finally, recommendation 10 states:

Include an apparent conflict of interest in the definition of a conflict of interest.

I think there's much food for thought there. I thank the New Democratic Party for the work they have done in the past and continue to do in this very important area.

• (1325)

As I put aside the idea that we should...and I look forward to us doing the statutory review of the act. It is the question of whether or not we have full confidence in the Ethics Commissioner to carry out his duties. To that, I would say that in the act we have the qualifications and the standards that the commissioner must hold for the seven-year term. I, for one, am very satisfied that we have someone in whom we can have full faith.

I will leave it at that. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I, too, would like to commend you on the manner in which you are chairing this committee. I'm not normally a member of this committee, and I'm here today substituting for another member, but I'm very pleased to be part of the discussion on a very important issue.

I, too, would like to salute a university in my riding. I happen to be fortunate enough to have part of a university in my riding. I have the faculty of agricultural and environmental sciences of McGill University in my riding, in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue. Of course, they are leaders in both areas, not only nationally but internationally.

I think the point that's being made by different members is that we have an incredible education system in this country, and I think that's one of the reasons we have such a strong economy and such a bright future as a nation.

In the amount of time I have today, I would like to talk about politics. I believe that what I have to say relates in many ways to what Mrs. Shanahan has said, what Ms. Brière has said, what Mr. Fergus has said, and, in fact, what Mr. Angus has said, who I know

is a formidable debater. I know him to be someone who seeks the truth but is also a very able political debater in the House. I think—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Chair, a point of order. If people are going to be saying nice things about me, could you at least turn the camera on me? My mom might be watching.

Actually, it's not true; my mom never watches Parliament, but I'm going to call her tonight and tell her that Francis.... She'll love it was Francis, because she loves Pope Francis and she'll like you, Francis, so thank you. If you're going to filibuster, keep talking about me.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: The point I was trying to make was that I know you put a political lens on many things.

But we're here because we believe in politics. We're here because we like politics. When we got involved in politics, we knew what we were getting into. We knew that it would be our name on the ballot, that we would be responsible for what we said, whether in the House or in committee or in a newspaper article, and we understood that if sometimes we don't say things the way we should or if we slip on a banana peel, we would have to deal with the consequences and the embarrassment sometimes of being so-called misquoted or what have you. So we got into this line of work very cognizant of what it involves, and I would say that our immediate families did as well.

I would imagine that anyone who has entered politics has had discussions with immediate family, especially with spouses, because sometimes children are too young to really have a say in our decision to enter politics. I hope that everyone would have the agreement of their spouse to enter politics; if not, I think that could lead to trouble down the road. But that's not the topic of discussion here.

This is a political committee. I think we've conducted ourselves in a very respectful manner today and with a lot of professionalism, but that should not obscure the fact that this is fundamentally a political committee. The Ethics Commissioner, on the other hand, is not a political person, and that's a very important distinction to keep in mind as we discuss this issue.

This is a political committee. The role of the opposition is to score political points. I know this because I've been in opposition. I've been on the government side. I was on the government side when I was first elected, and then I sat in opposition for 10 years. When you go from government to opposition, you leave the responsibility of governing, which takes up a lot of time for members and cabinet ministers on the other side. You leave that responsibility, and your focus becomes almost entirely political.

I'd like to add that there's nothing wrong with that, because politics is fundamental to our democratic system. It's how the will of the people, the priorities and concerns of the people, get translated into government decisions. How does that happen? It happens because we have election campaigns and parties put forth platforms that are intended to reflect the wishes of the voters in order to be elected on those platforms, and the opposition's role is to point out imperfections in the government's approach. Oftentimes we've seen that persistent opposition attention to an issue will result in the government modifying its approach to the issue, and that's what makes our democracy so effective and efficient and so wonderful. So there is nothing wrong with the fact that there's a political angle in this committee and in the House of Commons.

Politics is as old as the hills, Madam Chair. It predates democracy. It is everywhere: in corporations, in educational institutions, in non-profit organizations, in sports. I would submit to you that probably the most difficult political decision in sport is being coach of the Montreal Canadiens. So politics is everywhere.

Mr. Fergus was speaking before, so eloquently and with great erudition, on the arc of history. I know that others have touched on this in their comments.

• (1330)

Mr. Greg Fergus: I hope my mother is watching.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: What has really been the common thread through the evolution of society over the last how many hundreds or thousands of years? It is that we have been moving away from a system that was arbitrary, sometimes cruelly arbitrary, where power resided in a tyrant or a king who could make decisions on a whim that caused great harm to some people. We are moving slowly—and sometimes up and down, I agree, as Mr. Fergus said—towards a system that is not governed by the subjective but by the objective, a system that is not arbitrary but system-based, a system that is rational, I should say, a system where, while we recognize that politics is fundamental to democracy, we also recognize that there are certain instances when, for the greater good of the system itself, for the integrity of the system itself and for the faith that people who vote place in the system, we have to take politics out of the process. We do this with courts of law.

You know, there's a misunderstanding generally, I think, in many quarters—and this is natural, in a way—that when a judge hands down a decision, somehow it's a matter of opinion, like, “Oh, yes, the court decided this because that's the judge. Whatever, that's his or her experience, and his or her bias.” But the system we've built painfully over decades and centuries is a system whereby those who are making decisions of that nature must take themselves out of the decision. They must base their decision on logic, on law, on rules, on evidence, on precedence, and of course, we know that precedence is very important in our system.

This is the kind of world that we are wisely moving towards every day, and as part of that process, we've taken many important steps forward since the time Mr. Angus and I came to this House. When I arrived here, I sat on the government operations committee. I would actually encourage every new member to try to sit on that committee, because it looks at the essence of how government operates and it deals with all kinds of ethical questions as well.

One of the first things we did on that committee, after I was elected, was to review a law called the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, which was another attempt to take politics out of important matters of government. We heard from witnesses who had been whistle-blowers and had been treated the way that subjects might have been treated under kings and queens 500 or 600 years ago. They were humiliated because they brought a wrong to the fore. They were mistreated. They lost their jobs. They were under incredible mental stress, and this law was brought in to give them due process, to make sure that they could lodge a complaint without experiencing retribution, but that law is a non-political law. That's a non-political process because it's a very important part of maintaining a system of government based on rule and integrity.

The Ethics Commissioner's position is very much the same. It's an attempt, and a successful one, to have someone who is not political make decisions about very important matters. I think this is very important to keep in mind. We're a political committee. I know I'm not normally a member of this committee, but it's a political committee, and the Ethics Commissioner is a non-political person who cannot afford to let politics enter into the process that he oversees.

• (1335)

I think it's very important that we understand that the public is very cognizant of what constitutes overreach. I've been in politics for a number of years, and you can tell right way that the public can see through a ruse or some kind of situation that really goes beyond what is necessary. I think the public understands that dragging those who are not part of the immediate family of a politician before a political committee for the purpose of maybe scoring political points and exposing their employment activities may not be fair and that it is best left to a non-political person to examine those relationships and those employment activities and to report on them.

I think the public understands what is fair and decent. I would submit that to examine the contracts of someone who is not part of the immediate family that would normally have to report their activities anyway to the Ethics Commissioner, and to extend that scope to people who are really not directly related to the situation at hand is not necessarily the most effective and decent approach.

I would also like to take a couple of minutes to talk about the current context in which we are living. This is the greatest national emergency situation since the Second World War. I think everyone recognizes that. The government is not perfect. That's why we have an opposition. The government has rolled out a series of programs—in electric speed, really—designed them and rolled them out with great alacrity in a very short period of time. Yes, there will be bumps in the road.

The government recognizes that no program will be perfect and, therefore, it has adjusted a number of programs. It adjusted the CERB when it realized that those whose incomes might have dropped by 90% but who were still working would have no support. It decided that there should be a ceiling on how much you could earn before you lost the CERB. That ceiling was determined to be \$1,000. It then adapted the wage subsidy program, including extending the timeline for the wage subsidy program.

It brought in a special loan program for small and medium-sized businesses, and when it found that some of the criteria were too restrictive, it admitted that it was not a perfect design and it adapted the program so that more business people could benefit from it.

Then it realized that students were put in a very difficult position. Students, by the way, whose unemployment rate is over 30%, were in a very difficult position because, through no fault of their own, they saw the prospects of their summer employment evaporate overnight, summer employment on which they depend to earn money to pay tuition but also other living expenses. The government brought out a program very quickly to help students as well. Again, it allowed students to earn up to \$1,000 and still benefit from the Canadian student emergency benefit.

• (1340)

It's often said that youth, our students, are our future. It's not just a cliché. We were talking about universities and the education system. We have one of the best in the world. The more students who benefit from an education, the better our country will be in the short, medium and long term, so it's very important to support students. We know that through the introduction of all of these programs—I think Canadians know this, they know it deep down—the intent of the Prime Minister and of the government was first and foremost, in every case, to stand by Canadians in their moment of need, including students.

We've heard, for example, from the volunteer sector. We all have many non-profit groups and charities in our ridings, and I think, as members of Parliament regardless of party, we know these groups very well. We know the important work that they do, and we know that there is a crisis in volunteering, Madam Chair. A generation that ardently contributed to the voluntary sector is now retired, and they have to pass the torch to another generation.

We've heard anecdotally, but also I think it's in serious studies, that there's a shortage of volunteers and that maybe not as many young people are stepping in to take up the challenge of volunteering. We know that, when a person volunteers, the impact on them is profound. The feeling they get of doing good and of contributing is so powerful that they remain volunteers for the rest of their lives.

This program was designed in good faith and it was not perfect but had to be rolled out very quickly. This program was intended to connect young people to the volunteer experience, not only to allow them to acquire skills that would help them in their careers but also to create a lifelong engagement towards volunteering activities, which will only be of positive benefit to our society in the long run.

I think it bears mentioning that government cannot do everything. I know my colleagues across the way—

Mr. Matthew Green: You have colleagues here, too.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: There, too, but my colleagues across the way have often said....

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

I apologize. I am raising a somewhat ideological question here.

[*English*]

My colleagues across the way often say governments cannot do everything, and I agree. I agree that governments cannot do everything. That is why, when the government, at the beginning of this crisis, understood that food banks were facing increased requests from those in need and it decided that it wanted to support food banks, it went to organizations that had broad reach, national scope. It went to Food Banks Canada and it went to the Salvation Army, and when the government decided that it wanted to help the non-profit sector because their revenues from donations were dropping precipitously, the government said, “We can't do this ourselves. We can't do everything”, and they went to see organizations like United Way, Centraide in Quebec.

Clearly, when it came time to roll out in very quick time a national volunteer program for youth, the public service recognized that the WE organization—and it was said at the finance committee yesterday—had the reach, the network, the goodwill of youth and the technological capability to handle that kind of rollout. Were there bumps in the road? Yes, Madam Chair, there were, and there always will be in government.

That is essentially the context in which we are having this discussion today. However, the main point I'm trying to make, and that my other colleagues have made, is that we have a very robust system for examining and investigating questions of ethics. We as a Parliament, as previous Parliaments, thought this matter of ethics was so important that it should be put in the hands of a qualified non-political person to conduct due process and that these matters needed to be dealt with in that way so that the political dimension does not interfere with due process. If it does, it does not serve our democracy well because it diminishes the faith that Canadians have in the systems and the institutions we've given ourselves as a democracy.

We need to recognize that this committee has important work to do. It has an important mandate. Also it's important to point out that when Ms. Shanahan spoke about mandate, what she was getting at is that this committee has a non-partisan role to play. Despite the fact, as Mr. Angus said, that committees can decide what they want to do, nonetheless they operate within frameworks and, especially a committee as important as the ethics committee, they have an interest in focusing on the broader principles and due process.

That is the point that Ms. Shanahan was making. It was not that committees are somehow constrained and do not have the liberty to look into what they want, but that it is very important that the ethics committee act in a professional and maybe a little less political manner than perhaps other committees, because it is important that the ethics committee maintains the faith of Canadians.

Madam Speaker—

• (1350)

Mr. Charlie Angus: I have a point of order. Are you getting to the end? If you're going to finish, I will withhold my question.

The Chair: Mr. Angus, I'm afraid that is not a point of order.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Yet he's so experienced in the House, he should know this by now.

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

The Chair: Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

It's been fascinating. I think I'm at the 21st century, but I'm not sure because I keep losing my place with his....

I think the issue of ethics is really important. Could he explain to us, if the ethics committee is so important to the Liberals, why they shut down the Ethics Commissioner from coming to give his last report on the Trudeau findings of guilt? If they believe we're supposed to work with the Ethics Commissioner, how come they continue to interfere with the work of our committee to find out the recommendations of the Ethics Commissioner every time Justin Trudeau's found guilty?

That would be very helpful, but maybe he's not at the 21st century yet.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: I think Mr. Angus is not following the procedure.

The Chair: Mr. Scarpaleggia.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Again, Mr. Angus is a good debater. I will give him that.

I think this committee has important work to do. I'm told it's supposed to be reviewing the law governing the Ethics Commissioner, the Conflict of Interest Act. Because, as a Liberal, I believe that we must always look to reform our systems and make them better, I think that would be an important task, to have a look at the Conflict of Interest Act. I don't know the last time it was looked at and amended, but like all institutions, like all laws, it merits to be reviewed and improved.

Madam Chair, again I appreciate the professional manner in which you chair this committee. I know we've debated in the House a couple of times and I know you to be an ardent and articulate debater. I thought when I came here maybe you would bring that ardour to your role, but you have managed the committee with a firm hand and made sure that people respect the rules. For that I thank you and I think, for that, the committee is well served.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I will move down my speakers list to Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I would like to address each of the points the Liberal members of the committee made, but to do so we'd certainly need to clear our calendars for the weekend, which I'm prepared to do. I'm not sure if that's the hardball that Mr. Fergus was promising that they would play if we pursued this motion.

With respect to the Conservative members on this committee, it was implied that they were not in compliance with the conflict of interest code for members with respect to filing their disclosures. As is reported on that website by the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, all members are completing the process as required. Two members' results have been published, and one result is awaiting publication by the commissioner's office. If anyone is curious enough to know who I have the privilege of co-owning my house with and through which financial institution, they are welcome to take a peek. That's the case for the Conservative members, so I'm not sure if that was the hardball that we were promised.

Also, it is apples and oranges. We are not talking about the conflict of interest code for members. We're talking about the Conflict of Interest Act. These are different. I am also not going to give a lecture to the members today about that. I'm not going to read to them sections of the Criminal Code that may have been violated by Justin Trudeau.

I'm not going to reread "The Trudeau Report" into the record. I'm not going to reread the "Trudeau II Report" into the record. Those are the findings of how Justin Trudeau had broken that law under the Conflict of Interest Act, earning the distinction of being the first Prime Minister in Canada to have been found guilty of that. He's in the company of his finance minister, Bill Morneau, who broke that law under the Conflict of Interest Act and who is now under investigation again.

We're here to talk about this first motion. I heard from multiple members about how it would be inappropriate to call family members of an elected official to this committee. Again, it was implied that this is what was on offer here. It is absolutely not.

I'll tell you that the only member of the Trudeau family that I want to see at this committee is Justin. If he wants to come to this committee, that would satisfy me to no end, but that's not consistent with the behaviour of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. He obstructed the Ethics Commissioner's investigation in the SNC-Lavalin scandal. That is a fact. That is a matter of public record. It is in the "Trudeau II Report". He invoked cabinet confidence. According to Minister Chagger in the House, when I asked her at committee two weeks ago, that was not the case. It's a fact. He did not waive cabinet confidence as promised. That's what needs to happen here. We need the facts.

I would love to know why asking for these documents, when we have this nearly one billion dollar agreement—you can really call it whatever gives you comfort or whatever satisfies the Prime Minister's Office in their direction to you, but it's a billion dollars of taxpayers' money going to an organization with direct financial dealings with the Prime Minister's family. I heard people talk about Stephen Harper. I know that when the Liberals start talking about Stephen Harper, they are panicked, and that's what's happening today.

I want to reference then prime minister Stephen Harper who, first of all, laid this—

• (1355)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: On a point of order, Madam Chair, can you add me to the speakers list, please?

Mr. Michael Barrett: I know the Liberals are in trouble when they start talking about Stephen Harper. It's like in a cartoon when you lay a rake on the lawn for another cartoon character to step on and it whacks them in the face. That's the Conflict of Interest Act with these Liberals. They can't help but not step on this rake. It hits them in the face over and over again. Prime Minister Harper had the foresight to lay out this very transparent law for public office holders to follow. The Liberals can't help themselves but to break the law in this case.

With respect to Prime Minister Harper, I'd like to reference his decision to recuse himself from any decisions dealing with Talisman Energy. It was reported in 2012 in the Ottawa Citizen that the prime minister recused himself, and the reason was that his brother was an employee there and he wanted to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.

We don't need to go back to Plato and we don't need to practice our Latin to look at very recent and relevant examples of why what we're doing here is essential to preserve public confidence in our institutions.

Let's look back to 2017. Justin Trudeau—and the Liberal government—gives more than a million dollars to his friends at WE. Campaign contributors, the founders of that organization, donated to his leadership. They employ members of his family. He hands them a million bucks to have a July 2 event on the stage here in Ottawa, and he'll bring his mom. Why won't they tell us if she was paid? Those are taxpayer dollars.

I'm not looking for Margaret Trudeau to come to this committee, nor am I looking for Ms. Grégoire Trudeau or his brother Alexandre to come to this committee. But he's put them in a terrible position by not recusing himself from this decision. He apologized for it, so he recognized what he did was wrong. Now he needs to follow through and be transparent, and he needs to appear at the committee. We're requesting him to come. My motion is not asking for anyone to appear at this committee. It's looking for records, documents as reported on in media. There's no fishing expedition or witch hunt. This is a matter of public interest and it's a matter of preserving confidence in public institutions.

We're going on the slow roll through this meeting, and I know we're going to hear more from the government members of this committee, and that's fine. I just wonder what they have to hide.

Why the attempt at a cover-up? Why not just vote on the motion? Have the courage of your convictions. Don't run out the clock. Vote, if you disagree with it. We've heard from all members on your side now. We'll hear from Mr. MacKinnon in a second—I can't wait. Then let's have a vote.

I know there's other committee business to deal with. I look forward to seeing how you vote. We've heard what you think. You're confused by the motion. I hope I clarified that for you. We're not looking for these people to come to committee. There's one Trudeau I would want to come here, and it is Justin, and I would like him to not invoke cabinet confidence. I would like him to bring all relevant documents.

If someone is proposing that we bring a Trudeau here, I'm not today, but sure, if we're going to bring a member of Justin Trudeau's family, let's bring him. If that's an amendment the government would like to move, to have Justin Trudeau come to this committee, I will tell them now that I will vote in favour of their amendment. If they are not moving that amendment, let's talk about the motion.

The motion is for these records pertaining to speaking appearances. I think that's pretty innocuous. We were going to give the organization a billion dollars to hand out. They were going to benefit by \$43.5 million. If there's nothing to hide, let's see them. I'm not looking for their tax returns. I'm not looking for their pay stubs. These folks are being dragged into this by virtue of the Prime Minister's failing to recuse himself from these deliberations, which he admits was wrong.

• (1400)

Just because you say sorry after you get caught robbing the bank doesn't mean that there isn't an investigation. It doesn't mean there won't be a trial, and it doesn't mean there won't be consequences.

This committee is the master of its own domain. We've heard that the government members want us to respect the mandate of this committee and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. It certainly wasn't the case when we wanted to bring him here to report on his work on the "Trudeau II Report", on his finding that the Prime Minister broke the law, the Conflict of Interest Act, for a second time. We didn't see any support for that from government members, which is inconsistent with what they're saying here today.

Let's talk about this. We've had a history lesson, thank you. I hope that I get credit from Madame Brière's alma mater. I will apply it to future learnings. I have a college in my riding, St. Lawrence College. I'm happy to have them. Since we're doing academic shout-outs, they're great. It's higher learning for sure.

We've had some fun. We've heard about people's pasts. We've heard about ancient history. We've had linguistic lessons, but let's instead talk about this. I've heard no amendments from the government. I've heard no effort to call Justin Trudeau, because they said that there's someone from his family that someone wants to come here. Yes, invite the Prime Minister to testify at this committee, and I will support your amendment. That would show that there has been an examination of conscience in the Liberal caucus room, that it's not just about politics, that it's about doing what's right.

I agree with my colleague who said we should depoliticize....

• (1405)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Chair, I'd like to put a motion on the floor that we do now adjourn.

The Chair: I'm sorry. During a point of order you cannot put a motion forward. Thank you.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Isn't this a privilege motion?

The Chair: During a point of order you cannot put that motion forward.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay, so I withdraw my point of order and I am putting forward a privilege motion that we do now adjourn.

The Chair: You cannot do that unless you are on the speaking list, at which point I would call upon you and then you could move a motion.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Okay.

The Chair: Do you wish to be added to the speaking list?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It's laid bare for everyone to see that the Liberals have attempted to filibuster this committee. Mrs. Shanahan has demonstrated the Liberal cover-up.

You talk to the clock until two o'clock, and now you don't want to deal with any of this committee's business—for shame.

That's politics, Mr. Scarpaleggia. That's naked, partisan politics. That's exactly what you said we shouldn't do here. Vote on the motion. Have the courage of your convictions, but that's not what we're seeing here. I thought we respected the committee's mandate. Is the committee's mandate not to vote on the motions put forward by the members? That's fascinating to me.

We read from procedural texts. We read historical texts. We've written new texts. I wonder how that translates in the streets of your constituencies. Would you feel the same way about another party that had a prime minister who awarded a non-tendered contract worth nearly \$1 billion to an organization that paid his family hundreds of thousands of dollars? Would you feel the same way? I'd wager you wouldn't, but here we are looking to clean up another one of Justin Trudeau's messes.

It's the third time he's under investigation, and though it may not concern members in the Liberal caucus room, it concerns constituents in my riding. It concerns people across this country—non-political people. It's an embarrassment to have a prime minister who has been found guilty of breaking the law multiple times and is under investigation again. There's great smugness we often hear in

the attempt to contrast the head of government in our country against the President of the United States. So often...oh, the smugness that comes! I feel no moral superiority to any nation when this is what we see here in Canada.

Again, to go back to Mr. Fergus's point, if hardball is to read from the public disclosures on the website, which, for Mr. Gourde and I, the results have been published from our public disclosures, or that Mr. Kurek has completed his on time.... He has completed his disclosure with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's office. Like for everyone else, like other public servants, there are technological limitations to their being able to discharge their duties in the same time they normally would, but he filed on time. If there is an issue to be taken, I encourage government members to raise that, but as far as resources go, that's not for the opposition members to have to seize themselves with at this committee. We're talking about the Conflict of Interest Act, but with respect to that other code, members here, members on the Conservative side, have met their obligations.

If playing hardball is filibustering the committee, running the clock until two o'clock and slyly moving a point of order to try to adjourn the committee, it's clumsy, but I'm not sure if that's hardball. It's consistent with my experience during the hearings on the SNC-Lavalin scandal and the cover-up that the majority Liberals tried to affect there. That's consistent with my experience. It's consistent with Canadians' experience with Justin Trudeau.

Liberal members have demonstrated that should this committee look to be the master of its own domain, should they wish to exercise their mandate to review ethical matters dealing with public office holders, they will filibuster when it's their Prime Minister they're trying to protect. They saw Gerry Butts fall in disgrace. They saw Michael Wernick fall in disgrace under Justin Trudeau. They saw their majority reduced to a minority, a distinction, again, that Justin Trudeau has.

• (1410)

First-term majority governments usually become second-term majority governments. If they are first elected by a majority, they probably will be re-elected a second time with a majority. That is not the case for Justin Trudeau because Canadians put the Liberals on a shorter leash, having had those ethical violations the first time.

It should be concerning for all Canadians that the government members don't want that accountability and don't have the courage of their convictions to vote on the motion on the table, knowing that their other colleagues gave notice of the motion in advance of the meeting to give them time to prepare a response and to articulate that to their fellow committee members and to Canadians. That's not accountability. That's not the government open by default that you all ran under. That's not using sunlight as the best disinfectant, as you promised. That's not the sunny ways that we heard from Justin Trudeau. It's obstruction. It does a disservice to Canadians. It does a disservice to your constituents.

Mr. Scarpaleggia mentioned the testimony we heard yesterday at the finance committee and the contention that WE Charity was the only organization in the country that could carry out this sole-source deal. When you only ask one person, if you don't ask anybody else what their capabilities are, guess what the answer is going to be. If you ask Google to give you a document that says whether they are the best search engine and here are some of the requirements you would like them to show you so you can endorse them as the best search engine, but you don't ask anybody else, they're going to demonstrate the standard that you asked for and they're going to get your endorsement. WE Charity was the only one who responded to this. It wasn't competitive.

We heard also that Ms. Wernick came up with this on her own. She testified yesterday that a finance official proposed WE Charity. We heard from Mr. Scarpaleggia that there's a crisis in Canada, that young people aren't volunteering. That's not what the head of Volunteer Canada said at committee yesterday. She said young people in Canada are very generous with their time. We also heard yesterday that this call for 100,000 volunteers is not consistent with what she understands in her industry, in her sector, as being the need. It's a vastly inflated number.

That was the testimony in finance yesterday.

However, here we are at ethics, having just endured a multi-hour Liberal filibuster as part of the cover-up into Justin Trudeau's third ethics scandal. Selective reading of texts and ancient history lessons have got us no closer to any transparency, but you know that when we hear about hardball and about assuming that the better angels are on the government side of the table, there's something more here. We're onto some trouble.

That's something that I heard at finance committee yesterday too. I heard one of my colleagues say that we're onto some trouble here with this Liberal government. I think he's right. Multiple investigations by independent officers of Parliament and here we are today with government members, Liberal members of this committee, in a coordinated effort, engaging in a cover-up to not allow this committee to do its work.

• (1415)

Mr. Fergus said that you play hardball. Well, Mr. Fergus, I think if you check the record, you'll see that's what you said and—

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

I think Mr. Barrett has made six references to hardball and attributing that to me. If you take a look at the record, I certainly didn't say that in English and I certainly didn't, at least as far as I

know, use that term in French. It's not a term I regularly use. Perhaps it had been translated that way, but that certainly wasn't the intention of what I meant.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I'll clip it for you and send it to you later, Greg, because that's what was said.

Obstructionist tactics are not what Canadians look for. We had the dare, I guess, that you'd play hardball. Well, I dare you to vote on the motion and have the courage of your convictions. It's a motion to adjourn. For shame.

Let's wrap up. Let's vote on this motion and then the other motions that committee members want to bring forward. You seem eager to have someone from Justin Trudeau's family come. Let's bring Justin Trudeau. I dare him.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Moving down my speaking list, we have Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Madame Chair.

I don't know whether I've said it yet today, but thank you for doing such an excellent job of keeping everybody on their respective sides without our going into the middle and breaking parliamentary procedure. Thank you so much.

It's been a fascinating day. Certainly we learned a lot about Madame Brière's long history at her college or university. We learned about ancient Athens and we went through the medieval era, so if you'll indulge me, I'll quote scripture from the book of Luke.

You didn't know I was an altar boy, did you? Well, I was. In the book of Luke, it says that what is done in the darkness will be shouted from the rooftops and what is whispered in the backrooms will be shown to all. I think this is what happens when we end up with corruption scandals and conflict of interest. It's embarrassing for the government.

I don't go back as far as Athens, but in my time in Parliament I've seen a lot of the tawdry, backslapping, rum bottle politics on the Rideau, which was famous for all the tawdry deals. I came in just after Jean Chrétien spent a couple of billion dollars on golf balls. I remember Brian Mulroney getting money in a brown paper bag and explaining that to Canadians. There was Bruce Carson. I've seen that one, and Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright. The work of this committee has been sometimes very raucous and very confrontational, but it is this committee that tries to establish some review of the ethical behaviours of parliamentarians.

We are not a technical committee. We are a political committee, as my good friend Mr. Scarpaleggia said. It falls to us to sometimes bring these issues into the public light.

I have been quoted extensively, so I feel as if I might have a life here beyond my limited career. If other people do quote me in perpetuity, it might speak to how long I've been on this committee.

The issue of the integrity of documents is something I've spoken of before. I've raised it when we've had Liberals in power and Conservatives in power, and we do need to establish precedence. I think that's really important.

I think what makes this issue difficult is that we had the WE charity state publicly that no money was paid to the Trudeaus, and that was false. The question of trusting them on this is very.... It raises questions now that have to be answered. What were those financial relations? The refusal of the Prime Minister and Mr. Morneau to recuse themselves has raised ethical questions that must be answered.

When we had two other findings of guilt against the Prime Minister, we tried to have the Ethics Commissioner report to our committee, but we were blocked by the government, so how do we make recommendations about how things should be done if the government refuses to let the Ethics Commissioner speak to our committee so that we can present to Parliament a report that would suggest changes?

If we had done that on the previous two findings of guilt, Mr. Trudeau might not be in the situation he is now, because maybe there would have been some measures put in place.

Madame Brière was great in talking about how we have these standards. Well, we have standards, but if those in power refuse to respect them, we have a problem. This is why the Prime Minister is under his third investigation.

We could talk all night. I've been in many long filibusters, but I have a conflict of interest with my own family members. I should put it out in case someone finds out. I am trying to move one of my daughters this weekend. That's a conflict of interest for me, because I'm a lot more afraid of my wife than I am of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, and I have to help move my daughter, so I'm trying to bring us together.

I've heard the Liberals say again and again that they think it's inappropriate that the financial records of the Trudeau family be brought before our committee, and they keep mentioning the Ethics Commissioner. I certainly heard my Conservative colleagues suggest that they want to hear Justin Trudeau speak, because it's Justin Trudeau who put his family in this situation. It was his choice, and it was WE's choice to start paying the Trudeau family after he became Prime Minister that put them within a very fair discussion about political influence.

I would offer a friendly amendment that we, the New Democrats, would support this committee calling for the financial records to be obtained from WE and transferred to the Ethics Commissioner so that we're not turning this into a family circus, but we want those documents turned over.

• (1420)

If the Liberals supported that, then that would back up everything they've said for the last three hours, excluding all the stuff they said about medieval kings and princes, ancient Athens and all

the other stuff. However, the gist of what they kept saying was to trust the Ethics Commissioner.

We would put that forward in a friendly amendment. We could say that we'd call on Justin Trudeau to explain his role in this and the decisions he made. The Liberals have said, again and again, that it's not fair to draw on the family members, that it's the office-holder, so if the public office holder, Mr. Trudeau, agrees to come here, we would agree to transfer the financial documents of the Trudeau family and the WE corporation to the Ethics Commissioner so that he gets to decide what's going to be released or not be released and we get to hear from the public office holder.

I would make that a friendly amendment if my colleagues are interested. Then we could vote on this, and then we could go home, and I could go move my daughter and not be in serious conflict with my family.

Other than that, I'm willing to stay.

• (1425)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus. I just want to be clear here. Are you moving an amendment to this motion right now?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes, I am.

The Chair: Then would you please help us to understand the wording of your amendment?

Mr. Charlie Angus: I move that pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), the committee review the safeguards which are in place to avoid and prevent conflicts of interest in federal government procurement, contracting, granting, contribution and other expenditure policies; and that, to provide a case study for this review, 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; and that these records be provided to the Ethics Commissioner for his study; and that this committee call upon Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to appear to give testimony relating to these matters.

The Chair: Just to be clear, are you asking, then, that those records be submitted to the Ethics Commissioner and to the clerk of this committee?

Mr. Charlie Angus: No. I'm asking that they be submitted to the Ethics Commissioner and that the committee call upon Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to testify regarding these matters to us.

The Chair: Okay.

Just one moment, Mrs. Shanahan.

Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Could I ask for a time out so that we can digest that?

The Chair: You're asking me to suspend the meeting?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes.

The Chair: Just give me one moment.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Actually, it might be good for a bathroom break for a few people too. I'm just saying.

The Chair: I'll tell you what. Why don't we suspend for five minutes? That will allow people to use the restroom should they need to, and it will also allow the analyst, the clerk and me to confer, just to make sure that we have the wording of this amendment correct.

I will suspend for five minutes.

• (1425) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1435)

The Chair: We're back.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Will we begin a new speakers list for the amendment?

The Chair: Yes, we'll begin a new speakers list. Do you wish to be added?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Yes, please.

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

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: As a point of order, because I'm offering a friendly amendment, does my colleague have to accept a friendly amendment, and then we begin the discussion by moving the amendment?

The Chair: No, the amendment is—

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay, then the amendment's on the floor?

The Chair: The amendment is on the floor for the committee to debate, at which point I'll move to a vote.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay, excellent. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

I want to make sure I have the speakers list correct.

Mr. Fergus, you had your hand up. Do you have a point of order, or do you want to be on the speakers list?

I will remind the committee that we are now entering the debate on the amendment that has been moved by Mr. Angus, so I move into a new speakers list for the amendment, starting with Ms. Shanahan.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Thank you, Chair.

For everyone here, could we have the clerk read out the amendment and where it would be situated in the motion?

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll ask the clerk to read that into the microphone.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): The amendment moved by Mr. Angus would follow the words "...provided that these records shall be provided to the", and the amendment would read, "Ethics Commissioner, and that this committee calls upon Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to appear before it."

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Where is that situated in the motion?

A voice: At the end.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: It's at the end?

A voice: Yes.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I have point of clarification on Mr. Angus's motion. It's a little fluid, and I hope the committee will indulge this.

Was it meant to be an "either-or"? Is it to provide the documents to the Ethics Commissioner, or that the Prime Minister will come and testify or be compelled to testify? I'd like clearer language around that, and to know if it is the full extent of what you were intending.

• (1440)

Mr. Charlie Angus: If I can just clarify, yes, we would agree to have the documents transferred to the Ethics Commissioner and they would agree that the Prime Minister would testify.

Then, of course, if they don't, then we're back to the original motion, which we're more than ready to vote on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Do I have the floor?

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: It is my understanding, then, that it is the wish under this amendment that the documents would be transferred directly to the Ethics Commissioner and not be a "pass Go" kind of thing. With regard to that aspect, I guess I'm just wondering why that is even necessary, since the commissioner has full powers to call for any documents or, I suppose, any record or anything that he has a need of in the execution of his duties.

I'm just posing that question because it has been very edifying this afternoon. We have sort of done three studies in one here, all trying to get an understanding of how the act works and how the office of the commissioner works.

That is my understanding. It is my understanding that the commissioner has those powers already, so for that reason I'm just a little confused as to why that would be considered an important amendment. It's as if we're telling the commissioner how to do his job, and I think that is outside our remit. I think we can have that kind of discussion once he has completed his review. In fact, that's why we would have the commissioner appear before us once he has actually tabled his report: to ask exactly what processes he went through and why he did x, y and z. I can see that, but I'm not sure it is necessary. I mean, I could be wrong. I'm just throwing that out there.

Then on the issue of the Prime Minister appearing, I think the Prime Minister appears almost daily and has been very open. He has already apologized for his actions or lack thereof, so I don't see the validity of that either, but I understand that it's important that we do some kind of reflection on this. I think that we want to reflect further on this amendment.

I'm happy to come back to another meeting, actually, to resolve it. That's where I would leave it. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

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

Thank you, Mr. Angus, for trying to bridge the gap and come up with a solution.

Before I get into the changes you are suggesting, let me reiterate what my colleague Brenda Shanahan just said.

I think there is a fair bit of merit in what you're proposing. Certainly I feel that it's important for us to provide this information to the Ethics Commissioner. If we have an opportunity to adjourn the meeting now and come back to this at a date set next week on this specific motion, I think there are a few things that can happen.

First, I think we can get to where we want to be. It would also give an opportunity, as we all are waiting for... We do know that this is not the only committee that is looking at this matter, and there may be an opportunity for both conditions to be satisfied on this. I would certainly like to put it out there that there is an opportunity for us to do this and try to get to the nub of the problem and come to a resolution that could satisfy everyone on each side.

Before I get to that, I have to say that my colleague Mr. Scarpalleggia is quite right. You are quite the experienced debater. I like how you, in all friendliness, took a strip off me for going back to take a look at the history of democracy, and yet you—

• (1445)

Mr. Charlie Angus: On a point of order, Madame Chair, I would never take a strip off Mr. Fergus, specifically when he's talking about ancient Athens.

Mr. Greg Fergus: That's in the friendliest of ways. You could talk about ancient Athens.

Mr. Charlie Angus: I resent being called a master debater when I'm a high school dropout who played in a punk rock band, but if he wants to continue ragging the puck rather than getting to the motion, he can talk about me as long as he wants. I can stay as long as we need to get this motion dealt with.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Well, that's great.

I can certainly say he keeps raising ancient Greece, yet he will quote Luke. I didn't know you had been an altar boy. We've had this conversation in the past.

It's really quite funny, because we're only about 400 years from each other in terms of deciding to quote figures from the past. Over a period of 2,500 years, that's chump change. Anyway, he's very good at making me feel the push of that, yet we do know that he's quoting from sources that are, frankly, in most people's minds, almost just as old.

I would like to also return to and correct the record again with Mr. Barrett. I am really quite convinced.... I look forward to reading the blues of this committee. It is not my habit to use the term "hardball", and I certainly didn't say that in English. If that is what came across in French through the translation....

First of all, hats off to our interpreters, who are doing a phenomenal job day in and day out in making sure they can provide us with all our words and share them not only with members here, but with Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Hats off to the interpreters, who are always there for us. I can tell you one thing, and that is that I don't even know how to say "hardball" in French. So I don't know what I might have said in French to have ended up with this translation of it into English.

[*English*]

The whole thing that we really get back to—and this is where I think we have a pretty positive approach to this whole debate—is that half of that suggestion Mr. Angus has brought forward is one that I really believe we should do, one that I've argued for at some length and one that my colleagues have argued for at some length. We should take this matter and provide it directly to the Ethics Commissioner.

[*Translation*]

This will ensure that it is impossible to play politics and further ensure that political rhetoric does not enter into this matter. We also have this opportunity, as MPs and as representatives of our fellow citizens, to ensure that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has all the required information. I would imagine that if it had been relevant, he could have obtained it himself, but if we want to take a twofold form of remedial action, I have no problem with that.

I would like to move that the meeting be adjourned to give us a chance to study this amendment, and that we return as soon as possible next week to settle this matter and proceed to a vote. I am hoping that all of my colleagues around the table will agree.

• (1450)

[*English*]

The Chair: Just to be clear, then, Mr. Fergus, you are putting forward a motion that this meeting would be adjourned and the debate suspended, and it would be continued at the earliest time possible on Monday.

Mr. Greg Fergus: It would be the earliest time possible.

The Chair: Earliest time possible? Okay, I want to make sure that is correct.

Mr. Greg Fergus: That would be correct with that change at the end.

The Chair: Okay, so it's "earliest time possible".

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I should add that it should not be held at the same time as a meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I would add that we need to avoid a scheduling conflict with a meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance, which is being held virtually.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, is this a part of your motion?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: If this works for Ms. Gaudreau, I have no problem with it. We want to facilitate the attendance of all MPs, including those who are doing double duty, whether with the Standing Committee on Finance or elsewhere.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. Give me one moment, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus: May I just clarify a mistake?

I would imagine that the committee clerk is in discussion with all the whips' offices to find a time in the schedule to hold the meeting.

I would not want to put her in a tight corner in these discussions, and suggest that we leave her enough latitude to be able to talk to the whips of all the political parties and find a date that suits everyone.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Mr. Angus, I see you have your hand up. Is it on a point of order?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Yes, it's on a point of order, and could I be indulged? It's because when we get to a vote on an adjournment, we just have to vote.

I've had two contradictory positions from the Liberals, so I'm not sure if I'm going to stay here or if I'm going.

I want to ask Mr. Fergus to clarify. We were told by Ms. Shanahan that the Ethics Commissioner can get whatever documents he

wants. I'm not interested in that. Our committee has the right to draw documents. We're saying we will draw those documents and transfer them to the Ethics Commissioner to respect the privacy of the Trudeau family, but if we don't have that, we will still draw those documents.

I'm waiting to know whether they will push to have the Prime Minister testify. If they're saying they're going to come back with a goodwill offer, then I'm willing to adjourn. If I don't hear that, then I'm willing to stay all weekend. I've heard two contradictory positions from the Liberals, so if we get to a vote, if I have clarity, I'll know which way to vote. If I don't have clarity, I'll vote to stay.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus.

I have a motion on the table by Mr. Fergus asking for the adjournment of this meeting, the suspension of this debate. Attached to that is also the clause that we would reconvene at the earliest time possible.

If you want that clause attached, it becomes a debatable motion, which we could not entertain right now because we have an amendment on the floor. However, if you wish to take away your caveat, then of course we can discuss the motion to adjourn.

• (1455)

Mr. Greg Fergus: In the interest of the folks around the table, I would happily withdraw that caveat, but reassure my colleagues around the table that this goodwill gesture is a goodwill gesture, and it is not one to try to stymie or to play procedural games.

I withdraw that caveat so that we can have a debate. That is very much a goodwill gesture that we're trying to put forward.

The Chair: Okay. Then, Mr. Fergus, you are moving a motion to adjourn this meeting. Is that correct?

Mr. Greg Fergus: That is correct.

The Chair: Okay. That being said, I must immediately go to a vote, and I go according to the majority of the members of this committee. It is your will that is respected.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, I'd like a recorded vote.

The Chair: Yes, we can do a recorded vote, absolutely.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: The committee has spoken. The meeting is adjourned.

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