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# **Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, May 25, 2010**

**Chair**

**Mr. Joe Preston**



## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)):** Order. This is meeting 16 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

We are looking at the main estimates for 2010-11, vote 5, House of Commons, under Parliament. Our witnesses to that effect are Speaker Milliken and our clerk, Madam O'Brien.

I take it you have a bit of an opening statement for us, Mr. Speaker?

**Hon. Peter Milliken (Speaker of the House of Commons):** Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm here to present the House of Commons main estimates for 2010-11.

[Translation]

As you will remember, I was here on March 18 to present the House of Commons Supplementary Estimates (C) for fiscal year 2009-2010.

[English]

Since that time, notable changes have occurred. Central to today's discussion are the Board of Internal Economy's decisions of March 22 to freeze office budgets for members, House officers, and presiding officers at the 2009-10 levels. Members' sessional allowances and House officers' and presiding officers' salaries have also been frozen at the 2009-10 levels, in accordance with the 2010 federal budget. Furthermore, the board decided to fund any House administration 2010-11 salary increases within existing resources. These measures are in addition to the stringent review of requirements that had already been conducted in preparation for these main estimates.

The revised 2010-11 main estimates, based on the Board of Internal Economy's March 22 decisions, total \$436,054,801—I'm not sure how many cents, we haven't put that in—which represents an increase of 2.2%, or \$9.5 million, over fiscal year 2009-10.

As you would expect, all items included in the main estimates have been presented to and approved by the Board of Internal Economy.

[Translation]

For reference purposes, you have received the document outlining the year-over-year changes from 2009-2010 to 2010-2011. You will note that the reductions are also highlighted in this document.

I will provide an overview of the budget increases and reductions along four major themes: budgets for members, House officers and presiding officers; security; services to members; and salaries.

[English]

I'd first like to start by providing an overview of the adjustments to the budgets for members, House officers, and presiding officers.

In November 2009 the board approved permanent funding of \$2.7 million for the travel points system. I should say this is additional funding for the travel points system. Travel under the travel points system is a non-discretionary statutory expense, as per the Parliament of Canada Act. As you know, this system ensures that all members have access to the same transportation resources, regardless of where their constituency is located.

Whereas the budget had remained unchanged since 2005-2006, travel expenditures charged to the travel points system have increased in recent years, reaching a point at which the current budget is insufficient to meet resource requirements. These increases are due to rising prices in the travel industry, which can be explained in part by a capacity constraint among airlines, surtaxes on airline charges, and increases in ground transportation costs.

Next, you will note the \$1.4 million reduction as a result of the board decision to freeze members' office budgets at 2009-2010 levels. Similarly, the main estimates reflect cost reductions of \$292,000 and \$18,000 further to the decisions to freeze House officers' and presiding officers' budgets, respectively.

Furthermore, the board has approved an amount of \$452,000 to cover the revised elector supplement allocations that are based on the final number of electors published by the Chief Electoral Officer. Following the October 2008 general election, the official electoral list showed that 74 ridings are eligible for either a new or a revised elector supplement. Members who represent densely populated constituencies receive an elector supplement that is added to the basic budget when there are 70,000 or more electors on the constituency's final list of electors.

Additionally, the main estimates allocate \$117,000 extra for an economic increase of 1.5% to the members' travel status expenses account. Similar to travel under the travel points system, the members' travel status expenses account is a non-discretionary statutory expense, as per the Parliament of Canada Act. The board approved this increase effective April 1, 2010, and it is in line with the Expenditure Restraint Act. It represents an increase of \$382 per member, bringing the account total to \$25,850. As you're well aware, members on travel status may charge their travel-related accommodation, meals, and incidental expenses to this account.

Moving now to the funding that is allocated to security requirements in the main estimates, essential funding of \$277,000 for the establishment of a dedicated IT security unit and expanded IT security throughout the parliamentary precinct was approved by the board in December 2008, and the funding was confirmed by the board at its March 22 meeting of this year.

I'd like to provide you with some background information on these initiatives.

In 2009-10, the newly formed IT security team was influential in driving security requirements into projects to enhance solutions through threat risk assessments. To reduce threats, existing tools were enabled and optimized to determine network anomalies, reducing the impact on the organization and loss of information. Additional funding is required to continue this essential work and support the security framework developed to protect the House of Commons IT infrastructure.

[Translation]

Information Services provides ongoing maintenance and support of security services in buildings and facilities throughout the Parliamentary Precinct and in other locations. Additional funding is required for the IT infrastructure to support security services in new buildings outside of the Parliamentary Precinct, including the Promenade Building, the Printing and Mailing Services facility and the Food Production facility.

The board is committed to continuing to provide the required funding to protect our IT infrastructure—given the essential work that it enables.

• (1110)

[English]

Let us now turn to the funding that the main estimates allocate to services to members.

In November the board approved a permanent funding increase of \$860,000 for the provision of high-speed constituency communication network services. The contract for this service was renewed in June 2007, and presented an opportunity to review requirements based on members' feedback.

The additional funding will allow for the delivery of enhanced services to members in their constituency offices and will enable access to members' Ottawa office data from constituency offices. Enhanced services will also include a higher level of security, uniform services for all members, and shorter timeframes for network installations.

[Translation]

As with the Travel Points System and the Members' Travel Point System and the Members' Travel Status Expenses Account, the Constituency Communication Network is non-discretionary item as per the Parliament of Canada Act.

[English]

Additionally, the main estimates reflect a net increase of \$11,000 in funding for the integrated procurement and contract management system. This project was initiated as planned; however, difficulties in obtaining qualified professional resources resulted in delays in the project. As a result, some of the work that had been planned for 2009-10 will be completed this year. Therefore, there was a reduction in funding of \$104,000 for the fiscal year 2009-10 and a re-profiling of \$115,000 from fiscal year 2009-10 to fiscal year 2010-11, resulting in the net increase of \$11,000.

Let us turn to the salary adjustments that are included in the main estimates. First you'll note that further to the board's March 22 meeting there is a revised funding increase of \$2.5 million for House administration employees, as opposed to the previously approved \$5 million. This funding will be used for the retroactive 1.5% salary increases prior to April 1, 2010, in accordance with the Expenditure Restraint Act.

Further to the board's decision, the remaining 1.5% salary increase for 2010-11 will be funded from the House administration's existing budgetary allocations. This board decision is consistent with the 2010 federal budget, which stipulates that Government of Canada departments must fund the 1.5% salary increases for their employees internally.

Next, the main estimates allocate an increase in funding of \$836,000 for salary adjustments for members, House officers, and presiding officers. This funding specifically pertains to increases prior to April 1, 2010 that are not affected by the 2010 federal budget. As I mentioned, members, House officers, and presiding officers' salaries have been frozen at the 2009-10 levels as of April 1, 2010.

You will also see that the main estimates allocate \$600,000 for a pension adjustment to the members of Parliament retirement compensation arrangements account. The cost to the House of Commons for contributions to members' pension plans is determined and managed by Treasury Board based on actuarial calculations. Treasury Board has estimated a \$3.2 million deficit in the retirement compensation arrangements account as of March 31, 2009.

Pursuant to the related legislation, the president of the Treasury Board has determined that the deficit should be amortized with interest in six installments over a seven-year period, beginning with the 2008-09 fiscal year. An annual amount of \$600,000 is therefore required until the 2013-14 fiscal year.

Finally, the main estimates provide \$1.2 million for employee benefit plans. This is a non-discretionary statutory expenditure that is based on the contribution rate set by the Treasury Board Secretariat. The rate of 17% that became effective on April 1, 2010, is consistent with the rate set for 2009-10. Employee benefit plan contributions cover costs to the employer for the public service superannuation plan, the Canada Pension Plan and the Quebec Pension Plan, death benefits, and the employment insurance account.

[Translation]

This concludes the overview of the House of Commons Main Estimates for fiscal year 2010-2011. I am confident that you will agree that these Main Estimates aptly represent the House of Commons' commitment to sound resource management.

The clerk and I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I recognize that you've brought your fantastic support staff with you today, and some of them may be asked to come forward and give us some answers too.

Since we're doing one hour, and then an hour with the Chief Electoral Officer, we'll do only five minutes each, if we can.

Madam Jennings, you're first.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Speaker, for your presence here today and the presentation you have just made.

I have several questions. The first question is with regard to the main estimates and whether or not the resources that are provided in the main estimates allow the House of Commons to attain its strategic goals to provide optimal services, etc. Are they sufficient? That's the first question.

The second question is are there any significant changes in terms of projects that were planned and did not move forward, or projects that were planned that have moved forward very well?

The third question has to do with West Block. We know that the members whose offices are located in West Block are expected to be moved out to other premises sometime over the summer months. We are now experiencing something of a heat wave, and I can tell you that there is absolutely no ventilation in my offices. We did some investigation. There appears to be some in the main corridors and on the ground floor, but not in the meeting rooms, not in many of the members' offices. This morning my office called Public Works three times to attempt to get some portable fans and were told that they would see what they could do. I then called before coming over here. The temperature had gotten up to 90 degrees in my office. I'm now at the point of considering sending my staff home because it is simply intolerable.

While I understand that services may have been cut because there are plans to move members, I believe that as long as people are

working there, resources have to be sufficient to ensure that the working conditions are acceptable.

That's my last question. What the heck is happening there, and why can't we get a response and get some portable fans for our offices?

• (1115)

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien (Clerk of the House of Commons, House of Commons):** Mr. Chairman, the Speaker suggests that I address the question of whether the main estimates are sufficient to see that the House of Commons meets its strategic objectives. I think they are. There is no question that we made a very serious effort as an administration. My senior management team made a very serious effort to come into line with the economic climate that everybody is facing, and we have been very rigorous in looking at our priorities.

We are most concerned with the continuation of excellent service to members. That is always our first priority. We are also experiencing, on the administration front, the question of the demographics of retirement, so succession planning on the administration front is something we obviously are planning for and are experiencing as time goes on. I would say this is leaving us in a good position.

We are going to continue to monitor very closely, and of course we are assisted in this by the fact that, as the Speaker's opening remarks made clear, many of the entitlements of members, for instance, for travel and for communications are statutory and therefore there are provisions for those to be increased as the need arises. We were very proud of the fact that we were able to manage the travel budget with 2005 resources up until now, but we couldn't go any further, so we've had to go ahead with the \$2.7 million increase there.

With regard to significant changes in our plans, I wouldn't say that has actually occurred. There might have been, again, a reordering of the plans so that we continue to put emphasis on member services, and there may be things that have slipped into a nice-to-do column from a we'll-get-right-on-it column, but that happens in any kind of time of economic downturn, such as the one we're facing.

With regard to the West Block and the long-term vision and plan, if I may say, the long term seems to be getting to the point of being the eternal-term vision and plan. We are proceeding with the plan to vacate the West Block.

There is, as far as I can tell, no excuse for the kind of situation you are living through now. I'll talk to the Sergeant-at-Arms. One of the things that sometimes happens with landlords generally and with Public Works in particular is they get ahead of themselves, and if we are supposed to vacate by the end of summer or early fall, they say we don't need to touch it now, while your people are slowly basting.

It has to be said that this heat wave took everybody by surprise, but we'll address that immediately.

• (1120)

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Imagine, hot and humid in Ottawa in the spring.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Go figure.

**The Chair:** Mr. Lukiwski, you're next.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Speaker Milliken and Ms. O'Brien, for being here.

To follow up on what Marlene was saying, I also had questions about West Block over the course of the ten years. I empathize with what Marlene was saying, because as members of Parliament we have a bit of a reprieve. We can always go down to the chamber, to the House of Commons, where it's air-conditioned. Our staff cannot. I know even in Centre Block, where we have portable air-conditioning units, it gets pretty oppressive. To be sitting in an area that has absolutely no ventilation, I agree with Marlene, if it were me, I'd be sending my staff home.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** They don't want to go.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** A good staffer is hard to come by.

Are there any contingency funding allocations for something like that? This is an extreme situation. It's a convergence of events that were unanticipated. Is there a supplementary or any kind of contingency budget that would allow us to get some portable machines of some sort in there as quickly as possible in cases like this?

I appreciate what you're saying, Audrey, that you're going to talk to the Sergeant-at-Arms and all that, but it has to be done quickly, obviously. These people are under a great deal of duress.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** If we were doing this ourselves, I think we would probably have that, but of course Public Works manages the building. We don't have a budget in our budget for reconstruction and all that sort of stuff. It's really a matter for the Department of Public Works to provide the space. That's the difficulty we face. As you know, I've expressed views on this before.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Yes. I appreciate that. However, I certainly support Marlene's point—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** So do I.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** —that whatever can be done should be done quickly. I don't know how many offices there are now in West Block, but if they're all going through the same situation, speed is of the essence.

My question is on West Block. I think it's a ten-year plan. This is undoubtedly a Public Works question, but you mentioned, Audrey, and I agree with you, the ten-year plan is turning out to be the eternal plan. How confident are you with your assessment, even though it does not come under your purview? What are your thoughts on this ten-year plan? Are we going to see this thing done within ten years, on time and within budget, in your opinion?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** I think that everything possible will be done to have it come in on time and on budget. One of the very great challenges that Public Works faces, in fairness to them, and that this whole renovation project faces, is that you're renovating heritage buildings but you're not renovating them to be museums. You're renovating them to be 2010 to 2075 or to 3000, God help us, working buildings. So you find things that cost more. I think it was something that was experienced, for instance, when they did the

renovations of the parliamentary library, and it ran them over the original budget.

That being said, I think the library has proved that renovations once launched can be done and done well, and can prove that the space, the plans that have been so long aborning, if you will, have been worth while.

Would I say I'm confident? I'm confident that once we get started on the West Block, yes. The Department of Public Works and Government Services has already made significant progress on the whole refurbishing of the Promenade Building. They basically gutted it and started over. The members' suites are ready now in the Promenade Building. They're working on the committee rooms there.

There's no question that it's going to be a long, hard slog. I think we're only going to see in the actual playing out of this the kinds of effects it's going to have on members' operations. And I don't say this to introduce gloom into the discussion, but I think we're all aware that it's not going to be as convenient to members. The Promenade Building is south of Wellington, and Number 1 Rideau is already very well advanced in terms of the renovations there to create committee rooms. They're going to be terrific spaces, but it's not going to be quite the same thing. A really major adjustment is going to be required, I think. We'll have to be attuned to that so we can then be able to come behind. For example, we're going to have much better technology in these interim committee rooms than we've had in this kind of room, but at the same time, we're going to have to be right behind to make sure things like the shuttle buses run that much more efficiently so people are not wasting time.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Monsieur Guimond.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Speaker, Ms. O'Brien, I apologize for not asking any questions on the air conditioning systems. I thought there were more crucially important questions concerning estimates. We're talking about \$440 million that comes to us from taxpayers.

My first question concerns the biggest increase, the increase in personnel expenditure. We see that the budget increases from \$310 million to \$320 million. How do you explain that difference of nearly \$10 million?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** What document are you referring to?

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** This is a table prepared by the library. It's entitled "Table 2 – Budgetary Main Estimates by Standing Object of Expenditure". In 2009-2010, we approved \$310 million. However, you are budgeting \$320 million for 2010-2011.

No doubt you would have preferred a question on air conditioning. It would have been easier for you to answer.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** I'm going to have to send you that information because I don't know how—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** In our documents, we only refer to \$5 million. That's on page 9.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** Is one of your many assistants capable of answering that?

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** This document was prepared by the library.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** While you're searching, I'm going to congratulate you with regard to a question I asked concerning succession planning two years ago. You've answered it in part.

Ms. Kennedy?

**Ms. Claire Kennedy (Chief Financial Officer, House of Commons):** Mr. Chairman, I have the breakdown of budgets for members, House officers and presiding officers. If additional information is required, I can provide it. With regard to members and House officers, the salary breakdown is approximately \$240 million. That also includes social benefits, which represent 17%. That figure is imposed by the Treasury Board. The rest concerns House administration.

• (1130)

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I understand that, but, since there is supposed to be a freeze on the salaries of members and political staff, I wonder how personnel expenditure could have increased from \$310 million to \$320 million. We're talking about an increase of \$9,621,000 here.

**Ms. Claire Kennedy:** The explanation is that a number of collective agreements were in effect on the House administration side. So there were arrears. The House had to comply with a 1.5% retroactive increase. I have the details on the collective agreements. In some cases, we went back two years because non-wage clauses were negotiated under the collective agreements. Those increases therefore represent arrears prior to April 1, 2010. In the federal budget, for the public service, arrears may be included in the Main Estimates.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** That's what the \$9 million represents?

**Ms. Claire Kennedy:** That's correct.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** All right.

Is there a hiring freeze? Do managers have directives they have to follow when replacing employees in each of their services? Are all employees who leave systematically replaced, or is there a reassessment following each departure?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** There isn't an official freeze.

However, I have asked each of the service chiefs to consider departures as an opportunity to reassess their needs. In some situations, for example, it might be more advantageous to reassign an employee elsewhere, or even to another service. Once again, that would be for the purpose of meeting needs and complying with priorities that are evolving.

I don't want to see systematic hiring to replace employees who leave. It must be determined whether we still need the position in question. We may need an employee, but elsewhere and for other duties. That's why I'm reluctant to tell you that there is a freeze. However, there is definitely a careful reassessment.

**Mr. Michel Guimond:** I have another question.

[English]

**The Chair:** I gave you an extra couple of minutes because of the time it took to find some of those answers.

Ms. Davies.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you very much.

I was just looking at the two columns as well—the one that we got today from the Library of Parliament and the one that you've submitted—and I don't know whether the difference is that you've included the supplementary estimates that came out for the previous fiscal year whereas maybe the Library of Parliament wasn't including those. I don't know, but there is a difference in the totals.

The question I want to focus on is security and building management overall. In the estimates there is some reference to changes for security, but that has more to do with IT. In terms of security services overall, I wonder if you can tell the committee whether you foresee that there will be changes forthcoming at some later date in terms of either the level of security services or the way they're conducted, and whether we can anticipate anything there.

In terms of building management, ever since I've been here there has been a lot of discussion about people moving out of West Block, and I guess it is finally going to happen this year. But in terms of the precinct overall, I think it's a very important question with regard to, as you made reference, the long-term-vision plan that just goes on forever and ever. I wonder if you could give us your perspective, or the Speaker's perspective, of what needs to happen in order for us to have a long-term-vision plan that we will actually be able to adhere to, that actually does get implemented and that we don't see being put off year after year while these buildings continue to deteriorate. They are national treasures, and we have a responsibility to make sure they are kept in good order historically speaking and also in functioning order. As you've noted already, that's a big challenge. But I wonder if you have any thoughts about what we need to do to address that.

• (1135)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I have concerns about the administration of the buildings here, over which we have very limited control, as you know. The Board of Internal Economy is not responsible. We're technically tenants in these buildings, so our say in the way things are run is quite limited.

In my view, we ought to have a new statutory authority that would run the buildings—and I've advocated for this for quite some time, as you're aware—and that would be responsible to the two houses of Parliament. That means maintenance, operation, and all that sort of stuff, and revitalization as necessary. I think it could be done far more effectively and quickly if we had somebody who was responsible only for these buildings and for looking after them, instead of shifting us to different locations all over the place.

We need to create a Parliament Hill complex that is operated for the benefit of Parliament and that makes the place work as such, and I think it could be done much more quickly and efficiently. The ongoing maintenance, which is important in old buildings of this kind, could be done on a regular basis instead of our waiting for 20, 30, or 40 years and then, when the thing is falling down, saying that it's time to fix it.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Perhaps I can address the security issues and questions that Madam Davies raised.

I think we've made significant progress in the professionalization of the security service at the House of Commons and in the coordination of security on the Hill. The creation of the master security plan and the master security plan office has made a big difference in the dialogue among the different services—the RCMP, the City of Ottawa police, and the two forces within Parliament.

There's a subcommittee of the Board of Internal Economy, and a subcommittee of the Committee of Internal Economy at the Senate. The Senate's is looking at security and accommodation; ours at the House of Commons is looking at security. They will be meeting to look at emerging issues.

There has been some talk that if the authority for the House, for the Parliament Buildings, were to be transferred to Parliament, security might fall under that umbrella, and that would obviously make a difference.

One of the things the Sergeant-at-Arms has been looking very carefully at is that the move of parliamentary functions like committees south of Wellington means greater involvement by the Ottawa police. So we're looking at those kinds of security concerns very carefully, because there might well be an impact on members' operations.

A meeting of senior security officials was held two weeks ago, and we talked about these various issues. So we're hoping there will be further progress on it—notably, for example, the change in the vehicle inspection facility. It has been promised for a decade now, and we're still waiting. We're hoping it will be relocated and will represent a step up in the seriousness of that exercise.

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Thank you.

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

Monsieur Proulx.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you Mr. Milliken and Ms. O'Brien, for being here this morning.

Since we are here mainly to discuss the Main Estimates, I would like to know certain things.

First, concerning the evolution of the 10% outside members' constituencies, the abolition of the 10% grouped together, and other measures that the Board of Internal Economy has taken to limit collective mailings—not the parliamentary newsletters and so on, but mailings done by members in hundreds of thousands of envelopes—what savings might all that represent?

Second, with regard to all these changes that are imposed on us by Public Works and Government Services Canada—whether concerning 1 Wellington Street or the Promenade Building—what additional security costs do they represent? There are going to be security problems. So we're going to have to increase security services, not those provided by the City of Ottawa, but those provided by the House of Commons in particular.

There will be additional transportation costs. We're now leasing different coloured buses on the outside—white buses that we'll have to use for a number of years. How much will that represent per year?

In addition, how much can this anomaly in the administration of our work force by Public Works Canada represent? Here I'm talking about the new kitchen that I've had the privilege of visiting—just talking about it makes me hungry. That requires one or more refrigerated trucks. I'm told that the Public Works Canada people have imposed their choice of vehicle whereas they could have been identical vehicles to those of the House of Commons fleet. So that represents expenditures and additional suppliers.

Lastly, Mr. Milliken, I would like you to give us a quick little course on the next steps that are to be taken to privatize—let's put it that way—the Parliament buildings and bring the management of those buildings to Parliament.

We have four minutes left.

• (1140)

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Indeed, to abide by—

[English]

**The Chair:** It's nice how you have that time.

[Translation]

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** —the remaining time, I suggest we provide you with the answers to those various questions in writing, that is the figures you are looking for and what has been saved, and so on.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** That's not a problem for me, Ms. O'Brien. However, there are some journalists here who would be very interested in hearing the answers. We will provide them to them.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Yes, that's it; that could be done. That nevertheless covers a certain—

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Yes, I understand.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** That's, in a way, a backdrop.

As for the next steps toward privatization—let's say it that way—I believe the Speaker could address that topic since he is its champion.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I have a lot to say on that subject.

This bill would obviously be a government bill since it would involve changing the management system for these buildings, which would no doubt require another position to be created for someone who could see to it, things like that. As you know, that kind of bill would require a royal recommendation. So it would be a government bill, or come from a member with whom the government agrees—in that case, that member could introduce it. However, it would have to be a bill coming from the government.



I know that talks are underway on the subject, particularly within this committee, but also within the Board of Internal Economy. I hope they will continue and that we will soon have a solution.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** You have about 30 seconds, if you think you can....

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** It's okay. We saved it.

**The Chair:** All right.

Mr. Albrecht.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of different questions. I'll give all three and then possibly allow you time to answer all three of them.

On page 6, Mr. Speaker, you talked about the IT security. One of the issues we often face is that when there's new technology available, many months or sometimes years pass before we can use that technology on the Hill because of security concerns. A new technology that came to light for me recently, with the recent banning of cellphones while you're driving in Ontario, was a little piece of technology called the iLane, which actually reads your e-mails to you while you're driving. You don't have to look at it or pull over to look at it. I'm wondering if there's been any progress made in perhaps the earlier adoption of these new technologies.

Then on your point on page 8, where you talked about how the members in our constituency offices will have access to the same data that we have here in Ottawa—and I think this has been a frustration that's been expressed around this table for some time—do we have any idea as to the timeline for when that might be available?

Finally, I have a follow-up of a question that was asked earlier about the fact that we're going to have buses off the parliamentary precinct. Will that impact our ability as members to get here in time for votes if there are traffic concerns across the way? Will the Ottawa police be involved? How will that whole piece fall into place as well?

• (1145)

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I've never heard of this technology, so I'll let somebody else answer that.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** One of the continual challenges that's faced by information technology and our chief information officer, Louis Bard, whom I've asked to come to the table, is this whole question of new applications coming on the market and so forth. He'll be in a better position to answer that, as well as on the timeline for the constituency communication network.

With regard to the time for votes, I should say that the Sergeant-at-Arms and I are meeting on a semi-regular basis with the whips to look at issues related to the moves to Promenade Building and the different committee rooms. What I've been suggesting to date is that we wait and see how it works, not least of all because you've got the situation where most votes are predictable; they're deferred to a certain time. So if you get a situation where, for instance, committee clerks are asked to remind their chairs that there is a deferred vote that night, then people can leave in good time to get to the chamber.

The other thing, of course, is because the chief government whip and the chief opposition whip come in together to indicate that they're ready to take a vote, that will allow for saving time. We will monitor it very closely, and it may be that the Standing Orders would have to be changed to give a little bit more time. But given the fact that most votes are deferred, I think that should actually work. And if it's not a deferred vote, then it comes at a time of day when there isn't the usual kind of traffic jam; this is not at the end of the day.

That's all I would have to say on that, but perhaps Louis could talk to you about the....

**Mr. Louis Bard (Chief Information Officer, House of Commons):** Very shortly, based on your specific question, sir, in terms of interfaces using the car for mobile device, we've assessed a number of solutions. Members are using a variety of solutions today. I think the Bloc was one of the first to introduce new technologies for these kinds of devices, and the security aspect is not as extensive as when you're trying to access the internal network. In your particular situation, I would be very pleased to look at what you were considering. Normally we have a very quick turnaround time for this kind of question or evaluation. I will follow up with you after and make sure we understand your requirements.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Okay. And on the matter of constituency access, what is the timeframe?

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** What is the turnaround time? Is it a week, a month, a year?

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** That was my question in terms of the constituency access.

**Mr. Louis Bard:** As you know, we have quite an extensive offering right now across Canada for every constituency office, and also we launched around three months ago an extensive pilot with around 20 members of Parliament in terms of allowing access at distant airports, when you travel from cottage, from home, and this and that. We've been very, very successful in launching that project over the last month or two.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** As a member who's not part of that, how soon could I possibly expect to have access?

**Mr. Louis Bard:** Ideally, the plan was for us to complete the pilot and go to deployment as soon as September.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Great. Thank you.

Monsieur Guimond or Madame De Bellefeuille.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much, Ms. O'Brien.

I'd like to go back to the personnel budget. Unless I'm mistaken, the \$9 million difference is not an increase, but rather back pay that was not paid. It can also be said that the real frozen amount is \$320,109,000.

I have a specific question to ask concerning pay equity. We know that the government has chosen to make it a negotiable right. It's strange to say that because a right is not supposed to be negotiated, but it is acquired.

I would like to understand a little. With regard to your personnel expenditure, how did you decide to negotiate this pay equity matter with your personnel? Is it an issue that poses a problem? Have you conducted your analysis of what the pay equity file might cost? Have you analyzed the file in light of the recent decisions the government has made in the matter?

• (1150)

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Mr. Chairman, through you, I must say that we have not been particularly affected by the government's decision. Consequently, a few years ago, in view of our pay equity concerns, we began a major classification project by conducting a thorough review of all classifications, of all positions at the House of Commons, to ensure that, in the classification method and in the points given for various aspects of a position, the pay equity issue was taken into consideration regarding men and women.

Under this classification system which is still in effect, we have been able to ensure that the infrastructure of our positions respects pay equity, and we rely on that.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** So you were visionaries, and you didn't have to make any corrections in other departments?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Let's say we were as lucky as we were visionary. We saw that there was really a fundamental problem that had to be more fundamentally corrected than we had thought at the outset. That's why we reviewed the classification.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Was that reclassification conducted under your guidance, Ms. O'Brien?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** No. I worked on it, but it was under my predecessor's guidance.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, could you give us a brief explanation of the savings you are achieving and that we find under the heading Professional and Special Services? There is a saving of \$306,000. Perhaps you could give us some idea on that point.

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I wrote that in my remarks?

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Would you like to have the table that we received?

[English]

**The Chair:** It's in the library documents.

[Translation]

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** I think the library's figures are organized differently from ours. It's hard for me to find them.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Perhaps our chief financial officer, Ms. Kennedy, could—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** Public Services... No, that's not it.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** It's Professional and Special Services. What does that include, and what justifies the...?

**Ms. Claire Kennedy:** Mr. Chairman, that heading includes, first of all, professional consultation services. For example, there is the

potential implementation of various computer systems. There's also speech-writing and thus everything that falls under professional services.

Under this heading, we also find training, which includes professional training services, courses, etc. This is a heading that will traditionally vary from year to year, where there will be a distinct difference. There are a number of projects in addition to that. For example, we offered training when Vista was implemented. That project has been completed, and other projects are being added.

So this isn't necessarily a single project, but these are projects for which funding was granted for a given period of time. Funding has been withdrawn and new initiatives are being added.

Earlier there was a relevant question concerning computer security where professional resources have been allocated for a period of time. Then, when the implementation is complete, the purchase of licences can appear under this heading as well.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** There's also a heading called Purchased repair and maintenance. These are also subcontractors and contract employees.

Pardon me, Mr. Chairman, this is fascinating.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

• (1155)

[English]

**The Chair:** Sorry. I even gave you extra time.

Monsieur Godin.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** That's part of what budget? For example, if we consider outside security, the RCMP has had to increase security since people climbed on top of the buildings. I see they have more cars, but who's paying for that?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** That's in the RCMP budget.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** The RCMP doesn't have a money-making machine; who's paying for the RCMP?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** The RCMP draws on the main and supplementary estimates necessary to—

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Does Parliament pay a portion of it?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** No.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** At no time.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** No.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** So everything that goes on outside doesn't come out of Parliament's budget.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** That's correct.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** The addition of RCMP officers won't be corrected later and be part of the—

**Hon. Peter Milliken:** There could be some changes in their estimates for that, but it's the RCMP that has to do it, not us.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** They're the ones who will do it. Earlier, if I correctly understood... Where do we stand with regard to the West Block?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** We're still waiting for progress on the Promenade Building in particular for the committee rooms. Work on the Promenade Building is progressing very well. We're assessing the stage the work will have reached by the summer adjournment to determine whether we can proceed to relocate members as planned.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** In fact, there are two groups: the committees and the members.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Exactly.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** With regard to members, is work advancing—because we don't have to do both at the same time?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Indeed, except that there are nevertheless repercussions for those who will occupy the building. For example, if the building is transferred to us, and the members move in, and work on the committee rooms continues at the same time, the move could take place if it's just a matter of finishing the committees' business. However, this is more a strategic matter than anything else. If we haven't made enough progress on the committees issue, we may have to review matters.

I really have every hope that the committee rooms will be ready and that we'll be able to proceed as planned a few months ago.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** As you said a little earlier, the same is true for the length of committee meetings. It's quite difficult even here in Parliament. If a meeting in the West Block finishes at 11:00 a.m. and the next meeting starts here at 11:00 a.m., everyone will arrive late. This will be even worse. Will we have to amend the House Standing Orders or merely the committee by-laws?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** I think that could be done by amending the committee by-laws. We could also change committee meeting times; for example, the committees could agree to finish their business 10 or 15 minutes earlier in order to allow members time to move.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I'd like to talk about a subject close to my heart, and that's the subject of people who work in this building.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** I would have been disappointed if you hadn't raised that question.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I wouldn't have spoken if it had been resolved, but that's not the case.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** I think we've made some progress.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Could you tell me about the progress that has been made?

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Can you tell me?

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** The problem is that, when there is a prorogation or an election, employees, especially those in the cafeteria, are sent home. They haven't accumulated enough time to be eligible for employment insurance benefits. They have no wages; they have nothing.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** I know and I apologize. I didn't want to suggest that I take that lightly.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** You're familiar with the problem.

● (1200)

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** The problem is that there isn't enough work to hire all those people on a full-time basis. We know there isn't enough work; consequently, they are there on a part-time basis. Unfortunately, when decisions are made such as the decision to prorogue, that no one has seen coming, those people suffer as a result.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** That happens at the fish plants. When I entered Parliament, I didn't think that happened, but it happens here too.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** Well, I believe that—

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** There was a time when you had to try to find another system in order to retain them and give them something to do.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** We're reviewing the options. I believe we've pretty much looked at all aspects of the matter, that we've tried to determine whether these people can be deployed elsewhere to do something else. It's very difficult. For example, the people who work in restaurant services are quite specialized. It's hard for them to find something else, but we're continuing. We haven't ruled that out.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I hope you aren't angry that I ask you that question every year.

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** No because I know you're concerned about it and I understand very well. I know that, even if there is a prorogation, for example, that no one sees coming, people have mortgages to pay and lives to live. I understand absolutely.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I simply want to emphasize that working in Parliament isn't always easy.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

**Ms. Audrey O'Brien:** I agree with you on that point.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you. I think that ends our questioning today.

I would like to thank the Speaker and the Clerk of the House for coming today, and their crackerjack staff for attending with them and answering our questions.

The question I have to ask is shall vote 5 of the House of Commons under Parliament carry?

PARLIAMENT

House of Commons

Vote 5—Program expenditures.....\$290,992,000

(Vote 5 agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report vote 5 of the House of Commons under Parliament, less the amount voted in interim supply, to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for coming to help us today. We'll suspend.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

We have the Chief Electoral Officer, Monsieur Mayrand, with us today.

We'll give you a chance to deliver some opening comments. Before we do, you sent us a letter about this committee meeting you on June 17 at Elections Canada. We had a great visit there a year ago, and we've said that we'll visit you again. We thought we'd let you know. We'll be happy to spend our committee time that day on a road trip. It's just a short one. Thank you very much.

I'll let you go ahead with your opening statement. Please introduce your guests to us, and then we'll have a couple of rounds of questions.

Committee, I'd like to have about five minutes of your time at the end so we can do a little committee business. We'll go almost to the top of the hour, but I think we'll stop just before then, if we can.

So we'll have an opening statement and then questions from members. But before we start, the chair calls vote 15 under the Privy Council, and now we have witnesses to that effect.

Monsieur Mayrand.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Mayrand (Chief Electoral Officer, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer):** I am pleased to have the opportunity to appear before the committee today to discuss the 2010-2011 Main Estimates for my office. I am accompanied today by Gisèle Côté, who, until recently, was Chief Financial Officer at Elections Canada; Brian Berry, the Acting Chief Financial Officer; and, lastly, Hughes St-Pierre, Senior Director, Strategy, Planning and Evaluation.

As members of the committee know, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer is funded by and operates under two separate budget authorities. The first is an annual parliamentary appropriation, which includes the salaries of permanent full-time staff. For these Main Estimates, our appropriation is \$29.6 million—representing the salaries of 404 full-time employees. It is this component that the committee is considering for approval today.

The second is the statutory authority that draws directly from the Consolidated Revenue Fund. It funds all the other Elections Canada expenditures, such as the costs of preparing for and conducting electoral events, maintenance of the National Register of Electors, quarterly political party allowances, and public information and education programs. Two other budget authorities are also statutory: the salary of the Chief Electoral Officer and the required contributions to employee benefit plans. Our total statutory draw is \$92.2 million for this year; this excludes the costs of conducting electoral events.

The funds are allocated to Elections Canada's four key programs. The first concerns electoral event delivery, political financing, compliance and enforcement. The second concerns electoral event readiness and improvements. The third is for public education and

information, and support for stakeholders. Lastly, there is electoral boundaries redistribution.

As members of the committee are aware, the most recent federal budget imposes fiscal restraint on government departments for three years. This has an impact on Elections Canada's appropriation, which covers the salaries of our permanent staff.

We will absorb this year's salary increase resulting from collective agreements. This is currently estimated at \$450,000. For the subsequent two fiscal years, my agency will not be funded for any salary increases arising from future collective agreements.

Even though the 2010 budget measures do not apply to Elections Canada's statutory authority, my agency will adopt the spirit of budget restraint by applying a cap to its day-to-day operating expenditures. At the same time, Elections Canada will seek to minimize the impact on the services we provide to electors and political entities.

I would now like to briefly describe our priorities for the current year. In 2010-2011, Elections Canada will focus on four over-arching priorities: these are, first, improvements for electors; second, recommended amendments to the Canada Elections Act; third, services to political parties; and, lastly, internal improvements.

With regard to electors, as you know, my office returned to readiness in the fall of 2009 following the 40th general election in October 2008. We will maintain readiness but have shifted our attention to pursuing a series of administrative improvements to the conduct of electoral events. These improvements flow from our strategic plan and the results of our evaluations of the last general election.

• (1210)

[English]

The improvements include continuing the development of an online registration system, to be implemented by October 2011; conducting a pilot project to test technology to assist voters with visual or physical disabilities in casting their ballots independently; developing new creative content for our advertising campaign aimed at youth; adding the voter information card to the list of pieces of identification authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer in order to address challenges some groups of electors face in proving their address prior to voting; improving our methods and approaches for election officer recruitment and training; and finally, exploring ways to reduce barriers faced by some groups of electors. As we pursue these initiatives, we will see the active engagement of stakeholders, including members of this committee and the advisory committee of political parties.

Our second priority for the fiscal year is my report on recommendations for amendments to the Canada Elections Act, which I intend to submit to the Speaker of the House in mid-June. My report will seek to respond to changing needs of Canadians by recommending measures aimed at ensuring greater accessibility, transparency, and efficiency of the electoral process.

Our third priority is to continue improving our services to political entities. In particular, we intend to introduce further measures, such as online tutorials, to assist political entities in understanding regulatory requirements and to promote compliance with the requirements of the act.

Finally, my agency is moving forward with internal improvements. Over the next fiscal year we will implement the first full year of our new human resources strategy, with a particular focus on the professional development of our employees. As well, my office will be analyzing the conclusions of a recent A-base review, an exercise aimed at aligning the agency resources with its highest priorities. We also intend to increase our emphasis on working more closely with our provincial and territorial electoral partners to improve elector services, reduce duplication, and identify opportunities for cost savings.

As part of the upgrade of our information technology infrastructure, we will complete the relocation of a data centre to a modern PWGST facility and continue our efforts to migrate our field application to a new web-based platform. This is required for Elections Canada to deliver new services such as e-registration.

As in the past year, I will continue to consult the advisory committee of political parties on key issues. Last December I consulted a working group of the advisory committee regarding my upcoming recommendations and report. On April 26, we held a second session on e-registration with the working group. Our next meeting is scheduled for June 21 and 22. I also look forward to hosting the members of this committee at Elections Canada on June 17 to discuss our accessibility agenda.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My colleagues and I would be pleased to answer any questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I like to tell the witnesses that since this meeting tends to take place from eleven until one o'clock, some of our members, including me, will try to eat lunch while you're here. It's not that we care less about you; it's just that sometimes our day gets very compressed. I apologize for eating in front of you.

Madam Jennings, you're first with questions.

[Translation]

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Mayrand, thanks to you and your team.

When you recently appeared before this committee, we asked you how much the continued litigation between Elections Canada and the Conservative Party on what's called the in-and-out scheme was costing Elections Canada. If I'm not mistaken, you answered by sending a letter to the Chair stating that this issue had cost around \$600,000 to date. I may be mistaken on the figures, but you gave them to us.

I recently read that you, as Chief Electoral Officer, and the Conservative Party had instituted an appeal from the decision. We understand the reason why the Conservative Party appealed part of the judgment. If that part stands, a number of Conservative members

or former Conservative candidates could be subject to criminal charges of exceeding the electoral spending limits allowed by law.

I'd like to know whether you have made another estimate of the cost of the appeal to Elections Canada. That was my first question.

My second question concerns the pilot projects or your projects concerning both electronic voting and electronic voter registration. I'd like to know whether studies have already been conducted showing that electronic voting can increase voter turn-out. Then, how much will that pilot project cost?

Lastly, with regard to on-line registration, what studies have been conducted to show that there may be a security system to ensure that this does not become an instrument for fraud?

• (1215)

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** The estimate of the cost of the appeal has not been done. That will depend on the various applications that may be filed and the time periods granted by the court.

I simply want to point out that, as of March 31, the cost of the civil suit to Elections Canada was in the order of \$359,000.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** My figures were wrong; I apologize for that.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** With regard to electronic voting, there have been a number of studies, which were not commissioned by Elections Canada, that examined the impact of on-line voting on voter participation. The results are not necessarily very conclusive, but it appears it had a very positive effect on voter participation at the municipal level. Some municipalities in Canada have used on-line voting, and they have observed a certain increase in voter participation.

I also know that Switzerland conducts its referenda on-line and has indeed observed an increase in voter participation. However, there is no uniform finding across all systems that use on-line voting.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Does that say whether the increase was 5%, 10% or something else?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It depends on the territories, but it's a several percentage point increase. Obviously, one must always be cautious in this matter because all kinds of other factors may also have contributed to the voter participation.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** What is the cost of the electronic voting pilot program?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** For electronic voting, we're still in the very preliminary, even very early stages. This year, a budget of \$475,000 was allocated mainly to continue research and to explore the various systems that have been used in other territories.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Thank you.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** This is a project that will not see the light of day in pilot project form before 2013. However, the work is starting now, and when we're ready for a pilot project, before we can go ahead, we will require this committee's authorization.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Exactly perfect. Excellent.

Mr. Reid, you're up.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As always, thank you to Mr. Mayrand for being here.

I want to start with a brief comment. I'm sure it was just a mistake in her statement, but I heard the word "criminal". I'm sure Madam Jennings meant some other word, because of course this is—

• (1220)

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Penal.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** What I heard in my earpiece was *criminel*. At any rate, if she's withdrawn that, I'm good.

**Hon. Marlene Jennings:** Through the chair, I meant to say "penal".

**The Chair:** You have the floor.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** It sure isn't what it sounded like to my ears. Be that as it may, I'm glad she corrected that.

I want to ask you about the.... You're drawing from \$29.6 million for, among other things, the salaries of 404 full-time employees. I'm not sure, but does your annual report state the numbers of full-time employees, and do previous reports state that? I just wonder if I could find publicly some kind of list or record of the number of people employed by Elections Canada over the past decade, let's say.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Not in these formats, but it's a table we could produce.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Would you be able to do one, let's say for the past ten years, and submit it to the clerk, just so we could get an idea of who the folks are, and if it's possible, some kind of breakdown as to which aspect of the numerous activities you're involved in that these folks have been involved in over that time? It would give us a sense of where you're develop—

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** We can align it by key programs, as I discussed briefly.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** That would be fantastic. Thank you.

The next thing I wanted to ask you about is electronic voting. I was at a seminar at Carleton University, which had been arranged partly by the university and partly by you, about two months ago, maybe three now, and one of the things discussed, as you mentioned, was the Swiss experience with electronic voting and referendums. There was also the Estonian example, which seemed to me, recognizing of course the very small size of Estonia compared with Canada in terms of both geography and population.... Nevertheless, that seemed to me to be the closest parallel.

Having looked at the presentation that had been given on the Estonian situation, I was wondering what you thought were the lessons that could be drawn in terms of whether or not we'd actually be able to apply this in Canada. A thought that occurred to me was that the privacy laws must be different in Estonia from here. I'd be interested in your thoughts on that.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** There are matters of privacy, security, and I think Estonia also had a national identity card, which we don't have in Canada. Obviously, the integrity and auditability of the process are going to be key in anything we do.

I should maybe also mention that i-voting, the way we're looking at it right now, is meant to address a particular group of electors who are currently facing challenges in voting. We're thinking of the military who are based overseas; we're thinking of Canadians abroad, who depend on the postal vote, which, depending on the service.... In the last general election we received 3,000 mail ballots too late to be counted. We're also thinking about disabled electors, who have serious challenges if they're not mobile, who could take advantage of a service like that.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Effectively, electronic voting would most likely to be introduced in a stick. If I think of Canada as being sliced up vertically by ridings, if you take a cross-section a different way, across, you might find that one sector—visually disabled voters, say, or people who are forced to stay at home because of their health—would be the first ones to be included in electronic voting. Would you introduce it that way?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** That's our thinking currently. Before we launch into a universal i-voting system, I think we need to test it with discrete groups who can be identified, can be located, and can be traced, so that we experiment to find out how well it's working.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Would you be able to do that in some by-elections first?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Ideally, we'd like to do it in a by-election after 2013. I think that would be the proper way to go on this.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Would you be giving us any advance notice beforehand?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Definitely. As I mentioned earlier, it requires permission from this committee to proceed. As we move throughout this journey, we will certainly continue to involve the committee. That's why we invited members to attend this conference at Carleton. As we progress on this, I plan to keep the committee fully apprised of our progress and challenges.

• (1225)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Reid.

Madame DeBellefeuille.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Mr. Mayrand, and welcome to all of your team.

I also had the opportunity to attend the symposium you organized in cooperation with Carleton University. I believe Mr. Reid and I were the only committee members at that very interesting meeting. However, as regards electronic voting, somewhat as that's done in Estonia, I was not convinced, and I still have some reservations in the matter. I believe it would be a radical change from the way we vote in Canada. I'm not sure either that we're ready for that kind of change.

Furthermore, the last time you appeared, you explained to me your vision of remote electronic voting. At the time, we wondered whether electronic voting might encourage young people to vote more readily. You answered that we could install terminals in the universities. Young people studying elsewhere than in their constituencies could vote at their universities. To do so, we would use the voters lists. Young people could therefore vote on their campuses.

When you gave Mr. Reid your answers, you didn't touch on that possibility. Is this still being considered? Have you ruled it out? Or else is it still moving forward?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** We haven't ruled it out. It's another option, another additional possibility, but it isn't really on-line voting. It would be more a kind of electronic voting that would make it possible to take ballot boxes to where voters are, whether we're talking about young people or ordinary citizens. It means people don't have to go to a location that, in some instances, is less convenient for certain electors. This is quite a fundamental change, which essentially consists in taking the equivalent of a polling station to where electors are. It could be in people's work places. For example, in real estate complexes, there are thousands of people who, on a break during the day, could take the opportunity to vote.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Is that part of your pilot project, in your 2013 strategy? Is it still too soon?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It's a little early. The next demonstration—we'll talk about it on June 17, during the visit—is designed to introduce a technology that enables persons with disabilities to vote independently, with no assistance. It's a technology called sip-and-puff. It enables a tetraplegic person to vote independently.

There's one issue in particular that we'll be dealing with in the case of blind people and persons coping with another type of disability. The idea will be to be able to deploy this equipment where these people are. The technology exists, and I think we could test it, with the committee's approval, in the next by-election. Based on that experience, we'll learn more about it. We'll know if we explore the possibility of having voting terminals across the country. We'll get a better idea through this technology.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** How many people do you estimate there are in Canada who could benefit from this new accessibility equipment? You've no doubt established a profile.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Based on certain data, there are millions of electors who suffer from various forms of disability.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** They could use—

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** They could benefit from this technology. The problem is that they are scattered across the country. How do we go about deploying the technology closest to where they're located? We've conducted a study. At one point, we were asked to explore the possibility of publishing ballots in braille, and the lists... One option was to publish a number of documents that way.

However, we discovered that not only the printing and distribution costs, but also the necessary logistics to produce the ballots in braille across the country... We thought it was impossible, given the time limits prescribed by law. That's why we started exploring other technologies.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Do I have a little time left, Mr. Chairman?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

• (1230)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** With regard to the elector's card, you say you'll probably add it as a piece of identification. So it would be a second piece of photo ID?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** You need either a photo ID card, including name and address, such as a driver's licence—that's fine, one card is enough— or—

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** We could add the elector's card.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** —if you don't have a driver's licence, you can present two authorized pieces of ID. There's a whole list of authorized pieces—there are 44 of them. We would add that card as the 45th piece which could be used to prove the identity of a number of seniors who find this difficult. So that would enable them to vote.

In addition, young people who are studying outside their constituency often have very few documents. The documents they have don't establish their place of residence during the academic year. So some groups would benefit from that addition to the list. It's the same thing for aboriginal people, who have few documents enabling them to identify themselves.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Godin, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** This electronic system you talked about earlier could help workers in Fort McMurray.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** They wouldn't be required to go and vote during their break. In fact, under the act, don't they have three or four hours to go and vote?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Three hours, but later on we'll have to examine the provisions of the act. If we conduct a pilot project and the demonstration is decisive, I'll have to come back before the committee to propose amendments to the act to reflect the introduction of this new technology.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** The time allotted so people can vote is taken out of business hours. That doesn't mean there is a polling station in the cafeteria. It troubles me to hear you say that. It would already be a lot to put the machine there. You don't walk around with ballot boxes. However, it remains to be seen how we go about making this secure before the vote takes place.

France has electronic voting, for example. However, they also have normal voting, like what we have today. It's a mix of the two, and the individual can choose one of the two ways of voting.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** In most countries—and this would be our approach as well—they add an equivalent way of voting. I don't think we can consider withdrawing or abandoning the traditional ways of voting in the short term. The idea is to offer another option that best addresses electors' needs and that best lends itself to the circumstances.

A lot of tests are currently being conducted, particularly in the United States, where certain states have put an enormous emphasis on postal voting. I believe that 80% of ballots are cast by postal voting in one of the American states.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** In the United States, there was already talk about the means that were used once to vote in California.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, there were some problems with the equipment.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** It was with electronic voting.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, and that's why we have to be very cautious when we examine these options and solutions.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Since then, have they continued with electronic voting in the United States?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes. The U.S. government has invested \$2.7 billion, I believe, to improve the technology. This option is being considered as a solution for adjusting to electors' needs. As I mentioned, our society is aging, and people have all kinds of physical barriers that mean they have special needs. It would be easier for them to exercise their right to vote using these new technologies.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Although they say we have the technological means in 2010, we still wonder whether they are appropriate. That's the problem.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, the technological means do exist, but they are recent and are constantly developing. We haven't had the Internet or e-mail for that long. Today we are so used to it that we wouldn't do without it. However, if we went back 10 years, I'm not sure we'd make that much use of e-mail, BlackBerries, etc. Technology is evolving very quickly, and we have gotten to a point—

•(1235)

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Ten years ago, we were able to answer an e-mail one week after receiving it. Today, we answer it the day before we get it.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes. Thanks to wireless technology, which has become widespread, it's estimated that we can guarantee coverage of virtually the entire country, of more than 95% of Canada. Opportunities are there, and Elections Canada's objective in the coming years is to explore those opportunities, to identify them and to seize the ones that best enable us to exercise the right to vote and that also best guarantee the integrity of the electoral process.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Where do we stand on the use of the voter information card as a piece of identification in an election? Will we need a bill to change that?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** No, it's an administrative improvement.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Who decides?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It's the Chief Electoral Officer.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** It's you, Mr. Chief Electoral Officer.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** I won't do it without consulting you. Moreover, it will be one of the points we'll discuss on June 17 when you come and visit us. We'll tell you about one possible approach to using the voter information card.

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Thank you very much. I'm leaving you because I have to attend another meeting.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Proulx.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Mr. Mayrand. Good morning to your team, and thank you for being with us this morning.

You got my interest, Mr. Mayrand, when you introduced Ms. Gisèle Côté by saying that, until recently, she was the senior finance officer at Elections Canada.

What did you mean exactly? Did she receive a promotion, a raise, additional duties? You don't have to answer, Mr. Mayrand.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It really happened very recently, not even two weeks ago.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** All right, that's fine.

Earlier you talked about wireless technology in Canada. In what year are you aiming to use it?

I just want to clarify the fact that there are a lot of regions in Canada, particularly in rural Canada, that didn't benefit from the Liberal policy that high-speed technology should be accessible across the country. This wireless technology project might be half-baked.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** With regard to wireless technology, following the recent by-elections, we first tested telephony in the offices of our returning officers. There are 440 of them scattered across the country, even in quite remote regions. We provide full coverage with wireless technology for each of the returning officers' offices.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** We're talking about telephony?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Exactly.

However, there are now technologies that make it possible to accelerate data transfer. That's the direction where Elections Canada is headed. In the next few years, the returning officers' offices will essentially operate from a web base currently centralized in Ottawa. Approximately 90% of communications will be wireless.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** When you say in the years to come, does that mean two, four, six years?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** For returning officers, the next general election will necessarily be conducted wirelessly. I'm not going to go into the details, but there are various methods for boosting the signals and increasing data transfer speeds. For example, the electoral lists revision that continues during the election will be conducted on a web base and wirelessly. I would say that, within five years, that should be the way we do things.



**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** All right. To be honest with you, since we're talking about expenditures, dollars, etc., I would have liked to talk to you this morning about certain changes to election procedure that might result in savings. I'm coming back to that tiresome example of shredding, which is centralized. It is Ottawa companies or your offices that take charge of that, whereas it could be the offices of the returning officers in each constituency. Perhaps there might be other opportunities to save money rather than centralize everything.

• (1240)

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Certain recommendations in my report will concern what we call efficiency. We're mainly going to target work organization in the polling stations, where we think it's possible to achieve quite significant economies of scale.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Both economies of time and of money?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, and the idea is also to improve service to electors.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** All right.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** There will be a series of recommendations concerning efficiency in my report, which will be tabled by mid-June. With regard to shredding, a provision in the act requires that us to bring all material back after an election. That's one thing. The other thing is that we have an agreement with Canada Post for the delivery of material in the constituencies. That agreement covers the deployment and return of material. Shredding is done through a federal government program that costs us nothing. Here in the National Capital Region, the departments and agencies can make free use of this program which is meant for them.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** However, you have return charges.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Under the contract binding us to Canada Post, the costs are the same. These are fixed costs. They cover the delivery and return of material.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** I understand, but the return isn't included; the rate will change.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** The fact is that there is always material to return.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Albrecht.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to put Mr. Proulx's mind at ease, on page 7 there's a clear identifier that you are looking at cost savings. Maybe at some point you could detail what type of cost savings you envision by working with the provincial and territorial electoral partners. Reducing duplication is one way, obviously, and I'd be interested in hearing a little more detail on that.

Prior to your answering that one, I want to go back to page 5, where you outline six different areas that you're focusing on in between elections in order to improve the administrative and voter turnout. I want to highlight two.

The area dealing with physical disabilities and visual disabilities is, I think, key, and I'm really pleased to see you focusing on that.

The other area relates to increasing the voter turnout among our youth. Certainly anything we can do there...and we've discussed that a number of times at this committee. I'm wondering, though, if there's any possibility for Elections Canada to work more closely with high schools who are using the Student Vote approach. I think it's voluntary right now.

I'm not sure if you have a direct relationship with the high schools—

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Oh, yes.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** —but this, in my area, for those high schools that are using it, is a crucial way to create, even though students are not yet old enough to vote, an environment where they may choose to follow through on that in later years.

If you could just comment on those three points, that would be great.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** In terms of the technology for electors with disabilities, we will be looking at that during your visit on June 17. We hope to make a demonstration of the technology so that you can see the devices, and see how they work and can be used.

With respect to youth, we are already funding Student Vote for federal elections.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Let me clarify. Is that available on a “per school” basis or “per school board” basis, or how is it administered?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It's on a “per school” basis, and it's very open. It's up to the school to indicate an interest, and Student Vote will....

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Is there a role that we as members of Parliament could assume in this, in terms of getting the word out to our constituency high schools to encourage them to go on your website to find out how they can participate?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** I would think so. Current members of Parliament as well as former parliamentarians would, I think, be welcome in schools to do a short presentation on what democracy is, what it means for us, and what the responsibility of a citizen is in a democracy. I know that Student Vote, during the short time that it runs, solicits candidates to go to speak to students.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** And I've been a part of it. My concern is for those who aren't participating. Are there ways that we could encourage those schools to participate? Could we go in six months before....? We don't always have six months notice, and I know that, but—

**The Chair:** Who are you telling this to?

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

• (1245)

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** We could maybe go right now, when there's not even a threat of an election.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It doesn't have to be during a campaign or just before a campaign.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** If there could be a packet of materials developed, I think many members would welcome that opportunity.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** I will certainly take this under advisement.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I don't know whether I still have time for that other question relating to the reduction of duplication with territorial and provincial electoral districts.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** We're seeking to work more and more closely with other electoral bodies across the country, provincial and territorial ones. We're already collaborating on a number of areas, such as civic education: rather than each organization running its own program, making those programs more complementary. Provincial organizations have easier access to the school system than federal organizations have, so we're working with other bodies.

On a bit of a longer term, and there will be a recommendation in my report around this, we would like to go a step further and start sharing resources, costs, and risks. I mentioned the technology we're looking at over the next several years. That requires a large investment on our part. Elections Ontario right now has also been mandated to test i-voting by 2012. The idea here is, why don't we share those development costs and share the benefits. That will require some changes in the legislation to facilitate that cooperation, but it's certainly an area we'd like to pursue.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** I'll share the rest of my time with Mr. Lauzon.

**The Chair:** There are five seconds.

Thank you very much.

Monsieur Bigras, I'm very happy to have you here today. It's your turn.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to be taking part in this committee.

Good morning, and welcome to you, Mr. Mayrand, and to your colleagues.

My questions more particularly concern page 5 of your document. In the section entitled, "Improvements for Electors", one of the points reads as follows: "improving our methods and approaches for election officer recruitment and training." I suppose that proposed improvement is based on the findings you have made, particularly with your returning officers. It appears they are having a lot of difficulty recruiting staff in certain constituencies or regions.

Is this need for improved recruitment based on a report that the returning officers submitted to you on the difficulty involved in recruiting election staff?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, that's one of the findings that was made during the last general election. I mentioned it in the report immediately following the election and in the evaluation reports. There are administrative measures that we can take.

Two problems emerged during the 40th election. The first is recruitment. This is subject to all kinds of statutory requirements that should be reviewed. In addition, with regard to training, much has been made of the lack of standardization in the application of rules.

So we have made an effort to revise our training programs. We tried to simplify them where that was possible and we opted for somewhat different training techniques.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I'd like to go back to the first aspect. I just understood that the recruitment changes would require legislative revisions.

Are you about to make recommendations to us on amendments to the act? Which officials would be affected? Would that range from scrutineers to revising officers? What positions in the electoral process would be concerned?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** The revising officer, deputy returning officer, scrutineer and clerk positions. These are the main positions for which we have to do a lot of recruitment in very little time.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** When you say clerks, does that include scrutineers?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes. We've observed that barely 33% of our election workers are recommended by the political parties. That percentage is constantly declining. Under the act, the returning officer must wait until the 17th day before starting to recruit, independently of the political parties. We're suggesting slightly different terms and conditions to enable the returning officers to start recruiting earlier. That would solve part of the problem.

• (1250)

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** The returning officer still has the power. If he started the process, the political parties would no longer be called upon to submit a list of recommendations.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** We propose to replace the waiting period, which is until the 17th day. The reason why we have to wait until the 17th day is that the candidates have to be confirmed. The act currently provides that the candidates refer the workers.

So our report will propose that responsibility for recommending staff be transferred to the constituency associations rather than wait until the 17th day. We would start on the 36th day to identify staff who could be recommended by the local associations. So we could conduct recruiting from that moment, instead of waiting for two weeks.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Unless I'm mistaken, a clerk or a scrutineer must be an elector from the constituency where he or she is recommended. That greatly limits the potential.

Has consideration been given to permitting recruitment in adjacent constituencies?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** On an exceptional basis, the Chief Electoral Officer may authorize it. We avoid doing so because, ultimately, it often amounts to piracy among constituencies. However, where it becomes necessary, and if the situation lends itself to that, we authorize the recruitment of personnel from outside the constituency. It's nevertheless a last resort.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Monsieur Lauzon, for just a couple of minutes, please. Then we have committee business to deal with.

[Translation]

**Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Mayrand.

I have a few questions to ask. You suggested a lot of improvements in your report. I think these are good improvements and that they will encourage electors to vote.

Do you think that advertising to encourage people to vote is the responsibility of Elections Canada? It's a good thing for it to be easier to vote, but do these electors have the necessary motivation to go to the polling stations?

Is it Elections Canada's responsibility to do something to increase voter participation?

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** I think Elections Canada has a role to play, but I doubt it's the leader. Elections Canada's role is to ensure that electors understand the various voting options available to them.

We could discuss at length how to motivate electors to vote, but that gets a bit delicate for an electoral agency. It's very hard to motivate electors to vote without discussing the issues. When electoral agencies start discussing the issues, they immediately expose themselves to being perceived as being involuntarily partisan.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** To start with, there's a lack of interest in politics. There's also a lack of motivation. We can make it easier to vote, but if electors aren't motivated, there's a problem.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** It's a vicious circle. I don't question that.

However, I would say to you that—and this is why our initiatives are based on evaluations of the last election—55% of electors did not vote. They told us why they didn't vote: it wasn't accessible enough; they had schedule conflicts; they were too busy; they had to feed the children; there was a soccer game, and so on.

As an electoral agency, it is our responsibility to ensure that voting is as accessible as possible. It's clear that that won't motivate electors. That's another aspect. All of civil society must get involved in that aspect.

Elections Canada can do a little work with young people in the area of civic education. We try to do it on the campuses, but, here again, it's quite complicated if you're on a campus and you want to go and vote. Our role is to try and see how we can simplify that. That's a broader responsibility, and civil society has to take charge of it.

• (1255)

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** In my opinion, you're getting off on the right foot by starting with the schools. That's where it should start.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Yes, absolutely.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I thank you for coming today. It's been informative. I look forward to June 17. I don't get out of this room very often, it seems, so being out on the road, just being out there somewhere....

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Marc Mayrand:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** The question for the committee: shall vote 15 under Privy Council carry?

PRIVY COUNCIL

Chief Electoral Officer

Vote 15—Program expenditures.....\$29,568,000

(Vote 15 agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report vote 15 under Privy Council, less the amount voted in interim supply, to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I'll proceed to committee business. We have the Mexican president speaking to the House on Thursday morning. Many other committees have cancelled their eleven-to-one time slot in case it goes beyond that time. I believe there is a bit of a reception after it, also.

I need the will of the committee. Should this committee be meeting on Thursday? Should we meet late? What is your choice? I'm open. As I've said, I've certainly heard from many other committees, through the little bit of research I have done, that they will not be meeting on Thursday. They're just collapsing their time slot and picking it back up. I need to know what the committee thinks.

Monsieur Proulx.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** What were we supposed to have?

**The Chair:** We have a report almost ready on the technology piece, the use of BlackBerries in other jurisdictions and other legislatures. We were going to talk about that and about whether we do a report. Then we also were going to talk a bit about how close we are to a report on the prorogation issue.

I see that June 3 is open for us. We have one more witness in Professor Heard, who we really wanted to hear from. He's probably an hour-long witness on June 1. We could use the second hour on June 1 to accomplish those two pieces I talked about, too. So it's really up to the committee.

**Mr. Guy Lauzon:** I think that's a great idea.

**The Chair:** I just think it's easier not to schedule if that's the case. We won't schedule in case the Mexican president does go long. You know how sometimes these things in the House don't quite start on time. You know what great time managers members of Parliament are. So I think that's the case then.

Is it the will of the committee that we will not meet Thursday and we'll meet again the following Tuesday, June 1?

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** What about doing an hour on Thursday from twelve to one?

**The Chair:** That's the question. How do we know we're done and ready? I originally thought that, and talked to the clerk about doing that. The question is we need to prepare a little bit more about making sure the report's done. That's not hard, because you know the crackerjack staff have that done, but having food here, who's attending the reception for the Mexican president and who isn't—those types of things.

I'm open to the committee if the committee would like to meet, but there are some grey areas as to whether we can or can't.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht:** Mr. Chair, in view of the fact that the subject matter isn't of an urgent nature, I would recommend that we —

**The Chair:** Yes, we're not really turning down a witness at this point. I would have been fearful if in fact we'd had a witness scheduled and we're trying to change them around, but we really don't.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** No, but we're pushing back the work of the committee for two hours.

**The Chair:** For the Mexican president, yes.

**Mr. Marcel Proulx:** Okay.

**The Chair:** All right?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** So we'll see each other a week from today.

Thank you very much.

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