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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

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•(1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)): Members, I'm going to uncharacteristically start on time so that we don't lose any questioning time with the minister, so that we get her full hour.

This is meeting number 12 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for the first session of the 42nd Parliament. The meeting is being held in public, and it's being televised.

Pursuant to an order adopted by the committee on February 4, we have with us today the Minister for Democratic Institutions, the Honourable Maryam Monsef, to speak and answer questions about the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments. The minister is accompanied by Ian McCowan, deputy secretary to the cabinet, legislation and House planning and machinery of government, Privy Council Office.

In our second hour we will be talking about the witness list and the caucus reports on family-friendly Parliament.

Thank you, Minister, for coming. I know there is great anticipation of having you here to talk about the new Senate process. We'll start right away so that we get the full amount of questioning in. I'll let you do your opening statement.

Thank you.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, committee members.

What an honour it is to be here with you today on this traditional territory of the Algonquin peoples. We talked about this last night. Had it not been for all the ways in which settlers like me were welcomed to this land, we would not have succeeded individually or collectively.

As you mentioned, Mr. Chair, I have the great privilege of being accompanied by Mr. Ian McCowan.

As Minister for Democratic Institutions, I have a mandate to deliver on the government's commitment to strengthen the openness and fairness of our democratic institutions. This committee—your committee—plays an important role in delivering on this commitment. I sincerely believe that it can lead the way in elevating the tone and the conduct of how we represent ourselves in committees, in the House, and to our constituents, and how we deliberate on the issues that matter most to Canadians.

As part of my mandate, I have the lead role in all matters relating to the development and implementation of the process with respect to the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments. Think of me as the custodian of the process. I can answer any questions you may have about its establishment, including the advisory board's terms of reference and the criteria being used to assess candidates.

The advisory board is an independent, arm's-length body. As such, I am not in a position to speak on their behalf.

As many of us agree, the Senate plays an important role in our democratic system; however, its legitimacy has suffered because of the partisan nature of the appointment system. It has become a place where political ties are often perceived as being more important than the best interests of Canadians. The new merit-based process to advise the Prime Minister on Senate appointments was designed to remove that partisan element and to help reinvigorate the Senate.

Before getting into the details of the process, I think it's important to have an understanding of the four principles that reinforce its legitimacy and effectiveness.

First, the process recognizes the important role that the Senate has in providing sober second thought and regional representation, as well as representation for minorities. Second, the process respects the constitutional framework by maintaining the Governor General's power to appoint senators on the advice of the Prime Minister. Third, the process includes elements to promote transparency and accountability, including public merit-based criteria for Senate nominees, public terms of reference for the advisory board, and public reporting on the process itself. Fourth, the process is designed to select Senate nominees who can conduct themselves in an independent, non-partisan fashion.

Canadians have asked for change, yes, but they do not wish our government to enter into constitutional negotiations. This new process delivers on that. The government is also fully confident that the new process respects our constitutional framework.

The key component of the new process is the independent advisory board, which has a mandate to provide the Prime Minister with non-binding merit-based recommendations on Senate appointments. The advisory board consists of five members: a federal chair and two other permanent federal members, whom you have met, and two ad hoc provincial members from each of the provinces or the territories where vacancies exist.

You've met the chair of the advisory board, Ms. Huguette Labelle. She has been recognized many times for her senior leadership roles in public service, and her years of experience do provide her with a solid basis to meet the challenges of leading the advisory process. You may also be interested to know that she brings with her a depth of knowledge on matters related to transparency as past chair of Transparency International.

Professor Daniel Jutras and Dr. Indira Samarasekera have been here before.

All of the advisory board members are impressive. I could take all of the time we have here together talking about each one of them individually, but what I want to leave you with is the confidence that they represent a range of experiences, from all walks of life, whether it's education, constitutional law, science, medicine, or the arts.

• (1105)

There are two phases to the process we have introduced. In the transitional phase, which is well under way, the advisory board is responsible for providing the Prime Minister with a shortlist for five vacancies in three provinces: two in Manitoba, two in Ontario, and one in Quebec. In this phase the advisory board was mandated to consult with a wide variety of groups, including indigenous, linguistic, minority, and ethnic communities; provincial, territorial, and municipal organizations; labour organizations; community-based groups; arts councils; and provincial and territorial chambers of commerce.

The idea was to allow the board to hear from a diverse range of individuals and bring forward a list that includes people from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences, but also with knowledge of the Senate. The permanent phase will begin shortly after the completion of the transitional phase and the appointments of the first five senators. In the permanent phase, the remaining vacancies will be filled from the seven provinces where vacancies currently exist.

In the permanent phase all Canadians will be able to apply directly for appointment to the Senate. Let me tell you a bit about the criteria. In both phases the advisory board will assess potential candidates on the basis of transparent, merit-based criteria. These criteria are public. They include the following: candidates—and I believe you have the criteria—must have a record of achievement and leadership either in service to their community, the public, their profession, or their field of expertise; candidates will need to possess outstanding and proven personal qualities in terms of public life, ethics, and integrity; candidates are expected to have an ability to bring a perspective and contribution to the work of the Senate that is clearly independent and non-partisan; and candidates must have demonstrated an understanding of the Senate's role in our constitutional framework, including the role of the Senate as an independent body of sober second thought, the role it plays in regional representation, and the representation it provides to minorities.

These criteria will be applied in a way that respects the importance of gender balance and Canada's diversity in the selection process. The public criteria will provide an important framework for the entire process both in terms of ensuring that candidates of the highest standard are selected, but also to allow Canadians to hold us accountable to this process.

I'd now like to talk about our commitment to carry out an open and transparent process. As I mentioned earlier, one of the foundational principles of this process is the importance of transparency and accountability. In that context each step of the process has been designed to be as open and transparent as possible. The merit-based criteria for Senate nominees was published online so that all Canadians could see the qualifications and skill sets that the advisory board has been using to assess candidates.

When the advisory board was appointed, the government published the terms of reference setting out the board's mandate. The advisory board itself established a public website calling for nominations during the transitional phase and has reached out broadly to consult with organizations.

The permanent phase of the advisory process will feature an open application process to which any qualified Canadian can submit an application. There is a requirement that the advisory board provide us with a report on their activities after each cycle of appointments. I believe this is an unprecedented level of openness in a process that has been previously shrouded in secrecy.

That said, in order to attract the best and brightest candidates a degree of confidentiality is required in order for the process to succeed, just as is the case with any other job competition. We want to ensure that all qualified individuals from diverse backgrounds have the confidence to put their names forward without fearing that at the end of the process their names or other personal information will be publicized. It's for that reason that the names of unsuccessful candidates will not be received.

• (1110)

I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have. I had three lines to read, yet the chair has waved and said the time is up.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I think we can extend the minister the necessary time to read the remaining three lines. I think we should extend that obvious courtesy.

The Chair: Okay, you can do your three lines.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: What a good man you are, sir.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Hold that thought.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Maryam Monsef: To conclude, I am confident that the advisory process will help to reinvigorate the Senate in a way that reinforces its fundamental role in our parliamentary system, while reducing partisanship.

I look forward to working with your committee, not only on Senate reform but also on the government's various mandates to strengthen our democracy and restore the public's trust in our institutions. We all have a role to play in setting a positive tone for that debate.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the honourable member, who is also my critic.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we're going to the first round of seven-minute questioning or comments, and we'll start with Madam Petitpas Taylor.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First and foremost, Minister Monsef, thank you for taking the time to meet with our committee today. We recognize that you're extremely busy, and on such short notice you made the time. We appreciate your presentation and your willingness to meet and answer our questions.

The first question I have is that you've indicated that you're the custodian of the process. I'm wondering if you or the advisory board has had the opportunity to meet with the provinces regarding the actual process that's in place right now.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: It's a great pleasure to be here. I've been looking forward to this.

When we began setting out the framework for this process, we decided that an important hallmark would be that for the first time provinces would be included in this conversation. To that end, I reached out to my colleagues in Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba. We asked each province to provide us with a list of five individuals who would represent their respective provinces on the ad hoc committee for the provinces with the vacancies.

We had very productive conversations, and in the end I was pleased to receive names from Ontario and Quebec. After the process was wrapped up, in terms of filling those seats on the advisory board, we asked all three provinces to provide us with feedback on how we can improve the transitional process as we turn it into a permanent base. We look forward to continuing that collaboration.

•(1115)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Have you received any feedback from the province regarding those consultations that you had with them?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: All three provinces were thrilled that we were having this conversation and we were engaging on the Senate appointment process. The feedback that we've received from all three will be given serious consideration as we move forward to enhance the permanent phase, if that need be.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: I have one last question, because I'm sharing my time with Ms. Sahota.

Could you perhaps speak to us about the present process and how it compares to the past or previous process?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I'm sure that we join many Canadians who are curious about what the process was in governments past. The difference here is that there is a process and that the process is public. Whether it's the criteria on which we're asking the advisory board to assess potential candidates, or their terms of reference, or the report that the advisory board will release after the process is wrapped up, all of this is out there. It is open for the public's review.

The reason is that we feel it's important to enhance Canadians' trust and confidence in this institution. One of the best ways we can do that is to include Canadians in the process instead of attempting to do this behind the curtain.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Thank you very much.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you for being with us here today, Minister. We've been looking forward to your visit.

You have touched upon this quite a bit, but why in your opinion does this government feel that this process is the preferred process and will actually work, in comparison to the previous process that we don't know much about?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We believe that the establishment of the advisory boards and framework we have outlined, in itself, is a huge success. We are attempting something that hasn't been done before, and we recognize that it's a challenge. But mostly in this there's a great deal of opportunity. We are confident it will work because we have received positive feedback from Canadians. We're confident it will work because we have received positive feedback from some senators already.

Some people in this room were at the parliamentary consultation I hosted, and the feedback I received there, whether it was from members of Parliament or senators across party lines, included that confidence we were aiming for, that level of trust we were hoping to increase. That's already happening. I look forward to having those first five appointed. I believe their merits and their qualifications and their contributions will speak for themselves.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You spoke about the background of some of the permanent federal members that came before this committee, and how they're diverse. But in particular, could you give us an example of what kinds of qualities you were looking for in these permanent members and also in the ad hoc members? You were saying that you asked the provinces to present you five from which you would choose two. How did you make that narrowing down of whom you would choose to put on the...?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The criteria that the Prime Minister and the Governor in Council took into consideration when appointing the advisory board members are very much in line with the criteria we've asked the advisory board to use to assess potential Senate candidates. We were looking for individuals who were demonstrating and had demonstrated leadership and service to their communities. We were looking for individuals who had been accountable to their stakeholders. We were looking for individuals who understood the importance of the Senate within our constitutional framework and recognized the role the Senate plays in providing that sober second thought as an upper chamber.

We were looking for people who could demonstrate the ability to conduct their work in an independent and non-partisan fashion. We were looking for people who have done their work and have worked throughout their lives demonstrating those personal qualities around ethics and integrity. We also wanted to make sure that the different ranges of experiences and backgrounds that are reflected within Canadian society would be reflected within the advisory board. We are happy to say we believe we have achieved that.

•(1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sahota.

Now we'll go to Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Minister. It's a pleasure to have you here. I miss our question period exchanges in the House of Commons. I thought we were like the Disraeli and Gladstone of the 42nd Parliament or maybe the Churchill and Lady Astor or the Archy and Mehitabel. It was a pleasure while it lasted.

I had a series of three questions that I think are so closely related that it is more logical for me to ask them as a chunk, rather than separately. Regarding the advisory boards and the lists that they have been compiling, when you and Mr. LeBlanc appeared before the Senate rules committee, he indicated that the advisory boards needed some extra time, just a couple of extra weeks.

My first question therefore is this. Have the lists yet been submitted to the Prime Minister?

The second question I have is on the decision regarding the phase one process to send out nomination forms as well as applications. Was that made by the government or was it made by the advisory boards?

Thirdly, Myriam Bédard, who serves as a Quebec member on one of the advisory boards, the one dealing with Quebec, indicated that about 100 requests for nominations had been sent out. Is that more or less a standard number for all three of the provinces, and how many of those came back? How many actual nominations were received? How large a pool were you dealing with in the end, or was the advisory board dealing with?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I thank the honourable member for his question.

I do miss our back-and-forth in the House of Commons, and I will take this opportunity to point out that the process is completely in your hands, sir, so whenever you're ready to come back to our back-and-forth in the House of Commons...I impatiently await it. I do appreciate the opportunity to have this conversation with you here today.

To your question, I want to make it very clear that the independent, arm's-length nature of the advisory board, as you can all appreciate, makes it so that I have not been involved in the consultations they've had. I have not seen any of the lists they've received, or the lists that are being recommended, or where the lists are at, for that matter.

What I do know is that, recognizing that this particular group of Canadians put quite a bit on the line to be part of something that has not been done before, we wanted to provide them with the right tools and the right capacity to do that work. They're in the process of carrying out the transitional phase of the process. Once that phase has wrapped up, they will be providing us, you, and all Canadians with a report on how the process went, who they reached out to, and so on and so forth.

On the application process and the forms, the independent advisory board independently chose to take that route, because they must have felt that it was the right thing to do. I don't have any more details about numbers or where their process and outreach is at. All I can tell you is that I join you in also impatiently awaiting the list and any reports they may have about the process.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Just for the benefit of other members here, this is why we want to get the members of the advisory board back again. It was an issue that Mr. Chan spoke at length about in regard to why we don't want them back again, saying that we can get this information from the minister.

It turns out that the questions I've raised here, which are the same ones I raised to members of the advisory board and which were found to be out of order, are precisely the ones that can only be addressed if you guys on the Liberal side do not attempt to prevent us from bringing them back again. Otherwise, we get no transparency or openness at all.

My next question for you, Minister, is on what you indicated to the media on February 1. I'm quoting here from a Joan Bryden article, which says that Minister Monsef says she's "not ready to commit" to a categorical rejection of a referendum on electoral reform. From your previous answers and Minister LeBlanc's previous comments, I had a sense that you hadn't shut the door completely.

Under what circumstances would we get a categorical yes or no from the government to a referendum on electoral reform?

• (1125)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I don't think this is relevant. We've called in the minister to discuss the appointments process. We have only one hour in which to get answers to a lot of important questions that Mr. Reid has wanted answered for a long time. I believe we should continue staying within the mandate that we've asked her in on.

The Chair: Minister, it's up to you whether you want to respond. You were only called here on the Senate. It's fair if you only want to answer on that.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: It's just like old times, Mr. Chair.

Let me go back to your earlier comments. From what I understand, the advisory board members were asked to appear before this committee so that you could assess their qualifications to determine whether or not they were the right people to be leading this process. I hope that, to that end, your questions and curiosity have been satisfied.

Your committee is the master of its own destiny, but rest assured that one of the aspects around transparency and openness within this process is the fact that there will be a report, which will include the answers to the questions that we all have about how this process went. Let's wait for that report.

As for the familiar question you've asked, as I have shared in the House, with the media, and during our one-on-one conversations, the process will engage Canadians in a meaningful and inclusive conversation about how we may enhance our electoral system so that those who are not currently engaged feel that they have a voice and that they have a place within this place and within the decisions that we make as a government. It is too early to prejudge the outcome of that process—

Mr. Scott Reid: What I'm asking you is, what criteria will you use when it is no longer too early? At some point it won't be too early, but none of us know what the criteria are that you will be using. It's hard, given the fact the Chief Electoral Officer has just prepared a report, released I believe it was yesterday or the day before, stating he will need extra time to deal with the referendum process. He'll also need extra time to deal with any electoral boundary redistribution that might occur as a result of this process.

Effectively as you take more time, you start precluding options. It's not hard to design a system so that only one option is left, which just happens to be the one your Prime Minister has indicated he prefers.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Point of order...

Mr. Scott Reid: My concern is that we get an answer as to what your criteria would be.

The Chair: Okay. Before you do the point of order, the time is up, so maybe it's not necessary.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I still think it's necessary to have a ruling on that point of order I made previously. If we continue in this fashion the time is going to be up pretty soon, and we're not going to get to the relevant matter we've called the minister here on.

The Chair: I'll leave it to the minister as to whether she wants to answer questions on things that she wasn't called here for. It's up to the members how they want to use their questioning time.

We'll move on to Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, thank you very much for your appearance.

If I may, I'd like to begin on a personal note, not necessarily a political one. I want to say, Minister, that you're not of my political party, you're the opposite gender to me, you're one-half my age, yet I want you to know how proud I am to see you sitting there as a minister for Canada because to me it's not just a success story for the Liberals. I think Canada gets to claim part of the success. You're a symbol of how Canada works. I'm incredibly proud we have a country that would have someone with your background arrive in that chair as our minister and I wish you all the best, on a personal basis.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1130)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you.

Mr. David Christopherson: Now I will give you the ultimate respect and treat you the same as I would any other minister, and you would expect no less.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I expect nothing less, sir.

Mr. David Christopherson: First of all, this whole charade is something that we in the NDP aren't buying into. By way of visualizing, I would say that if we were starting with a blank slate and saying to the people of Canada, "We'll select your government by an appointment process and they'll be your representatives for law-making", there would be a revolution. We don't do that.

What we did say was that we'll split the decision-making for laws into two parts. You get to elect one part, but for the other one we still

stay in the dark ages and appoint. That's still the way we view this. It's legal, but it does not have legitimacy in the eyes of the Canadian people. In this day and age the fact that a vote in the upper House, because there are fewer of them than us, is worth more than that of an MP is nothing short of disgraceful as we present ourselves to the world as a mature democracy.

Having said that, it is still there and this process is there and we have to deal with it. You mention on page three of your remarks, Minister, there were at least four criteria that you'll be looking for. What I would like to know is, what are the assurances and guarantees in those new transparent criteria that would guarantee the likes of a Senator Duffy and a Senator Brazeau would not happen again?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Through you, Mr. Chair, thank you to the honourable member for his kind remarks. I do appreciate them. I recognize what a privilege it is to be here. What woman in my lineage could ever have dreamed of being in this place? It's one of the reasons why, every time I'm asked to appear before a committee, every time I'm asked to rise in the House to answer a question, I consider it a great honour. It's why I take my role as custodian of this process so seriously.

When we were developing our platform as a party, the now Prime Minister spent three years speaking and listening to Canadians, to experts, to different groups, to academics. When we developed our policy plank around a more open and transparent government, we heard loud and clear from Canadians that the Senate does need to change, that despite the good work of senators for generations, the effectiveness of the Senate has been hampered by the perception of partisanship.

We also heard loud and clear from Canadians that they do not want us to bring about change that would include a protracted constitutional debate. Canadians want us to focus on their issues—growing the economy, the environment and climate change, addressing the issues around missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The process we have introduced takes into account the constitutional framework that we need to be working within.

The processes that we've outlined, the accountability and the transparency that's embedded in it, the wide range of organizations and individuals who will be consulted, who will be asked to put their names forward—all of these will lead to a stronger and a more effective Senate. In just a few weeks, in just a few months, any Canadian who meets the constitutional requirements may put their name forward to be considered for appointment to the Senate.

Mr. David Christopherson: You're right, Minister—and anybody who buys a lottery ticket also stands to be a multimillionaire by the end of the week. It sounds good in theory.

I didn't hear anything that really answered my question. The reality is that we've just gone from an appointment process to a more expanded appointment process, where other appointed people will now decide who the appointed people will be. The fact is that when we get a bad one.... Bad MPs get elected, but there's a mechanism to get rid of them. It's called an election. With senators, we're stuck with them until they're 75 years old.

With respect, Minister, I don't see anything in this criteria that will prevent the likes of another Senator Duffy or another Brazeau or, for some Liberal balance, a Mac Harb to still find their way into the Senate. It's still unaccountable and it's still unacceptable.

I want to pursue a couple of other things. Correct me if I'm wrong, Minister, but I believe you mentioned that you had received names for appointees to be on the selection committee from every province. What about Manitoba? Did you have names submitted from Manitoba?

• (1135)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Let me go just back to your previous—

Mr. David Christopherson: Not too far back, Minister. My time is tight.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: No, not too far back, but you thought I didn't answer your question.

Dear sir, you began your line of questioning by congratulating me on finding myself in this place. This is Canada, and if somebody like me can get herself elected in Canada, if somebody like me can be appointed to the Prime Minister's cabinet in Canada, then in this country anything is possible.

I want to leave that piece with you—

Mr. David Christopherson: Don't kid yourself. You got there because of the power of election, Minister, with respect, and not because you knew somebody.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: —because this is the spirit in which this new process is designed as well.

I'm looking, and the Prime Minister is looking, to bring more people like Senator Chaput to the Senate. We're looking for more Roméo Dallaires. We're looking for more Serge Joyals. We are looking for individuals like those who are in that chamber, who have been in that chamber before, to join their ranks.

That's the place we're coming from.

Mr. David Christopherson: What about John and Jane Smith? You give all these great luminaries. We're ordinary people. You're ordinary people. I'm ordinary people. We got here through an election. This process will not put ordinary people in the Senate. If anything, they'll be tokens.

The Chair: Thank you, David and Minister.

The time is up for this round. We will now go to Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): We're going from one David to another.

Mr. Chair, I'll be sharing my time with my old boss, the former critic for democratic reform, Scott Simms.

I want to address a little bit what I think is the very important role of the Senate. For me the Senate is actually a very valuable institution, and I think it's very important to this country to have a body of people who do not have to worry about their next job and the next election, so they can make what I call a sober second decision, regardless of alcohol, David. It's not that kind of sober. That's a joke.

The Constitution mandates that the Senate exist. We can't get around that without having a wonderful big constitutional debate, which we've had many of in this country and we've all very much enjoyed. I wonder if you could talk about the importance of the Constitution in this process and how we're managing to stay within the boundaries of it while making a real, significant change to the Senate that will change how we get there.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Chair, we are confident that this new process works within the parameters of the Constitution and the Supreme Court ruling. I'm surrounded by bright individuals who assure me that we are. We've maintained the Prime Minister's and the Governor General's independence in that process. The changes we have introduced don't change what's already there in terms of constitutional requirements; they only enhance the criteria. The process of appointments is a public, transparent, and merit-based one. I believe that is where the greatest amount of change is coming from, and we will be able to see that in the calibre of the individuals who are appointed.

I understand that you folks have a lot of fun around this table and that this particular conversation is one you've had before.

Ian, would you like to share your thoughts around this particular piece?

Mr. Ian McCowan (Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Legislation and House Planning and Machinery of Government, Privy Council Office): As I think the minister indicated, the proposal was developed very much bearing in mind the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in the Senate reference case. A number of important markers were laid down there and that's very much a part of the framing of the proposals in question.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You've spent two minutes and 43 seconds.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I don't want to take too much of Scott's time, because he's a good speaker.

We hear a lot that the Senate should be either elected or abolished. Do you see any value to having an elected Senate? For me, if you have an elected Senate, it has to assert its role and it has to assert its purpose, and therefore, it becomes a competition rather than a complement to the House of Commons. Do you agree with that view of the Senate?

• (1140)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I come from a place where the democratic institutions that we have here are dreamed of, are longed for. While what we have is great, it could be so much better and while we will be bringing about various reforms, there are some core foundational aspects of our current system that we would do well to maintain, including that particular role the Senate plays as a body to provide that independent sober second thought without having to worry about the next election.

I want to talk about ordinary people being part of this process, because I think that's very important. Ordinary people may not have the appetite that we do to find the means and the courage to run for public office. How many people applied for the job that you and I have? Not very many people find compelling the process of going through a campaign. We're going to open it up to all Canadians so that even those who do not find it exciting to run for an elected position may be included in this process.

Mr. David Graham: Thank you for your leadership on this.

I'll give it over to Scott.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Thank you, Minister. It's good to see you again.

Every time we engage in this argument, we always come around to the names of the people who are, I'll say, at the base degrees, according to their behaviour, being said in this place.

I'm not looking directly at you, sir. I'm just waxing on metaphorically. You just happen to be in the line of sight.

Mr. Scott Reid: I am just wondering where this is going.

Mr. Scott Simms: We know the names that were already brought up, the Brazeaus of the world, the Mac Harbs of the world, these people.

Let's take a moment and talk about the people who have done really good stuff. Let's talk about, as the minister pointed out, Roméo Dallaire. Let's talk about Hugh Segal, who has done tremendous work. Let's talk about Michael Kirby, whose reports on health have been cited in institutions across this country, all of them. They started out as ordinary, David. They started out as ordinary people who did extraordinary work, and continue to do extraordinary work in all these places.

What I would say to people.... This process is something that goes that way.

In the last election—I'll get to my question—we had three options on the table, one of which we are talking about here right now. Another one included an election of the Senate, and the third required abolishing.

Now, in April 2014, the Supreme Court was quite clear as to what you desired. The opposition never reached out to any of the provinces to either elect it or abolish it, not one. It became a Twitter campaign with #disingenuous. I am a little upset about this, because I thought the whole thing was disingenuous. The plan was not thought out right.

This plan.... I'll get to my question now. When it came out that we would do this appointment process, there were a lot of people who criticized us and said, but you too need to open up the constitution in order to do this process. However, that is not the case, is it, Minister?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, Minister.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: No, it is not.

The Chair: That's close enough.

We'll now go on to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I appreciate your being here today. I am glad that you were able to make this a priority in your schedule, to be at this committee, finally.

I'll start with a question. I assume you would agree with the statement that the ability of Canadians to cast their vote and to have their voices heard in an election is an important part of democracy.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Is that your question?

Mr. Blake Richards: I assume you would agree with that statement.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I think more Canadians should be voting.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, great. I am glad to hear that you think that's an important value in our democracy because 309,587 Albertans had a chance to cast their vote for a man named Mike Shaikh, in Alberta, to be their senator when the next Senate vacancy comes up. This follows in a long history. In 1989, Stan Waters was elected by the people of Alberta, and appointed to the Senate in 1990.

Then, in 1998, Bert Brown and Ted Morton were chosen by Albertans but unfortunately ignored by the Liberal governments of the day. Then, in 2004, we had Bert Brown, who was elected and then appointed to the Senate in 2007, and then Betty Unger, who was appointed in 2012. In 2012, we had another senatorial selection process in Alberta, and the winner of that process was Doug Black, who was appointed in 2013. Then, Scott Tannas was appointed later in 2013.

The next vacancy that appears in the Senate for Alberta should be filled by Mike Shaikh. As I said, he was elected by over 309,000 Albertans, which, I would point out, is more votes than all the members of this committee, combined, received in the last election.

We have certainly heard—in your indication at the Senate committee, and when I asked your parliamentary secretary in the House of Commons—that somehow there is a belief that this isn't merit-based.

I would have to ask, how do you not see 300,000 Albertans choosing someone to be their senator, in a legitimate senatorial selection process, as merit-based? How is it that you could tell Albertans, those 309,000 people who voted for Mike Shaikh, that their opinions aren't based on merit, that their vote for him isn't merit-based? I just don't understand that.

• (1145)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Let's start with first premise, that neither you, nor I, nor anyone else in this room has the constitutional prerogative that the Prime Minister has to advise the Governor General on whom to consider for the Senate positions. That is the first place that we are going to come from.

Second, I am sure Mr. Shaikh is an exceptional Canadian who has contributed to the province of Alberta in extraordinary ways, and I congratulate him. The next opening, the vacancy for Alberta, is going to be in 2018, I believe. The process that we have introduced will allow for any Canadians, ordinary Canadians who have done extraordinary things in their lives, to put their name forward for consideration for the Senate.

This means that people who do not have the means to engage in what can be an expensive election campaign are included in this process. This means that individuals who may not have the desire that you and I had to knock on doors to get elected are included in this process.

We are opening up this process to all Canadians in just a matter of weeks. I look forward to Mr. Shaikh and anyone else from Alberta putting their name forward for consideration by the advisory board and the Prime Minister.

Mr. Blake Richards: I appreciate the answer, but it isn't about Mike Shaikh; it's about Albertans. It's about their choice. It's about their right to democratically select the people they've chosen. That's something that's been respected by past prime ministers. It's really unfortunate that this current Prime Minister will not be respecting that.

Let me move on, though, because I don't sense I'll get a different response about the idea of the importance of democratic election and the disrespecting of Albertans.

You mentioned in your opening remarks about Ontario and Quebec, that you've had a list of names come forward. You didn't mention Manitoba, which is also, of course, on there. Obviously, their government indicated that they weren't interested in being a part of the process. I guess I want to ask two things. First of all, how were the two advisory board members for Manitoba selected, given that Manitoba was not interested in being a part of the process? Also, have you received a list from Manitoba and, if not, when do we expect to receive that list? Why the delay?

The Chair: Just give a brief answer, Minister.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I had very productive and positive conversations with my colleagues in Manitoba, and I understand and respect their reasons for not being able to participate in the transitional phase, but I do look forward to working with them on this file and other files moving forward.

As we indicated at the outset of this process, in the event that a province or territory was not able to participate in the appointment of ad hoc members to the board, we would proceed to appoint individuals, and we did. We found two exceptional Manitobans, and these two incredible women are serving their province well. We're pleased to hear from the leadership in Manitoba that they approve of the choice as well.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move on to Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Minister Monsef, for coming before this committee. I also want to thank you for your hard work and dedication to improving Canadians' confidence in our democratic institutions.

Before I begin with my questions, I noted that you didn't get a chance to answer the question from my colleague Mr. Simms about the Constitution. So, if you wish, I can give you a few moments to answer that question before I begin with mine.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We are confident that this process respects the constitutional framework. In fact, I would like to assure

everyone in this room and those watching this that all our decisions as a government are guided by the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We respect our democratic institutions, including the Supreme Court of Canada. It's refreshing to see that we are all on the same page.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

I'd like to talk a little bit about how you view this process improving the way the Senate functions in its committees and improving the collegiality, independence, and non-partisanship of the Senate. As we know, traditionally the Senate has always been viewed as being more collegial, and senators do not always wear their political party hat. In recent years that's diminished somewhat.

But this is a process that has never before been seen in terms of selecting senators. Already the Prime Minister has made Liberal senators independent and not subject to party discipline. With the new senators coming in, who will also be independent, not subject to party discipline, and not appointed solely at the discretion of the Prime Minister without consultation, how do you see that improving and elevating the tone of the debate in the Senate?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you for your question. The tone is an important measure of success on its own.

Before I go into this in any further detail, it's important to recognize that we, as the lower chamber, have certain limits we work within when it comes to our relationship within the Senate. The Senate's own rules, the way they operate within their committees, their own conduct, and their own activities are up to them. They are not for us to dictate.

Where we are able to make a difference is within an appointments process that puts merit ahead of patronage and that opens it up to all Canadians, so that people who may have never been considered for these positions can begin to be considered and can reflect Canada's diversity in the process.

Also, we believe that reducing partisanship and encouraging independence will mean that senators will feel more confident and comfortable to serve the best interests of Canadians, as opposed to any political party. I think that's a huge win for Canadian democracy.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I'd like to pick up on your comments about the diversity because we all know that public policy benefits when there are more voices at the table with different life experiences and with different backgrounds. This is a process in which, as you mentioned in the criteria, we'll be able to bring in people who have different kinds of experiences that they bring to the table and different perspectives. Is that something you also see improving the debate in the Senate?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I firmly believe that when you bring people from different walks of life around a table to make decisions on behalf of Canadians from all walks of life then the tone, the nature of the debate, the amount of deliberation, and the different perspectives that may not have been included in the past will all be present, and the end result will be better outcomes for Canadians in terms of policies and programs we implement.

I'm proud to be part of the government that recognizes that. I am proud to serve a Prime Minister who appreciates that. He not only has a commitment to all Canadians that will incorporate gender, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity in his appointments to cabinet, but he demonstrates that with a gender-balanced cabinet.

One of the criteria we've asked the advisory board to be especially mindful of, and something the Prime Minister will give serious attention to when making his recommendations to the Governor General, is just that. We know that when you add women and when you bring people from different cultural groups into conversations we have in this House, and in the other House, it can only lead to better outcomes for Canadians. That's one way we can lead the world in terms of how a strong democracy can function. I think that's our responsibility as Canadians as well.

● (1155)

The Chair: I will now go to Mr. Schmale for a five-minute round.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much, Minister. It's great to see you again. For those who don't know, we share a geographical boundary and we share Peterborough County. I look forward to continuing to work on the various issues together on that, and it's great to see you in this capacity.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: It's very nice to see you.

Something you said piqued my interest. You had mentioned about the process for some people possibly being appointed to the Senate, but before that for the current system of being elected, where you run for nominations and then you go to the general election, you said some people might be a little disheartened by going through that whole process of meeting the people who get to elect them and appoint them to a legislative body.

I thought that was interesting because as we know in the Senate— as Mr. Christopherson and Mr. Reid pointed out many times—there are fewer of them and they have more power than the House of Commons.

I see a quote here from Emmett Macfarlane, who was the original designer of this process you're using, who said, "Serving in the Senate should be the result of answering a call, not making a call".

I put two and two together. Why is it easier for them to go through this process of just putting a letter to the Prime Minister asking for an appointment, rather than knocking on the doors, listening to people, and meeting the constituents you are hoping to represent?

Mr. David Christopherson: Hear, hear!

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Firstly, I'd like to thank the honourable member for his leadership around raising awareness for ALS. The work you're doing with our colleague Greg Fergus is admirable and I thank you for that. I look forward to serving the people of Peterborough—Kawartha with you.

No Canadian will be able to write a letter to the Prime Minister and be appointed to the Senate. That's actually not how this process works out. Canadians will be able to apply, and there will be an advisory board—independent, at arm's length—that will assess the

qualifications of these individuals and make non-binding recommendations to the Prime Minister.

It's not just that people are going to write a letter to the Prime Minister and hope he'll say yes. That may have been the old way, but it's certainly not the way we're moving forward.

I believe that being able to participate in an election, especially as a candidate, is a great privilege, and I have a lot of respect for the process itself; but this process is meant to be inclusive, and it's meant to work within the constitutional framework. In that spirit of inclusion, let's take a moment to reflect. I know many of us have not had a chance to do that, because we have all hit the ground running since October 19.

Let's think about how expensive an election campaign is. Let's think about what a privilege it is for us, as able-bodied individuals, to be able to go out and to knock on doors and to walk door-to-door and to be standing on our feet at various events. Let's take a moment to reflect on what a great privilege that is, and let's recognize that not everyone has the means to participate in what can be an expensive election campaign, and let's recognize that not everyone has the physical capacity to go out and to knock on doors.

That does not mean that individuals who cannot do either of those things are not connected to their communities, are not serving the best interests of their regions. What this process is doing is opening it up and creating a level playing field within the constitutional framework that will allow all Canadians from all backgrounds, from various socio-economic statuses, and with various disabilities, exceptionalities, and abilities to put their names forward to the Senate for consideration. I think that is something we can all be tremendously proud of.

● (1200)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I would say that everyone has the same opportunity with selling memberships. That doesn't cost anything and that is part of the process.

What I've noticed here also is that we've talked about a lot of transparency and openness, which is great. You changed the process, but when I look at this I see that all you did was basically put in another level of the decision-making process. The names being submitted to this advisory panel are being kept in secret, and the names selected to go to the Prime Minister are being chosen in secret.

Rather than just the people in the Prime Minister's Office making that decision or finding the names, you've given everyone the ability to apply, which is a good thing. However, we don't know who has applied, what the names are, or who is being considered. If the Prime Minister selected this person, then who are the others who didn't get selected, and why?

In my opinion, that's just another level and it's done behind the curtain. I think someone says it isn't, but I don't see anything more than that you get to apply. What is different? What is being done in front of the curtain?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: What is being done is this. In the past there would not have been a conversation like this by this committee about the Senate appointments process, because frankly, in the past there was not a process that was open in any way to the public. With the greatest of respect, this is more change and more of an improvement than any other process that has existed before in the past around appointments to the Senate.

I challenge you to reflect on where the process was when the former government appointed nearly 60 senators. This is that difference.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Respectfully, Madam Minister, I disagree. We had an election in Alberta.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The difference here is that the criteria that individuals are being assessed against are based on merit and not political patronage.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I would also argue that there are a number of senators with very extensive resumé's.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schmale. We're over our time.

Thank you very much, Minister, for coming. I'm sure we'll have future conversations.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I would, if I could.

Thank you very much. Thanks for your good work.

The Chair: We'll suspend for a few minutes.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: This is a very productive working committee. We'd like to get lots done, so I'm calling us back so we don't socialize too much.

We have two really important things we have to do on our family-friendly report. One is the caucus reports and the other is the witnesses. We can decide later whether we go in camera for the witnesses, which we normally do. However, I suggest we do the caucus reports first because the NDP whip is here to present the NDP caucus report, and I think she'd prefer to do that so she can carry on with her other duties.

• (1210)

Mr. Scott Reid: Is that in public or in camera?

The Chair: She has no problem with being in public.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, fine.

The Chair: Does anyone have any problem with being in public for the caucus report?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: In deference to the whips, I know you're very busy. Maybe if it's okay with the committee we could let you go first.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am very grateful.

I will read my report in French.

We in the NDP decided to work on several fronts simultaneously to improve work-life balance. My team and I, as whip, have worked to establish certain things that would improve the lives of MPs. We have already achieved some things, and others are under way. Therefore, I will talk about what we have done and what is still to come.

I, along with Theresa Kavanagh, met with the Speaker of the House and Mr. Marc Bosc. We had several requests to make of them and received a really good response from them. The Speaker of the House has been very co-operative, and I am very happy. They agreed to most requests.

We have taken a number of steps and more are under way. One of these efforts relates to parking and reserved areas for pregnant women and young families. Three spaces have already been reserved: one at the back of the Centre Block, one in the Confederation Building and one in the Justice Building. They have already been identified with proper signage. That is one of the things we have accomplished.

There are also issues with day care. For example, day care does not accept babies under 18 months. Also, there is a problem when parents want to leave their children only part of the time. This problem has no easy solution, but in the meantime, the HR people said they would help young parents find a nanny for their babies. There is help on that front too.

We also made an important request, specifically for a room dedicated to parents of young children. We are very pleased to have received a positive response in this regard, and a room has been reserved on the 6th floor of the Centre Block. The room is not finished yet, but it will be. There will be a playpen or a crib where children can sleep, a changing table, a refrigerator, a microwave and a high chair. The room will also have a workspace for parents during the debates in the House.

Although these initiatives were undertaken by the NDP, all this is for the parents from all parties. Obviously, if there are six parents who want to share a room, it may be necessary to go back to the Speaker of the House to see whether it would be possible to get more space, but for now, this room will be very useful.

We also discussed how to address the same needs in the West Block. At some point, we will leave the Centre Block and the House will sit in the West Block. Keep in mind that we should have the same amenities in the West Block while Parliament is sitting. When we return to the Centre Block, we will take the time to plan all of this on a better scale, as we also mentioned to the Speaker and to Mr. Bosc.

We discussed many other things, for example, the availability of healthy snacks after cafeterias in other buildings close. At the Confederation Building and the Justice Building, there are vending machines where you can buy chips or that kind of snack, but that is not the best food for a breastfeeding mother or a pregnant woman. We should therefore ensure that healthy food is available. That will be good for everyone, not just for parents.

We also asked for high chairs for young babies. Those in the parliamentary restaurant, for example, are not suitable for a 6-month baby, who may fall down. Therefore we need high chairs that are better suited to small babies.

We also noted that at the Confederation Building, on the side where the buses arrive, the access provided for people with disabilities or those pushing a stroller is closed after 8 p.m. As a result, parents with strollers or people in wheelchairs who come through that side do not have the access they need to enter the building. They would have to go through the front, which has only stairs, so that does not work. There is no intercom, either. We told the Speaker about this.

There should also be a crosswalk at the Confederation Building. We have a reserved space, but there is no crosswalk at the side door that I just mentioned. There are many cars going by at that location and that is dangerous.

• (1215)

Lastly, we confirmed with the Speaker of the House that the votes that take place right after question period are very popular with young families because that compresses the working hours. Parents do not have to leave and then return to work later in the evening.

That completes my report. As you can see, these are practical things to ensure the well-being of parents and children on a daily basis. I am delighted that this worked out so well and that we had such a positive response from the Speaker of the House.

[*English*]

The Chair: Just for the minutes, it was Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet, the whip for the NDP, giving this report.

We'd also like to welcome Sheila Malcolmson to the rest of the committee meeting.

I don't know if anyone had any questions, or anyone else from the NDP wanted to add to that before we go to the other parties.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I might suggest, by way of proceeding, that we hear from the other two caucuses and then throw it open to see how much we line up and whether there are any discrepancies, in which case then we would want to talk those through.

The Chair: Does that sound good?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, let's go to the Conservatives.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'll be fairly brief.

Our caucus found it quite difficult, given the depth and breadth of the proposals that are out there, including that we heard some new suggestions and ideas in the report that the NDP whip just gave, to be able to provide a lot of opinion on proposals that I think are quite extensive and varied, I guess we'll say. Obviously there are a lot of factors in those that we haven't had a look at yet. With some of them, there's obviously a lot of cost that could be involved. There are unintended consequences that could be involved.

I think our caucus needs to have the committee narrow down a bit more what some of the proposals might be or what sorts of areas the proposals might be in, before we could give a lot of feedback in a lot of areas.

I think the one thing that was quite clear in our caucus was the idea that's been discussed quite heavily and has been in the media quite a bit, which is the idea of members not sitting on Fridays. It was something that our caucus certainly didn't feel it could support.

Mr. David Christopherson: Sorry, was that could or couldn't support?

Mr. Blake Richards: We couldn't support that.

Whether it be in the name of family friendly or any other rationale that might be given, anything that would remove the accountability of the government to the House of Commons is something we wouldn't entertain or support. That would be one lens with which we would look at everything. If it's something that would appear to remove the accountability of the government in the House of Commons, that would certainly be off the table for us.

But with regard to other things, we would want to have a bit more information as to what avenue the committee is looking to go and get some sense from experts on what the costs might be, what some of the unintended consequences might be, and other implications to the proposals. There are a wide variety of things that have been mentioned and thrown out there.

I think it might be best if the committee tried to narrow things down a bit more before we could really provide more input.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Vandenbeld from the Liberals.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much.

We actually delved into this quite deeply. In fact, we conducted a survey of all of our caucus members with quite a good response, so a lot of the numbers that I'm about to talk about are actually very indicative.

There's a lot of anecdotal discussion going on and there are people who say that it doesn't really affect all that many people because how many of us have kids anyway? We decided to actually look at the numbers and find out how much this affects caucus members. I will go through some of the results of the survey because it is actually very revealing and indicative, and it could inform the work of this committee.

On the number of children, we asked MPs how many children they had. Of the MPs that responded, 78% are parents and 17% said they did not have children. Another 10% said that they were expecting children or were planning to have children in the future. The reason that adds up to 105% is because 5% of those who already have children also said that they were planning to have more children. This means that 10% of our caucus could very well have children during the period that they are here as members of Parliament.

As far as the ages, 47% of the MPs who responded had children younger than the age of 16. That's about half of those 78% who have dependent children, young children that need more care. On the number of children, 39% have two children, 14% have only one child, 17% of our caucus have three children, and another 6% have more than four children.

Anecdotally, I spoke to one of my colleagues who has six children. He lives in a rural and very remote area, and he spoke about the difficulties that he's having, particularly if he wants to bring his family here to Ottawa. It uses pretty much all of his travel points just to bring them one time. I think there is an appetite for families that are larger to have some kind of accommodation, so they can actually bring some of their children to Ottawa from time to time.

Interestingly, almost 6% of caucus said they were expecting children. That is something that is self-identified, but about 60% of our caucus responded to the survey. That's something quite indicative. Another 5% are preparing to have children, so that would indicate that it would be imminent.

When we looked at some of the other questions regarding child care, 89% agreed that day care services should be more flexible. With regard to whether or not day care should be moved to Centre Block, or in the case where we might be sitting to West Block, 80% of the respondents said that the day care should be in the same building where members spend most of their time. Right now, that would mean Centre Block and moving to West Block when the chamber is in West Block. My understanding is that right now the day care is near the Justice or Confederation Building. That's quite a distance if somebody wants to go down and see their child.

There was also quite a bit of discussion about the flexibility of the day care in terms of the hours of the day care and also the fact that you can't use it intermittently. For that family of six who comes here, and might only be here for one sitting week and then home again for three weeks, that family can't avail themselves of the day care because the day care is only available to those who are there on a permanent basis. This was something that generated quite a bit of discussion. The day care should reflect the reality of the lives of members of Parliament.

I would like to indicate that we only surveyed members of Parliament. We didn't survey staff and, of course, for staff some of the answers might be different. As we go on in this study, it will be very important that we also get the opinions of staff and try to perhaps do almost a similar kind of survey among some of the staff because they're here in Ottawa all the time. That would be very different.

• (1220)

One of the things that came up when we were talking about an inclusive Parliament and work-life balance is the fact that there are dietary restrictions. I'm very pleased that my colleague from the NDP mentioned this as one of the barriers. We did include a question on this in our survey. It turns out that 8% of our caucus has food allergies of some sort.

I won't go into every single one. We have the percentages for the lactose-free and low cholesterol ones and all of those. I think the big ones are that 8% are some form of vegetarian, either vegan or

vegetarian—that's as a category combined—another 3% are kosher, and another 7% are halal. Our hours often are incredibly long, and we can't leave the committee room, and we can't leave the chamber if we're on House duty, so the only food that's available may or may not be.... This goes to the inclusivity of Parliament.

Moving on to the issue of chamber reform, a majority of the caucus, when asked the simple "yes or no" question—I know that our committee has actually delved into this in a lot more detail than just yes or no—in discussing the Friday sittings, about three-quarters of the caucus said we should eliminate Friday sittings. Now, they haven't had the benefit of the discussion about parallel chambers or alternate methods, but what is interesting about this is that the exact same number—76%—said that we need to replace that lost time elsewhere.

I think that's very important to note. There was almost 100% agreement among those who thought that we should compress the workweek or find some way to eliminate Fridays, but that we need to not have less sitting time. We broke that down a little as well. Fifty per cent agreed that we need to add extra time on the days other than Fridays.

In the discussion on this, a lot of people were talking about starting at nine o'clock instead of 10 o'clock on other days of the week, or even trying to add, you know, two days...we talked about the dual sittings in one day and other possibilities like that. But there was a general perspective that caucus members and the government need to have the time to get our agenda through, to get legislation through, and there was virtually no appetite for eliminating Fridays and not making up those hours somewhere else. Twenty per cent said they would support extra sitting days. I think that's also indicative.

Just anecdotally, I did speak to some of the older members of our caucus, who said that a day that starts at 7 a.m. or 8 a.m. to begin preparing and then goes until nine o'clock or 10 o'clock at night is actually very difficult for some of the older members, whereas some of the younger members were saying that they need to be home in their constituencies to do the work there and be with family. They would rather sit those long, long days on Monday through Thursday. This is a much more complex topic than it looks at first. Then, interestingly, 30%—almost one third of our caucus—said they support both adding extra time to other days and adding extra sitting days. There's quite a bit of support for maybe changing the way that the calendar is set up, but not necessarily for any one way that has been proposed.

There were a number of comments. We had an open section in the survey. By the way, if any of the other caucuses would like a copy of what our survey questions were, I'd be happy to give them to you—not necessarily all the replies—if you wanted to survey your own caucuses or even the staff. There were several comments.

• (1225)

The Chair: If you send that to the clerk, she'll distribute it.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

On the chamber reform, there are a number of open comments. There were dozens, and I'm not going to go through every single one, but there were quite a few comments that talked about heckling and even applause. The idea was that we could actually make Parliament more friendly, more amicable, if there were less heckling. This particularly came from a number of women's caucus members. I think the reason for that, of course, is that we want to attract more people to Parliament, and seeing that kind of behaviour is not something that entices a lot of women or a lot of other individuals to run for office or to become members of Parliament.

Certainly, we've all had the case where we've had school groups who are looking at the behaviour in the House, and this is something their own teachers don't want their students to be learning. At one point Samara was doing a Twitter chat, and there was a 13-year-old girl in the lobby—the daughter of one of our members—and I asked her what she thought about it. She said, “Well, if I tried to do this in my school, my teacher would dock me marks.” So I think this is just in terms of the lessons we're showing to the young people who might aspire to politics. Actually, there were quite a few comments about the decorum, the heckling, the game-playing, and the posturing.

But the one that surprised me a little bit was the applause. There were quite a few people who said we could save a lot of time if we didn't do standing ovations every time somebody spoke, with whom we agreed, and particularly in question period, where we regularly see that we're going over time. That's something that I actually see as a positive thing, but if it's something that's taking away from our work, that was certainly something that was brought up.

Video conferencing technology was brought up both in the discussions we've had in caucus and also in the comments. I think there was a lot of support for the idea that, you know, we're all sitting around the table right here. If one of us had something, an emergency with our family or something very important in our constituency.... I know a number of my colleagues who are women had to fly back to their ridings to do International Women's Day events on Tuesday and then fly back. In fact, one colleague said her flight was at something like six o'clock right after the House adjourned. Then she flew home, did a 7 a.m. event, then did another one at 9 a.m., and then went straight to the airport to fly back in time for question period. People do have to be away. With the committees, there's no reason why we wouldn't be able to have video conferencing. We allow the witnesses to video conference, but we're not allowing our own committee members to video conference.

That was something about using technology more, the recognition that this institution is still working exactly the same way it did 150 years ago. That was a time when, if you wanted to come and have a talk with one of our colleagues, you actually had to get on a train and come to Ottawa and then spend the time here. Today, we can have a teleconference in which all of us could be in completely different parts of the country.

There was a strong sense that we need to modernize Parliament. Most businesses, certainly when I was working internationally.... At the United Nations, I had staff on five continents and we were able to function predominantly through Skype, and we were functioning as a coherent group and knew each other as if we were sitting side by side. That was probably the largest one, and I do know that there was a draft report of an all-party women's caucus that talked a lot about

the use of technology. So that would be something I think we could delve into.

Then, there were a number of suggestions about improving technology on the Hill, including the idea of electronic voting. But notably, 63% of our caucus members believe that you have to be here in person to vote. Then there was another 30% or so who said you can use technology. If you're on the Hill somewhere, you can vote, but you have to be somewhere in the Parliamentary precinct. So for instance, if a young mother is with her child but she's at least here in Ottawa in the Parliamentary precinct, there might be a mechanism of voting that way.

Then of course, the votes after question period was another one that came up. I know we've been doing that.

• (1230)

I want to specify, Mr. Chair, that none of these things affect me. In some ways I'm the ideal spokesperson for this because my stepdaughter is grown up. I don't have dependent children, and I live in Ottawa. My home is a 15-minute drive from here unless there's snow or traffic. In most circumstances it's a 15-minute drive. I'm not speaking to this because of any personal interest.

I think it was indicative that some of my caucus colleagues didn't want to speak publicly. They only wanted to speak privately about this or through the anonymous survey because they felt if they were to raise this kind of issue they would somehow be seen as lesser or not wanting to do their work. There were a number of people that responded privately to the survey, but didn't want to say it publicly.

I agree with some of the comments that came up through the NDP, as well as about the sixth floor and things like that.

I don't want to take too much of the committee's time. We went to a lot of effort to put together this report, and I think it was worth it to be able to go into it in some detail.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Briefly I would thank everybody for their feedback.

I'm going to ask our whip to give her thoughts.

I have a couple of things. We're clearly going to run into a problem on the Friday thing because your caucus was overwhelmingly interested, even though the time would be made up. Ours overwhelmingly was not interested, mostly because of the trade-off. When they started looking at losing constituency weeks, or sitting later, or the whole idea of compressing two days into one, all are more problematic to our caucus than being here on the Fridays. That could be a major area of disagreement.

Another thing I want to mention is a personal thing. Under the issue of security we haven't yet had a chance to talk about the green bus system. The last government all but decimated the green bus system. It's inefficient and costs all kinds of productivity. We've had to change the hours of committees meetings because it takes so darn long to get around. The one I want to raise in particular in this context is that one hour after the House is done, the buses stop. There are an awful lot of us that are still meeting in Centre Block, in East Block. Not so much for myself, but I'm thinking of others walking around at 10 or 11 o'clock at night and even ordinary MPs walking around. Being on the bus is the first casual bit of security that's there. Without the buses it means at 10 o'clock at night you have MPs wandering around on Parliament Hill. It's not the greatest kind of safety, not to mention for women or others who may feel particularly vulnerable being out in the dark that late at night, or not to mention people who have any kind of a disability. The older I get, I get more and more of them. It's a long walk from the East Block all the way down to the parking lot.

There are a whole host of issues. I'm hoping at some point the government will indicate they're reviewing that whole system. It all started with a cost-saving measure and they laid off droves of the drivers. That's what led to cutbacks in the service. It's not efficient. It doesn't serve members or staff well. I do hope the new government is going to undertake a review of that green bus system to make it the system it should be.

Chair, I'd like to ask my whip to maybe provide a couple of comments as to what she has heard.

Thank you.

● (1235)

The Chair: Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There is something that has often emerged in the NDP talks. Whatever decision is taken on work-life balance, we must take into account not only the needs of members, but also those of all the people working with us, namely our teams, our assistants and the House staff. That is very important.

Ms. Vandenberg's report made me think of something about travel points, for example for the children. There are also people who bring someone with them to help care for their children, such as a grandmother, aunt, sister, brother, or someone else. For now, it is not possible to make the travel points system more flexible in order to help families.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Perhaps I can respond to Mr. Christopherson's comment.

First of all, about the Fridays, there really wasn't consensus. I think our committee has quite a bit of latitude—particularly for those who have a lot of travel time, such as our chair—because we didn't really come to a consensus. As well, the yes-no question didn't delve into a lot of the things we've been discussing in the committee.

An issue that came up amongst the women was I think very telling. One woman said that she could see, once she got here, that she could trade her Fridays, and that we're not always on House duty. Often on Thursday evenings she's able to go home, because there are people like me who are quite happy to take on the Fridays. She said she hadn't known that before she ran. In fact once she gave up running for the nomination because she had young children and didn't want to be away five days a week. Had she known she'd maybe be able to get home on Thursday nights and sometimes maybe come in a little later on Mondays, she said it might have actually changed her decision at that time during that election cycle.

We're all here, and we know how it all works, but we can't forget the deterrent effect on a lot of people with young families and on a lot of women when we're looking at the Friday sittings. We haven't come to any conclusion on that, but I think it's something that's certainly worth considering.

● (1240)

With regard to the security, I'm actually very pleased you brought that up. One thing I noted when we had the security officials here the other day was the discussion about constituencies and the fact that there's nothing provided for residences. As an Ottawa MP, obviously I'm a lot easier to follow home from Parliament, for instance, or something like that; that line isn't as blurred. For instance, some of my colleagues who don't have security alarm systems in their homes are installing very expensive alarm systems solely because of the nature of their public responsibilities. These are things that haven't been discussed, to my knowledge.

From a woman's perspective, I'm walking down to the parking lot quite often late at night. As you said, we have meetings that go till 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock sometimes, and I'm walking to that parking lot, getting in my car, and then driving home. I think the issue of security could very well be one of those topics that we should come up with, both because we are the committee that is responsible for the estimates for the security service but also because of the family-friendly Parliament. It can be a tremendous deterrent to you as a woman who wants to run if you are concerned about your security, especially if there are people out there—there always are—who may not necessarily be pleased with what you're doing and who take that out on you in certain ways as a public official. I think it's something that probably affects women predominantly, a little bit more than men.

I think it definitely would be something to add to our study on inclusive Parliament. Thank you for bringing it up

Mr. David Christopherson: Excellent. Thank you for the feedback.

The Chair: David, if nothing has been done on the buses, you might also bring it up when we do main estimates. Maybe you can warn the Speaker in advance that you'll be bringing it up so that they have an answer.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes. I was hoping for a chance to shoehorn it in the other day, but it seemed kind of small compared with what we were dealing with.

But I appreciate that. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm not sure if this is germane to the conversation, and maybe everyone realizes this, but I think it bears repeating. When we get elected, we have one fundamental choice of either living here or living in the riding. When it comes to the Friday situation, I'm sure many of those with families here would opt to sit on Friday to avoid the compressed time.

In our decision, we should be careful that we don't put the people who decide to bring their families to Ottawa in a precarious situation. It could very much do that, even though the numbers may be overwhelming that most families live in the ridings, for whom that Friday option would be good.

I would think the first place to start would be to find out where most of the MPs live and move your regulations and your rules and your changes around that.

The Chair: Mr. Graham.

Mr. David Graham: I think that when it comes to Friday sittings, we're going to have to defend our position on it to all our caucuses and all our colleagues, whichever way we go. There's not an obvious answer. Whether we say we're going to keep them or we're going to toss them, we're going to have to defend it, and it's going to be a challenge, with a lot of arguments to be had on that.

I want to make sure that we don't fall into the Michael Chong trap of using legislation to solve problems that could be solved through whips' offices. If it can be solved with House duties, great, let's look at that as the new, clear option to go farther than that.

On the buses, I really want the buses to talk to us eventually. We can make buses better, more accessible, with more efficient routes, instead of going all the way up to the parking lot and all the way back. I ran into Senator Nancy Greene Raine the other day at an event at Mont Tremblant, and she chastised me for even considering using the buses. That's a whole other point, but I'll leave that there.

I'm very much looking forward to tackling the bus issue head on. We have other options too. Why don't the buses run to the airports on Monday mornings and Thursday nights? There are so many things that we could explore that we should be exploring.

The Chair: I'm careful not to participate in debates, but I wanted to make a point. I've traded off on my Friday sittings this year, so that's not the issue, but the issue is the votes Thursday night. As you know, it takes me about 12 to 14 hours to get back to my riding, and if there's a vote on Thursday night, I can't get back on Thursday. Whether or not there's a Friday sitting, I'm travelling all day on Friday, anyway.

Are there any more comments?

Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I was getting a bit worried that we wouldn't be able to get to other matters. I still have a motion on the floor regarding bringing back the members of the advisory committees. I hope we'll be able to get to that and perhaps have a vote on it today.

On this subject, the Thursday matter is a really good one. I think it can be dealt with by a separate change to the standing orders to move it. Am I right that if it was moved to right after question period on Thursdays that would be okay from your perspective? You, arguably,

have the biggest travel problem of anybody here, so your answer would be good.

• (1245)

The Chair: Yes, that would be a lot better.

It changes all the time.

Ms. Vandenbeld, and then Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I wanted to respond to Mr. Reid's point. Sometimes it's not pre-scheduled votes, but the possibility of dilatory motions or unexpected things, and for that reason a certain number of MPs often have to be within 15 minutes of the Hill.

I know that when we have the late show, we can go on autopilot. There are ways that we could perhaps accommodate that, even on a Friday, by assuring that it's.... I know that the issue of quorum is in the Constitution, so it's not likely that our committee is going to be addressing the possibility of reducing quorum, but it could mean going on autopilot more often whereby, on a Friday, you know there will not be a vote when you suddenly need to bring back a number of MPs into the House for an unexpected vote. I think that's more the case.

Since I've been here, we haven't had a pre-scheduled vote on a Thursday night, but there's still a requirement for us to have House duty and to be present. I know a number of my colleagues have told me about that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Anita's quite right. It's a point that I hadn't taken into consideration.

What tends to happen with Thursday votes is not that they happen, but parties play this game of threatening each other, so you're not sure up until the last moment whether or not it's going to happen.

I'm not trying to deal with that gamesmanship. Something in a rule change would do it.

The Chair: As you say, the rules could be changed. We've done it for Fridays. There are no votes on Fridays.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I just wanted to point out that I think it would be very useful if Anita would hand over that survey. Perhaps the Conservatives especially could take that survey, because we haven't been able to get much feedback from them, and they have a lot of members in the House. It's important to make sure we know how their members feel, because I'm starting to feel that perhaps at times, as Anita was saying, some of the members would be more willing to participate anonymously to say how they feel, and that they are not willing to do so out of fear of being chastised or looked down upon for not wanting to work hard enough, though that's surely not the case.

We're already seeing articles in which the media is spinning this as us wanting to work less. We just want to figure out how we can get good representation in this House and not have certain people discouraged from running in elections. That's something we were talking about with the minister, that so many people want to represent and take a lot of pride in representing their people. We want to make sure we get a good balance of those people. I personally have talked to a lot of Conservatives who have strong views on family-friendly politics and who do want to see certain areas of change. That might not necessarily mean the Fridays or whatever.

At some point, Mr. Richards was saying they definitely don't want to see us removing accountability, but I don't know where that's coming from because I don't think in all our discussions we ever talked about removing any sort of accountability. We'll still be having question period and we're still trying.... I think there is pretty much a consensus, according to the feedback we have so far, that we don't want to eliminate hours; we just want to figure out how we can schedule our days to accommodate people's needs.

I needed to say that. I really urge everybody to get involved in this important discussion. We have the opportunity in this Parliament to make some changes so that we can see better representation in the future, and if we don't take that seriously now, then quite frankly, all our parties are going to suffer. I don't see this as just a Liberal problem. I'm sure in the NDP and the Conservatives you want to attract a greater variety of people from different backgrounds into your caucuses, so I think we should take this exercise seriously and put some effort into it and make sure everybody is consulted within the caucuses, because I have talked to people on all sides of the parties and there are a lot of opinions. I'm not saying we're all going to come to one conclusion, but the thoughts deserve to be represented.

• (1250)

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I know there's been a suggestion that we go back to the motion, but I have to say that I am kind of anxious for us to get at the witness list simply because we need to start scheduling those things. They take a lot of time. This thing's already getting a bit unfocused, so I really think if we're going to keep this file moving in a timely way, Chair, that we need to get those witnesses nailed down and get the clerk coordinating them.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Blake Richards: Can I just make a suggestion now, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Obviously we don't have a lot of time left today to really have much of a discussion here anyway. I have a list of names we as a group are suggesting for witnesses. Maybe it would be better if everyone submitted their names, and the clerk could then send those around. I know there were some sent around. I don't know who suggested them. We would obviously add some to that list. Maybe we could have it sent around again. We just received it late yesterday. It might be good for all members to have a chance to look over the list and see what they think of the various suggestions. Then we can have a proper, fully informed discussion about them the

next time we have a chance, which I hope will be at the next meeting. I don't know what we have scheduled.

The Chair: We had the deadline of last...whatever it was, and we have a list here, which we'll distribute, but if you have more, we'll take those suggestions and we can add them. Everybody can have the list we have so far with everything up to today.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm not looking to pick a fight here, but part of the business was witness lists, so it kind of surprises me.... It almost seems as though they're not ready. I don't know why they're not ready. We are, and I get the sense the government is. This is not new. I don't know what the problem is.

The Chair: And there's a—

Mr. David Christopherson: I have to share the concern. You start to wonder whether or not all three parties are as engaged in moving forward in this as we put forward. I'll just leave that there.

Mr. Blake Richards: I just want to quickly respond to that.

Obviously we all have an intention to try to move forward and look at this in a full manner. It's just that obviously having just seen some of these lists, we haven't really had a chance to clearly look at them. It's not that anyone is trying to delay anything. I would like to see us get there.

We have seven minutes or so left in the meeting. If we want to start the discussion, I guess that's okay, but I do think that there's a pressing time demand on Mr. Reid's motion as well. We've indicated in the motion he has that we would see them at the committee before the end of March. It seems to me the government is trying to stall and delay that, but I think we need to move forward with that. I think that actually takes precedence here.

The Chair: There's one thing I'd like to decide on quickly. The Chief Electoral Officer could come on May 3 or 5, which is a long way from now, but to give them the time to plan does anyone have any problem with us picking one of those two dates?

Mr. David Christopherson: Do we have work plans, current work plans?

The Chair: There's nothing for May.

Mr. David Christopherson: In the absence of a work plan, what do we have scheduled around that, Chair?

The Chair: Around that time...?

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes.

The Chair: Right now, it's open. We're going to do our report and stuff.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, so what are you suggesting, Chair?

The Chair: It's either one of those days, Tuesday or Thursday.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'll move the Tuesday then just to give us a focus.

The Chair: That is moved by David, May 3.

Is anyone opposed to that?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, I just want to confirm that we're not going to find that we're restricted in what we're allowed to ask the.... For every witness who has come here, every single question I ask or almost every single question, I am being told it's not permissible to ask this question and the witness is only here to talk about one thing not the other thing. I assume we get to ask him about everything or do the Liberals have plans to shut that down too?

The Chair: Mr. Reid, you've been here long enough to know that when we give the notice of meeting, it says what the person is called here for and that's what you should respect.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's why I'm asking it about this.

The Chair: This particular person has offered to come and report on the election, an informal briefing.

Mr. Scott Reid: Does that mean that it is your intention to rule out of order questions dealing with the statement he made yesterday regarding the timeline issues he would have with regard to implementing new electoral systems because of the fact that it involves electoral boundaries or redistribution, and the potential for the timelines that are involved in having a referendum should one occur? Would that be considered out of order or would that be considered permissible to ask?

• (1255)

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

Mr. David Christopherson: Before you answer that, can I provide some input because that's pretty important?

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that's one of the agents of Parliament, and if so, normally the experience is that there's a broad breadth of questions you can ask because they're answerable to Parliament, not to government. If you deny parliamentarians an opportunity to ask any question.... They're pretty sharp. They'll tell you pretty quick whether that's germane to the points they're raising.

I wanted to jump in, Chair, and just caution that I would be very surprised and have a bit of a problem if you were to rule that ahead of time you were going to start contracting the questions that we can ask an agent of Parliament. To me, that's really starting to speak to the rights and privileges of members and the separation between Parliament as the legislative arm and government, which is the executive arm.

The Chair: This is a briefing. We haven't called them. They're offering us a briefing and we were supposed to have it today but we postponed it. Other than that, I had no thoughts on it.

So we'll do that May 3.

The other thing I asked you to think about for this meeting was that letter, which you now have, from the Speaker—

No, you haven't got it yet.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, we have two minutes left. We have time to have a vote on bringing back the members of the advisory committee to answer the questions that were ruled as being out of order at our previous meetings. These are questions that are absolutely germane to their mandate and to the oversight we practise on their mandate, and on the minister, and on the portfolio of democratic renewal, and they are questions that the minister now confirmed today she could not answer.

The sole reason that was given by Arnold Chan for saying that the government did not want to pursue this and this was all unnecessary—I think actually it was the main reason given by Mr. Graham as well—was that the minister could answer these questions, something that she confirmed today she cannot do. This is information to which she is not privy. Therefore, I would like us to go back to this.

The Liberals could talk it out if they want to spend two minutes doing it, but it would be nice to get a vote. This was a motion to bring them back before the end of March. We are not going to be back in this place, if I'm not mistaken, until March 22, thus the reason for the urgency to vote this up or down today.

The Chair: I'm happy to go to this in a minute, but we have to decide what we're doing. There are two days before Easter break. The first one is budget day, and we've agreed to meet that day. The second day is the Thursday before Good Friday, and the House leaders have not yet decided whether that will be a Friday-type schedule.

Mr. David Christopherson: They have.

The Chair: Well, I haven't been told.

If it is a Friday-type schedule, then we wouldn't have our meeting, but if it's not, we would have our regular meeting.

Mr. David Christopherson: My understanding is that the decision was made that the Thursday would be treated like a Friday.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Oh, I don't know.

Mr. Scott Simms: According to the calendar it is a regular Thursday.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: It would be like a regular Thursday, so we would be having a meeting that day.

Mr. David Christopherson: Apparently that's not finalized. They're kicking that around. I thought that was finalized. We do it quite frequently.

The Chair: Minimally, we have to decide what we're doing on the Tuesday when we come back. We haven't decided that yet, unless we do these witness lists, which we obviously haven't had time to do today.

Does it sound good to do the witness list?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, so the day we come back we'll do the witness lists.

Mr. David Christopherson: Do we have any estimates pending?

The Chair: We have main estimates, yes. We need two hours for that. We need one for the House estimates and then the other for the Elections Canada estimates. We could do one hour on witnesses and one hour on one of those main estimates, if you want.

Which main estimate would you like to do?

Mr. Scott Reid: [*Inaudible—Editor*] this out so it can't be done?

The Chair: No, I'm going to get to that in a second. We need to know what we're doing when we come back.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Actually, just to inform, my understanding is that on budget day on March 22 there wouldn't be any rooms available because of all the lock-ups. Have you confirmed a room for that day? There may be trouble.

The Chair: There wouldn't be any here but I'm sure there are rooms all over Parliament.

We have a room, yes.

• (1300)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: We have a room. Okay, sorry, I just wanted to double-check.

The Chair: Would someone suggest an estimate, either House or

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, wouldn't it make sense to tie the elections to the visit of the Chief Electoral Officer? Quite frankly, Mr. Reid, that should even open up a further broadening of questions you can ask under that ambit.

The Chair: The Tuesday we come back, the first hour we'll do the witness list; the second hour will be the House estimates. Is everyone agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Mr. Reid's motion. Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Reid: In practice, if adopted, this motion would mean we'd be inviting the witnesses to come on the Thursday of the week we come back after the break because that is the only remaining day in March. I'd just like to get a vote on this. The motion is: That the federal members of the Independent Advisory Board for Senate Appointments be invited to appear before the Committee before the end of March 2016, to answer all questions relating to their mandate and responsibilities.

I've already explained why I think that's important.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Isn't there a speakers list?

The Chair: There is, but we're also at one o'clock, so I need permission from committee to extend the hours if you want to go on.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I can't. No, we have other commitments.

The Chair: There is no permission to go on.

Mr. Blake Richards: Let the record show that the government side is clearly trying to block this motion from moving forward.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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